

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SOCIETY FOR PENTECOSTAL STUDIES

Plenary Session

By Vinson Synan

Regent University

Presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies

In 1985 at the SPS meeting that met in the Word of God Catholic Charismatic Community in Gaithersburg, Maryland, I gave a paper on the first fifteen years of the SPS. It was a good time to look back and get a perspective on the history of the Society up to that point. Now twenty years later we have an even longer and more distinguished history to consider. As usual, I again make the point that I am the only person that has never missed a meeting of the Society from its organization in 1970. I hope that I can make that statement when the Society observes its golden anniversary in 2020.¹

It might be well to look at the Pentecostal/Charismatic world as it stood in 1970 and trace some of the highlights of the society's beginnings with some comments of important developments during the thirty-five years. In the Pentecostal world, there was no forum at that time that could bring together the varied strands of the movement. In the U.S. the Black and White Pentecostals were segregated as they had been since the last major racial separation occurred in 1924. The Pentecostal Fellowship on North America, formed in 1948, was a whites only organization. No Blacks were invited. The only forum in which American Black Pentecostals felt at home was the Pentecostal World Conference which met every three years. The Oneness Pentecostals were still outside the

¹ The best sources for SPS history are: *Commemorating Thirty Years of Annual Meetings* (produced in 2001 by the Society for Pentecostal Studies, edited by William Faupel and Kane McKann); Russell P. Spittler, "Society for Pentecostal Studies," in Stanley Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 1079-1080; and Vinson Synan, "Fifteen Years of the Society for Pentecostal Studies," a paper presented to the SPS in 1985 which met at The Mother of God Community in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

pale of mainstream Trinitarian Pentecostalism and there was no forum in the world where the two streams could gather to carry out dialogues.

Although the Charismatic Movement had erupted a decade earlier in 1960, there was no forum where traditional Pentecostals and Protestant neo-Pentecostals could gather. With the outbreak of the Catholic Pentecostal movement in 1967, there was a great deal of interest and controversy among Pentecostals as to the possibility that this movement could possibly be of God. In 1970, there was no forum in the world where these two major Christian forces could dialogue together. Also, although there were many theological societies in the Protestant and Catholic worlds, there was no forum in existence where Pentecostal theologians and historians could gather to reflect on this, the fastest growing movement in Christianity.

Looking back, David Barrett estimates that there were no less than 74, 352,000 Pentecostals and Charismatics worldwide in 1970. (He put the number at 625,000,000 in 2005). At that time Pentecostals were still working with the figures David du Plessis had offered a few years earlier. He estimated that there were about 12,000,000 Pentecostals in the world. That was hard for some of us to believe at the time.

Other events in the religious world had direct or indirect effects on the Pentecostal people of the world. In 1970, Bishop James Pike died in an Israeli desert trying to communicate with his dead son. A few years earlier this famous Episcopal prelate had opposed the Neo-Pentecostal movement in California by calling it “heresy in embryo.” Catholics and Protestants continued to kill each other in Northern Ireland. The Jesus movement was also making headlines as desperate hippies abandoned the drug culture and turned to Jesus. Chuck Smith, the Foursquare pastor from Costa Mesa,

California, was the major figure in this movement which featured Bible communes, coffee houses, and speaking in tongues. Also making news was the triennial gathering of Pentecostals from all over the world in Dallas, Texas at the ninth Pentecostal World Conference. Chairman of the meeting was Paul Yonggi Cho whose Full Gospel Assembly in Seoul, Korea, with some 30,000 members was on its way to becoming the largest local church in Christian History.

Some interest was stirred during the conference when, on November 6, 1970, 139 people gathered in a luncheon session to launch a new society of scholars who had a burning desire to meet together to discuss the future of the movement from a historical and theological perspective. This was truly something new for the Pentecostal tradition. There was a lot of curiosity from Pentecostal leaders as they gathered with scholars from many nations to see what would happen. Since I was deeply involved in bringing this meeting into being, I would like to give my perspective on how this society came into being.²

I was serving as a history teacher at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia, when several things came together that led to the meeting in Dallas. For four years I had been working on my M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in American Social and Intellectual History at the University of Georgia in nearby Athens. My major professor, Dr. Horace Montgomery, an elder in the Unitarian Church, had persuaded me to write a dissertation on the Pentecostal Movement in the South. As my research widened, he suggested that it be a national rather than regional study. I was fortunate enough to

² Some parts of this paper were taken from the new autobiography that I am now writing. I offer it to add some flavor of the era when the SPS was born.

complete my degree in only one year and eleven months, (which was probably illegal at the time).

