Ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostal churches is no longer seen as a novelty.¹ Many established churches today are open to relationships with the Pentecostal tradition. The spiritual, social, and theological presuppositions for this ecumenical work, on the other hand, are often taken for granted and not made explicit. Regrettably, it is exactly in these presuppositions that we frequently find a rather unstable basis for the task of ecumenism even before any official dialogue sessions begin. The Pentecostal tradition, in particular, has presented the established ecumenical movement with many questions concerning the presuppositions of their ecumenical discourse. What exactly is the definition of the term 'Pentecostal'? How can ecumenical dialogue with these 'Pentecostals' be conducted?² What is the 'Pentecostal' understanding of ecumenism? What are their goals, visions, and contributions? Despite the fact that many actively seek dialogue with Pentecostals, there is at this time more clarity about the actual agenda than about the ecumenical presuppositions for such dialogue.³ In this study I want to clarify these presuppositions. I will begin


² This relates especially to the 'movement versus church' typology that is still prominent in contemporary ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostals. See, e.g., Ralph del Colle, 'Fruits of Witness: Reflections on Evangelism, Proselytism and Common Witness,' One in Christ 36.4 (2000), 354-364.

with an analysis of five areas that should be addressed before official
dialogue can focus on the actual issues that unite or divide the churches. I
will substantiate this analysis with illustrations from the history of the
ecumenical and Pentecostal movements and conclude with a description of
theological principles for ecumenical dialogue that are applicable not only
to Pentecostalism.

1. A Common Definition of Ecumenism

Ecumenical dialogues differ in method and goal, depending on the nature
of relationships and the degree of communion already established between
particular churches. Such a statement may seem obvious and superfluous
to many in the ecumenical movement. Nonetheless, the illusion that there
exists a single universal ecumenical formula is still dominant in many
churches, in particular among the small number of Pentecostal churches
that engage in ecumenical dialogue.4 It is therefore of primary importance
to clarify what kind of dialogue should be expected before the actual
discussion of a particular ecumenical agenda takes place. The ecumenically
established churches stifle the growth of the ecumenically inexperienced
if they overlook or downplay the fact, that there exists at this time no
single ecumenical hermeneutic that would allow all churches to conduct
ecumenical dialogue with other Christian traditions on all levels according
to one predefined and universally applicable pattern. In neglecting this
fact, the established churches continue looking for fruit on a barren tree
that first needs elementary care and fertilization (cf. Lk. 13:6-9). In not
acknowledging this fact, Pentecostal churches live with a preconceived
understanding of ecumenism that does not prepare them for the demands
of contemporary, diverse ecumenical relationships.

Pentecostal churches are ecumenical saplings, and it would be irresponsible
to abandon them prematurely. If they cannot learn from the
established ecumenical movement, they will develop following their own
principles, a path that has frequently encouraged ecumenical isolation
rather than cooperation.5 It is important that all those who are involved in

4 This illusion belongs to the realm of an ecumenism of Babel; see my article 'Appeal
for a Pentecostal Council for Ecumenical Dialogue,' Mid-Stream 40.3 (July 2001):
45-56.

5 See, e.g. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., 'The Assemblies of God and Ecumenical Coopera-
tion: 1920-1965,' in Pentecostalism in Context, ed. by Wonsuk Ma and William W.
Menzies, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, 107-150. A good example of
the teachable nature of Pentecostals can be found in Murray W. Dempster, 'Pacifism
in Pentecostalism: The Case of the Assemblies of God,' in The Fragmentation of the
Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking, ed. by Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel,