Mission and the Issue of Proselytism

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.

Proselytism is a blight on the veracity of the Christian message and on the effectiveness of Christian mission. Almost weekly one can pick up a local newspaper or Christian periodical and find a story in which the members of one group are charged with attempting to lure members of another group into their ranks. The heat and animosity generated by such allegations and activities hold explosive potential in many parts of the world.

Proselytism, as G. R. Evans observes, "is a sign that the sense of sharing a common mind has broken down." This breakdown may be observed at two levels. First, it can be seen in the multitude of Christian communities that do not respect or recognize the genuineness or fullness of ecclesial claims made by other communities that call themselves Christian. Second, it can be observed in our inability or unwillingness to work together on a common definition of terms. To date, one group's evangelization is still another group's proselytism.

Besides the disparity between definitions of the problem, even the assumptions that undergird certain definitions are not shared by all. Evans argues, "If I think you are already in Christ in his Church where you are, I shall not want to win you for my Church. Indeed, I shall regard you as already a member of it." But many of us can think of situations in which this basic assumption is not shared, and evangelistic or missional activity continues unabated. As a result, sincere efforts of Christian witness may be seen as proselytism, creating division rather than reconciliation.

What is proselytism? How is it being defined? And who is defining it? It is not my concern to redefine or to do away with the term "proselytism" but to explore its common usages in such a way as to preserve the legitimate place for a noncoercive, sensitive evangelism.

In January 1994 Armenian Orthodox Catholicos Karekin II visited the United States. While he was in Southern California, he shared some of his concerns about the interface between the Orthodox and evangelicals. Since the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, he reported, many evangelicals have made trips to that region of the world to engage in what they call evangelism. Some of them met with Catholicos Karekin himself. When they did, they found him dressed in clerical attire, wearing a cross. Although they knew who he was, they nevertheless pressed him on the question of whether or not he knew Jesus.

"They ignore the fact that Eastern Orthodox Christians are just that—Christians," he protested. He went on to point out that "Christianity is not something we have inherited from the West but something that has been with us since the beginning of the Christian era." Such stories are common among Orthodox leaders in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and they serve notice to evangelicals that they could use some lessons both in theology and church history—not to mention the kindness and common courtesy of 1 Corinthians 13:4-5.

Evangelicals know remarkably little about Eastern Orthodox. But this is not the total story. The Orthodox know far too little about evangelicals. One need only note the action of Archbishop Iakovos, archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, who issued an encyclical letter in September 1994 declaring Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, and Pentecostals to be "religious groups which are not of the Christian tradition." Fortunately, the damage has been somewhat ameliorated through the issuance of a corrective that declares that "most congregations of the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists are of the Christian Tradition. Some are not."

Much more positive is the work undertaken in a joint evangelization project called Mission Volga. Beginning in the spring of 1992 some leaders in the Russian Orthodox Church and a number of evangelical parachurch leaders worked out an evangelistic program that resulted in 100,000 people responding to invitations; through a series of televised events, Mission Volga was seen by some 25 million people.

The ignorance of some evangelicals often leads to what can only be called proselytism. On other occasions, such as occurred with Mission Volga, there may be cooperative efforts that are both evangelistically effective and successful in avoiding the proselytism label. But in still other situations, the charge of proselytism would appear to be unwarranted. Rules that are unilaterally declared regarding geographic or cultural boundaries are clearly debatable. Consider, for example, unchurched Hispanic Catholics who are contacted by evangelizing Protestants. On one hand, any charge that such Protestants do not take

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Hispanic history and culture seriously or that they do not understand the Roman Catholic theology of baptism must be answered. The other hand, some Roman Catholic leaders, such as Cardinal Augusto Vargas Alzamora, are prepared to recognize that "the number of baptized Catholics who live a life totally indifferent to their faith is dramatically changing the face of the culture." Whatever might have once been said about a strong Hispanic Catholic culture must now be modified.

Although proselytism possesses a neutral or positive meaning in the Bible, today most connotations are derogatory. But it is equally clear that despite widespread agreement about the negative character of proselytism, definitions differ dramatically, depending upon who employs the term. A few examples will make the point.

