

In One Accord... Pentecostals and the Yearning for Christian Unity: A Case Study of the Swiss Pentecostal Mission and Its Initiatives Towards Unity in the Spirit.

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Introduction

From its inception, many leaders in the Pentecostal movement have repeatedly stated a desire to unite in the name of Christ, through the power of the Spirit and to the glory of God. After all, being in “one accord” was the hallmark of the Early Church. Like a literary inclusion, being in one accord is mentioned at the beginning and at the end of the second chapter of Acts, an account of the quintessential Pentecostal church. Nineteen centuries later and after the Reformation was largely responsible for bringing about a fragmentation of the Christian witness into many denominations, early Pentecostal leaders felt that the Holy Spirit would bring about a fresh unity so that the Good News could be preached in all parts of the world before the second coming of Christ would take place. The main reason was to present a credible witness to the Gospel “in these last days” and the desire to allow the Holy Spirit to blow wherever God wished. Another reason for achieving unity was to enable cooperation across denominational lines. The task at hand was huge and cooperation was of the essence. A third reason for the quest towards unity was the often overlooked fact that the early Pentecostal leaders had a common experience in the Spirit, but at the same time they came from a variety of ecclesial traditions and cherished a different theological convictions. Obviously, the question of unity was highly relevant.

This paper will have a look at how a small Pentecostal denomination has worked towards Christian unity over the past 100 years. The Swiss Pentecostal Mission, or the Pentecostal Assemblies of Switzerland as they are now called, provides valuable insight in the dynamics at hand; the perceived move of the Holy Spirit, the ambitions of the denominations leaders as well as the historical circumstances that provided opportunities and drawbacks. We will basically follow the chronological developments and touch on the various expressions towards working to be of one accord. Towards the end of the paper, the focus will be widened to include the global context.

The Beginnings

The Pentecostal movement came to Switzerland through two women missionaries from Norway that had previously brought the Pentecostal message to Kassel in Germany. The meetings there generated quite a stir. People began to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit in very audible, visible and physical ways. After three weeks of revival, the meetings had to be closed because things got out of hand. Fortunately, however, the ladies travelled faster than the public reports of these events. In Zurich, Switzerland, they met a small group that was open to their message and before long a Pentecostal church was born there. Similar events took place in other European cities and the

respective leaders of the new Pentecostal congregations kept in touch with each other. This led to an interesting phenomenon.

The fact that the church in Zurich had visiting pastors from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Great Britain as well as other nations meant that on the one hand they experienced unity through their common understanding of the Holy Spirit's move. They were in one accord, because they all had experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. On the other hand some of these pastors were Anglican, like C.E.D. de Labillière, the first pastor of the Pentecostal church in Zurich, or A.A. Boddy a key person of English Pentecostalism. Others were Methodist, like T.B. Barratt who visited the congregation in Zurich twice and almost decided to become their pastor in 1909. Geritt Polman, the Pentecostal pastor in Amsterdam, had been an officer of the Salvation Army, and people like Jonathan Paul and Emil Humburg were Lutherans from Germany. These men visited the Zurich assembly repeatedly. To that one could add the Baptist influence of Lewi Pethrus of Sweden and Reformed convictions that were in evidence in the following years. In other words, although there was unity in spiritual experience there was also a wide variety in ecclesial, sacramental and theological opinions that these leaders brought along.

It seemed natural to assume that if the Holy Spirit had brought such diverse Christians together to experience an infilling with power and love, then God was calling all people into this movement, no matter from which church they had originally come. God would bring apostolic gifts in order to bring unity and equip the church with the power of the Gospel as the coming of the Lord was drawing near. In this vein we read in the November 1913 issue of *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, that the Pentecostal assembly in Zurich had no intentions to create another denomination, that it was obvious that God had his children in all existing churches and that God had called the whole Body of Christ to unity in the Spirit.¹

