

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

The Holy Spirit and the Christian life

- 3** Editorial
Karl Koop
- 6** Overcoming Holy Spirit shyness in the life of the church
Cheryl Bridges Johns
- 14** Spirit of God! descend upon my heart: A Mennonite minister reflects on the Holy Spirit
Carol Penner
- 22** The Holy Spirit in the scriptures
Jon M. Isaak
- 31** The Spirit-Paraclete as Jesus' alter ego in the Fourth Gospel (John 14–16)
V. George Shillington
- 40** The Holy Spirit and gender equality: A Latin American perspective
Patricia Urueña Barbosa
- 48** Healing and the Holy Spirit: A manifestation of the "already, but not yet" kingdom of God
Cara Pfeiffer
- 56** Turning from scripture to Spirit: A sermon on Revelation 1:9–19 for the Sunday before Pentecost
David Driedger

- 64** Bread, not stone: Refocusing an Anabaptist vision
C. Arnold Snyder
- 74** Learning to trust the Spirit: Lessons in mutual transformation
David B. Miller
- 84** The Holy Spirit in the world
Jeremy M. Bergen

Where is the Spirit of God at work in our lives, and how do we recognize the Spirit's activity in the world? While Christians in the West may stumble in trying to answer this question, believers elsewhere evidently have a strong sense of the Spirit's presence.

Eastern Orthodox Christians are intensely aware of the Spirit's activity every time they gather for worship and Eucharistic celebration. Before partaking of the elements, the Orthodox priest prays to the Spirit (the *epiclesis*) that it might descend on the

Is God's Spirit limited to the confines of the inner self, the parameters of the faithful church, or the public square? Do we dare to imagine that the Spirit may be at work in all of creation?

worshiping community and transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Here the Holy Spirit is constitutive of authentic worship and communion with Christ. Without the Spirit there can be no worship, and without the presence of the Spirit there can be no church.

Christians living in the global South likewise seem to have a heightened awareness of the Spirit's activity. They regularly participate in healings, visions, prophecies, and ecstatic utterances, and they link these

activities directly to the presence of the Spirit of God. Being filled with the Spirit is integral to what it means to be a faithful Christian.

Among North American Christians such experience and talk about the Spirit is often met with ambivalence. As Daniel Migliore has observed, the church in the West has tended to look "on the experience of and appeal to the Spirit as potentially subversive and in need of control."¹ At best, Western Christians view the Spirit's work not as a distinct action but as an activity identical with the work of Christ. Perhaps, in part, this is why Christians in the West have felt compelled to say in their recita-

tion of the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.”

To be sure, Christian history bears witness to spiritual excesses, which might explain why some Christians have pulled back from being overly “spiritual.” Down through the centuries, various groups, such as the second-century Montanists or the fourteenth-century “Free Spirits,” pushed the boundaries of Christian belief and experience to the point at which the church felt compelled—rightly or wrongly—to condemn these outliers. When sixteenth-century apocalyptically minded and “spirit-filled” Anabaptist radicals took control of the northwest German city of Münster, and also stormed a Frisian monastery near Bolsward, many Anabaptists who were promoting reform and renewal settled for a more christologically focused faith. With the exception of spiritualist groups in the seventeenth century, certain pietistic groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and various charismatics in the twentieth century, Mennonites generally have stayed clear of matters related to the Spirit. Along with other Western Christians they have felt an obligation to mention the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, or to include Holy Spirit language in certain baptismal formulae. Beyond these seasonal references, however, they have preferred to say little about the third person of the Trinity, preferring to remain “Jesus centered.”

Times may be changing. The rise of Pentecostalism, a heightened awareness of the role of the Spirit among Christians in the global South, and a renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity may be some of the factors contributing to an increased attentiveness to the Holy Spirit even in the Christian West. Recently, European theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Michael Welker have given significant attention to the study of pneumatology, linking the Spirit’s activities to liberation movements, including secular ones. Moving beyond abstract idealism and personalistic individualism, these authors and teachers of the church have highlighted the diverse and public dimensions of the Spirit’s work.

Amos Yong, a pioneering Pentecostal theologian from the United States, has also written on the Spirit’s public activity. In the approximately twenty books that he has written or edited in the last decade, he has linked the doctrine of the Spirit to such

wide-ranging topics as hospitality, a theology of disability, the relationship between science and religion, and the place of non-Christian religions. Yong is critical of teachings on the Holy Spirit that focus only on the individual or are content to stay within the confines of the church. He is interested in reflecting on the world-

The elusive movements of the Holy Spirit are surely beyond our grasp, but my hope is that the contributions in this issue of *Vision* will challenge us to broaden our horizons and inspire us toward greater faithfulness.

oriented dimensions of the Spirit, which leads him to develop a critique of political regimes of corruption and environmental neglect, as well as economic systems of exploitative capitalism, and the various social conventions that promote sexism, racism, and able-ism. Yong is convinced that a faithful teaching of the Spirit must include the social, economic, and ecological issues of our time.

How are we to understand the presence and work of the Holy Spirit? Is God's Spirit limited to the confines of the inner self, the parameters of the faithful church, or the public square? Do we dare to imagine that the Spirit may be at work in all of creation? The elusive movements of the Holy Spirit are surely beyond our grasp, but my hope is that the contributions in this issue of *Vision* will challenge us to broaden our horizons and inspire us toward greater faithfulness.

Note

¹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 224.

About the editor

Karl Koop teaches theology and is the director of graduate biblical and theological studies at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Overcoming Holy Spirit shyness in the life of the church

Cheryl Bridges Johns

The contemporary church suffers from what James Forbes calls “Holy Spirit shyness.”¹ Most Christians know that the Holy Spirit exists, but in their day-to-day existence and in the life and worship of the churches they display hesitation about and even fear of the third person of the Trinity.

In his popular book *The Forgotten God*, Francis Chan comments: “From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. While no evangelical would deny His existence, I’m willing to bet there are

Most Christians know that the Holy Spirit exists, but in their day-to-day existence and in the life and worship of the churches they display hesitation about and even fear of the third person of the Trinity.

millions of churchgoers across America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can.”²

The absence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians has made our churches places where the liturgy is void of what may be called “real presence.” Christians profess that Jesus is in the midst of two or three who are gathered together in his name, but in practice that presence seems more like the absence.

Contemporary Christians have grown accustomed to living with the absence and fearing the presence. We suffer from a bad case of what may be called Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder.

Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder is a serious condition. It is a condition that has created severe problems in the life of the Christian churches. According to Augustine, “What the soul is in our body, the Holy Spirit is in the body of Christ, which is the church.” In light of this statement it is safe to say that many of our churches are soul-less bodies. They lack the life that is found in the life of the Triune God. They hold on to profession of Christ,

assuming that this profession substitutes for the actual living presence of Christ, who comes to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not long before his departure, Jesus comforted his disciples with these words: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. . . . Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:18, 23; NRSV). Jesus promised that the Triune Life would become our home and that we would dwell in the very presence of the God. These promises were given for here and now and not just for life in eternity.

It is the Spirit of God who makes the life of God known among believers. We might say that the Holy Spirit is the link of continuity between the ministry of the incarnate Christ and the church.

The promises Jesus gave his disciples include the sending of the Holy Spirit, the one who would in effect take up the ministry of Jesus after his departure. The Holy Spirit would continue to usher in the kingdom, speak the truth of God, and glorify Jesus

(John 16:4–15). It is the Spirit of God who makes the life of God known among believers. Just as Jesus was empowered and led by the Spirit, followers of Jesus will be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We might say that the Holy Spirit is the link of continuity between the ministry of the incarnate Christ and the church.

In spite of these wonderful promises, many Christians live as orphans, and our churches are disempowered entities rather than forceful agents of the kingdom of God. How did we get here? And what shall we do to remedy the situation?

How did we get here?

The tragic neglect of the Holy Spirit is the result of several factors. First, Protestant Christianity is decidedly Christ centered (when it is not anthropocentric). The Reformation brought about an explicit focus on Christ, especially in the practices of preaching and teaching. This focus was necessary in order to correct the tragic neglect of faith in Christ as the way to salvation. But the credo “Faith alone” came to be narrowly defined as faith in Jesus alone, and Trinitarian faith suffered loss.

This loss did not go unrecognized. During the sixteenth century one of the criticisms that Anabaptists leveled against the Protestant churches was that “they do not have sword of the Spirit . . . and because they do not have it, it is manifest that they also lack the Holy Spirit as he who should wield that sword in and through them.”³

This focus on Christ alone and faith alone created a great imbalance in Protestant doctrine and practice. By separating Jesus from the life of the Triune God, a form of modalism developed, which resulted in a view of salvation that disconnected knowing Christ from knowing the Father and the Spirit.

An emphasis on scripture over against Spirit created a separation of Spirit and Word. This separation, while honoring the Word, treated the scriptures as a mere witness to truth rather than a truthful vehicle of God’s presence.

Today many Christians believe that they can have a compartmentalized relationship with Jesus, and that this relationship does not bring them into a direct relationship with the Holy Spirit. Or, putting it another way, they fail to see that it is the Holy Spirit who brings believers into relationship with Jesus.

Second, stress on the Holy Spirit is often associated with enthusiastic forms of religion, emotive worship, and a disregard of scripture. The Radical Reformation saw a flourishing of lay preaching and prophets. “Spirit-inspired speech” was common in worship services. The Zofingen Disputation of 1532 articulated a defense of “Christian order” that included spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.⁴

Over time, the abuses of Spirit-inspired speech provoked a reactionary movement. Over against those who disregarded the Bible in favor of the pneumatic work of the Holy Spirit, many church leaders became suspicious of Spirit. Instead, they made a turn to “Word over Spirit.” This turn had historic implications for the life of the churches of the Radical Reformation. They turned away from the Holy Spirit as the one who wields the sword of the Spirit. The Word became separate from the life of God.