The Orthodox and the Issue of Proselytism

Although concern over proselytism against the Orthodox is not new, events in Eastern Europe over the past half dozen years have highlighted the problem. The uninvited entry of Protestant missionaries into the Orthodox communities of the Middle East

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For some groups in the former Soviet Union, zeal outruns knowledge.

spans more than a century and a half. As Norman A. Horner has noted, the charge of proselytism may have emerged when Protestant missionaries were disappointed in their efforts to evangelize Muslims, so that they turned their attention instead to members of the various Orthodox communities already present in the region.12 A number of studies on the subject have been undertaken by the Middle East Council of Churches and individual members of the council.13

In more recent years, the Orthodox Church throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been deeply troubled by what it perceives to be an invasion of groups bent upon proselytizing those whom it understands to be part of its legitimate flock.14 Many groups—from historic Protestant denominations to younger churches, independent evangelists, parachurch organizations, and so-called sects, cults, and new religious movements—have rejoiced at the new freedoms available in the whole of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, or Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).15 Many have taken advantage of the situation to carry their message into Eastern Europe and the CIS. Sometimes they are sensitive to the cultural and religious histories of the region, but often they are not. Zeal frequently outruns knowledge.

It is equally clear that the Orthodox Church, dominant in this region for a millennium, counts on its cultural link with the past to move ahead after the era of Soviet suppression. Yet the seventy-year presence of Communism, with its intense persecution of the churches, has produced an enormous spiritual vacuum. The national churches, Orthodox and otherwise, find themselves with inadequate resources to fill this vacuum. Protestant and other groups from the West are entering the region with a distinct advantage. They are often able to afford to do things that the Orthodox churches can still only dream of.16

As a result of this “invasion,” the primates of the Orthodox churches issued a formal statement on March 15, 1992, in which they charged that the traditional Orthodox countries are now being viewed as “missionary territories” by a variety of groups that are setting up missionary networks and proselytizing. Of particular note in this statement is the reference to the then-unresolved Uniate issue in the Ukraine, Romania, East Slovakia, the Middle East, and elsewhere; as well as the rise of Protestant fundamentalist (and evangelical) missionary activity “in Orthodox countries which were under communist regime.”17 The primates maintain that the behavior of Protestant fundamentalists (and evangelicals) is inappropriate, and that the outsiders’ view of these countries as terra missionis is unacceptable, “since in these countries the Gospel has already been preached for many centuries.”18 Genuine mission, the primates go on to point out, is properly “carried out in non-Christian countries and among non-Christian people.”19

The cultural and ecclesial insensitivity of some contemporary groups has been extremely disturbing to Orthodox and other Christians who paid a severe price for their faithfulness in the midst of Communist oppression. Such insensitivity needs to be challenged.

But it also appears that the Orthodox, who admittedly are ill
prepared to rush into a fully democratic, societal pluralism, have overreacted. In late 1994 the theological commission of the Russian Orthodox Church recommended to the governing synod that it withdraw from membership in the World Council of Churches "in protest over continuing 'missionary intrusions' in Russia by other churches." Their claims seem to overlook the impact of the seventy-year reign of atheistic ideals, as though to deny that it had any effect. The region is claimed as "Orthodox," which must be understood as "Christian," merely because in times past the Gospel has been preached there, the culture has been Christianized, and the Orthodox Church is entitled to cultural hegemony. The Orthodox have essentially defined proselytism so broadly that any missionary or evangelistic activity undertaken by non-Orthodox within these countries is labeled illegitimate, and those who are active in such practices are frequently described as thieves.

**Roman Catholics and the Issue of Proselytism**

A similar situation exists in Latin America, where it is the Roman Catholic Church that raises the charge of proselytism. The arguments used by Roman Catholics in Latin America, which are deeply rooted in claims to cultural hegemony, are similar to those used by the Orthodox elsewhere. Similarly, alleged proselytizers are accused of theological and cultural insensitivity.

At Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church condemned proselytism. In its "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" (*Ad gentes*), the council noted, "The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith, or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices." No one should be "forced to act against his convictions or is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters."

