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A FOCUS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT: 
SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY IN JOHN WESLEY

ALBERT C. OUTLER

‘And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets’.  

Any attempted focus on the Holy Spirit is bound to be blurred. The terms for ‘spirit’, in many languages (ruach, pneuma, spiritus, Geist, esprit, etc.) point beyond precise denotations. But they also point “behind” self-consciousness, and they point “toward” the radical ineffability of such terms as ‘soul’, ‘selfhood’, ‘psyche’—whether in reference to the human mystery or to the Encompassing Holy in which [or in whom] we live and move and have our being. Something of this sort seems presupposed in St. Paul’s address to the Athenians in Acts 17:23-31. Pneumatological reflection on this aura of human awareness of Holy Spirit has therefore to be an exercise in discernment, and a tricky one, because it can be no more than groping along a pathway between the quicksands of credulity on one side, and the thickets of superstition and magic on the other.

Neither ‘transcendence’ nor ‘immanence’ is a biblical term, but the paradox of their dialectical integration is a biblical commonplace. Phrases like ‘the Spirit of God’ are derivative

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metaphors from familiar things connoting spontaneity, like breath or wind; they go on to include such elusive realities as life itself (e.g., "the breath of life"). They were then extended to such matters as human dispositions (e.g., the "poor in spirit"). On their other side, they point to God's prevenient initiatives in human affairs and history, and here their emphasis is on the spontaneity of divine action, whether from beyond or within. Within perspectives such as these, the biblical people felt comfortable with a wide range of anthropomorphisms, with a myriad of anthropomorphic images, similitudes and analogs. At the same time, they were horrified by various anthropocentrisms, for there they could see the sort of over-reaching self-centeredness that distorts the primal human vision of transcendence. The original temptation was an attractive promise that our finite limits can be surpassed (as in our contemporary slogans: "you can have it all"; "your world should have no bounds"). Thus it is that idolatry was and still continues as the archetypal sin of pride-in-action—forbidden by the First Commandment.

The ontic pair of human happiness and tragedy have always lived together in the mysterious paradoxes of divine-human interaction. This is reflected in later explorations (as in Origen's theses about an 'original righteousness and happiness', or in St. Augustine's opening 'confession' ("Thou has made us for thyself"), with its implication that the natural inclination of the human heart is harmony and peace, not in ourselves but in God. And these are echoes of a New Testament idea: viz., that humanity is designed for "life in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25 and 2 Peter 1:4), because it is, first and last, God’s special project, and above all, a divine gift.

It is remarkable how carefully the biblical references to "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit," "God," and "Spirit of Christ" manage to avoid what came later to be called modalism on the one side, and sheer mystification on the other—yet with never an attempted conceptualization that ever pretended to be definitive. One thing is clear, however: in all true spirituality there is a deep moral taproot; the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-13) are correlated with the fruits of the Spirit (as in Gal. 5:22-25).
It is a commonplace that in Christianity's emergence (or expulsion) from its Jewish matrix in the later decades of the first Christian century, and with its hazardous ventures into the hellenistic world, a language about the Holy Spirit's continuing presence and agency in human life and in the newborn church passed into the formulae of Christian worship. It helped to differentiate the new Christian sect from the other thiasoi ('mystery religions') in the Greco-Roman world with which Christianity was unavoidably associated (and times confused). The point here, however, is that all of this happened without a fully realized pneumatological doctrine that we know of. The earliest approach to such a formulation appears in St. Irenaeus (in his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, I, 1:6). But notice how much pneumatological pre-understanding is taken for granted, as if already lodged in devout Christian consciousness by the seventh decade of the second Christian century:

And the third article is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs were taught . . . and the just were led in the paths of righteousness—and whose power in these last times has been poured forth upon humanity over all the earth, renewing men and women to God. Therefore from the baptism of our rebirth comes these three articles, granting us rebirth unto God the Father, through his Son, by the Holy Spirit . . . So, without the Spirit, there is no hearing the Word of God, and without the Son there is no approaching the Father—for the Son is the knowledge of the Father, and knowledge of the Son is through the Holy Spirit . . .

The early creeds affirmed 'Holy Spirit' by title (another instance of how much could be taken for granted). But it was not until the Spirit's full deity was denied by the Pneumatomacheans in the mid-fourth century that a major theologian thought it worthwhile to explain it at some length (unless Athanasians' *Epistles to Serapion* may be counted as explanations). This reasoned refutation of tritheism comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa—along with a summary trinitarian formulary:

It is not possible to confess that Jesus is Lord except by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are to be known only in a perfect Trinity, in closest interaction and unity, before all creation . . .
It was in this climate (ca. A.D. 375) that the drafters of the Constantinopolitan revision of 381 were able to flesh out the cryptic ending of the original Nicene Ecthesis of 325 ("And in the Holy Spirit") with the fuller phrasings that have stood ever since, in "The Creed Commonly Called Nicene".

... the Lord and Giver of Life who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets . . .

St. Augustine was looking both backward and forward with his lament (ca. A.D. 393) over the neglect of pneumatology (as a doctrine) by the theologians:

Wise and spiritual men have written many books about the Father and the Son . . .

With respect to the Holy Spirit, however, there has not been as yet, on the part of learned men and competent interpreters of the Scriptures, a discussion that is full enough or careful enough, to make it possible for us to obtain an intelligent conception of what constitutes the Spirit's special individuality (proprium) in virtue of which it is the case that we cannot speak of him either as Son or Father but only Holy Spirit—excepting that they predicate the Spirit as the Gift of God and that we cannot believe that God's Gift is inferior to himself.*

Some of the obvious reasons for this underemphasis upon pneumatology are instructive. On the one side, there has been the tilt toward various sorts of "domestication" of the Holy Spirit in Holy Church. This goes back as far as Simon Magus, and always it has tended to link Spirit too closely with the institutional Church. Eastern Orthodoxy resisted this domestication more successfully than the Latin West—which is one of the reasons for the Protestant preference for the correlation of Spirit and Church in an opposite domestication: Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture. This produced new patterns of authority, with a new guild of certified interpreters of Scripture, with an acknowledged authority "rightly to divide the word of Truth." On the fringes of both traditions, of course, were the champions of 'the free Spirit'—from Montanus to Joachim and the Fraticelli, to the Anabaptist 'spirituals', to the English Quakers and German pietists and French quietists, down to our current
charismatics. But this godly motley have an appalling track record of disruption and fanaticism. St. Paul had forewarned against this (in 1 Cor. 14), but St. Paul has not always been heeded by those with disparate causes that rested on other grounds.

The intent of so impressionistic a prelude as this, thus far, has been to call attention to the fact that, in the history of Christian doctrine, theologians with a special interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit are something of a rarity. Moreover, even at the level of genius (e.g., St. Bonaventura and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa) such men and women have drawn down suspicion upon themselves of obscurantism at best or fanaticism at worst. And there has been a tendency toward "enthusiasm," always aimed at lifting the level of spirituality in the church, but, almost as often, spreading abroad the image of a spiritual elite whose versions of spiritual superiority have offended other Christians, who themselves find much comfort in deploring 'spiritual pride'. There is, therefore, no question of even a thumbnail sketch of the hopelessly heterogeneous tradition of 'Christian Spirituality'. The literature is unmanageable and the story interminable.

It may, however, be allowable for us to pick out an arbitrarily chosen sample of 'a focus on the Holy Spirit' that has had an importance of its own and, maybe, a continuing relevance. Moreover, in this particular collection of essays in pneumatology, it may not be inappropriate to select John Wesley for a closer look at an exemplary correlation of 'Spirit and Spirituality'.

Wesley was neither foremost nor hindmost in the tradition he represented, but he is interesting all the same. Any suspicion of Methodist triumphalism can always be allayed by a quick glance at the bibliographical subject heading of 'pneumatology', and the Methodist presence (or absence) in it. But there is a better warrant for a brief summary of Wesley's focus on the Holy Spirit: that is, his persistent concern for a trinitarian doctrine of the Holy Spirit—a concern that appealed to Scripture tradition and to rational argument for his vivid experience of the radical difference between nominal orthodoxy and fruitful Christian
spirituality. This is to suggest that Wesley's pneumatology begins with an awareness of the religious and ethical import of a valid integration of Christology, soteriology and pneumatology; the vital linkage between theo-logy, Christo-logy, and pneu-mato-logy held together by a consistent emphasis on preven-tence of all grace, an habituated awareness of the Holy Spirit as the Giver of all Grace.

John Wesley's pneumatology has many interesting aspects (and none of them can be spelled out fully here). It gathered up into itself an attempted balance between spirituality and ethics. It seeks the excitements of the free Spirit without abandoning the stabilities of a life ordered by a numinous sense of existence (coram Deo). It allows for the paradox of instant exaltations and the processes of Christian maturation (toward what Wesley called "the plerophory [fullness] of faith").

John Wesley's pneumatology . . . seeks the excitements of the free Spirit without abandoning the stabilities of a life ordered by a numinous sense of existence (coram Deo).

John Wesley's Britain was working its way through a bad case of burn-out (political, cultural, religious) even in a time of exciting colonial adventures and of opening horizons in science and new technology. The intellectual excitements of the age were being generated by the impulses of the Enlightenment. But the state-church was suffering from exhaustion after two centuries of nearly fruitless turmoil from the harrowings of the Tudor "Reformations", the holy war between Puritans and royalists, the blood-baths of the Civil War, the hysterics of the Commonwealth, the debilitations of Restoration, Old Dissent and the new deism.

Wesley's first three decades reflect the sort of fruitless devotion that left him deeply discontent. His first "conversion" in 1725—to a life-long dedication to God, which was never repudiated or outgrown—was not "life-giving." The second (an
illuminist experience, in 1727) reinforced his mystical impulses and his Puritan habits of self-examination. There are obvious parallels between the “singularities” of the Oxford Methodists and other patterns of an asceticism-within-the-world with which Protestant rigorism had sought to replace the monastic flight from the world.¹⁰

Wesley’s most famous experience on May 24, 1738 (‘Aldersgate’) has long since achieved an iconic status in Wesleyan hagiography. But it is still worth noticing that Aldersgate was not the transformation of an irreligious man into a man of faith (“an almost Christian” into an “altogether Christian”). Nor was it a triumph of Moravian pietism (the Moravians themselves were quick to deny this). It was not the last of his conversions.¹¹ It was not even the beginning of the Methodist Revival. And yet one is blind not to see it as a decisive turning point in Wesley’s entire life and work, as a reorientation of his sense of mission and a more fruitful harvest in it. Aldersgate was less the reconstruction of Wesley’s basic doctrines of God-in-Christ than an unexpected discovery of their power and effects. And its focus was the “internal witness of the Holy Spirit,” (as in Romans 8 and Ephesians 2:5, 8-10). Whatever psychological account one may prefer, the theological import of Aldersgate was largely pneumatological.

Aldersgate was less the reconstruction of Wesley’s basic doctrines of God-in-Christ than an unexpected discovery of their power and effects.

Its story has already been better told by Wesley (in that long journal entry for May 24, et seq.) than by any of his biographers thus far. Most of them have ignored the remarkable sequence of lections in the round of his daily prayers for the day—from 2 Peter 1:34 at matins (with its stress on divine-human “participation”), followed by a congruent emphasis in the anthem for vespers at St. Paul’s (Ps. 130, Book of Common Prayer). The actual ‘Aldersgate experience’ came at a reluctant compline and was far less subjective than tradition has it.
Typically, the emphasis has been on Wesley's "warmed heart." But Wesley understood enough of his tightly reined temperament to add a crucial adverb: a "strangely warmed" heart. The active verbs in his narration (e.g., "I felt") are misread unless the verbs in the passive voice (e.g., warmed) are stressed even more. Otherwise, the sense of the divine initiative in the whole affair is distorted into something more like a "peak experience" than a providential climax. "I felt my heart strangely warmed"; "An assurance was given me . . . ."

Methodist sentimentalists have overstressed Wesley's feelings (as so often he did himself, but not here). But Aldersgate and its subsequent developments make more sense if the stress falls on the sheer givenness of the assurance of pardon (a synonym for 'justification'). Thus, the Aldersgate experience was Wesley's personal appropriation of the familiar promises of Romans 8:10-17, 26-28. Nor did it bring an instant comprehension. It took five subsequent decades for his Christian self-understanding to grow and mature. May 24, 1738, was the dramatic turning point in an extraordinary career, from a dedicated perfectionist who seldom succeeded to a wayfarer of the Spirit who seldom failed (at least not in his reliance upon God's upholding Providence). He had been brought up in a particular tradition of will-mysticism by a mother who was a closet theologian in her own right (and a highly competent one into the bargain!). This heritage continued with him (with altered valences) throughout his life. Before Aldersgate and the early flush of the Revival, his mystical quest had combined with other obsessions to bring him to despair, to bitter complaints against "the mystic writers."

It is remarkable that Aldersgate recedes from sight so quickly in subsequent autobiographical accounts; the reasons for this are not altogether clear. What remains—and has not yet been studied in requisite depth—are the pneumatological overtones which develop into a sort of theme and variations throughout the corpus and provide a ground-tone in Wesley's version of the ordo salutis. In a series of sermons published in 1746-48 he began to sort out the dynamics of his doctrine of grace (prevenient in all its modes—repentance, justifying faith, assurance, regenera-
tion, sanctification) in a perspective that is explicitly pneumatological and implicitly trinitarian. In “The Witness of the Spirit,” Discourse I (1746), the emphasis is on

the testimony of the Spirit as an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly “witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God” [assurance and reconciliation]. This ‘Spirit’ not only worketh in us every manner of thing that is good but also shines upon his own work and clearly shows us what he hath wrought.”(I, 8, 10)

Twenty years later, in a revised version under the same text and title, Wesley defends this notion of “perceptible inspiration” against all critics, adding a heightened emphasis on the correlation of the Spirit’s witness and its genuine fruit: “inward and outward holiness . . .” “Holiness” is for Wesley, of course, another term for “true religion . . . the love of God, and of neighbour.” Pneumatology, therefore is never merely spiritual without an ethical imperative, or vise versa. Personal holiness and social holiness are never disjoined—and their order never reversed.

Let us never rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it . . . Let us never rest in any supposed ‘fruit of the Spirit’ without the [objective] witness [to filiation]. (“The Witness of the Spirit”, Discourse II, V. 3-4.)

Wesley’s refutation of the charges of enthusiasm (as in his sermon No. 37 “On the Nature of Enthusiasm”) is to join his critics in rejecting fanaticism, spiritual pride, and all their congeners. Thus, he can stress the “fruits of the Spirit” that depend upon persuasion, insight, conviction (Gal. 5:24).

How many impute things to the Holy Spirit, or expect things from him, without any rational or scriptural ground! Such are they who imagine that they do or shall receive ‘particular directions’ from God, not only in points of importance, but in things of no moment, the most trifling circumstances of life. Whereas, in these cases, God has given as our own reason for a guide, though never excluding the ‘secret assistance’ of his Spirit.”

Authentic spirituality is “a daily growth in pure and holy religion . . .”
In Wesley's religious epistemology, God-in-se is unknowable and ineffable. God-language, even when logical in form, is apophatic in function. What we "know" of God is what God reveals to us: in and through his "works" (in creation and nature); in and through the law and the prophets; in and through Jesus Christ, as the divine eikon (Col. 1:15) and character (Hebrews 1:3). Moreover, it is God as Holy Spirit who is the revealer of all these revelations. As Holy Spirit, God is 'Lord and Life-Giver'. The operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is so radical as to move Wesley to vivid hyperbole:

When [the new-born Christian] is born of God, born of the Holy Spirit, how is the manner of his existence changed. His whole soul is now sensible of God... The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul, and the same breath which comes from, returns to God. As it is continually received by faith, so it is continually rendered back by love in prayer and praise and thanksgiving... And by this new kind of spiritual respiration, spiritual life is not only sustained but increased day by day... The eyes of the understanding are opened...

The eyes of faith now see, 'third ears' are now opened. "All the spiritual senses being now opened, faith has a clear intercourse with the invisible world... He who is born of the Spirit, dwelling in love, dwelleth in God and God in him."

From the images of birth and perception, he moves on to metaphors of growth and maturation:

The [enlivened person] feels in his heart the mighty working of the Spirit of God...; he is inwardly sensible of the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart... By the use of these, he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and of all the things pertaining to his inward kingdom. And now he may properly be said to live... God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained and the child of God grows up, till he comes 'to the full measure of the stature of Christ'.

Rhetoric of this sort is readily distorted when it is psychologized or sentimentalized. The workings of God as Spirit are
more deeply inward than self-consciousness can reach; it is prevenient and objective, beyond manipulation. A precondition of valid worship is "the realization that God—the Spirit and the Father of the spirits of all flesh—should discover himself to your spirit, which is itself a breath of God—divinae particula aurae (a particle of the divine aura)."

"Holiness" is for Wesley, of course, another term for "true religion . . . the love of God, and of neighbour." Pneumatology, therefore is never merely spiritual without an ethical imperative, or vice versa. Personal holiness and social holiness are never disjoined—and their order never reversed.

It is important to note this antidote to obscurantism and its context, specifically its equal emphasis upon the rationality and ethical concerns of authentic spirituality:

How does the Spirit of God 'lead' his children to this or that particular action . . . . Do you imagine it is by 'blind impulse' only? By 'moving' you to do it, you know not why? No, he leads us by our 'eye' at least as much as by our 'hand'. . . For example, here is a man ready to perish with hunger. How am I led 'by the Spirit' to relieve him? First, by 'convincing' me that it is his will that I should and, secondly, by his filling my heart with love toward him . . . This is the plain, rational account of the ordinary leading of the Spirit. . . . Now where this is, there is no dead form, neither can there be. . . All that is said and done is full of God, full of spirit and life and power.

Once one begins to look for them, such gyroscopic balances turn up in almost every part of John Wesley's prose—and throughout Charles Wesley's verse as well.

After the Revival's energies came to be relatively self-sustaining, practical and theoretical questions about Christian matura-
tion began to loom larger than before. These brought with them a shift, not away from justification and regeneration, but toward the wider horizons of growth and development. This included the tricky business of differentiating between what Gordon
Rupp called Wesley’s “pessimism of nature” and his “optimism of grace.” He took as much as he could from the prophets of the new doctrine of progress; he denied outright their secularistic premises. In rhetoric and action, he looked more and more to a synthesis of spirituality and social reform (as in his ‘poor relief’ and his anti-slavery crusade). Reform became the social analog to his soteriological image of “restoration of the divine image.”

The Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life: of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost—of holiness and happiness—by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created . . . [which always include a communal imperative].