Just as an over-emphasis on Christ created a loss of Trinitarian theology, an emphasis on scripture over against Spirit created another separation, the separation of Spirit and Word. This separation, while honoring the Word, treated the scriptures as a

mere witness to truth rather than a truthful vehicle of God's presence. Furthermore, the ongoing witness of the gifts of the Spirit, with the Bible as the standard of this praxis, was neglected in favor of scripture alone.

The separation of Word and Spirit furthered the Reformation's neglect of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches. Together, Christ alone and *sola scriptura* left little room for a robust pneumatology in the life of the churches. For centuries the Holy Spirit was relegated to the margins, and Protestantism languished with its severe case of Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder.

Another reason for our tragic neglect of the Holy Spirit is the Enlightenment's separation of mind and spirit, reason and emotion. The modern age is characterized by a renewed emphasis on

Christ alone and *sola scriptura* left little room for a robust pneumatology. For centuries the Holy Spirit was relegated to the margins, and Protestantism languished with its severe case of Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder.

reason. The religious wars of the Reformation left many people skeptical of the supernatural. Thinkers such as Rene Descartes and John Locke understood reason as the only avenue for human flourishing and progress. The Age of Reason created its own emphasis on logic and reason as the primary means of conveying the gospel.

While there were Christians who dissented from the turn to reason (in movements of pietism and revivalism, in particular), Protestant Christianity found a home in the Age of Reason and joined in the modern project of rational progress. Even those who have roots

among the dissenters to the Enlightenment find refuge within its safe walls of logic. As a result, we fear anything that appears irrational and emotive. Failing to understand the difference between the transrational and the irrational, modern Christians limit the work of the Holy Spirit to that which can be understood and rationally explained. In doing so, we have further marginalized the work of the Holy Spirit from the life of the churches.

Hopeful signs

One can identify some hopeful signs that the neglect of the Holy Spirit is at last being addressed by contemporary Christians. First, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement of the twentieth century

helped to bring about a renewal of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches. While there were the usual abuses and extremes, as a whole the movement has shown signs of maturity.

Furthermore, Pentecostalism's growth in countries of the majority world shows no sign of abating. This worldwide movement of the Spirit is a key impetus for the growth of Christianity. It has affected all Christian denominations. And as we move further into the twenty-first century, Pentecostalism is becoming its own unique form of ecumenism. It has the potential to bring together Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic around a common experience of the Holy Spirit. This spiritual ecumenism may be able to break down long-established barriers within Christianity and to bring about a renewed joint witness that yields the "sword of the Spirit."

Second, among theologians one sees a renewed emphasis on the third person of the Trinity. We are now in what is being called a renaissance of Trinitarian theology. What is common to these theological discussions is a rejection of the tight separation between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Such discussions

Pentecostalism is becoming its own unique form of ecumenism. It has the potential to bring together Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic around a common experience of the Holy Spirit.

exhibit more openness about the person of the Holy Spirit and more attention to how the Spirit bridges the gap between the life of God and human existence. The *perichoretic* life of God, so often seen as unknowable and distant, is now being understood as available to humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Theologians are coming to understand that emphasizing Trinitarian theology does not detract from a Christocentric gospel. In reflecting on the implications of the Triune Life for the church, Miroslav Volf observes

that the church, born through the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit, "presupposes that the exalted Christ himself is acting in the gifts of the Spirit."⁵ Furthermore, notes Volf, "confession of Christ as Savior and Lord is an essential dimension of charismatic activity."⁶

These two developments, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement and the renaissance of Trinitarian theology, are helping to address contemporary Christianity's Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder.

As we move forward, what might we expect this renewed emphasis to look like within the life of the churches? What difference will it make in our preaching? How will it affect our reading of scripture? What will characterize our worship services?

The Holy Spirit in the life of the churches

One of the first things that would result from a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit would be a new vision of the church. The Radical Reformation's vision of the restoration of primitive Christianity centered around an understanding of the church as a pneumatically constituted community. In our time the church as a community of women and men who are endowed by the Spirit

The current renaissance of Trinitarian theology exhibits more openness about the person of the Holy Spirit and more attention to how the Spirit bridges the gap between the life of God and human existence.

becomes the distinctive factor in a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

This pneumatic vision of the church changes everything! It changes how we see the life and witness of believers. It changes the corporate gatherings of Christians. It means that the Holy Spirit is not a silent partner in the Christian life. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the overt, dynamic presence in the church, actualizing the living Word and making real the ministry of Jesus.

Also, in the context of the Spirit-constituted community, space, time, and people are made holy. The most ordinary spaces become sacred. Ordinary time becomes sacred time. Ordinary speech becomes Spirit-speech, and ordinary people become vessels of God's grace.

Another result of a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit is the revelation of the mystery of Christ. The Latin word *sacramentum* is the primary translation for the Greek word *mysterion*, which means "that which is revealed." For the early Christians, *mysterion* was a term used to refer to the mystery of the incarnation and of Jesus Christ and the extension of that incarnation in the church (see Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7–8; Eph. 1:8–10). Whenever the Holy Spirit is actively present, there the great mystery of Christ is. This mystery is deep and wide and includes those who are being brought into the life of Christ. A Spirit-filled church is therefore a church filled with the mystery of Christ.

Another result of a renewal of emphasis on the Holy Spirit would be the unity of Word and Spirit. Preaching in a pneumatic community offers a fresh word that honors the marriage of Word and Spirit. This marriage results in a multidimensional understanding of the text wherein scripture is seen in the context of the ongoing witness of the revelation of God by the Spirit. In this context the text comes alive and the Word of God conveys the presence of God. It announces that God is here. It testifies and invites people into the very life of God.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches would also result in a great baptism of love. By the power of the Spirit, the inner life of God—a life of love—comes to dwell within the

Inviting the Holy Spirit into the life of the church is not a matter of adding a bit of Holy Spirit flavor to our worship services or changing the liturgy. It means embracing the third person of the Trinity so that we can experience the fullness of the Triune Life.

body of Christ. This love transcends social, race, and gender barriers. In addition, the other fruits of the Holy Spirit—joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22)—are evident. A Spirit-filled church is marked by these fruits.

Finally, a Spirit-filled church hosts the precious gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, or *charismata*, include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, and tongues. Perhaps it is fair to say that these gifts are mysterious, transrational expressions of the life of God as this life intersects with the life of the church. These gifts make the life of God

known. They make the will of God known. They sacramentally bring the presence of God into the lives of ordinary people and into ordinary time.

By the gifts of the Spirit the church can know what cannot otherwise be known. Gifts of the Spirit are mysterious and deep expressions of what at times seems inaccessible. The Holy Spirit brings the life of God into the life of the church. The gifts are expressions of the depths of God's grace.

In many ways, the gifts of the Spirit do not follow the standards of human distribution of gifts and wealth. The Spirit gives gifts without regard to race, gender, or social status. And it seems that the gifts of the Spirit are most profoundly seen among the dispo-

sessed. Indeed, these gifts often mock human rationality and human knowing. The illiterate can have great gifts of knowledge and wisdom. The inarticulate can speak profound words in an unknown language. By the power of the Holy Spirit, those who are poor and dispossessed find great wealth. For this reason, Spirit-empowered churches are thriving in poor communities.

Finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches allows for the reconstruction of life in the face of death. The Holy Spirit brings life to places that have been ravaged by sin. People with addictions are set free. Bodies are healed. Families are restored. Where the Holy Spirit resides, human life flourishes. It is the intention of God to restore creation, and the Holy Spirit is the agent of that restoration.

Everything must change

Inviting the Holy Spirit into the life of the church means that everything must change. Such an invitation is not a matter of adding a bit of Holy Spirit flavor to our worship services or changing the liturgy. Rather, to invite the Holy Spirit into the church's life calls for a radical revisioning of our relationship with God. It means embracing the third person of the Trinity so that we can experience the fullness of the Triune Life. After all, that life is our future.

Notes

¹ James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21.

² Francis Chan, *The Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 15.

³ Shem Peachey and Paul Peachey, trans., "Answer of Some Who are Called (Ana)Baptists—Why They Do Not Attend the Churches: A Swiss Brethren Tract," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45, no. 1 (1971): 10; see also Charles Byrd, "Pentecostalism's Anabaptist Heritage: The Zofingen Disputation of 1532," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 28, no. 1 (2008): 58.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 228.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 229–29.

About the author

Cheryl Bridges Johns is professor of discipleship and Christian formation at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Cleveland, Tennessee. She is co-pastor of the New Covenant Church of God.

Spirit of God! descend upon my heart

A Mennonite minister reflects on the Holy Spirit

Carol Penner

When I was sixteen, I learned to play one hymn on the piano. Since that time, whenever I sit at a piano I play that hymn. I chose the piece because I liked the tune, the words spoke to me, and it wasn't too hard to learn. In this way, "Spirit of God! descend upon my heart" has become a life-time prayer. George Croly wrote the poetry in 1854, and his words are still resonating in the corners of my life. I will use the verses of this hymn as guideposts in this reflection on the Holy Spirit.

Spirit of God! descend upon my heart.

*Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move.
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,
and make me love thee as I ought to love.*

This hymn has made the cut in many Mennonite hymnals. Mennonites sing lustily about the Holy Spirit, but I don't think we are as comfortable *talking* about the Holy Spirit. In my experience, Mennonites rarely hear people talking about the Spirit. We are way more comfortable talking about Jesus. Maybe it has something to do with humility. We are loath to point to someone and say, "She is filled with the Holy Spirit"; it might lead to pride! And we almost never claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit ourselves, because it sounds too self-aggrandizing and offends our Mennonite sensibilities.

I have been far more likely to hear, "We are following Jesus," "We are disciples of Jesus," or "I'm trying to do what Jesus would do." Any mistakes along the way are obviously our own fault; there's a margin for error when you are imitating someone. If we claim we are filled with the Holy Spirit, perhaps it seems harder to account for our actions, or lack of actions. It's tricky to strike a balance between admitting our own weakness and claiming the power of the mighty Spirit.

