

The Apostolic Faith Study and the Holy Spirit

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For more than half a century the World Council of Churches has sought a number of ways to move its member churches forward in their mutual recognition of one another. Four projects undertaken over the past three decades stand out. First among them has been the attempt to find a way forward in the mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist, and ministry. Second has been the proposal to work toward some common confession of the Apostolic Faith. Attention has been focused specifically on the role that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed might play as a common confession of faith. Third, the WCC has hoped that they could then move on to the even more difficult issues of common decision making and acting. Finally, the subject of the unity of the Church and the renewal of human community was added to the list. In this paper, I will take a look at how the National Council of Churches has participated in or contributed to the second of these important studies.

In Lima, Peru in 1982, the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches completed its very important study, on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.¹ The result was a convergence document intended to bring participating denominations and congregations closer to one another through greater understanding and appreciation of the many ways they approach these issues. While baptism and eucharist, in particular, were originally instituted as sacraments of unity, they have often become sources of division between Christians. In *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, the churches made significant progress in overcoming misunderstanding and in finding ways beyond the sometimes centuries-old impasse.

¹ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* Faith and Order Paper 111, Geneva, Switzerland, World Council of Churches, 1982.

But the members of the Commission knew that more was necessary if the Churches were going to have a long term, sustainable prospect for visible unity. They would have to see whether the churches themselves would receive the fruit of their labor. As a result, with the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, which is now in its 39th printing came the invitation for churches to study the document and submit a formal response to the World Council of Churches.² Thus, as one process ended, another began.

The work on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the request for official responses were not the end of the quest for greater understanding or moves toward visible unity. The Commission also recognized that any meaningful efforts toward a genuinely visible expression of Christian unity would require a common recognition of the apostolic faith in one another. Already at the Standing Commission's meeting in January 1981, a study group had been formed on the topic "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith". Later that year, two consultations were held. The first one, "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today" met in Chambésy, Switzerland at the end of June 1981, while a second one, "The Ecumenical Importance of the Nicene Creed", convened in October in Odessa, USSR. As a result of this preliminary work, before the Standing Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC completed its work in Lima, the Commission authorized a new theological study. It authorized a process that would extend over the next decade and ultimately lead to the publication of *Confessing the One Faith*, in 1991, an explication of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.³

² *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, x.

³ *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* Faith and Order Paper No. 153 (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1991), 139 pp. The Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches had already produced a booklet titled *Confessing One Faith: The Origins, Meaning and Use of the Nicene Creed: Grounds for Common Witness* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1988), 68 pp. for use in ecumenical small groups.

The Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches in the United States watched these actions closely. While its life is independent of that of the WCC Commission and it has interests that are unique to the American context, members of the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches believed that the study on Apostolic Faith being conducted by the World Council of Churches would benefit from input derived from the unique testimonies of churches at home for which the American context is home. The United States, after all, has provided not only a unique context; it has produced a unique set of churches. And this context and these churches have had a global impact upon churches everywhere.

Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformation Protestant churches thrive here, though in the United States, none of them benefits from being an established church. The United States has also given birth to Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, and Reformed denominations that have broken or at least individuated from their mother churches in Europe over issues as wide ranging as State politics, liturgy, language, and internal governance. It has provided space for Puritan, Quaker, and Anabaptist congregations that were frequently persecuted or at best, tolerated on the fringes of Christianity in Europe, but which have been warmly embraced as vibrant counter-cultural voices with the American context without fear of persecution.

Before the Civil War, the country generated new denominations as older ones split over the issue of segregation (e.g. African Methodist Episcopal Church) or of slavery, (e.g. Northern and Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians). After the war it also gave birth to new churches that for one reason or another were racially bounded, denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Colored, later Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention and others within

the African American community. And during much of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, it produced a flood of Wesleyan-Holiness (e.g. Wesleyan Church, Church of God [Anderson, IN], Free Methodist Church, Church of the Nazarene) and Pentecostal denominations (e.g. Church of God in Christ, Church of God [Cleveland, TN], Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World), as well as a hoard of independent congregations.

In addition to producing new denominations and congregations, the American context early on provided space to the Presbyterians and Congregationalists to cooperate, first in the Plan of Union in 1801, and again in 1810 through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) founded by Congregationalists. Its existence would ultimately lead to the formation of other mission agencies by other denominations as well as concerned individuals in the United States, to become primary exporters of foreign missionaries around the world. Not only did these missionaries bear witness to the Gospel, they also transplanted to other parts of the world, American culture, emerging American denominations, and many of the biases and concerns of these groups, taking division and at times, a compromised witness with them.

When the Commission on Faith and Order of the NCCCUSA decided to undertake a study of the Apostolic Faith, Brother Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C. was serving as the Director of Faith and Order. It was his conviction that because of its unique history and purpose, the Commission on Faith and Order might be able to assemble a table of conversation partners where a broader range of Christian churches in the United States than those that were members of the National Council of Churches, could participate. He set about to do just that. Gros worked tirelessly to recruit and include voices in Faith and Order that had not traditionally been heard in earlier ecumenical discussions. He supported the study of

the Apostolic Faith within the Commission's regular meeting schedule and he encouraged consultations that studied the subject from a variety of vantage points.⁴ In the end, the Commission's work led to a series of publications that document its work.⁵

Intersecting with the work done specifically on the Apostolic Faith as it was expressed in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed right from the beginning, was work that was undertaken on the Holy Spirit. It involved previously unheard Pentecostal voices.⁶ At first glance, the reasons for this intersection may not be readily apparent. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes less of a mystery. The earliest name that the modern Pentecostal Movement took for itself was the “Apostolic Faith Movement”. The earliest newspaper published by the Movement from a variety of cities was called *The Apostolic Faith*.⁷ The byline from the paper was Jude 3, “Earnestly contend for the faith which was

⁴ Several consultations related to the Apostolic Faith study were sponsored by the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, in addition to the ones that are mentioned in the body of this paper. For a list of them, see S. Mark Heim, “The Holy Spirit Consultation: An Introduction,” in Theodore Stylianopoulos and S. Mark Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit* Faith & Order/USA (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986), 2.

