

Who Challenges Whom?

Exploring and Responding to Theological Diversities between the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches and the Lutheran Church

A Paper Presented in the Consultation on: The Charismatic Challenge for Ecumenical Partnerships: Insights from Different Contexts and Churches

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1. Introduction

Honorable EKHN's President, Dr. Volker Jung, honorable bishops, distinguished guests, and all participants of this consultation!

Let me mention at the outset of my presentation, that my paper comprises of more questions than answers. These questions are meant to stimulate a discussion and exchange, so that, together, we can explore and respond to theological diversities and challenges between the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches and the so-called historical churches or mainline churches. Allow me to begin with a short story.

Last Sunday (2nd of October 2011) I attended a worship service in the Agape Christian Fellowship Church in Omurushaka Town – a small but growing town in Karagwe District. That congregation is called “*Mito ya Baraka*” (*the fountains of blessings*). I know the leader of the congregation, by name Pastor Lutenta. He is one of the prosperity preachers. He is a friend of mine; and every time we have met each other, he has always invited me to visit his church. Pastor Lutenta is a trained assistant medical officer and before he became Pastor of the Agape Church, he was working at Nyakahanga Hospital, which is owned by Karagwe Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Formerly, he belonged to the Lutheran Church and later on to the Evangelistic Assemblies of God of Tanzania (EAGT).

But that is not the story I want to tell you. The story is about me (myself). It is about the thoughts and feelings, which I had as I planned to attend the Sunday service in the Agape congregation. Although I have been attending several services in Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches, it was not easy for me this time, firstly to decide and secondly to walk to the Agape church. I did not feel free to drive a Lutheran church car to go to the Pentecostal Church. It would probably been easier. But where could I have parked the car? On the way to the church, I wrestled with a number of questions in my mind: *What if my fellow Lutheran Christians see me going to Agape Church? Will they understand me? How will they react upon seeing me going to and/or coming from a Pentecostal church? What will I answer, when they ask me 'where have you been'?* We should remember that it was Sunday morning and I am a Lutheran pastor going to a Charismatic-Pentecostal Church! But I took courage; I went there. I thought I could find something to explain to those who could ask me. After all I had already been to the Lutheran service, which started at 9 a.m. at the Lutheran Hospital Chapel.

On the way back, I did meet some people who asked me: Where have you been, Pastor? Funny enough one was a Muslim brother! *The sheep, who know their pastor, ask him he has*

been. Every time they asked me, I told them a long story! The question is: *why should there be a struggle in me? Is it wrong to worship in a Pentecostal Church?*

2. Implication and Challenge

Fear, hesitation and suspicion of encounter with the Charismatic-Pentecostals are a big challenge for the leaders of the Lutheran Church (and of Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches) in Tanzania today. You can find this challenge at all levels of the church's organizational structure. *How prepared and open are the Lutheran Christians to meet and work with our fellow Charismatic-Pentecostal Christians? How prepared and ready are the Charismatic-Pentecostals to come into encounter with the Lutheran Christians? How can a Lutheran pastor learn and know what is taking place in the Pentecostal Churches without taking part in their services? How many Lutheran pastors feel free to attend services in the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches? (I guess they are only a few) Why? Is it prohibited? And if it is hard for a Lutheran pastor to go and take part in Charismatic-Pentecostal service, how is it for a Lutheran bishop?* Lack of willingness and readiness to meet with the Charismatic-Pentecostals (and vice versa) is a setback for any ecumenical encounter. Forums are needed, (even at the grassroots, i.e. in congregations), if we need a positive ecumenical partnership with the Charismatic-Pentecostals. There are things that we cannot understand about the Charismatic-Pentecostals without "experiencing" them personally. Without encounter with the Charismatic-Pentecostals, we will end up with prejudices and misconceptions about them.