A similarly ecumenical spirit was publically witnessed between 1908 and 1914 at the Sunderland Conferences in England.² Being together in one accord was not only desirable but also possible. However, World War I broke many of these international and inter-denominational ties. But even then many early Pentecostals held pacifist and ecumenical convictions because they could not imagine fighting a fellow brother who had been graced with the same presence of the Holy Spirit, just because he was a citizen of another nation. For Swiss Pentecostals, whose government took a politically neutral stance, it was even harder to imagine what value there could be in fighting such a war. Yes, there was hope for a great movement of unity, but it was not expected to happen

¹ „Der Herr machte es uns jedoch von Anfang an klar, dass es nicht nach seinem Sinne wäre, wenn wir um der neuen Segnung willen die Zahl der schon bestehenden organisierten Kirchengemeinschaften wieder um eine neue vermehren würden. Sondern, wir sollten in unseren Versammlungen einfach die uns neu offenbarten Wahrheiten verkündigen und so allen Kindern Gottes aus den verschiedenen Denominationen, und der Welt, Gelegenheit bieten, zur Prüfung und zur Annahme der Wahrheiten, sowie zur Weiterverbreitung derselben in ihren Kreisen. Es war uns auch klar, dass unser Dienst im Besonderen den Verlorenen gehöre, die wir sollten zum hellen Licht des Evangeliums zu bringen suchen. Deshalb suchten wir auch nicht die gläubigen Kreise zu stören und in irgend einer Weise herrschenden Einfluss zu gewinnen, sondern, der Herr wies uns die Linie in klarer Weise, wir sollten in der Einigkeit des Geistes mit dem ganzen Leibe Christi bleiben, der Seine Glieder in allen Denominationen hat... Declaration by Richard P. Ruff and Anton Reuss in *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, November 1913, p.1+2.

² *Confidence*, no. 3 June 1908, p. 9.

politically. Only God could bring it about. It had started with the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit and was being carried to the historic churches too.³

Soon after the end of the Great War, international communications and travel was possible again. Contacts immediately resumed and Swiss Pentecostals started to engage in missionary activity in collaboration with churches in Norway, the Netherlands and Great Britain. Once in the field in Basutoland and the French Congo, Swiss missionaries were happy to associate with Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans. After all, they had done that before, at the beginning of it all.⁴

The Great European Pentecostal Conference in Stockholm, June 5-12, 1939

Up to that point no conference had brought together so many Pentecostals in Europe. It was not just a gathering for fellowship and church services. Difficult issues were discussed. Donald Gee put it like this:

“The deeper inward spiritual side was marked by one arresting, often amazing, fact—the unbroken unity of the Spirit. During the week that we were together, questions that had been sent in from all over Europe were discussed in the sessions. Some of them centred around admittedly delicate and controversial subjects. A variety of viewpoints and opinions was expressed, but always with unfaltering charity. Such unity in diversity was a miracle of grace. Only a genuine Pentecost could make it possible.”⁵

The impact of the conference was so great that the Swiss Pentecostal periodical *Die Verheissung des Vaters* reported on the discussions for a time span of eleven months.⁶ Two topics were given prime importance. First there was a long discussion on varying views regarding the baptism in the Spirit. Could it be possible to be baptized in the Spirit with evidence other than speaking in tongues? The second main topic of discussion related to the issue whether there could be organizational unity among Pentecostals. English, Swiss and some East-European representatives argued that an organizational unity was often desirable and sometimes even necessary, as for instance in the face of communist oppression. Whereas the Scandinavian Pentecostals emphasized that the center of Christian activity resided in the local congregation, thus adopting a typically Baptist ecclesiology.

³ *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, January 1918, p. 8f.

⁴ An example can also be given on an international scale. After World War II new dimensions of missionary work were opening up. The *World Missionary Aviation Fellowship* was created and based on an interdenominational missionary cooperation. “It was suggested that the mission flights of the Scandinavian plane “Ansgar,” operating from Sweden; the British plane the “Pathfinder,” operating in Africa; the American plane “St. Paul,” operating in China; and the American plane “Ambassador,” operating from Springfield, Missouri, should be co-ordinated so as to present a complete worldwide continental and trans-oceanic missionary aviation network . . . The Conference decided to establish an interim executive committee composed of the following members President, Daniel Nelson, Lutheran World Federation; Vice-President, Noel Perkin, Assemblies of God; Executive Sec., Paul C. Hartford, Victory Sky Pilots, Inc.” Quoted from *Pentecost*, September 1948, p. 3.