⁵ David T. Shannon and Gayraud S. Wilmore, Eds., *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith*, Faith & Order/USA (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985) pp.; Thaddeus D. Horgan, *Apostolic Faith in America* Faith & Order/USA (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) pp.; S. Mark Heim, Ed. *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century, Papers of the Faith to Creed Consultation Commission on Faith and Order NCCCUSA, October 25-27, 1989 – Waltham, Massachusetts*, Faith & Order/USA (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 206 pp.

⁶ Theodore Stylianopoulos and S. Mark Heim, Eds. *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit* Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986; *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987) published a number of the papers that were given at the October 22-24, 1986 consultation on Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. This issue of *Pneuma* was subsequently published under the title *Confessing the Apostolic Faith: Pentecostal Churches and the Ecumenical Movement* (Pasadena, CA: Society for Pentecostal Studies, 1987). The articles in these volumes were also published in *One in Christ* 23 (1987); and William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocom, Eds., *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

⁷ *The Apostolic Faith* was initially published by Charles F. Parham who played a significant role in the early years of the Pentecostal Movement. He published a newspaper from Melrose, KS, and then Houston, TX, and finally from Baxter Springs, KS, where he established his own denomination and named it “The Apostolic Faith. When the famous Azusa Street Mission distanced itself from any relationship with Charles Parham and was incorporated in California under the leadership of William J. Seymour, it did so as the Apostolic Faith Mission. Beginning in September 1906, it published a newspaper called *The Apostolic Faith* through the summer of 1909. In 1908, Florence Crawford broke with Azusa Street and established a new denomination in Portland, OR, once again naming it, the Apostolic Faith Mission of Portland, OR. She attracted the primary editor of Seymour's paper to join her in Portland, and from 1909 they published *The Apostolic Faith* from that city.

once delivered unto the saints.” In its own way, and through the use of a Restorationist historiography, early Pentecostals understood themselves as bearing witness not only to what the apostles believed and taught, but also to what the apostles had done. And they believed that it could be done apart from any theory of apostolic succession and apart from the confession of any historic creed. They believed that they had a unique mandate to proclaim the “apostolic faith” as they understood it, that is, to preach and teach what the apostles had preached and taught, and they believed that they were to live “apostolic lives,” that is, to live lives marked by personal holiness and as vehicles for God to move with the same kinds of signs and wonders that had been performed through the earliest apostles.⁸

In the earliest publication of Faith and Order on the subject of the Apostolic Faith in the United States, this intersection was acknowledged, in part, because of the obvious dependence of the modern Pentecostal Movement on African American religion.⁹ In the initial consultation that featured African American perspectives on the Apostolic Faith, held in December 1984, participants addressed “the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the Church of Jesus Christ,” with the self-understanding that African Americans were marginalized within American society, within American churches, and within the Church at large. By doing so, they hoped to make a substantive contribution to the “common expression of the faith”.¹⁰ By taking this position they also leveled a powerful critique at the ways that many white Christians in North America and in Europe

⁸ On this, see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “The Holy Spirit and the Unity of the Church: The Challenge of Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Independent Movements,” in D. Donnelly, A. Denaux, and J. Famerée, Eds. *The Holy Spirit, the Church and Christian Unity: Proceedings of the Consultation Held at the Monastery of Bose, Italy (14-20 October 2002)*, BETL 181 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2005), 353-381.

⁹ Gayraud Wilmore and David Shannon, “Introduction,” in Shannon and Wilmore, Eds. *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith*, iv. On the relationship between African American religion and the emergence of Pentecostalism see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

¹⁰ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective, 64.

have interpreted the Apostolic Faith, ways that have allowed them to oppress Christians of color. Participants made clear their suspicion of any attempt to talk about unity that from the beginning did not take seriously the political, economic, and cultural diversity that is represented by all Christians. They lifted up the vision of unity that is understood solely in “spiritual” terms as particularly onerous because it allows proponents to be dismissive of the tangible realities of inequality between races to be explained as though these inequalities were not related to the issue of Christian unity.¹¹

The fact that Black folk were frequently given second-class status even in the Church meant that the operative understandings of the unity of the Church that allowed and encouraged this were inherently racist. The fact that certain perspectives on the unity of the Church rested upon presuppositions that they identified as being linked to power, prosperity, and a privileged cultural hegemony clearly indicated the same. They made it obvious that the unity of the Church must ultimately include Black and White Christians as well as others, in particular Latinos, as equal partners with equally valuable contributions to that unity.¹²

As they turned their attention to the holiness of the Church, they bore witness to the fact that the holiness of the Church rests upon the work of the Holy Spirit in its midst, but they insisted that the holiness of the Church must also manifest itself in works of “justice and liberation.”¹³ Once again, they brought a stinging criticism of those traditional interpretations of “catholicity” that they viewed as being driven by “Western” norms, norms by which many Africans and African Americans had been deprived of full participation in the life of the Church. They repudiated these norms as being heavily

¹¹ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective, 65.

¹² “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” 6.