3. On the Growth of Charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity

A lot has been said and written about the growth of Charismatic-Pentecostalism in Africa and in the world at large. I can only repeat that the growth of the Charismatic-Christianity can be seen everywhere in the world. To ignore the existence and growth of the Charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity today would be a contra-fact. This is also true in Europe. Reinhard Hempelmann (June 2009) made a statement saying: "*Pentecostal groupings and organisations in Western Europe have lost momentum.*" The statistics given by some scholars like Werner Kahl do contradict Hempelmann's assertion. According to Kahl, there are (*for example*) not less than 1000 Migrant Charismatic-Pentecostal congregations of the African origin in Germany. These have been established by migrant Charismatic-Pentecostal pastors, who are seeking to evangelize and win new and lost European souls for Christ. These Charismatic Pentecostal pastors feel having a burden of bringing revival amongst the Europeans, so that they can come back to Jesus. And, I think, Revival – be it from within or from without - is needed in Africa, Europe and elsewhere, if we want to keep the church lively and strong. The challenge is how the revival campaigns are carried out by our Charismatic-Pentecostal brothers and sisters; and how the Lutherans respond to the Charismatic-Pentecostal evangelistic campaigns.

There has been a tug-of-war between the Charismatic-Pentecostals and the Lutherans. For example, some members of charismatic-Pentecostal Churches claim that there is no salvation in the Lutheran Church and that Lutheran pastors are unsaved Christians. Archbishop Zachary Kakobe refers to them as "*viongozi vipofu*" (blind leaders), who are

misleading their followers by not leading them to the right path of salvation.¹ Moreover, for many Charismatic Pentecostals, the so-called mainline Churches are untrue churches, which do not have the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, Lutheran pastors and other leaders in Tanzania argue that: the Charismatic-Pentecostal churches do not have a sound theology and their doctrines are misleading, their songs, prayers and testimonies do not have any theological basis. Furthermore, the Lutheran pastors warn the members of the Lutheran Church to be careful of the sermons, prayers, songs and liturgies of the charismatic-Pentecostal churches. According to the Lutherans, the charismatic-Pentecostals' interpretation of the Bible is wrong. The Lutheran Church regards itself as the only church with the correct interpretation of Scripture and the right administration of the sacraments. This "Lutheran pride" can be traced way back to the 16th century during the Reformation. There has also been a tug-of-war between the Lutheran Church and the Charismatic-Pentecostals due to diversities on the doctrines on infant or adult baptism, on the Holy Spirit, on speaking in tongues, on prayer healing, on possession of demons, on miracle performance, etc.

4. Who challenges whom?

Let me go back to the title of this paper which says "*Who challenges whom?*" Ever since I started to hear about Charismatic-Pentecostalism (more than thirty years ago) and since I started to attend workshops on Pentecostal-Charismatic-Christianity, the theme has always been on "*the challenges of the Charismatic-Pentecostals to the so-called historical churches.*" This is evident also in the title of this workshop: "*The charismatic challenge for ecumenical partnerships.*" For many Lutherans in Tanzania, the word "*challenges*" (*changamoto*) of the *Charismatic-Pentecostals*" normally carries a negative connotation. It is like saying "*troubles caused by the Charismatic-Pentecostals to the Lutheran Church.*" The Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches have been viewed as a threat, rather than a blessing. This is testified, for example, by a statement made by Lutheran theologians during the LWF-workshop in Soweto (South Africa, 2008) that: "As Lutherans, we often experience these rapidly growing churches as competitive threats since their popular appeal may attract some of our members."² My question is whether it is not the high time now to start speaking about the challenges of the Lutheran Church (and other so-called historical churches) to the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches! In my opinion, challenges come not only from the Charismatic-Pentecostals, but also from the Lutheran Church. Churches challenge one another. I would like to highlight some theological diversities and challenges and we can answer together the question "*who challenges whom?*"

5. Theological Diversities and Challenges

It is true that there are a number of theological, missiological, ethical, liturgical and ecclesiological challenges that have been brought by the growth of Charismatic-

¹Cf. Zachary Kakobe, *Masomo ya Mwanzo baada ya Kuokoka*. Dar es Salaam: Neno la Uzima Publishers, 2004, 130-145.

²Karen L. Bloomquist, *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008, 149.

Pentecostalism. I will underline a few examples of what the Charismatic-Pentecostals teach and practice; and what the Lutheran Christians normally criticize.

