

Vincent of Lérins: Principles for a Theological Hermeneutic

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Vincent of Lérins (c. 390-450 CE) was a fifth century monk, presbyter, and theologian renowned as “a man learned in the holy scriptures, and sufficiently instructed in the knowledge of ecclesiastical dogma.”¹ We know little of his life, little of his work has survived, and there is little recent published scholarship regarding him. Even so, his contribution to understanding the development of theology looms large in Catholic and Protestant thought. Vincent was aware that Nicene Trinitarian dogma had developed over centuries. Furthermore, many theological controversies troubled his own time. Pelagius had written on human free will and Nestorius on the nature of Christ. Vincent’s concern was straightforward. How can we discern between truth and heresy? How can we properly read Holy Scripture? To this end, Vincent wrote the *A Treatise for the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies*, generally known as the *Commonitorium*.² This was published under the pseudonym Peregrinus which suggests that Vincent saw himself on a spiritual pilgrimage.

In this paper, I will offer an analysis of Vincent’s *Commonitorium* using an available English translation.³ Then, I will offer reflections on how Vincent’s methodology may have helped theologians navigate the theological controversies of the Great Reformation and the Pentecostal Movement. It is my purpose to demonstrate that Vincent’s theological hermeneutic continues to be helpful as Christians seek to navigate the controversies encountered in the wilderness of postmodernity and beyond.

The *Commonitories*: An Analysis

Truth matters. Vincent declares that believers are “moved particularly by the terrible fear of approaching Judgment” and this fear “urges us to increase our studies” and “requires much careful attention” to the “deceitfulness of new heretics.”⁴ Faithful believers should “dread with great fear the sacrilege of changing faith.”⁵ So, what is the standard by which truth and heresy may be discerned? Vincent insists that the Faith is fortified by the canon of Sacred Scripture and

¹ Gennadius, *De Viris Illustribus*, 65. Quoted in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online* s.v. “Vincent of Lérins”

² Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume IV: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1986), 546. *New Advent* s.v. *Commonitorium* (Vincent of Lérins). Available online: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>

³ Vincent of Lérins. “Commonitories” in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Volume 7. Rudolph E. Morris, trans. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 267-332. Hereafter, *Commonitories*.

⁴ *Commonitories* 1.

⁵ *Commonitories* 7.

the sacred theological tradition of the Church.⁶ He is not the first to suggest the priority of Scripture and Tradition in the theological task. Irenaeus (2nd century), declared that there are two essential elements in Christian theological reflection – *Scripture* as read through the received *apostolic tradition*.⁷ Likewise, Didymus the Blind (4th century) insisted that a proper theological method includes the primacy of Scripture in dialogue with the “the old ecclesial writers.”⁸ Even so, Vincent is the first to present a systematic treatment on Scripture and Tradition as a theological method.⁹

According to Vincent, Sacred Scripture is of divine authority and is therefore “complete and more than sufficient in itself.” However, Scripture can be difficult, and therefore “is not universally accepted in one and the same sense.” Scripture, used by the faithful and heretic alike, can be “interpreted differently. . . [and] it can yield as many different meanings as there are [interpreters].”¹⁰ In fact, the primary method Satan uses to tempt the faithful is the misinterpretation of Holy Scripture.¹¹ With heresies abounding, Vincent sought to establish a proper hermeneutic which could discern theological truth. He wrote,

In the Catholic Church itself, every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been believed *everywhere, always, and by all*. . . This general rule will be truly applied if we follow *the principles of universality, antiquity, and consent*. We do so in regard to universality if we confess that faith alone to be true which the entire Church confesses all over the world. [We do so] in regard to antiquity if we in no way deviate from those interpretations which our ancestors and fathers have manifestly proclaimed as inviolable. [We do so] in regard to consent if, in this very antiquity, we adopt the definitions and propositions of all, or almost all, the bishops and doctors (emphasis added).¹²

The principles of *universality, antiquity, and consent* are remarkably consistent with the criteria of canonization of the New Testament: apostolic authority, antiquity, orthodoxy, catholicity, and traditional use in worship.¹³ Since the days of the apostles, spurious gospels and letters which contained heresy have abounded. Later, as some post-apostolic leaders began to assemble a collection of sacred scriptures, many of which contained spurious documents, it became

⁶ *Commonitories* 2, 29. In Vincent’s context, the Church is the ancient Catholic Church. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the Church in reference to those ancient Christians who embrace Nicene Trinitarianism. Ancient heretical or schismatic Christian groups will be identified accordingly.