I think too that the Holy Spirit is something of a wild card, and Mennonites tend not to like to live on the wild side. In our collective history we've had leaders pop up who have claimed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The results have rarely been good. How can you argue with someone who claims to have the Holy Spirit, who claims that the Holy Spirit is making him do something?

And yet, in spite of our cautiousness and reticence in talking about it, being filled with the Spirit is something we do believe in! It's something we are taught, we sing about it, preachers declare it formally from the pulpit, and it's right there in our confession of faith, if anyone cares to look that up. But as for the rank and file—we prefer to talk about Jesus.

As a young adult, I worshiped in a charismatic church several summers. Everyone who attended there spoke frequently of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the common currency of the group: they expected that you would ask God for it and it would be deposited in your soul. You could ask specifically for certain gifts: speaking in tongues, prophesy, or the gift of healing, for example. You were expected to ask and God was expected to provide the gifts—and by all appearances, that was happening. It was a Spirit-filled place! I was amazed at how freely they talked about the Spirit: “The Spirit is moving today!” “She was filled with the Spirit!” “The Spirit spoke through him tonight.”

While I was fascinated by the power of the Spirit in that church, I also remember being afraid. There were certain gifts that I definitely did not want to have, and I saw that people were often given gifts for which they did not ask. I couldn't imagine standing up spontaneously in the middle of a church service and suddenly saying, “The Spirit has given me a word for our church.” That happened pretty regularly in these services. It just seemed too out there, way outside my comfort zone.

I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
no sudden rending of the veil of clay,
no angel visitant, no opening skies,
but take the dimness of my soul away.

Years later, in reading an autobiography of Teresa of Avila, I came across similar hesitations. She dreaded certain gifts of the Spirit

and wished they would not be given. It was embarrassing for her, for example, when she was so filled with the Spirit that she levitated in church. But she had little control over how the Spirit was given.¹

For all my fears, I have found myself in pastoral ministry, where I regularly stand up and deliver a word for the church. I don't preface my sermon with the words, "The Spirit is saying . . .," but I do believe I've been given the gift to preach. When I was ordained, people laid hands on me and prayed that I would receive the Spirit. I think the people in my church are still praying for me, and I pray for them. Even if we don't often speak explicitly about the Spirit, we understand that we need the gifts of the Spirit in the church, and that they are given.

I have seen the Spirit giving gifts in surprising ways to the church. I remember being part of a tense congregational meeting. It had been going on for a number of hours, and people were

While I was fascinated by the power of the Spirit in that charismatic church, I also remember being afraid. There were certain gifts that I definitely did not want to have.

emotionally wrung out. The issues we were speaking of were deeply felt and deeply painful. Many tears and some angry words had been exchanged.

A woman (let's call her Grace) spoke. I would probably have voted Grace least likely to say something helpful, as she was prone to long discourses that wandered away from the point at hand. In this situation, however, she spoke clearly, concisely, with power. Her

observation about where we were as a church was spot on, and we all realized it. She sat down.

Then a man stood up. He had a brain injury and was slow of speech. In his careful way of saying things, he also commented on who we were as a church and what we were about. A long silence followed these comments. There was nothing left to say that day. We closed the meeting with prayer and a feeling of renewed hope.

I think everyone at that meeting was following Jesus. We were given a special gift of hope in that dark time by two people the Spirit chose. We ask for light on dim pathways, and the Spirit provides it. The Spirit works not only through the educated and articulate people but also in the humblest and simplest people. The Spirit filled and breathed insight and words into people—

powerful, important words, which were accepted and received by an attentive community. Hearing is a gift of the Spirit too.

Teach me to feel that thou art always nigh.

*Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,
to check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.*

When I was on my knees being baptized, my minister held out his hand and said, “I extend to you the right hand of fellowship. May God grant you the Spirit from above.” That sentence, proclaimed

We are pretty permeable: the Spirit is given but we are not always able to retain it or sustain it. It is a wild sort of thing, showing up in surprising places. It’s a Holy Spirit, not a tame Spirit, and it doesn’t always do what we expect.

by my minister—and which I have also said, extending my hand in fellowship to the one newly baptized—confirms our basic belief that we are indeed personally filled with the Holy Spirit. God is present with us in mysterious ways. As a community of faithful people, God is present with us through the Spirit in the people around us. They are the ones who help us with our struggles and doubts, they teach us patience.

In my work as a pastor I see the Holy Spirit filling people, filling me, in lots of different ways. There is still a margin for error.

We are pretty permeable: the Spirit is given but we are not always able to retain it or sustain it. It is a wild sort of thing, showing up in surprising places. It’s a Holy Spirit, not a tame Spirit, and it doesn’t always do what we expect.

I’ve seen the Spirit as a divine spark, lighting the way, leading people in a certain direction, so that they go this way, not that way. They meet this person and not that person. They are in the right place at the right time to share a word, which is the word of God for someone. The Holy Spirit as a glimmer, half-seen, leading us in dark times. A hymn, taken up by chance, becoming a lifetime prayer—also the Spirit’s leading.

I see the Spirit working as the Great Unsettler. Old friends who have lived for many years with a terrible rift between them become unsettled about this division. They find themselves yearning for peace. A young adult, entrenched in a demanding university program, feels an unignorable urge to drop everything to go to

Africa to teach English for a year. A girl wants to fit into the social group with her friends but feels that being a Christian makes her different and unable to participate in some of their activities.

It's the Spirit as poison ivy, creating an itch that we feel compelled to scratch. Or perhaps the Spirit is giving us a thirst for

I see the Spirit working as the Great Unsettler. Old friends who have lived for many years with a terrible rift between them now find themselves yearning for peace.

what will save our life. But thirst can also be uncomfortable. For that matter, the Spirit as wind is a comfortable image for those who have never been caught in a hurricane. The Spirit is a mighty wind.

I see the Spirit at work as breath, a life force in situations where death reigns. A relationship between a mother and her adult daughter is lifeless as cement. The relationship weighs them both down; it's hard to walk

with cement shoes. After a shuffling journey, many decades long, after fervent prayers for release, the answer dawns in an astonishing way and a new relationship springs out of an old dead stump. Dry bones from the tomb are suddenly filled with breath, and grow flesh. The Spirit surprises us with resurrection.

In the churches I've served I've seen feats of strength that can only be described as the Spirit at work. People not hated, even when hateful reasons exist. People forgiven, even when forgiveness is not requested. Faith held onto in spite of years of doubt. People loved even when they have been entirely unlovable. When faith, hope, and love surpass the bounds of what is conceivable, the miraculous divine nature of the Spirit is in evidence. I see these transformations happening in the lives of people in my congregation.

Hast thou not bid us love thee, God and King?

All, all thine own, soul, heart, and strength, and mind.

I see thy cross, there teach my heart to cling.

O let me seek thee, and O let me find!

I had a vivid encounter with the Holy Spirit once when I was visiting a dying woman. This woman, whom I knew well, was bitter and opinionated. She was recalcitrant and grumpy to the end. She was dying with much unfinished business and many broken relationships. She was still clear in her mind, and relatives

were gathered in the hopes that some final peace might yet be found. She was refusing to see them. On my way to what I expected would be my last visit with her, I remember thinking that we needed a miracle. We needed the Holy Spirit to show up in a big way, to make some changes. We needed something like a mighty wind to change the course that had been set for long years. As I drove to the woman's house I prayed, "God, send your Holy Spirit down. We really need it here!"

I stumbled from the room and sat in the car, shaking. What had just happened? I had asked the Holy Spirit to show up, and the Holy Spirit had arrived. But it hadn't occurred to me that I was the one who needed to be changed.

My visit with her was similar to many other visits. Her voice was more feeble, but there was still the litany of complaints, the blame directed to everyone else. I asked her whether she would like to make peace with some of the people who had gathered. She declared that she had no unfinished business, that she had no apologies to make. She was lying in the bed, and I was sitting in a chair next to the bed. As I listened to her, a wave of frustration and even dislike washed over me, and a sense of hopelessness about lost chances. And then something happened.

It was like a whoosh, definitely a physical sensation. I was suddenly and completely filled with love for this woman. As I looked at her, she was someone who was incredibly dear to me, so entirely loveable. I had been sitting beside the bed, but now I went to her and bent over her, and I put a hand on her forehead and prayed with her, a prayer of fervent blessing, wishing her well on her way. I kissed her good-bye, and she said, "Thank you, dear."

The nurse came and said that the time for our visit was over, because the woman was so weak. I stumbled from the room and sat in the car, shaking. What had just happened? I had asked the Holy Spirit to show up, and the Holy Spirit had arrived. But it hadn't occurred to me that I was the one who needed to be changed.

This was not a warm and comfortable experience. It was an excruciating experience, in which I became acutely aware of how far I sometimes am from God in the work that I do. So often performing the motions of ministry, but without the love that ministry requires. My own sin so often getting in the way. It was a

falling-on-your-knees-at-the-cross experience. I am thankful for the Spirit's chastising presence.

That experience, and others, less dramatic but of a similar nature, have made me less blithe and casual about invoking the Spirit.

Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,

*one holy passion filling all my frame;
the baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,
my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.*

I have always been captured by the image Gerard Manley Hopkins uses in his poem "God's Grandeur." After speaking of the brokenness of the world he ends with hope, "Because the Holy Spirit over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." There is something entirely reassuring about God's presence, the Spirit's loving presence, moving over the deep.

The Spirit brings hope, even to a denomination as diverse as the Mennonite church. I see the Spirit at work like a river pushing the church in a certain direction. Elements of the church may speed along in narrow currents, anticipating the flow. Other elements are swirling around or even temporarily going the other direction. People filled with Spirit, groups of people, churches, around the country, around the world. Cooperating, competing, crying at cross-purposes, combining efforts to do considerable works of compassion. The river flows on. I like Martin Luther King Jr.'s thought, not originally about the Holy Spirit, but applicable: "The arc of moral history is long, but it bends towards justice." The church is a broad institution, but the Spirit is moving us toward love.