¹³ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” in Shannon and Wilmore, Eds., *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith*, 67.

influenced by the sins of racism, sexism and classism that discourage fellowship with many “African Independent church[es] or Black Holiness and Pentecostal denominations, among others in various parts of the world.”¹⁴ By building walls between older Christian denominations and these newer expressions of Christianity, they argued, the older denominations were guilty of denying “the catholicity of the Body of Christ.”¹⁵

When it came to the issue of apostolicity, they argued that it does not necessarily rest upon a doctrine of succession of learned clergy, because they were convinced that that which was “apostolic” had been passed down to them even by their “unlearned and ignorant” slave ancestors, who by their deeds even more than by their creeds had demonstrated that they had “fully received and acted upon the faith of the apostles.”¹⁶ In fact, each of the traditional marks of the church, they contended, demanded more than a simple confession of faith in words. They demanded actions that were consonant with those words, actions that many Christians had failed to embody.

Participants in the “Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith” consultation noted a number of contributions that Africans and African Americans could make to the larger discussion of the Apostolic Faith. Among those contributions was the value of its witness or testimony from the “margins” of the Church, from those who had been oppressed. And why not, for Jesus had himself been the “Oppressed One of God”.¹⁷ Participants pointed to the strong affinities that they shared with many Christians from the developing world, and they offered their own observations on life at the margins as providing a lens on these larger constituencies who had also been oppressed through some interpretations of the Apostolic Faith. They also noted the substantial contribution that African Americans had

¹⁴ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” 68.

¹⁵ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” 68.

¹⁶ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” 69.

¹⁷ “Toward a Common Expression of Faith: A Black North American Perspective,” 64.

made to the birth, life, and worship of Pentecostal churches that had largely gone unacknowledged in the past, and they criticized those white Pentecostals who denied the role played by African Americans in their origins.

Coming on the heels of this important consultation was a second one held at Fuller Theological Seminary in October 1986. It was remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that Evangelicals and the National Council of Churches have not always been on the best of terms with one another. This three-day consultation was intended to focus upon the subject of “Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches,” and right from the start the nature of the “Apostolic Faith” confessed by the Pentecostal churches was questioned by some representatives of Faith and Order.¹⁸

The questions that were raised came, in part, because many Pentecostals view themselves as non-creedal. As a result, their belief systems are not always clearly articulated, leading to questions from those who come from creedal churches. At the same time, it quickly became apparent that any conversation with Pentecostals soon leads to two observations. First, most of the basic statements affirmed in the Creed are shared by Pentecostals and other Christians alike. Second, Pentecostals are wary of creeds because sometimes those who “confess” them do not seem to understand what it is that they confess. The confession of a creed, like the recitation of certain prayers often appears to Pentecostals to be a rote activity without any real meaning. Echoing to some extent a point made in the African American consultation, it was pointed out that for

¹⁸ Most of the papers from this conference were published in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987). They were also published as a separate volume for National Council of Churches under the title, *Confessing the Apostolic Faith: Pentecostal Churches and the Ecumenical Movement* (Pasadena, CA: Society for Pentecostal Studies, 1987). Many of the papers were also published in *One in Christ* 23 (1987). On this particular point, see, Jeffrey Gros, FSC, “Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987), 8-10.

Pentecostals “Theology, in its written form, has been less important than the evidence of the Spirit in life, worship, and the gifts.”¹⁹

Clearly this consultation did not settle any major issues regarding the nature of the Apostolic Faith, in part, because a number of underlying issues needed to be addressed before turning to the Apostolic Faith proper. The consultation was an important beginning, however, for discussions between members of the National Council of Churches and some of the Pentecostal churches in the United States. These discussions have been fostered in at least two ways by the Commission on Faith and Order since that time. First, the consultation pointed out the need for ongoing Pentecostal participation on the Commission itself. Since 1984, the Commission has continued to include a number of Pentecostal voices. Second, this consultation led to an annual dialogue between Pentecostals and the National Council of Churches that lasted for the better part of a decade. The invitation to begin such a dialogue came from Claire Randall, who had served as the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches from 1974 through 1984.²⁰ That invitation and the ensuing discussion resulted in a recommendation from the consultation that further consultations be held between Pentecostals and the Commission on Faith and Order.²¹

During the same years in which the work of these two consultations was published, the Commission on Faith and Order began its own internal work on the subject of

¹⁹ Jeffrey Gros, FSC, “Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987), 8.

²⁰ Claire Randall, “The Importance of the Pentecostal and Holiness Churches in the Ecumenical Movement,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987), 50.

²¹ Thaddeus Horgan, “Consultation Summary: A Conciliar Perspective,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (1987), 102. This dialogue began in October 1988, (St. Louis, MO.), and continued in November 1989 (Fresno, CA.), October 1990 (Louisville, KY.), November 1991 (Lakeland, FL.); October 1995 (Hartford, CT.), March 1996 (Pasadena, CA.), and March 1997 (Oakland, CA). While it had been the intention of the dialogue partners to publish a volume of their papers and findings in the Faith & Order /USA series, the decision was made by the new Director of Faith and Order at the Oakland meeting not to pursue the dialogue or this publication any further.