⁵ Donald Gee in „The Gospel Call“ reproduced by <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1939-october/the-great-european-pentecostal-conference/> accessed on July 8, 2013.

⁶ *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, February to December 1940.

They argued that if they truly wanted the Holy Spirit to guide them, then they should not establish manmade organizations. This issue whether organization was desirable or not was also widely discussed among Swiss Pentecostals because most churches that were in partnership with the Swiss Pentecostal Mission Society decided in 1935 to unite as an association and thus became a denomination. Other churches adopting the Scandinavian argument were not sure in the beginning, but joined a few years later.

The first Pentecostal Word Conference, May 1947

Leonhard Steiner, who as an editor of the above mentioned periodical, attended the 1939 conference in Stockholm. The discussions he reported continued to be a matter of concern for him. Steiner was pastor of the Pentecostal assembly in the town of Basel right by the French and German border and maintained close contacts with Pentecostals in the nearby Alsace and in Germany. He was also missions secretary of the Swiss Pentecostal Mission Society and as such well informed. He was for all practical purposes a global Pentecostal.

After World War II Steiner noted that there was a new willingness in Western societies to do things together.⁷ There was political will to organize. Winston Churchill, the war time prime Minister of Great Britain, had visited the University of Zurich on September 19, 1946, and gave his famous speech concluding with the phrase "Let Europe Arise!" After Europeans had witnessed two world wars with disastrous consequences for themselves, could it not be that Europe could unite in peace? Was it not possible to create a European commonwealth?⁸ It is fair to assume that Leonhard Steiner translated these ideas into the question, could there not be a Pentecostal commonwealth? Furthermore, other religious bodies began to form worldwide alliances. In addition, another fact brought great urgency to the matter. East-European Pentecostals were disproportionately suffering from the consequences of war. They needed help from their brothers and sisters in the West. But this help could only be effectively given by a common and coordinated effort.

These ideas jelled into a concrete mandate during a prayer conference in Basel that was also attended by Gustav Kindermann, Assemblies of God representative for Europe, and Umberto Nello Goriotti, chairman of the newly founded Assemblee di Dio in Italy. These men had discussed the need for Pentecostals to work together and Leonhard Steiner felt the call to take responsibility. *"During the celebration of the Lord's Supper I felt the Hand of God upon me. I felt that it was the will of the Lord to impose the responsibility upon me to call God's people to a conference."*⁹

As a result the first Pentecostal World Conference took place from May 4 to 9, 1947 in Zurich, Switzerland. All expectations were exceeded as 260 guest from 23 countries gathered, representing

⁷ L. Steiner in *Verheissung des Vaters*, January 1948, p. 3-6.

⁸ *"We British have our own Commonwealth of Nations. These do not weaken, on the contrary they strengthen, the world organization. They are in fact its main support. And why should there not be a European group which could give a sense of enlarged patriotism and common citizenship to the distracted peoples of this turbulent and mighty continent? And why should it not take its rightful place with other great groupings and help to shape the onward destinies of men? In order that this should be accomplished there must be an act of faith in which millions of families speaking many languages must consciously take part."* Quoted from: http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/AboutUs/zurich_e.htm , accessed July 11, 2013.

⁹ *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, January 1947, p. 5.

70 different Pentecostal bodies. Donald Gee, was impressed. *"'Zurich' was made possible because of what God hath wrought' already: the further potentialities are immense. Our eyes are on the big things that unite: not on the smaller issues that divide... Within the Pentecostal Revival itself a profound, and indeed unique, unity of the Spirit has been given to us by Christ Jesus: it leaves nothing for us to "make," but much that we must zealously endeavour to "keep." The burning heart of Pentecostal Fellowship is not an idea, nor a form of government; nor even a "vision," but a BAPTISM—in the Holy Ghost and Fire."*¹⁰