I am trying to find the words to speak of the Holy Spirit in congregational life. I am looking for evidence of the holy passion in my life and in the lives of others, and encouraging others to speak of the Spirit out loud. I am trying to be careful to speak of the Spirit's presence in a thankful and reverent way, avoiding the corrupting urge to speak of the Spirit in a proprietary way.

I am eager to see how the Spirit will work in our denomination in the coming years. The Spirit changes us, challenges us. I am excited by the rich diversity of the Mennonite family around the world. I am excited by the breaking down of barriers between

denominations, and the movement of people back and forth between different traditions. There is much to be learned about the Spirit from our charismatic brothers and sisters both inside and outside the Mennonite tradition.

I am looking for evidence of the holy passion in my life and in the lives of others, and encouraging others to speak of the Spirit out loud. I am trying to speak of the Spirit's presence in a thankful and reverent way, avoiding the corrupting urge to speak of the Spirit in a proprietary way.

I think that Mennonites in the future will need to take risks with the Spirit, to trust ourselves to holy fire. As a Mennonite, I relate to Abba Lot in this story from the Desert Fathers: "Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, 'Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?' Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, 'If you will, you can become all flame.'"²² Abba Lot is doing everything by his strength, as far as he can, but his yearning is for something more. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Spirit of God! descend upon my heart.

Notes

¹ Teresa of Avila, *The Book of My Life*, trans. Mirabai Starr (Boston: New Seeds, 2007), 139.

² *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984, rev. ed.), 103.

About the author

Carol Penner is the pastor of The First Mennonite Church in Vineland, Ontario. She has been a chaplain and a sessional lecturer. She loves to write, and has a blog of worship resources at www.leadinginworship.com.

The Holy Spirit in the scriptures

Jon M. Isaak

What do the biblical writers say about the Holy Spirit? And how have Christians made meaningful the biblical testimony to God's Spirit?

The church's Trinitarian language

For early Christians, the Holy Spirit was closely linked to the new self-disclosure of God that came in and through Jesus. Before Jesus, the Spirit was known among the Israelite people as the "Spirit of God" (Gen. 1:2; Job 27:3) or the "Spirit of Yahweh" (Judg. 6:34; Isa. 61:1), empowering God's people for special ministries (Exod. 31:3; 1 Sam 10:6). After the resurrection, however, the first disciples recognized Jesus in their worship

For early Christians, the Holy Spirit was closely linked to the new self-disclosure of God that came in and through Jesus.

experience as the Lord of God's newly reconfigured people. They also recognized the deeper significance of their memories of Jesus' earthly life and ministry.

It was only natural that all this activity be identified as the moving of the "Spirit of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:45). Not to identify this

activity with God would have seemed inappropriate to the first Christians, since they used Hebrew categories to make sense of their experience. For example, in Rom. 8:9, Paul uses "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ" to identify the rule of the Spirit, in which believers now participate. Notice the interchangeable use of the designations *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*, in the unified expression of God's gracious reconciling presence; all three share a seamless identity.

The same seamlessness comes through when Paul explains that the diverse spiritual gifts energizing the church in God's mission are held together by the reality of "the same Spirit . . . ; the same Lord . . . ; the same God who activates all of them in everyone"

(1 Cor. 12:4–6; NRSV). The varied yet unified expression for God is regularly found in the Pauline tradition and among the other New Testament writers. For example, “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6; see also 1 Cor. 6:11 and Heb. 9:14).

Later, in the third and fourth centuries, Greek rational thought influenced proto-orthodox church theologians to individualize or isolate the unified expression of God’s presence into “three distinct persons” or “three masks,” but of the *same* “substance” or “essence” (*homoousios*); it was not enough to say they are *similar* in essence (*homoiousios*), as did Arian theologians. Only one letter

Trinitarian language continues to be difficult for Western “either/or” thinking. Instead of focusing on “substance” or “persons,” more promise may come in describing the Trinity in terms of relationship.

distinguished the two Greek terms, but that letter made a big difference for the proto-orthodox theologians arguing the divinity of Jesus, against Arianism. In the end, the language of “same substance” (*homoousios*) emerged as the orthodox confession (First Council of Nicea, 325 CE).

Trinitarian debates in the history of the church have, however, sometimes led to division and misunderstanding. The theological rationalizations have tended to introduce more problems than they solve. Is God like

the three states of matter—solid, liquid, and gas—an analogy that suggests God’s evolution from state to state? Or is God like the three parts of an egg—the shell, the white, and the yolk—suggesting categorically distinct roles within the self of God? For example, is it the Son’s role to satisfy the Father’s requirement for honour and justice by paying for the penalty of human sin? While not the only way Christians have thought of the saving significance of Jesus’ death on the cross, this view of the atonement is an example of how isolating the members of the Godhead from one another can put them in opposition and thus compromise the unity of God’s “being-in-relation.”¹

A traditional “isolated” view of the Trinity

Even though an isolated view of the Trinity became popular

among some Christians, the New Testament writers give no evidence of ever imagining God to have three parts or of God's evolving from one form to another. Fundamentally, the orthodox articulation of the Trinity at the First Council of Nicea in the year 325 was aimed at ruling out both of these notions: that God had three parts, or that God had evolved from one form to another, abandoning the previous form. The doctrine of the Trinity that finally emerged was an attempt to recognize the multiplex character of God's "being-in-relation," without suggesting three individual deities or some sort of transactional exchange between them.

Trinitarian language continues to be difficult for Western "either/or" thinking. However, instead of focusing on "substance" or "persons," more promise may come in describing the Trinity in terms of relationship or as a community-of-being. Thus, the basic Trinitarian confession remains: God, as revealed in Jesus, is fully personal within God's own mode of existence as Spirit (that is,

In a relational understanding of the Trinity, God makes space within the very self of God for the universe, as creation is launched, carrying forward God's desire for intimate relationship.

relational and therefore necessarily plural), and God, as Creator, wills to give God's very self to the creatures of the world in loving relationship.² In this way, there is a dynamic and relational unity within God's being.

A relational understanding of the Trinity

In a relational understanding of the Trinity, God makes space within the very self of God for the universe, as creation is launched, carrying forward God's desire for intimate relationship. God's community-of-being

relates to creation in different ways, helping it to understand both God and itself better over time. God as revealed by the *Son* shows God's desire to relate intimately to humanity. God as revealed by the *Spirit* shows God being true to God's very character of breathing life into the world and moving all creation forward to its goal of shalom. God as revealed by the *Father* shows God's parental desire to give God's very self for creation in loving relationship, so that ultimately it may recognize who it is, and who it is becoming. In this way, the Trinity is not so much a metaphysical problem to solve but an invitation to share the life of God together.³

With a relational understanding of the Trinity, we hear the New Testament chorus saying that the Holy Spirit is God's living presence among God's people, carrying out the mission of the risen Lord Jesus, which is the creation of a new humanity.⁴ The Spirit is the way God's presence is made known to us in these last days through Messiah Jesus. The Spirit motivates, empowers, and guides God's people, enabling them to go beyond previous possibilities in the formation of open, sharing, and true communities of Jesus.

Early Christians' experience of Jesus' powerful presence as they gathered in his name could only be accounted for if God were truly behind it. Thus, the monotheistic category of singleness mutated to one of relational unity.

The mutation within Jewish monotheism that the early Christian disciples enacted was in response to their encounter with the risen and exalted Lord Jesus. Their experience of his powerful presence among them in worship, guidance, healing, and discernment, as they gathered in Jesus' name, could only be accounted for if God were truly behind it. Thus, the monotheistic category of singleness mutated to one of *relational unity* as well, for the Christians who followed that first generation. Not to understand the experience of Jesus as an experience of God would be to reject God, for God was surely behind all that they had experienced of the divine presence among them in Jesus.⁵ Nevertheless, Christian

monotheism (unity) is different from Jewish or Islamic monotheism (singleness). For Christian theology, "what the mystery of the Trinity discloses is not a mathematical problem (how can one be three?) but the mystery of life given and shared. The Trinity is the mystery of God's own life as life given and received and shared in a never-diminished abundance of being. The Trinity shows us God as community."⁶

Such developments in theism are not new, however. The Christian mutation of Jewish monotheism was yet another shift in the development in Jewish theism. Like their Israelite ancestors long before them, who had abandoned belief in many gods (*polytheism*; see Gen. 31:19–35; 35:2–4), then belief in one god among many (*henotheism*; see Exod. 20:1–7; Deut. 32:8–9), and who, finally by the end of the exile came to understand Yahweh as the only God (*monotheism*; see Isa. 40), the early Christians also came

to recognize most clearly “the glory of God in the face of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:6) through the Holy Spirit, who animated their gatherings. Since the master of the universe was most clearly present and represented in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of

In the post-Easter period, the unity of Yahweh included the Holy Spirit, who touched and continues to touch members of the faith community personally with the personal presence of God through the risen Lord Jesus.

Nazareth, it was not a great leap to expand the language of “Lord” to refer to him. Now, in the post-Easter period, the unity of Yahweh included the Holy Spirit, who touched and continues to touch members of the faith community personally with the personal presence of God through the risen Lord Jesus.

Characteristics of the Holy Spirit according to the New Testament writers

What then do the New Testament writers actually say about the Holy Spirit? New Testament scholar Tim Geddert notes at least

twelve characteristics or activities of the Spirit that can be identified.

1. The Spirit is both preserver and initiator of God’s living presence within creation, which is why the Spirit can be further characterized as holy (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 8:9).
2. The outpouring of the Spirit is a sign that the end-time has begun (Acts 2:16–17; 10:44–48; John 20:22).
3. Receiving the Spirit is simultaneously a call to ministry and an equipping for ministry (Acts 1:8).
4. The Spirit is a sign of and the effective cause of humanity’s participation in God’s salvation—the deposit or first installment (*arrabōn*, 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) and the “first fruits” or “guarantee” (*aparchē*, Rom. 8:23) of the promised creation inheritance.
5. The Spirit facilitates a range of experiences, both individual and collective, in which God’s people share (Acts; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4).
6. The Spirit facilitates moral and ethical growth (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:22–26).
7. The Spirit brings about a loving, trusting relationship with God (Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6).