In a paired sermon, “On the Omnipresence of God” (Aug. 12, 1788), Wesley sought to turn traditional abstractions about immanence into vivid metaphors of God’s active presence, in and through the Holy Spirit:

The great God, the eternal, almighty Spirit, is as unbounded in his presence as in his duration and power. . . God acts . . . throughout the whole compass of creation, by sustaining all things, without which everything would sink into its primitive nothing, by governing all, every minute superintending everything . . . strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures. . . .(I, 2, 1I,1)

In order to attain to these glorious ends spare no pains to preserve always a deep, a continual, a lively, and a joyful, sense of his gracious presence (i.e. coram Deo). [III,6]

Notice the absence here of modalism, tri-theism, or spiritualism. As the whole context will show, here is a conscious attempt at a trinitarian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In his last published sermon but one—No. 120, “On the Unity of the Divine Being”—notice Wesley’s unacknowledged fidelity to orthodox Christian teaching (here and elsewhere, in the tradition of ‘Christian Platonism’)

True religion is right tempers toward God and man. It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence. . . . It is the loving God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. . .
This begins when we begin to know God by the teaching of his own Spirit. As soon as the Father of spirits reveals the Son in our hearts and the Son reveals the Father, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. Then, and not until then, are we truly happy. We are happy first in the consciousness of God's favour, which is better than life itself; then, in all the heavenly tempers which he hath wrought in us by his Spirit. Again, [we are happy] in the testimony of his Spirit that all our [good] works please him, and lastly, in the testimony of our own spirits that, 'in simplicity and godly sincerity' . . we have had our conversation in the world'. Standing fast in this liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, real Christians 'rejoice ever more, pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks'. And their happiness still increases as they grow up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ [16-17].

In both the biblical revelation and in the Christian tradition, there is an unwearied struggle to conserve the balance and wholeness of God's mystery and self-disclosure. John Wesley was one of those who joined in this struggle in his time and circumstance.

Christianity is that religion which stands or falls by its profession of faith in one God: Lord and creator, Lord and Savior, Lord and Giver of Life. This selfsame God has disclosed himself in Jesus (and made him to be both Lord and Christ). Moreover, as Holy Spirit, God has “saved” Jesus from being lost or distorted in history’s limbo or obscured in the mist of timeless truths. Any separate focus on tri-unity confounds the uniqueness of Christian truth: 'unitarianism', 'Christo-monism', 'spiritualism'. Pneumatology is especially vulnerable to the seductions of anthropocentrism (usually in one or another form of credulousness, fanaticism, antinomianism, self-righteousness, pantheism, superstition). In both the biblical revelation and in the Christian tradition, there is an unwearied struggle to conserve the balance and wholeness of God's mystery and self-disclosure. John Wesley was one of those who joined in this struggle in his time and circumstance.

The prospect of contemporary Christianity is grimly problem-
atic. None of its past epochs can serve it well any longer as a norm or paradigm, least of all its notorious mesalliances with Western secularisms and their current debilitations ("the ambiguity of the modern scientific consciousness, the loss of Western political and spiritual dominance, the death of the Western deity of progress . . . ; this situation is therefore, quite new . . . ") The nineteenth century sense of Western "dominance" and "cultural superiority" has been numbed; in more recent times, the human prospect around the globe has been diminished. Concurrently, the clamors of the wretched of the earth can no longer be ignored, even though much of the trendy rhetoric in praise of Christian social activism has been scarcely more than that—trendy rhetoric.

There is a non-negotiable difference between the idealized human potential as the prescription for a human ethical agenda (as in Feuerbach), and the biblical vision of the humanum restored in and for its primal design—by its Designer.

The visionaries and passionaries of our time, in their myriad clamant causes, sound more and more like 'enthusiasts' in Wesley's pejorative sense (i.e., benevolent souls who will good ends without being prepared to identify and accept the necessary means, or the primal motives, that could convert their good will into effective action). More and more the options between "The New Age" of human self-realization and the New Age of God's rule and his righteousness stand opposed—and the crux of the matter seems, once more, the ancient choice between the Tempter's Promise ("you shall be as gods") and the Promise of the Paraclete ("when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." John 15:26-27; 16:13). There is a non-negotiable difference between the idealized human potential as the prescription for a human ethical agenda (as in Feuerbach), and the biblical vision of the humanum restored in and for its primal design—by its Designer. For this latter
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possibility, it is the power and grace of God in Christ that can bring us to that finally realized Rule of God (apocatastasis) foreseen in Acts 3:21 and 1 Cor. 15:24-28. Betimes, come weal or woe, it is our privilege to live in the assurance that “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit” really is with us and the whole People of God, always.

NOTES


2. Confessions I, I.


4. On Faith and the Creed, Ch. IX, 18, 19, 20.

5. As in Ronald A. Knox, Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1950), who defines his subject as “a chronic tendency in church history reflected in the ‘clique’, where an excess of charity threatens unity—. . ., an elite, of Christian men and (more importantly, women) who are trying to live a less worldly life than their neighbors, to be more attentive to the guidance (directly felt, they would tell you) of the Holy Spirit,” p. 1.

6. Samples of what could be done in special cases, however, can be seen in Henri Bremand’s brilliant Literary History of Religious Thought in France or in the ponderous beginnings of the current multi-volumed project of World Spirituality, edited by Ewert Cousins.

7. A remarkable current inquiry into this ancient problematic may be seen in Fr. Kilian McDonnell, OSB, “A Trinitarian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” in Theological Studies, vol. 46, 1985, pp. 191-227. Here is a challenging and substantive program for what has become an urgent desideratum: an updated pneumatology that includes historical perspective along with the opening horizons of a postmodern and global age. One would not wish to claim that Wesley achieved what Fr. McDonnell is calling for—only that he understood some of the same issues and worked at them in something of the same spirit.

8. See the quite remarkable, even if somewhat difficult, essay of Fr. David Coffey, Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit (Manly: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1979).


10. See, for example, the minute daily and hourly records of his attention to the vicissitudes of his spiritual states in R. H. Heitzenrater’s newly-edited diaries in The Works of John Wesley, vol. 5, 1998.


16. The human re-action of faith to grace is conscious (joy): "the soul intimately and evidences perceives when it loves, delights and rejoices in God" (I, 11).
18. Ibid., 39.
23. For a brilliant summation of these premises, see Carl L. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Pr., 1932), especially pp. 102-3.
25. 2 Cor. 1:12, where anastraphemen means something like "lifestyle."
Recently I have been made aware of some of the frustrations that many black United Methodist pastors face in their pastoral roles in black local churches. These frustrations seem to relate to the inability of some local congregations to respond to the new spiritual vitality and renewal that is taking place within many black churches across denominational lines and within the United Methodist church. Many black United Methodist pastors are seeing and hearing about the great numerical growth of some churches and about the success of efforts to make disciples of these new members, to train them to occupy significant roles within the church. Naturally, many of these pastors desire to serve in viable and thriving churches and to respond to the perceived spiritual needs within the black community. In an attempt to respond to the perceived spiritual needs, many pastors have begun to attend workshops on church growth and evangelism, led by these successful pastors.

In these workshops pastors are exposed to the dynamics of liturgical renewal, trained to form Bible study groups to facilitate church growth and discipleship, and instructed in the role of music in revitalizing church worship. Many of these pastors leave the workshops motivated and excited by new visions and possibilities for their churches. However, such excitement and

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new visions often meet with opposition and objections from the leadership within the local church. It does not take long for the new enthusiasm of the pastor to ebb and wane.

Some skeptics and chronic despisers of church growth would be delighted at the frustration that some black pastors are facing in their attempts to contribute to the renewal effort in local black United Methodist churches. Some might say that black pastors do not need to get caught up in the numbers game or in efforts to make career moves based on numerical success. Moreover, there is criticism from some circles to the effect that black pastors should not copy the TV evangelists or to go on the kinds of "ego trips" so characteristic of some of the TV personalities. Indeed, some of this negative motivation does lurk in the hearts of some pastors who desire their churches' growth. However, by far the majority of them sense the real spiritual renewal that seems to be permeating the black community and the black church. They discern the movement of the Holy Spirit within the community and have a genuine desire to respond to the work of the Spirit. With a sense of urgency they try to help their own congregations to discern and to respond to the movement of the Spirit in their midst, and there is discouragement when a pastor discovers that the local congregation is not ready to become involved in renewal efforts.

Through many informal conversations with pastors I have been attempting to understand the nature of the resistance within some local black United Methodist churches to renewal. I have found that some of the problem lies with pastoral leadership, but, by and large, the problem transcends leadership. It is slowly becoming clear that the problem is a clash between the goal-oriented, task-focused, programmatic and organizational structural emphasis of the United Methodist Church as a whole and the more spontaneous, intimate, informal, spirited, fellowship orientation of the historically black churches. More precisely, the problem of resisting spiritual and liturgical renewal seems to result from the clash between those who are satisfied with the United Methodist Church's orientation toward corporate structural values and those who want to move toward a more communal fellowship orientation, characteristic of the black church tradition.
The problem of resisting spiritual and liturgical renewal is not peculiar to black United Methodists. It exists wherever there are black churches, particularly where there are black churches in predominantly white denominations. This problem has been highlighted by a black Catholic, Clarence Rivers. He sees resistance to liturgical and spiritual renewal as the result of a clash of two cultures: the oral African culture, undergirding the religious heritage of black Christians, and the ocular Western tradition that is characteristic of Christianity in the dominant culture. As an ocular culture the Western tradition is sight-biased and emphasizes reading and writing. It prizes the rational, logical, abstract, and intellectual dimensions of religious expression more than the emotive, celebrative, poetic,

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communal, relational, and story-telling and story-listening dimensions so strongly characteristic of oral culture. When these two orientations clash, there is conflict, and these two orientations make for great diversity within black local churches as well as for diversity between churches and between denominations.

There are differences between oral and ocular cultures with regard to preferred forms of worship. Oral cultures tend to prefer emotional expressiveness, spontaneous participation, and lively sermons with lots of storytelling in worship. Ocularly oriented worship is formal in liturgy, less emotionally expressive, with structured and deliberate congregational participation.

Western ocular culture also prefers, as a general rule, a rational style of administration that is based on a goal and task orientation and expects its leaders to be trained professionals.
Oral cultures, on the other hand, rely primarily on traditional values, long-established ways of doing things, and leadership is expected to embody the values embedded in the tradition. Formal education and training are not necessarily a prerequisite for leadership in oral cultures.

Many black United Methodist churches feel the tension of participating in an ocularly structured denomination while possessing an oral heritage. Moreover, when liturgical and spiritual renewal does occur in a black church, it seems to come as a result of the desire of many to be true to the oral culture of the faith while still maintaining connection with the denominational goal and task orientation. However, this is not easy.

According to Zan Holmes, pastor of a growing and vital black United Methodist church in Dallas, Texas, the way out of this dilemma and tension between the oral and ocular orientations is for each local church to discover and to discern its own unique identity and its own unique ministry. At a workshop following his preaching at the Martin Luther King celebration at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in January of 1987, he emphasized that each church is unique and must discover and discern its own mission and purpose and should not copy another church's model. He went on to describe the development of the church that he serves and its unique social outreach and spiritual renewal.

Western ocular culture also prefers, as a general rule, a rational style of administration that is based on a goal and task orientation and expects its leaders to be trained professionals. Oral cultures, on the other hand, rely primarily on traditional values, long-established ways of doing things, and leadership is expected to embody the values embedded in the tradition.

Drawing on the wisdom of Zan Holmes and of other pastors, this article sets forth three theses. First, pastors must help local congregations to discern their unique mission, purpose, and
reason for being. Second, the local congregation must find unique ways of addressing the tensions existing between those who are committed to the structural goal orientation of the United Methodist Church and those who are committed to the communal relational orientation. Third, discerning the local congregational's unique mission and bridging the gap between the structurally minded and the communally minded require discerning the work of the Holy Spirit within each local congregation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHURCH GROWTH

The problem of the relationship between the ocular orientation and the oral orientation within black United Methodist churches as well as in other black denominational churches raises the important issue of the relationship of the Holy Spirit and church growth. There is an effort underway to recover the oral religious heritage of black Christians with regard to the Holy Spirit, and some have equated this effort to recover as the work of the Holy Spirit. What is the relationship between the cultural phenomenon of recovering one's religious heritage and the work of the Holy Spirit?

The meaning of "the Holy Spirit" as it is used in this presentation is the presence of God through the Spirit working out God's reign in our midst. Can God's work through the Spirit be seen at work in the effort of some black Christians to recover their oral and spiritual heritage? One way to answer this question is to make a distinction between searching for one's cultural heritage and searching for one's spiritual roots. Many of the persons who are involved in the revitalization of black churches today are searching for deeper spiritual roots, and their searches are helping them to rediscover their spiritual heritage simultaneously. It seems to me that many persons are being renewed spiritually within black churches through the work of the Holy Spirit, and they are finding means within the oral tradition to give expression to that spiritual awakening. In other words, deepening spiritual experiences are a prelude to the formal expression that this awakening will take. It could be
stated that for some the rediscovery of the oral heritage of black Christians is a response to a spiritual renewal that has been initiated by the Holy Spirit.

Can God’s work through the Spirit be seen at work in the effort of some black Christians to recover their oral and spiritual heritage? One way to answer this question is to make a distinction between searching for one’s cultural heritage and searching for one’s spiritual roots.

This conclusion, that some of the renewal taking place in black churches and the resulting rediscovery of the oral heritage are results of God’s presence in the Holy Spirit, is buttressed by Zan Holmes’s distinction between church growth and church swelling. True growth, to his mind, is not the swelling of church rolls. Rather, it is moving toward growth and perfection in John Wesley’s understanding of sanctification. Holmes states that many of his “turned on” church members know that they have been justified by grace. However, they know that there is more to faith than being justified. They also want to grow in faith and to live transformed lives in their homes, on the job, and in the world. He says that the church he serves has taken very seriously its responsibility for providing opportunities for personal growth and selfless service to the church’s membership.

True church growth is a response not only to the justification message of the faith, but also to its sanctifying message. Both justification and sanctification are a work of the Holy Spirit. Rediscovering traditional forms of the oral heritage of black Christians seems to be the result of expressing the way in which the Holy Spirit is at work. The rediscovery of the oral heritage seems not to be the goal in true church growth; rather, it seems to be a means of expression. The end seems to be faithfulness to the work of the Spirit in the midst of life.

Indeed, the spiritual renewal occurring within some black churches is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our task in church
growth is not to manipulate the Spirit; rather, our task is to discern the work of the indwelling Spirit in our midst and cooperate with its work. In order to develop a discerning orientation to the work of the indwelling Spirit, it is important to examine the emphasis on the Spirit in the black church tradition.

BLACK CHURCH HERITAGE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The relational, communal, and informal orientation seems to be characteristic of the historic black church, rather than the formal, goal-oriented, and structural style. Melvin D. Williams, a black anthropologist, describes the spontaneous relationships of intimate bonds as communitas, and it enables persons to transcend status and class lines.4

Authentic encounter with others made possible by the deity is an important element of the African heritage for understanding the relationship of the Holy Spirit to local black congregations.

Historically, communitas has been the center of black religion. Communitas was rooted in the African heritage and was the force behind African worship. Communitas was the dynamic power that enabled people to transcend the barriers that separated them from each other. When these barriers were transcended, true and authentic encounter between persons took place. In preliterate societies this happening was seen not as the work of humans alone, but it was visualized as the work of the deity, according to Victor Turner.5

Authentic encounter with others made possible by the deity is an important element of the African heritage for understanding the relationship of the Holy Spirit to local black congregations. Communitas is a descriptive concept from behavioral science used here to understand one dimension of African heritage that predisposed black Christians to identify with biblical Christianity. The account of Pentecost in the Book of Acts has some analogy to what anthropologists call communitas in African
traditional religion. At Pentecost an encounter took place between God and others through the Holy Spirit where language, cultural, racial, and national barriers were transcended. Thus, when the Afro-American slaves were first told about the Pentecost experience, they already had predispositional archetypal patterns that enabled them to understand what took place at Pentecost.

The predisposition of black Christians toward biblical Christianity and faith can also be envisaged in another cultural inheritance from Africa. This cultural heritage is the tradition of spirit possession. An example of this cultural heritage is the spirit possession in Nigeria among the Igbo people, understood as union with the Spirit (God). The deity actually possesses the person in a public rite or ceremony.

According to Thomas Hoyt, in an article entitled "African-American Worship Experience and the Bible," in Judaism and in the Hebrew Bible, in general, the Spirit was understood temporarily to possess a person, empowering the person to perform miraculous feats for a time. This understanding, as well as the New Testament conception of the indwelling Spirit as a gift edifying the church, found acceptance in black church tradition, an acceptance largely accounted for in terms of cultural predisposition by African traditional religion.

The inheritance of spirit possession also inclines black Christians to value personal transformation, known in Christianity as conversion. The emphasis on conversion in American revivalism and the conversion experiences and the calls of God's prophets and apostles in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament appealed to black Christians because of its similarities with aspects of a spirit possession.

The oral heritage, along with the heritage of communitas and spirit possession, also enabled black people to identify with the oral forms that formed the background for the writing of the Scripture. Moreover, the African tradition of oral forms of communication and of spontaneous forms of participation led to a lively form of worship and preaching in many black churches. Worship was characterized as the Holy Spirit descending, enlivening, and anointing.
Thus far we have emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit within the church in facilitating community and the work of the Holy Spirit within the individual member of the worshiping congregation. We have also seen how the African religious heritage predisposed black Christians toward the Holy Spirit dimensions of biblical faith. It must be added also that the black Christian religious tradition not only viewed the Holy Spirit at work within the local congregation and within individuals, it also has envisaged the work of the Holy Spirit in the world liberating the oppressed. Indeed, there is a linking of the personal, communal, and social dimensions in the conception of the work of the Holy Spirit within black church tradition.

It appears conclusive from the above statements that black Christians are primarily biblical with regard to the theology of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is very important to explore further the similarities between the faith of many black Christians, especially those in the Wesleyan tradition, and the view of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BLACK METHODISTS

It is through the indwelling spirit of Christ in the sociological reality of the congregation that true community or koinonia is achieved in the New Testament. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit works within the person as well as within the community in the New Testament. Finally, when persons become part of the church through baptism, it is possible to become part of the koinonia and to participate in God's presence or Spirit. These three views of the New Testament understanding of the Holy Spirit are found in the faith perspective of black Christians, especially in the Wesleyan tradition (AME, AMEZ, CME, and UM). Within black Methodism the Holy Spirit is the indwelling of God's presence among God's people, and it works within persons, within the local congregation, and within the world.

Because the Holy Spirit seeks to work within persons, within the church, and within the world, it is the energy and basis for ministry within the black churches. Therefore, ministry within black churches revolves around discerning and coopera-
ting with the work of the Holy Spirit in its various realms. Not only is biblical faith present in the emphasis on the Holy Spirit among black Methodists. Orthodox Christianity is also evident with regard to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. That is, there is among black Methodists an affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity as understood in the creeds of the historical church.¹² Black Methodists do not emphasize distinctions between the persons of the Godhead; rather, God the Father is creator and sustainer, God was present in Christ (as the Son), and God is present in the Holy Spirit. Black Christians in the Methodist tradition affirm this view of the Trinity. Moreover, God the liberator of oppressed people through the Holy Spirit establishing God’s reign is also emphasized.