“Apostolic Faith in America”. It did so by forming two groups who would work together between 1984 and 1987. One of them would work specifically on questions of the American context while the other would study the dimensions of what constituted the “Apostolic Faith” in America. The result of their work was subsequently published under the title *Apostolic Faith in America*.²²

Geoffrey Wainwright wrote the Foreword to this volume. He outlined four contributions that the churches of the United States had made. First, he described them as a “sampler” of all previous attempts at organizing and expressing Christian faith. Second, he argued that any vision of unity that they might yet demonstrate would likely not be limited to those so far envisioned within the European context. Third, he noted that American Christians were a pragmatic people, thereby ensuring that their focus on the “Apostolic Faith” would not “remain at the level of words to the exclusion of deeds.”²³ Fourth, he pointed to the particularly participatory nature of Christianity in the United States with its unique emphasis upon the local congregation. In the end, he called for local involvement in the Apostolic Faith process that the Commission on Faith and Order was undertaking, but he urged the churches of the United States to see themselves as standing within a global conversation on the subject in order to counter any temptation to become either isolationist or triumphalist.²⁴

Like Wainwright, Thaddeus Horgan pointed to the significance of what he called the “lived fidelity” to the Gospel that stood behind so much of the division and the missionary effort sponsored by the various Christian churches in the United States.²⁵ He lifted up the unique context of North America, in which most churches had broken with

²² Thaddeus D. Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 68 pp.

²³ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Foreword,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, viii.

²⁴ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Foreword,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, ix.

²⁵ Thaddeus Daniel Horgan, “Introduction: Confessing the Apostolic Faith,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, xi.

the European context or had emerged within the American context, leading to no living memory or no vital sense of an historical link with a European past. Even the tensions that exist between the Catholic Church in the United States and the Catholic Church in Rome had arisen due to the unique context of the United States.²⁶ Similarly, the missionary enterprise first, from North America to Latin America and the Caribbean and later to Europe itself, had come as a result of breaks between American churches and European ones, with direct implications for the notion of apostolicity

The complexity of the American context, including over 300 Christian denominations, many of which have a distinctive American history, was set forth in several papers. Attention was called to the immigrant character and a resulting pluralistic character of the nation that includes many of its churches old and new. When placed alongside the facts that no denomination in the United States is established, that immigration plays a continuing role in its churches, that some churches have shaped the American ethos and culture while others have been more profoundly shaped by America's ethos and culture, and still others have provided counter-cultural critiques of America's ethos and culture, that recent decades have seen the rise of unique forms of civil religion, that there has been a blurring of denominational lines alongside the softening of commitments to institutional religion and the quest for individualistic spirituality, and that there have been rising levels of materialism in the ranks of some churches that have touched their theology, the complexity of the American situation became much clearer.²⁷

²⁶ One need only think of the work of James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, MD, who argued for an indigenous expression of Roman Catholicism in the United States and the counter concern for what Pope Leo IX called "Americanism" in his 1899 encyclical, *Testum benevolentia*, to understand the substantive differences that seemed to separate American Catholics from European Catholics.

²⁷ See Thaddeus Horgan, SA, and Thomas Hoyt, Jr., "Characteristics of the American Context," in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 7-13, and Donald W. Dayton, "Reflections on Apostolicity in the North American Context," in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 28-29.

During this study, the notion of what constitutes the “Apostolic Faith” was dominated by discussions on the nature of apostolicity itself. Many of the historic churches in the United States, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, reiterated the claim that the Apostolic Faith is tied directly to the notion of apostolic succession. Apostolic succession was, in turn, viewed primarily as being “fidelity to the apostolic proclamation and mission” that stands in continuity with the first Apostles and is assured by this succession.²⁸ While these churches criticize the Reformation cry of *sola scriptura* as being inadequate to cover the truth claimed by Tradition, James Jorgenson observed that virtually all Christians confess what he called the “nucleus” of the Apostolic Faith: “belief in the Triune God, the incarnation of the Son of God, his death and resurrection, and our salvation through faith in Him.”²⁹

A review of various documents inspired by the World Council of Churches led George Vandervelde to observe that in these documents the notion of apostolicity lay as a “dynamic reality” at the heart of the Church and that it provides the identity of the many Christian churches which exist in “pluriformity”. Yet in the end, he explained, the “fundamental criterion (*norma normans*)” of apostolicity resides in contemporary reflections of the Apostolic Faith to stand in agreement with the testimony of the apostles to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures.”³⁰

Donald W. Dayton developed a three-fold typology of ways that the idea of apostolicity gets lived out in American churches. What he called the *Tradition*-based model typical of the “Ancient” churches, emphasizes the “continuity of ministry, sacraments, and perhaps teaching with [that of] the apostles,” each of which play a role in

²⁸ James Jorgenson, “Apostolicity in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, and Reformed Traditions,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 16.

²⁹ James Jorgenson, “Apostolicity in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, and Reformed Traditions,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 18.

³⁰ George Vandervelde, “The Meaning of ‘Apostolic Faith’ in World Council of Churches’ Documents,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 25.

the equally important doctrine of ecclesiology. The second group, what he described as churches that embraced a *teaching*-based model, includes churches that also emphasize continuity with the apostles, but instead of appealing to the notion of apostolic succession to safeguard their apostolicity; find the safeguard to apostolicity in specific doctrines and confessional formulations, what they would describe as the “truth” of the Gospel. These churches, he identified among certain Lutheran and Reformed groups of the magisterial Reformation. He also identified a third group of American churches as being primarily *praxis*-based, that is, Methodist, Anabaptist, and Restorationist, including Pentecostal, churches that attempt to root their ethics and practice in the apostolic practice.³¹

Two other members of Faith and Order who developed other typologies were the Quaker, Dean Friday, who wrote on what he called “Orthochristianity,” while distinguishing between denominations typified by such things as “Orthopraxis on Christ’s Model” (Anabaptists/Mennonites), “Covenanting Together to Walk in God’s way” (Baptists) “Orthopresence and Orthotaxis” (Quakers), “Orthopeira – Orthoexperience” (Methodists), and Orthopraxis and ‘Open Membership’” (Church of God, Anderson, IN). At the same time, Clyde Steckel, of the United Church of Christ, contributed thoughts on the African Methodist Episcopal, Zion Church, the Assemblies of God, the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ that were focused on the “Christological accents” that they brought to bear on the subject.³²

In the end, the commission noted that while there was considerable diversity in how the various denominations within the American context expressed the Apostolic Faith, all of them shared at least four major components. First, they shared a common confession

³¹ Donald W. Dayton, “Reflections on Apostolicity in the North American Context,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 31-33.