8. The Spirit is the source of the “overflowing life” that God gives the people of God (John 7:38; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).
9. The Spirit is the mediator of the presence of the resurrected Jesus in the life of the believer and the church (John 14:18–26; Rom. 8:3, 9–11; 1 Cor. 15:45; Col. 2:11).
10. The Spirit who gathered the church as the end-time expression of God’s kingdom is constantly about the task of preserving and renewing the church in God’s mission (1 John 4:1–6; 1 Cor 2:6–16).
11. The Spirit speaks to the church through scripture (as it is interpreted in a discerning Christian community) in ways that invite the church in every culture and time to ongoing transformation, and that animate its witness to the world (John 16:13; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 5:1, 13–14).
12. The Spirit gives spiritual gifts for the “building up” of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12–14).

Given this list of characteristics of the Holy Spirit, two stand out. The Spirit is known as the power of God’s presence active

The Spirit is known as the power of God’s presence active within human beings, and as the personal presence of God initiating conversion, transformation, and discernment among God’s people.

within human beings, *and* as the personal presence of God initiating conversion, transformation, and discernment among God’s people. And yet the New Testament writers do not spell out the distinct personal identity of the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, the language is ambiguous—at one place, “Spirit of Christ,” then at another, “Spirit of God.” For some later theologians, the ambiguous language made sense, if the Spirit was indeed the spirit of the Father *and* of the Son (that is, the double procession of the Spirit); and so

the *filioque* clause (“and the Son”) was added to the Nicene Creed at the Third Council of Toledo (589).

The gifts of the Spirit animate the church

The personal presence of God is brokered by the Spirit through the power of the risen Messiah Jesus, and animates the community gathered around the Lord with gifts of service and mutual

encouragement. However, throughout Christian history the instruction regarding spiritual gifts has often proved controversial and divisive. Typically one instruction is taken in isolation from the other New Testament teaching. Attending to all the voices in the choir and locating one's community within the interpretive matrix are important for developing a biblical theology of spiritual gifts.

In outlining what the New Testament has to say about spiritual gifts, Tim Geddert again helps steer a path through some of the contention by drawing out a number of assertions and implications.

1. The church is the main context for the discovery and exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 26).
2. The church is the body that discerns what gift is genuine and what is not (1 Cor. 14:29). The tests of authority remain the same as they always have been in the church: the gift promotes clear affirmation of Jesus as Lord; the gift is exercised in freedom from ulterior motivation or of personal gain and in coherence with the memory of Jesus' life and ministry. Given these parameters, a wide variety of customs, explanations, and practices is acceptable.
3. Spiritual *fruit* is more crucial than are spiritual *gifts*, and fruit helps the church make sure that the exercise of gifts is proper and helpful (1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 5:22).
4. Every member of the body has at least one gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 18, 27; Eph. 4:7).
5. No member of the body has all the gifts (1 Cor. 12:11, 14, 18, 24, 28).
6. Each member needs the gifts of the others (1 Cor. 12:21).
7. No gift is given to *all* members (1 Cor. 12:8–10, 18–21).
8. God decides who gets which spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 24, 28).
9. Members of the body are not ranked as important or not important according to which gifts they have (1 Cor. 12:24–25).
10. A person who has a spiritual gift is responsible before God to use that gift in ways that are helpful to the church (1 Cor. 14:26–28).

11. Spiritual gifts were not meant just for the first century. There is no biblical evidence for the cessation of gifts. (Note that 1 Cor. 13:10 refers to the *eschaton*, when salvation will be completed.)

Based on what these writers say about spiritual gifts, several implications can be delineated for the church's exercise of spiritual gifts. (1) No gift should be pushed onto a church that is not open to it. This would not build up the church. (2) Spiritual gifts can be exercised in home fellowship groups, even if the whole

The Spirit's primary purpose is to bring glory to God—to help all acknowledge God's presence, power, and claim on human beings. As believers exercise spiritual gifts within the faith community, they grow in the recognition of their partnership with God in the mission of God.

church is not present to benefit. Early house churches are similar to home fellowship groups. (3) There are genuine spiritual gifts that are not mentioned in the Bible. The New Testament presents no complete list. (4) There is no clear division between spiritual gifts and human capabilities or talents. (5) Spiritual gifts are not permanent or personal possessions but empower God's people for specific ministries in specific contexts within the mission of God.

From the list of these gifts it is clear that the Spirit's primary purpose is to bring glory to God—to help all acknowledge God's presence, power, and claim on human beings (Mark 2:12; Rom. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:12). As

believers continue to exercise the spiritual gifts within the faith community, they steadily grow in the recognition of their partnership with God in the mission of God.

Paul's affirmation offers an excellent summary of the character and function of God's Spirit at work among God's people: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17–18).

Notes

¹ C. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 92.

² Ibid., 93.

³ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 113–14.

⁴ Kraus, *God our Savior*, 149.

⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 122.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 251.

About the author

Jon M. Isaak serves as director at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This essay is a shortened version of a chapter on the Holy Spirit from his book, *New Testament Theology: Extending the Table* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), and is used with the permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers. www.wipfandstock.com.

The Spirit-Paraclete as Jesus' alter ego in the Fourth Gospel (John 14–16)

V. George Shillington

The word *Paraclete* is now used by many Christians, who seem to consider it just another name or title for the Holy Spirit. But the English term *Paraclete* is drawn directly from the Greek word *paraklētos*, and translators of the Gospel of John, where it is found, render it with a variety of English words, including “Comforter” (KJV/ASV), “Helper” (NASB/GNT), “Advocate” (NIV/NRSV), and “Friend” (The Message).

The basic sense of the word is “one called alongside.” The fuller meaning is determined by context. And what is that context? This special title for the Spirit occurs only in the Fourth Gospel (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and in 1 John (2:1)—nowhere else in the New Testament. In order to understand the word, then,

The basic sense of the word *Paraclete* is “one called alongside.” The fuller meaning is determined by context. And what is that context?

we must examine the community in which it had currency, the community that produced the Johannine writings.

The focus in this article will be on the Farewell Discourses in John 14–16, in which the Spirit-Paraclete sayings come to light. As it is used in these three chapters, the word *Paraclete* is wrapped in mystery. Ernst Haenchen observes astutely that it “remains ambiguous

and perpetually disputed.”¹ Even so, rereading the relevant passages against the historical and theological backdrop of the Gospel of John can be fruitful for us, personally and communally.

In what follows we will explore the role of the Spirit-Paraclete as Jesus' alter ego, empowering a faltering community in a hostile environment some sixty years after Jesus' earthly life. After a brief overview of the situation in the life of the community, inferred from reading the Fourth Gospel and the three Epistles, I will focus on the five sayings about the Spirit-Paraclete, found in John 14:15–17; 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11; 16:13–15.

A community of Jesus threatened with extinction

Jesus of Nazareth created a community of disciples around himself for the proclamation and performance of the kingdom of God in Palestine. After Easter the surviving community of first disciples attracted new members and branched out to various centres around the Mediterranean basin. Jesus was no longer with them in the flesh, but the memory of his word and work continued, merging judiciously with the social and cultural mores in locations where the Jesus-groups settled: Galilee, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Rome, etc.

Over time, each group in its particular location developed its own faith identity in relation to Jesus the Christ, crucified and raised. Such identity formation included theological vocabulary, patterns of thought, forms of worship, and moral convictions. In

While the narrative material in the Gospel about Jesus and his disciples is important, of equal importance is the life of the community from which and for which the Fourth Gospel was written.

the process, the community faced challenges from the outside and also from within. In particular, this brings us to what is sometimes called the Johannine community. A history of this community is described in Raymond Brown's classic work, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.²

The geographical site of the Johannine community cannot be determined with certainty. Nor does the physical geography matter for the interpretation of the sayings

about the Paraclete. What does matter, however, is the sociopolitical location of the thought and life embedded in the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles. While the narrative material in the Gospel about Jesus and his disciples is important, of equal importance is the life of the community from which and for which the Fourth Gospel was written.

Scholars generally agree that the Gospel was written around 90 CE, and the Epistles five to ten years later.³ That dating puts the community some sixty years beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus, in a very different situation in life. The narratives and discourses in the Gospel of John about Jesus and his disciples effectively instruct the Johannine community about how to live in its environment more than half a century after Jesus had departed his earthly life.

Some of the tensions the community faced can be detected in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles. “The world” in John consists of all those who do not believe in Jesus as Son of God and Saviour. The unbelievers include both Jewish and non-Jewish people. Some of the harshest statements in the New Testament against Jewish leaders appear in the Gospel of John not merely because the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus but also because the Jewish synagogue leaders of the time of the Johannine community cast aspersions on the Jesus group who speak of a Messiah no longer visible. So Jesus in John lashes out at his fellow Jewish leaders with such words as these: “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44; NRSV). The Johannine community is equally challenged by neighbouring Jewish critics, and equally offended by their taunts: Where is this Jesus-Messiah you talk about? How is your invisible Messiah helping you live the good

A minority group with bold exclusivist convictions, the Johannine community would have been called to account for their refusal to join their neighbours in their worship.

life God promised his people? Imagine especially how the Jewish believers in the community would be offended by the criticism, tempted even to defect to their former life in the synagogue.

Accusations would have come from non-Jewish sources as well. The Johannine community, with its roots in Jewish faith, would not participate in the local cults or the imperial cult, both of which they regarded as idolatrous. A minority group with bold

exclusivist convictions, the Johannine community would have been called to account for their refusal to join their neighbours in their worship. As such, the little community could easily feel orphaned, leaderless, and helpless. Hence the stalwart encouragement in the Farewell Discourses about the Spirit-Paraclete who stands in for Jesus to help and defend the struggling community, as the earthly Jesus had done for his disciples decades earlier.