Underscoring the oral tradition and the cultural inheritance from Africa has enriched the Christian orthodoxy of black Methodists with regard to the Trinity. Being black and African has helped black Methodists to particularize trinitarian orthodoxy in black churches. However, black Methodists as well as many other black Christians in other denominational traditions share Christian trinitarian orthodoxy with the historic church.

A DISCERNMENT MODEL OF MINISTRY

One way to respond to the tensions within black United Methodist churches (as well as within other black churches) between the structural orientation and the spontaneous community orientation is to be found in the theology of the Holy Spirit that has been explicated in the previous section. It is not enough to express a theology of the Holy Spirit, however. It is necessary to have an operational theology that becomes a discernment model of ministry in response to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the task of black Christians within church to discern God’s indwelling Spirit at work in their midst and to cooperate with that work. It is important to work at developing spiritual eyesight in order to discern what the indwelling Spirit is doing within persons to bring healing and wholeness. It is also important to discern what the Spirit is doing within local congregations to bring koinonia, fellowship and
communitas. Within the realm of the world it is important also to attempt to discern what the indwelling Spirit is doing to bring about justice and liberation to oppressed people.

Once we discern the work of the indwelling Spirit within persons, within the local congregations, and within the world, it is important to respond to that work through commitment and cooperation with the work of the Spirit. Our task, then, as ministers of the Gospel is to discern and to cooperate.

In what follows we will examine the practical steps involved in discerning and cooperating. The areas of focus will be planning, worship, caring, nurturing, and witnessing in the world.

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As we explore the implication of the indwelling Spirit for ministry in black local churches, it is important to reemphasize that historically the growth of communitas has taken place in an oral culture. That is to say, storytelling and story listening have been central. Storytelling and story listening have assisted the indwelling Spirit to carry out its work within persons, within the local congregation, and within the world. It was through storytelling and story listening that black churches were enabled to talk about what God had done and was doing in their midst. Testimony has been the major vehicle for communicating the work of the indwelling Spirit. The story, then, has functioned as an interpretive tool for the work of the indwelling Spirit. Moreover, the story has become a means for envisioning future possibilities for the lives of individuals, for local congregations, and for liberation.

Discernment and the Vision of the Church's Mission. As Zan Holmes has indicated, each church must discover its own unique and particular mission. He uses the development of his
own church as an illustration of how churches can discover their unique mission. It was through this recounting of the story of the Saint Luke United Methodist Church that I discovered one resource that is available to each church for the discernment of its own unique mission and identity. That resource is the oral historians of the church, who are the repositories of the church’s history and identity. As these historians tell their stories, it is possible to hear how the Spirit has been working within the life of the congregation. Beyond this, however, it is also possible to pinpoint some of the obstacles to the work of the Spirit within the local congregation.

Pastors need to provide opportunities for those who do the planning to encounter the past dynamic work of the indwelling Spirit through the stories of the church’s oral historians. Providing these opportunities will help all involved to discern the present and future work of the indwelling Spirit within that church.

Participation in planning retreats can provide important opportunities for discerning through the mechanism of oral histories from key oral historians. The retreats could give the oral historians a chance to begin to tell the church’s story. Each participant in the retreat will need time to envisage how his or her own story intersects with the church’s story. Prayer for the revelation of what God is currently doing within the church’s midst is also an important part of the retreat. Preparing people to visualize the past work of the Spirit and the current work of the Spirit in their midst is the major purpose of the planning retreat.

Discernment and Caring. I am convinced that listening to people’s stories is a way not only to care, but it is also a way to build communal relationships. Listening to people’s stories is also a means of envisaging where the indwelling Spirit is at work in a person’s life. Indeed, the truth of pastoral care in the black church is that caring is primarily a storytelling and a story listening experience. By attending to the stories of people, a pastor can help them to see how their own lives intersect with the work of the indwelling Spirit. Attending to stories gives the pastor an opportunity to help parishioners to discern the Spirit at work within the person interceding on behalf of his or her
healing and wholeness, as expressed in Romans 8:26. Moreover, having someone attend to their stories helps people to feel valued and appreciated.\(^{15}\)

Attending to stories can also help to reveal the personal blocks hindering the work of God's indwelling Spirit in people’s lives. Sometimes people have developed stories that become scripts, preventing their growth and development. Often, attending to stories that are blocked gives the pastor an opportunity to intervene along with the Spirit to change the growth-blocking script underlying the person’s life.

Attending to the stories of others is an important vehicle for assisting the work of the indwelling Spirit within persons. It helps to create avenues for persons to discern the work of the indwelling Spirit as it seeks to bring healing and wholeness in their lives.

**Discernment and Worship.** Private devotions and public worship are places where the work of the indwelling Spirit can be discerned. Private devotional life can be given over to praying that God will reveal where the indwelling Spirit is at work in one's own life, in the life of the local congregation, and in the world. Sometimes writing a journal, as a means of charting the story of one's own life as it intersects with the Christian story can also be a key vehicle for discerning the work of the indwelling Spirit.

Public worship through the church's ritual can be a vehicle or sacramental means of encountering the work of the indwelling Spirit in the midst of the church’s life. Public worship in the form of ritual becomes a process through which persons are linked with the work of the indwelling Spirit in their lives and within their churches. Liturgy, therefore, as the work of the local congregation in response to the work of the indwelling Spirit in its midst, should be given careful attention. Decisions concerning hymn choices, prayers, sermons, Scripture readings, and the worship environment should all be made with concern for an encounter with the Spirit at work in the congregation. Holy Communion, especially, could become an opportunity to focus on the indwelling Spirit’s work within persons. Moreover,
baptism, as the event when we are incorporated within the life of the church, could be a time for emphasizing that our lives will continually be intersecting with the work of the indwelling Spirit within the church.

The black prayer tradition also has a rich dimension of public and private worship that should not be ignored. Prayer could be defined as the positioning of ourselves as individual Christians and as local churches in ways that bring them into line with what the indwelling Spirit is doing in our midst to bring healing, wholeness, communitas, justice, and equality.

It is also important to view healing as a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to the local congregation on behalf of those who need healing. Viewing healing in this way will help the minister to utilize the caring community in healing prayer, and it will also help to avoid the pitfall of focusing on an individual as the gifted healer.

There are a variety of occasions for the use of prayer. One occasion for prayer that appears central in many black Methodist churches is the altar prayer. Contemporary practice in the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church, for example, consists of people coming to the altar and presenting their individual petitions to God, followed by the pastoral prayer. I have found it helpful to teach briefly concerning the work of the indwelling Spirit in the lives of persons as an introduction to the altar call. I also prepare persons for the altar prayer by pointing to God's work within the church and in the world. The point for doing this is to help persons to focus their prayers at the altar toward discerning and cooperating with the work of the indwelling Spirit in their midst. Further, I try to communicate that it is important to come with the expectation that the Spirit will reveal its work within us. When this revelation takes place in someone's life, I point out that it is necessary to be prepared to cooperate with the work of the Spirit in whatever arena in which it is active.
Praying for holistic healing is something that black pastors frequently do. This includes pastors in the Methodist tradition, I have found. The indwelling Spirit heals in the arenas of the physical and the emotional, and in our relationships to others and to God. True prayer for healing begins with a prayer for discernment. That is, prayers for healing need to begin by asking the Spirit to reveal where it is at work in the life of the person, church, or community in bringing healing. The next step in praying is to recognize the revelation when it comes and to prepare the petitioners to cooperate with the leadership of the Spirit in the healing process.

It is also important to view healing as a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to the local congregation on behalf of those who need healing. Viewing healing in this way will help the minister to utilize the caring community in healing prayer, and it will also help to avoid the pitfall of focusing on an individual as the gifted healer. The whole congregation needs to pray for the wellness and wholeness of persons, for interpersonal relationships, and for the community. The pastor can pray on behalf of the people, but the pastor needs to be aware that the whole congregation is in intercession for healing.

As a way to summarize this section: it is important to point out that the entire service of worship, including the music, liturgy, and preaching, serves as a vehicle to enable people to participate in the work of the indwelling Spirit in their midst. It is through full participation and cooperation with the work of the indwelling Spirit that healing, wholeness, communitas, justice, and equality are facilitated.

**Nurture and Witness and the Indwelling Spirit.** Within each local church God's Spirit is at work seeking to help the church to respond to its members, to its community, and to the spheres of influence in which the church's members are at work in the world. The work of nurture is to foster fellowship relations within which authentic encounters with others, in response to the indwelling Spirit, are made possible, throughout a person's life cycle. In witnessing (by which I mean the effort to foster in the community and the world the quality of environment
necessary for high quality of living) the indwelling Spirit is at work. In sum, the task of ministry is to help the local congregation to discern where God’s Spirit is at work in the spheres of influence where people live, work, and worship and to help its members to cooperate with the Spirit’s work in these arenas.

CONCLUSION

Initially, the tension between those who prefer the goal and structural orientation of the United Methodist Church and those who want the informal, spontaneous, and communal orientation was highlighted. The proposed solution to this dilemma has been sought primarily within the black church’s emphasis on the indwelling Spirit and what it is doing within the person, within the local church, and within the community and the world. The implicit assumption, then, is that the tension between the structural and the communitas orientations can be transcended, even though the tension is very difficult to resolve. However, when each local congregation gives attention to discerning and cooperating with the work of the indwelling Spirit, a vision of ministry can emerge that is inclusive of both orientations. Therefore, pastoral leadership should not be focused on the merits or demerits of each approach. Rather, the task is one of helping the local church as a whole to engage in the discerning process. It is through discerning the work of the indwelling Spirit in the midst of congregational life that black local United Methodist churches can begin to sense a mission and a vision that transcends the two divergent orientations.

NOTES


11. This summary is from C. F. D. Moule, The Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 73-83.


The Second Vatican Council was a watershed in official Catholic theology and a vindication of previously suspect theological explorations among Roman Catholic scholars. Much of what was officially recognized in the council was a long-term response to the insights and challenges of the sixteenth-century reformers and their followers. However, much was also a direct response to contemporary experience and understanding. Not least among the important shifts in understanding has been the Catholic sense of the Holy Spirit at work in the world and among believers. This has always been an important theme, but it has not always been viewed in the same way.

The basic points concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit are fixed: the Triune God, known to Christians as the transcendent creator and sustainer, expressed historically in the Word that is Jesus Christ, immanent in the human community as a sharing of the love between the Father and the Son; a history of sin and salvation in which the Spirit is active as the source of prophetic discernment and action; the Spirit of God as breathed forth by Jesus to his followers in a new and unique way in his death and resurrection; and the continuing life and mission of the community of believers as the essential life of the Spirit, which heals, strengthens and builds community; and finally, the

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indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the essence of grace. These fixed points provide a frame of reference and a language of interpretation for Catholic discourse about the divine dimension of Christian life and experience for individuals and communities.

This frame of reference is built up from scriptural modes of expression that are common to all the Christian traditions. But Catholic theology throughout the centuries has also consciously followed the imagery, language, and thought patterns of the church fathers, thereby setting up traditional interpretations that may be at variance with modern scholarly interpretations of the original biblical text. In particular, the association of the Holy Spirit with sacramental efficacy and with the rulings of hierarchic church authority has emerged from continuous reflection upon historical experience.

Although Catholic piety and theology at no time denied the prophetic experience of the Holy Spirit, it must be admitted that until the Second Vatican Council there was a certain tendency to attempt to domesticate the power of the Spirit.

Although Catholic piety and theology at no time denied the prophetic experience of the Holy Spirit, it must be admitted that until the Second Vatican Council there was a certain tendency to attempt to domesticate the power of the Spirit, and to see that power as operating almost exclusively through official ecclesiastical channels. Thus it has been understood that the Holy Spirit guided the writers of the various books of Holy Scripture and also guided the community of believers in establishing the canon. The Holy Spirit has also been understood as the guiding principle in the process of tradition, guaranteeing the inerrancy of definitive hierarchic teachings in which the process of tradition culminates. It has been taught that the Spirit is conferred upon the faithful in the sacraments, that is, by baptism, confirmation, and ordination, all of which are permanent in nature and confer certain powers.
Thus Catholic piety acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is the source of gifts or charisms by which the church is built up and fulfills its tasks. But there has been a certain tendency to institutionalize charisms in theory and practice, identifying them with the role of ordained officeholders in the church. It is this tendency to arrogate the workings of the Spirit to established institutional patterns that has been persistently questioned in modern times.

There has been, however, a complementary aspect in liturgy and spirituality to balance the institutionalizing tendency. The feast of Pentecost is traditionally preceded by a novena (that is, a nine-day series of special prayers) for the coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the faithful, bringing the "gifts" and "fruits" of the Spirit. The gifts are enumerated as seven (from Isaiah 11:2 as rendered in Jerome's Latin translation, the Vulgate): wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, and the fear of the Lord. Medieval theology gave extensive definition and content to these gifts, which are explained quite elaborately. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, sees them as effects and manifestations of divine salvation working in the souls of the faithful. Tradition also enumerates twelve "fruits" of the Holy Spirit (compiled from a blending of various Pauline and Johannine texts in the New Testament): charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, humility, fidelity, modesty, continence, and chastity. These are taken to be palpable evidence of a spirit-filled community or individual life.

It is probably difficult, if not impossible, for Christians of other churches to realize the tremendous impact the Second Vatican Council has in the Catholic church and community.

Within the liturgy itself, prayers to the Holy Spirit are formulated officially in several hymns, notably the hymn for vespers, "Veni Creator Spiritus" ("Come, Creator Spirit"); the
hymn for matins, "Jam Christus Astra Ascenderat" ("Christ Has Now Ascended to the Stars"); the sequence at the Eucharist, "Veni Sancte Spiritus" ("Come, Holy Spirit"); and a long series of shorter texts, such as antiphons, versicles, and responsories—all for the feast of Pentecost alone. However, the theme of Pentecost is also echoed in various ways in the liturgy for the rest of the year, and the whole liturgy for the sacrament of confirmation is built upon it. Moreover, popular piety, taking its cue from liturgical formulations, included many types of prayers and hymns to the Holy Spirit, asking for wisdom and seeking guidance in particular decisions. Several communities of vowed religious have been and are dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

It is probably difficult, if not impossible, for Christians of other churches to realize the tremendous impact the Second Vatican Council has in the Catholic church and community. It is no exaggeration to say that from the Council of Trent in Reformation times through the First Vatican Council in the late nineteenth century and up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, the official attitudes of the institutional Catholic church were defensive—doggedly repeating the old formulae of faith and moral teaching against Protestants, Enlightenment rationalists, modern technology, political democracy, some of the findings of science and many of the best thinkers within the Catholic community. Although individual Catholics could be far more open, it did seem that the central authority in Rome was constantly fighting a rearguard action to prevent the progress of the modern world. With the election of Pope John XXIII everything changed in radical and unexpected ways, although Pope John himself might have been surprised at such a turn of events and certainly considered himself conservative in the long run.

The difference that Pope John XXIII made in calling the council was due quite clearly to his attitude on the Holy Spirit. He once remarked that he understood his role as Pope to be not a
matter of telling the church what the Holy Spirit was saying, but instead looking around and discerning in the lives of Christian people what the Spirit was already doing in the church. There was a great simplicity and humility about him, and he was ready to learn not only from the Catholic community but from all Christians—and even from non-Christians of good will. When asked why he called the council, he said that his desire was to open the windows and let a lot of fresh air into the Vatican. At that council, for the first time in the history of the church, there was a great representation from the Third World, giving perspectives from a wide variety of cultures and historical experiences. Also, for the first time since the schism of the eleventh century that divided East from West, and since the schisms of the sixteenth century that divided the churches of North and South in the West, observers from the churches of the East and the Protestant churches were invited to the council, and were constantly drawn into informal exchange with the Bishops and their advisers.

The difference that Pope John XXIII made in calling the [Second Vatican] council was due quite clearly to his attitude on the Holy Spirit.

From such exchanges, and from the voices that came from many parts of the world, there arose a very different sense of the Catholic church. The documents that were drawn up at that council expressed this different sense. Indeed many people at that time were speaking about the council as a new Pentecost, with the Spirit sweeping church authorities along with a boldness and freshness of outlook that they themselves had not dreamed of until they were gathered together praying for the guidance of the Spirit on behalf of the whole church. What happened was a far greater openness to the world, to other Christians, to one another within the church. That led to a new
approach to old questions about Scripture and tradition, such as the nature of the church and its role in the world, the participation of the laity in church affairs, and the ministry of the priesthood.

Some people both inside and outside the Catholic church have wondered seriously whether the new openness that began 25 years ago with the Second Vatican Council can possibly continue in the present pontificate. They have noticed that there is a far more heavy-handed intervention from Rome in the affairs of the local churches, that a distinctly more conservative type of bishop is now appointed whenever there is a vacancy, that there have been moves from Rome to restrict women to their roles in pre-council times, and that ecumenism and social action appear to be suspect before Roman authority.

It was in the aftermath of Vatican II that the prophetic element came once more to the fore, and this is due in large measure to explicit teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit that was incorporated into the documents of the council.

There is no doubt that all these things have happened. Yet a return to the pre-Vatican II church is not really possible. The changes that have been made in the liturgy alone would be sufficient to guarantee that the effects of the council will continue to grow. Those liturgical changes include a far more extensive use of Scripture and frequent commentary on Scripture readings, a reshaping of the rites so that their meaning is much clearer, and the regular use of the vernacular language of each country rather than Latin in public worship. Because the laity have more active participation in the liturgy, they have gradually come to think of their role in the ordinary life and action of the church in a more active way also. And because there has been extensive consultation on various issues before the synod of bishops (which since the council now meets from time to time in Rome), the laity have recovered their sense of
involvement in the discernment processes and decisions of the church. Combined with the more creative interest of the church in public and social issues of justice and peace, there is a renewed sense of what it means to be the church in the world. This progress is not easily reversed, even during a very conservative pontificate.

An overview of Catholic piety before Vatican II suggests that the action of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers was seen mainly in two ways: the public guidance of the institutional church in its hierarchy, laws, and teachings, and the private guidance of individual Christians in living a good and devout life within that church. It was in the aftermath of Vatican II that the prophetic element came once more to the fore, and this is due in large measure to explicit teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit that was incorporated into the documents of the council. It is true that many of these explicit references to the Holy Spirit have to do with apostolic succession, the role of bishops, the ministry of ordained priests, the teaching office of the church, and so forth. Yet there is also a definite shift of emphasis toward a broader, more ecumenical and prophetic understanding.