As a consequence of this first Pentecostal World Conference an office for the coordination of relief work in Europe was established in the church of the Pentecostal Mission in Basel. David du Plessis came from South Africa and joined Leonhard Steiner in his efforts to coordinate help for the Pentecostal churches in Eastern Europe. Donald Gee was designated to be editor of the new magazine *"Pentecost"* that would create an international platform on Pentecostal activities and missionary endeavors in order to avoid unnecessary overlapping in missionary work. And last but not least, the wish was expressed that another Pentecostal World Conference should be organized in the not too distant future. Indeed the Basel office relayed an invitation from France to Pentecostal leaders in different countries with the result that the second Pentecostal World Conference would take place in Paris in 1949. Ever since, these global conferences have been taking place at a triennial rhythm.

The Stuttgart Conference, August 10-13, 1948

After the World War II there was new life among Pentecostal churches in Germany. But the lack of resources, the division of the country in different occupation zones and rudimentary transportation meant that communication and networking among Pentecostals was difficult. Besides the Mülheim group that had its beginnings in 1907 had a different context and history than the newer independent Pentecostal groups like the Elim churches, the Church of God or the assemblies of the Volksmission. There was simply no coordination among the various fellowships and no unity in communication. Groups that were against Pentecostal teachings used this situation to their advantage by pointing to the fragmentation among of those who considered themselves Spirit-filled and ridiculed them. It was in 1947 that two Swiss Pentecostals, Leonhard Steiner and Karl Schneider, visited several German Pentecostal congregations and noticed the diversity existing in the assemblies. The idea arose that the Swiss, as neutral observers, could broker a conference that would call the organized and independent German Pentecostals together. Steiner and Schneider did so by convening a conference in Stuttgart, Germany, with the argument that the common Pentecostal hymnal for the German speaking areas in Europe had to be re-edited and made available to all Pentecostals. In August 1948 seven different Pentecostal groups and mission societies met under the auspices of the Swiss, the American Assemblies of God, and the International Pentecostal (Holiness?) Church.¹¹

¹⁰ *Pentecost*, no. 1, September 1947, p. 2.

¹¹ The Germans represented: Christlicher Gemeinschaftsverband Mülheim-Ruhr, the Elim-Gemeinden, the Deutsche Volksmission and the Internationale Volksmission, the Freien Christengemeinden, the Vereinigten Missionsfreunde as well as the Freie Pfingstverein. The Assemblies of God were represented by Gustav Kinderman and C.W. Loenser. David du Plessis was also present. For a full report see: *Die Verheissung des*

The result was a common declaration that also stated, “*We have noticed with sorrow and shame the lack of unity among the Pentecostal Movement and we humbled ourselves in deep repentance over it. In prayer and meditating the Word of God, and confirmed through the ministry of spiritual gifts, we were let to acknowledge that it is the will of the Lord of His Church that we belong together and form a unity, further, that we need one another for the completion of our ministry.*”¹²

It was this meeting that brought about the creation of an official Pentecostal network in Germany (*Vereinigten Pfingstgemeinden in Deutschland*) that later developed into *the Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden*. Today this association networks with more than 750 churches, runs a common theological seminary and is a platform for missionary outreach and social action.

The Pentecostal Unity Conferences in Switzerland

In the meantime the Swiss Pentecostal Mission was no longer the sole Pentecostal denomination in Switzerland, in the 1930 two other groups were experiencing revival and successfully beginning to plant churches. One met around the former Lutheran pastor Christoph Drollinger and had its sphere of influence mainly in the Bernese Oberland and another group under the leadership of Adolf Rutz had churches in the northeast of Switzerland. French speaking Pentecostals in western Switzerland associated under the name *Eglise Evangélique de Réveil*.¹³ The French-speaking Pentecostals nurtured regular contacts with the Swiss Pentecostal Mission and its mission society.