⁷ Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 3.

⁸ Didymus, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.

⁹ Reginald Stewart Moxon, ed., *The Commonitorium of Vincentius of Lerins* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), xxxiii. Moxon states that Vincent is “the first real theorist of tradition.”

¹⁰ *Commonitories* 2, 25.

¹¹ *Commonitories* 25-26.

¹² *Commonitories* 2.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 255-269.

necessary for the catholic bishops to declare which books were suitable for public worship and teaching. The primary criteria for declaring a book as *inspired* was apostolicity. Only those documents that were discerned to be apostolic in origin and content were *authoritative*. A summary of the apostolic kerygma came to be known as the Rule of Faith.¹⁴

Vincent declared that the Rule of Faith required a right reading of Scripture as proclaimed by righteous bishops and doctors in faithful communion with one another. The Faith has been *proclaimed* by Spirit-inspired prophets and apostles and *received* by the universal Church. The Rule *unites* the church in message and mission. The Church *guards* the truth of the Faith with a singular heart, and *proclaims* the message with a singular voice.¹⁵ Vincent's principles are derived from the ancient hermeneutical tradition that declares the Church to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.¹⁶

Vincent acknowledged that there are times when heresy seems to prevail as when “the poison of Arianism had infected . . . nearly the entire world.”¹⁷ Therefore, majority opinion does not correspond to universal consent. Vincent allowed that it is unlikely that there will be an *absolute* consensus among theologians, but an *approximate* consensus has prevailed throughout the centuries.¹⁸ He gives priority to tradition over novelty, to unity over schism, to universal consent over the error of the few. The ecumenical council, consisting of bishops and doctors consulting together regarding general decrees, is the most authoritative body of the Church. Less important matters may be decided by “great and outstanding teachers.”¹⁹

Vincent wrote to combat “novel ideas” and “new dogmas” that were being proclaimed by “eminent persons who are well established in the Church.”²⁰ He presented a directory of heretics with their offending doctrines.²¹ It appears that those who have most provoked his ire are Pelagius and Nestorius.²² Pelagius gave priority of human freewill over divine grace.²³ Nestorius denied the union of divinity and humanity in one Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary.²⁴

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 3ff; *Against Heresies* 1.10.1; Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 13.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 11-13.

¹⁶ “The Nicene Creed” in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds, vol. 1* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1878), 28.

¹⁷ *Commonitories* 4.

¹⁸ Moxon, xliv.

¹⁹ *Commonitories* 27.

²⁰ *Commonitories* 10.

²¹ *Commonitories* 12, 16.

²² *Commonitories* 9, 11. Since the seventeenth century, it has been accepted that Vincent was also challenging Augustine's teaching on predestination. However, Augustine is not named in the *Commonitories*. Vincent did not hesitate to name the eminent bishop Nestorius as a heretic, and therefore it is likely that if Vincent was challenging Augustine, he would have call him out by name. Contemporary scholarship rejects reading Vincent as anti-Augustinian. See: Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), xxii-xxvi.

²³ *Commonitories* 24.

²⁴ *Commonitories* 12.

