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Foreword

After over 200 years of rationalism and the dominance of technology and bureaucracy, many are finding modern life shallow and meaningless. We are living in a time of widespread curiosity about religion and the supernatural. Unfortunately, modern interests cover everything from witchcraft and astrology to Eastern mysticism.

Nonetheless, this climate provides Christians with opportunities perhaps unmatched since the first centuries of the church. Many who were formerly hostile to religion are now willing to listen. These conversations are leading many Christians back to the Bible and the historic faith of the church for wisdom and insight; especially needed in the current American climate is a recovery of the biblical witness to the work of God's Spirit and its implications for a genuinely Christian understanding of religious experience.

These essays are presented to encourage Christian reflection on God's presence in the world and in the church, and to enable responsible Christian voices in the broader society.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

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The Spirit of God in the Old Testament

R. Mark Shipp

Few concepts in the Bible are as fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings as that of the Spirit of God. Just to mention the words "Spirit of God" conjures up mental images of the unusual, the numinous, or the paranormal. Over the past several generations the term "Spirit of God" has almost become equivalent to emotional experience in some church circles or to some form of paranormal religious experience in others. Some deny the present, active role of the Spirit in the world, as if the Spirit of God did His work in the past and then went on a long vacation. Generally lacking in these debates over the presence and function of the Spirit of God in the life of the Church is much discussion about what the presence of the Spirit is intended to produce in the life of the believer and the church.

While not as immediately relevant or obvious to this discussion as the New Testament texts, the Old Testament mentions the spirit, a spirit, or God's Spirit some 394 times. The irony is that there are few books and articles which treat this subject written in the latter half of this century in the English language. It is my conviction that a study of the Old Testament's view of the Spirit can help us clarify our understanding

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of his function and role in the New Testament, for it is on these Old Testament concepts that it builds.

"Spirit" in the Old Testament

We normally think of the word "spirit" as referring to a disembodied being, whether of the dead or divine beings such as angels. The word has as wide a range of meaning in Hebrew as it does in English. It can refer to the mode of existence after death, an attitude or character trait, a divine or supernatural being, or animated behavior, whether in English or Hebrew. In addition, in Latin (*spiritus*), Greek (*pneuma*), and Hebrew (*rûach*), spirit can also refer to the wind, movement of air, or the breath an animal or human takes.[1] It is important, therefore, to define what one means by spirit. It is perhaps not too misleading to suggest that all of these meanings relate to dynamic, animating, or creative power or the manifestation of such power in living beings or natural processes. We are going to survey now, however, not the general usage of the term spirit, but the meaning and function of the term "Spirit of God." There are at least three significant ways that the term "Spirit of God" is used in the Old Testament: Spirit as the wind or breath characteristic of life and its maintenance, Spirit as influence on character, and Spirit as the empowering presence of God.

The Spirit of God as Breath or Wind

The first significant category relates to spirit as a natural force, "breath," or "wind." The breath that we take into our lungs is the *rûach*

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[1]Lloyd Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972) 3–4 suggests that there are three main definitions of the term "spirit" in the Old Testament: wind, the spirit in man whether breath or spirit, and the spirit of God.

as is the unseen movement of air we know of as wind. It is an unseen force which is nevertheless evident by the affect it has on its surroundings. This is probably the reason why the same term is used of the Spirit of God. It is unseen and yet its affects are manifest. At stake in these occurrences is whether just a natural force is involved or God's active presence. In Gen 1:1-2, perhaps the "wind of God" and the "Spirit of God" are the same:

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the spirit/wind of God was hovering over the surface of the abyss.

To distinguish between the effect of God's presence and the means he uses to manifest that presence may not be the best approach in Genesis one. Notice the ambiguity even in John 3:8 in the New Testament, where wind and spirit are compared much as in the Old Testament:

> The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, and you do not know whence it comes or wither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

The unseen wind or Spirit also dwells in living and breathing beings. The breath they draw is the "wind" or spirit which comes from God and returns to God. It is the life force which proceeds from God and as such belongs to Him.

The Spirit as Influence on Character

One of the most striking ways in which God works His will in the Old Testament is through the sending of "a" spirit, but not always represented as "the" Spirit of God. It would be better to characterize these instances as "influences on character." For example, God sends a lying spirit to the false prophets so that Ahab might believe their prophecy in 1 Kings 22. God sends a spirit of confusion on the Egyptians in Isaiah 19 so they might be destroyed by the Assyrians. Joshua

(Deuteronomy 34) and the coming Messianic king (Isaiah 11) possessed spirits of wisdom, in the first instance imparted by Moses and in the second coming directly from God. We might interpret these manifestations of spirit in the Old Testament in our day as personality or character traits or bad or good influence.[2] They may refer to innate human character or be bestowed or sent by God to effect His will.

The Spirit as God's Empowering Presence

In several cases in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is the special visitation of his presence which empowers an individual to carry out a particular task or do extraordinary things.[3] I think especially of the Spirit of God which comes upon Samson in the book of Judges. Samson is empowered by the presence of God's Spirit to be a war leader and hero. When the Spirit of God came upon him, he became extraordinarily strong and was able to defeat the Philistines. This was not contingent upon his moral uprightness or his faithfulness to Israel's laws or traditions, but seems to be related strictly to the fact that he was set aside for God's service as a Nazirite and was used as a deliverer in spite of his unsuitability in other aspects of life.

Other examples of this kind of empowering include Gideon and Othniel. It is said of Othniel that the Spirit of God "came upon him" and in the case of Gideon, "clothed" him. In these instances, the Spirit of God was external to the judges' own spirit and enabled them to do

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[2]Neve points out that these occurrences of spirit are generally modified, such as a "lying spirit," "angry spirit," "spirit of power," etc. (3).

[3]Leon Wood suggests that empowering for a particular task is the fundamental reason for the bestowing of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. See Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 63.

extraordinary deeds. Such special empowering ought not to be thought of as ordinary or common. Gideon, as is the case with most heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, is skeptical and reluctant to take on this role, indicative of the extraordinary nature of the commissioning.

More important to biblical history is the way in which God empowered His servants the prophets through the spirit of inspiration. At times the Spirit so overpowers the prophet that he is overcome and his personality is subsumed under or taken over by the Spirit of God, as is the case with the ecstatic prophesying of the sons of the prophets and Saul (1 Samuel 9). This, however, is not the norm, even for prophets.

The typical way in which the prophets manifest God's Spirit is by empowerment through the presence of the Spirit to speak boldly, to give surprising words of judgment in periods of prosperity and apathy, to give comfort in times of despair, and to suffer on behalf of the people of God. The Spirit descends on Micah, a spirit of power and bold speech in a time of corrupt speech and scoffing rulers. Jeremiah is chosen before he is born to faithfully speak God's word in a time of crisis and disbelief. Isa 61:1-2 says, relative to the prophet's endowment with the Spirit and commission, that

> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...

The Spirit of God as his empowering presence is never intended primarily to benefit the prophet or as a proof to the prophet that God will follow through with his promises to him. Rather, it is to empower the prophet

to speak judgment to sin, comfort to the afflicted, and to do acts of kindness and faithfulness.

The thing which ties all of these various manifestations of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament together is that all are ways in which God extends his active presence. The wind or Spirit of God hovering over the waters in creation was the extension of God himself, active and present even in creation. The spirit which God sends of confusion or wisdom or delusion is the active extension of his presence to affect his will. The Spirit which called and empowered the prophets was the extension of his presence to call his people through the mediation of the prophets to repentance and faithfulness.

Though the Spirit is depicted at times as a force, or a character trait, or an influence, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is on the whole not limited to these activities, nor is he somehow separate from God himself. God invariably sends the Spirit, bestows the Spirit, influences behavior or creates by means of the Spirit. One could say that the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is not dissimilar from the hand of God (the demonstration and extension of his power) nor from the glory of God (the visible manifestation of the presence of God in theophany). Yet the extension of the presence of God is at the same time distinct from God himself. This is why I say that the Spirit of God is the active extension of the presence of God in sinful human history to fulfill his will and carry out his purposes to save his people and judge human sin.

A Test Case: 1 Samuel 16

I can think of no single passage in the Old Testament which lays out more clearly the meaning and function of the Spirit than 1 Samuel 16. Note the words of David's investiture with the Spirit of God:

> Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.
>
> Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

First, we can see two ways in which the term "spirit" is used in this passage: first, the Spirit of God comes upon David, much as we saw above with the prophets, empowering him and setting him aside as the true king over Israel; and second, the spirit is an influence on character in the case of the evil spirit tormenting Saul.

From the moment of David's anointing, it is clear in the history who is truly king, as 2 Sam 5:2 makes plain: "For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel." For all intents and purposes, David was the Anointed and Saul was king in name only. The use of the term "Spirit of God" here relative to David is to designate clearly who had been chosen and set aside as king.

More than this is in view, however. Notice what the servants of Saul tell him about David and his skill:

> And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.
>
> Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well."
>
> So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well, and bring him to me."
>
> One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him."

Not only is David designated king, he is also endowed with God's presence and empowered with the capability of fulfilling the role of king in warfare, diplomacy, and even aesthetics. The Spirit of God coming mightily upon David, therefore, established him as the legitimate king and furnished him with the capability of fulfilling that role.[4]

Later on, David attributes his kingship and right character to the Spirit of God. In David's last words in 2 Sam 23:1-7, he said:

> The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue.
> The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me:
> When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God,
> He dawns on them like the morning light,
> Like the sun shining forth upon a cloudless morning,
> Like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Righteous kingship was intended to provide blessing to God's people. In a powerful metaphor, righteous kingship was like rain on the grass, providing blessing and sustenance. The presence of the Spirit of God sanctified and empowered the king to bring such blessing. Jesus, the latter-day son of David, could think of no better analogy to use of his own commissioning than that of Isaiah 61 (quoted in Luke 4:18): "The Spirit

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[4]There is no indication here that the endowment with the Spirit of God is temporary or situational, as was apparently the case with Samson, Othniel, etc. The endowment with the Spirit in David's case appears to be a permanent endowment, as the tradition reflects in 2 Sam. 23:1-7, where in "David's last words" he says, "The Spirit of God speaks through me..." Furthermore, the endowment with the Spirit occurs in the case of David at the time of the anointing. It is not separate in time or space from that event and apparently continues throughout David's life. The closest analogy to this permanent endowment would be the practice of baptism in the New Testament, at which time the believer is given the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). As is the case with Saul, and potentially David, the Holy Spirit can be "quenched," but the intent is to permanently endow the prospective king with the Spirit of God at the time of the anointing. The point is to enable him to carry on the task of righteous kingship.

of the Lord is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives." This king came not to be served but to serve, and the Spirit of God sanctified and empowered him to fulfill his role as Messiah to Israel.

Saul is depicted in altogether different terms. He also receives a spirit, but this spirit is one of torment, an "evil spirit from the Lord." The first thing to notice is that this spirit is not the empowering presence of God, as David receives, but serves to underscore the point made above. This spirit — whether a force to influence character or a spiritual tormentor is immaterial — is not God's empowering presence but still attributable to God's agency. The Spirit had come upon Saul in 1 Samuel 9, as it would come upon David. Saul rallied all Israel and won battles against his enemies, as David was to do. The impossible possibility, however, is that once sanctified and equipped to do God's will on behalf of Israel, Saul could still reject his role and seek his own convenience, glory, and honor.

The second thing to notice is that nature hates a vacuum. When the Spirit of God left Saul and came upon David, it is not only that Saul was left like someone who still has to clean out his office after he has been fired. The loss of the Spirit of God not only deprives him of the qualification for kingship, but also in significant ways deprives him of aspects of his humanity and leads to his rejection by his own people and eventual death on the field of battle.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Spirit of God creates and sustains life, influences character, sanctifies for service and empowers the fulfilling of that service. The Spirit is never endowed for the personal benefit or experience of the individual, but rather for the blessing and the service of the people of God. It demarcates those who are anointed by it and equips them for ministry.

The implications of these functions of the Spirit of God are many. First, the Spirit still creates and sustains life. In fact, the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of life. Note the words of Rom 6:8 and 11:

> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
>
> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Jesus mentions in John 6:63 that "It is the Spirit that gives life." The Spirit that hovered over the waters and was active in creation in Gen 1:2 is the same Spirit which re-creates us (see Rom 7:6).

Second, the Spirit influences character. This is especially evident in 1 Sam 16:18, where one of Saul's men says "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." In New Testament parlance, we might refer to this aspect of the Spirit's work as the "fruits of the Spirit."

A final implication is that the Spirit empowers for ministry on behalf of the people of God. David's endowment with the Spirit was intended to enable him to rule the people of God well. The Spirit was never given for the personal benefit of the recipient, but rather for the

benefit of the community of faith. Perhaps this is why Paul says gifts were given through the spirit of Christ to equip the saints for ministry:

> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13).