Thus Lumen gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, speaks of all Christians (and not only Catholics) as joined by the bond of the Holy Spirit that is active among them with sanctifying power because they are baptized and because they are believers (Documents, pp. 33-34, 36-37). Moreover, this text envisages the bond as one that moves Christians to play a role in the conversion of the world so that it becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. Unitatis Redintegratio, the Decree on Ecumenism, repeatedly points out that ecumenism is not our initiative, but that of the Holy Spirit, whose gifts are poured out on Christians of all denominations, drawing them together in the communion of redemption (Documents, pp. 343-66). Dignitatis Humanae, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, links the workings of the Holy Spirit with the need to acknowledge that faith is by invitation and not by command (Documents, p. 696).

Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, clearly states that the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit
has awakened the Catholic laity to sense their vocation as Christians in a world that is in great need of redemption (Documents, p. 494). This theme is developed at great length throughout the document Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which admits that selfless service for others in temporal affairs is also among the varied gifts of the Spirit (for example, see Documents, p. 226). The characteristic offering that the Christian faith can make to the public welfare of the community is discernment—that gift of the Holy Spirit that seeks out concrete situations to work toward human salvation (Documents, p. 213). This discernment is applied very explicitly in the document to matters of social justice and peace among nations and races (Documents, p. 227-28).

PROPHECY, LIBERATION, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

This pattern of thought in the documents of Vatican II has led to a new impetus in the Catholic laity toward “basic Christian communities,” serious ecumenical encounters, deep involvement in peace movements, and toward bold steps in liberation theology, spirituality and activity in pursuit of social justice. There is a newly reemerging theme in spirituality behind this, and it is the notion of discernment. Spiritual discernment is, of course, a biblical idea. Scripture is full of the awareness that we must constantly discern whether our actions, attitudes, inclinations and preferences are motivated by the Spirit of God or are driven by the spirit of Satan the tempter, that is by a spirit of rebellion, self-centeredness, greed, lust for power, and so forth. But it is probably true to say that the life of the churches encouraged a bold and prophetic kind of discernment in the first three centuries that suffered a setback with the Constantinian establishment and never really recovered during the subsequent centuries of Christendom—and that has for the most part been seen as highly improper since the Enlightenment. It would seem to be this bold and prophetic kind of discernment that is returning openly and widely in our times.

Among Catholics, such a sense of personal and communal
discernment has been widely fostered by the renewed vigor of the Ignatian retreats. These are retreats built around the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, spiritual guide and teacher of the Catholic Reformation and founder of the Jesuits. These retreats are constructed to coax the retreatant step by step to see and judge everything in the light of the mysteries of faith, and to become introspectively aware of the movement of different "spirits." The aim of the training to become sensitive to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit in one's life, and to follow it with confidence and courage. People who have been formed in this way are likely to be loyal church members but they will not be so dependent on detailed and constant directives from authority. They are unlikely to be legalistic or timid. In most cases they will think more critically and more creatively about their own situation and options and about the situations and problems of communities. In working with communities they will tend to respect the discernment of others, and therefore they will be inclined to seek consensus and communal discernment processes.

There is a built-in prophetic or critical aspect to . . . basic Christian communities because they usually meditate on the Scriptures together and because they try to see the situations in which they live by the light of the gospel. This means that they often see a stark discrepancy between what is preached and what is done . . .

All this, of course, tends to the kind of association in faith that has come to be designated "basic Christian community." It involves active and creative participation of all in prayerfully discerning what is good and bad, possible and impossible in a situation, and in planning and executing what the Christian community will do about it. There is a built-in prophetic or critical aspect to such basic Christian communities because they
usually meditate on the Scriptures together and because they try to see the situations in which they live by the light of the gospel. This means that they often see a stark discrepancy between what is preached and what is done, or between the gospel and church practice, as well as the discrepancies they see between the world of God's creating and the world as we know it. All this lifts the individual's awareness of and attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit out of the realm of purely private concerns into that of public or societal issues. This is supported in Catholic basic communities by the underlying doctrinal position that the redemption is a corporate transformation of the human situation, geared not only to the saving of souls out of the world, but to the saving of the world, that is of the human situation in all its aspects, relationships, structures and systems.

Such a thrust in contemporary spirituality could not be without conflict. It is a movement that questions established patterns of social control and of political and economic organization and policy. It is a movement that also challenges dearly held, though erroneous, identifications of religious faith with national, racial and class loyalties. It touches and questions traditional ideas about spirituality and religious authority, about who has the right and duty to interpret revelation, about the privacy of faith, the identification of the status quo with the divine will, and many such sensitive topics. This is the basis for the pervasive and resilient phenomenon of "liberation theology" and its underlying Christian social praxis. It should be no matter of surprise or consternation that this new movement in theology has on the one hand been a widely and comprehensively ecumenical one, and on the other hand been polarizing and conflictual within denominations, most notably within Catholicism. A prophetic movement is generally conflictual; if it were not so there would be no need for a prophet stance.

However, there is more here than the ordinary experience of the prophet or the prophetic movement. Some of the more conservative circles within Catholicism—whether lay, clerical or hierarchic—cling to the understanding that the gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit are expressed in charisms for
governance and teaching of the community that are bestowed upon the official leaders of the church, and charisms for individually holy (but rather passive) lives which are bestowed on Christians who do not hold office in the church. Many such more conservative Catholics also have a persistent sense that it is proper to draw an analogy from this for secular affairs: the proper guidance is given to the office holders, not to protesting groups who agitate for peace, nuclear disarmament, and for social justice in racial and economic matters. So strongly are they convinced of this that they would even apply the principle to the bishops, as with the joint pastorals on race relations, nuclear disarmament, and the American economy. There is a deep struggle in the Catholic church of the United States over this. It is at root a conflict between the orthodox understanding of the guiding role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the implications of the statements on that topic in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Pneumatology and ecclesiology are very closely intertwined (as indeed they usually are) in this debate over a critical and far-reaching shift in perception of the existential meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ and of the life of his Holy Spirit that he bequeathed to us.

. . . the substantive issue for the community of Catholic believers and for the Church's practical policies is the reemergence of prophecy in new, often communal forms that are frequently of consequence in the secular world. The substantive issue, in other words, is where to look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is true, of course, that formal academic courses in theology still discuss the classic issues. Seminary professors and others demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is equal and coeternal with the Father and Son. They discuss the procession of the Divine Persons and the problem with the vocabulary of "persons" in
speaking of the divine. They continue to deal with the matter of the “filioque” as with the issue of the epiklesis. They set out the scholastic interpretations and elaborations of the “gifts” of the Spirit, and the traditional teaching about the Spirit as the soul of the Church indwelling in the community and the individual baptized believers. They discuss the special role of the Spirit in confirmation and ordination, and in the role of Bishops and of the teaching office of the Church.7

All this is still subject matter for formal theological discussion in Catholic circles, but the substantive issue for the community of Catholic believers and for the Church’s practical policies is the reemergence of prophecy in new, often communal forms that are frequently of consequence in the secular world. The substantive issue, in other words, is where to look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The remaining vestiges of the triumphalist “Christendom” mentality suggest that in the Church and in a Christian country this guidance of the Spirit has long been securely institutionalized, so that a prophetic voice should be extremely rare. But the vistas reopened by Vatican II—on scripture and on the mode of Christian life and thought of the early patristic era—suggest that prophecy be seen instead as the ordinary communal and individual mode of life of Christians in the course of history as the Spirit works in Church and world, readying the human situation for the full realization of the Reign of God. The Christendom mode is predominantly a static one in which the voice of the Holy Spirit has been duly recorded and is regularly played back for succeeding generations. The mode revived by Vatican II is dynamic and vital, necessarily allowing for differences in perception and for trial and error and for conflict. But it is perhaps especially in this mode that true faith in the immanent working of the Holy Spirit in Church and world is realized.

NOTES

1. The influential texts of the church fathers on the Holy Spirit have been gathered very conveniently by J. Patout Burns and Gerald M. Fagin, The Holy Spirit, vol. 6 of Message


4. This and all references to Vatican II documents are taken from Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Pr., 1966).


6. For an overview of this movement see Haight, *Alternative Vision*, *passim*.

A major misconception of historians of American religion is that the nineteenth century was for old-line Protestant churches preeminently the century of atonement theology, while the present century has been marked by a great rebirth of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. A further misconception is that this shift of emphasis was prompted in part by the spread of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

All the early nineteenth-century Methodist preachers—Timothy Merritt, Nathan Bangs, Wilbur Fisk, Alfred Cookman, and Phoebe Palmer—believed they were carrying forward the renewal of pneumatology that George Whitefield, John Wesley, and John Fletcher had begun. Eventually, such non-Methodist figures as Charles S. Simeon, Charles G Finney, Asa Mahan (who led in turn the Oberlin and the Keswick revivals in America and England), Isaac Hecker, Abraham Kuyper, Adoniran Judson Gordon, R. A. Torrey, and Handley C. G. Moule, Bishop of Durham, echoed their emphasis.

Indeed, Wesley created a bond of fellowship and a system for propagating his doctrine that were together able to preserve even the details of his teaching. Wesley taught that the Holy Spirit, the administrator of grace to humankind, acted “while
we were yet sinners," as Jesus Christ had, in order to make us saints. Wesleyan theologians call this divine order "prevenient grace." We love him because he first loved us. For Wesleyans, the word "grace" is not a category of thought about divine things but the active expression of God's faithfulness and power in the world. Dispensing grace has been, since the Fall, the work of God's creating, redeeming, sanctifying Spirit. Even Paul usually introduced his letters with some variation of the words, "Grace and shalom be unto you from God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ"; they comprised, in fact, a trinitarian introduction.

Did the Holiness people of the last 100 years—since 1886—really grasp the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in a Wesleyan way? Let us see. I shall begin where John Wesley began, with attention to the theology of popular hymns. Then I shall turn to a sampling of their notable devotional literature, analyze the sermons of preachers whom the Holiness people held to be both spiritual and learned, and, finally, consider the theologians of the movement.

If one were to ask a conservative United Methodist leader or one in the chiefly white evangelical Wesleyan denominations—the Salvation Army, the Wesleyan Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Brethren in Christ, the Missionary Church (a merger of several Wesleyanized Mennonite groups), the Free Methodists—to name his or her twenty favorite hymns for Sunday morning worship, most likely the following nine would be on the list. All express the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as Holiness people understand it: "Draw Me Nearer"; "Deeper, Deeper"; "I Know Whom I Have Believed"; "Blessed Assurance"; "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart"; "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"; "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"; "Jesus, Thine All-Victorious Love"; and "Holy Spirit, Be My Guide."

Consider the longtime favorite from the early twentieth century, "Deeper, deeper in the love of Jesus." Its second stanza reads:

Deeper, deeper, blessed Holy Spirit
Take me deeper still

50
This hymn, in which Holiness people sing of the life that is to follow the “second moment” of inward cleansing, summarizes Wesley’s doctrine of progressive sanctification and, in the lines quoted here, emphasizes the Christian aim of being restored in God’s own image, “perfected at last.”

Or note the ever-singable nineteenth-century hymn, “I Know Whom I Have Believed,” also often chosen as an evangelistic song. Its words confess wonder that God helps us respond to prevenient grace by granting us the gift of faith:

I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin
Revealing Jesus thru the Word,
Creating faith in Him. (WIS 449)

Its sentiment echoes the first verse of Fanny Crosby’s hymn, set to music by Phoebe Palmer’s daughter:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in his blood. (WIS 437)

The theme of “perfect submission,” the opening words of Crosby’s next two stanzas, had been central in Palmer’s preaching as it had been in Wesley’s threefold test of the experience of entire sanctification, namely, that it enabled believers to “rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.”

So with two favorites among two nineteenth-century prayer hymns, “Spirit of God, descend upon my heart” and “Breathe on me, Breath of God.” The first, dating from early in that century, is a prayer for the perfecting of our love (“All, all Thine own: soul, heart, and strength, and mind”). Its words speak of the “altar” differently from the way Phoebe Palmer later did:

Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,
One holy passion, filling all my frame;
The baptism of the heav'n-descended Dove,
My heart an altar and Thy love the flame.^

The second prays with simple profundity to the same Holy Spirit:

Breathe on me, Breath of God
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will
To do and to endure. (HFL 336)

In 1963 Mildred Cope, a Nazarene laywoman in Indianapolis, published the increasingly popular “Holy Spirit, Be My Guide.” Its popularity is proof of the continuing relish Holiness people have for Wesley’s doctrine. “Holy Spirit, my heart yearns for Thee,” she cried; “Make me clean, O make me pure, I must know the double cure!” (WIS 268). She was not then aware that the phrase “double cure,” which Wesley’s Calvinist contemporary, August Toplady, made famous, had appeared earlier in words John and Charles Wesley composed. Wesleyans ever since have understood Toplady’s “Rock of Ages” to refer to two moments of sanctifying grace. Nor did Mrs. Cope realize, I suppose, that Wesley made “Christian liberty” a synonym for sanctification; but her second stanza echoes his teaching:

Never, never shall I be set free;
Never, never till Thou purgest me!
“Come, just now,” my cry, my prayer;
Inbred sin, I cannot bear.?

Such prayer hymns addressed to the Holy Spirit stand in a long tradition that dates from the medieval Catholic hymn, “Veni, Creator Spiritus.” It was one of the earliest translated during the Protestant Reformation and is still sung at the elevation of popes and the coronation of kings:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with Celestial Fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who doth thy seven-fold gifts impart;
The Wesleys found this tradition flourishing among English Christians. What they added in 1745 in their *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father* was the promise that God would come to abide in the hearts of all true believers in sanctifying power (see Smith, “Holy Spirit”). Consistent with that Wesleyan mode are numerous other nineteenth-century examples. Many Holiness people can recite from memory “Holy Ghost with Light Divine” and “Hover o’er Me, Holy Spirit.” Stanzas in each plead for purity of heart:

Holy Ghost, with power divine  
Cleanse this guilty heart of mine;  
Long hath sin without control  
Held dominion o’er my soul. (HFL 196)

and

Thou canst fill me, Gracious Spirit,  
Though I cannot tell Thee how;  
But I need Thee, greatly need Thee;  
Come, O Come, and fill me now. (HFL 202)

The popularity among Holiness people of Charles and John Wesley’s two famous hymns, “Love Divine” and “Jesus, Thine All-victorious love,” stems from their doctrine of full salvation. The oneness of Jesus with the Spirit is manifest in both of them, most gloriously in the simple notion that God’s love actually transforms us through the Spirit of Christ.

Breathe, oh breathe, Thy loving Spirit  
Into every troubled breast!  
Let us all in Thee inherit.  
Let us find that second rest. . . .  

Finish then Thy new creation  
Pure and spotless let us be  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee. (HFL 335)

53
A stanza of the other hymn makes clear to converts that entire sanctification was the momentous beginning of a life perfected by God’s presence:

Refining Fire, go thru’ my heart,
Illuminate my soul,
Scatter Thy life thru’ every part
And sanctify the whole. (HFL 319)

If these hymns of worship signalize the Holiness tradition, so do evangelistic songs used since 1880 in Sunday evening revival services. “Oh, spread the tidings round, wherever man is found. . . . The Comforter has come,” by late-nineteenth-century writer W. H. Kirkpatrick, often marks the opening of such meetings. The association of the outpouring of the Spirit with the “last days,” that Wesley and many others taught us to make, is evident in Kirkpatrick’s second stanza, which begins, “The long, long night is past, the morning breaks at last.” But his emphasis is on the present. The “King of kings, with healing in His wings . . . To every captive soul a full deliverance brings.” Kirkpatrick also wrote the popular revival song, “‘Tis Burning in My Soul,” the key line of which salutes the “love-enkindled flame.” It speaks in turn of the Spirit, the Cross, altar (“Upon the sacrifice, the fire from heaven falls”), promised grace, and love “shed abroad.”

Other examples of revival songs include “He Abides” by Herbert Buffum, and Mrs. C. H. Morris’s “Sanctifying Power,” both composed in the early part of this century. Buffum’s second stanza reads,

I’m so glad it reaches me,
All unworthy tho’ I be,
Overcoming grace made freely mine;
Since the Comforter abides
And within my heart resides,
I am walking in the light divine. (WIS 269, 296)

The Nazarene rouser entitled “Called unto Holiness,” written at the turn of the century, emphasizes both the christological and pneumatological character of righteousness:
Called unto holiness, children of light,
Walking with Jesus in garments of white;
Raiment unsullied nor tarnished with sin,
God's Holy Spirit abiding within. (WIS 290)

Even more important to the spiritual character of evangelistic meetings are the hymns sung after sermons on heart purity, either when the preacher invites seekers forward to the kneeling rail or tries to help them think and pray while bowed there. The one beginning "Jesus, see me at Thy feet," written in the early part of the present century by George Bennard, reaches its climax in the fourth stanza:

Lord, Thy love hath won my all,
Let Thy Spirit on me fall;
Burn up every trace of sin;
Make me pure within. (WIS 285)

Another, from the same epoch, closes with the lines:

Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way;
Hold o'er my being absolute sway.
Fill with thy Spirit, till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me. (WIS 276)

Yet another, "O! To Be Like Thee," often sung as a chorus, was set to music in 1897 by William Kirkpatrick. Its final stanza reads,

O! to be like Thee, while I am pleading,
Pour out thy Spirit, fill with thy love;
Make me a temple, meet for thy dwelling,
Fit me for life, and heaven above. (SPP 53)

Particularly evident in both hymns and revival songs is the identification of the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ. The composers equate cleansing through the merit of Christ's atonement with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, much as Phoebe Palmer did when she wrote the words,

The cleansing stream, I see, I see,
I plunge and O it cleanseth me,
O praise the Lord, it cleanseth me,
It cleanseth me, it cleanseth me. (SPP 109)

William J. Kirkpatrick taught generations to think of Christ in the same way, when he set to music Fanny Crosby's poem, "He Hideth My Soul":

With numberless blessings each moment He crowns,
And, filled with His fulness divine,
I sing in my rapture, O, glory to God,
for such a Redeemer as mine. (SPP 77f)

Indeed, Kirkpatrick's songbook contains a score or more lyrics explicitly teaching that we are sanctified wholly through the baptism of the Spirit, that this experience is rooted in the atonement, and that it results in Christlike living. Many of his hymns equate being filled with the Holy Spirit with Moses' Shekinah, that is, the presence of the Lord restored in the hearts of men.13

Biblical scholars have recently given renewed attention to the spirituality of the religion of Israel and to the unity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, none more notably than James Dunn.14 In this, they sound like modern John Fletchers, if not latter-day Wesleys and Whitefields. And they echo the faithful witness of the Holiness people to the God who named himself Yahweh—"I am that I am present"—and to Jesus, "called Emmanuel, which is to say 'God with us.'"15 Like the hymns and songs described above, many exegetical studies link the ideas of incarnation, atonement, sanctification, and an ethically holy life with what is now called creation theology, the renewal of the divine image. Repeatedly they declare that Pentecost is fundamental to both the existence of the Church and promise of the Second Coming of Christ.16

The books of devotion long popular among the Holiness people reiterate these same ideas. Widely used among these are the ones by the Methodist missionary and evangelist, E. Stanley Jones, especially his first, called Victorious Living (1936). Just to glance over it is to realize that Jones's purpose was to help
Christians grow in Christlikeness, that is, in love and purity. But he wrote also of the reality of an experience of the Holy Spirit's cleansing presence. In the Acts of the Apostles, Jones said, "the Holy Spirit was no mere vague, impersonal influence—He was God meeting them inwardly, reinforcing, cleansing . . ."\(^{17}\)

More explicit on the doctrine of the sanctifying Spirit is Bertha Munro's *Truth for Today* (1947). Reared a poor widow's child, Miss Munro graduated valedictorian and president of her class at Boston University, completed in all but technical details a doctorate in English literature at Radcliffe, and served for more than four decades as academic dean at Eastern Nazarene College. Her volume assumes the correctness of Wesley's teaching of a second moment of heart cleansing, which she calls, with him, perfect love, or renewal in God's image. It is so preoccupied with the life and atonement of Jesus that one might at first glance suppose it to represent what H. Richard Niebuhr once called a "unitarianism of the Second Person." Not so, however; it is thoroughly trinitarian and makes the risen Lord pneumatological—one with the Spirit, one in us. She affirmed, as Phoebe Palmer did, that to be like him we must wholly consecrate ourselves on the altar, which is Christ, and be filled with his Spirit.\(^{18}\)

Does God seem unreal and far away? Miss Munro asked. "Get Jesus in your heart by the baptism with the Holy Ghost, and God will be a living reality."

to say, was “deliverance from the power of all sin.” Quoting the Wesleys’ hymn, “O Glorious Hope of Perfect Love,” she declared that “everyone who has been sanctified wholly has made an eternal covenant in a definite crisis. Once for all we are to be cleansed from sin and identified with Jesus Christ.” Does God seem unreal and far away? Miss Munro asked. “Get Jesus in your heart by the baptism with the Holy Ghost, and God will be a living reality.” In her reading for the following day she explained to the Holiness people how they are to abide in Christ:

He is the Vine, we the branches; He the Head, we the body; He the bridegroom, we the bride; He the Shekinah, we the temple. . . . What is the “glory” He promises us? That certainty of His inwrought Presence which we may have here and the assurance of an unveiled Presence hereafter.