The first example is the over-emphasis of the Charismatic-Pentecostals on the experience of the Spirit, which is accompanied by ecstatic manifestations like speaking in tongues and visions. Lutheran Churches are very skeptical about that. Sometimes, I think, some Lutherans have even been too skeptical to the extent of denying, ignoring or not recognizing the power of the Holy Spirit. If you nowadays talk about receiving the Holy Spirit, a Lutheran church member - even a pastor - will look at you as if you were a “fanatic person”. In fact, many people today (even some Lutherans) –*unknowingly* - do equate “*the Holy Spirit*” with “Charismatic-Pentecostalism.” What I mean is that there has been a tendency amongst Lutheran communities to speak very little about the Holy Spirit. And I think, it is high time for the Lutheran Church to revisit its teachings on the Holy Spirit, his manifestations and his gifts.

But, on the other hand, the Charismatic-Pentecostal Christians do, in my opinion, *over-emphasize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit* to the extent that other realities in life are ignored. Everything is taken to have been caused or done by the Holy Spirit. It appears sometimes as if some Charismatic-Pentecostal preachers “own” the Holy Spirit. They speak and/or “distribute” the Holy Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit were in their suitcases. I have seen this challenge in various places in Tanzania.

But this is not only in Tanzania. One day I led a devotion hour in Hamburg (Germany) and chose to speak about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was during a “*Prediger-Seminar*” which was organized by the Academy of Mission. Some leaders of Charismatic-Pentecostal congregations in Hamburg also attended the devotion. After the devotion, a leader of one Charismatic-Pentecostal congregation approached me and said to me: “*Pastor, your sermon was dry! Why didn't you allow the Holy Spirit to speak to people?*” Thanks to God, I was calm. I didn't say anything. The Holy Spirit kept me calm. But the words of that fellow touched me. After preaching, we normally expect that people will tell us: “thank you for the nice sermon!” But that was not the case for me on that day!

Some Charismatic-Pentecostal Christians think that they are the only Christians or Churches having the Holy Spirit and that other Churches (e.g. the Lutheran Church) do not have the Holy Spirit. The expectation of many Charismatic-Pentecostals is that wherever there is the Holy Spirit, people must speak in tongues, miracles should take place, etc. That means, a person who does not speak in tongues, he/she has no Holy Spirit. I think, this is the most irritating Charismatic-Pentecostal judgment to the Lutherans and it is a big challenge for the ecumenical partnership.

We therefore need a balance regarding our perception of the Holy Spirit and its manifestations. On the one hand, our Charismatic-Pentecostal brothers and sisters need to know that their **over-emphasis** of the Holy Spirit makes some people (*especially in Europe*) skeptical to the Charismatic Pentecostal Churches. But on the other hand, the “**under-emphasis**” of the work of the Holy Spirit by the Lutheran Church should be worked upon. To me, both “over-emphasizing” and “under-emphasizing” the work of the Holy Spirit are a manipulation of the Holy Spirit. Instead of reacting defensively to the Charismatic-Pentecostals who claim that there is no Holy Spirit among the Lutherans, the Lutheran Church needs to revisit its theology of the Holy Spirit and allow members of

the Church to experience the creating, redeeming and sustaining work of the Holy Spirit in people's daily lives. (Cf. Bloomquist, 2008, 149).

The second challenge is the “over-emphasis” on miracles by the Charismatic-Pentecostals, and a partial or complete denial of the existence of miracles by fellow Lutheran Pastors and Theologians. Most Charismatic-Pentecostals do over-emphasize miracle performance. They teach people to wait for miracles in everything, and this may prevent people to find real, feasible and lasting solutions for their problems. For example, they over-emphasize “the healing miracles”, sometimes refusing to take medically approved medicines. Some Charismatic-Pentecostals encourage their members not to go to hospitals. Recently, there was a case in Rukwa Region, where a Charismatic-Pentecostal Pastor was beaten up, and the church was destroyed by angry people after a child died, while the pastor was conducting a healing miracle prayer for the child. It is even more dangerous, when Charismatic-Pentecostal leaders like Pastor Lutenta of the Agape Church in Karagwe (a trained assistant medical officer) tell that Jesus is enough and that sick people should not bother themselves to go to hospitals. There is so-to-say a tendency among the Charismatic-Pentecostals to look for spiritual and miraculous answers for everything even for real social, economic and physical problems.