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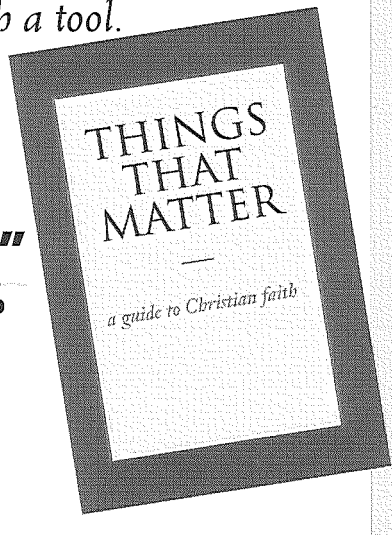

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Spirit of Holiness or Spirit of the Age?
The Holy Spirit in the Teaching of Paul

Jeffrey Peterson

In various quarters today it is suggested that Restoration churches in general, and Churches of Christ in particular, are pneumatologically challenged. The Restorationist way of being Christian is described as deficient in its experience of the Spirit's presence in the Christian life; the rationalism of Bacon, Locke, and Reid is held to be the tap root of Restoration theology, and such soil is reckoned as inhospitable to the reception of the Spirit. Traditionally in Churches of Christ, it is being taught, the work of the Spirit has been thought to be mediated through the rational principles for the interpretation of Scripture outlined for Restoration Christians as early as Alexander Campbell's *Christian System*. As this critique has sometimes been epitomized, "We have relegated the Holy Spirit to the role of retired author."

No doubt there is much in this critique of Restorationist rationalism that merits consideration.[1] Some concern may be justified,

[1]The fullest such account of the Restoration tradition to date is by Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), esp. 92–116. More popular and explicitly confessional is C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988), esp. 75–87 and 101–112. Robert Webber traces the eclipse of affect by reason in Protestant Christianity beyond the Enlightenment to Ulrich Zwingli, whose perspective was developed by the Protestant scholastics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

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however, regarding the effects of disseminating this critique in churches and the use to which it is put in re-forming congregational faith and practice. The equation of Restorationism with rationalism may encourage the supposition that pushing the pendulum in the opposite direction is the manifest will of God; if convinced that an excess of reason has denied the Spirit entry into our churches, we may jump to the conclusion that a visible surfeit of emotion is a sure indication of the Spirit's presence.

Such "emotionalizing" of the faith, increasingly evident in Churches of Christ, is by no means limited to any one tradition but can be seen in all Christian communions open to the influence of the charismatic movement.[2] Ironically, some observers have concluded that the emphasis on visible emotion encourages conservative churches to confuse the experience of the Holy Spirit with the immediacy and intensity of individual sensory experience that is one of the principal values of contemporary secular culture—most vividly and tragically evident in the drug culture, but present also to a less intense degree in various forms of popular entertainment. These observers argue that the assimilation of the church to this culture—while surely contrary to the intentions of those Christian leaders furthering the process of emotionalizing the faith—is in fact the result.[3]

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notably the Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (*Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978]) 95–97.

[2]For the "convergence" of charismatic worship with traditional, see Robert Webber, *Renew Your Worship: A Study in the Blending of Traditional and Contemporary Worship* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson) 1997.

[3]See Neil Postman's chapter "Shuffle Off to Bethlehem," in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1986) 114–124; Quentin J. Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1989); Harold O. J. Brown, *The Sensate Culture* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1996). In terms of H. Richard

A renewed engagement with the Spirit of God, distinct from the spirit of the age, must be mediated through the witness of Scripture to the Spirit's sanctifying work. The letters of Paul loom large in any quest to rediscover the biblical witness concerning the identity and work of the Spirit. Further, Pauline pneumatology has recently received renewed attention with an eye towards its significance for the life of the contemporary church.[4] A reconsideration of the Pauline witness is thus an appropriate step towards a fuller appreciation of the Spirit's transforming work in the life of the believer and the ministry of the church.

In particular, this essay seeks to identify three key elements of Pauline teaching on the Spirit: (1) the Spirit's role as the agent of God's new, eschatological creation; (2) the Spirit's work creating and sustaining communities of this new creation; and (3) the moral transformation of these communities as the present outcome of the Spirit's work in the life of the church. As we will see, Paul's understanding of the Spirit that Christians share does not encourage preoccupation with our individual emotional states; the Holy Spirit poured out on the church through Christ rather invites us to engage with God's redemptive purposes, which extend

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Niebuhr's well-known typology, these critics warn that contemporary evangelical Christianity tends towards "the Christ of culture"; Richard John Neuhaus's suggestive reformulation of Niebuhr's typology in terms of "church and world" (*The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World* [New York: Harper & Row, 1987] 16–24) argues that the proper stance is "church and world in paradox" (the term Neuhaus finds preferable to Niebuhr's more frequent "dualism"; see *Christ and Culture*, [New York: Harper and Row, 1951]) 149–189).

[4]Most exhaustively in Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994); Fee's *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996) distills and develops the conclusions of his more encyclopedic work. See also Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) 103–135.

to the renewal of the whole creation. Paul preached not the hedonistic spirit of the age but the Holy Spirit of the age to come.

The Spirit and the Ends of the Ages

In Pauline teaching, the Spirit with whom we are in contact in the church of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of the Father, granted by the Father to the Son, and now, at the intersection of two ages, shared through the Son with all those who are made his in baptism. As we will see, the crucial test of who presently belongs to the Son—i.e., of who is truly in possession of his Spirit—is the moral quality displayed by persons claiming that the Spirit is at work in them. More than extraordinary states of experience, it is the character of believers that indicates which spirit is at work in them.

In 1 Cor 10:11, Paul describes Christians as those "on whom the ends of the ages have met."[5] That is, the end of "the present evil age" (Gal 1:4) has abutted the beginning of the new age of salvation inaugurated through Christ's death and resurrection. Christians live at the juncture of an age dominated by the power of sin and one in which Christ will be recognized as Lord of all. It is the Spirit that enables Christians to confess the Lordship of Christ in advance of all creation. The confession of Jesus as Lord will resound from the heights of creation to the depths on the last day (Phil 2:11); Christians are enabled to acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ even now, by the power of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

The Pauline perspective has been well captured by Richard Neuhaus.

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[5]This is the literal translation offered by Richard B. Hays, who rightly draws attention to this text in his excellent account of Pauline ethics (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996] 16–59, esp. 19–27). Other translations of New Testament texts herein are the present writer's.

> To live by the authority of Christ is to abandon the search for authority as authority is understood in other vocations. Compared with other members of the diplomatic corps at the courts of the world, an ambassador for Christ is in an awkward position. Most ambassadors bear the authority of and are legitimated by the sovereignties that they represent. But the sovereignty of the one we claim to represent is itself in question. The claim is under the shadow of a history shadowed by powerful evidence against his sovereignty. The shadow will not be dispelled, the question will not be answered, until he returns in glory.[6]

In the Pauline perspective, the Spirit is the agent through which the Father presently enables his ambassadors to attest Christ's sovereignty by their words and deeds, and the Spirit is also that power which will ultimately make Christ's sovereignty manifest to every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. This dimension of Pauline teaching on the Spirit is perhaps the least often explicitly stated in the letters, but it is nonetheless crucial to our apprehension of the Spirit's work.

The Spirit's work can clearly be seen as eschatological in Rom 1:3–4, although the point is made more clearly in the Greek text than in most English versions. Introducing himself and his Gospel to the Roman church, Paul describes the Christ whose sovereignty he proclaims as one "designated Son of God in power by the Spirit of holiness through [the] resurrection of dead ones." The expression "Spirit of holiness" is a Hebraic way of saying "the Holy Spirit," so it is by the action of his Father's Spirit that Jesus has been powerfully designated God's Son in the resurrection. It is striking, however, that in this passage Paul does not refer to Jesus' resurrection "from the dead" (as in 1 Cor 15:12); he says rather that Jesus has been "designated son of God in power by the resurrection of dead ones"—that is, by the resurrection of all the dead, of

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[6]Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 69.

which Jesus' resurrection is the beginning.[7] Jesus' own resurrection is not an isolated incident in human history but the first installment of the general resurrection that marks the transition from this age to the next.

The same perspective is evident in Paul's description of Jesus' resurrection as the "firstfruits," the initial ingathering that signals a bountiful harvest yet to come (1 Cor 15:23); it is noteworthy that Paul uses the same agricultural image to describe the Spirit received by Christians as the gift Christians have already received which is the harbinger of the full harvest of resurrection and renewed creation yet to come, when God's adopted children will experience the redemption of our bodies from death (Rom 8:23). The same point is expressed in commercial imagery when the Spirit is described as the "pledge" or "security" of the inheritance that God has promised his children (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14).[8] The Spirit by which God raised Christ from among the dead will also be God's agent in the regeneration of all those whom he will transform so that they might share the life of the age to come.

Nor is the Spirit active at only these two points in the history of redemption; it is not as though the Father breathes the Spirit forth once for Christ's resurrection and then a second time for the general resurrection thousands of years later (perhaps even millions), in the meantime having no work for the Spirit to accomplish.[9] Rather, in the

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[7]An Old Testament text that likely informed Paul's teaching connecting resurrection and the Spirit (or "breath," as discussed above) is Ezekiel 37, the resurrection of the dry bones of Israel by the breath of God.

[8]For consideration of this understanding of salvation throughout the NT, see Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

[9]Paul himself reckoned with a period of only decades between resurrection and parousia, which he expected to welcome (cf. 1 Thess 4:15–17; 2 Thess 2:1; 1 Cor 15:52; see Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998]

interim between Christ's resurrection and ours, the Spirit is powerfully at work drawing people into association with the risen Christ in preparation for his return in glory.

We have seen above from 1 Cor 12:3 that the Spirit is the agent of the Christian's confession "Jesus is Lord" (*Iēsous Kyrios*). Indeed, Paul says in that text that it is *only* the Spirit that can lead a person to confess Jesus as Sovereign. The acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord is of course not a matter of mere words; Paul's statement assumes that the person crying out *Iēsous Kyrios* means what (s)he says and is sincerely assuming the role of Jesus' slave (*doulos*), the term which answers to *kyrios* (as in 2 Cor 4:5). The Spirit is thus also the source of the power that enables Christians to live under the lordship of Jesus the Messiah.

It is in 1 Corinthians that Paul most fully discusses the gifts (*charismata*) that are granted to Christians by the Spirit, in particular the gifts of prophetic utterance and "speaking in tongues," which had caused such disruption in Corinthian worship assemblies (chaps. 12–14). It should not escape our notice that Paul first mentions such gifts at the opening of the letter (1 Cor 1:4–9), and there he describes these gifts as given by the Spirit to confirm the Gospel for those "awaiting the disclosure of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:7). As Paul describes the work of the Spirit, its effect is not to focus Christians on the immediacy of the present moment or on extraordinary experiences of spiritual ecstasy but rather to sustain the church in her mission until the coming of the Lord. The

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esp. 243–256). Although the "delay of the parousia" has given rise to considerable hermeneutical exertions in the past 150 years of scholarship, the central claims of the Pauline Gospel are not significantly affected by the elapse of a greater period of time than Paul envisioned; see Austin Farrer, "A Return to New Testament Christological Categories," *Theology* 26 (1933) 304–318.

Spirit at work in Christians is the Spirit by which God raised Christ Jesus, and by which he will raise Christians, from the dead (Rom 8:11); this Spirit draws the church forward towards the eschatological life that awaits God's heirs adopted through Christ.

The Spirit communicated to believers in Christ is eschatological: the revelation that the Spirit communicates concerns God's recreative purpose in Christ, and the consummation of this Spirit's work will be achieved in the age to come. It is this consummation of God's saving work—those blessings prepared by God that eye has not yet seen, nor ear heard, nor human minds conceived—that the Spirit makes known to the church through the ministry of Christ's apostle (1 Cor 2:9–10). The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the spirit that leads the church towards God's future; far from focusing our attention on the ecstasy of the present moment, the Spirit of Christ beckons us forward and invites us to participate in the holy future that God is preparing for his faithful ones in Christ.

Living in Accordance with the Spirit

How does the Spirit work to prepare the faithful to welcome Christ at his return? Paul answers that the Spirit accomplishes the moral transformation of believers into the image of Christ. Romans chap. 8 supplies the fullest exposition of this theme in the Pauline corpus. Here, drawing on an image widespread in ancient moral exhortation, both Jewish and Greco-Roman, Paul refers to moral conduct under the figure of a journey down a path that forks into two ways, requiring a decision about which path to follow.[10] Paul's particular Christian adaptation of this

[10]For the image of the "Two Ways," see e.g. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–33; 1QS 3:13–4:26; *Didache* 1:1–5:2; and discussion by Abraham J.

hortatory tradition is found in the labels he supplies for the two roads that lead from the fork, i.e., the two directions in life one may pursue; the choice is between "walking in accordance with the flesh" and "walking in accordance with the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). The context of this statement in Paul's exhortation to Roman Christians helps the reader see the difference between these two ways of living.

Romans chap. 8 begins by reiterating a conclusion first stated in Rom 5:15–19, that Christ's death and resurrection results in the overturning of the verdict of condemnation (*katakrima*) pronounced on Adam by the divine Judge; instead, those who are incorporate in the eschatological Man Jesus Christ share in the verdict of acquittal (*dikaiōsis*) that God has pronounced on Jesus, which he signified by raising him from the dead.[11] This earlier discussion is taken up in Paul's statement that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). The advance here made over chap. 5 is that the latter abstractly states the consequences of acquittal in the heavenly court, in terms of universal human history; in chap. 8, these consequences are presented in concrete terms addressed to a sinful Gentile whose soliloquy Paul depicts in 7:7–25—much as contemporary preachers will sometimes represent others as speaking in their sermons, especially in the form of a dialogue (as throughout Romans) and sometimes at even greater length than Paul in chap. 7.[12]

Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Library of Early Christianity 4; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 135.

[11]The original exposition of this point continues into chap. 6, with baptism as the faithful act by which Christians are incorporated into Christ, "baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into his death" (6:3).