Commissioner Brengle, in The Guest of the Soul, was similarly explicit, as he had been in his earlier book. Brengle declared that the Holy Spirit’s great work is to exalt Jesus, to knit Christian hearts to him “in faith and love and loyalty.” The Spirit illuminates the Bible, enabling Christians to see God speaking “in love, in promise, in precept,” and purifies the hearts of those who welcome the Spirit as Lord of their whole selves. Having, through the Spirit, “glimpsed the character of Christ,” Brengle wrote, “the soul yields itself eagerly to the Holy Guest to be conformed to that insight.”

Such devotional books stressed process, of course, as well as instantaneous experiences. Those published in the nineteenth century were often composed of the letters and diaries of saintly women such as Hester Ann Rogers, Phoebe Palmer, the Quaker Hannah Whitall Smith, and Catherine Booth. The purpose of each was to help Christians to receive and enjoy cleansing from all sin. The authors equated the power that comes from the Holy Spirit’s baptism not with mystic exaltation or miraculous gifts but with purity and perfect love. In this, they were as sophisticated about ethics as John Wesley had been, and often had to curb the mystic tendencies of males.
The writings of thoughtful ministers, from that time to the present, reflect very closely the language and experiences of these women. William Arthur, an Irish Methodist evangelist who visited several American Methodist conferences in the late 1850s, published a notable volume, *The Tongue of Fire*, that helped make Methodist teachings about the Holy Spirit the inheritance of many denominations. Arthur stressed the Holy Spirit’s relation to the Godhead, regenerating and purifying work, ethical guidance in an age when evil had acquired many new faces, and empowerment of Christians to live a Christlike life, one filled with God’s love. A bit later Congregationalist Asa Mahan, Presbyterian evangelist William E. Boardman, and Society of Friends evangelist Dougan Clark wrote volumes explaining the term “baptism with the Holy Ghost,” All three volumes were popular in both the American Holiness movement and its overseas soul mate, the English Keswick movement.

The sermons preached at the “National Camp meetings for the Promotion of Holiness” were similarly pneumatological, though by no means did all of them describe the experience of entire sanctification as the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The preachers sometimes chose, as Wesley did, to speak of experiencing the Spirit’s fullness, referring not to Christians receiving first a part and then all of the Spirit, but to the Spirit’s gaining first a part and then the uttermost of themselves. Otherwise, they declared, or assumed, that the Holy Spirit was the divine agency responsible for all the work of convicting and regenerating sinners and sanctifying believers, first in the moment of entire sanctification, then in a lifelong process. And they stressed the ministry of the Spirit in preparing for the coming kingdom.
One book of such sermons, called The Double Cure, included the earliest discourse published by Phineas Bresee, a Los Angeles Methodist pastor who later founded the western branch of the Church of the Nazarene. Its title was "The Baptism with the Holy Ghost." Bresee’s sermon and another by Joseph H. Smith, entitled "The Fullness of Christ," made christology central in their pneumatology. After urging at length, in the fashion of Wesley’s Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, that Pentecost was the crowning work of Jesus, Bresee asked, "What did the baptism with the Holy Ghost do" for New Testament Christians? "It purified their hearts by faith," he said first, citing Peter’s account of Cornelius. Then, changing the reference to present believers, he said that it "reveals Jesus, the King of Glory in the soul"; it illumines the Bible; it "imparts power," the power of humility, gentleness, tenderness, and contrition; and it produces "unworldliness," setting the believer’s eyes "on the unseen glories."

These themes appear in numerous volumes of sermons published in the 1880s and 1890s: Christian and Missionary Alliance Founder Albert B. Simpson's The Fullness of Jesus; Or Christian Life in the New Testament; Presbyterian evangelist Edward F. Walker’s Sanctify Them: A Study of Our Lord’s Prayer for His Disciples; Baptist Absalom B. Earle’s Abiding Peace; Pilgrim Holiness pioneer Martin Wells Knapp’s Christ Crowned Within; Wesleyan evangelist W. B. Godbey’s The Work of the Holy Spirit; Methodist Henry Clay Morrison’s The Baptism with the Holy Ghost (by the founder of Asbury Theological Seminary); and Bresee’s associate, evangelist C. W. Ruth’s The Pentecostal Experience. They also appear in other volumes by notable Methodist preachers.

The publication of such works continued through the middle of the twentieth century. Nazarene editor and outstanding Holiness preacher D Shelby Corlett's God in the Present Tense capped a lifetime effort to express the doctrine of entire sanctification in contemporary terms. His chapters on the Holy Spirit’s work and personhood and on the experience of perfect love were followed by one dealing with the "New Life-Style"
which stems from "the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in
the life." This new life of "devotement to God," Corlett went on,
grows from a desire to be more and more "transformed into the
likeness of His Son." The following pages echoed the same
themes we have seen were central in the tradition: hope for final
perfection; anticipation of the Second Coming; fidelity to
Christ's example; and submission to God's call to perfect
obedience, as clear in ancient Israel as in the Christian era.\textsuperscript{30}

Doty's chapter on the baptism of the Holy Ghost linked
instantaneous to progressive sanctification. His next
chapter, on "the baptism of fire" (which some Pentecostals had recently argued was a third work of grace),
declared this experience to be "the same and only baptism
of the Holy Ghost."

Wesleyan Methodist Thomas K. Doty's book of 1901, The
Two-Fold Gift of the Holy Ghost, which moved preaching forward
into formal theology, was long H. Orton Wiley's favorite. Doty
kept both exposition and explanation simple, however. The
result was a mixture of devotional, hortatory, and analytical
material that is "folk theology" at its best. The recent revival of
the experience of heart purity, Doty began, was scripturally as
well as logically inseparable from the doctrine of the sanctifying
Spirit. Nineteen closely reasoned chapters followed, explaining
how the divine Spirit must be regarded as a person and insisting
that "the Holy Ghost is God," that the Spirit's work is central to
the great plan of freeing humanity from sin, and that the Spirit's
special mission is to apply the atonement and empower us to
live by Christ's example.\textsuperscript{31}

Doty's chapter on the baptism of the Holy Ghost linked
instantaneous to progressive sanctification. His next chapter, on
"the baptism of fire" (which some Pentecostals had recently argued was a third work of grace), declared this experience to be
"the same and only baptism of the Holy Ghost." In the Hebrew
Scriptures, Doty said, the burning presence of God is always
linked to God’s rejection of our sin and readiness to heal us from it. Doty then explained the "two-fold" nature of the gift of the Spirit, the one being the baptism of the Spirit—the unrepented and instantaneous experience of cleansing or purification—and the other being the "comfort," the fellowship, of the One who had in that baptism come to abide. The first aspect of the gift is subtraction, the second is addition. One causes us to rejoice in God’s taking away the remains of inbred sin; in the other, we delight in the "Infinite Companion" who exerts a continually sanctifying power over our lives (Two-Fold Gift, 133, 137-45).

Steele declared that his object was to convince doubters who professed to "find no such sharply-defined instantaneous transition in the Christian life after regeneration." This stemmed, he said, from their failure to identify this blessing with "the baptism of the Holy Ghost . . .

So with Daniel Steele, sometime professor of theology at Boston University, in his 1908 revision of Love Enthroned. The book is a long and detailed argument in support of Wesley’s doctrine. Steele explained the pneumatological character not only of the experience of perfect love but of the continuing fellowship that follows that experience. The section, "The Abiding Comforter," followed closely the exposition of John 14:15-26 in Wesley’s Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. Steele declared that his object was to convince doubters who professed to "find no such sharply-defined instantaneous transition in the Christian life after regeneration." This stemmed, he said, from their failure to identify this blessing with "the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the fullness of the Spirit, . . . and the gift of the abiding Comforter." The "full splendors of assurance," which the Comforter brings, enable and inspire believers to love God perfectly and obey God continually. Then, Steele concluded, "they emerge into the 'kingdom of the Holy Ghost,' as Fletcher styles it. They are filled with the Holy Spirit. They now walk in the light constantly, are
consciously cleansed from all sin, and have joy unspeakable.”

The consistency of modern Wesleyan theologians with the hymns, devotional literature, and preaching described above is especially evident in H. Orton Wiley’s classic work, Christian Theology, required in the course of most Holiness ministers’ preparation. Wiley’s second volume contains a 215-page section on “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit” that has done much to perpetuate Wesleyan ideas.

Wiley began by emphasizing the progressive revelation of the Spirit and carefully reviewing the Hebrew Bible’s teachings about the work of the Spirit in creation and providence—striving with individual consciences, molding the chosen family, giving the Law, and inspiring the prophets. The same Spirit combined the uncreated and the created natures in the “new man,” Jesus Christ, and thereafter anointed and directed the Savior’s earthly ministry. “Dwelling in the human nature of the anthropic Person [Christ], the Spirit searched not only the deep things of God (I Cor. 2:10-13), but also the full depths of human nature,” he said, and thus became, “in a peculiar sense,” “the Spirit of the incarnate Christ” (Christian Theology, 2:303-309).

At Pentecost, Wiley continued, “by a strange reversal, He who was presided over by the Spirit during His humiliation, now in His Exaltation becomes the Giver of that same Spirit to the Church.” Thereafter, this Comforter or Paraclete, this Spirit of truth, “glorifies only the Son.” He is “our Lord’s ever-present Self.” Through his outpouring “our Lord enters upon His higher ministry—a ministry of the Spirit.” Thereafter, “the fullness of grace and truth revealed in Christ is through the Holy Spirit universalized and made available to the Church.” (Christian Theology, 2:308, 311).

Wiley’s summary of the “soteriological function” of the Spirit added to that of Doty. The rubrics of baptism (or cleansing), anointing, and sealing become “the threefold aspect” of the gift of the Spirit as sanctifier. Like Doty and generations of Wesleyan preachers who had preceded him, however, Wiley riveted the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to the Christian’s experiences of regeneration, entire sanctification, and daily increase of the
The grace of holiness. Through this Spirit God renewed fallen persons in the image of God and incorporated them into the "new humanity" begun in Christ. Wiley distinguished sharply between birth through the Spirit and baptism in the Spirit, even while affirming that both experiences are a proof of the being, the Presence, and the sanctifying purposes of the Spirit. The Spirit gave life to the Church, born at Pentecost in the Spirit's flaming love, and incorporated its members into the "body" of Christ (Christian Theology, 2:321-23, 329-36).

Theologians of the Holiness movement who wrote after Wiley, both from within and outside the United Methodist Church, continued in the main to hold ideas about the Holy Spirit that they believed they had inherited from Wesley and Fletcher.

The crowning chapter of Wiley's section on the Holy Spirit, of course, was the one on entire sanctification. It offered an extensive scriptural exposition of heart purity. Wiley summarized Wesley's perennial testimony to the doctrine and explained his own objections to certain modern departures from it. We are not surprised, therefore, by the powerful section that defines "progressive sanctification" so as to preclude any emphasis on growth or development that beclouds the instantaneous character of inward cleansing. Wesley, Wiley said, "taught that there is a gradual work both preceding and following the act of God by which we are sanctified wholly." Had Wesley taught otherwise, Wiley wrote, he would have denigrated "the preparation of the Spirit in the hearts of men" and demeaned "the importance of prevenient grace." And he would also have minimized the synergistic position of Arminian theology, which had, historically, understood a person's response to grace to be prerequisite to faith in the sanctifying Spirit (Christian Theology, 2:440-63, 479-86).

Theologians of the Holiness movement who wrote after
Wiley, both from within and outside the United Methodist Church, continued in the main to hold ideas about the Holy Spirit that they believed they had inherited from Wesley and Fletcher. Like Wiley, they occasionally made constructive contributions of their own. So also with historians and Bible scholars of the movement. The Bible scholars and theologians affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit's work in creation, in inspiring the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, in presiding over the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and in creating and guiding the church. That, however, the primary emphasis of modern Wesleyans has been upon the Spirit's ministry of transforming grace in convicting sinners, leading them to saving faith, and purifying their hearts in the power of perfected love—that is, upon the order of salvation—differs not at all from Wesley's emphasis upon that theme. Moreover, unlike eighteenth-century Wesleyans, modern ones were usually members of congregations that celebrated in personal testimony the fact of their entrance into the experience of heart purity. This profession Wesley does not seem to have made for himself, though he often implied it; but several thousand converts won his favor by doing so during the last thirty-three years of his ministry.

But the close attention writers of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gave to the idea of growth in grace belies the allegation that the Holiness movement stressed only the moment of sanctification and gave minimal emphasis to one's lifetime of deepening response to it.

True, the preachers and evangelists in the Holiness movement have not been as explicit as Wesley on the process of sanctification that goes on in individual believers before and after the experience of heart purity. During the decade of the 1970s many theologians and Bible students expressed concern about this fact. At least one, however, J. Kenneth Grider,
denied Wesley's concept of progressive sanctification entirely, and confined the term sanctification, or purity, only to what Wesley had taught was the instantaneous aspect of the experience. But the close attention writers of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gave to the idea of growth in grace belies the allegation that the Holiness movement stressed only the moment of sanctification and gave minimal emphasis to one's lifetime of deepening response to it.

These scholars were in agreement with the preachers that preceded them on another point, however. They interpreted the experience of perfect love as Christlikeness, as a partaking of his nature, as putting on "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24, cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). They anchored both power and purity in what Fletcher and Wesley termed "the faith that works by love." And they understood both individual and communal experiences of repeated outpourings of the Holy Spirit as marks of God's purpose to lead God's children forward in the quest of yet higher degrees of Christlikeness.

Thus, in retrospect, Holiness people in the last one hundred years have clung to the ideas of the Spirit's work that made Wesley's system coherent. From the singing congregations to the pastors and theologians, they spoke with a united voice to declare that the Spirit of Jesus and the sanctifying Spirit are one; that a Christlike holiness was revealed and made possible through the same Spirit; that heart purity is both instantaneous and progressive; that the fullness of Pentecost is the heritage of all true believers; and that the Spirit is daily being poured out to prepare a kingdom for the King.

NOTES


Subsequent hymns from this source will be designated by "WIS" followed by hymn number.


5. *Hymns of Faith and Life* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Light and Life [Free Methodist] Pr., 1976), no. 197. Subsequent hymns from this source will be designated by "HFL" followed by hymn number.


10. William J. Kirkpatrick et. al., *Songs of Praise and Power* (Chicago: Christian Witness Co., 1900), no. 217. Subsequent hymns from this source will be designated by "SPP" followed by hymn number.


13. SPP 110, 112-13, 125, 131-32, 135, 137, 142, 158, 208, 222-23.


24. See the sermons collected in the following: Penuel; or, Face to Face with God, eds. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869); A Modern Pentecost; Embracing a Record of the Sixteenth National Camp Meeting, ed. Adam Wallace (Philadelphia: Methodist Home Journal, 1875); Days of Power in the Forest Temple, ed. George Hughes (Boston: John Bent & Co., 1874); and The Double Cure, or Echoes from National Camp-Meetings, ed. William Nast (Boston and Chicago: Christian Witness Co., 1887).


27. The publishers and dates of these books are, respectively: Simpson (New York: Christian Alliance Publ., 1890); Walker (Philadelphia: Christian Standard Co., 1899); Earle (Boston: J. H. Earle, 1886); Knapp (Cincinnati: Revivalist Publ. House, 1893); Godbey (Louisville, Ky.: Pickett Publ., 1902); Morrison (Louisville, Ky.: Pentecostal Herald Pr., 1900); and Ruth (Chicago and Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1909).


39. See the various issues of The Wesleyan Theological Journal during the decade of the 1970s, especially vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 77-98, containing the article by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, "Theological Roots of Wesleyanism’s Understanding of the Holy Spirit."


The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions . . . (The Character of a Methodist)

The points we chiefly insisted upon were four: First, that orthodoxy, or right opinions, is, at best, but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all. . . . (A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists)

But what is faith? Not an opinion, no more than it is a form of words, not any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. (A Letter to the Lord Bishop of Gloucester)

If true opinions and, therefore, orthodoxy, according to Wesley, have scarcely a place or role in religion, at least in its Methodist expression, then what place or need may there be for doctrinal standards? The statements quoted are far from exceptional in Wesley’s published writings and seem, on the face of it, inhospitable to the very notion of standards of doctrine and their historic use and function in the Christian churches.