Vincent had little patience or mercy for the heretics – those “mad dogs” who “bark against the Catholic faith.”²⁵ He pronounces “anathema” upon them and assigns all heretics and their disciples to Gehenna.²⁶

Furthermore, according to Vincent, neither ecclesial eminence nor intellectual genius is an excuse for departing from the teaching of the Church. He offered the example of Origen of Alexandria, a man of “admirable qualities” born of a noble Christian family. His “powerful genius” was “so comprehensive that there were few matters in theology [or] philosophy that he did not master.” Even so, Vincent accused Origen of arrogantly abusing the grace of God by despising “the teachings of the Fathers and [interpreting] some passages of Holy Scripture in a novel manner.”²⁷ Origen was controversial, but had many defenders among the monks. Origenists monks became a major theological and political influence in the Church. Origenism taught the pre-existence of the human soul, denied the resurrection of the flesh, and proclaimed the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, that is, the ultimate salvation of all creatures, even Satan.²⁸ Origenistic thought became so controversial that it was condemned in the sixth century.²⁹

Vincent offered a vision of the faithful theologian as one who “loves the Truth of God” and is not deceived by human genius or eloquence, who is determined to hold and believe nothing but what the Church has universally held from ancient times.³⁰ The faithful theologian must avoid “novelties of dogma, subject matter, and opinions contrary to tradition and antiquity.”³¹ Vincent’s offered a distinct and clear presentation of Trinitarian theology that should be followed.³²

With the emphasis on fidelity to antiquity and the avoidance of novelty, Vincent was compelled to ask, “Is there to be no progress, or development, in the theology of the Church?” He replied, “To be sure, there has to be . . . exceedingly great progress” but, “progress in the proper sense of the word, and not a change in faith.” The faithful *progression* of doctrine is Vincent’s fourth principle. The faith of the church can grow and mature, and yet “remain incorrupt and unimpaired, complete and perfect . . . so that it does not allow . . . any loss of its specific character, or any variation of its inherent form.” Theology must be perfected so that truth might “take on more evidence, clarity, and distinctness.” The decrees of the ecumenical councils have issued “authoritative decisions, condensing weighty matters in a few words, and

²⁵ *Commonitories* 13.

²⁶ *Commonitories* 6, 8-9, 16.

²⁷ *Commonitories* 17.

²⁸ Ivor J. Davidson, *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World AD 312-600* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 151-153.

²⁹ It is not clear that Origen himself was condemned as a heretic. It is generally accepted that Origen’s thought was misunderstood, or misrepresented. It is certain that later Origenistic thought was condemned in 543 and 553. See: *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* s.v. “Origenism”

³⁰ *Commonitories* 20.

³¹ *Commonitories* 24.

³² *Commonitories* 13-15.

particularly for the enlightenment of the mind, by presenting in new words the old interpretation of the faith.”³³ For example, the dogmatic seeds of Trinity and Incarnation have been planted in the New Testament. In an effort to articulate the doctrine of the apostles, later theologians employed words like *trinity*, *homoousios*, *hypostasis*, *perichoresis*, and *Theotokos*. The creed proclaimed by the Council of Nicaea in 325 was perfected by subsequent councils in 381 at Constantinople, 431 at Ephesus, and 451 at Chalcedon. The introduction of the term *filioque*³⁴ into the Nicene Creed in 675 demonstrates the progression of doctrine and has the support of antiquity; but it has been rejected by the churches of the East. The greatest challenge to Vincent’s principles is yet to come. Vincent’s *Commonitories* would be virtually ignored for centuries, but would enjoy a revival during the Reformation³⁵ in which Catholics and Protestants employed Vincent’s principles in opposition to each other.

The Vincentian Principles and the Great Reformation

Vincent asked, “What, therefore, will the Catholic Christian do if some members of the Church have broken away from the communion of universal faith?” He offered a threefold method of discernment - hold to the ancient faith; give priority to the ecumenical councils; and consult and compare reliable authorities who lived in different times and different places and have nevertheless remained faithful.³⁶ It has been suggested that Vincent’s principles are of “little help towards the settlement of a controversy while it is in progress.”³⁷ However, it is more likely that Vincent’s principles were constructed for just such a time. Even with the proliferation of heresy in Vincent’s age, it is unlikely that he could have envisioned the Great Reformation vested with intractable theologians challenged by irreconcilable differences. We must ask, “How might the Vincentian principles guide Reformation era theologians?”