[12]For this interpretation of Rom 7:7–25 as "speech-in-character," see Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) 258–284. The

Paul comes to v. 4's contrast between proceeding through life in accordance with the flesh and proceeding in accordance with the Spirit by way of the Incarnation, by which God "condemned sin in the flesh [of Christ]," i.e., in his faithful and obedient offering of his bodily flesh in death, to which God responded by raising and exalting Christ, as detailed in Rom 3:21–26 and 5:15–21. Jesus' faithfulness towards God even unto death, described in these two pivotal texts, is exemplified in chap. 4 by appeal to Abraham, who "considered his own body as already dead . . . and [also] the dead condition of Sarah's womb" (Rom 4:19) yet "trusted on God who raises the dead and names the things which are not as things that are" (Rom 4:17).

To walk in accordance with the flesh, then, is to proceed on the assumption that the prospects for human fulfillment are limited to those the created order offers; it is to leave the God who raises the dead out of account when planning one's course. Had Abraham walked in accordance with the flesh, he would have declined to chart his course by the promise that God would create a great nation from his descendants, he would have maintained his residence among the Chaldeans, and he would never have consented to offer his heir back to the God from whom he received him; had Jesus made his way through his incarnate life in accordance with the flesh, he would have refused to accept death—by shameful crucifixion, no

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textual point that most strongly favors Stowers's interpretation is the reading *se* in 8:2, which represents Paul as turning in dialogue to the imaginary speaker of the preceding passage and announcing to him the deliverance from his plight afforded by the Gospel: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you [my friend] from the law of sin and death." The variants are best explained as secondary to the second person singular pronoun, introduced to make sense of the text when its dialogic character was effaced due to construing Romans as a general theological treatise.

less (cf. Rom 6:6)—as this was clearly no way to claim his Davidic inheritance (cf. Rom 1:3–4). To walk in accordance with the Spirit is to follow in the steps of Abraham (cf. Rom 4:12) and of Jesus (cf. Rom 15:1–7). It is to be guided by trust (*pistis*) that what the Creator promises he will fulfill, any appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

The "renewal of the understanding" that Paul appeals for in Rom 12:2 permits Christians to bridge the gap between life in accordance with the flesh and life in accordance with the spirit, between our conformity to the present age, of which Paul warns, and our transformation into people of approving God's good and well-pleasing will now brought to fruition in Christ, for which he appeals. The new life that the Spirit brings about is one in which self-centered concerns give place to concern for the Messiah's fellow servants, a manner of life most fully described in Rom 12:1–15:13.[13] The agency of the Spirit in this transformation is most evident in Rom 8:13; it is "by the Spirit" (*pneumati*) that Christians mortify the actions of the fleshly body that lead to death, and so find the resurrected life of the risen Lord. The result of this process at work in the church's mission is the creation of a fellowship "sanctified in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16) for eschatological presentation to God.[14]

Moral transformation as the aim of the Spirit's work is evident also in Paul's description of the "fruit" of the Spirit, i.e., what the Spirit

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[13]On the communal virtues encouraged in this section of Romans, similar to the manner of life encouraged by Stoics and mild Cynics—as contrasted with the individualistic virtues associated with self-mastery by harsh Cynics—see Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 317–323.

[14]For the "offering of the Gentiles" as not something Gentiles offer (i.e., a subjective understanding of the genitive) but as Paul's sacrificial offering of sanctified Gentiles to God (i.e., an objective genitive), see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 712, citing Phil 2:17 as a comparable image.

yields when implanted and cultivated in a human life (Gal 5:22–23). Such instruction on the sanctifying work of the Spirit formed an element in the preaching of Paul that founded new congregations, part of the ABC's of Christianity as Paul taught it.[15] This can be seen from 1 Thess 4:3–8, where Paul describes his converts' "sanctification" (*hagiosmos*, v. 3) in sexual behavior as the will of God, "who grants you his Spirit, which is holy (*to pneuma autou to hagion*, v. 8)"; and this is but a reminder of Paul's instruction to his converts at the outset of their Christian experience, "the precepts we gave you through the Lord Jesus," (v. 2), "just as we also told you previously (*proeipamen*) and attested" (v. 6). That this was Paul's general missionary practice is confirmed by 1 Cor 6:11, where Paul recalls the sexual and other vices that the Corinthians abandoned when at baptism they were "washed, . . . sanctified (*hēgiasthēte*), . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

The qualities that Paul lists under the heading "fruit of the Spirit" are not states of mind but moral dispositions that result from the Spirit's work in the lives of believers, dispositions that direct individual Christians' energies towards the community of the faithful. When Paul speaks of "peace," for example, he is not referring to a state of internal tranquillity that might equally well be obtained through aromatherapy; he is referring to the communal well-being (including but not limited to the absence of hostilities within the community; cf. Gal 5:15) that marks lives

[15]This is clearly the case with the vices that Paul lists under the heading "works of the flesh" just previously in Gal 5:19–21; Paul reminds the Galatians how he had "previously said (*proeipon*) that those who practice such vices shall not inherit God's kingdom" (5:21). It is likely that in the course of this same prior instruction Paul had outlined the contrasting behavior that *does* qualify one as God's heir, in terms similar to those rehearsed as "the fruit of the Spirit" in 5:22–23.

lived in union with Christ. Further, the "works of the flesh," with which the fruit of the Spirit is contrasted, focus on vices that disrupt the life of the Christian community. This communal focus of the life inspired by the Spirit leads us to the final aspect of Pauline pneumatology that we will note, which may be the most surprising to many modern Christians.

The Spirit and the Body

In Paul's teaching, the Spirit's work does not focus on the individual Christian. Rather, the Spirit's focus is directed towards the good not of the individual Christian in isolation but towards the health of the body, and to the good of the individual Christian as a member of the body contributing towards its growth.

A good entry into this perspective can be found in Roman 8:3–4. Here the result of Christ's incarnation, presented in v. 3 as the culmination of God's history with Israel from the giving of the Torah at Sinai, is that "the just requirement of Torah [is] fulfilled among us, who walk not in accordance with the flesh but in accordance with the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). The concrete shape of this fulfillment in local Christian communities is suggested in Rom 13:8–10, where Paul returns to the terms of Rom 8:4 in his exhortation of the Roman Christians. Loving the neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18) involves the keeping of all the commands of Torah; a community governed by love is one where Torah has found its fulfillment (*plēroma*, 12:10).[16] Paul's term for the Torah (*nomos*), borrowed from the Greek translation of Old Testament, itself would suggest a

[16]Luke Timothy Johnson has noted other important connections between Romans 8 and 12–14 in his paper "The Work of the Spirit and the Formation of Character," read to the Character Ethics and Biblical Interpretation Consultation of the SBL Annual Meeting in San Francisco, 23 November 1997, which he kindly made available for the writing of this paper.

communal orientation to Paul's readers, since it is the term for a national "constitution."[17] The just requirement of Israel's constitution is fulfilled not by isolated individuals but among the people of God newly reconstituted around the Messiah whom they acclaim as Lord by the power of his Spirit.

The communal focus of the Spirit's work is further evident from the role that Paul ascribes to the Spirit in his own ministry of planting and nurturing churches. Reminding the Thessalonians of his ministry which founded their community, Paul recalls that "our gospel did not come to you in word alone but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction, just as you know what sort of people we became among you for your sake" (1 Thess 1:5).[18] Addressing the more troublesome Corinthians, Paul expresses the same point with the metaphor of a letter dictated to a scribe: "You are our epistle, inscribed on your hearts, known and read by all men, openly displayed that you are an epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but *with the Spirit of the living God*" (2 Cor 3:2–3).

In Rom 8:23, the reference to Christians who possess the Spirit groaning as we await "the redemption of our *body*" in the singular suggests that Paul speaks of the one body of Christ in which Christians are incorporate as members, which Paul will mention in Rom 12:4–5, just after referring to the individual bodies of the Christians composing the church in Rom 12:1; there too the several bodies offered to God in

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[17]See Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 34–36.

[18]The context makes it clear that it is the Holy Spirit working through the apostle and his associates that is recalled here; God's "election" of the Thessalonians (v. 4) is documented by recalling first the character of the instrument through whom God worked to bring it about (v. 5) and then the response of the Thessalonians to Paul's preaching (v. 6). The same alternation from preaching to response is evident as the reader moves from 1:9a to 1:9b–10 and from 2:1–12 to 2:13–16.

obedient service constitute only one sacrifice (*thusia*), i.e., they are taken up into Christ's sacrifice of his body, which serves as the model of Christian ethical behavior in Rom 15:1–6. In what is likely a passage reflecting prior instruction, with which Roman Christians as well as Corinthians may have been familiar, Paul uses the verbal cognate of *thusia* in reference to Christ's paschal sacrifice (1 Cor 5:7). Paul is quite clear that the Spirit is the agent by which Christians are first united with the body of Christ in baptism (1 Cor 12:12), and his allusion to the Lord's Supper as "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink" (1 Cor 10:3–4) strongly suggests that the Spirit's unifying work continues in the meal that forms the regular expression of this body's oneness (1 Cor 10:16–17).

The best known Pauline text on the Spirit asks to be read in the same light. Paul's discussion of the Spirit's *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12–14 begins with an elaboration of the image of the church as the body of Christ (12:12–28), continues with an exemplary discussion of love (i.e., active concern for fellow members) as the animating principle of this body (chap. 13), and concludes with a series of specific directives for Corinthian worship assemblies (chap. 14). These directives stress the need to subordinate one's perceived gifts to the needs of fellow worshipers for knowledge of God and communion with him through Christ (see esp. vv. 4, 12, 19, 23–25, 26).[19]

Conclusion

In 1949, Dorothy Sayers produced a parody of a catechism summarizing what most non-Christians suppose Christians to believe; her purpose was

[19]For fuller discussion of these chapters in the context of 1 Corinthians and Paul's apostolic ministry, see Jeffrey Peterson, "'How Shall the Seeker Say Amen?' The 'Seeker' and the Service in First Corinthians," *Christian Studies* 13 (1993) 25–31.

to draw attention to the failure of churches to communicate the essential claims of the faith to persons outside their fellowship. About the Holy Spirit, she wrote

> Q.: What does the Church think about God the Holy Ghost?
> A.: I don't know exactly. He was never seen or heard of till Pentecost. There is a sin against Him which damns you forever, but no one knows what it is.[20]

Sayers's comments—intended to shame Christians into thinking through our faith and articulating it clearly enough for outsiders to understand what Christians believe—suggest that Restoration churches are by no means unique in lacking a clearly articulated doctrine of the Spirit.

Conversely, the vital impulse at the heart of the Restoration vision is especially pertinent in a consideration of the Spirit's work, not only among Restorationist Christians but within all communions. Perhaps surprisingly, this consideration of Paul's teaching on the Spirit suggests that such Restorationist emphases in pneumatology as can be discerned are not without precedent in the earliest exponent of the Christian faith.

For any Christian confused about the work of the Holy Spirit—or for any church—the first order of business is a thorough and prayerful reconsideration of the scriptural witness to the Spirit's work, of which this essay represents at best the beginning. Only such re-engagement with the Scriptures can enable preaching and conviction that will truly open Christians to the power of God's Spirit, rather than making the church captive to the spirit of the age and the fashion of the moment.

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[20]Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949; reprinted, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1995) 22. Sayers is not as well known as C. S. Lewis, but her writings on the church's faith repay reading as well as his, especially her meditation on the doctrine of the Trinity, *The Mind of the Maker* (Cleveland and New York: World, 1941).

How Does God Give Guidance Beyond the Illumination of Scripture?

Allan J. McNicol

She had come to my office with a battery of theological queries. Among her circle of friends there were few opportunities to explore sensitive theological issues; she was determined to get the most out of the visit.

Yet it was I who found the session to be a learning experience. The woman kept talking about how Jesus spoke to her and how he gave direct guidance in various situations which she confronted in her life. Clearly she was referring to some kind of communication process which she claimed took place regularly between God and herself. But how could that be? How could a person claim blithely that God and Jesus gave personal guidance in a multitude of situations that one faced in daily living?

As I emerged from the meeting I had as many questions as the woman had on her mind when she arrived at my office. What did she mean when she said that she listened to Jesus? Was this an auditory experience that others, beside the woman, would understand? Was it some form of ecstatic communication? Or was it more a leading, an impression, a sense of being persuaded? And how did she know it was God who was speaking, and not an alien or demonic power? Many other questions troubled me. These questions have led me to the following reflections.

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Of course the woman was using language that is common among contemporary charismatics and neo-Pentecostalists. Even in the context of generic evangelicalism this is fairly common fare. People regularly speak in such terms as Jesus "touching them," or, "God laid it upon my heart." What is really being claimed is that God is speaking to believers today through some form of understandable expression other than the Bible. For believers anchored in the Reformed-Restorationist heritage this language immediately draws attention. We are heirs of a long theological heritage which teaches that the appearance of signs, wonders, and extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit ceased by the end of the New Testament period. We have tended to view claims that the Spirit guides our lives in some sentient way to be peripheral, at best, and even vacuous.

But this can hardly be the last word on the matter. Anyone who teaches a Bible class regularly will be asked to give an explanation as to how God answers prayer. If we are offended by the terminology of the charismatics how do we give an intelligible explanation as to how God is active and Sovereign in our lives. How do we describe the work of the Holy Spirit today?

