Ralph Del Colle agreed immediately to write a Roman Catholic assessment of the work of Amos Yong and the state of Pentecostal scholarship. Ralph’s exceptional knowledge of Pentecostalism, his longstanding relationship with the Society for Pentecostal Studies, his involvement in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, his personal acquaintance with Amos Yong, and his professional career as a systematic theologian made him the single-most expert of his generation for the assignment. However, during the early phase of writing, Ralph was diagnosed with angiosarcoma, an aggressive cancer, and although committed to finishing the project, he succumbed to his illness on June 29, 2012, before he was able to complete his work. This brief tribute to his work sketches the parameters of his engagement with Pentecostal scholarship, in general, and with Amos Yong’s work in particular.

Ralph Gerald Del Colle was born in New York City on October 3, 1954, and was raised in Mineola, Long Island. He received a B.A. in Near Eastern Religions from New York University and M.Div., M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees from Union Theological Seminary. His professional career began at Barry University, Florida, led him to St. Anselm College, New Hampshire, and eventually to Marquette University, where he taught for 17 years in the Theology Department. In that diverse community he was respected not only for his scholarship but for his devotion to God, the church, and the spiritual life.

Ralph’s scholarship speaks clearly of his ecumenical commitments. He served for 12 years as a representative of the Pontifical Council on Christian Unity to the Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, and also was a member of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue and Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue, both for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and of the international Roman Catholic-Seven Day Adventist Consultation. He was invited by the Pontifical Council to serve as representative to the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998. He was a
member of the Archbishop’s Consultation for Theological Issues of the Archdiocese in Milwaukee, and in 2003 he received the Archbishop’s Vatican II Award for Service in Ecumenism. ¹ Throughout his career, one of the most significant traits of Ralph’s work was the ecumenical and theological conversation with Pentecostalism and Pentecostal scholarship.

Ralph was raised in the Catholic tradition and encountered Christ in a Pentecostal/charismatic house church during his Master’s studies before returning to the Catholic Church. ² This journey of faith remained formative during Ralph’s theological career. He joined the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1986 and was a constant presence at business meetings, interest groups, and sessions, chairing the theology interest group from 1999–2001 and serving as president of the Society in 2002–2003. He brought the annual meeting of the Society to the Marquette campus and increased the visibility of that Catholic scholarly community among Pentecostals, reflected also in a large number of Marquette’s doctoral students from Pentecostal traditions. His presence in that community and his scholarly work significantly impacted the new face of Pentecostal scholarship.

Ralph first met Amos Yong in November 1994 at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies at Wheaton College. Yong was drawn into a discussion on the sacramentality of glossolalia that is echoed in many of his early publications and that reflects the central concerns of Pentecostal scholarship in the United States at the time. ³ The spontaneous conversations on a variety of topics continued for a number of years and found a climax in the review of Yong’s book, Discerning the Spirit(s), at the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 2002. The discussions eventually resulted in the publication of a table-talk by several theologians, including Yong and Del Colle, revolving around the role of pneumatology, Christological, and trinitarian dogma in assisting a discernment of truth beyond the Christian community. ⁴ Yong made use in his publications

¹ “Ralph Del Colle,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (July 31, 2012), p. 4B.
² Ralph Del Colle, “Ecumenism and Interchurch Families,” unpublished presentation given at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, St. Louis, Missouri, June 10, 2005.