I almost missed going to the University of Georgia when, in 1965 in Richmond, Virginia, Oral Roberts offered to pay all my expenses to attend Harvard, Yale, or Princeton to study theology. All I had to do was to teach for two years in the new Oral Roberts University. I was sorely tempted, but I already had a wonderful pre-doctoral assistantship in hand from the state of Georgia to study history. How different my life would have been had I accepted Oral's offer. I might have been a theologian rather than a historian.

Nevertheless, after earning my Ph.D. degree in the summer of 1967, I plunged into the most exciting and unforeseen time of ministry that I had ever experienced. As the founding pastor of a new Pentecostal Holiness Church in Hartwell, Georgia, I preached three times a week and spent much time visiting and ministering to my members. At the same time, I taught a full load of classes at Emmanuel College with classes of up to 40 students. I also was invited to preach in many local church revivals in the area. My wife was working full-time at the church denominational offices in addition to giving birth to three of our four children. All of our Georgia babies were born in the Ty Cobb memorial hospital in Royston. I had met Cobb in 1960 when I heard that he was visiting the hospital. Together with several students, we met him and talked about his life. He immediately asked if I was a preacher. When I told him that I was a preacher and a teacher at Emmanuel, he confessed that he was giving full scholarships to some of the students. Our children born in Ty Cobb's hospital were Virginia (1963), Vince, Jr. (1966) and Joey (1968).

A highlight of my pastorate in Hartwell was a wonderful revival among the young people in the town. I was excited to read about the “Jesus movement” in California under the leadership of Chuck Smith and prayed that we could share in that movement in our small town. As I drove into town, there was a large shopping mall parking lot where hundreds of teenagers gathered on week-end nights. There was much concern in the town about drugs and sex going on in the dark of the night. I would pass the mall every time I went to church to preach. I often wondered how we could reach these young people who would probably never enter my church. The answer came from an elderly lady in the church, Dollie Stovall, who reprimanded me for not “doing something about those young people.” I then asked some Emmanuel College students to go with me to “case the joint” and make plans for future witnessing. After an awesome time of prayed in the church, we went to the parking lot “just to look around.”

One of the girls began to weep saying that we must do something “tonight.” Reluctantly I took my guitar out of the trunk and we began to sing “Michael row the boat ashore.” I felt that this would not offend anyone. Soon cars began to circle the lot and then kids got out of their cars and gathered around us in a circle. We sang any song that they requested, including “Amazing Grace” and “What a friend we have in Jesus.” Suddenly a young boy fell on the pavement by my car and began to cry out for mercy. After I led him to the Lord, he stood and gave one of the most eloquent and impassioned altar calls I had ever seen. Several teens were converted in the months that followed as we went to the parking lot every weekend throughout the cold winter months.

Soon the Baptist, Methodist, and Church of God pastors came to see me and told of a great revival that was breaking out among their youth members with all night prayer

meetings and lock-ins in the churches. In a short time, many of the churches in town joined with me in renting an old abandoned theater on the city square where hundreds of youth gathered on Sunday nights for worship and praise. It was a marvelous time for our church and for the city. The first young man who was converted on the first night on the parking lot preached the gospel from my pulpit a few months later.

Another matter that began to occupy my time was the new relationship between the Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Methodist Church in Chile. In 1966 I was invited to address a conference of pastors in Santiago at the invitation of an interdenominational ministry representing all the evangelical churches in Chile. I was asked to read a paper on the roots of Pentecostalism. We met in the Club Italiano and there were about 500 pastors in attendance. My paper, which highlighted the Methodist roots of Pentecostalism, went over like a bombshell. Soon after I returned home I received a printed copy of my paper which was published by Bishop Enrique Chavez and sent all over Chile.