Historically speaking, churches in the Restoration Tradition find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. We claim to be people who are attempting to be the church of the New Testament, and the New Testament is marked by many accounts of the early heroes of the faith hearing divine calls and responding to them (Acts 8:29; 16:6–7; 2 Cor 12:1–5; Rev 1:1). Yet we maintain that these kinds of experiences have ceased (the "cessationist" view). Since for most people today experience is a key factor in understanding how God is directing their lives, cessationist

presuppositions are very unpopular. To many they appear to be marked by inner contradictions and may even cut the ground out from under our apologetic.[1] Perhaps a theological case on behalf of cessationism can be developed successfully; it would be a welcome contribution.[2] But, at the very least, to get a hearing such a contribution must offer reasonable suggestions as to how God guides and directs believers today. Otherwise, if we are left only with a vague concept of inner illumination brought by rational study, why persist with spiritual disciplines such as confession of sin, prayer, and talk about a direct walk with God?

A Proposal

In this essay our main focus will be on a restricted but critical question. Based on what the New Testament says about how God intervened and revealed himself to the earliest Christians, what can believers today expect to receive as "guidance" from God apart from the study of scripture?

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[1]Although this is no proof of the truth of either cessationism or neo-Pentecostalism, there is no question that the twentieth century has rendered its verdict on the appeal of these respective theological orientations. While cessationist groups like the Restoration Movement deriving from the Campbell-Stone Reformation of the nineteenth century have languished, charismatics and neo-Pentecostalist movements have undergone tremendous growth.

[2]It is taken as a given that there is a close relationship between the function of the Holy Spirit and the word in the New Testament. For example, in the occurrence of conversions in the early church what is attributed to the power of the Spirit, is likewise attributed to the influence of the word. Both Peter and Paul attest that the believer is begotten through the living word of God or the gospel (1 Pet 1:23–25; 1 Cor 4:15). But, at the same time, one is also born of the Spirit (Gal 4:29; Titus 3:5; cf. John 3:4–5). And the observation made repeatedly by the nineteenth century Restorationists remains true. Despite all of the remarkable manifestations of the Spirit in the book of Acts whenever someone was converted (even in the case of Paul) a preacher was at hand giving instructions as to what was necessary to do.

Procedurally, our study will first note briefly that the extreme positions of both contemporary cessationists and charismatics with respect to the continuity or discontinuity of extraordinary expressions of the Spirit in the first century are often overdrawn. It will be concluded that God manifests his presence with his people today just as he did in the first century, although materially, the actual mode of expression that this presence takes will always be contextualized. Second, this argument will be fortified by looking briefly at the role of the witness of the Spirit in Jesus and Paul in early Christianity. Finally, on the basis of all this evidence, we will venture to draw some conclusions as to what is entailed in apprehending the work of the Spirit in functioning as a regulative principle that gives shape to the Christian life.[3]

Re-Visiting Cessationism

Cessationism is the idea that manifestations of the Spirit such as the occurrence of extraordinary healings, miracles, and the startling manifestations of the Spirit (e.g., speaking in tongues), were necessary to establish nascent Christianity. Once Christianity was firmly established in history, there being no further need for these extraordinary expressions of the Spirit, such expressions of the Spirit are considered to have ceased.[4]

At the outset it should be noted that in using such terminology as "extraordinary spiritual manifestations" or "miraculous gifts" we betray

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[3]I am indebted to John Yates ("How Does God Speak To Us Today? Biblical Anthropology and the Witness of the Holy Spirit," *Churchman* 107 [1993] 106) for my use of the term "regulative principle" in connection with the need to find a coherent way of speaking about the witness of the Holy Spirit.

[4]It would take at least a monograph to discuss adequately both the exegetical issues and the use of evidence drawn from church history by cessationists and non-cessationists in favor of their respective arguments. We need to confine our remarks to several brief paragraphs.

our dependence on a world-view that is contrary to the main drift of biblical thinking. In the Enlightenment, (1650–1806) debates on miracles tended to focus on the perception that the workings of nature could be compared with a great machine; any extraordinary happening that broke the laws that governed the operation of that machine was "supernatural" or miraculous. But the Bible does not understand the world in such categories; it views the world continuously sustained by a gracious God. Nature is not self-contained and self-explanatory.[5] Due to the creative power of God, new and different things continue to occur. In the Bible some of these things are deemed remarkable, and are considered to be so significant for the life of the community, that they are called "signs and wonders."[6] Events like the Exodus and certain actions carried out by Jesus in his ministry, are thus labeled as "signs, powers, and wonders" (Deut 4:34; 6:22–23; John 2:11; 11:47–48). These dramatic events were considered to be attestations of the creative power of God working among his people. This understanding of the working of God is part of the warp and woof of biblical faith.

Some of these happenings described in the Bible as "signs and wonders" are, in our parlance, non-miraculous (Isa 20:3; Ezek 12:1–11; 24:15–27).[7] The crucial point is not that, in the course of history, new or unusual things occur; but that the people of God, through the canon of Scripture, have designated a particular number of these occurrences in the biblical period as so significant, that they have been marked off as being

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[5]Ted Peters, "Response to John Cobb," *Dialog* 30 (1991) 244.
[6]Neither Hebrew or Greek has an exact word equivalent for what moderns understand by the word "miracle."
[7]D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 94.

definitive attestations of the nature and purpose of God. These signs, wonders, and extraordinary demonstrations of power stood as criteria for assessing whether later claims for the appearance of revelatory occurrences among the people of God could be accepted. For these reasons, strict cessationism is untenable.[8]

On the other hand, it should be noted that in recent years a significant branch of the charismatic movement has claimed that the appearance of signs and wonders of biblical proportions should be considered a normal part of the life of the church. It is no different than

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[8]Some of the extreme exegetical positions of cessationists need to be challenged. In essence their position is as follows: the full revelation of the Christian Faith was given in the era of the apostles. In the words of Jude 3 it was "once delivered to all the saints." Special signs were given for the specific purpose of corroborating this once-and-for-all message (Mark 16:17–18). But once the perfect revelation (cf. 1 Cor 13:8–10) was preached and attested with signs, and the inspired writers of the New Testament had completed their words, the time of spiritual gifts ended. Note *Spiritual Sword* 25 (July, 1994) especially 30–31, 33, which adheres to this position. Yet, such exegesis is not compelling. Jude 3 presumes that the earliest gospel proclamation had a consistent texture of moral demands "once and for all delivered . . ." and functions as a call for faithfulness in light of evidence of immorality in the early Christian Community. Cf. Carrol D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Abilene, Texas: Restoration Perspectives, 1994) 122. Even if the text of Mark 16:17–18 is part of the work of the composer of Mark, there is not a word there about the cessation of the signs. It is quite a stretch to claim that the Greek word *bebaioō* ("to confirm") in Mark 16:20 means to furnish attestation that, once produced, is no longer needed. The word is generally thought to carry the notion of "making firm" or "to establish." Finally, with respect to 1 Cor 13:10, years ago Robertson and Plummer in the original ICC Commentary on *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914) 297 said it all, "The apostle is saying nothing about the cessation of charismata in this life: prophesyings and knowledge might always be useful. All that he asserts is, that these things will have no use when completeness is revealed and therefore they are inferior to love." For a thorough critique of traditional cessationist arguments which needs to be taken seriously see Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* JPTSS 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

the process of conversion.[9] But this is an inflated claim and can be discounted by the empirical evidence. Thoughtful observers note that the healings in modern charismatic healing lines are psycho-somatic in nature, and, formally, are no different than those claimed to take place at Lourdes, or among similar movements or places in Islam or Hinduism. This is not to deny that God is active and does, in response to prayer, bring genuine healing from illness. But one suspects that such actions of God occur as much in non-charismatic churches as charismatic churches. What is questionable is the claim that God has selected certain contemporary individuals "anointed" as his agents to perform signs, powers, and wonders.

In this connection, Paul's experience may be especially apropos. Paul had the capacity to do "signs and wonders" (2 Cor 12:12). Yet he was often derided because he could not even heal himself (2 Cor 1:8–10; 10:1–13:10). The practice of calling mass assemblies, working people to a fever-pitch through emotional preaching, and then performing "miracles" is totally at odds with the picture of Paul we find in the Bible. Leander Keck, having spent a lifetime studying the pattern of Paul's conduct of his life, has observed

> One can as easily imagine Paul announcing a Spirit-healing service as one can imagine him throwing a Halloween party.[10]

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[9]Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders," 90. Basically, we have reference to various developments in the charismatic movement that have, at the time of writing, crystallized around such entities as the Vineyard Fellowship. According to Carson, the essential theology behind such thinking is that since Jesus inaugurated the kingdom with extraordinary events heralding the defeat of Satan, and since the struggle with Satan is still going on, one may expect similar evidences of these victories today paralleling what happened in the New Testament period.

[10]Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (2d ed.; Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 96.

For Paul, above all, the regulative principle for the working of God's Spirit was that although the messenger was a very weak vessel, the Spirit functioned to undergird the message with power (2 Cor 12:9–10: 13:3–4; Rom 8:17–27). For Paul, while undergoing sufferings on behalf of his message to the world, the Spirit gave him the capacity to continue a pattern of conformity with the ministry of Jesus; and he even considered that through this vicarious suffering a process of rectification in the human community was facilitated (2 Cor 4:7–12; cf. Col 1:24). It seems that the pattern of Paul's life may be a more helpful clue to view the contextualization of the Spirit of Christ working in the world today than to look for amazing signs worked by faith-healers in mass assemblies. We will now follow this lead and see what evidence is discovered as we further explore both Jesus' and Paul's understanding of the role of the Spirit in guiding believers today.

Jesus and the Spirit

The gospel accounts give every indication that Jesus was a person who undergirded his mission with a disciplined life of communion with God. This is evident particularly in their testimony as to the importance of prayer in Jesus' life (Matt 11:25–27//Luke 10:21–22; Matt 26:36–46//Mark 14:32–42//Luke 22:40–46; cf. Heb 5:7–8) as well as the example of his teaching (Luke 11:1–13; 18:1–5).

In itself it is unremarkable that Jesus was one who was concerned actively with a walk with God. He was a Jew who was raised with the heritage of the Psalms and other treasures which could be drawn from a huge store-house of Hebrew piety. As one called to carry out a prophetic mission, it is reasonable to assume that he would be vitally involved with perceiving the ways of God.

When one looks more closely at Jesus' spiritual life two outstanding features emerge. One is Jesus' experience of closeness with the Father. The second involves a conviction on Jesus' part that in some special sense the Spirit was "poured out" upon him in his earthly mission. Both of these features function as precedents for later Christian reflection and devotion.[11] Yet, a close reading of the gospels indicates that there is a unique element woven into Jesus' communion with God. The emphasis on the specialness of Jesus' Sonship should make us very cautious in attempting easily to draw direct correspondences between Jesus' spiritual life and our own daily walk with God. Similarly, the same reservation applies to the latter.

Jesus' Closeness with the Father

Jesus' communion with God comes to expression in his sense of absolute dependence upon God as Father. In Matt 23:9, Jesus spoke to his disciples of the need to call God "Father." These were men accustomed to addressing their own fathers with terms of endearment which were summed up in the Aramaic word *abba*. Now Jesus exhorted them no longer to use *abba* with respect to any human. By coming into Jesus' circle of followers they were constituted into a family whose sole head was "the father in heaven."[12] He was the true ground and sustainer of this new community. They were to live in total dependence upon his gracious provisions (Matt 16:31–32). Without question, there is ample evidence that Jesus taught his disciples to instantiate this reliance by opening their

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[11]In particular, the Book of Acts gives many examples of the latter feature.

[12]It is widely accepted that the Aramaic word *abba* rests behind the Greek word for father in Matt 23:9. See Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 48–49.

prayers with the expression "Our Father . . ." The model prayer (Matt 6:9–13//Luke 11:2–4) opens with this address. If earthly fathers knew how to give good things to their children, how much more does "the Father in Heaven" know how to take care of his special family (Matt 7:11; cf. Luke 11:13). This teaching of the need for utter dependence upon the Father, which was instilled by Jesus in his disciples, continued in the early church where even the expression *abba* was used in the Greek-speaking communities (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). Truly Jesus' sense of deep dependence upon the Father was transferred to the community which he founded.

But granted Jesus' closeness to God, is it possible to learn more about how he received guidance from the Father? Was there something in his relationship that may serve as a model as to how believers today may expect direction from God?

Here we need to be careful. In the context of teaching his disciples to pray, using the *abba* expression, the gospel hints that Jesus may have a special relationship with the Father not shared by the disciples. For example, there is no evidence that Jesus ever joined the disciples in communal prayer activity using the address "Our Father." On the other hand, there is abundant evidence that Jesus, in his own prayer life, frequently used the expression, "My Father," perhaps distinguishing himself, in a certain way, from the disciples with respect to his relationship to the Father.[13] Some have even argued that the same understanding is present in Jesus' decision to elect twelve as the newly re-

[13] *Viz.*, 13 times in Matthew and 25 times in John. For a detailed discussion see J. Jeremias *The Prayers of Jesus* (SBT Second Series 6; London: SCM Press, 1967) 44–48. In retrospect, some of Jeremias' conclusions may be overstated. The reader is advised to weigh them very carefully before using them in teaching and preaching.

constituted Israel rather than include himself as the twelfth![14] Thus, in his role of re-gathering Israel, Jesus, as God's special representative, is distinct from the disciples in his relationship with the Father.

The crucial Synoptic gospel text in this connection is Matt 11:25–27 //Luke 10:21–22.[15] Here, in a series of exclamations, Jesus refers to the relationship between himself (the Son) and the Father (God). As opposed to the wise (the power structure of Israel), it is claimed that through the works of Jesus, God has made his will known to the "simple disciples" (*ēpioi*, Matt 11:25). The latter were followers of Jesus who did not come from the scribal class. In just three verses (Matt 11:25–27), there are five instances of the expression "Father," and three of "Son," indicating a strong sense of personal relationship between the two.[16] Of course, we have no direct access to Jesus' own internal perception of his relationship with the Father. But Matthew intimates that it must have been close when he emphasizes a strong Son of God Christology throughout his Gospel (Matt 1:23–25; 3:17; 16:16–18; 17:5, 27:54).