Martin Luther was rather lukewarm in his commitment to the Vincentian principles. In fact, there is no evidence that he ever read the *Commonitorium*. Even so, he was familiar with it because King Henry VIII cited the *Commonitorium* in his response to Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity*. Luther did not ascribe authority to tradition, even that of the ecumenical councils, unless their teaching could be clearly supported from Scripture. In his insistence on *sola scriptura*, he denied the dual authoritative status of Scripture *and* Tradition. Luther scoffed at the

³³ *Commonitories* 23.

³⁴ *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* s.v. “Filioque”

³⁵ Thomas Guarino, “Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question: Historical and Theological Reflections.” *Gregorianum* 75.3 (1994), 493.

³⁶ *Commonitories* 3.

³⁷ Moxon, lxix.

idea of consensus among the ancient bishops and doctors, pointing out that they often disagreed with each other.³⁸

We should acknowledge that which Catholics and Protestants agreed upon – Trinitarian dogma as proclaimed in the Nicene Creed. Protestant theologians exercised great care to demonstrate fidelity to the ancient Nicene faith. In the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melancthon insisted that Lutherans desired to embrace “one simple truth . . . for the future of one true and pure religion . . . so we may be able also to live in unity and concord in the one Christian Church.” The first article of the Confession declared “common consent” with the Council of Nicaea.³⁹ Likewise, John Calvin⁴⁰ and Ulrich Zwingli⁴¹ held to the ancient creeds. Radicals who sought to challenge the theology of the Nicene Creed were met with opposition from both Catholic and Protestant leaders. Michael Servetus proclaimed himself a reformer and rejected the doctrine of Holy Trinity. He was condemned by Catholic authorities in France, so he fled to Geneva where he was denounced by John Calvin and burned as a heretic. Catholics and Protestants were committed to the divine authority and inspiration of Holy Scripture, although they disagreed on the canonicity of certain books. Whereas, the controversies of the earlier ecumenical councils were primarily Christological, the controversies of the Reformation were soteriological and ecclesiological, that is, “How is saving grace administered and received?”⁴²

The Catholics accused the Reformers of introducing novel teachings that were not universally accepted and did not have common consent. The Reformers countered that it was the Roman Catholic Church that had imposed novel and heretical doctrines upon the faithful. John Calvin declared that the Roman Church was an “impious tyranny opposed to God’s Word” formulating new doctrines, ensnaring God’s people with “wicked traditions” and “pretended ecclesiastical jurisdiction.”⁴³ In fact, “the Reformers did not think the Reformation was primarily a revolution for new, modern ideas, but a retrieval and renewal of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”⁴⁴ The Reformers were appealing to an ancient and universal consensus.

³⁸ Quentin D. Stewart, *Lutheran Patristic Catholicity: The Vincentian Canon and the Consensus Patrum in Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Zurich, CH: LIT Verlag, 2015), 37-39.

³⁹ *The Book of Concord*. Online at <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/>

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 volumes. Ford Lewis Battles, trans. The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 120–121.

⁴¹ Ulrich Zwingli, “The Exposition of the Faith” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, G. W. Bromiley, trans. The Library of Christian Classics, Volume 24 (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), 246ff.

⁴² Luther declared that repentance “cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.” Martin Luther, *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences: October 31, 1517*, electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1996).

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1219-1220*.

⁴⁴ Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 3.