On this trip I was invited to preach in the Jotabeche P.M. Church on Alameda Avenue. I had never seen anything like it in my life. Over 7,000 persons jammed the church and filled all the aisles. The Pentecostals were full of joy and enthusiasm. They shouted out the three glories, “Gloria a Dios, Gloria a Dios, Gloria a Dios” (Glory to God) throughout the service. Hundreds of the saints danced in the Spirit in a style that looked like the “queca,” the native dance of Chile. The response to my sermon was electric. I was mobbed by the crowd as I left the church with hundreds of people begging me to autograph their Bibles. I became a friend and admirer of Pastor Vasquez and his

great church. It was by far the largest Protestant church in the world at that time with an estimated membership of 40,000 persons.

Two major things came out of my trips to Chile at this time. The first was an agreement of affiliation between the Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Methodist Church of Chile. I actually wrote the document in my hotel room at the request of Dr. Corvin. Bishop Mamerto Mancilla approved of the document which we brought back to the U.S. for the Pentecostal Holiness Church to consider. Joining in the affiliation was the Pentecostal Church of Chile led by Bishop Enrico Chavez. At the time the three churches together numbered almost 1,000,000 members.

After a series of meetings with all the parties involved, the affiliations were approved and signed at the Eighth Pentecostal World Conference in Rio De Janiero in July 1967. The basic principle written into the agreements was that the Chilean churches were fully developed and indigenous denominations as was the Pentecostal Holiness Church. They would remain as self-governing bodies while recognizing each other as the same church. This meant that the Pentecostal Holiness Church would not send missionaries to Chile. The agreement was based on the common Wesleyan roots of the churches as well as the common history and theology they shared.³

On this trip, we also met with President Eduardo Frey in the presidentialpalace. I watched in awesome disbelief as Dr. Corvin promised that Oral Roberts University would help build a \$100,000,000 campus in Chile. The Santiago newspapers ran the sensational news in *El Mercurio* and other national papers. I felt sure that Oral Roberts had approved the offer in advance. I later found out that Roberts was not informed and

³ Details of the Chilean affiliation can be found in my book *Old Time Power: A Centennial History of the Pentecostal Holiness Church* (Franklin Springs, Georgia: Lifesprings Press, 1998), pp. 267-268.

that he later broke off all relationships with Chile. The crisis came when a Roberts Crusade in Santiago in 1967 went bust after a local leader embezzled funds from the crusade. Only two years later in 1969, Oral Roberts left the Pentecostal Holiness Church and joined the Methodist Church, partly in protest over the Chilean debacle. Corvin also lost his position with ORU.

Although I was busy and happy in my pastoral and teaching ministries, I was extremely concerned to get my dissertation published. I went first to the Publishing house of the Pentecostal Holiness Church and was told that the book would never sell enough copies to justify the investment. I also sent it to Abingdon Press thinking that the Methodists might be interested in my thesis. After a long time of consideration, they also declined. I then sent it to the University of Georgia Press for them to evaluate. After a long time, I was told to meet with Ed Harrell who had been a reader for the press. Harrell lectured me for not doing complete “runs” of the major Pentecostal periodicals. Although I had read hundreds of pages in the major magazines, I could not say that I had seen every single page. Harrell said that if I did this research and incorporated it into the manuscript I would have a good book. I determined to do just what he said.

In the summer of 1968, I took a long research trip to various Pentecostal headquarters to read their periodicals. When I arrived in Cleveland, Tennessee, I read all the copies of the *Church of God Evangel*. While there I met with Charles Conn, the great historian of the church. They freely opened all their archives to me and it was especially helpful to read the journals of A.J. Tomlinson. While in Cleveland, I met Dr. Horace Ward who was serving as dean of students at Lee College. We became fast friends and carried on endless discussions about Pentecostal history and theology. At his invitation, I

came back two times to speak to the whole student body. Horace and I felt the exhilaration and joy of discovering kindred Pentecostal spirits. We began to discuss the possibility of calling a group of Pentecostal scholars together in a colloquium in the near future.