It is noteworthy that while the council wished to safeguard people from coercion, inducements, and enticements, it did not wish to discourage mission. This is stated clearly in the "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*). "A member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities," the bishops noted, "must be considered useless both to the Church and to himself" (italics mine). Members were encouraged to engage in evangelization as well as acts of charity. In order to safeguard these acts of charity from criticism such as the charge of proselytism, the bishops encouraged members to look for the *imago Dei* in those to whom they sought to minister. "The liberty and dignity of the person helped must be respected with the greatest sensitivity," they argued. "Purity of intention should not be stained by any self-seeking or desire to dominate. The demands of justice must first of all be satisfied."

In 1993 Cardinal Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, made a helpful distinction between "sects" and those who may at times exhibit sectarian attitudes. This distinction, he noted, was made as a result of two important dialogues that have included evangelicals and Pentecostals.

In spite of these welcome and obvious changes at the upper levels of the Roman curia, the word on the street is that evangelicals continue to be viewed and treated as though they were proselytizing sectarians, especially in Latin America. A speech that John Paul II gave on October 12, 1992, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, as he began the Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops, clearly employed the language of "sects" to describe non-Catholic movements. While it is unclear whether the pope intended to include evangelicals and, in particular, Pentecostals in the category of "rapacious wolves," other Catholic voices certainly did. Evangelicals and Pentecostals are viewed as the most substantive part of the "problem of the sects" in Latin America. Penecostals are especially singled out by the bishops of California and of the Sonoran region of Mexico as being among the "sects or new religious groups . . . most aggressive in their proselytizing." As such, they would be viewed and treated according to the 1986 Vatican report *Sects, Cults, and New Religious Movements*.

This stance is grounded in the assumption of historical and cultural continuity. "Many . . . Hispanic people have lived all their lives in a thoroughly Catholic environment and have been formed as Christians by the tradition, culture, piety and religious practices of the Catholic Church." But this is an unfair judgment on two counts. First, it does not take seriously the presence of evangelicals who are themselves Hispanic and who have been part of the Hispanic culture for a century or more. Second, evangelicals are being told that even though vast multitudes of Hispanic people rarely ever darken the doorway of a church, they should be considered Christian; they remain Roman Catholic and are therefore off-limits to non-Roman Catholic mission. "We feel," write the bishops of Alta and Baja California, that evangelicals display "a lack of understanding and appreciation both of the rich history of the Catholic faith in Hispanic culture and of the theology of baptism.""20

Over against the "sects" the bishops list the "historic churches"—the Orthodox Church, Protestant churches stemming from the Reformation, and the Anglican Church. These are viewed as ecumenical because of their search for Christian unity and their respect for "all religious beliefs." This suggests that very little, if any, evangelization is being undertaken by these churches in Latin America, which may account for their relative lack of growth as compared with evangelicals throughout that region. These churches do not challenge Roman Catholic claims to cultural hegemony and thus do not threaten the place of Roman Catholicism in Latin American life.

Latin America is not the only region of the world where the Roman Catholic Church has been concerned about the issue of proselytism. In preparation for the special synod of African bishops in 1994, a working paper titled "Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Africa" astutely described both the problems and the possibilities for the evangelization of Africa by Roman Catholics, one of the problems being the rapid growth of what are termed "sects and new religious movements." Among these groups are included the many African Independent Churches, which are accused of embracing an "unyielding fundamentalism or aggressive proselytizing." Other groups are also charged with proselytism, defined as "pressuring people to conversion by methods unworthy of the gospel, and offensive propaganda against fellow Christians." Competition between groups is also portrayed as problematic within the African context, especially in relation to such things as "initial proclamation [evangelization], rivalries over schools, the siting of churches and the presenting of candidates for public office."21

Two documents produced over the past decade—one officially in relation to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the other a more recent and unofficial statement produced in the United States—have addressed the subject of proselytism. In each of these cases, evangelicals have contributed to the discussion in significant ways. The second of the two statements, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," has produced considerable reflection, discussion, and consternation on the part of the con-
Vatican II. The document charges both evangelicals and Catholics with poor stewardship and involves practices that violate the Gospel. The drafters recognize that both faith communities possess the “opportunity and means of growth in Christian discipleship.” They call for respect for those who are “active adherents of another Christian community” and for the decisions made by people who have joined one group or the other. They condemn various forms of coercion, the bearing of false witness, the presentation of unjust and unbalanced caricatures and stereotypes, and other unworthy practices. Also condemned is “denominational or institutional aggrandizement,” examples of which are not given; this is a charge, like the use of coercion, that shows up repeatedly in recent documents on proselytism.