Unfortunately this cannot be said of the German speaking groups who preferred to argue for the advantages of their own denomination to the detriment of the others. Condescending remarks were common. Whereas one group accused the other of having no sense of sobriety in the use of spiritual gifts, the other retorted that they were the ones growing in numbers and had church services where the work of the Holy Spirit was in evidence. In the 1950s however, common evangelistic outreaches broke the ice, pastors from the different fellowships invited each other to special events and slowly the question arose whether some sort of agreed upon cooperation or even unity could be envisaged. For the purpose of getting to know each other better and clarifying issues yearly unity conferences were established starting in 1961. Guest at these meetings were well-known leaders like Donald Gee (England), Lewi Pethrus (Sweden), Charles Butterfield (USA) and Erwin Lorenz (Germany). Besides being spiritually refreshed, the participants discussed concerns and challenges in detail. A working group was established to work on cooperation issues throughout the year. One of the first fruits of these unity conferences was the establishment of a common Bible School. In 1968 the three German-speaking Pentecostal denominations in Switzerland began to publish a common magazine called *Wort und Geist*.

Vaters, September 1948, p. 18-21 und Chr. Krust, *50 Jahre Pfingstbewegung: Mülheimer Richtung* (Altdorf bei Nürnberg: Missionsbuchandlung und Verlag, no date), p. 187+188.

¹² *Pentecost*, no. 6, December 1948, p.1+11; Chr. Krust, *50 Jahre*, p. 188.

¹³ Drollinger's churches first associated under the name *Gemeinde für Urchristentum* and is now known under the name *BewegungPlus*. Adolf Rutz's congregations was known as *Freie Christengemeinden*. After financial difficulties emerged in connection with a large building project, the group had to declare bankruptcy and its churches were absorbed by the Swiss Pentecostal Mission in the mid 1990s.

Well a fusion of the three denominations never took place. Although the church members were largely in favor, the leadership could not overcome technical obstacles and vested interests. One participant put it somewhat bluntly when he said, *“The sheep were willing but the mutton-heads not.”*¹⁴

Nevertheless, cooperation between the groups was further organized and in 1973 the Association of Pentecostal Free Churches (Bund Pfingstlicher Freikirchen) was established. An alliance that functioned for almost 30 years.

Looking back, we can see that Swiss Pentecostals took the call to unity serious. Being “together in one accord” was motivation and aspiration. Having “everything in common” as it is described in the second chapter in the Acts of the Apostles was perhaps too high a goal. Achieving unity is not an easy task. It takes common effort, or, as Paul has put it, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3).

The Charismatic Renewal

A different challenge to consensus came in the 1970s through the Charismatic Renewal. The boat of fairly traditional Pentecostalism in Switzerland was already rocked with the sudden impact of the Jesus People Movement. Long hair and jeans for men, women wearing jewelry and pants were issues unthinkable just a decade earlier when even young men were wearing suit and tie for church. And now, these young people, also called hippies, kept coming to church. They had a genuine faith and many were empowered by the experience of being baptized in the Spirit. It hardly took a year and the Pentecostal congregations in Switzerland adapted to freer expressions of Christian discipleship. The Pentecostal press was full of praise.¹⁵ Why was this revolution possible, why was it benign? Three simple reasons may have played a role. First, the older generation recognized that these young folks had experienced a genuine conversion to Christ. Secondly, as these young Christians shared their experiences with God it resonated with the stories the older generation could tell. There was not only agreement in principle; there was a perceived unity of the Spirit. An old sister advised her husband, “Don’t look at their hair, look into their eyes.” Thirdly, the Jesus People had a dynamic faith. They shared the Good News with an energy that made many older Pentecostals remember early days of revival with nostalgia. The common experience of young and old on the level of the local congregation was the catalyst for reform.

At the same time there was another phenomenon that challenged Pentecostal identity. News from North America was streaming in that revival had begun in the mainline churches. Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Methodists had experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, began to worship God in languages unknown and minister with spiritual gifts. 1971 Dennis Bennett was the keynote speaker at the Pentecostal summer conference in Nyhem, Sweden. And Lewi Pethrus, the Swedish Pentecostal leader, commented that this Charismatic movement was the follow-up to the Pentecostal movement, through which God’s Spirit was reaching out to the lost of

¹⁴ Quoted in the memoirs edited by the BewegungPlus, *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, Berchtold Haller Verlag, 2007, p. 132.