But there were also internal struggles. As the group developed its self-identity in relation to Jesus of Nazareth, some members were drawn to a more spiritual understanding of the Christ. This pattern of belief is broadly called Gnosticism, namely, that

knowledge of God and salvation is spiritual in nature. James Robinson thus points to two trajectories traceable throughout early Christianity, one from Easter to Valentinus—a Gnostic believer in Christ—and another from Easter to the Apostles Creed.⁴ It is noteworthy that the Gnostic theologian Valentinus (100–160 CE), was the first to comment on the Gospel of John. By contrast, the larger branch of the church that led to the Apostles Creed was slow to acknowledge the authority of the Fourth Gospel, with its heavy emphasis on spiritual birth and spiritual knowledge. By the time the Johannine Epistles were written, some members of the community had already seceded, no longer willing to confess “that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7–8). The Gospel of John, especially in the

The five Paraclete sayings in John 14–16 assure the community that Jesus is not a mere memory but a real presence for the performance of faith in the midst of adversity.

Farewell Discourses, aims at keeping the community connected with Jesus of history through the power of the Spirit-Paraclete, Jesus’ other self.

It remains to be seen to what extent the sayings about the Paraclete confirm this view.

The multiple roles of the Spirit-Paraclete

A recurring theme in the Farewell Discourses especially is that of Jesus going away and coming back. The disciples do not under-

stand where he is going, and they tell Jesus so. His replies offer encouragement: his departure from them paves the way for his return to them with more expansive energy for their work in the larger world.

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.” (14:28)

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” (14:18)

“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate (paraklētōs) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (16:7)

In John there is little mention of a future apocalyptic return of Jesus to rescue his own from the judgment to fall on the world. Instead, Jesus comes back to his own in the form of the Spirit-Paraclete, enabling them to face the trials of life through which they must surely pass, as Jesus did during his lifetime.

One can imagine that the Johannine community would feel orphaned. Jesus as he was in the flesh was no longer with them. He was not forgotten in the mind of the community. Leaders, such as the Fourth Evangelist, saw to it that the memory would not vanish: Jesus was the revelation of the true God in the flesh. Yet he was not present in that form in the community living at the end of the first century, surrounded as it was by antagonistic powers. The five Paraclete sayings address the situation, assuring the members that Jesus is not a mere memory but a real presence for the performance of faith in the midst of adversity.

Another Paraclete (14:15–17)

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete, so that he may be with you for all time. That one is the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it neither understands him nor knows him. You know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.”⁵

William Domeris has observed that “the most striking aspect of this passage is the mention of ‘another paraclete.’”⁶ The implication is that there was one before, and that one was Jesus. What Jesus was in thought, word, and deed is precisely what the “other Paraclete” will be in Jesus’ stead. Jesus “had been with them for a short time, but the ‘other paraclete,’ his *alter ego*, would be with them permanently, and not only with them but in them.”⁷

There are two words in Greek for “another.” One, *heteros*, signifies another of a different kind, while the other, *allos*, signifies another of the same kind (compare Gal. 1:6–7). The latter is the case in this saying. The Paraclete carries forward the commandments and the Spirit of truth found uniquely in Jesus. The community now owns Jesus’ commandments along with his Spirit-power to obey them.

The Paraclete as teacher (14:26)

“But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, that one will teach you all things and will cause you to remember all things that I have spoken to you.”

Two points stand out in this saying: the Paraclete will teach the community and will bring to mind the word of Jesus. The role of the Paraclete, as the Holy Spirit of Jesus, is not merely to teach the members how to think and live in the moment; the Spirit will also remind them of the word of Jesus spoken many years before. There is no hint here or elsewhere in John that Jesus of history can be set aside under the influence of the Spirit. On the contrary, the two are bound together integrally. The word of Jesus from the past is spoken afresh in the new situation under the influence and guidance of the Paraclete.

The Paraclete as witness to Jesus (15:26–27)

“Whenever the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that comes from the Father, that one will bear witness concerning me, and you also are bearing witness [at the same time], because you are with me from the beginning.”

In this saying Jesus does the sending, although the source of the Paraclete, as also Jesus, is the Father. The role of the Paraclete in

The Spirit of truth is personified as “one called alongside” the community of believers in Jesus to communicate the will and word and work of Jesus to the faithful members.

this instance is that of a defense attorney in a courtroom, one who takes up the case in behalf of a defendant. He gives testimony concerning Jesus. The Greek word for “witness” is *martyr*. The witness to Jesus may not persuade the earthly judge, and thus the defendant may suffer martyrdom. Even so, the Paraclete bears witness to the truth in the face of death. But the Paraclete does not bear witness so that the members of the commu-

nity may not do so. Both the Paraclete and the members give testimony in one voice, not ever denying knowledge of Jesus, who gave his life for the members.

The Paraclete as judge (16:7–8)

“It is better for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And coming thus he will pass sentence on the world concerning sin and justice and judgment.”

Again, Jesus is the one sending the Paraclete in his place. With this saying the community can take heart that the case is not stacked against them. One or another of the members may have been called to account, either in the court of the synagogue or in a tribunal of Rome. In either setting, the issue had to do with their confession of Jesus as the Messiah of God. The Paraclete-Judge will reprove the world concerning sin (that is, injustice), concerning the just cause of Jesus, and concerning judgment for wrongdoing. Presumably the Paraclete does not function as judge independently of the members of the community. He is with them and in them. The action of the Spirit-Paraclete in the world corresponds integrally with the action of the community. Speaking for the currency of this saying, and the others, for the present time, René Girard avers, Jesus “himself becomes our Paraclete . . . who will work ceaselessly within the world to bring the truth to light there too.”⁸

The Paraclete as spokesperson (16:13–15)

“Whenever that one comes, the Spirit of truth, he will lead you in the whole truth. For he will not speak from himself, but whatever he hears he will speak, and will communicate to you the things to come. That one will glorify me, because he will receive from me and communicate the same to you. Whatever things the Father has are mine. On this account I said that he will receive from me and communicate the same to you.”

While the title *Paraclete* is not present in this saying, it is evident that the same concept is at play. The Spirit of truth is personified as “one called alongside” the community of believers in Jesus to communicate the will and word and work of Jesus to the faithful members. They will be granted insight concerning things to come,

presumably so that they will not be caught unawares. What is especially poignant in this saying is the dynamic integrity and interaction between the Father, Jesus, the Paraclete, and the community in bringing the truth and glory of God to bear in community life and in the world. Members of the community do not speak out of their own human spirit-mind but only as the Spirit of truth instructs. However hard it is to grasp this dynamism, it is worth pondering deeply for ongoing Christian community life in the world.

Conclusion

In his commentary on the Fourth Gospel, Calvin states: "If it is asked whether we today are not still under the patronage of Christ (*sub Christi clientela*), the answer is easy. Christ is a continual Patron, but not in a visible manner. While He dwelt in the world, He openly manifested Himself as the Patron. Now He guards us by His Spirit."⁹ The leap from the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel, set in the first third of the first century, to the present moment is a common occurrence among Christians: John Calvin in his time, and we in ours. As the above discussion illustrates, I

The Gospel of John was written to assure the community, many years removed from Jesus and in a hostile environment, that it was not orphaned. The gift of the Spirit-Paraclete brought Jesus to life in the thought and activity of the threatened community.

find it instructive to keep clearly in mind the origin of the Fourth Gospel in a community living at the end of first century. The Gospel was written to assure the community, many years removed from Jesus and in a hostile environment, that it was not orphaned. The gift of the Spirit-Paraclete brought Jesus to life in the thought and activity of the threatened community. No doubt the Johannine community had its rituals and pattern of speech, as all religious communities do, but the real presence of Jesus in life and thought springs not from human constructs, linguistic or otherwise, but from the initiative of the risen Christ in the presence of Father-God.

The Spirit-Paraclete is sent, not summoned. The reality of the Spirit of Jesus is a gift to the Christian community to shape identity and empower faithful witness in the world.

Notes

¹ Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 126.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

³ *Ibid.*, 59–138.

⁴ James M. Robinson. “Jesus from Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles’ Creed),” in *Jesus: According to the Earliest Witness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 27–63.

⁵ The translation of the sayings is mine.

⁶ William Domeris, “The Paraclete as an Ideological Construct: A Study in the Farewell Discourses,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 67 (1989): 21.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 302; see also Raymond E. Brown, “The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 13, no. 2 (1967): 113–32.

⁸ René Girard, “History and the Paraclete,” *Ecumenical Review* 35, no. 1 (1983): 11.

⁹ John Calvin, *The Gospel according to St John: 11–21 and The First Epistle of John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 82.

About the author

V. George Shillington is professor emeritus of biblical and theological studies at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Holy Spirit and gender equality

A Latin American perspective

Patricia Urueña Barbosa

To see the Holy Spirit from the perspective of churches that work for peace and justice is to understand the liberating, empowering, and transformative dynamic of the work of God's Spirit among us.

Before looking at whether conditions and practices of justice exist in our societies, we must ask ourselves how justice is practiced in our congregations so that we are led to live in peace. What we find in the world is people with power who dominate the world economy; colonize other peoples; exploit resources; and use social, economic, and political structures for their personal ends. And we must ask, how are these relationships of domination also present in our churches? We cannot say that we are churches

Pneumatology, the theology of the Spirit, has been the neglected stepsister of Christian theology. Like Cinderella's potential, the Spirit's attributes have gone largely unrecognized, lost in obscurity.

working for peace and justice when our theological beliefs lead us to practice relationships of domination and exclusion. Specifically, we need to examine the discrimination that women suffer in the church: some of our congregations exclude women from decision making and from ministries we reserve only for men. Some Christian churches exclude women from ordination as pastors.

We need to question and revise the patriarchal theological beliefs that have led to the oppression and marginalization of women in the church as well as in society. We must revise concepts and practices such as those that consider men superior and women inferior, and that make women responsible for the fall of humanity, for sin, and for the presence of evil in the world. Patriarchal societies' views about male superiority and female inferiority have resulted not just in asymmetric relationships between women and

men but also in unjust and powerful economic structures in the world. These views have generated evils such as xenophobia, racism, domination, colonization, wars, exploitation of natural resources, destruction of the environment, and death.