³² Dean Friday, “Apostolicity and Orthochristianity,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 34-52 and Clyde Steckel, “The Apostolic Faith in the African Methodist Episcopal, Zion, Church, Assemblies of God, the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ,” in Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 53-58.

that “Jesus Christ is God and Savior.” Second, they trusted in the “guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” Third, they affirmed the “authoritative witness of the Scriptures.” Fourth, all Christian confessional bodies that were subjects of this study were communal. They understood the Church as “the Body of Christ, God’s sacramental blessing in the world, a community of prayer, preaching, healing, and teaching.”³³

In spite of all the diversity that emerged both in the denominations that were part of this study and the factors contributing to the complex context that makes up the United States of America, participants in this study recommended that all churches embrace or at least study further the Nicene Creed as an ancient and “still regulative summary of the apostolic witness”.³⁴ Furthermore, they recommended the development of a commentary on the Creed that took seriously the gains of the 16th Century Reformation in the field of soteriology as well as the insights of holiness, sanctification, justice, and liberation. And finally, they recommended that while a number of typologies had been studied, they believed that there were yet more the study of which could strengthen the unity of American denominations and bring them closer to a time of common confession regarding their “apostolic unity in ancient and contemporary expressions.”³⁵

While work had begun on the “Apostolic Faith in America Study” a related strand of Faith and Order’s work was picked up in another consultation. This one, convened on the campus of Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, MA, in October 1985, was focused on the Holy Spirit. Mark Heim set the stage with the observation that this discussion was part of the broader “contemporary search of the churches for unity in the trinitarian apostolic faith.”³⁶ At the same time, the Klingenthal Memorandum, having much to do with the

³³ “Dimensions of Apostolicity,” Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 60-63.

³⁴ “Dimensions of Apostolicity,” Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 67.

³⁵ “Dimensions of Apostolicity,” Horgan, Ed., *Apostolic Faith in America*, 68.

³⁶ S. Mark Heim, “The Holy Spirit Consultation: An Introduction,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds. *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 1.

difficult insertion of the “*filioque* clause” into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had only recently (1979) been completed. As a result of the work on that document, with the aid of the Orthodox and Catholics alike, with Holiness and Pentecostal voices only recently come to the Faith and Order table, and the insights of feminists and those calling for greater understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the world, it seemed time to look at the Holy Spirit in recent discussions of the Apostolic Faith. It was the explicit intention of consultation organizers that participants address “issues in the creed which divide East and West on the subject of the Spirit.”³⁷

Several of the papers, therefore, focused intentionally on the Creed. Others gave insight into the ways the Holy Spirit was understood within specific traditions, notably, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Holiness, Church of the Brethren, and Pentecostal. In the end, those responsible for listening to the various papers and resulting exchanges noted three major areas of concern: (1) the issue of the *filioque*, (2) the naming of God, and (3) “the dynamic polarity between apostolic doctrine (creed) and apostolic life (experience).”³⁸

Issues surrounding the use of *filioque*, that is, the term inserted into the Nicene Creed intended to indicate procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son, took substantial energy in the consultation as contributors of the Catholic and Orthodox positions made their cases. The Catholic position viewed the addition of the “*filioque* clause” as a protection against the threat of Arian subordinationism, while the Orthodox argued that the term *perichoresis*, referring to a mutual indwelling between the members of the Trinity was sufficient to guarantee equal glorification and worship of all members

³⁷ Lloyd G. Patterson, “The Spirit, The Creed, and Christian Unity,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds. *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 5.

³⁸ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds. *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 188.

of the Trinity. For the Orthodox, the addition of *filioque* to the Creed undermined their understanding of the Monarchy of God.

At the time of this consultation, the Feminist Movement was at its peak in the United States. As a result, part of the discussion of the Trinity revolved around how the Church should speak about God, that is, were there other ways than traditional patriarchal ways that could be used to address God. Arguments were given for analogical and anti-analogical ways of naming God. The point was made that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is of necessity analogical because of the creator/creature relationship, but that “Gender categories constitute only one kind of language regarding the *imago Dei*”.³⁹ While it was noted that the *imago Dei* is the *imago Trinitatis*, it was also observed that language regarding God need not be sexual. Discussions around the naming of God as representing such things as “persons”, “activities”, “functions”, and “relationships” ultimately made little headway. In the end, it was noted that “All theological language is provisional and a mere human attempt to grasp the mystery. While formed and informed by tradition, theological language is also shaped by context”. In the end, participants agreed that the discernment of which names had been inspired by the Holy Spirit and which ones had not stood at the core of the debate.⁴⁰

In a sense, the third issue debated in this consultation, the relationship between “Creed and Experience”, was a discussion between the ancient churches and many of the newer ones, especially of the Pentecostal and Charismatic variety. While most participants were somewhat uncomfortable with too much attention being given to the notion of experience, they did affirm the legitimacy of both personal and ecclesial experience as

³⁹ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 191.