¹⁵ The monthly magazine *Die Verheissung des Vaters* regularly reported in 1972 on the activities of the Jesus People Movement, One Way Cafés and the programs of Teen Challenge.

the world. The Swiss Pentecostals were informed in detail and their magazine continued to report favorably the stories their Charismatic friends could tell.¹⁶ The rapprochement was astonishing. Catholic priests invited Pentecostals to sing and testify during mass and Pentecostal pastors invited nuns and priests to attend their Bible studies. Why was this possible? Where there not insurmountable dogmatic obstacles? Lewi Pethrus gave a pragmatic answer, "We can spend a lot of time discussing doctrine, the church and congregational systems, and completely lose sight of the human being. This is incredibly tragic."¹⁷ In terms of spreading the Good News and seeking God's will through the move of the Holy Spirit, there was agreement.

Unfortunately dogmatic issues resurfaced and brought a cooling of relationships. The ecumenical fellowship was short-lived. Nevertheless, the memory of the 1970s lingers on as an example of experienced unity.

Recent developments

As the impact of the Jesus People Movement and the Charismatic Revival ebbed, Swiss Pentecostals began to focus again on questions of identity. They did not want to lose their core values. Consequently, questions of Christian unity were mostly answered critically. Doctrinal and ecclesial differences were emphasized.¹⁸

But there emerged new ways in which the phrase "in one accord" became relevant. The rising influx of migrant workers in the urban centers of Switzerland meant that Pentecostals of different color brought fresh expressions of faith and new opportunities to live Christian unity in practical terms. This was especially the case if a local congregation would not simply lend their facilities to some particular ethnic group but would consciously decide to celebrate together. The main Pentecostal church in Zurich, for instance, has made it a principle to worship cross-culturally and in a multi-lingual context. Each service is a testimony of togetherness and common purpose.

Parallel to this development there has been the establishment of new independent churches. These do not call themselves Pentecostal or Charismatic but in are in practical terms open and seeking a form of church life that is sensitive to the move of the Holy Spirit and includes the ministry through spiritual gifts. Questions of unity do not arise in the sense that a merger between groups would be envisaged. But on another level a tacit agreement has been struck. There is a constant flux of membership between these churches. It is a sign of our post-modern age that people do not feel bound to be lifelong members of one particular church. This is especially the case if there do not seem to be doctrinally significant differences between certain churches. The issue of proselytism loses its doctrinal edge. It has turned into a social or economic consideration. Questions of unity acquire a different meaning. A common purpose is more important than a common organization or a nuanced statement of faith.

¹⁶ *Verheissung des Vaters*, Sept. 1971, p. 1-5; also in the October and November issues.

¹⁷ *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, Sept. 1971, p.4.

¹⁸ Jakob Zopfi, *Auf alles Fleisch... Geschichte und Auftrag der Pfingstbewegung*, Dynamis Verlag, Kreuzlingen, 1985, p. 147-161.

This new vision of unity can be noticed in recent developments. One is called "Love in Action". "Love in Action" is a yearly recurring activity of various churches in the city of Zurich that takes place during one week in June. People band together across denominational lines in order to show practical love to its citizens as a testimony of their Christian calling. Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Catholics and Protestants are engaged in solidarity for those who need help or just a bit of friendly attention. Unity is expressed through caring love.

Another example is the initiative started by Billy Wilson called "Empowered 21". The idea behind it is simple. If the Holy Spirit is working in and through different churches, especially with regard to Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, could these churches not unite in purpose? The mission statement stresses that the purpose of "Empowered 21" is "to Unite the Global Spirit-filled movement together intergenerationally for the purpose of seeking a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the 21st century," and "to Focus the energy and resources of the Spirit-empowered global church on the harvest and challenges that are before us."¹⁹ It seems to be a sign of the new 21st Century attitude, that this campaign is not based on a common statement of belief, but rather on pragmatic reasoning. Its purpose is not to gain intellectual assent, but it is geared to action for the sake of the Gospel.

A third example of a practical initiative as a demonstration of Christian unity is the "Global Christian Forum". It sees itself as an open space for Christians of various traditions to meet in order to foster mutual respect and address common challenges.²⁰ The aim is not to create an organization, but to facilitate the sharing of faith in testimony and worship and to encourage cooperation. It is significant that half of the people engaged in the Global Christian Forum are Pentecostals and Evangelicals.