In some respects, the earlier document, Evangelical–Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (ERCDOM), is more thoughtfully constructed. Proselytism, according to ERCDOM, is a perversion of genuine evangelism, a form of “unworthy witness.” The drafters explore the reasons for proselytism, including definitional problems over categories of church members such as “lapsed,” “inactive,” and “nominal,” and the problems inherent in the ecclesiological distinction between the “visible” and the “invisible” church. Finally, drawing from the 1970 document “Common Witness and Proselytism” (produced by a joint theological commission of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches), they emphasize three aspects of the document. Proselytism occurs wherever the evangelizer’s motive is unworthy, the methods are unworthy, or the message is “unjust or uncharitable” in its portrayal of the other’s faith community.

Proselytism and the World Council of Churches

Proselytism has been on the agenda of the World Council of Churches at least since 1954. Following the Evanston Assembly, the Central Committee of the WCC appointed a commission to study the subject of proselytism and religious liberty. This was undertaken because of “difficulties which had arisen affecting relationships between member churches.” The commission produced its report in July 1956. It was revised by the Central Committee, July 28–August 4, 1956, and finally passed at the New Delhi Assembly in 1967 and published that fall under the title “Christian Witness, Proselytism, and Religious Freedom.”

Providing the groundwork for continuing discussions within the council itself, “Christian Witness” also held implications for the relationship between council members and churches that were not part of the council. Proselytism, which was termed a “corruption of witness,” included such actions as cajolery, bribery, intimidation, placing an organization’s success before Christ’s honor, comparing one’s strengths with the weaknesses of others, bearing false witness against other churches, and the replacing of love for souls with self-aggrandizing motives. It is worth observing that this paper was adopted by the WCC at a time when a number of Orthodox groups joined the council and when the International Missionary Council was incorporated within the structure of the WCC.

The WCC continued to work on the topic throughout the 1960s, in particular, with the Roman Catholic Church immediately following Vatican II. In May 1970 a Joint Theological Commission released “Common Witness and Proselytism: A Study Document” and recommended that it be studied by the Joint Working Group, which had been established in 1965 to facilitate common agenda items between the WCC and the Vatican. The Joint Working Group went on to recommend that the member churches of the WCC also examine the document.

In “Common Witness and Proselytism” the definition of proselytism focuses on “whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth.” The document describes various actions that should be avoided, actions thus identified as proselytizing activities. Included is the condemnation of coercion, whether physical, moral, or psychological, which would tend to deprive human beings of freedom of choice and full autonomy. Here the document points out that “certain abuse of mass communications can have this effect.” Offers of aid, whether “open or disguised,” given with the expectation that someone would receive them if he or she converts, are condemned. The offering of inducements, exploitation of weakness, the raising of suspicions about others, improper motivations linked to “social, economic, or political pressure,” and the use of “unjust and uncharitable references” about other religious communities are also included in the broader definition of proselytism.

A decade later, Norman Horner authored a helpful historical overview of discussions on proselytism. He concluded that especially in the Middle East, where the Orthodox had lived for centuries as a highly restricted minority, other Christians, including Catholics, Protestants, and what he called a “a variety of small, sectarian groups,” needed to develop better definitions for evangelism and proselytism, and a better understanding of the culture in which these ancient Orthodox churches exist.

In 1988–89, Raymond Fung, secretary for evangelism for the WCC, published a series of letters on the topic, which have now been collected in his book Evangelically Yours. He began by noting that proselytism constitutes “sheep-stealing or coercive

As the issue of common witness is lifted up, there will be a decrease in proselytism.
Chambésy, Switzerland, on February 24–27, 1993. The results of that meeting were subsequently published under the title “Towards Responsible Relations in Mission.” The group stated that “commitment to evangelism is inseparable from the commitment to the unity of the Body of Christ.” Of most significance is the claim that participants in this study group “shared the reality of the pain that unilateral and insensitive mission activity has caused.” “Invasion” language is used to describe the “proselytizing activities of sects and new religious movements” and the “unilateral mission work by churches, groups and agencies who are not members of the WCC.”