Vincent insisted that the “force and etymology” of the term *Catholic* “comprises everything truly universal.”⁴⁵ John Calvin concurred that there is but one universal Church comprised of those who are elect and united in Christ gathered from all nations, dispersed throughout the world across the ages, “but agrees on one truth of divine doctrine.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, he declared that the Church is the mother of the faithful.⁴⁷ However, for Calvin, being *catholic* does not require submission to the Roman see which he believes is an innovation that lacks the support of antiquity.⁴⁸ Rather, to be *catholic* is to teach apostolic doctrine and observe the sacraments instituted by Christ – Baptism and the Eucharist.⁴⁹

We are reminded of Vincent’s fourth principle - the *progression* of Church doctrine. The Reformers were seeking to recover ancient truth that had been buried by centuries of extra-biblical tradition. Could it be that Vincent’s principles might encourage progress and development that enables such theological recovery? Vincent acknowledged the temporary ascendancy of Arianism and celebrated the ultimate victory of Nicene theology. Might this be an example of the recovery of truth over heresy? Maybe Luther’s epiphany of justification by faith is the recovery of an ancient catholic consensus. In fact, after years of dialogue Roman Catholics and Lutherans published *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* which articulated “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ” and encompasses “a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.” Furthermore, “this Declaration is shaped by the conviction that in their respective histories our churches *have come to new insights. Developments have taken place* that . . . require the churches to examine the divisive questions and condemnations and *see them in a new light*” (emphasis added).⁵⁰ This document is a *consensus* that acknowledges history (*antiquity*) and proclaims basic truths (*universality*) informed by *developments*. Maybe Vincent has cause to offer a nod of approval.

Vincent, Tertullian, and Pentecostalism

With the advent of the modern Pentecostal Movement, the Christian Church faced its greatest challenge since the Reformation. Likewise, Pentecostalism may be the greatest challenge yet to Vincent’s methodology. For the first several decades of the Movement, Pentecostals were maligned as superstitious fanatics spreading confusion. For most observers,

⁴⁵ *Commonitories* 2.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1023.

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1016.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1102.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1451.

⁵⁰ The Lutheran Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 10-11.

the practice of tongues-speech and the doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit were at the very least novel innovations and at the worst demonically inspired. However, more than a century after the Azusa Street Revival, Pentecostalism is the largest Christian movement in the world and includes most Christian groups from Roman Catholic to Mennonite.

So, how might Vincent discern the Pentecostal movement? It's worth noting that Vincent gives little thought to the Holy Spirit beyond the Creed, so there is room for progression and development of pneumatology. Even so, Vincent rebuked Tertullian for his involvement in the "madness of Montanus." Vincent admired Tertullian as one of the greatest thinkers and writers of the ancient church. But Tertullian was not "steadfast enough in Catholic dogma . . . He was more eloquent than faithful . . . changing his position."⁵¹ Tertullian reminded his opponents that he remained committed to the Rule of Faith.⁵² He did not change his mind. He insisted that the contention between the Montanists and Catholics was not a matter of doctrine, but of discipline.⁵³

Let us briefly consider how Vincent's principles might be applied to Pentecostalism. Pentecostals have always understood themselves to be a restoration movement. They envisioned the restoration of the church of *antiquity*. They often appealed to the ancient theologians for support. In fact, when the New Issue controversy (denial of Holy Trinity) was raging within Pentecostalism, many Pentecostal leaders appealed to the ancient Nicene Creed and its defenders as examples of biblical orthodoxy. As one reads through the various statements of faith of most Pentecostal churches the influence of the Nicene Creed is evident. Also, Pentecostals appealed to antiquity in support for the doctrine of tongues-speech. Wade Horton published *The Glossolalia Phenomenon*⁵⁴ in which he appealed to examples of tongues-speech throughout history. The charismatic Roman Catholic scholars George Montague and Kilian McDonnell published *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*⁵⁵ in which they appealed to ancient catholic theologians in support of the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism *subsequent to* regeneration with attesting charismatic signs.

Vincent's principle of *universality* insists that the true faith is confessed by the Church all over the world. One of the strengths of the Pentecostal Movement is its remarkable diversity. Pentecostalism has shown phenomenal power "to embrace and transform almost anything it meets *in the cultures to which it travels* is one of the qualities that give it such remarkable energy and creativity" (emphasis added).⁵⁶ As of 2020, there are almost 650 million Pentecostals

⁵¹ *Commonitories* 18.

⁵² Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 21.

⁵³ Tertullian, *On Fasting* 1.