In the struggle to overcome these evils the patriarchal or *machista* system has perpetrated against women—but also against other men, oppressed peoples, and creation itself—we need theological renewal. We need a theology that will help us establish and support relationships of justice and peace among individuals and groups of people, with God, and in our care for creation. In particular, we need to reconsider our beliefs about the presence and action of the Spirit of God in the world.

The Holy Spirit as theology's neglected stepsister

Since biblical times God's people have attempted to understand the role of the Spirit of God in the world. In the first centuries of the church's existence, councils articulated developing Trinitarian understandings of God, which gave attention to the role of the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is not spelled out in scripture; it is a dogma, a creedal formulation. What we do find in the Bible is the important and active function of God as creator, sustainer, liberator and savior; of the Son as redeemer of humanity and creation; and of the Spirit present before the creation of the world, and accompanying the people to legislate, to create order, and to comfort.

Theologians have devoted a lot of attention to the creating, liberating, providing, and saving role of God, and to the nature and work of Jesus Christ. But theological work on the role of the Holy Spirit has been minimal. The Spirit has been forgotten and marginalized by theologies, both traditional and contemporary. Pneumatology, the theology of the Spirit, has been the neglected stepsister of Christian theology. Like Cinderella's potential at the beginning of the old fairy tale, the Spirit's attributes have gone largely unrecognized, lost in obscurity.

Women in Latin America as human Cinderellas

Many societies have abused, exploited, and marginalized women not only in Latin America but in much of the world throughout much of human history. Like Cinderella, many women have been

oppressed and mistreated, and their gifts and worth have gone unrecognized.

In countries shaped by some forms of traditional Christian theology, women have been held responsible for the fall of humanity and for the sin and evil that exist in the world. Women have been considered the gateway through which the devil came into the world, and have been seen as tempters and heretics, inclined to do evil. For these reasons, women have been regarded as unworthy to represent divinity and therefore ineligible to serve as priests for God's people.

Multiple forms of marginalization and death are the experience not only of Latin American women but of women throughout the world where structures of domination and exclusion continue to determine their lives.

Theology that has been framed in the context of patriarchal society has not used feminine language and images to talk of God's action. Its categories are reinforced by masculine language and images for God (God as Father). It does not use the language or imagery of God as mother, and it disregards those scripture texts that reflect the maternal action of God (God as procreator and caregiver; God as compassionate, faithful, nurturing, and comforting; see Num. 11:12; Deut. 32:11–12,18; Isa. 46:3; 49:15; and 66:13).

Many women continue to live in patriarchal contexts of marked social injustice and religious exclusion. Even in denominations that ordain them, women are not always granted an authority that would enable their full participation in church leadership, on a par with men who lead. Women in patriarchal societies tend to be second-class citizens, with few opportunities to study or do work that pays well. These constraints limit their possibilities for self-improvement and independence. The political contributions of women in such societies are undervalued. A setting in which these attitudes prevail becomes a breeding ground for male domination of women, for violence and abuse that women suffer at the hands of men. These multiple forms of marginalization and death are the experience not only of Latin American women but of women throughout the world where structures of domination and exclusion continue to determine their lives.

The Holy Spirit, neglected stepsister, and human Cinderellas

The above analysis suggests that the Spirit is theology's neglected stepsister, a divine Cinderella who has yet to emerge from obscurity. Similarly, women are the human Cinderellas of patriarchal societies, including the society of the church. We turn now to explore the symbolic relationship between the oblivion that the Spirit has fallen into in theological study, and the marginalization and neglect that women suffer in the church and in Latin American society.

If we reinterpret the Spirit's presence and action from a liberating perspective, seeing her as the Spirit of a God who does not marginalize, oppress, or exercise control over or use violence against, then women—and men—can begin to overcome male chauvinism with all the evils it has caused, and instead find fulfillment in a life of justice and peace. At the same time, more equal social structures can emerge, which can help reduce violence, colonialism, domination, and race and gender exclusion. In this way women and men will become more aware of the value and respect that women, life, and creation itself deserve. Together, liberated women and men will be better equipped to face the challenges to do justice, live peaceably, and care for creation.

A theology of the Spirit that overcomes dualisms of gender

I want to focus not on theological and historical disputes about the *nature* or *essence* of God as Spirit and will concentrate instead on understanding the *activity* of God-Spirit in the world. Our purpose in this theological reconstruction is not to replace an unjust system of masculine domination with one of feminine domination, which would only perpetuate the domination system in another form.

Our proposal is to understand and name a God whose concern is justice. Our aim is to overcome the dualisms of gender that perpetuate injustice. This theological reconstruction we are undertaking is intended not to find a masculine God with some feminine characteristics but to discover a God in whose image we—women and men—were created, a God with whom all human beings can identify, knowing that God understands us, brings us comfort, and is our strength and hope in this world of injustice, pain, and death.

The Spirit, God's Wisdom. The scriptures provide significant resources for thinking about the action of the Spirit of God. Particular passages about the presence and power of the Spirit are found in the canonical books of the Bible as well as in the Old Testament apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, especially in wisdom literature: Proverbs 1–9 (4–3 BCE), Ben Sirach or Sirach (2 BCE), and the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (1 BCE). In this sapiential literature Hebrew terms related to the Spirit of God are grammatically feminine: *shekinah* (“the presence of God”), *ruah* (“spirit”; the Greek equivalent is *pneuma*, which is neuter), and *hokmah* (“wisdom”; *sophia* in Greek, also feminine).

All these words provide feminine images of the Spirit of God. *Hokmah* is used to talk about the mystery of God in feminine

This theological reconstruction is intended not to find a masculine God with some feminine characteristics but to discover a God in whose image we—women and men—were created, a God with whom all human beings can identify.

symbols. The biblical figure of *hokmah* or Wisdom is the personification of the presence and activity of God in the Old Testament. *Ruah* points to the presence of the divine Spirit, and refers to the creative and liberating power of God in the world, with marked feminine connotations. The female term *shekinah* is associated with the Spirit of God; it indicates the permanence of God's presence among the people of Israel. The *shekinah* expands the biblical understanding of the Spirit of God as feminine.

In translations of the Bible, and perhaps because of an androcentric and patriarchal mentality, *ruah* (spirit) was translated into Latin as *spiritus* (male). *Hokmah* (*sophia*, Wisdom) was translated into Greek as *logos* (male). As a result, any identification of the Holy Spirit with the feminine in God was lost.

Spirit-Wisdom, giver of life. The Spirit-Wisdom dwelt with God before the creation (Prov. 8:22), was the beginning of the creation (Rev. 3:14), was present in the creative action and generating of life (Gen. 1: 2; 26; Prov. 8:27–29), and was ordering all (Prov. 8:30) as an act of lawmaking, to judge the world. In Sirach 24:1–31 the Spirit-Wisdom describes herself and recounts her origins and her work: she came out of the mouth of the Almighty; God created her from the beginning, before the ages; in

the holy tent she ministered with her presence, then was established in Zion; her power was in Jerusalem; she and the law are identical (Sirach 24:1–31; JB).

As creator and giver of life the Spirit-Wisdom sustains creation and hopes her sons and daughters will also care for creation. From this ecological perspective, people are called to be involved along with God in the care, preservation, and salvation of all creation. We have solidarity with and responsibility for taking care of the biosphere to sustain life.

Spirit-Wisdom, the maternal face of God. Some biblical metaphors offer us a broad view of God's compassionate and maternal power. In Isaiah 42:14, God screams with terrible pain to give birth to the new creation. In Isaiah 46:3–4, God carries people in her womb and will bear them until old age. These verses imply a nurturing role: God teaches God's people to take their first steps, carries them from here to there, accompanies them from birth into old age. God is a consoling mother in Isaiah 66:13 and Hosea 11:3–4; in Isaiah 49:15, unlike some human mothers, God as mother will never forget the children of her womb.

The Spirit or God's Wisdom in the Jewish tradition has a marked maternal face, and is strongly linked with the biological function of maternity (the feminine). The Spirit-Wisdom

The view of Spirit in wisdom literature integrates male and female traits; in the Spirit-Wisdom, patriarchy's male and female stereotypes are overcome.

is also linked to law, government, and justice, which in the androcentric mentality are male roles. The view of Spirit in this wisdom literature integrates male and female traits; in the Spirit-Wisdom, patriarchy's male and female stereotypes are overcome.

Spirit-Wisdom, proclaimer of justice.

Proverbs 1:20–21; 3:19; and chapters 8 and 9 recognize the presence and action of God through the Spirit, as a cosmic figure who administers justice, is the embodiment of God, and is God. In these texts, Wisdom invites people to follow her ways of life, truth, and justice. Wisdom raises her voice, preaches, and manifests herself in the middle of the public life. She is seen in the streets, in the plazas where people engage in trade and economic activity. She is at the gates of the cities where

justice and mercy are imparted. She sends her maids (prophets, apostles, and wise people) to invite those who are in the streets—the excluded, marginalized and dehumanized—to eat at the festive table. She leads humanity to great things, inspiring and bringing wisdom. Through her guidance, people find life. They follow the ways of truth, walking by paths of justice, knowing God.

This call of the Spirit-Wisdom is an inclusive call. It sets out an alternative proposal not only for women but for all humanity. It seeks to establish justice in the world and to cultivate equitable relationships in personal, ecclesiastic, economic, politic, cultural, and social spheres, and with creation. When we embrace it we leave behind the image of the patriarchal God who manipulates

The power that we as women want is power to be respected; to stop violence against us at the hands of men; to gain access to resources and assets; to live in freedom; and to experience a world free from domination, destruction, and violence.

and exterminates life through power that knows no bounds; that creates hierarchies; and that excludes, oppresses, and exploits nature.