The report attempts to think theologically about the relationship between proselytism and “communion of churches.” One result is that if the idea of koinonia is allowed to serve as a basis for understanding the church, “competition in mission activities, proselytism, the creation of parallel church structures and interference in the life of already existing churches would be avoided.”

In August 1993 the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order of the WCC convened in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, with the issue of proselytism again on the agenda. Perhaps more than at any time since 1970, new concerns were factored into the discussion. The idea of a fuller koinonia was central to the meeting. Proselytism was viewed as including the use of coercive and manipulative methods in the act of “evangelism” that lead to the distortion of “the real though imperfect koinonia Christians already share.”

The conference delegates proposed that the WCC undertake a new study of “mission, evangelism, and proselytism,” for which they offered a four-point rationale. First, Christians who are not part of the WCC are often charged with proselytism, but seldom are they part of the discussion in which such charges emerge. This needs to change. Second, those who have succumbed to the “proselytizing” efforts of others are seldom if ever debriefed by the community they leave. Representative “proselytes” should be included in future discussions; their testimony may have value. Third, churches that are losing their sheep need to have an opportunity to ask why. Fourth, a forum is needed in which the accusers and the accused may face one another in a constructive way such as is outlined in Matthew 18.

Finally, two affirmations emerged from the group. First, it was affirmed that most persons engaging in proselytism “do so out of a genuine concern for the salvation of those whom they address.” Second, it was acknowledged that churches that show signs of spiritual vitality in “faith, life, and witness” appear to be relatively immune to losses resulting from proselytism.

Georges Lemopoulos reports that, in follow up to the meeting in Spain, the WCC’s Unit II has pursued the subject, and that, in cooperation with Faith and Order and Unit II, the Joint Working Group has completed a study document titled “The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling of Common Witness.”

The WCC and Interreligious Proselytism

In spite of all these conferences and study groups, proselytism persists as a major concern. This is true for two reasons. First is the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and the changing social and religious landscape that has followed. Second is the transformation or broadening of ecumenical commitments by some members of the WCC to include Jews and, for that matter, members of other world religions. In the first instance, we can see the rise of concern as is evidenced by the cries of the Orthodox. In regard to the second, we need to look briefly at the issue of what might be called interreligious proselytism.

A troubling understanding of proselytism is one that is receiving considerable attention within many conciliar and Roman Catholic circles and that is also beginning to receive discussion in evangelical circles.

The World Council of Churches clearly held to this position in the past. In its 1948 Assembly convened in Amsterdam, the WCC received a report entitled “The Christian Approach to the Jews,” in which this issue was spelled out explicitly: “All of our churches stand under the commission of our common Lord, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ The fulfillment of this commission requires that we include the Jewish people in our evangelistic task.”

Because the Holocaust lay in such close proximity to the founding of the WCC, it is understandable that the WCC and its various constituencies should seek greater understanding of the Jewish people and their faith. Dialogue between a number of different WCC member denominations and the Jews, as well as between Roman Catholics and Jews, has raised a number of very important questions about the covenantal relationship between God and the Jews, between God and the church, and between the church and the Jews before God. But the verdict is still out on whether, on theological grounds, Israel still has a “valid covenant with God” or whether the churches may need to “proscribe all proselytism of Jews.”

The latter position, set forth by Allan Brockway, is at best premature, but it is not difficult to detect movement in this direction by some of the member churches of the WCC. Simon Schoon observes that in recent years “the WCC and its member churches [have moved] away from the missionary approach to the Jews towards a dialogical relationship between the churches and the Jewish people.” For many, this has been accompanied by a parallel movement away from direct missionary effort. Dialogue, as the Presbyterian Church (USA) noted in its 1987 study “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews,” “is not a cover for proselytism.”

The idea that proselytism and dialogue—real, genuine, give-and-take dialogue—could go hand-in-hand violates the meaning of both terms.

From an evangelical perspective, the point of disagreement comes when evangelization and proselytism are equated. In an increasingly pluralistic world, when dialogue is set against a negative idea such as proselytism, and when proselytism is viewed as a synonym for evangelism, the implications are entirely unacceptable to evangelicals.