On the other hand, there have been - in Tanzania - tendencies among the Lutherans to dismiss the issue of miracles and prayer healing. I believe, such a tendency is even bigger in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Most of you have certainly heard about *Loliondo and a miraculous healing by Pastor Ambilikile Masapile*, popularly known as *Babu*. There have been different reactions to this healer and to the healing ministry, not only among the European brothers and sisters, but also among the Tanzanians. I had a privilege to participate in some discussions with a number of Danish and German friends; and I can tell you that some couldn't accept at all that there can be a miracle. There are many people who think that they can explain everything in rational terms. And that is a problem, when it comes to an exchange with the Charismatic-Pentecostals. The Lutheran Church ought, in my opinion, to revisit the theology of healing and accept also that God can perform miracles. God performs miraculous things without asking for permission from anybody. The Lutheran theologians should be ready to hear and *sometimes* accept that there are miracles; and that there are things that the human being cannot explain rationally. In so doing, we can enter into positive ecumenical exchange with our Charismatic-Pentecostal brothers and sisters.

The third challenge is the teachings of the Charismatic-Pentecostals on the Success or Prosperity Gospel, which promises that people who believe in Jesus and pay tithes to a Charismatic-Pentecostal Church will achieve prosperity. Those who advocate prosperity gospel put much emphasis on material wealth and tell people to wait for God's miracles. Those who pay tithes are promised to receive a lot of blessings; while those who do not pay tithes are threatened that they will be cursed. If you visit their services and hear sermons of the prosperity preachers, you will hear statements like “*our God is not poor*”, “*failure is not part of God's plan for mankind*”, “*God never sent the Holy Ghost into anyone to make him fail*” etc. These do attract many listeners especially those facing hardships in life. Adherents of the Gospel of Success or prosperity regard poverty and other social and economic problems as God's punishment of sinners and non-believers. Poverty is implicitly equated with sin. Rich people are seen as the ones who

have been blessed, while poor people as people who have been cursed. All these assertions are not biblical.

The Lutheran Churches should be aware of such Charismatic-Pentecostal teachings, and if possible try to help the followers of the Charismatic-Pentecostal teachings on prosperity to look for viable socio-economic solutions to the problems they are facing. Charismatic-Pentecostals should stop putting too much emphasis on material wealth, since some people might think that material wealth and success is the only goal of being baptized or becoming Christians.

But again, there is a paradox that we should think about as we discuss the teachings on prosperity. By nature, every person wants to be successful (*and to be "rich"!*) Who does not want to drive a car? Who does not want to have a good house? When I posed these questions to the Lutheran pastors in Karagwe in 2010 (during a workshop on the Challenges of Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches), I had a feeling that most of the pastors would like to advocate for the prosperity Gospel, because they also want to get rid of all situations of poverty they living in. Prosperity Gospel will continue to prevail as long as people are poor and needy.

The forth challenge is Charismatic-Pentecostals' over-emphasis of moral and holiness issues to the extent of denying the sinful nature of a human being. There is a dualistic worldview among the African Charismatic Pentecostals that distinguishes between "the world and the church," the "devil and the divine," "good and evil" and "sickness and health." Many Charismatic-Pentecostals are very strict on moral issues. And we should not ignore the positive side of this, because by emphasizing on moral life, the Charismatic-Pentecostals have contributed in changing the life styles and behaviors of people. I know people, who were alcoholics in the past, and who are no longer alcoholics today. We can give a lot of examples in this area. The problem comes when the Charismatic-Pentecostals strongly emphasize on moral issues – for example, referring to those who drink a glass of beer or smoke cigarettes as sinners; telling them that they are living under the dominion of Satan and that they are going to hell.

In the Lutheran Church, little emphasis is laid on moral issues. This may differ from one context to another. The emphasis is put on the teachings such as "*salvation by grace*", "*justification by faith alone without works*", "*Simul iustus et peccator*" (justified and sinner at the same time) and the like. These are the fundamental Lutheran theological formulations and I think, they are very important and I like them. But there has been a tendency of neglecting moral issues, good works, (etc) in our teachings. If we are not careful, these very nice theological statements may lead the so called "cheap grace!" It should also be said that these statements are very philosophical and complicated. Only some theologians can understand them. We should simply them, so that common people can also understand them. That is what the Charismatic-Pentecostals are doing, it doesn't matter whether they have been to a theological university or not. They offer simple messages, so that everybody can understand them.