Yet, this crucial relationship between the Father and the Son does not seem to consist of the Father communicating esoteric information to

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[14]In other words, over and against the twelve, Jesus saw himself in some unique relationship with the Father. J. D. G. Dunn *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975) 25–26.

[15]The author assumes that the Johannine references to "my Father" are heavily influenced by the special Johannine Christological perspective that Jesus consciously reveals in his earthly ministry the nature of the eternal relationship between Father and Son (cf. John 3:35; 8:19; 10:15; 14:9).

[16]J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 64.

the Son.[17] Rather, the things that are revealed (Matt 11:25) appear to be "the deeds" of Jesus, which are stated in Matthew 11:2, 25. And as elaborated in Matthew 11:5 these were the equivalent of the visible "mighty works" of his ministry (Matt 11:20–24). They were visible for all to see. The "knowing" of the Father by the Son is simply an expression of the total unity of Father and Son in will and purpose.[18] Jesus' revealing of the Father to the "simple disciples" (Matt 11:25), is done totally through his messianic ministry, which is received by them as the Revelation of God. The sense of Jesus' uniqueness does not rest in his inner life but in what is accomplished in his mission.

In his dedicated service to God, Jesus saw himself carrying out his mission with the same intensity as an obedient Son who follows the word of the Father. By the way he fulfilled these responsibilities obediently, Jesus was unique. But the power of his legacy is not in some special intuition or connection which he was able to develop in his inner nature with the Father, but in the persistence of his mission when he refused to quit: even with the threat of the cross.

Perhaps Jesus had the capacity to do this because he knew that the Father was gracious and cared for his creation; and in that light he was prepared to respond to such love with an obedience that knows no limits.

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[17]It is generally understood that the occurrence of the *Bath Qol* (divine voice) at the Baptism and Transfiguration (Matt 3:17 parr. and Matt 17:5 parr.) has precedents in other Jewish literature and is used by the Gospel authors to highlight the special significance of these occasions for Jesus' story. In other words, their major function is not for Jesus' spiritual development, but to highlight Jesus' significance for the reader.
[18]Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 64.

The Spirit Upon Jesus

The gospels leave us with little room for doubt that the baptism of Jesus was an event of fundamental importance for the mission of Jesus. Luke, in particular, stresses the importance of the coming of the Spirit, as a sort of commission empowering Jesus for ministry (Luke 3:21–22; 4:1, 11, 18). There is no question, either, that what subsequently ensued in Jesus' ministry was a series of healings and exorcisms indicating that God was inaugurating a new epoch of his rule among his people. The Holy Spirit was the agency that provided the power for these works.

Although it is strange that there are relatively few references to the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry in the Synoptics, the classical text of Matt 12:28//Luke 11:20 leaves no doubt about the role of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry. Matthew 12:28 says that Jesus casts out the demons by the Spirit of God. And the parallel "finger of God" in Luke 11:20 is simply Luke's attempt, as with many of his other arguments, to ground this expression of the working of the power of God in the scriptures (Exod 8:19; 31:18; Deut 9:10; Ps 8:3).[19] Thus, when these astonishing events occurred in Jesus' mission, the appropriate conclusion was that the new eschatological era had arrived; not that Jesus was merely a sage with extraordinary spiritual powers.

Consequently, the great error would be to deny that the expressions of the coming of the Kingdom were the work of the Spirit. In Matt 12:31–32, Jesus solemnly declares that this cannot be forgiven. This does not mean that this sin was tied to a failure to accept the Spirit when it was working in some special "age of miracles." (After all Matt 7:21–23

[19]Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1958) 107.

warns that the working of special signs and powers were not always the product of the Holy Spirit.)[20] What is unforgivable is to confuse the work of Jesus with that of Beelzebul (Matt 12:31–32) by saying that Jesus is possessed by the Devil (Mark 3:22, 28–30).[21]

As the "stronger one" who is seizing the goods of the "strong man" by his exorcisms done in the power of the Spirit, Jesus was defeating Satan (Matt 12:29//Mark 3:27). But this must always be seen not as some extraordinary expression of special power within Jesus, but an indication of the coming of a new age. These expressions highlight the significance and importance of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry but provide no clear indication of the role the Spirit played in Jesus' own spiritual life. Indeed, our analysis of the best historical sources indicates that Jesus was not an ecstatic or charismatic.[22] No doubt Jesus had a deep sense of the presence of God in his life. But the Synoptics do not stress this as an extraordinary *inner* spiritual capacity, but as a reflection of what was taking place eschatologically in his day-by-day ministry in Israel.

Paul and the Spirit

It is to belabor the obvious to assert that Paul also was a person of the Spirit. For Paul, the Holy Spirit was the special agent that energized the Christian for living in Christ. To use a metaphor drawn from John, the

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[20]As well noted by D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 8 (ed. F. E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 291.

[21]Luke 12:10–11 appears to view the matter in a somewhat different way. In his setting, Luke intimates that blasphemy against the Spirit is the rejection of Jesus by a disloyal disciple in a critical period of testing by refusing to be led by the Spirit. cf. R. C. Tannehill, *Luke* in *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 203. See also Luke 21:12–19//Mk 13:11.

[22]Contra J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 88, albeit he is somewhat equivocal in his final assessment.

living vine is dead without the life-giving nutrition. That nutrition was the Spirit. It was the mode of Christ's presence in the early Christian community.

The Charismatic Paul

Paul taught that, by the agency of the Spirit, one was incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Titus 3:5). Basically, he said that when one is baptized one is initiated into a corporate entity (the church) that derives its existence from Christ. Christ is the head of the corporate entity (church) which, to complete the metaphor, is called "his body." The believer is not personally connected with Christ as a kind of isolated island, but to the body. Yet Christ, through the animating power of the Spirit, is active in us through the corporate life of the body.

Christ, through the agency of the Spirit, gives certain gifts for building up the church (1 Cor 12:4–31; Rom 12:3–8; cf. Eph 4:7–16). The gifts are not for our personal benefits but to enable us to fulfill the mission of Christ. The gifts (charismata) for Paul were of two essential kinds: word and deed (Rom 15:18). With respect to the latter there would be gifts of leadership, administration, and the capacity to heal. Examples of the former would be speaking with God's power, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and discernment. In his sovereign distribution to believers it appears that God gives each one several gifts. Paul's gifts fell mainly within the area of the word. He clearly spoke in tongues (1 Cor 14:18). And he was prepared to put his authoritative word up against any prophet (1 Cor 14:36). He attributes his coming to belief in Jesus to revelation (Gal 1:12, 16–17). And, to cap all of this, Paul speaks about taking a spiritual journey of ascent to paradise (the throne of God?) where he hears

inexpressible words (2 Cor 12:4).[23] It is one of the great ironies of the West that Paul is remembered for being the one who first systematized the Christian Faith into some semblance of doctrinal order. Krister Stendahl is closer to the truth about Paul when he claims that his letters reflect his major concern which was, through the intercession of prayer, to call upon God's support and guidance for a fledgling Christian community. Above all, Paul was a man of the Spirit.[24]

Guidance of the Spirit in the Believer's Life

Yet it is remarkable how reticent Paul is with respect to references to the nature of his direct guidance from the Lord. Aside from claiming that his ascent to Paradise was the highest form of revelation, which even exceeded that of his spiritual opponents, Paul refuses to speak about it (2 Cor 12:1–12; cf. 2 Cor 10:12; 11:5; 12:1). The matter of Gal 1:11–12 is a little more difficult. Here Paul claims to have received his gospel in a revelation from Jesus Christ. But, again, several points need to be remembered. Whatever Paul received from the Lord in the Damascus experience was a once-and-for-all revelation. This revelation ended a direct chain of revelatory appearances to the apostles commencing with the revelation to Peter (1 Cor 15:3–8). Even granted that in the appearance mentioned in Galatians 1, the Lord spoke with Paul about the mission of the Gentiles, the whole episode appears to be more of a

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[23]For analysis of the text see A. T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension* in *Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991 [1981]) 71–86. Also J. D. Tabor *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America. 1986) 113–127 is useful.

[24]Krister Stendahl, "Paul at Prayer," in *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia Fortress Press. 1984) 151–161.

commissioning scene rather than the transfer of information.[25] Thus, even, for Paul, the arch-charismatic of the New Testament, such terminology as "the Lord told me this" and "the Lord told me that," cannot be documented.

There is one text (Rom 8:15–27), however, where we get the closest discussion in Paul with respect to what it means to have regular guidance of the Spirit in our lives. In Romans 8:15 Paul asserts that we have received the Spirit of sonship. This reminds us that for Paul Christ's lordship in the believer's life is made effective by the presence of the Spirit. In the power of this Spirit, Christ and the early Christians addressed God as Father. So may we. Then, in Rom 8:16, for purposes of analysis, Paul draws a distinction between our spirits and the Holy Spirit. He asserts that the Spirit of God bears witness to our spirits that we are children of God. Paul goes on to argue that as God's children we are heirs: not of an earthly territory, but of a new restored world if we co-suffer with Christ.[26]

Here, as we noted earlier, Paul introduces a theme that permeates his whole theology. The entire Christian journey is God's way of teaching us that his strength is made effective through weakness. In this way our lives are made to conform to the way of Christ. Paul learned this insight after his journey of mystical ascent (2 Cor 12:8–10; see also 2 Cor 4:7). We must learn it in our day-by-day walk with the Lord.

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[25]Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 174 sums up a study of revelation in Paul by saying, "Paul gives no palpable indication of basing the authority of doctrine on a private vision. . . . He exercises his stewardship of the divine mysteries by couching new disclosures in fully traditional language and biblical reasoning."

[26]"Provided we suffer with him" (Rom 8:17).

We come to understand that the world is pregnant with the glory of the next world (8:19–22). And in the same way our lives in the church are shadows of what will be (8:23–25).[27] As our spirits share in this struggle we are brought into collaboration with Christ. In this shared struggle with fellow believers in the body we *hear the Lord speaking*; not in some supernatural dimension beyond the normal working of our senses, but in our common sharing with sisters and brothers in the groaning of the creation as we complete Christ's suffering for it (cf. Col 1:24). It is here that we find hope that sustains us as we await the fulfillment of the new age. How we conceptualize this kind of spiritual communication remains something of a mystery.[28] It certainly goes beyond the level of the mystical or the intuitive. Many have had the experience of going through a deep crisis, and after constant prayer, finally coming to peace with themselves, sensing a way forward. Many times we only appreciate this word in retrospect. Could it be that our Creator who made us and knows us far better than we know ourselves has transmitted a word to us through avenues deep within our minds and senses, and we have heard?[29]

Conclusion

The focus of this essay has been to address, in the light of our historic Christian Faith, the crucial issue of how we may expect to receive the guidance of God in our lives today. We have rejected both hard-line

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[27]I am indebted to N. T. Wright, *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 85–86 for dramatically making me aware of this image in Paul.

[28]Theologically, a full scale anthropology would be needed to work it out.

[29]Yates, "How Does God Speak To Us Today," 120, reminds us that much current neurophysiology and cybernetic research construes the human as having different levels of perception rather than having separate entities of mind, soul, and spirit, etc.

cessationism and the triumphalist proclamations of some forms of current neo-Pentecostalism. Analysis of the spiritual life of Jesus and Paul reveals that they were deeply sensitive to the divine demand, rather than giving evidence for special communicative powers with the Heavenly Father. While always understanding that there are such things as false signs and wonders (Matt 7:21–23), we have argued that we need to be sensitive to the Lord and his demands as he directs through his Spirit today. So, we sum up this discussion in the following two theses:

1. God never tells his people to do things that violate his commands given to the church in scripture. Scripture sets the boundaries for determining what constitutes a valid word of God for the Church.
2. By being conformed to Christ and sharing his sufferings, we stand in an appropriate situation to hear his gracious word, and to determine the particular form of his guidance and thus avoid spiritual and moral suicide. It is in the cross-shaped life that God communicates meaning, hope, and above all, presence. In short, in the cruciform life we go deeper into the heart of God.

A Postscript on Prophecy in Acts

In this essay we have been concerned to discuss the thorny issue of how the believer receives a word of guidance from the Triune God beyond illumination gained directly from Scripture in order to live the Christian life today. The author is painfully aware that this is an exploratory essay. There are a number of areas that need to be discussed more thoroughly, such as thoughtful reflection on prayer in the biblical tradition and the teachings of the Gospel and Letters of John. Another area would be to discuss the function of the Spirit in Acts.

One point which is directly relevant to the matter needs to be made. It involves the issue of whether we can construe certain expression of prophecy in Acts which convey a direct word of the Lord as having some analogues in the contemporary church.

First, it needs to be underscored that Luke-Acts regards the reception of the gift of the Spirit at conversion as a fundamental element of the Christian life for each Christian. This encompasses the promise of the coming of a prophetic Spirit, as found in Joel 2:17–21, as being realized not just at Pentecost but functioning as a prototype for the gifts of the Spirit that are referred to throughout Acts.[30]

Second, in Acts the coming of this prophetic spirit in part involves the Spirit, under the direction of the risen Lord, giving guidance either through revelatory visions/dreams (Acts 7:55–56; 9:10–18; 10:10–20; 16:9–10; 18:9–10; 22:17–18, 21; 23:11) or revelatory instruction (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12, 28; 13:2, 4; 15:28; 16:6–7; 19:21; 20:22–23; 21:4).[31]

Third, in keeping with the rejection of a strict cessationist perspective, as argued in this essay, the author sees no exegetical reason to claim that the promises of the prophetic Spirit of Acts 2:17–21, as interpreted by Luke as coming to pass in the early church, have been rescinded.