⁴⁰ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 192.

they spoke about experiencing the Spirit. Participants from the ancient churches were helped when they learned that while many non-creedal churches view their experience of the Holy Spirit as more important than what they understand as the sectarian and formalistic character of creedal confessions, these non-creedal churches have often developed their own theological culture and statements of faith that affirm much historic creedal content, and in the end, their intention is to “affirm...shared faith in the Spirit.”⁴¹ By noting this important point, the discussion seemed to take up some of the concerns of the earlier consultations on the “Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith” and “Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches.”

Noting that many Holiness Christians, Pentecostals, and one can also add here African American Christians have come from among marginal and disadvantaged people, participants queried whether the older churches, often composed of people from very different classes of people had been fair in their “theological and ecumenical” assessment to the experiential claims of the newer churches.⁴² From the perspective of the newer churches, faith and experience are viewed as necessarily inter-related. The point was made that the emergence of charismatic renewal in many churches had “added to the quality of that church’s spiritual experience,” while at the same time, the renewal had challenged the nature of the church’s spiritual formation.⁴³ This challenge was left for the churches to consider.

The question of the role of the “*filioque* clause” also came up as impatience was expressed over the continuing debate. Gerald Sheppard, at that time a minister of the Church of God in Christ, observed that the entire debate surrounding the inclusion or

⁴¹ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 193.

⁴² “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 193.

⁴³ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 193.

exclusion of the “*filioque* clause” reminded him of a fight between a set of separated parents. It didn’t trouble him which way the Eastern and Western churches finally resolved the issue, for Pentecostal churches had only made “passing notice” of the issue.⁴⁴ The problem was that in the dispute between the ancient churches over a seemingly philosophical issue, the concerns of the younger churches (e.g. Is there anything experiential at stake in this debate?), the offspring of these older churches, were being ignored. They had not been part of this debate between their parents, but they felt that they were being pushed to choose sides and it wasn’t very comfortable to be placed in that position. As a result, participants urged the Catholics and the Orthodox to do their utmost to end this millennium-long dispute.

In the end, participants in the consultation encouraged wider reception of the Klingenthal Memorandum and asserted that the churches of the East and West hold much more in common with one another regarding their Trinitarian faith than what divides them. The consultation also encouraged as an “interim” solution to the *filioque* question, the liturgical use of the Creed as it appeared prior to the addition of the “*filioque* clause”.⁴⁵

The challenges that Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations posed in the meeting were not ignored. The danger of demonizing another’s tradition through the use of caricature was lifted up as was the counterpart of idealizing one’s own. Members of the older churches encouraged Pentecostals to expand their understanding of experience and to share with the older churches something of their wisdom of the discernment process by

⁴⁴ Gerald T. Sheppard, “The Nicene Creed, Filioque, and Pentecostal Movements in the United States,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 179.

⁴⁵ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 195.

which experience is normed. In the end, the consultation acknowledged the importance of these churches for any future theological or ecumenical discussion to be complete.⁴⁶

In 1988, the Commission on Faith and Order saw the publication of a small but very helpful study guide to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁴⁷ In some ways it was a direct, initial response to a request that had been issued by the World Council of Churches for help in preparing people in local congregations to understand the Creed. This volume was designed to be studied, preferably by an ecumenical collection of Christians at the local level, in one or two hour segments over several weeks. It contained a copy of the Creed, a short preface that outlined its use and purpose, and five chapters, including the Introduction that set forth four main reasons that various churches use the Creed: Profession of Faith, Witness, Worship, and Safeguarding Sound Belief.

The Introduction was followed by an historical and theological chapter that outlines how the Creed came into existence followed by three chapters laid out in the same Trinitarian schema that is employed in the Creed itself. At the end of each of these chapters, there are several questions that can be used for discussion purposes. The volume concludes with an “Afterword” that provides a brief overview of the vision of Faith and Order for the unity of the Church, and three pages of resources for those who might desire do undertake further personal study on the topic. While it provided a useful tool for local congregations and study groups, it seems to have had little effect on any subsequent work of the Commission on Faith and Order.

At the same time that copies of *Confessing One Faith* were distributed to members of the Commission, a new program of studies was authorized that continued the work on the

⁴⁶ “The Holy Spirit Consultation: A Summary Statement,” in Stylianopoulos and Heim, Eds., *Spirit of Truth: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Holy Spirit*, 197.

⁴⁷ *Confessing One Faith: The Origins, Meaning and Use of the Nicene Creed: Grounds for a Common Witness* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1988), 68 pp.

Apostolic Faith through two additional studies. Toward the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Study: History Study found expression in two ways. One was an October 1989 consultation on the 4th Century titled “Faith to Creed”, convened in Waltham, MA. The papers presented there were subsequently published in a volume with that same title.⁴⁸ The other came as a result of a Working Group whose work resulted in a book later published under the title, *Telling the Churches’ Stories: Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History*.⁴⁹

The focus on the 4th Century envisioned by consultation organizers explicitly brought participants into contact with the Nicene Creed. This consultation was important for several reasons. The work of the World Council of Churches now shadowed in its own unique way by the work of the National Council of Churches seemed to suggest that if a common expression of faith that all churches could confess were to be found, it would most readily reside in the Nicene Creed. More importantly, given the experience of the churches within the American context, it was clear that the ancient churches as well as some of the Reformation churches now at home on American soil were very interested in pursuing this line of reasoning as more or less normative for the whole Church.

Other churches in the American context were not so enthusiastic about the prospect. In particular, some of them (e.g. certain Baptists, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and Pentecostals) embrace what is sometimes labeled a “Constantinian” or “Post-Constantinian Fall” of the Church. They believe that the churches of both East and West went into spiritual decline about the time that “Christendom” or the alliance of Church

⁴⁸ S. Mark Heim, Ed. *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 206 pp.