Belief in the power of the devil has been a part of every religion. The tendency nowadays is that, there is no a "*real*" Lutheran Pastor who talks about the power of the devil. In so doing the Lutheran pastors are like "denying" the existence of the devil on earth. Whereas I don't support over-emphasizing the "devil" and "evil", I think, it would not be wise to

reject completely the teachings on the power of the devil. Belief or fear of the devil and demons is still very strong among many people in Africa, even among the people who publicly reject the power of the devil. Therefore, refusing to speak about the devil doesn't help people. In this point, we should probably learn the approach of the Charismatic-Pentecostals of first recognizing that evil powers do exist, and then take the next step of telling them that the Power of the Holy Spirit overcomes all evil powers.

The Charismatic-Pentecostals should understand that putting much emphasis on "devil" and "demons" does not help them win the lost souls in Europe. In other words, over-emphasizing demons and demons-possession does not speak to a European mind. The charismatic-Pentecostals' over-emphasis on demons will always lead to their (Charismatic-Pentecostals) rejection, because "the devil", "demons" and "spirits" are not a part of the modern European worldview. It ought to be mentioned here that, possession by demons in the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches is not only interpreted as something signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches, but also it is interpreted as a proof that a minister has the Holy Spirit in him/her. To the Charismatic-Pentecostals, demons can only appear where and when the Holy Spirit is working. In other words, the demons show up, because they fear the Holy Spirit.

To conclude this point, I see a great danger of 'demonizing' the society, if Charismatic-Pentecostal preachers continue to preach frequently about demons and evil powers. Talking regularly about the power of demons does not lead to the liberation from the demons, but rather to the dependence on demons. The result is that even more people believe in demons, evil spirits, witchcraft and supernatural powers. There is therefore an urgent need of *anti-demonization campaigns* in Africa.

The fifth challenge is the over-emphasis of the Charismatic-Pentecostals on the "Bible" and "Biblical authority" in all walks of life. The Bible is the central teaching authority of the Word of God; and the Charismatic-Pentecostals take it very seriously. During Bible study hours, individual Christians participate actively in theologizing and hence growing in matters of faith. They nurture and encourage each another. This is a challenge to the Lutheran Church, because in most Lutheran Congregations we do not find Bible study groups, where people study the Bible together. Bible study groups ought to be established, in order to quench people's spiritual thirst and to strengthen their faith.

But applying the Bible in every situation may also be problematic. Some members of Charismatic-Pentecostals churches feel proud of carrying the Bible, so that every person can see it. This may not necessarily convince every person; and it may sometimes be interpreted as fanatic. The Lutheran Church, on the other hand, ought to encourage its adherents not to be ashamed of the Bible. They should read it always; and should not dismiss it from their everyday life.

The sixth challenge is the spirit of expansionism

As I prepared this paper, I made interviews with ten fellow Lutheran Pastors in Karagwe. The interview question was only one, i.e.: *What are the challenges of the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches?* Answers from all ten pastors were nearly similar. Interestingly, although they were interviewed differently, the first statement from every interviewed pastor was: *Challenges are so many!* Four pastors said: *"The Pentecostals fish from our boats!"* (*wanavua kwenye mitumbwi yetu*); three pastors said: *"they are stealing our sheep"*. The rest three maintained: *"The Pentecostals are harvesting from our fields."*

The notion that the Pentecostals are “*fishing or harvesting from the Lutheran fields*” or “*stealing sheep*” is not new. It started in the 1980s if not earlier. It is the same view, which Reinhard Veller (1991) puts forward arguing that the Charismatic-Pentecostals are less concerned with the mission to the non-Christians than with the poaching of members of other churches. This claim carries some truth in it, because there are Charismatic-Pentecostal preachers, who – under disguise of non-denominational evangelistic campaigns and with promises of healing and success or prosperity - have induced members of the so-called historical churches to join the Charismatic-Pentecostal churches. However, the notion of “*stealing members from other churches*” may also signify the concern (*and probably the fear*) of some Lutheran Pastors and other leaders that the “*growth*” of the Charismatic-Pentecostal congregations means a “*decline*” of Lutheran congregations.

