What shape, if any, would common witness take between two traditions which are either in the initial stages of ecumenical relationships, or belong to denominations which are uneasy about any form of ecumenism? Is it even possible for Christians of different traditions to express their faith together in natural ways without committing themselves to structural reunion? Is it possible to engage in common witness while rejecting ecclesiastical reunion as an ideal? Are there no more limited choices between organic reunion on the one hand, and no common witness whatsoever on the other hand? Can we cooperate in mission and common witness in some concrete manner, even if only to a limited degree? Can Christians of differing theological views witness together without compromising their distinctive witness?

Experience of Jesus Christ as a Point of Departure

We can begin to look at these delicate issues by stating the presuppositions to common witness in the context of Classical Pentecostal–Roman Catholic relations as expressed in the international dialogue. This international dialogue has repeatedly asserted that it does not have as its goal structural reunion. Rather its goal is the death of mythologies, the
demise of those distorted views each partner has of the real faith and practice of the other. We are guilty of false witness against our neighbors if we keep repeating third-hand information coming out of the histories of our mutual antagonism. I need to hear from Pentecostals what they stand for doctrinally. I want to know from them how they experience God. What is the Classical Pentecostal spirituality? And I would like Classical Pentecostals to hear from a Catholic source what we believe and how we experience God in history.

The theological basis of common witness is found in Jesus Christ, the Absolute Witness, sent for the salvation of all by the Father in the power of the Spirit to lead us in the Spirit through Christ, back to the source and fountainhead, the Father. Since Jesus is the face of the Father in history, witness and evangelization start here. Pentecostals can agree with Pope Paul VI: 'There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed'. As 'Gospel people' the Pentecostals will want to know in more detail what gospel truths constitute our point of departure. There is a christological concentration which goes beyond an academic confession of who this Jesus is who comes from the Father. 'The impulse to a common witness comes not from any strategy, but from the personal and community experience of Jesus Christ.' Experience of Jesus Christ unites us.

But we can also name biblical truths which join us. Together we believe in the Fatherhood of God; the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Messiah, Savior, and Coming Lord; the enduring nature of Pentecost; the love of God which is poured out through the Spirit; the unique character of the divine initiative in salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the promise of everlasting life, the centrality of the Scriptures, the significant role of the charisms (a church without charisms is a non-church). The experience of Jesus Christ in the Spirit and our faith in these biblical truths constitute a real though imperfect communion between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics. We may interpret some of these differently, but nonetheless there is a real basis for a large measure of oneness. We are, in fact, united in primary truths of the Gospel.