The above mentioned examples of unity are in my opinion symptomatic of our times. The emphasis is not primarily on establishing doctrinal consent, but on common outreach. Of course, it will be the next generation that will be able to evaluate if these initiatives will have had an impact on global Christianity and the world we live in.

Conclusion

The chronological walk through 100 years in search for Christian unity through the lenses of Swiss Pentecostals has revealed various dimensions through which the quest towards unity can be seen. There are at least three points that can be made.

First, the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement whether in Switzerland, in Europe or in other places of the world, have had an inherently ecumenical context. The experience of God's grace through the Holy Spirit has been stronger than particular theological or ecclesial differences. To my knowledge there hasn't been a single country where the movement has suffered a mortal blow because of its ecumenical ramifications. Loss of identity through assimilation did not take place. On the contrary, these ramifications have prepared Pentecostals to adapt to local circumstances without having to give up their *raison d'être*. A case in point has been the reception of the Charismatic renewal in the 1970s in many parts of the world. There was agreement on essentials, generosity on

¹⁹ Quoted (incl. capitalization) from the website <http://empowered21.com/about/global-vision-statements/> accessed on July 12, 2013.

²⁰ See: <http://www.globalchristianforum.org/>

particulars and liberty with regard to details. The memory of these ecumenical circumstances may serve as an encouragement for future approaches to Christian unity.

Second, as the discussions at the Stockholm conference in 1939 and the First Pentecostal World Conference in 1947 have shown, there is a tension between organizing a worldwide Pentecostal organization and upholding the independence of individual churches. The solution has been to associate as a fellowship instead. The situation in other global Christian bodies²¹ seems to indicate a move into the same direction. In a similar vein we see the activities of the Global Christian Forum as a fresh way to envisioning unity in the Body of Christ through sharing salvific stories and the various gifts that the churches can give to each other. The unity conferences among three Swiss Pentecostal denominations illustrate the same point. Although there was wide doctrinal agreement between the different groups a fusion into one denomination did not prove possible. Nevertheless, the association formed resulted in significant cooperation with regard to evangelism, education and communication.

Thirdly, the need for unity emerges through practical circumstances. This has been evidenced in the case of common missionary activities as well as when Pentecostals and Christians of other churches needed to band together in order to have a stronger voice in view of hostile circumstances. In the 21st century practical cooperation among Pentecostals, with fellow Christians of other churches and beyond may present a credible witness to Christian unity. It may happen in common worship, public witness, through coordinated education or in the face of humanitarian needs and fighting systemic injustice. For "being in one accord" as seen in the book of Acts implies sharing ones gifts and means to the glory of God and the good of humankind.

In this study we have seen that Pentecostals considered unity in Christ to be worth striving for. Even if full unity cannot be achieved there can be a unity in the Spirit and a unity of purpose, while still allowing for diversity. In closing, I would like to mention two current international examples that illustrate what we have been talking about. The one comes from a recent statement of the Pentecostal European Fellowship where it says, "The unity among European Pentecostals is a missional testimony."²² The other example can be given by referring to the recent Indonesian Christian Forum Rally in Jakarta on Pentecost 2013. The rally brought together people from seven different families of church traditions including Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Protestant for the sole purpose of expressing Christian solidarity. Rev. Andreas Yewangoe, chairperson of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, reminded the crowd in the national sports stadium that *"the unity of the churches is not because we declare it. No, the unity of the churches is only possible because Christians are called to love one another."*²³

²¹ For instance in the Anglican Communion sees itself as a family, the Lutheran World Federation considers being on a common journey, and the Baptist World Alliance to give another example, describes itself as a fellowship that wants to be in step with the Spirit. Interestingly enough, these associations describe themselves by metaphors and not by using the language of national governments or business organizations.

²² PEF flyer "Why PEF?" 2013

²³ <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/big-crowd-celebrates-christian-unity-in-indonesia-22229> accessed July 13, 2013.