⁴⁹ Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., *Telling the Churches’ Stories: Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 134 pp. This volume will not be discussed in this paper because it ultimately focused less on the Apostolic Faith discussion and more on issues that originally stemmed from that discussion regarding whether or not it is possible to write Christian history from an ecumenical perspective.

with State became a reality. As a result, they have been generally suspicious of the value of creeds, and for some of them, of this creed in particular. Rather than seeing creeds as instruments of unity, some of these churches had viewed creeds and in some cases even experienced creeds as instruments of separation, persecution, and exclusion rather than instruments that facilitated unity.⁵⁰

The question of historical perceptions regarding the reading of a spiritual decline that followed the recognition of the Church by Constantine, whether this alleged decline lay at the feet of the Church or at the feet of the Roman *imperium* quickly became a matter of debate. In spite of the sometimes spirited discussion on this subject, the issue was left unresolved.⁵¹ It seems to have been the most divisive issue faced by the consultation, and it clearly points to the need for further work in understanding history ecumenically.

While most of the participants in this discussion clearly favored the use of the Nicene Creed as a common expression of the Apostolic Faith, voices from a number of younger churches, most dating from the Reformation period or shortly thereafter, were also heard. In addition to the questions of Church and State, others were raised by these younger churches regarding the ethical dimensions of the Creed.⁵²

As a result of these discussions, participants pointed out two facts that are not always acknowledged. First, when judging the Nicene Creed, it is important to place it in its Fourth Century context. The Creed should be allowed to speak from the rich and complex context of that time and it should not be judged on the basis of a later context. Second, present day questions and issues that have arisen within specific traditions that came into existence later should not be read back into the Fourth Century. These

⁵⁰ S. Mark Heim, "Introduction" in Heim, Ed. *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, xvii.

⁵¹ "Faith to Creed Consultation: Summary Statement," in Heim, Ed., *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, 200-201.

⁵² "Faith to Creed Consultation: Summary Statement," in Heim, Ed., *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, 201.

questions may illuminate certain realities from later experience, but they may unfairly judge the intentions of the framers of the Creed in the Fourth Century, and hence, the value of the Creed for later generations.⁵³

Finally, participants in the consultation concluded that there were a number of issues left undone in their work. They lamented the fact that for whatever reason, there were no Pentecostal or historic African American voices in the consultation. Clearly, their absence impoverished the discussion to some extent, though some important insights that would have had a bearing on the subject of this particular consultation within these two traditions are available in the earlier studies of the Apostolic Faith project conducted by the Commission on Faith and Order from at least 1984.

An equally important omission from this discussion was any discussion of the status that the Creed has come to hold within many churches as “unique and authoritative”. What was the process by which that came to be? What role did discernment play in this process? A related study might reflect on the normative character of the Creed as it is used within the various traditions that appeal to it. What participants did note was the fact that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed succeeded in bringing them together around issues of primary importance to their Christian faith and walk, as well as to the recognition that they all hold much in common with one another when it comes to the question of the Apostolic Faith.

Finally, “Toward the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today: Spirit, and Church” also found its expression in an ongoing Working Group of the Commission beginning in 1988. The publication of the papers produced for discussion in these

⁵³ “Faith to Creed Consultation: Summary Statement,” in Heim, Ed. *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, 200-202.

sessions was slow in coming.⁵⁴ The Working Group was explicit about its work standing in continuity with earlier studies in the Apostolic Faith study process, most notably with the *Apostolic Faith in America* and the *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith* projects. What brought many of this group together was a question. Throughout the Apostolic Faith study process many of them had become close friends who accepted one another as being fully Christian and as “valued and valid members of the Body of Christ”.⁵⁵ At the same time they also recognized that the denominations in which some of them held membership refused to recognize the value and validity of other denominations in which some of them held membership. “How could this be?” they asked. Would it be possible for the discerning process that went on between individuals to be applied in a similar way between Churches? Would this be a way to contribute to the visible unity of the Church?

In a sense, this project attempted to build on the two interests of Faith and Order from the early 1980s extending into the first half of the 1990s, namely the Apostolic Faith and the Holy Spirit. As they approached the different means by which their respective denominations tended to define the Apostolic Faith or assess whether the Apostolic Faith claimed by their denomination was to be found in the claims of other denominations, the Working Group kept arriving at dead ends. What they realized, however, was that all of the denominations represented in the Working Group recognized the action of the Holy Spirit in the faith and worship of their denominations. The question was, “How could it be recognized in the others?” Could the exploration of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in their denominations provide a way forward? Not only might this prove to be a

⁵⁴ William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocom, Eds., *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 136 pp.

⁵⁵ Clyde J. Steckel and Robert E. Hood, “Preface,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, x. In the Introduction to this volume, the editors raised a similar question. “Why is it that Christians often find it much easier to see and affirm the Spirit at work in the lives of individual persons than in the denominations and traditions to which these persons belong and in which they have been nurtured and shaped? See, William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocom, “Introduction,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 2.

valuable tool in the quest for visible Christian unity, but the group also came to believe that its work on the Third Person of the Trinity might contribute something substantial to the lacuna left by the already substantive discussions on Theology (God) and on Christology that tended to dominate so many other ecumenical agendas.⁵⁶

The process by which this Working Group went about conducting its inquiry, included a number of papers that were repeatedly critiqued and revised as they were studied from the viewpoint of the various denominations and traditions represented in the group. In the end, the editors affirmed, “We have come to recognize more fully that essential to apostolic faith and our common confession of and witness to it is a fuller and deeper life in the Spirit.”⁵⁷

With Scripture as its starting point, the Working Group studied the person and work of the Holy Spirit before moving on to various ecclesiological questions. Thaddeus Horgan, who died quite suddenly midway into this study, wrote the paper that gave much shape to the work that followed. The charism of the discernment of spirits and the more generalized understanding of processes associated with the exercise of “discernment” both within and outside the Church were then explored, laying groundwork for others. The work of the Spirit was discussed as it is manifested in worship and liturgy, the proclamation of the Gospel, the formation and forms of the Church, and the Spirit in the ministry, as well as the mission and service of the Church all became part of this project.

