This article arose from a request to prepare a paper on 'The Mission of Pentecostalism' for a meeting of the Encuentro Pentecostal Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1989. However, once I started to work on the theme, I came to the conclusion that it is not theologically appropriate to speak of 'the Mission of Pentecostalism', as though this Christian movement had a mission separate and distinct from that of other churches and other confessional traditions. Are not all Christian churches called by the same missionary challenge of Jesus?

What does seem appropriate to me, as I emphasized at the Encuentro in 1989, is that we ask ourselves about, and reflect upon, the contribution which our Pentecostal churches, in their unity and diversity and in relation to their own characteristics as concrete expressions of 'the Church of Christ', can do for a new 'ecumenical understanding (and praxis) of the mission of the church in the difficult years which are before us' (Document of the Encuentro de Bahia, 6-9 January 1988).

Therefore, I would like for these reflections to be an invitation to the review and evaluation of our Pentecostal identity, tradition and missionary practice, but having as its frame of reference the unique mission of Christ which brings together all the Christian churches to fulfill his call.

In the first part of this exposition, a brief characterization of the Pentecostal movement is attempted. In the second part, an attempt is
made to point out the more important and relevant contributions of Pentecostalism to the understanding and practice of the Christian mission.

1. Background

The 'Pentecostal experience' is nothing new in the history of Christianity, characterized as it is by a search for an intense 'living experience' of God through the Holy Spirit, by a search for holiness or sanctification, by a strong eschatological expectation, and as a consequence of all the above, by a strong zeal to evangelize. The Pentecostal traditions underline the fact that these features were clearly present in New Testament Christian communities. But also throughout the history of Christianity there were movements which, to some extent, experienced and promoted the same experience.

Already in the second century, the Montanists promoted spiritual ecstasy, ascetic practices and hoped for the soon inbreaking of the 'New Jerusalem'. In the sixteenth century the movements which are called 'The Radical Reformation' (that is, those movements which, although they originated from the reforming impulse of Luther and Zwingli, separated from them in order to carry out the reforms more radically) experienced various aspects of what we have entitled 'Pentecostal experience'. The peasants, guided by Thomas Muntzer, reclaimed the right and the possibility of understanding the Scriptures by means of the light of the Holy Spirit, over against the academic erudition by which Luther questioned their interpretations. All of these movements had a strong eschatological expectation and attempted to build their communities of faith according to the models of the New Testament.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Pietism reacted against the cold intellectual speculation which characterized the Protestant theologians, and reclaimed a more affective and intense religious experience, a festive and joyful emphasis in worship and in the worship service, a pious life, and a new missionary concern.

Indeed the movement of John Wesley in England in the seventeenth century can be considered the most direct antecedent of the present Pentecostal movement. Wesley, with his experience and his theological reflection on that experience, contributed the central elements of what,