Such words as, “the distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort,” have from time to time suggested to some—both Methodists and others—that doctrinal standards have little right of place in Methodism. Some even suspect that

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the oft-alleged latitudinarianism of Methodism in the 20th century, or its current so-called doctrinal pluralism, has, in fact, a long pedigree that goes back to no less authorities than the Wesleys themselves.

Sometimes judgments of this sort have been prompted by Wesley's well-known but poorly understood "punch lines" based on 2 Kings 10:15: "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? If it be, give me thy hand," and "No difference between us (if thou art a child of God) can be so considerable as our agreement is." Those suspicious of easy ecumenicity regularly overlook the point that the unanimity of heart that Wesley applauds actually invokes Paul's definition of saving faith: "For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Rom. 10:10, emphasis added). In Wesley's view, such a person is already the subject of saving faith and so may be presumed to have crossed the only threshold to the Christian life.

Moreover, those who find in this camaraderie of "heart-religion" a want of doctrinal sobriety easily miss the import of the rightness of heart that invites community. The relationship captured in the phrase, "right as my heart is with thy heart," is, for Wesley, the fulfillment of the second great commandment. And that is impossible without fulfillment of the first, the love of God, as in Mark 12:29-30. The two together signify one who is "going on to perfection." Thus, rightly understood, this almost proverbial Wesleyan invitation to Christian fellowship may be seen to be, however surprising, doctrinally cogent by Wesley's standards. In it there is affirmation of an indissoluble complementarity and union of those two pillars of Wesley's "experimental divinity," that is, justification by grace through faith and sanctification, or Christian life going on to perfection. And this, of course, was for the Wesleys the only promising ground of human community.

Any suspicion of doctrinal indifference on Wesley's part, however, is quickly retired on four grounds we can mention here. First, there was Wesley's verification of Peter Bohler's innovative (for Wesley) doctrine of justifying faith by finding its
manifest affirmation and exposition in the *Homilies* of the Church of England.

The second is Wesley's constant indictment, especially in the earlier years of the Revival, of contemporary churchmen of rank for both open and silent departures from the doctrine of the church—on one occasion of eminent persons by name in public address.

Or, to "a serious clergyman of the Church of England," who inquired of Wesley on what points he differed from other clergy of the Church, Wesley answered: "In none from that part of the clergy who adhere to the doctrines of the Church; but from that part of the Clergy who dissent from the Church, (though they own it not) I differ in the points following.

The list includes four or five basic doctrines declared in both the *Homilies* and *Articles*. To be noted especially in this regard are *The Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, together with Wesley's letters, private and public, exemplary sources for such critique in which the norms for Wesley are repeatedly asserted to be the *Homilies* and *Articles* of the Church of England. Yet we shall see that creedal declarations are not, in and of themselves, enough to certify "living" and "saving faith."

Never, perhaps, has the leadership of an emerging branch of Protestant Christianity, in ecclesial expression, more truly relied upon its hymnal to teach doctrine and so to inculcate its salient doctrinal norms.

But, thirdly, there is no way to attribute doctrinal indifference to John Wesley and to acknowledge, at the same time, his formidable provision for normative doctrine in the United Societies onward from the *General Rules* of 1743; the *Minutes of Several Conversations* of 1744-1789; the *Model Deed* prescribing Wesley's *Sermons*, and *Notes on the New Testament*, as standards for preachers assigned to Wesleyan chapels in Britain; the constituting Conferences of American Methodism beginning in 1773 and 1784, together with the doctrinal substance—including the liturgy an sacraments—of the *Sunday Service* delivered by
Thomas Coke at the Christmas Conference, with the accompanying Twenty-four Articles of Religion abridged from the Thirty-Nine of the Church of England. It would be tedious to elaborate save to state the obvious, namely, that Wesley's Standard Sermons were to represent doctrinal norms in American Methodism for at least a century following upon either the Christmas Conference or the Deed of Declaration for British Methodism, after 1784. Nor have the Sermons, as a compendium of Wesleyan doctrine, ever been officially disallowed or superseded as "doctrinal standards" in British or in American Methodism; they have been only, first, neglected and, then, quite forgotten.

In the fourth place the Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists (1780) was rather conspicuously declared by Wesley in the preface to be "a little body of experimental and practical divinity." The same may be said of most of the published hymnals of the Wesleys from 1739 onwards, as the prefaces declare. Especially is this true of the poorly known Hymns on the Lord's Supper of 1745, long recognized as a body of sacramental theology.

Never, perhaps, has the leadership of an emerging branch of Protestant Christianity, in ecclesial expression, more truly relied upon its hymnal to teach doctrine and so to inculcate its salient doctrinal norms. With not a little justification it may be said that the Wesleys, as reformers, supplied their following, and in an unprecedented measure, with the means to sing the Creed. Moreover, it has perhaps been the continuing usage of that hymnody and the liturgy of historic Methodism, deriving from the 18th century, that together has supplied and preserved what does in fact survive of the experimental and practical divinity of the originative era, along with its doctrinal impulse. It now remains our business, if possible, to identify the differentiae of that doctrinal impulse and understanding as it contrasts with ever-recurrent "orthodoxy," or "true opinion," in religion. This, as we have seen, Wesley viewed as all but superfluous.
On the evidences presented, which are but fragments of the whole story, it plainly cannot be doctrinal standards, as such, that Wesley discounts as insignificant. Rather, one should look for some basic difference of nature as between what the Wesleys understand by normative doctrine and something else named "opinions" in religion, or that claims the name and parades as "orthodoxy" on surreptitious grounds, in the view of the Wesleys. Also, if we are alert, we may surmise that the Wesleys have in mind a profound difference between "living faith" and belief, that is, espoused or inherited beliefs that are not rooted in immediate personal experience.

In sum, we may surmise, if we know the Wesleys, that, for them, authentic doctrinal standards are possessed of a grounding and status that espoused "opinions" in religion do not have, however fervently entertained or adamantly defended.

In sum, we may surmise, if we know the Wesleys, that, for them, authentic doctrinal standards are possessed of a grounding and status that espoused "opinions" in religion do not have, however fervently entertained or adamantly defended.

From much observation, but also from buffeting and even bitter personal experience, the Wesleys—and both of them by much the same route—had come to understand that orthodoxy, ever protesting its verity, may exist, not for intrinsic but only for extrinsic reasons. They actually came to perceive that piety, even their own, may be—as might be said today—"a very mixed bag"; and that in progressing from the mere form of religion to the power of it, or holiness of life, no substitute for the gifting grace of God in justification by faith avails for salvation. And the Wesleys had come to acknowledge by 1738 no other cogent foundation for Christian doctrine. Here is the crux of the matter.

"The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his
opinions of any sort.” That is the shocking sentence! The rest of the essay states and describes the truly distinguishing marks. In most respects, the essay is a sum of Wesleyan doctrine in the uncommon form of a portrait of the Christian life, not fully attained, but “on the way to perfection.” If the above sentence does not commend doctrinal indifference for the Methodist, as it does not, it nevertheless does say with near-unparalleled emphasis, on the part of the most scholarly popular evangelist Christianity has known, that “true opinions” in religion (by which Wesley regularly means the Christian religion) are not constitutive of it, or, if in any degree, then quite secondarily.

Yet, in all of his professional life, Wesley was as much or more a defender of the Articles, the Homilies, and the liturgy, i.e., the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as any clergyman of the 18th century.

Yet, in all of his professional life, Wesley was as much or more a defender of the Articles, the Homilies, and the liturgy, i.e., the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as any clergyman of the 18th century. It was a near-constant presupposition of his endeavor. And the paradox grows tighter in that there is no question but that Wesley himself became such a Christian as that he could scarcely evade being “orthodox”—unless “orthodoxy” is the wrong way either to describe or to understand the living faith of a real Christian. Let us move on to that consideration, for there is no way to ease the paradox without the help of “experimental divinity” as Wesley knew it.

DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS: THROUGH EXPERIENCE ONLY

For the Wesleys, authentic doctrinal standards are so understood because they possess a grounding and, therefore, an authority that “orthodoxy,” or “true opinions” in religion,
have failed to acquire. With orthodoxy the import or meaning of true opinions has not become truth for me as a believer; its truth remains secondhand. In short, what is deficient in every orthodoxy is the personal experience of justifying faith and “working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” And Wesley’s quarrel with the Church of England was not with its long-authorized doctrine but with its defect of discipline for its implementation or nurture, from top to bottom. The church was without discipline capable of or disposed to nurturing and inducing the appropriation of living and saving faith in believers, as Cranmer’s Homilies understood such faith.

The Wesleyan dissent from “orthodoxy,” although more emphatic, is continuous with the Reformation dissent, particularly that of the Lutheran wing. It is dissent, that is, from the predominant conception of faith in late medieval Catholicism. Faith had become very much and merely assent to what was taught by the Holy Church and required of individuals to believe for their salvation. Salvation and submission to ecclesial authority, ultimately to that of the Papacy, were virtually indistinguishable. The Lutheran reformers, in promulgating justification by grace through faith, were obliged, therefore, to redefine and restate the meaning of faith. Nowhere in the early Reformation under Luther was this more ably and earnestly done than by Philipp Melanchthon in his Loci Communes Theologici (1521). The core of his treatment is found in the Locus entitled Justification and Faith, and there Melanchthon has this to say:

You will see that the gospel is sprinkled throughout the whole of Scripture in a remarkable way; and the gospel is simply the preaching of grace or the forgiveness of sins through Christ. . . . He who hears the threats [of damnation] and acknowledges the history [of redemption through Christ] does not yet believe every word of God; but he does who, in addition to . . . the history, believes also the [gracious] promises. It [salvation] is not merely a matter of believing the history about Christ; that is what the godless do. What matters is to believe why he took on flesh, why he was crucified, . . . that he might justify as many as would believe on him. If you believe that these things have been done for your good and for the sake of saving you, you have a blessed belief. Aside from faith of this kind, whatever they [the Papists] call “faith” is deceit, lying, and false madness. . . .

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What, therefore, is faith? . . . this cannot take place unless the Spirit of God renews and illuminates our hearts. . . . Accordingly, faith is nothing else than trust in the divine mercy promised in Christ . . .

Salvation is "not a matter of believing the history about Christ; this the godless do." Rather, it is trust in Christ as my saviour; and just this is what Wesley found reiterated in the third part of the Homily on Salvation in the Book of Homilies:

For the right and true Christian faith is, not only to believe that holy Scripture, and all the foresaid articles of our faith are true; but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises, . . . whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.

Then, as with Melanchthon, it is allowed:

And this true Christian faith neither any devil hath, not yet any man, which in the outward profession of his mouth, and in his outward receiving of the sacraments, in coming to church, and in all other outward appearances, seemeth to be a Christian man, and yet in his living and deeds showeth the contrary.

The reference to a devil as "believer" takes as its scriptural source, for both Melanchthon and Thomas Cranmer (author of this and other Homilies), the Epistle of James (2:19). The reference underscores for both reformers the qualitative difference between a person possessing saving faith, who relies upon God's forgiveness of a truly penitent heart through Christ, on the one hand, and a "godless" person, or devil, on the other, who affirms a divine event but either declines for himself or herself both its relevance or its benefit by way of penitence to sin, or proves faithless by not bringing forth the fruits of faith—"for by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16).

In this what is not to be missed is both Melanchthon's and Cranmer's effort to redefine faith, or to define the faith that saves, in differentiation from belief. The latter is simply consent to matters of fact (e.g., by Satan) or alleged fact (e.g., by persons who assent to what the church declares to be the case). As Melanchthon states the point, godless belief is "merely a matter of believing the history about Christ." It is not acknowledging Christ as my personal redeemer. Being indifferent to this meaning of
Jesus Christ for me, it is, however paradoxically, faithless “belief.”

And so widespread was this distinction in 16th-century Protestantism that it is not at all surprising to find that Richard Hooker, usually regarded as the father of Anglican theology, should declare:

Therefore the first thing required of him which standeth for admission to Christ's family is belief. Which belief consisteth not so much in knowledge as in acknowledgment of all things that heavenly wisdom revealeth; the affection of faith is above her reach, her love to Godward above the comprehension which she hath of God.⁹

With these testimonies in hand, what do we find on turning to John Wesley? Let us quote from An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion. Of the famous Council of Trent on the nature of saving faith Wesley declares: “They have decreed: 'If any man hold (fiducium) trust, confidence, or assurance of pardon, to be essential to faith, let him be accursed.'” And he continues:

Thus does the Council [Trent] anathematize the Church of England; for she is convicted hereof by her own confession... in the Homily on Salvation are [the words]: “Even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin; that he wrought all kind of miracles... that for our sakes he suffered... to redeem us from death everlasting. These articles of our faith the devils believe; and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet, for all this faith, they be but devils,... lacking the very true, Christian faith.”¹⁰

Plainly, then, and in the succession of the Reformers, there is under Roman auspices, in Wesley's view, a “faith” which is not “saving faith” and which the Council of Trent actually justifies as orthodoxy. It is merely a judgment of fact on the part either of a “devil” or a “believer,” and so a true doxa or opinion. In Wesley's view, it is not saving, for, as with devils, the fact can inspire further rebellion. In the case of Catholic believers, there is assent to a saving history, but not penitence unto acceptance of God's acceptance in Christ, or justifying faith. But, to clinch the point of the anathema of Trent upon the Church of England, Wesley further quotes the Homily on Salvation, regarding the faith that saves:

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The right and true Christian faith is not only to believe the Holy Scriptures, and the articles of our faith, are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation through Christ. . . . Or, [as it is expressed a little after] a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.  

The words in italics, here quoted by Wesley, had been often recurrent in his written and spoken word since, according to his Journal for the dateline April 22, 1738, Wesley met with Peter Bohler once more and could freely report:

I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith, namely, that it is (to use the words of our Church) "a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ has sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." Neither could I deny either the happiness or holiness which he described, as fruits of this faith.

Here, of course, are the two pivotal doctrines of Wesley's experimental and practical divinity: justification by faith and, consequentially, holiness of life, or sanctification, and in that order only. Furthermore, it is in the nature of "right and true Christian faith" that believers be possessed of this happy and holy assurance. It is a gracious gift of God's Holy Spirit and attended by transformation of mind and life. It is this experience which differentiates "saving faith" from "true opinions" or "orthodoxy" in belief; for the latter without the former have, perhaps, foundation with men, but are not known to be of God. Wesley's concurrence with Bohler on this "nature of faith"—a nature he had hitherto quite overlooked—he had found corroborated by the Homily on Salvation in the Edwardian Book of 1547. On this foundation stone he was to ground all other doctrinal standards henceforth. And its corollary in doctrine Wesley expounds: "Hear St. Paul clearly describing the nature of his faith, 'The life I now live, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.'" Such faith issues in a transformation of life by way of new birth, a new creation that is going on to perfection.

By way of summary, we may say that Wesley's disallowance of "opinions" as substitutes for "saving faith" derives, first,
from his sharing fully with the 16th-century Reformers their critique of a view of "faith" that reduces it to obedient assent to doctrinal affirmations on the authority of a church, which has the sentence of salvation or damnation at its disposal, and without appeal. This breeds "orthodoxy" for extrinsic, not intrinsic reasons. The intrinsic reason for a "right and true Christian faith" is God's gift of justifying grace through faith, as the Apostle Paul had discovered.

But the second reason for Wesley's dismissal of orthodoxy, although fully related to the first, is profoundly autobiographical. This is to say, saving faith had come to mean for Wesley (and, by his own admission, through a long ordeal of pharisaism) what also was the crux of the dissent of both Melanchthon and Cranmer: it was that saving faith conformed to God's way of redemption through the grace of the Redeemer in justification by grace through faith.¹⁴

What happened in the experience of John Wesley at "about a quarter before nine" was, it appears, very much a recapitulation in his own experience of the lines on saving faith and forgiveness of sins in Part III of the Homily on Salvation: "a sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins be forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God."

On justification, we have Wesley's personal testimony to saving grace in his Journal and, particularly, in the climax of his momentous exchange with Peter Bohler in May of 1738. Wesley reported that since he remained under the "law still, and not grace," he must needs abandon his search "to establish his own righteousness." Moreover, his faith still had God for its object and was, he now admitted, "not faith in and through Christ." Forgiveness of sins, as a present assurance, he knew not, nor had he known it hitherto, as an option of "saving faith." Thus Wesley relates that he was driven to renounce "all dependence upon my own works" and to resort "to the constant use of all
other means of Grace, continual prayer for this very thing, viz., justifying faith." This Bohler emphatically witnessed, and Wesley found it confirmed in the Homilies, namely, a "justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in him, as my sole justification, sanctification and redemption."^5

At this juncture it is fitting to compare the Journal for Saturday, April 22, with the consummation in Wesley’s account of his experience May 24, 1738, at Aldersgate Street, where "one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans." What happened in the experience of John Wesley at "about a quarter before nine" was, it appears, very much a recapitulation in his own experience of the lines on saving faith and forgiveness of sins in Part III of the Homily on Salvation: "a sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins be forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God."^6 And I judge that if there is one foundation stone of Wesleyan "experimental and practical divinity," it has its manifest instance in this recapitulation of precisely that doctrinal statement from the Book of Homilies of the Church of England that was all but forgotten in the Church of Wesley’s day and earlier.

With Wesley it came to life in firsthand immediate experience; and the same thing had overtaken Charles a little before. It was understood by them as "a blessed work of the Holy Spirit."^7 On the matter of this justifying faith, let us attend Wesley, once again, in his 1749 Letter to The Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton, Occasioned by His Late "Free Inquiry"—the latter a volume of three hundred and seventy-three quarto pages.^8 This Wesley "took apart" with such devastating logic, in addition to massive use of the early Church Fathers, (in the space of twenty days to publication) that few Deists among the English clergy of the Age of Reason would have cared to earn such public demolition and disclosure.

Wesley’s censure was accomplished without resort to charges, however warranted, of either deceit or heresy, while at the end, in division 6, he earnestly invites the adversary to reconsider the saving truth of the Christian religion. This he does in a series of propositions with commentary that may come close
to being the most helpful insight Wesley has left us into his theological method and the relation between "experimental religion" and doctrinal standards.

On these matters, and in the first place, we are reminded by Wesley, in section 2 of division 6, that "genuine Christianity" is "a principle in the Soul" and that, as such, it manifests itself in the kind of "character" described in Wesley's section 1 preceding, and indeed with which we are already well acquainted by way of Wesley's somewhat perplexing but important essay, The Character of a Methodist (1742). This "character" is sketched, says Wesley, in the Hebrew Scriptures and fully manifested in the New Testament. In the latter, what are described in Christ's Sermon on the Mount as norms, are also commandments. But they are "commandments-with-promise," but only through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is, moreover, a "promise," the enablement of which is supplied only by justifying faith and as God's gift. Of this point we have learned not to be surprised, however out-of-mind the work of the Holy Spirit had become in the prevailing Caroline Divinity, and for more than a century. Nor had it improved to speak of at mid-18th century for Wesley.