⁵⁴ Wade H. Horton, *The Glossolalia Phenomenon* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1966).

⁵⁵ Kilian McDonnell and George Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

⁵⁶ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1995), 147.

worldwide with adherents on every continent of diverse races singing the praises of Jesus the Lord.⁵⁷

The principle of *consensus* requires that doctrine be acknowledged by “almost all” of the bishops and doctors of the church. This is a work in progress. Pentecostals have been engaged in ecumenical outreach as demonstrated by the work of David Du Plessis⁵⁸ and Cecil Robeck.⁵⁹ The inclusion of Pentecostal denominations in the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942)⁶⁰ demonstrated a developing fraternal fellowship and cooperation. Pentecostals began ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in 1972 “with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and overcoming of prejudices between Catholics and Pentecostals.”⁶¹ Pentecostals have also participated in various dialogues sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Pentecostal pastors are engaged in micro-ecumenism throughout the world as they promote fellowship and cooperation with Christian ministers of diverse denominations in their localities.

The Pentecostal Movement has had a profound influence on the *progression* of Christian doctrine. For centuries the Holy Spirit was relegated to being the silent partner of Holy Trinity. I have previously written,

Pentecostal theology is the reclamation of true Trinitarian theology. For some Catholics, the Holy Spirit has often been lost in discussions of church organization and liturgy; or identified with Marian devotion. Often, Protestant theology is more or less binitarian (Father and Son) as one can see by looking at many Protestant systematic theology texts . . . the Holy Spirit has often been lost in discussions about salvation . . . The Spirit has found willing voices among Pentecostals. The Spirit of Pentecost is not the gentle breeze of a silent God, but noisy “violent rushing wind” (Acts 2:1-14). It has been the advent of the modern Pentecostal Movement that have moved the Church to embrace once again a theology that is fully Trinitarian.⁶²

⁵⁷ Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 6–8, 26.

⁵⁸ *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* s.v. “David Johannes du Plessis”

⁵⁹ *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* s.v. “Cecil Melvin Robeck, Jr.”

⁶⁰ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God 1886-1996* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2008), 311-313.

⁶¹ Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, “Message of Pope for 50th anniversary of international Catholic–Pentecostal dialogue” (July 2022). Online: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/2022/2022-07-12-dialogo-cattolico-pentecostale.html>

⁶² Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar, Revised Edition* (Cleveland, TN: Cherohala Press, 2019), 48-49.

The twentieth century has been designated as the century of the Holy Spirit.⁶³ The Society for Pentecostal Studies was founded in 1970 giving a place for Pentecostal thinkers to engage the ecclesial dialogue with anointed minds and hearts on fire.

Conclusion

The Reformers could not have envisioned the trajectory of their movement in which there are hundreds of Christian denominations. Nor could they envision that the continuing protestations of their ecclesial progeny would lead to the rejection of the authority of Holy Scripture, the denial of the God of the ancient creeds, or the reaffirmation of pagan sexual morality. It is just as unlikely that Catholics and Protestants could not have envisioned the advent of Pentecostalism. With the proliferation of schisms, the decline of orthodoxy among mainline Protestant churches, and the explosive growth of independent churches, Thomas Oden has asked, “Is it possible that a particular church body or denomination could display the essential mark of catholicity?” His answer is that catholicity may be found “in reasonably undistorted form in the ancient ecumenical tradition.”⁶⁴ It is truly remarkable that in spite of the multiplied schisms suffered by the Christian movement in past centuries there remains a catholic center that is supported by commitment to the sacred canon of Scripture and allegiance to the Nicene Creed. As the Christian church traverses the wilderness of post-modernity, the Vincentian principles of antiquity, universality, consensus, and progression serve as boundary markers⁶⁵ that will guide Christian theology towards an ever-faithful trajectory – always remembering, always going into all the world, always growing in grace and knowledge.

⁶³ Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

⁶⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology Volume Three* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), 343, 345.

⁶⁵ Cf. Proverbs 22:28

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