On my trip to Springfield, Missouri, a few months later I visited the Assemblies of God archives where I did a research run of the *Pentecostal Evangel*. Again I was treated royally and given access to the inner sanctum of the archives. The first person I met on this trip was the great Assemblies of God historian William Menzies, who was a professor at Evangel College. He had already read the microfilm version of my dissertation and was anxious to discuss the history of the Pentecostal movement. According to my church teachings, the Assemblies of God people were not “sanctified” and were therefore less perfect than we were. I soon found, however, that Menzies was about as sanctified as any person I had ever met. He made a tremendous impression on me. As with Horace Ward, we discussed how wonderful it would be to organize a gathering of Pentecostal scholars from the various colleges to discuss common scholarly concerns. I told about my discussions with Ward and we agreed on the spot to start making plans for a gathering at the Pentecostal World Conference which was due to convene in Dallas, Texas, in 1970. I promised that I would take the lead in planning and calling such a meeting. As a result, Ward, Menzies, and I became an *ad hoc* committee to plan a meeting of Pentecostal scholars to meet in Dallas in 1970.

On my return home, I wrote to the chairman of the conference, Paul Yonggi Cho, to request a slot on the program for a banquet to organize a new Pentecostal scholarly society. He enthusiastically agreed. In the meantime, I communicated regularly with

Ward and Menzies about the plans for the meeting. In preparation for the organization meeting, I wrote a draft constitution based on the existing constitutions of the Wesleyan Theological Society (WTS) and the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). The name I suggested was accepted, "The Society of Pentecostal Scholars."

When we gathered in Dallas, we did not know if enough people would attend to pay for the room. To our happy surprise 139 persons registered and the money collected was barely adequate to pay the bill. Before we entered the room for the banquet, I heard a disparaging remark by a bishop about not being a scholar and insinuating that he was not welcome. A friend from Emmanuel College, Dr. Garnet Pike, counseled us to change the name and add the word "studies." I immediately called an emergency meeting of the leaders and suggested that we change the name to the "Society for Pentecostal *Studies*" (SPS) This was done on the spot.

Among those who attended were the top executives of Pentecostalism around the world including Thomas Zimmerman, Yonggi Cho, David du Plessis, and others. To my surprise, Father Kilian McDonnell, a Roman Catholic scholar, was there and spoke to the assembled crowd. He was one of the first charter members of the Society. This was possibly the first time a Catholic had ever addressed a function of the Pentecostal World Conference. The main banquet speaker was Dr. Klaud Kendrick, the widely known Assemblies of God historian. I was an avid admirer of his work. In the organizational part of the session, William Menzies (Assemblies of God) was elected as the first president, Hollis Gause (Church of God) as Vice President, Rev. Edward Wood (Open Bible Standard Church) Treasurer, and I was elected to serve as the first general secretary. At this meeting I also met the great Pentecostal scholar Russell Spittler of Southern

California College of the Assemblies of God. Like other scholars I had met, he seemed lonely and was not sure of his place in the educational scheme of his church. He immediately saw the possibilities in the new society and soon played an important role in its growth and development.⁴ At the end of the session, 108 of the 139 persons present signed on as charter members of the Society.

One of my first SPS jobs was to publish a newsletter for the Society. This I did faithfully for several years. I also was Secretary and kept all the records of the Society. The first annual meeting after the organizational session convened in Des Moines, Iowa, on the campus of the Open Bible College in November of 1971. Only 25 registered for this first meeting that featured the reading of scholarly papers. Among these were, Kilian McDonnell, Myrtle Flemming, and David du Plessis. It was a small but exceedingly motivated group of scholars. The program chairman was Dr. Hollis Gause of Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee. When the meeting was reported in the religious press, some wags said that the words “Pentecostal scholar” was an oxymoron. Yet this was the beginning of many meetings that was destined to bring Pentecostal scholarship into the mainstream of Christian religious life.

At the same time we were organizing the SPS, David du Plessis was beginning to make plans for a Catholic Pentecostal Dialogue which would begin talks between Catholic scholars and some Pentecostal and charismatic scholars from the mainline protestant churches. He saw the SPS as a rich source of Pentecostal scholars who could speak as theologians in these annual meetings. The big news out of the first annual

⁴ Vinson Synan, “Scholars in Dallas,” *Society for Pentecostal Studies Newsletter*, February, 1971. Also see the article on the founding of the SPS in the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* (January 2, 1981), p. 15.

meeting was the announcement by Kilian McDonnell and du Plessis that a new Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue would convene in Rome the following year.⁵

I was invited to be a participant in some of the earliest meetings of this group. In the meantime we attempted to keep in the good graces of the leaders of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA). We therefore scheduled our sessions at the end of the annual PFNA conventions so that denominational leaders could stay over and attend our sessions. This did not work out because the very busy churchmen seldom had time to stay.