Fourth, however, it is instructive to note (see note 2 above) that these words of prophetic instruction, coming from the risen Lord through the vehicle of the Spirit, function in Acts either as aids to bring people to

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[30]See Max Turner, *Power From on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* JPTSS 9 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 348–349.

[31]Turner, *Power From on High*, 349–350.

a knowledge of the gospel or for service which is based on it. And this is always communicated to humans in intelligible speech.

From this we conclude that Acts maintains that the Triune God does furnish a word of guidance to believers apart from Scripture, but that it never obviates or qualifies that truth of the Gospel which is found in human language in Scripture. However, as far as setting forth an anthropology that would enable us to understand this process of the contemporary guidance of the Spirit, Acts does not take us beyond what we learned from our study in Paul.

Finally, we within the Restoration Movement need to open our eyes to some very important exhaustive exegetical works being produced by a new generation of scholars who have emerged in the Charismatic Movement. A dialogue needs to be opened. We can do no better than close with the words of one of these scholars spoken with reference to the debate between cessationists and non-cessationists.

> The positive way forward for the church lies in the combination of wisdom of both sides not in the arrogant and alienating polemics between them. In this context we may perhaps be permitted to conclude with words drawn from the exhortation of Ephesians 3:3–6, . . . With all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in *love, strive eagerly to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*[32]

[32]Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996) 358–359.

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Religious Experience and Spirituality
Biblical and Post-Modern

Michael R. Weed

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience . . .

T. S. Eliot

At the outset of these reflections, it is important to remind ourselves that both "religious experience" and "spirituality" designate difficult concepts. Not only is the phrase "religious experience" not a biblical one, but the very concept of "experience" is itself complex.[1] And we know that the expression "religious experience" can be used in different ways. For example, we occasionally hear such expressions used to describe a visit to Rheims Cathedral or attending a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. But we also know that there are other "religious experiences" wherein one becomes aware of a different order of reality, an experience of the numinous or transcendent. It is with this latter sense that we are concerned.

"Spirituality" is equally complex. For these reflections Robert C. Roberts' definition will be adopted. That is, "spirituality" designates the manner in which different visions of "what human life is and ought to be" shape the self in correspondingly different ways.[2] Both religious and non-

[1]Cf. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1986). Kasper reminds us that the concept of experience "is one of the most difficult and obscure concepts in all of philosophy" (81).

[2]Cf. Robert C. Roberts, *The Strengths of a Christian* (Philadelphia:

religious interpretations of the meaning of reality and human existence offer basic concepts and evoke attitudes and dispositions which significantly shape the self. Used in this sense, one may speak of Hindu spirituality, Muslim spirituality, and even Marxist spirituality. To the extent that "religious experiences" become foundational to different visions of reality and of "what human life is and ought to be," such religious experiences will evoke their own "spiritualities."

Before proceeding, two observations are critical. First, as Robert Sokolowski observes, "there are no absolutely raw, uninterpreted, unarticulated givens in experience."[3] All human experience is interpreted. Further, experiences cannot be fully or accurately interpreted simply on the basis of immediate sensations or feelings. Taking medicine, for example, may be an unpleasant experience but necessary to restore one's health. On the other hand, inhaling tobacco smoke may be a pleasant experience but damages health. Food deprivation may feel good or bad and be either depending upon whether one is dieting or undergoing forced starvation. That is, every event or occurrence which becomes part of a "human experience" must be understood or interpreted within a broader context or horizon of meaning.

Second, it does not follow from the fact that experiences must be interpreted that subjective meanings are simply imposed on objective data. Nor is it the case that one may completely separate external or objective data from its subjective response or interpretation. Human "experience" is always a complex interplay of data and interpretation; experience can neither be

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Westminster, 1984) 17–18. Roberts' definition has an advantage over definitions which limit "spirituality" to specifically supernatural views. But in that every total explanation of "reality," including materialistic ones, organizes the self in terms of a confessional viewpoint, i.e., nonempirical, it is appropriate to speak of materialistic and secular "spiritualities."

[3]Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 134.

reduced to its subjective aspects nor restricted to its objective aspects. Rather, human experience has a dialectical structure wherein the self responds to the ongoing flow of events on the basis of previous interpretations formed in the interplay between the self and external reality.[4]

Still, it follows that perspective or outlook significantly shapes—even limits—one's experiences. Perspective predetermines both what one sees and overlooks; in effect, perspective largely predetermines what one "experiences." Thus, to say that an experience is "supernatural" one must not only have a perception of the "supernatural"; one must also have an interpretation of that which is designated "natural." Within such an outlook, an experience of the supernatural would appear to be exceptional—perhaps an intrusion into the natural.

By contrast, an alternative perspective might view all reality as dependent upon, reflective of, and inseparable from a deeper personal reality. For such a perspective, distinguishing between experiences of the "natural" and the "supernatural" might appear artificial and possibly misleading. At best, designations of the supernatural would identify those experiences that more directly reflect the deeper reality present in and through all events.

Two Types of Religious Experience

These observations make possible the identification of two fundamental types of religious experience. The first is a general religious experience built into the structure of the human at the foundation of human consciousness; the second may both presume and illuminate the first.

General religious experience grows out of our involvement with life itself; it expresses itself in the form of a mysterious depth to reality met "in, with, and under" life's common experiences.[5] It emerges with our "experience

[4]Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 82.

[5]Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1 (New York:

of our experience" and with the inescapable awareness of our own historicity. Finding ourselves existing in a fleeting "now" between a retreating past and an uncertain future, we encounter the mystery out of which we emerge and toward which we move. Or, experiencing both meaning and meaninglessness, we eventually are driven to question the meaning of reality as a whole; we desire a total answer.

Although this type of religious experience (growing out of our awareness of being inescapably bound to a reality which is ultimately mysterious) is given through reflection, it is not just an intellectual puzzle. It evokes awe and wonder, involving our total self—intellectual and affective—at its deepest levels. As such, this experience underlies and colors all our other experiences. It is, as Walter Kasper states,

> an indirect, not a direct type of experience . . . It is therefore not just one experience alongside other experiences, but rather the basic experience present in our other experiences; it is an experience that presides over and gives a pervasive tone to all other experience.[6]

This "basic experience" of the unfathomable mystery of ultimate reality lies at the foundation of human consciousness and behind all human experience. Because human identity is inescapably bound to the mysterious origin and goal of reality, the question it raises may be repressed but not dismissed. It is not merely the question that humans ask; it is the question that humans are.[7]

The second form of religious experience consists of "disclosure situations" in which one experiences an epiphany of the mysterious depths of reality as personal and intentional. Such situations are not to be confused with occasions of what we have termed "general religious experience" in which one

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Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964 [1944]). Niebuhr can speak of a revelation "in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands" (127).

[6]Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 84–85.

[7]Cf. Don Luigi Guissani, *The Religious Sense* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 63, 75.

becomes aware of, or reawakened to, the underlying question of human existence. That is, beyond the self's occasional awareness of the awesome and mysterious nature of existence, there are those rare experiences wherein one senses that the insurmountable chasm is being bridged—from the other side. Here, religious experience as "disclosure" is attached to particular objects or historical events. These occasions may become foundational for total interpretations which, in turn, guide subsequent interpretations of interactions with reality.

Biblical Spirituality: The Old Testament

The biblical view of reality stands in sharp relief from those of the surrounding world. Similarly, the organization of the self in response to reality, "biblical spirituality," also differs from that of the surrounding world. In the pagan world there were numerous accounts of encounters between humans and gods (theophanies). In these accounts, various supernatural powers, although existing at a different level than humans, still exist within the broader boundaries of the universe and may intrude into the world of human experience from time to time. Pagan theophanies thus provided fleeting contacts with powerful and unpredictable gods who moved on the horizon of human events.

Pagan spirituality was fundamentally shaped by the position of the self as vulnerable to the oblique interests of powerful supernatural beings who rewarded and punished humans according to their own mercurial amusements or annoyances. Certainly there was no sense that the gods desired or sought the best for the creation. In the first instance, the pagan gods were powerful; they were not good, much less faithful or just.

Thus the pagan lived with an underlying degree of anxiety not only regarding the flow of life's everyday events but also regarding whether the

powerful gods presently worshipped might be vanquished by some other god with equally ambivalent or malevolent intentions.[8]

In the biblical outlook, by contrast, there is no "other world" and there are no other gods. Yahweh alone is God. He is Creator of both heaven and earth. Thus, for Israel, God does not "break into the world" from time to time; he is never absent. On the other hand, God's presence is an "elusive presence"; he is never directly encountered.[9] In spite of visual features signifying God's presence, he is heard rather than seen.[10] And the word that is heard is the word of election and promise, commonly calling the hearer to carry out a particular task or mission (e.g., Abraham in Gen 12:1–2; Moses in Exod 3:7–8; Isaiah in Isa 6:1-13; Ezekiel in Ezekiel chap. 2).

Herein lies a crucial difference between biblical and pagan theophanies and their attendant spiritualities, namely, the disclosure that Yahweh alone is God and that his identity lies in his electing mercy and historic faithfulness to his covenant promises. Yahweh is fundamentally the God of promise, the God of history, and therein the God of the future. Human history is invested with direction and meaning, viz., the fulfillment of God's promises and the realization of his purposes. The revelation of God's promises and thus the revelation of God as the God-of-promise evokes a spirituality which orients its recipients toward the past, present, and future. The present is lived between memory of God's past faithfulness and hope in his future faithfulness: it is a present which stands in visible contradiction to the promised future, a present in which the unrealized fulfillment of promise

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[8]Cf. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1965).
[9]Cf. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
[10]Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 69, 110.

draws one confidently and expectantly "onward" (not "upward") through the everyday affairs of history into the future.[11]

Biblical Spirituality: Jesus and Paul

Christian thought unfolds within the horizon of Old Testament promise and yet finds the center of that horizon in the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the incarnate Son of God in whom the nature and purpose of God is fully revealed. Thus Jesus provides the center and point of departure for Christian identity. In the Gospel accounts of Jesus and the letters of the apostle Paul, we see the foundations and emerging shape of early Christian religious experience and spirituality.

While the Gospels portray Jesus as experiencing human emotions and possibly visions (Luke 10:18), little attention is given to Jesus' subjective state of mind. It would be accurate to say that the Gospels offer little insight regarding Jesus' own subjectivity or "experience." Further, the Gospel accounts of Jesus show him with no disdain for the world; he sought neither to avoid nor to escape life's daily activities.

Although Jesus instructs his disciples how to pray (e.g., Matt 6:5-13; Luke 11:1–4) and assumes the common practices of fasting and alms giving, he offers no instructions on meditation or how his disciples might have special experiences. Other than promising that in the future his disciples will see the "Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" at the parousia

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[11]Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 118. Cf. James Muilenburg, *The Way of Israel: Biblical Faith and Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). Muilenburg points out that Israel does not seek to know God through escape from the mundane world. Even in its worship, perhaps especially in its worship, this is apparent. For Israel, "[w]orship is not a flight to 'the dim Unknown,' timelessness, or to 'a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts,' or to a shoreless ocean of quietude and unperturbed peace" (107–8).

Fortunately, Paul provides a vivid demonstration of the manner in which he views his own experience in light of the Christian message of the cross and resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 1:8f Paul records an experience of hardship and suffering, of being "under great pressure," even to the extent that he "despaired of life."

Through the "eyes of faith," however, Paul is able to interpret the suffering and hardship accompanying his apostolic mission (and that of other Christians) as sharing in the sufferings of Christ in a manner enabling him both to receive and to offer comfort. Further, Paul can declare that the purpose of the events described in 2 Corinthians 1 was "to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:8b, 9). Herein Paul's subjectivity (his emotional experience, his despair) is subordinated to and reinterpreted in light of the objective reality of God's resurrection of the one who suffered and was crucified.[13]

The biblical and early Christian orientation toward ultimate reality is more nearly temporal and social—even political—than spatial and individualistic. From the biblical perspective, one awaits not personal deliverance to a heavenly realm above, but the deliverance of the people of God in a coming final act which, inaugurated in Christ, is yet to be consummated in the future—an act with cosmic dimensions: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." As the Christian faith made its way in the Hellenistic world, however, this orientation would alter considerably and Christianity would emerge with a much more individualistic and otherworldly spirituality.[14]

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[13]In Jesus and Paul we see a continuation and development of the Old Testament orientation toward the surrounding creation as the arena in which the Creator encounters his creatures and unfolds his redemptive purposes.

[14]In time, Christian spirituality has become largely identified with more otherworldly forms of spirituality and even mysticism. In this regard one cannot exaggerate the influence of the sixth-century Neo-Platonic writings

Post-Modern Spiritualities: Attestation and Opportunity

The Enlightenment rationalism which, riding on the successes of science and technology, largely displaced traditional Christian interpretations of reality, is now itself being rejected as inadequate—shallow and sterile. We are now entering not only a Post-Christian age but also a Post-modern (Enlightenment) age.[15]

In this climate, new spiritualities are emerging.[16] These, however, are decidedly modern in that they embody modern views in which traditional understandings of reality have been discredited. But they are also unmistakably post-modern in that they sense and react to the failures of modernism. In particular, post-modern spiritualities display a loss of confidence in the abilities of science and technology to provide a humane environment for human flourishing.