Eugene Stockwell has recently noted that the issue of pluralism is posing a whole new set of questions for the church. If dialogue qua dialogue replaces evangelism or mission, one must ask, Does the missionary mandate of the church get lost? Do the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, and therefore the claims of
Gospel, get lost as well? What happens if some churches or even the WCC ultimately decides that a “pluralism of faiths” is actually God’s intention rather than the long-held idea that God intends “that everyone on earth should be a Christian”? Is the next step to suggest that the evangelization of people of other “living faiths” is in fact proselytism and therefore ought to be banned?

Conclusion

Speaking from an evangelical perspective, I conclude with five observations. First, definitions and applications of the term “proselytism” differ, depending upon who defines them and where they are applied. Second, those who use the term have defined it for evangelicals rather than with evangelicals. Third, when the term is defined for another group and then unilaterally applied to that group, the issue becomes one of ecclesial oppression. Fourth, since those who most frequently invoke the charge of proselytism against younger churches were themselves in earlier times engaged in similar activities, the older churches may well run the risk of self-incrimination. Fifth, it would be wrong to judge evangelicals as not having any sympathy for the wrongness or inappropriateness of proselytism, for they have publicly recognized its evils.

I believe that most evangelicals would agree that those who have a demonstrably active living faith in Jesus Christ should not be treated as persons to be evangelized. I also believe that evangelicals would agree that any form of evangelization that is coercive, deceptive, or manipulative in nature is unworthy of the name and should be labeled as proselytism and condemned. The term “proselytism,” however, cannot be applied indiscriminately to all evangelistic activity. Space must be left for legitimate evangelistic efforts directed at persons of other religious communities when the affiliation of such persons is merely nominal.

Notes


2. In particular, I think of recent attempts to pass legislation in the Commonwealth of Independent States that would restrict a great deal of evangelization and that would have the potential of aiding more repressive elements in the current parliament.


4. Ibid.


11. In the Old Testament the original proselyte was a Gentile foreigner and came under the protection of God in the midst of Israel (Exod. 22:21; Deut. 29:10-15). Later, as they assimilated into the whole of Israel’s life, proselytes were seen as Gentiles who believed in Israel’s God, with or without the mark of circumcision. The term appears in the New Testament only four times (Matt. 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). Only in Matt. 23:15 is there a negative connotation to the term.


15. George Otis, Jr., and his staff at the Sentinel Group in Seattle, Washington, gave a report, “The Holy Spirit Around the World,” in “Rebuilding the Fires of Faith,” Charisma 18, no. 6 (January 1993): 55-56, 58-59, in which the breadth of work undertaken in the whole of Eastern Europe by new groups is displayed. The work of Pentecostal and charismatic groups is viewed as evangelism and mission activity. It is noted, however, that “proselytizing by cults is another problem in the former Soviet republics. Mormon, Hindu, Baha’i and Buddhist groups are recruiting members, as are various proponents of occult and New Age doctrines” (p. 59).


17. “Message of the Primates,” p. 58. Since the message was issued in 1992, the Uniate problem has been largely resolved. See the work of the Pontifical Commission for Russia, “Principles and Norms: Evangelization and Ecumenism in Former Soviet Territories,” Origins 22, no. 5 (June 11, 1993): 301-4, as well as the report of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion,” Ecumenical Trends 22, no. 8 (September 1993): 4-7.

18. “Message of the Primates,” p. 58. Leaders from two former Soviet republics, the Ukraine and Armenia (the one political, the other ecclesiastical), have made similar comments in the American press. Mary Mycio quotes Dmytro Karchynskyi of the Ukrainian National Assembly as ridiculing the missionaries who preach on Kiev’s Independence Square. “They come from a country that didn’t exist 300 years ago to preach in a country that was Christianized 1,000 years ago.” “Even more galling,” reports Mycio, “they use Russian translators” (“America Losing Luster in Ukraine,” p. H2).


22. Dominatus humanae (“Declaration on Religious Liberty”) 2.

23. Apostolicam actuositatem 2, 8. On human dignity, see also Gaudium et spes (“The Church in the Modern World”) 26 and Dignitatis humanae.