At least one time, the board of the SPS met with the Board of the PFNA to explain what we were doing. This happened in Des Moines in 1971. The major question was the meaning of our constitutional purpose of speaking “authoritatively” as Pentecostal scholars. We were told in no uncertain terms that we could never speak “authoritatively” since we were not heads of churches. Our answer was that there was such a thing as “scholarly authority” in addition to ecclesiastical authority. This answer seemed to fall on deaf ears. Soon after this, we changed our annual sessions to meet separately from the PFNA annual meetings.⁶

In order to speak from the Pentecostal perspective, we had adopted the PFNA statement of faith as a doctrinal requirement for membership in the Society. At our second Annual meeting in Oklahoma City, Father James Connolly, a Roman Catholic member, expressed surprise that we would have a doctrinal requirement for membership which would exclude some people from other traditions as members. As a first step, we provided for “Associate members” who would not have to sign the doctrinal statement

⁵ James Tinney, “Pentecostals to Rome,” *Christianity Today*, December 3, 1971, p. 45.

⁶Hollis Gause, “SPS Officers Meet with PFNA Board,” *Society for Pentecostal Studies Newsletter*, (Vol. II, No.2), April, 1972, p. 1.

but could join based on their interest in Pentecostal history and theology. As time went on, this policy became more and more untenable because it led to artificial limits on participation and leadership of non-classical Pentecostals in the society. They felt like second-class citizens. I then reminded the SPS board that the Pentecostal World Conference had no doctrinal statement but was based simply on “the things that are most surely believed among us.” We decided to adopt the PWC model and make the Society a group of people who shared the same scholarly interests but not necessarily the exact same doctrines.

The program for the second annual meeting, called “*Pneuma 72*,” which met on the campus of Southwestern College in Oklahoma City, was led by Dr. Russell Spittler. In many ways this meeting set the tone for the future. Spittler was able to bring together such distinguished scholars as Clark Pinnock, Stan Burgess, Donald Gelpi, J. Rodman Williams, Athanasios Emmert, and Jane Massingberd Ford . At the suggestion of Dr. R. O. Corvin, we started with a festive Pentecostal worship service on the first night. It met in the Muse Memorial Church with about 300 in attendance. The sermon was delivered by Bishop J. Floyd Williams of the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

For the first time, special interest groups requested booth space to display their literature. One group from Australia promoting a more Calvinist approach to theology was permitted to rent a booth featuring the magazine *Restoration*. Another booth request by James Tinney promoting homosexuality as a “Pentecostal problem” was denied. At one session there was a time of prophetic utterance which amazed some of the non-Pentecostal participants, including the Christian Reformed Church scholar Anthony Hoekema, who was deeply moved at what he heard. Other special features of the meeting

Vinson Synan, *Beginnings of SPS*

included reports on the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue by Kilian McDonnell and David duPlessis, as well as a banquet speech by Krister Stendahl of Harvard University.

Pinnock's paper, which called for Pentecostals to lower their emphasis on initial evidence and for Evangelicals to accept Pentecostals as true brothers in Christ, made a deep impression. Papers from this meeting were edited by Spittler and published in 1975 under the title, *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*.⁷

In 1973, the annual meeting called, "*Pneuma*'73," convened in Cleveland, Tennessee, on the campus of Lee College. In some ways it was one of the most explosive meetings in the history of the Society. I had moved up in the hierarchy of the Society from Secretary to the office of Vice-President, which meant that I was program chairman for the 1973 meeting. The worship service in the North Cleveland Church of God featured a sermon by Thomas Zimmerman, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God. The choral singing by the Lee College choir led to a true Pentecostal outpouring of praise that stunned some observers. That night Donald Dayton reported that the Christological tone of the service forced him to "sit on his hands" to keep from speaking in tongues.⁸

The papers were varied and challenging. They were presented by such scholars as Larry Christenson, Leonard Lovett, Horace Ward, Jr., Melvin Dieter, William Menzies, Edward O'Connor, Ray Hughes and David Reed. An important participant was Bishop Nathaniel Urshan from the United Pentecostal Church, the largest Oneness church in America. He was particularly interested in the paper read by David Reed on the roots of

⁷ Pinnock's paper was published just prior to the conference. See Clark Pinnock and Grant R. Osborne, "A Truce Proposal for the Tongues Controversy," *Christianity Today*, October 8, 1971, pp. 6-9. Russell P. Spittler ed., *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976).