Sociologist Peter Berger and others have observed the manner in which modern society produces widespread estrangement and alienation from social institutions. In Berger's apt phrase, the self is "homeless" among the impersonalism of technology and bureaucracy which dominate life in the modern world.[17] Under modernity's relentless pressure, even the traditional

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falsely attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, mentioned in Acts 17:34.

[15]Nearly sixty years ago Pitirim Sorokin foresaw this development in his predictions of an emerging "sensate society." For Sorokin, as societies reject the existence of and/or the importance of transcendent values—Truth and Goodness—attention inevitably shifts to that which is immediately available to the senses. Whereas pre-sensate societies seek truth and meaning and take pleasure in the quest, sensate societies abandon the pursuit of objective or public truth for subjective and private meanings. Eventually, in hypersensate societies, questions of truth are completely abandoned for the pursuit of pleasure. See Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age* (Oxford: One World, 1992 [1941]).

[16]Cf. Paul Heelas, ed., *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[17]Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1974). A classic statement of this thesis is Max Weber's contention that Puritan this-worldly asceticism has given rise to economic conditions which dominate modern life as an "iron

haven from the outside world, the home, takes on the characteristics of society's impersonal institutions.[18]

Not surprisingly, post-modern spiritualities tend to be highly individualistic and subjective. The self, having abandoned transcendent reality and alienated from the social world, turns within to find meaning and truth—or merely pleasure. The turn inward, however understandable, exacts a high price; for the self is left to construct its own "personally indexed meaning system" without reference to any transcendent reality. Post-modern meaning systems thus tend to be highly eclectic, and unstable. In describing modern religiosity as the product of individual tastes, Robert Wuthnow sees a kind of "synthesis of Christianity, popular psychology, *Readers' Digest*, folklore, and personal superstitions, all wrapped up in the anecdotes of the individual's biography."[19]

Such visions of life, and their accompanying spiritualities, are "thin and insubstantial." Significantly, the pursuit of pleasure, calibrated to individually indexed meaning systems, takes an enormous toll on the public sphere, which is no longer sustained by shared views of reality and commonly acknowledged commitments. As Robert Bellah (and co-authors) noted, the radically individualizing society generates "lifestyle enclaves" wherein one finds others who "reflect and affirm one's selfhood."[20]

But post-modern views of reality not only threaten the broader social fabric. Post-modern approaches to reality realize the visions of Nietzsche by

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cage." Cf. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958 [1904]) 181.

[18]Berger et al., *The Homeless Mind*, 187.

[19]Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, & Secularism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) 116. Thomas Luckmann discerned the development of private and subjective "universes of meaning" as early as 1967. See *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan) 77–106.

[20]Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 73–74.

threatening to destroy the unity of the self.[21] As the fundamental harmony of the self with its social and natural environments is weakened, the self's turn inward risks not only solipsism but the abandonment of the self to its sensations. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot, the emerging post-modern self is a self which has experiences but is unable to understand and synthesize its experiences within any context of meaning. The "self" is reduced to being little more than meaningless dissociated sensations against the backdrop of a nihilistic abyss. It is only, as Eliot observes, "approach to the meaning" which "restores the experience."[22]

A Formidable Challenge

Contemporary fascination with religion and spirituality offers a formidable challenge for Christianity. "New age" spiritualities in particular, in a manner similar to ancient Gnosticism, employ and distort Christian beliefs and practices within their own broader schemata. Such spiritualities are especially seductive to those finding themselves weary of secularization but too modernized to return to more traditional expressions of Christian faith.

This difficulty notwithstanding, contemporary spiritualities may be viewed as attesting to the strength of the religious impulse and as providing a challenge for Christian faith to commend itself. The contemporary fascination with "spirituality" and "things religious," however confused, may attest to the human heart's insuppressible desire for contact with the "beyond," with transcendence (what we have designated "general religious experience"). Further, the instability and confusion of contemporary spiritualities evidence that they are driven by truncated views of reality and of the self.[23]

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[21]Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 462.

[22]T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1943) 39.

[23]Whatever the terminology or spiritual exercises employed, the contemporary "turn within" feeds upon the forces of alienation and

Nonetheless, contemporary interests in spirituality provide occasions for Christian faith to demonstrate that it addresses the deeper mysteries of life in a manner which fully encompasses the social, corporeal, and temporal aspects of human existence. The illumination of reality by the Second Adam calls and enables us to be more, not less, fully human than we are otherwise wont to be.

Our age is not poor in experience, but in faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

estrangement operative in modern society. The post-modern turn within presumes and does not alter the self's acute disorientation within the external world. Ultimately, the "turn within" abandons the self to strategies of contacting transcendence and meaning within its own subjectivity—a move that inevitably divinizes the self. Cf. Peter Berger, "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven: 2,500 Years of Religious Ecstasy," in *Facing up to Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1977) 195–206.

Once Again: The Boundaries of Fellowship
*A Review Essay**

Allan J. McNicol

F. LaGard Smith, *Who is My Brother? Facing a Crisis of Identity and Fellowship* (Malibu, Calif.: Cotswold Publishing, 1997). Pp. 281.

In the past several years several prominent ministers within the fellowship of Churches of Christ have, for various reasons, decided to air openly their beliefs in an area where we have been somewhat silent over the years. That area is our relationship with believers in other communions. Basically, these ministers are being heard to say that we should accept other believers as Christians in good standing. As I understand it they see no problem in entering into full fellowship in worship and other matters of mutual interest with believers in other communions.

Certainly, there are some reasons why we might look in that direction. Have you ever noticed how many hymns we use that have not been written by members of our fellowship? How many books and commentaries on the shelves of church and ministerial libraries were not written by people generally regarded as members of the brotherhood? And what about people as diverse as William Barclay, Mother Teresa, Chuck

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Colson, and John Stott? Haven't they influenced the course of events in modern church history toward a far more positive outcome than many of those we would claim as brothers or sisters in the fellowship of the Churches of Christ?

Well, many among us are well aware of this reality. And now, apparently, some are saying openly that all of these people whom we just noted, and many more, are fully our brothers and sisters in the Lord - even though few of them have been immersed in the triune name as believers for the remission of their sins.

For a fellowship that claims to be a non-denominational, contemporary embodiment of the New Testament church, such a development raises some questions. Are we being told that the traditional denominational confessions and the divisions which they spawned are not that significant because they can be trumped by a greater union: namely, our commonalty in sharing the Lordship of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit? Is this the new definition of what we believe makes a Christian? Or are the admissions another way of saying that our plea for undenominational Christianity, as we have perceived it, is a myth and we may as well just admit that Churches of Christ are just another denomination? And that as a denominated part of the body of Christ, being no better or worse than the others, we ought to co-operate with other communions for the greater good of the entire body? As to the bottom line, is the implication that what have constituted the doctrinal distinctives of Churches of Christ are no more significant than the distinctives that mark other groups? The implications of these and similar issues raised in some circles prompted LaGard Smith to write his book.

The Issue of Boundaries

Certainly the issue of where we draw the boundaries is a fundamental question that must be addressed by any fellowship that has institutional integrity. To be sure it was an issue that was front row center in the early church. Many thought that male members of the church needed to bear the mark of circumcision to be assured that they were within the proper boundaries of the people of God. Paul argued vociferously that it was not necessary for his Gentile converts to be circumcised. They were justified in God's court on the basis of faith apart from the badges of the Sinai covenant. As is clear from the shape of the canon that emerged in the ancient church Paul's position finally won the day.

In the early church the issue of where the boundaries of fellowship had to be drawn involved an interesting intermingling of social practices and doctrine. LaGard Smith claims that it is the same today. He claims we are being driven into controversy on this matter by sociological realities. By and large, in the past generation, among the mainstream religious groups in North America a process of ossification has set in. At best most groups are barely holding their own. It is no different with us. We have about reached saturation point with the number of churches "vying for the same limited pool of members." What LaGard Smith talks about as the Wal-Mart syndrome is emerging. Translated, that means in many communities one church breaks out from the rest. With its great facilities, prime location, dynamic up-beat preacher, exciting worship format, and programs for every age and interest group in the community, it becomes the place to be. Such a fellowship flourishes as the dominant expression of church life in the community. It grows while others wither and die on the vine.

Obviously, in such situations, if we aspire to be the Wal-Mart church of our community it helps for purposes of facilitating growth that no fundamental encumbrance such as distinctive denominational confessional demands be placed before prospective members. Thus, given these sociological realities, the need for marketing and the use of church growth techniques tend to lead us to a position where we opt in favor of playing down religious differences. An evangelical family starts attending the assembly. You want them to become members. It is easy to say "Let us not ask questions. Let us not set up any unnecessary barriers so that this nice family from a Bible church in Minnesota can become members of our fellowship on no other grounds than the simple common confession of acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord."

So, today, we are being called upon to ask ourselves a tough question, "How should we regard believers whose doctrine is different?" To what extent do we make common cause with them? LaGard Smith has thought about these issues. How does he propose to deal with them?

The Smith Proposal

Smith argues that the problem could be settled if we only took the time to sort it out and adopt a multi-level approach to the matter. He claims that members of the Churches of Christ live in a world where there exists the possibility for five levels of fellowship. Failure to appreciate the different functions of these various levels is the basic source of our problem. Specifically, he refers to the five levels as the Five-fold Fellowship. (1) The first level is our *universal participation* in the human family. (2) A second level of fellowship Smith calls "*Faith Fellowship*," by which he seems to mean the basic commonalities we share with believers in Jesus in other historic confessions, which can be acknowledged and

celebrated with caution. (3) Next comes the "*Extended Family*," by which he means people within baptistic fellowships such as the Campbell-Stone movement: baptized believers into Christ no matter what their allegiances or life-style. (4) At a fourth level is what he refers to as "*Conscience Fellowship*," which applies to the Churches of Christ. It recognizes that within Churches of Christ there are various sub-groups. It respects the various principled positions of different subgroups within Churches of Christ as all being fellow believers while, at the same time, denouncing the party or sectarian spirit among these sub-groups. As a positive instance, it may be noted that some of the brethren among the non-Sunday school churches fit this mold. They hold a principled position, but they see themselves "in fellowship" in every other way within a brotherhood that stands on the platform that one enters into the body of Christ through the initiatory rite of believer's baptism. (5) Finally, there is "*Congregational Fellowship*." This is the fellowship we share in our local congregations. It is precious. Smith notes that even this is becoming endangered today because "comfort zones" are being impaired by major changes in the format of worship, matters of discipline, and issues of inclusiveness. He urges that considerable effort be invested in maintaining this unity of fellowship at the congregational level as well as giving consideration to how fellowship works at the other levels.

Without taking the perfunctory cheap shot of noting that this has been drawn up by a lawyer, and so may be intelligible only to someone who appreciates the niceties of legal distinctions, it may be helpful simply to note what is the bottom line. For Smith, the bottom line is to be found in determining what constitutes the unity of the many and varied sub-groups that now exist within the brotherhood. There has to be a glue

which holds them all together. For Smith, it is our common belief that the baptism of believers into Christ is the culminating initiatory rite of the obedient faith which saves and is absolutely necessary for one to be part of the body of Christ, the locale of the saved. In Smith's view the problem with the developing ecumenical sub-group among us is not that they espouse just another principled position held by yet another constituency in the brotherhood, but if one followed their basic rationale, it would undermine the very *raison d' être* of our existence as a fellowship. This is what Smith says:

> Just how messy is fellowship going to get [I think Smith means membership here] when we can no longer assume that someone who comes into our midst from the churches of Christ is in fact a Christian? When the one thing we have always had in common [our baptism into Christ] is no longer commonly shared... Before some of us go that far, it is left for the rest of us to draw the line in the sand. When it comes to conscience fellowship over the matter of Christian birth, previous controversies are *penny ante.*

Thus Smith perceives that there is something peculiarly dangerous about the ecumenical sub-group that sets it apart from other sub-groups in Churches of Christ.

A Response

Space does not allow me to enter into a detailed conversation with LaGard Smith's book. As a lawyer he definitely has the gift of setting forth various options. Somehow or other I have the deep suspicion, that despite this analysis, many in our churches, regardless of anything we say, will go on meeting with interdenominational prayer groups, Bible Study Fellowship, and Promise Keepers, finding much in common with the evangelicals, the various "confessing communities" in the old-line churches, or even beyond that, the conservatives in Catholicism. To the growing number of people among us who do this, LaGard Smith's position, although raising

some very valid points, sounds a little "moss-backed." In short, it will probably not get a hearing in the very circles where it needs to be contemplated the most.

I am not denying that he has raised a number of serious issues. As one who was raised in the brotherhood in a far-flung part of the world, the idea of catholicity (that the brotherhood throughout the world say and teach the same thing), is very important. I have long taught and written that the ecclesiastical pluralism in the American churches has significant ramifications for believers in the growing brotherhood in other parts of the world. There are consequences for those advocating this new ecumenism. But, in my judgment, these issues can only be addressed in proper perspective by a more advanced vision of what the Church is and ought to be.

Our Perspective

I would like to conclude with a positive and more simplified response to the ecumenical sub-group. I would come at these issues from a slightly different angle. Let me illustrate with a case example. Several years ago I was asked to be a participant in a project where a number of scholars were tasked to do assignments for a one volume International Catholic (i.e. Roman Catholic) Commentary. I thought about this some. I asked the Catholic judicatory authorities why they would be interested in having me and other non-Roman Catholics write for this project. "Oh," they said, "since Vatican II we have an understanding of the church that there are those in apostolic fellowship with Rome and then there are the 'separated brethren' who are believers but are not in full fellowship with us. If we are to have a commentary that is truly catholic we need to hear from some

folk like you." I thought then and I think now that the distinction is helpful.