A number of points became apparent as the Working Group went about its tasks. First, Scripture was clearly the starting point, the standard or norm by which all of the traditions entered into the discussion. Second, the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the

⁵⁶ Clyde J. Steckel and Robert E. Hood, “Preface,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds., *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, x.

⁵⁷ William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocom, “Introduction,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds., *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 5.

churches became equally apparent. Third, the discerning process received considerable attention throughout these studies, both as a discreet study and as part of other studies. Thus, it was necessary for the group to work toward a common understanding of the meaning and practice of discernment within the whole Christian tradition. Fourth, the Working Group made repeated reference to earlier studies on the Apostolic Faith, and lifted up the potential contribution of Pentecostals and the Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith in particular.⁵⁸ Finally, while the work of this group was launched by the larger discussion on the nature of the Apostolic Faith, its primary contribution seems to have been on the presence and work of the Holy Spirit throughout the Christian community that underlies the Apostolic Faith, for in the end, no one is able to confess that “Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:1).

Conclusions

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Faith and Order in the United States it is only appropriate to ask what the various studies of the Apostolic Faith have accomplished in the larger discussion regarding the visible unity of the Church. It is safe to say that one note needs to be made before that question is answered. It is to acknowledge the enormous role that was played by the Director of Faith and Order at that time, Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC. Jeff spent countless hours recruiting, training, empowering, and overseeing scores of newer and younger ecumenists in as broad a configuration of the ecumenical table as he could spread at the time. His contribution to the Apostolic Faith studies was huge, and it needs to be acknowledged as such. That being said, it is also important to acknowledge the number of publications that came into being as a result of

⁵⁸ William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocom, “Introduction,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 2, note 2; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Discerning the Spirit in the Life of the Church,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 29-49; George Vandervelde and William R. Barr, “The Spirit in the Proclamation of the Church,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 82, note 5; and Tom Hoyt, Jr. and Clyde Steckel, “The Spirit in the Mission and Service of the Church,” in Barr and Yocom, Eds. *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*, 123-136.

various studies along these lines. I do not know of another study or set of studies from Faith and Order that has produced as many books and articles as did these studies on the Apostolic Faith.

The question of what these studies accomplished is probably as complex as the American context in which they were conducted. The broadening of the ecumenical table in Faith and Order came, in large part, with the decision to pursue studies on the Apostolic Faith. New to the table were representatives of both Holiness [with the exception of the Church of God (Anderson, IN) which had been represented in Faith and Order for some years] and Pentecostal traditions that had not previously engaged in ecumenical discussion. By focusing on the nature of a common confession, even the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, it brought a range of churches into conversation with one another over mutual doctrinal concerns. At the same time, it provided opportunity for open discussion on where various parties differed on the issue of the Apostolic Faith.

The focus on the Apostolic Faith also made it possible for a new set of discussions within the National Council of Churches. It was within the American context that the Pentecostal Movement had arguably made its most significant appearance. At the same time, this study made possible a new discussion on the Third Article of the Creed, that having to do with the Holy Spirit, to be undertaken with partners who felt at home talking about the Holy Spirit. The consultation on “Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith” held at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1986 was a watershed of sorts. It was the first time that Faith and Order had been hosted by an Evangelical organization, and it was the first time that Faith and Order had an in depth conversation with a variety of Pentecostals. In the

end, it made possible the series of “Pentecostal-National Council of Churches Conversations” that ran from 1988 through 1997.⁵⁹

In all the discussions on the Apostolic Faith, and in a number of the discussions that focused either on the Pentecostal contributions or on the Holy Spirit, considerable emphasis was placed upon the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This may have been necessary, and for many it was even desirable. After all, if everyone could confess a common creed, and this Creed seemed to be the desirable one, then perhaps the churches could be thought of as coming closer to accepting one another fully. The pressure from some who simply assumed that this Creed should be normative was intense. True, people were mostly always gracious. But in many ways, even though resistance to the ways the Creed had traditionally been interpreted (e.g. African American churches), or resistance to the ways that creeds had been used to silence dissidents in times past (e.g. Anabaptist), or resistance to the limitations that some traditions saw in the use of creeds at all (e.g. Holiness and Pentecostals) were expressed and even noted, in the end they seem to have been ignored. Most discussions of the Apostolic Faith, seems still to be focused on a common confession of faith, notably the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

In the end, it may be that this position can and should be the position that all churches will embrace, but it should not be undertaken at the expense of any churches. Until everyone involved in the discussion agrees that the questions, criticisms, and fears have been genuinely acknowledged and addressed, the pressure to accept a common creed will continue to be experienced as an imposition by force that values some churches over others. For the sake of the unity of the whole Church, Faith and Order cannot afford to allow this to happen. Still, we may rightfully look back on the decade between 1985 and

⁵⁹ The background and goals of these conversations were spelled under “Other Projects” in *Program of Studies 1988-1991 of the Commission on Faith & Order* (New York, NY: Commission on Faith & Order/NCCCCUSA, no date), 15-16.

1995 during which most of these studies in Faith and Order took place in the United States as one of the richest decades in the past half century of its work.