But what is the nature of this faith, we ask once more, by which the commandments-with-promise may find fulfillment? Says Wesley: "But what is faith? Not an opinion, no more than it is a form of words; not any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true" (Letter to Middleton, p. 73).

Then, with allusion to a well-known appurtenance of Catholic piety, Wesley continues:

A string of opinions is no more Christian faith, than a string of beads is Christian holiness. It is not an assent to any opinion, or any number of opinions. A man may assent to three, or three-and-twenty creeds: He may assent to all the Old and New Testament (at least as far as he understands them) and yet have no Christian faith at all. (Letter to Middleton, p. 73)

The paradox was here, again, being stated by Wesley with shocking clarity! And now, at last, we are about to be informed upon the root difference between orthodoxy—true opinions in any number—and saving Christian faith.
Says Wesley:

The faith by which the promise is attained is represented by Christianity, as a power wrought by the Almighty in an immortal spirit, inhabiting a house of clay, to see through that veil into the world of spirits, into things invisible and eternal; a power to discern those things which, with eyes of flesh and blood, no man hath seen or can see; . . .

This is Christian faith in the general notion of it. (Letter to Middleton, p. 73)

On such a premise, it is not hard to understand that Wesley, in the Earnest Appeal, which was addressed mainly against rationalism in the Church of England and its clergy, should press the question at issue: “Do we leave [i.e., abandon] the fundamental doctrine of the Church, namely, salvation by faith?” Having confronted the detractors among the clergy with the plain evidence of the Homilies, the Articles, and the liturgy of the church, Wesley confronts the lay unbelievers:

Let every reasonable man now judge for himself, what is the sense of our Church as to the nature of saving faith. Does it not abundantly appear that the Church of England supposes every particular believer to have a sure confidence that his sins are forgiven, and he himself reconciled to God?

Nor is there the slightest question that, in his appeal to the Homilies, Articles, and The Book of Common Prayer, that Wesley in The Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion all but silenced the censures of churchmen who, in attacking the Wesleys, were proved to be either in ignorance of or departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.

Be these things as they may, the matter for our most strict attention is fivefold: It is, first of all, that the experience of justification by grace through faith is, by the standard of both Scripture and doctrine of the Church, inaugural for every Christian life that claims the name. Second, that this is attended by assurance of sins forgiven and acceptance by or “reconciliation” with God, through Jesus Christ as Lord. Third, that precisely this is new life or transformation of human existence after the manner of Christ and as vocation. Fourth, that this
status in its entirety is the meaning of "saving faith," that is, fides qua creditur, the faith by which we, in fact, believe what is held to be Christian doctrine. And fifth that, in the absence of this foundation, "true opinions" or "orthodoxy" in religion are, though perhaps better than nothing, not saving faith and often are deterrent substitutes for it, even excuses for its avoidance. On such grounds nothing can be plainer as to the foundation, for the Wesleys and early Methodism, for what is understood by "experimental and practical divinity." Wesley can address his contemporaries in the clergy:

Do some of you ask, "But dost thou acknowledge the inward principle?"
I do, my friends: And I would to God every one of you acknowledged it as much. I say, all religion is either empty show, or perfection by inspiration; . . . Dost thou experience this principle in thyself? What saith thy heart? . . . Art thou acquainted with the "leading of his Spirit," not by notion only, but by living experience? (Farther Appeal, p. 188)

ORTHODOXY DISMISSED: FINDINGS IN SUMMARY

We conclude that when Wesley rigorously holds that true opinions, or assent to true Christian doctrine, does not make a Christian, he is far from discounting Christian truth or doctrines as such. On the contrary, Wesley is saying several things all related one to another: (1) Wesley is saying that orthodoxy so-called is defective in the measure that the truth of "Christian doctrine" has not come to life, as a new way of being in relation first to God and, then, to one's fellows. (2) He is saying that the only God-given way Christian truth may and does come to life in this fashion is through justifying faith, as the Apostle Paul taught. This entails a work of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, the "new birth" or renovation of life, and "renewal of our souls after the image of God" (Farther Appeal, pp. 46-69). (3) Thirdly, Wesley is also saying that as justification is the unexceptionable gateway to human salvation, so also its "condition" is holiness of life. Of the latter he teaches: "That at what time soever faith is given, holiness commences in the soul." This is the vocation of "Christian perfection" incumbent upon all real Christians. It
will show forth its fruits in "the Character of a Methodist" or of a "true Christian"—its equivalent of whatever denomination.

Wesley concurs that it is "the Spirit of adoption" that works faith in the Christian believer, saying: "And therefore every man [or woman], in order to believe unto salvation, must receive the Holy Ghost."

(4) Wesley, furthermore, is saying that "saving faith," as indicated represents, thereby, a change of life, not merely of mind or opinion from untrue, or defective, to true judgments. In this, as already noted, he follows a line of emphasis common to Philipp Melanchthon and Thomas Cranmer, as in the latter's homilies on salvation and on faith. And Wesley is not unaware of the same stress in the writings of Richard Hooker, who speaks thus:

Devils know the same things which we believe, and the minds of the most ungodly may be fully persuaded of the truth; which knowledge in the one [devils] and persuasion in the other [the ungodly], is sometimes called faith, but equivocally, being indeed no such faith as that whereby a Christian man is justified.

What is the difference, then, between these judgments of demons or of the ungodly, and what is rightly called faith? Hooker's answer concerning justifying or saving faith, however quaintly stated, is also Wesley's two centuries later: "It is the Spirit of adoption that worketh faith in us, in them not; the things which we believe, are by us apprehended, not only as true, but also as good, . . . as good, they are not by them apprehended; as true they are" (Hooker, p. 627; emphasis added). Wesley, of course, is on record for entire agreement with the two points of difference as between saving faith and true opinions, or orthodoxy here noted. Wesley concurs that it is "the Spirit of adoption" that works faith in the Christian believer, saying: "And therefore every man [or woman], in order to believe unto salvation, must receive the Holy Ghost." Since "opinions" are
the outcome of the natural exercise of discursive reason alone, neither Hooker nor Wesley find such judgments authorized by the Spirit of God; therefore they are not declarations of saving faith: "As the light of nature doth cause the mind to apprehend those truths which are merely rational; so . . . saving faith, which is far above the reach of human reason, cannot otherwise, than by the Spirit of the Almighty, be conceived." So speaks Hooker. Wesley takes an identical stand with greater specificity respecting content of saving faith:

Faith, in general, is a divine, supernatural elenchos of things not seen, not discoverable by our bodily sense, . . . Justifying faith implies, not only a divine elenchos [i.e., persuasion] that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me. And the moment a penitent sinner believes this, God pardons and absolves him. So we may ask: is not this viewpoint, which Wesley shares so fully with Richard Hooker, adequately indicative of the grounds upon which he distinguishes radically between "true opinions" in religion and saving faith? The former, quite on its own, is persuasion of the truth of judgments; the latter, "saving faith," presupposes the moving, renovative, and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. Says Hooker: "It is the Spirit of adoption that worketh faith in us, in them not, . . ." For Wesley, in the 18th century, the absence of efficacious working of the Spirit shows itself pervasively among nominal Christians in the "form without the power of godliness," in short, in religious pretense, indeed, even in Wesley's own acknowledged pharisaism. Such pretense may go on affirming the creeds, but has no grounding in a transformed life. It has not begun at the only divinely authorized beginning of "living faith," namely, justification by grace through faith, the fundamental doctrine of the Church.

NOTES

Wesley's lifetime till 1786. We noted that this essay, along with the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, was commended to all preachers by the American Conference Minutes of 1781 as sound doctrine for instruction. *The Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, Works, VIII, p. 249. First published at Bristol and Dublin in 1749, the substance of a letter to Rev. Mr. Perronet, 1748.


8. *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to Be Read in the Churches*, 1623 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1844.) *Sermon on Salvation*, Pt. iii, p. 26. Emphasis mine. The Oxford University Press recension of the final Royal Edition of James I in 1623. No regius edition was published thereafter, but the reasons for the virtual eclipse of the influence of the *Homilies* until recovered by Wesley in 1738 are an interesting but untold story of Caroline Divinity, quite missed by John Tulloch. Wesley extracts from the *Homilies*, *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works* (London: James Hutton, 1739), was, as Albert C. Outler correctly affirms, Wesley's earliest doctrinal manifesto after May 24, 1738, with, of course, justification by faith at focus. See *Journal*, I, Nov. 12, 1738, p. 164.


14. *An Earnest Appeal*, pp. 71, 29. “More especially, we call upon those who for many years saw our manner of life at Oxford. These well know that 'after the straitest sect of our religion we lived Pharisees'; and the grand objection to us for all those years was, being righteous overmuch. . . .” See also p. 880.


Inquiry Into the Miraculous Powers. Wesley shows that Middleton denies not only miraculous powers to the sub-apostolic Church, but to Christ and the Apostles, among others.

20. An Earnest Appeal, Works, VIII, 84, p. 35.
27. Earnest Appeal, p. 35.
Our lections are at the center of Mark’s Gospel. Mark 9:2 is almost exactly in the middle, having as many verses before it as after it. Everything up to this point has been concerned with Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Afterward he and the disciples move toward Jerusalem. Our first two lections (7:1-23; 7:31-37) come from the Galilean section, the third is at the turning point (8:27-38), and the final two come from the journey to Jerusalem (9:30-37; 9:38-50).

Interpretation is something like fishing. Last summer our family fished on the banks of the Trinity River in northern California. My wife, Gaynl, fished above the bridge, where only fly-fishing with barbless hooks was allowed. My daughter, Sheena, and I fished below the bridge for salmon. Our equipment was too light, and the good positions were all occupied. Gaynl caught several trout in short order; but Sheena and I came away empty.

The preacher, quite rightly, is looking for something that “preaches.” By this is meant some point that makes contact with
our congregation. After some experience in finding that contact point, our temptation is to run to what preaches too quickly. At first reading we grasp what strikes us—which over time becomes the “tried and true,” the over-sentimentalized, the hackneyed. Or we may settle for fish others have caught, canned and pre-packaged. Harder, but ultimately most rewarding, is to work through a text with a good exegete, even though like fishermen we have to stand out in the hot sun, and learn to use unfamiliar equipment.

The different exegetical methods are like fishing tackle: what you use determines what you will catch. The best exegesis respects the integrity of the text, letting it “speak” for itself. But it will speak different words depending on the exegetical method chosen. Each different word will be a legitimate aspect of the Word.

**REDACTION CRITICISM**

So we pick up the equipment of redaction criticism—Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark* (Fortress Pr., 1974)—and cast into the river. The equipment is designed to catch the theology and point of view of the one who wrote the Gospel. We are not fishing here for the historical Jesus and what he actually said. Rather we will catch preaching points made by Mark as he describes Jesus and his teaching several decades after Jesus’ death. Mark preaches to the needs of his own people out of the Jesus tradition.

Kelber connects this Gospel directly with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. He rejects the older theory that it was written prior to 70 and in Rome. Internal evidence seems convincing that for Mark the locus of the Kingdom of God is in Galilee, and that Christian survivors of the Jerusalem “holocaust” needed a radical reorientation. They needed, in short, “Good News,” and that Mark promises in the first verse.

Our first two texts are near the middle of a section of the Gospel delimited as 4:35-8:21. Jesus leads his disciples back and forth across Galilee at a frantic pace, seeming to make a point by
touching many bases. Galilee, especially as delineated in this Gospel, was ethnically and geographically diverse. Voyages to different sides of the lake apparently symbolize that the Kingdom is announced to both Jews and Gentiles.

Drawing from Paul Achtemeier, Kelber identifies two cycles of miracle stories in these chapters. Each cycle consists of five stories, in this order: a sea miracle, three healing miracles, and a feeding miracle. The first cycle is the stilling of the storm (4:35-41); the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), raising of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (5:21-43); and the feeding of the five thousand (6:35-44). These healings are of a man and two women. The five thousand who are fed are Jewish.

The second cycle is the Walking on the Water (6:47-52); the man healed by touching the hem of Jesus' garment (6:53-56), the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter (7:24-30), and healing the deaf-mute (7:31-37); and the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10). In contrast to the first cycle, two women are involved in healing, and a man. Now the four thousand who are fed are Gentiles.

This nice balancing of the miracle cycles tells us that Mark sees the Kingdom as all embracing, including both Jews and Gentiles, male and female, "all Galilee"; and that it is free from the Jerusalem authority.

1. Mark 7:1-23. Jesus' openness to Gentiles has attracted the attention of Jerusalem. The ostensible issue is that of ritual uncleanness, which Jesus replaces with inward purity. Jesus' argument, however, is fully consistent with the prophets, and one the Pharisees would readily understand. What is really at stake is the "Gentile issue." Gentiles are the contaminating influence that necessitates ritual cleansing. It is the ethnic and racial exclusiveness of Jerusalem (read the Church at Jerusalem) that is being challenged here. So it is notable that following this encounter Jesus immediately travels to the Gentile North and cures the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman, underlining the rejection of ethnic exclusiveness.

The "obvious" point of this text, and the way it is usually preached, is the freedom from law espoused by Paul in Galatians. To Protestants, nothing could be more evident. But
when you see it from the point of view of Mark, the more incisive point (for our own day as well) relates to the inclusivity of our fellowship, how faithfully we reflect the multi-cultural nature of the Kingdom. A sermon on this text ought to reflect on our own “kosher-ness.” For instance, a woman from the majority culture in an inner-city Los Angeles parish declared: “People of other races are welcome here so long as they do things our way!”

2. Mark 7:31-37. Now we notice that this lection has a place in the second cycle of miracles. These miracle cycles were part of a theological tradition of “superman” Christology, which Mark did not find adequate as an understanding of Christ in the wake of the Jerusalem holocaust. The Christology of the disciples in Mark’s Gospel understands Jesus as an epiphany of God who intervenes in human affairs to work miracles. In contrast, Mark is presenting an understanding of Christ that is not triumphalist, but a Christ who is self-emptying, humble, servant of all, who must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day.

Mark uses the miracle cycles but sees in them a different point, even a different theology, than the disciples in this Gospel. Here Mark’s own hermeneutic is exposed, if you will. There was no help in the superman understanding of Jesus to reorient the Christian’s faith after the destruction of Jerusalem. A miracle-working Christ would have never allowed the destruction of the Temple and the Holy City, bound up as they were with the prophecies of God’s kingdom, with all the hopes of Hebrew history. It was the inadequacy of that theology of ethnic exclusiveness and triumphalism that drove Mark to write this “good news.” The belief in a superman messiah after the fall of Jerusalem could be only bad news—either it had never been true, or God had rejected God’s people.

In light of this, the key verse in this text is verse 31. It describes a convoluted journey, like going to San Francisco from Los Angeles by way of San Diego. But Mark is describing the same topography here at the end of the section that he described at the first (3:7-12); the various Gentile towns that have heard the announcement of the Kingdom. It is the Gentile-ness of the
deaf-mute he stresses. Jesus uses his healing power to incorporate Gentiles into the Kingdom.

This can be preached as a missionary text. In approaching those outside the covenant Jesus did not begin with the necessity of circumcision, nor with demand for obedience of the law, nor even with a confession of faith on his part. All that was necessary was that the deaf-mute’s need match Jesus’ ability and power. The idea of a superman Jesus is given a Markan twist! The servant Jesus who will suffer and die for others is made to stand out from within the image of the all-sufficient healer. And Mark gives it a touch of irony—“He has done all things well”!

This could be the basis of a sermon about AIDS. It could deal with the sorry history of our “Christian” relationship with the Jews. It could rehearse the shameful story of Christians and Native Americans in the United States and where we could begin anew. And so forth, from where you stand.

The next three lections are in a section delimited by 8:22-10:52. The theme of this section is “the way” (en te hodo). This is mentioned at the beginning, at the end, and four times in between. The section is subdivided into three passion-resurrection predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), each placed in its own geographical position moving from North to South. Three other place names scattered through the section keep the narrative on “the way.” The section is bracketed by two healings of the blind, surely to alert us to be “on the look out.”

Kelber believes that the Transfiguration (9:2-13) is the true center of the whole Gospel, revealing not a proleptic, anticipatory resurrection epiphany but a vision of the eschatological final victory of Jesus. It is included for the reader who stands after the resurrection, but before the End. His full discussion is worth study. But since that is not one of our lections (coming instead at Lent 2), we have only to note that Kelber insists that this eschatological vision, not Peter’s “confession,” is the center.

3. Mark 8:27-38. So we turn to Peter’s “confrontation,” as Kelber prefers to describe it. Since these verses come at the
beginning of the trip, Kelber gives this lection the ironic title, "Losing the Way." The disciples throughout this Gospel are depicted as afraid, lacking understanding, antipathetic to Jesus' real purpose. Peter, their spokesman, simply opts for the wrong Christology. And when Jesus defines what sort of Son of Man he must be, Peter dares to correct him and "rebuke" him.

The superman theology described above, subscribed to by the disciples—and evidently the theology of the ill-fated Jerusalem church—remains today the more popular understanding of Jesus, especially in the Christianity one most often encounters on television.

Not too long ago the 700 Club had a discussion of the New Age philosophies, and the satanic dangers thereof. In interviews and dramatic recreations they quite accurately pegged those self-actualization movements as basically self-centered rather than God-centered. Then Ben Kinchloe, the amiable host of the show, left the listeners with what he suggested would be a fail-safe test of whether people using the New Age jargon are actually Christians or not. The test was Jesus' question from this text, and Peter's confession as the right answer—"Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ!"

But Mark believed that that answer was not enough. You must ask further, "Christ in what sense?" And as a matter of fact, the rest of the 700 Club hour was devoted to miraculous and astounding healings, with no mention of denying oneself, taking up one's cross, or losing life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.

The problem with triumphalist, superman theology is that it is not adequate in a real crisis. It works very well for normal, middle-class, unchallenged lives. But when there is incurable cancer, a life denied real opportunities, the endurance of an unjust arrangement, occupation by a foreign despot, persecution for righteousness' sake, or a nuclear holocaust—when life really touches bottom—then the good news is that there is a way to endure and even to prevail. It is to walk in the way of Jesus, trusting in God, even though you are on a cross. It is the faith Tillich described as "in spite of."
Note how the redactionist critic makes the text yield a different point. More traditionally the preacher lets the text, even a sentence within the text, challenge our understanding of life on more or less its face value. In that style the answer of Peter, “You are the Christ,” is a challenging confession of faith. But when we put ourselves in Mark’s position, and see Peter’s confession in the light of the whole lection, section and Gospel, the verse yields a quite different point.

To preach Mark’s message in this text, using Peter as his foil, might well shock congregations used to the more traditional interpretation. One should first acknowledge what is right about Peter’s answer, what preachers have poured into that answer for hundreds of years. But the redaction critic will help us minister to our people at an even deeper level of their need, to offer them a theology of the cross beyond “cheap grace.” Can we dare less than affirm that the final victory is at the end of history, that until then we live by faith, grateful for those flashes of “transfiguration” when for a moment the Kingdom is not secret but manifest for us to see?