If I could take a page out of this book, I would want to say that we in Churches of Christ also have a sense of understanding of the church catholic. Fundamental to that position is that we only teach and preach as the basis for fellowship what is universally accepted as biblically based doctrine. With respect to concerns about baptism that means the immersion of believers in the triune name as the rite of entrance into the body of Christ. And so on down the line with other doctrines. In short, if we take this catholic position agreed upon, by all, as being valid, the burden of proof is on those who adopt other practices (viz., taking the Lord's Supper quarterly), which are not universally accepted, to show why they are not sectarian and divisive. Until they can give that proof from Scripture, for the sake of integrity, and the unity of the body of Christ at large, we cannot welcome into membership those who conform to a different set of theological confessions and understandings. They remain "separated believers."

So, I think, the Roman Catholic analogue has some merit. We are not saying, "We are the only ones!" We can learn much from other believers in other communions. We can interact and co-operate with them at a number of different levels. They enrich us in countless ways. But *our* position has also its own integrity. And fundamental to that integrity is our understanding of believer's baptism and a particular vision of ecclesiology. Instead of using our beautiful vision as a club to beat each other over the head with, why shouldn't we offer our views quietly, lovingly, but firmly to the wider ecumenical community as something they ought to consider. In particular, I believe our views on baptism and

ecclesiology are our gifts to historic Christianity and may well be the answer to many of the countless and needless divisions that have been perpetrated on the body of Christ.

So, what is a defensible position on fellowship? We ought to interact and share common concerns with the wider ecumenical community of Christians on a continuing basis. As noted, we all can learn a lot from each other. But at the end of the day, we can only maintain our integrity as a Restorationist fellowship by insisting that membership in the local assembly to which we give allegiance be restricted to those who have been baptized as believers in the triune name. May God help us remain true to our calling and in all things faithful to his word as we uphold this vision.

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Book Review

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996. Pp. xv + 508. $25.00.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Peterson

If your schedule will accommodate only one book of New Testament scholarship before the end of the millennium, make this the one. (Since the second millennium AD technically ends on the last day of the year 2000 rather than 1999—despite Y2K hysteria—it may be possible to fit another in, as well.) The author taught from 1981–1991 at Yale Divinity School, since then serving as professor of New Testament at Duke; his earlier books include substantial studies of Pauline theology (*The Faith of Jesus Christ* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983]) and Pauline interpretation of Jewish Scripture (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989]). Here he turns his attention to the word that the Scriptures of the New Testament address to the church on living as people of God, supplying a weighty volume that ministers and teachers will read with appreciation and consult with frequency.

Hays distinguishes four "tasks" entailed in ethical interpretation of Scripture, to each of which he devotes a "part" comprising two or more chapters. First is the *descriptive* task of identifying the ethical instruction

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conveyed in the principal New Testament texts, i.e., Paul, the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, the Johannine Gospel and letters, and Revelation (pp. 13–185); an excursus (pp. 158–168) considers the historical Jesus in relation to Christian ethics and supplies a sensible alternative to recent treatments of Jesus receiving attention in the media. The chapters succeed not only as coherent summaries of the ethical concerns of the texts but also as capsule introductions, fully informed by recent study.

Like much modern biblical scholarship, Part One tends to identify divergent viewpoints within the biblical canon; unlike most critical scholars, Hays then advances in Part Two to the *synthetic* treatment of the New Testament witness as a whole (pp. 187–205). Hays bases his synthesis not on the principle of canonical shape and sequence advocated by Brevard Childs, but on the three "focal images" of Community, Cross, and New Creation, which bring the canonical picture into focus (pp. 193–200, the relations between the images most succinctly stated on p. 292). While acknowledging that these are not the only images through which the unity of New Testament witness might be apprehended, Hays suggests criteria for the evaluation of focal images (pp. 195–196) and criticizes the popular images of love and liberation as marginal to some significant New Testament texts and inadequate to the task of synthesis (pp. 200–204).

Part Three (pp. 207–312) is the one most reflective of Hays's own mainline Protestant, academic context. It concerns the *hermeneutical* task, the effort to specify criteria by which contemporary readers may appropriate the particular messages of ancient scriptural texts. A reader facing the deadline for a sermon or a lecture may be tempted to skim this informative discussion, or bypass it entirely; its heart can be found in the delineation of the four "modes" in which Scripture teaches ethics (pp. 208–209, 293–296; cf. 339–340). This

discussion of biblical rules, principles, paradigms, and symbols makes salutary reading for those weaned on commands and examples—and perhaps especially for those alienated from this Restorationist paradigm.

Perhaps the greatest surprise awaits the reader in Part Four on the *pragmatic* task (pp. 313–461); here one finds evidence that Hays has neglected to read the memo that cautions biblical scholars against expressing a judgment on controversial matters before the church—or chose to disregard it if he read it. He thus concludes with five case studies that aim to "articulat[e] the concrete implications of the Word of God for the community of faith" (p. xii). These considerations of the use of force, anti-Judaism and ethnic conflict, homosexuality, abortion, and divorce and remarriage offer much to stimulate reflection even by readers who disagree on some points (e.g., this reviewer).

Hays rightly repudiates violence as a Christian option, but the real moral question here is confused by the choice of *violence* (with its inherent connotation of illegitimacy) as the basic term of discussion rather than *force* (which can be either legitimate or illegitimate, and which more readily admits of degrees than *violence*). The cleansing of the temple is inadequately treated (especially Mark 11:15–16), and while Hays notes that military officers converted in the New Testament are not required to leave military service (pp. 335–336), he does not acknowledge that this differentiates them from the prostitutes and tax collectors whose entry into the company of Jesus' followers involves repentance. A consistent application of Hays's position would require Christians to withhold payment of taxes, which support the institutionalized exercise of force known as government, and then to accept imprisonment or fine without resistance; as payment of the emperor's taxes is enjoined in Matt 22:20//Mark 12:16//Luke 20:24 and Rom 13:6–7, it seems difficult to defend the position that the New Testament dissociates Christians entirely from the

exercise of force. More significantly, it may be asked whether Hays (like John Howard Yoder) has thought through the moral responsibilities of Christians who have been granted the franchise in a democracy—a situation for which the New Testament offers principles, but no explicit guidance.

Hays's concluding reflections on the biblical mandate to care for the poor rightly call the Christian community to sacrificial concern with those in want. This very brief discussion (pp. 464–468) lacks, however, the clear distinction between ecclesial practice and public policy found in the earlier excellent chapters on abortion, homosexuality, and marital ethics. Especially the use of *justice* as the basic category may prevent the reader's recognition that Christians properly seek not the absolute equality of incomes but suitable food, clothing, shelter, and work for those lacking these goods. Here the discussion could have profited from engagement with Richard Neuhaus's distinction between biblical ends and biblical means; following John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Neuhaus argues that the needs of the poor in post-industrial economies are better met by their being included in the circle of production and voluntary exchange than by the redistribution of wealth that was the only available remedy for poverty in the nearly zero-sum economies of biblical antiquity (*Doing Well & Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* [Doubleday, 1992] esp. 171–176). The course of action thus suggested may involve considerable sacrifice, as business people who volunteer for such efforts as vocational education in urban schools can attest.

Biblical scholars are sometimes accused of multiplying learning to no purpose, amassing footnotes in documentation of irrelevant minutiae. One book cannot acquit a discipline, but Hays has provided an impressive exhibit for the defense. No preacher or teacher should face the third Christian millennium without it.

Obiter Dicta

These thought-provoking "other words" have been contributed by readers of *Christian Studies* and friends of the Institute. Our thanks for their efforts in calling them to our attention.

Affluence

The hand that gives so generously in the material realm also takes away devastatingly in the spiritual.

David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth*

American Religion

While most people claim to be religious, most are also not comfortable with those whose faith is strong enough to affect their public behavior.

The truth is that, despite statistics on churchgoing, etc., the United States is a very secular nation that . . . does not take religion seriously. Not only may the statistics overstate the religious reality . . . but statistics say nothing of the quality or depth of American religious belief. It is increasingly clear that very few people who claim a religion could truthfully say that it informs their attitudes and significantly affects their behavior.

Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorah*

A Church That Engages

Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark have suggested that only "high-tension" religions prosper in America. Once a religion assimilates to the culture, it almost invariably diminishes into a social center or kind of low-cost group therapy. There are now fewer Episcopalians in America than there are Catholics in Los Angeles.

Charles R. Morris in *Commonweal*

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Entertainment Evangelism

To attract people from our culture, some Christian churches depend upon glitz and spectacle and technological toys, rather than on the strong, substantive declaration of the Word of God and its authoritative revelation for our lives. The tendency is blatantly demonstrated by an emphasis on "Entertainment Evangelism," without a correlative process for nurturing those attracted into deeper discipleship.

Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*

Evangelicals

[T]he evangelical Church, whose taste for what is popular appears to be insatiable, is in danger of being destabilized by the cultural captivity of some of its popular "thinkers," as well as by the academic captivity of some of its scholars.

David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*

Evangelistic Methods

[D]oes a flashy, hard-rock sound track bring people to a Christ who calls us away from the world's superficiality to deeper reflection and meditation? The exhortation of 2 Timothy 2:15 to handle correctly the word of truth must always be our guide when we choose methods—and the recognition that the Greek *methodia* is used only twice in the New Testament and both times pejoratively make us cautious lest any of our methods be those of the Deceiver.

Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*

An Evening at the Cinema

[The film *Titanic* does the equivalent of holding up your hand in front of your face so that it appears to be larger than the sky. The problem is that it precludes your seeing how large the sky really is. The film's story line puts the actual drama of the ship into the background and concentrates your attention on the silly story of a teenage girl trying to escape from a planned marriage by getting involved with a boy artist in the steerage section of the ship. The almost cosmic tragedy of the ship's significance is blotted out for the sake of a teenage attachment. . . .

If you want two hours of excitement with a bit of steamy sex thrown in with a certain shallow level of interpersonal moralizing, go see *The English Patient*. If you want to lengthen the experience to three hours, go see *Titanic*.

Patrick Henry Reardon in *Touchstone*

The Importance of Church

Does there exist on earth, since Easter and Pentecost, a church founded upon the apostles, with Jesus Christ as its cornerstone—a church that embodies, in a real though imperfect manner, the new life brought into the world by the Incarnate Son of God? If the true Church of Jesus Christ subsists anywhere within history, every style of Christianity that lives apart from it suffers from a serious deficiency.

Avery Dulles in *First Things*

Leadership

Genuine leadership in the Church, therefore, is not a matter of finding out what everyone wants and already knows and articulating it; genuine leadership is a matter of teaching and explaining what has not been so well grasped, where the demands of God's truth and the habits of the culture pull in opposite directions. . . .

Without real leaders, God's people are led by the pollsters—which is to say, they lead themselves. . . .

Genuine leaders often have to be different. They often have to articulate the truth of God's Word among those who do not fully understand its demands and implications. . . . there are many organizers and many managers but only a very few leaders.

David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth*

Like a Business?

These days, ministers, like many other people, are in bondage to the business ethos of the global economy. We have unquestioningly adopted the model of the CEO or entrepreneur of the congregation, seeing the church as an organization that must be run like a business, viewing members as customers and other churches as competitors, pursuing church growth instead of performing evangelism, and budget raising instead of stewardship. The bottom line is financial, not spiritual.

John Robert McFarland in *The Christian Ministry*

Popular Theology

Popular theology is a hybrid in which what is popular so often eclipses what is theological, because what is popular typically owes far more to the habits and mental conventions of modernity than it does to biblical truth.

David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*

"Prayer of the Just"

The evangelical preference for extemporaneous prayer all too often results in a litany of form prayers, such as the familiar "Prayer of the Just": "Father, we just want to thank you, Father, we just want to praise you, Father. Just help us Lord, just help us to enjoy this time of sharing now, Father, just bless us, Lord, etc., etc."

Lendol Calder in *Touchstone*

Preaching to the Modern World

The Bible doesn't want to speak to the modern world; the Bible wants to convert the modern world. . . .

When we speak of reaching out to our culture through the gospel, we must be reminded that the gospel is also a culture. In the attempt to "translate" the gospel into the language of the culture, something is lost. We are learning that you have not said "salvation" when you say "self-esteem." "The American Way" is not equivalent to the "kingdom of God."

William H. Willimon in *Christianity Today*

Pride

The tragedy of our human situation, and the impossibility of relieving it save through the Atonement provided by God Himself, lies in the fact that we men, having once fallen into the sin of pride, are so infected and corrupted by it that we cannot conquer it without at once becoming proud of our conquest, and that even if we could, we would then in turn be proud of having conquered our pride without taking pride in the conquest, and so on ad infinitum. . . . The fact that my sin has this character is another proof that its seat is not, as Plato wrongly thought, in the lowest part of me but in the highest part of me, so that my worst defects are the defects of my highest qualities.

John Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*

Worship—Entertaining or Enchanting?

Liturgy in this postmodern world must aim for enchantment, not entertainment. Entertainment is a major facet of our culture. But entertainment as a cultural model is inadequate to the mission of the gospel because it works best when it leaves one satisfied with oneself and one's world. Enchantment, on the other hand, casts a spell that leads one from a drab world to another, brighter, more interesting world.

Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*

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