⁸ Personal interview with the author, 2004.

Vinson Synan, *Beginnings of SPS*

the Oneness movement among Pentecostals. The participation of Oneness Pentecostals, although criticized by some, opened the way for future dialogue with this stream of Classical Pentecostalism. The papers presented by O'Connor and Hughes caused a time of high tension since Hughes' topic amounted to an attack on the Charismatic movement in the Catholic Church. O'Connor's paper was a ringing and emotional testimonial to the power of the Charismatic movement in his own life and in the American Catholic Church. We later occasionally referred to it as the "shootout in Cleveland."

The banquet speech by Martin Marty was an interesting exercise in the use of communication technology. Since he was prevented from coming to Cleveland because his travel agent had sent him to the wrong Chicago airport, he gave his banquet speech by telephone using a speaker system. It was very successful despite the circumstances. I was able to edit the papers from this meeting in 1975 under the title, *Aspects of Pentecostal/Charismatic Origins*.⁹

In the years that followed, the SPS grew into the major scholarly organization in the Pentecostal/charismatic world. In 1979 The Society began publication of a truly scholarly journal titled *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* This name was suggested by Russell Spittler. The first editor of the new journal was Dr. William Menzies. In time, *Pneuma* (from the Greek word for spirit) became a major focus of ongoing research and publication in the scholarly world with subscriptions going to most major seminaries and universities. Others who served as editors over the years included Mel Robeck, Murray Dempster and Frank Macchia. Many years later, while on a trip to Korea, I served as an advisor for the birth of the Asian Society for Pentecostal

⁹ Vinson Synan, *Aspects of Pentecostal Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1973). Bob Slosser kept this book on his office shelf to show students at Regent University an example of a terrible book title.

Vinson Synan, *Beginnings of SPS*

Studies, a group led by Young Hoon Lee and Wonsuk Ma, that grew to be another major forum for Pentecostal research and publications.

Other decisions placed the Society in the forefront of such scholarly societies. In 1975 the SPS elected the first African American to serve as President. He was Dr. Leonard Lovett, the President of C.H. Mason Theological Seminary in Atlanta. In 1987 Edith Blumhofer became the first woman to head the Society. Over the years the society also elected to serve as President, a Charismatic Presbyterian, J. Rodman Williams; a Wesleyan non-Pentecostal, Donald Dayton; a Oneness Pentecostal, Manuel Gaxiola-Gaxiola (from Mexico); and two Roman Catholic Charismatics, Peter Hocken and Ralph Del Colle.

During the early part of this period, I was unable to find a publisher for my dissertation which was titled, "The Pentecostal Movement in the United States." After revising the manuscript and adding the research gathered on my trips that had resulted in the organization of the SPS, I still had no publisher. This time I sent it to W.E. Eerdmans publishers in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since this publisher was well known for its Calvinist leanings, I expected the usual rejection letter. To my utter shock, amazement and joy, Eerdmans accepted the book. They explained that they had been looking for a good book on Pentecostalism and that my manuscript was just what they had in mind.

As I prepared the final manuscript for publication, I decided that I needed to make two changes. First, I changed the title to the *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*. This was done to make the title match the content of the book. The reader was not introduced to the Pentecostal movement until the 5th chapter. The first four

chapters dealt with the Methodist/Holiness movement. The publisher accepted this change.¹⁰

The other change was a proposal to take two weeks to add a section on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal which had begun about the time I first wrote the book. This change was also accepted. It was not until after its publication in 1971 that I understood the reason for the four-year delay in getting the book into print. Had I published it earlier, the Catholics would have had less interest in it as a resource book. The decision to add the Catholic story was also a risk to my standing in the Pentecostal world since I included the Catholic renewal as an authentic part of the whole Pentecostal phenomenon.