Every church is afraid of losing its members. It is like doing business. Many churches have become like business entities and they are afraid to lose “customers”. It should be remembered that in the country like Tanzania, losing church members means losing money to pay pastors and evangelists. We do not have a church-tax system. So, churches are struggling to “*expand their territories*” (*expansionism*) by making more members in order to safeguard the economy of the churches. Otherwise, growth in itself is a positive thing, and it would probably be proper to give compliments to any church which is growing, rather than saying bad words against it.

But on the other hand, it is not comfortable for the Lutheran pastors to see members of their congregations leaving their Churches and joining other denominations. Some Lutheran pastors and other leaders react so strongly, when that happens, because they wish the best for their people. They wish that their people don't join churches with “unsound doctrines” such as prosperity gospel, payment of tithes in order to get material blessings or in order to avoid curses, etc. To respond to the issue of sheep stealing, I agree with one Charismatic-Pentecostal leader (as quoted by Allan Anderson) who said: “*We don't steal sheep; we plant grass!*” Instead of blaming the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches, the Lutheran Church should strive to plant better grass, so that the sheep can eat and enjoy themselves. The sheep are looking for greener pastures, where they can eat and be satisfied. Thus, instead of becoming angry of the sheep and of those who are thought to have stolen the sheep, one is supposed to be happy, when he/she finds that his/her “*so-called stolen sheep*” are happy and satisfied. It would be very interesting and ecumenical, if Lutheran pastors and bishops could take initiatives to visit their ex-members (*the so-called stolen sheep*), who have joined the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches. By so doing, they (Lutheran pastors and bishops) would show their concern for the wellbeing of their ex-members. For both Lutherans and the Charismatic-Pentecostals, “*there is one body and one Spirit, just as [we] were called to the one hope of [our] calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

6. CONCLUSION

It is necessary for the churches to open up for a dialogue with one another. There is a lot to learn from each other for the wellbeing of the Body of Christ. The Lutheran Churches have something to learn from the Charismatic-Pentecostals for example: Lively services that are full of joy associated with lively singing, dancing, life of prayer, life of reading the Bible, friendly communities (many Charismatic-Pentecostal communities are very personal; members visit one another; help each other; encourage one another, etc. In so doing, they fill in the vacuum that has been growing due to continuing disintegration of

traditional families. All these elements do attract people to join the Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches. But on the other hand, ecumenism is not a one-way traffic. Thus, the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians *should learn to be ready to learn* from the so-called mainline churches. They can learn, for example, how to adjust to different contexts, avoiding over-emphasis of the phenomena like demonization and miracle healing.

Furthermore, if the Charismatic Pentecostals could open up, they could get more academic theological studies, something that is missing in many Charismatic-Pentecostal communities. In this line, it is probably high time for the Lutheran Church in Tanzania to allow Charismatic-Pentecostals to study theology at Makumira and other theological colleges in the country. It is at such higher learning institutions, where a real, positive and lasting theological encounter can take place. Ecumenical learning does not only happen by one church taking teachings and practices of the other church; it happens also by questioning some unbiblical teachings and practices, which may distort the gospel.

More programs and forums between the Lutheran Churches and the Charismatic Pentecostal should be organized, in order to discuss various theological matters from different viewpoints. Such workshops will help the two sides to learn from each other and do away with prejudices existing between the Lutherans and Charismatic-Pentecostals. More and more Charismatic-Pentecostals will continue to knock on the doors of the Lutherans and members of other so-called historical Churches. I think, it is also high time for the Lutheran theologians and Church leaders to knock at the doors of the Charismatic-Pentecostals – for example, to attend services in the Charismatic-Pentecostal Congregations, in order to learn what is done and taught there. Opening up the doors for one another will not only open up doors for new challenges, but also for more new possibilities towards strengthening the Body of Christ. Each Church should strive for a peaceful coexistence with other churches; and avoid things like “sheep stealing” that poison the ecumenical partnership. In this line, we ought to *cast out the spirit of expansionism*, which is sweeping across many churches today.

Finally, we ought to understand that in every ecumenical partnership there will always be differences. Churches will continue to be different. Attempts to make all churches similar will never succeed. But in ecumenical partnerships, differences ought not to be regarded as a problem, but as a positive challenge. In my opinion, differences can provide a great opportunity for the enrichment for earth other. The body of Christ is healthy and fit with various gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12). We need to be humble as we approach the Charismatic-Pentecostal brothers and sisters, they should also learn to be humble to us and learn from us.

Thank you!