4. Mark 9:30-37. The second prediction of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection follows the same pattern as the first. First there is the prediction; then the confusion, not only of Peter, but now of all the disciples; followed by another definition of servant discipleship. The challenge is to find a different angle in a text that says nearly the same thing as last Sunday.

One angle would be the irony that “on the way” (the very way to Jerusalem and the Cross, the self-emptying of Jesus) the disciples were discussing who of them was the greatest. How often do we get trapped in such discussions, in the church, on our way!

Jesus’ use of a child as the model of the Kingdom presents another whole set of sermon possibilities. It is important not to sentimentalize the child image. Material developed for the Year of the Child a few years ago by the World Council of Churches would be useful here, especially that by Hans-Reudi Weber.

Another angle is opened up by the stories surrounding this lection. As opposed to last week’s lections, in the present texts
the disciples have to admit their inability to cure an epileptic boy (9:14-29). And they complain of a man casting out demons in Jesus' name, but not "following us" (9:38-41). This opens the text in the direction of the small-mindedness of the disciples, the need for an ecumenical spirit and practice, and a rejection of the exclusiveness of triumphalism.

5. Mark 9:38-50. The real bite of this passage is in vv. 42-50. Mark apparently is calling for a kind of self-discipline, rigorous and thoroughgoing. The commitment to the Kingdom has to be tough-minded, because we are on the way to Jerusalem, and there "everyone will be salted with fire!" The familiar metaphor of the salt and saltiness is then invoked. This lection is a challenge to the comfortable and sentimentalized versions of the Gospel many of us embrace. Christians must be disciplined athletes of the Spirit, prepared in advance to endure suffering. Not a popular message. In such a text it is very important to look for the good news. Perhaps it is the knowledge that you are ready to face and prevail no matter what life brings, because you walk with Jesus. Or perhaps it is the recognition that only those who suffer really know the companionship of Jesus.

LITERARY CRITICISM

To adjust our method of logical perspective we must, so to speak, go to our tackle box and bring back another set of fishing gear. Literary criticism will catch different "fish." There will be some similarity because Werner Kelber also used some literary categories. But this time we will work our way through the texts with David Rhoades and Donald Michie as our guides (Mark As Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel; Fortress Pr., 1982).

The literary critic wants us to enter into the imaginative world presented in the text. "Mark's narrative contains a closed and self-sufficient world with its own integrity, its own imaginative past and future, its own sets of value, and its own universe of meanings." (Mark as Story, p. 4) The best way to understand is to suspend judgment and enter into that world with a certain
naivety. But it is a naivety armed with the tools of literary analysis. This story, like any other story, will yield its truth through rhetorical devices, settings, plot development, and characterization.

Our lections lead up to a story that Rhoades and Michie consider to be of central importance. Soon after Jesus comes into Jerusalem and cleanses the Temple, he tells a parable which is in effect Mark's version the entire Gospel story (12:1-12). A man plants a vineyard, lets it out to tenants, and goes to another country. When it is time for the harvest he sends servants to receive his due (establish God's Kingdom). The servants are beaten, treated shamefully, or killed. Finally he sends his son—"They will respect my son." But they kill him too. "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others!" This is Mark's Gospel story, beginning with the arrival of the son.

There are two stages in establishing God's rule. In the first stage God's rule is hidden and secret. God's agents, beginning with Jesus, are to remain weak and powerless, with only the ability to invite others to obey God, not to compel them. Jesus talks in riddles and gives no signs. He and his disciples have no credibility as God's agents because they are powerless and poor. They look like servants; they suffer and are crucified. However that will all change when the second stage begins (Parousia). Then the faithful will be vindicated and everything reversed. This event lies in the future, although it will happen in this generation.

1. *Mark* 7:1-23. The very presence of Jesus generates dramatic opposition—from the demonic forces and nature, from the authorities, even from Jesus' family and disciples. Seeing this text now through the conventions of story, the drama is heightened. Here are two great antagonists—Jesus and the authorities from Jerusalem.

The dramatic energy is increased first by the literary device of the two miracle cycles already described in the first discussion of this lection. There is a sense of "here we go again" at the beginning of the second cycle, and an intensifying of the
momentum. We are now in Gentile territory, and the Jerusalem authorities have confronted Jesus here for maximum effect.

Other literary devices are used to help us feel the conflict. The authorities use a confronting hostile question: "Why do your disciples not walk (not live, RSV) according to the tradition . . . ? And Mark puts irony in the question with the word "walk," usually linked with the "the Way." Jesus quotes back at them from the Pharisees' own favorite scripture—Isaiah, and exposes the way they dispense with the law when their avarice impels them (vv. 9-13).

Several techniques are used that pull the reader into Jesus' side of the struggle. A riddle is cited (v. 15) which makes the reader feel superior to the Pharisees and the disciples. Mark makes three explanatory asides (in parentheses in RSV) with the effect of taking the reader into his confidence.

All of this gives us clues for the style of our sermon. If the Gospel message is best conveyed by this kind of dramatic confrontation of antagonists, perhaps the sermon would best use the same genre. Thus the preacher might first build up the credibility of the authorities' side of the conflict. They are, after all, only defending God's law, and the Hebrew tradition—a tradition that has guarded Judaism down to the present day. They have no knowledge of Jesus' special mission, of his baptism or the voice from heaven. They only see that Jesus "assumes extensive legal authority for himself, interprets the law in ways they consider illegal, and disregards many religious customs" (Mark a Story, p. 80).

Jesus also is too clever in debate. He undermines their authority by quoting scripture against them. He gives evasive, cryptic answers. He tells riddles, for which only he knows the explanation. They feel ridiculed and discounted in front of the people.

The sermon, in other words, would draw the congregation onto the side of the Pharisees, not too hard to do by dynamic analogy with some imagination. The church, after all, has vested interest in the status quo just like the Temple.

The outline of the sermon would be: 1) The Pharisees are right!
2) but in their very rightness they are wrong! The latter part of the sermon would illustrate how human authority and institutions insulate us from God's Kingdom when it really appears. We have all made a thousand comfortable compromises in order to get along. When those compromises are challenged by an authentic life we become angry and defensive. Invite Jesus to come and stand before us; list our present practices for which we might be ashamed in his presence. The trick in using story is to let the drama make the point.

2. Mark 7:31-37. We are now in a position to see how the healing of the deaf-mute works dramatically. Gentile defilement is the issue of the whole second cycle of miracle stories. Jesus has made clear in our first lection that the purest of persons and institutions are also defiled. He then heals two distasteful types of persons: the daughter of a pagan and a woman; a man who is a pagan and is physically afflicted (as a result of someone's sin, according to popular Jewish belief). The region is also repugnant (defiled)—Decapolis. In other words Jesus throws these miracles into the faces of the Jerusalem authorities, who must be holding their noses all the way.

The challenge of preaching dramatically on this text is to find the dynamic analogy for defilement. Perhaps it would be that part of town and those people most distasteful to us. Then we could imagine doing the best that we could for them.

3. Mark 8:29-38. The key issue here related to the plot is that the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus compels the opposition of the disciples, as well as others. This is expressed consistently in their misreading of Jesus and his teaching. The dramatic pattern established in this text is that used in the other two passion-resurrection predictions: the prediction of Jesus' death-resurrection; the disciples' incomprehension; Jesus' teaching on discipleship. The reiteration of that pattern underscores the impregnable ignorance of the disciples (9:30-37; 10:32-45).

Notice also the dramatic setting and its irony. They are "on the way" (v. 27). They are moving toward Jerusalem, the place where Jesus and they will suffer and die, but they still think they are on the way to glory, riches and power.
This may be a text to contrast dramatically the disciples and Jesus, as we did the Jerusalem authorities and Jesus in 7:1-23. Rhoades and Michie describe the disciples' side of the conflict as "too much too fast" (p. 89). Perhaps they have been recruited without knowing the whole story. Like the authorities they knew nothing of Jesus' baptism and the voice from heaven, or Jesus' struggle with Satan in the desert. They readily left their nets and followed Jesus, and have tried to do what he expected. But they are constantly insulted and reprimanded by Jesus—for being afraid in the storms, for not understanding the riddles (although even the experts cannot figure them out), and for not seeing in advance Jesus' new interpretation of Messiahship. To their credit, they did leave everything to follow Jesus. And they naturally expect they might get some compensation for that some day. It is touching that, in spite of all the abuse, they at least stay with Jesus "on the way."

The basic problem is that their values are not those of Jesus. Perhaps the very difference is what attracts them to Jesus in the first place, but the attraction is intuitional and not very self-conscious at the beginning. Is it not true that all of us started "on the way" only vaguely understanding where it would all come out? We were well down the road before we knew how much trouble we were in. And even now most of us have resisted going all the way. Here again, the sermon needs to end on the "good news" in that. Perhaps it may be found in Mark's narrative tactic of leaving his Gospel "open-ended." At the end we still do not know if the disciples actually "made it." In spite of all our failures and willful ignorance up to this point of the journey, Jesus still patiently welcomes us and promises to stay with us "on the way."

4. *Mark* 9:30-37. We have already spoken of the prediction pattern, here repeated, a device adding dramatic force. The ostensible issue in this lection is power. Notice again the episodes before and after: the ineffectiveness of the disciples in 9:28-9, and their jealousy of someone who is effective in 9:38-41. And in between, we find Jesus' healing of a child—the very epitome of the powerless, the unskilled, and the vulnerable.
Using this framework of meaning, the ultimate ineffectiveness is to become a victim like Jesus, and to die on a cross.

Our society is one that worships technology, know-how, success. Suppose that more important than know-how and power is simplicity of life, trusting faithfulness, vulnerable love. Can you think of a dramatic way to contrast those in a sermon using contemporary issues?

5. *Mark* 9:38-50. In this whole section “on the way” (8:22-10:52) the real issue between Jesus and his disciples is the question of death. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for his death, and ultimately for their own in the service of the Kingdom. Drawing nearer to Jerusalem, with each episode the tension and stakes rise higher and higher with the suspense.

The suspense and tension along “the way” lures the reader to join in the journey, to push the disciples along, to want to follow Jesus for ourselves. “By facing death vicariously through the story, the implied reader is purged of some of the fear of death and is therefore better prepared to be faithful as Jesus was” (*Mark a Story*, p. 140).

Since the passage has the style of listing what people might give up for the Kingdom (particularly impediments to full devotion), perhaps this would be the place for a sermon that would lift up persons in your congregation, or town, or from elsewhere but generally known, who have made sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom. Using this dramatic device, keep the examples homely and within reach of most us. Super heroes or heroines may serve only to discourage and not inspire. Again, emphasize the “good news” in the very sacrifices. Such role models may help us contemplate what sacrifices we are ready to make, how far down “the way” we are ready to go at this point in our lives.

**SOCIOCOLOGICAL CRITICISM**

Once more we take up rod and reel to see if there are other fish in these texts from which we have not yet had a nibble. Sociological exegetical method applies the analytical techniques...

The social reality expressed in the Gospels that Brown uses as his measure of the first century Palestinian society is the imperial Roman control and presence. He analyzes both the “psychic state of alienation, and the beginnings of hope” under the imperial regime. He promises a sequel indicating how Jesus' life and message are a response to that. (I am not aware as of this writing whether it is available yet, so we will have to do some of that for ourselves.)

Brown describes the social differences between Galilee and Jerusalem. And since a sharp distinction is made between these places in the Gospel of Mark, we need to understand those social differences.

In Jesus' time Galilee was ruled by a “Jewish” Roman puppet, Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great. There was no Roman military in Galilee because Antipas took care of matters for Cesar.

Villages were grouped into counties called “toparchies”. The term is used in Mark 6:11. Evidently that was the administrative unit used by the Herodians to impose their rule and taxes. The villages, on the other hand, were essentially theocratic with judicial authority in the synagogues. The Temple authorities in Jerusalem were ultimately in control through lay Pharisees, who had the real power in the villages, and who collected a second religious tax. Rome and Herod acceded to this because they had ultimate control through the Temple and the Pharisees.

Thus Galilee was something of a sanctuary from raw Roman power. Resistance groups flourished there and were less
vulnerable. Life was at a subsistence level for people, who were for the most part tenant farmers. But because it was a productive agricultural area people found enough to eat and survived. The first beggars the disciples encounter are in Jericho (Mark 10:46-52).

Jerusalem and Judea, on the other hand, were under direct Roman rule. They were ruled by a Roman procurator, himself subject to the governor of Syria. There were Roman garrisons in the city and surrounding territory. Tax collectors worked directly for Rome, and there were religious taxes too. The Temple council (the Sanhedrin), had quasi-judicial authority in some matters, but only at the behest of the procurator. Its religious authority was recognized throughout Palestine.

There were much greater disparities between rich and poor in Judea, typical of an urban area. We already noted the presence of beggars. And the Jewish aristocracy, the Sadducees, was resident largely in Judea, owners of tenant farms elsewhere.

In the South the Roman oppression was much more naked. Also the presence of a *lingua franca* of Latin nouns and other words is very obvious from the Gospels and other records. Brown documents this in great detail, believing that this is one of the main evidences of imperial domination.

One can see immediately how the study of this kind of society will lend itself to liberation themes. Here is a society dominated and exploited by a foreign imperial military power, whose rule is reinforced by the legitimate and illegitimate representatives of the oppressed common people; a people who suffered daily reminders and indignities of their subject condition.

If you preach regularly to a people who are at the lower end of our society, or who suffer disabilities and indignities because of their ethnic background, they will readily notice these social realities in our texts. Let’s cast out one more time into them.

1. *Mark 7:1-23*. When we looked at this lection before, we noted that the Pharisees and scribes had come from Jerusalem. Now that takes on even more weight. These are not just Jerusalem religious authorities but, indirectly, representatives
of Rome. This is especially ironic since they present themselves as being concerned about these Galileans being defiled from contact with Gentiles—they who are Gentile Rome's collaborators. Galilee is suspect; Galileans don't observe the laws and customs. Nothing is more subversive to imperial control than eccentrics. It starts with not observing ritual cleanliness. Pretty soon there will be defiance of Roman rule. So when Jesus challenges these Pharisees, he is risking being accused of blasphemy and treason at the same time—exactly the charges made against him later.

This passage also exposes the dishonest way taxes were administered. Evidently persons could declare their wealth "Corban" and thereby have no responsibility for the care of their parents, since their wealth is thereby dedicated to the Temple. Then an inside deal can be made with Pharisee tax collector and what's left is your own.

The sermon suggested by this analysis would first spell out some of the ways our customs and laws are sometimes part of a system of domination—economic, racial/cultural, or sexist. Take the custom of showing deference to women—such as opening doors for them. Does that perpetuate a stereotype about the "weakness" of women? Should we open the door for a person, not because she is a woman, but because we show such politeness to all our companions, men and women? The latter part of the sermon could come as Jesus does (v. 21) to the real issues of human relationships that cut through motives of domination.

2. Mark 7:31-37. With the healing of the deaf-mute we come to one of Brown's most insightful observations. There are several direct consequences for human individuals of an oppressive system. There is direct physical suffering: the result of physical abuse and warfare, poverty and malnutrition, and so forth. But a more subtle consequence is the increase of psychosomatic diseases, psychosis, "demons." Brown makes a provocative point: Jesus' "announcement of the time of salvation, the Kingdom of God, precedes his healings, and that initially it is the suffering who seek him out and persuade him that he can heal
either themselves or their family” (“Techniques,” p. 367).

Any pastor working in a racial ghetto will readily recognize the reality of Brown’s observation. When persons are told often enough that they are worthless, the body cooperates to confirm that judgment with various disabilities. People even unconsciously walk into accidents that cripple and thereby fulfill society’s judgment.

In addition, we know much about environmental pollution and the diseases that issue therefrom. This is direct, physical suffering due to exploitive special interests or government policies. There is a rich field here for prophetic preaching, and for lifting up insights that may in fact be healing for many in your congregation.

3. Mark 8:27-38. In a sociological understanding of this crucial passage, we should remind ourselves that Galilee was a fountainhead of the Zealot movement, of insurrections and guerrilla warfare. Brown analyzes the names of the disciples:

Seven of the first thirteen apostles—two Simons, two Judases, two Ma(tta)thiases and John—were named by their fathers after the Maccabees. One Simon is said explicitly to be or have been a zealot (Luke 6:15). . . . The tendency of the Twelve is to take a violent course.” (“Techniques,” p. 369)

Jesus nicknames James and John, the sons of Zebedee, “sons of thunder” (3:17). And of course a sword was drawn in Gethsemane (14:47). Resistance was in the air in Galilee.

If you combine this sociological observation with Kelber’s theory that this Gospel is written after the fall of Jerusalem, after the complete failure of a violent, military solution, then Mark has helped the surviving Christians recall that Jesus’ way of resistance was non-violent and, though firm, redemptive toward human enemies. That comes out most clearly in the description of discipleship in the third passion-resurrection prediction (10:35-45), which is a discussion with the “sons of thunder.”

The sermon ought to pose the two opposite understandings of “Christ”—Peter’s and Jesus’. Spell both of them out as
convincingly and honestly as possible, and let your people make their choice.

4. *Mark 9:30-37.* One of the most persistent problems in a system of oppression is the cooperation of the oppressed in their oppression. Indeed, the oppressed often aspire to their oppressor’s style of life. Note the irony—“on the way,” the way of Jesus, they are discussing how to be part of the system of domination. They don’t want to end the system. They just want to make it work for their advantage. They want to be the dominators. Jesus indicates that the first and most important step for liberation is for the oppressed to adopt an entirely different mentality, to refuse to buy into the culture of oppression on any terms. A new consciousness is what Jesus wants for his disciples.

5. *Mark 9:38-50.* This lection now reflects a revolutionary situation in which one cannot be too “picky” about coalitions and allies. “He that is not against us is for us” (v. 40). It is enough that the people at least don’t work against you, or inform the authorities on you. At any rate, sooner or later “everyone will be salted with fire” (v. 49). Some believe that by remaining neutral they can endear themselves to the oppressors. But when the insurrection begins the authorities will suspect every Jew, no matter how ingratiating some have been. There is an atmosphere conveyed by this passage in which subversive bands appear and disappear, melt into the landscape, become indistinguishable in the wandering groups of migrant workers, and are grateful for any cup of water offered surreptitiously.

This could lead into a sermon on complacency. Most of us are trying to just “get along.” We are not too anxious to “rock the boat,” probably because we can’t see that swimming would be any better. Walter Muelder once observed: “God guarantees the instability of the wrong (unjust) solution.” Cooperation with unjust social conditions will ultimately be self-defeating. The only real security is to be part of God’s Kingdom.
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