Little did I know how fateful this decision would be and how my life would be changed by the publication of my dissertation. It appeared in 1971 and quickly gained a wide readership among scholars of all traditions. At first I thought that a few Pentecostals, Methodists, and holiness scholars would have an interest in it. To my utter surprise, more Catholics bought the book than any other group. Copies were obtained by the Vatican and photocopies were sent all over the Europe for Catholic bishops and scholars to read. They desperately wanted to know more about the roots of the Pentecostal movement and for some reason thought that my book was what they needed. Suddenly I was in demand to speak at Catholic charismatic events and even to participate in the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue which had just been inaugurated by David du Plessis and Father Kilian McDonnell.

¹⁰ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971).

A totally unexpected turn relating to my book came in the summer of 1972. One afternoon while playing tennis on the Emmanuel College tennis court, I saw two men come up to the chain fence asking for me. They were David Bundy and Donald Dayton. They were student leaders at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. They had recently read *Holiness Pentecostal Movement* and felt that I should visit Asbury to present my thesis in a student-sponsored forum. This was amazing to me since I knew that Asbury had recently adopted a policy refusing to admit Pentecostals to their student body. Being a school historically committed to the Methodist Holiness-movement, Asbury had always opposed Pentecostalism although they had admitted some Pentecostals in the past.

I went to Asbury not knowing what to expect. The student paper advertised my coming to the consternation of the faculty and administration. When I arrived at the session, there was standing room only in the meeting room with many students sitting on the floor. The session was lively as I made my presentation and answered questions afterwards. My thesis, that Pentecostalism was born in the Holiness Movement, was considered novel and even startling at the time. I was well treated at Asbury and met with many students who talked into the wee hours of the night. Some of them included William Faupel, Donald Dayton, and Paul Chappell. Somewhat later I was invited to read a paper at the Wesleyan Theological Society explaining and defending my thesis. When the elders of the Society found out about it, they vetoed my invitation.

This is ironic in hindsight in the light future developments. Shortly after my visit, Asbury rescinded its policy excluding Pentecostals and in 1988 invited the Society for Pentecostal Studies to meet on the Asbury campus. A decade later, in 1998, there was

Vinson Synan, *Beginnings of SPS*

even a joint meeting between the Society for Pentecostal Studies and the Wesleyan Theological Society. In a way I was a pioneer bridge between the two movements.

In the years since 1985, the Society has matured into a first rate gathering of scholars. One of its most enthusiastic supporters was Harvey Cox who attended SPS meetings while researching his book *Fire From Heaven*. He said that the Society was one of the best-run and highest quality societies he had ever attended. In the annual session which met in Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada, in 1996, the Society celebrated 25 years of service to the Christian world. By then the annual meetings featured six parallel sessions, with time also allotted to five interest groups. Over the years the burden of keeping the business of the Society on track was largely borne by the Secretaries and treasurers who worked without pay but with great dedication. Some who served the longest were Peter Hocken and William Faupel.

Now, after thirty five years, the SPS has served as the major forum that helped to bring together the White and Black Pentecostals in North America. SPS members, Dr. Ithiel Clemmons and Bishop Bernard Underwood, were the two co-chairmen of the “Miracle in Memphis” meeting in 1994 that dismantled the all-white PFNA and organized the new and inclusive body known as the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA). I had the joy of writing the constitution and presiding over the organizational session of this new body. It was also members of the SPS, David du Plessis and Kilian McDonnell, that helped found and carry on the Catholic Pentecostal Dialogues which have continued till this day. Many members of the SPS have also served as participants in these sessions over the years. Also the Society has been instrumental in carrying out dialogues with the National Council of Churches and the

Vinson Synan, *Beginnings of SPS*

World Council of Churches. In addition, the first theological talks between the Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals took place under the sponsorship of the SPS.

In addition to these accomplishments, the members of the Society have produced a tremendous flood of scholarly articles and important books that have helped to shape the future of the movement for decades to come.

It has been a joy to watch the Society grow from conception to childhood, and on to adulthood and maturity. As great as the past has been, I believe that even greater days lie ahead.