24. It is indeed gratifying and significant to note Cardinal Cassidy’s informed and carefully nuanced distinction between “sects or new religious movements” that do not participate in ecumenical dialogue and those groups that have participated in ecumenical dialogue,
even if on a relatively limited scale. He notes, "We must be careful, however, not to confuse the issue by lumping under the term 'sect,' groups that do not deserve that title. I am not speaking here, for instance, about the evangelical movement among Protestants, nor about Pentecostalism as such. The Pontifical Council has had fruitful dialogue and significant contacts with certain evangelical groups and with Pentecostals. Indeed, one can speak of a mutual enrichment as a result of these contacts." (Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, "Prolusio" [given at the Meeting of Representatives of the National Episcopal Commissions for Ecumenism, Rome, May 5–10, 1993], in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity's Information Service, no. 84 [1993/III–IV]: 122). While the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has made it clear that many evangelicals and Pentecostals do not fall under the categories that are the focus of the 1986 document Sects or New Religious Movements: Pastoral Challenge (Rome: Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, May 3, 1986), much of the language of the document leaves open the possibility that bishops may apply this work to evangelicals and Pentecostals. This seems particularly the case in Latin America. See "Vatican Reports on Sects, Cults, and New Religious Movements," Origins 16, no. 1 (May 22, 1986): 2–10. Haynes, "Brazil’s Catholics Launch ‘Holy War,’ " highlights the work of Bishop Sinesio Bohn in this regard. Quite understandably, Latin American Protestants resent being referred to as sects, a term they reserve for groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.


26. John Paul II, "Opening Address to Fourth General Conference of Latin American Episcopate," Origins 22, no. 19 (October 22, 1992): 326, sec. 12. In an interesting exchange on this issue of which I have been a part, Edward L. Cleary, O.P., wrote "John Paul Cries ‘Wolf’: Misreading the Pentecostals," Commonweal 119, no. 20 (November 20, 1992): 7–8, in which he lamented the pope’s language, which tends to feed old stereotypes, especially about Pentecostals. In response, I wrote a letter to the editor that was printed under the title “What the Pope Said,” Commonweal 119, no. 22 (December 18, 1992): 30–31. In my letter I affirmed Cleary’s point and applauded the pope’s recommendations to his bishops on steps to stop the problem of "fleeing sheep." The pope had suggested that the flock was not receiving adequate feeding from the church. I argued that the very issues the pope addressed to the bishops were the issues that Pentecostals and evangelicals had lifted up throughout this century. A rebuttal to my letter came from James Chichetto, C.S.C., "Dubious Tactics," Commonweal 120, no. 2 (January 29, 1993): 2, in which he argued that evangelicals and Pentecostals are indeed "rapacious wolves" bent upon "destructive proselytism." Cleary submitted a subsequent edition printed under the title "El maltrato de la jerarquia católica a los pentecostales," Pastoral Popular (Santiago, Chile) 44, no. 226 (March 20, 1993): 15–17. An excerpt from my letter to Commonweal was printed at the end.


29. Ibid., p. 667. The Orthodox make a parallel argument in Eastern Europe.

30. Ibid. The relationship between faith and culture or Gospel and culture is barely an area that Roman Catholics and Pentecostals need to study together, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that Pentecostals simply misunderstand the nature of Christian baptism as practiced by Roman Catholics. In “Perspectives on Koinonia,” the report from the third quinquennium of this dialogue, it was apparent that there was much about baptism on which Pentecostals and Roman Catholics have agreement. But there is also much on the topic over which they disagree, and some of those disagreements are based upon the rejection of the theology of the other, not merely upon misunderstanding or an overemphasis on some aspect of baptism, as the bishops have suggested. See "Perspectives on Koinonia," Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 12, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 125–31, especially secs. 41, 47–51. See also Cecil M. Rebeck, Jr., and Jerry L. Sandidge, "The Ecclesiology of Koinonia and Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 27, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 504–34.


40. Ibid., p. 11, sec. 8; pp. 18–19, sec. 27. See also p. 17, sec. 25.


44. Ibid., p. 238.


46. Ibid., p. 257.

47. See, for instance, the review article by John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Evangelicals Reconsider World Religions: Betraying or Affirming the Tradition?" Christian Century 110 (September 8–15, 1993): 858–65, in which the author studies the recent thought of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders.


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