Daughters of the Spirit-Wisdom

The patriarchal image of God the Father has been exclusive and oppressive, and it has justified violence against women. This understanding of God has also led humanity to violence, war, and the destruction of nature. The maternal image of God is not the only helpful view of the divine, but it is a more holistic view and provides a framework for

the elaboration of an ecological theology that promotes the protection of life in all its forms.

Reinterpreting the presence and action of the Spirit-Wisdom gives us resources for overcoming the marginalization, abuse, and oppression of human Cinderellas, and for opening possibilities for women to experience the fullness of life. Many have said that women want the power to dominate, but our goal is not to exercise the power that dominates. The power that we as women want is power to be respected; to stop violence against us at the hands of men; to gain access to resources and assets; to live in freedom; and to experience a world free from domination, destruction, and violence.

Through this reinterpretation of the Spirit, marginalized women strengthen their self-image, a self-image now based on their identity as daughters of the Spirit-Wisdom. They grow in their understanding of themselves as created in God's image, and they find a space of identification with God. The Spirit-Wisdom forges a consciousness of the freedom and equality with which God endowed women and men. Men and women, both bearing the image of God, will then cultivate equitable gender relations. Women, together with men, will accept the call of the Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and 9 to follow her ways of justice, and they will come to her table to acquire instruction and wisdom, to seek justice, and to overcome inequalities by confronting unjust systems. They will seek transformation and work to make the necessary changes in church and in society.

The Spirit-Wisdom encourages the formation of inclusive communities that manage resources without hoarding, celebrating what God has given to all humanity for the sustenance of life.

Finally, the Spirit-Wisdom is a symbol of hope because she encourages the formation of inclusive communities of peers, women and men, who foster just societies, without discrimination, xenophobia, or racism; communities that manage resources responsibly and without hoarding, celebrating what God has given to all humanity for the sustenance of life. The search for peace and the practice of justice should lead us to build communities of faith and societies that dignify and humanize, with relationships of fairness and equality between women and men, at the same time ensuring human care for the earth.

About the author

Patricia Urueña Barbosa is from Colombia, South America. She has an undergraduate degree in theological studies from Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia and holds a masters degree in theology from the Latin American Biblical University. She is serving as a Mennonite Mission Network worker in Ecuador. During 2010–11 she and her husband, César Moya, were visiting scholars at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. She and César have three children, Daniel, Juan, and Andrea.

Healing and the Holy Spirit

A manifestation of the “already, but not yet” kingdom of God

Cara Pfeiffer

Isaiah prophesies that physical healings will accompany God in coming to save Israel from its enemies: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (Isa. 35:4–6; NRSV). A version of that message of hope is found on the lips of Jesus when he responds to the question brought by John’s disciples: “Are you the one who is to

Jesus in effect identifies himself as Messiah by pointing to these works of healing: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear . . .”

come?” Jesus invokes Isaiah’s prophecy and in effect says that his acts of healing and proclamation of good news to the poor fulfill the prophet’s promise of salvation. Jesus in effect identifies himself as Messiah by pointing to these works of healing: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear . . . (Matt. 11:4–5).

Thus we see that Jesus’ ministry of healing did not stand alone but was connected to a theology of salvation, restoration, and messianic expectation. Matthew twice summarizes

Jesus’ ministry as “teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness” (Matt. 4:23, cf. Matt. 9:35). Healing was not an add-on to Jesus’ ministry; it was integral to Jesus’ messianic, kingdom-centered life.¹ And as we will see in hearing a personal testimony and engaging in a study of scripture, healing is not an add-on to faith but is the substance of things hoped for.

Pentecostal hermeneutics

Having been raised in the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG), a Pentecostal denomination, I heard much about

both the Holy Spirit and healing. In fact, even the name of the denomination includes both themes: “Foursquare Gospel” is a didactic tool representing Jesus as the Savior, Healer, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and Soon Coming King.

In a Pentecostal hermeneutic, theology is usually developed at the intersection of experiential knowledge and a careful reading of scripture. In what follows, I will approach the issue of healing and the Holy Spirit in true Pentecostal fashion through the case study of a dear family friend, Crystal, who has been seeing clearly through a glass eye for the last thirty-nine years. Crystal sat down with me for more than an hour this past June at the annual ICFG International Convention in Columbus, Ohio, and told me her story. What follows is an edited transcript of our conversation, detailing her story of healing.² After recounting her story I will end with my own reflections on healing and the Holy Spirit, based on an “already, but not yet” view of the kingdom of God.

Crystal's story

Crystal is a middle-aged woman originally from the hilly country of southeastern Ohio, but now living in Toledo, Ohio, with her husband. They have five children and six grandchildren. She is an ordained minister in the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel where she pastored for twenty-three years with her husband before being appointed a divisional superintendent, the capacity in which she now serves. Crystal has an effervescent personality, but she is also a straight talker and a deep thinker.

Crystal was not initially raised in a Christian home but always heard church bells in the distance and wanted to go to church. She began going to a Moravian church when she was six, and shortly afterward her parents began going to church as well.

When Crystal was two, doctors discovered that she had a detached retina, which caused her to go blind in one eye. During adolescence she had to have her eye surgically removed and replaced with a glass eye.

The eye was hemorrhaging and deteriorating and they discovered that somehow an infection settled in my left eye. They watched it close until I was thirteen to make sure that it never came back and that it never transferred into the other eye. So at that point they knew that

eventually the eye would have to come out, but they wanted me to grow as old as I could, so that the socket would be the same size. So when I was nine the eye was just hemorrhaging so bad. I'd be playing and I'd scream, and before I could scream and grab the eye, the pain would be gone. It was just hemorrhaging right in my head, and the doctors told my parents I had a 50/50 chance of hemorrhaging to death because it was deteriorating so bad. So my mom, she just gave her heart to the Lord and said, "If you help me take Crystal through this and she can grow up feeling whole about herself, I'll give you my life."

After Crystal's parents became Christians they got filled with the "baptism of the Holy Spirit,"³ along with their pastor, and they were "politely" asked to leave the church. At that point Crystal's family started traveling around, going to other church services.

During that time I saw a lot of miracles. I saw legs grow. Somebody couldn't fake that. I remember going to the Ohio Theater and seeing people who couldn't speak, speak. Eyes, blind people putting down stuff. I just saw a lot of miracles. I always remember believing it. I just always knew God was healer, just like he was my Savior. Maybe it was just my age, I don't know. It says "by his stripes we are healed" and I knew that the same blood that was shed for my salvation is the same blood that was shed for my healing. It isn't like you've got to be Christian so long. It's a free gift, just like salvation is. So I knew that and accepted that. But I never sought healing for myself, because I didn't feel like I was losing anything. I never remember seeing. And so I was never really seeking healing. I was just seeking a close walk with the Lord.

Around the age of thirteen Crystal chose to be baptized, even though she had been baptized as a child. That experience was formative for her, as she felt overwhelmed by a "powerful love."

Shortly after that we went to a Foursquare Church. Next thing we knew we were going there Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. And they had camp, so

I got to go to winter camp. I loved it—so I signed up to go to summer camp. And Sammy Oppenheim (I think it was the first year he spoke there), one day he was talking about how Satan comes to rob and steal and destroy. He gave us certain scriptures to read and asked us if we would spend time doing that instead of playing games in the afternoon when we had a break. So I went back. I never stayed in my dorm, but I can remember staying in the dorm and praying and just seeking the Lord.

I was asking, “What is the enemy stealing from me that God would want to give me?” I had no clue; but I prayed, “Whatever it is, Lord, I want it.” And so that night at the meeting Sammy gave an alter call inviting us to come up to receive what the Lord had for us if we wanted more. And as I was praying, I looked up, and this friend of mine who was supposed to get orthodontics surgery on her teeth, her gums were moving and her teeth were moving and her face. At first I thought I must be crying and I can’t see plain. So I wiped my face and I looked at her and I’m like, “Becky, I think your teeth are moving!” And she’s like, “I know! Isn’t it great?!” And she wouldn’t look. She wouldn’t talk. She just kept praying and bawling.

And I just started serving the Lord and praising him. Then all of a sudden a thought just went through my head, “God’s going to heal me and give me sight.” I said, “No. Why would he do that?” And I just thought, “God’s going to heal me. You know, you need to go forward and ask that man to lay hands on you.” And then I thought, “No. What am I going to do if he says, ‘What? God can heal anything, but an eye?!’” And as soon as I thought that, it was like the Lord was saying, “You know that man can’t heal you.” And I thought, “Yeah, I know he can’t heal me. I know it’s all about you.” It was just like I was having a dialogue back and forth with the Lord. Then I thought, “Okay, I’m going to go for it.”

So I went up and I said, "I believe God is telling me he is going to heal me." And Sammy said, "You what?" And I said, "Yeah, God's going to heal me." And he said, "Oh, great honey, what's the problem?" I said, "Well, I have an artificial eye and God's going to give me sight." And he says, "You have an artificial what?!" So he prayed for me, and as he started praying for me I didn't really feel anything happening, but I was so wrapped up in God's love because I felt like God was just loving on me and telling me he loved me and was going to heal me.

At first I didn't notice anything had happened. Nothing had changed. I just didn't quit praying, so they just kept praying with me. And all of a sudden I started seeing something like little heads, and they looked like they were just floating, like they weren't on the shoulders. And again I thought I was just seeing things, because I'd seen right before that some bright lights coming toward me, so I was encapsulated in that. I thought, "Oh my goodness, is this a dream, a vision, what? This is so awesome." And again just feeling his love. Well then when I saw the little heads floating in there I thought, "Oh, is this part of this dream?" And then I realized I was seeing, and I just went berserk.

After camp, Crystal returned home to an ecstatic mother and a cautious yet believing father and tried to integrate back into normal life. But as news of her restored sight spread, she was approached by a reporter who wanted to do a story about Crystal. Part of the story involved her being examined by several medical doctors.

This was a trying time for Crystal, because though the doctors all agreed that Crystal could see out of her glass eye, they dismissed the idea that her sight came as a miracle and decided it was some yet-to-be-uncovered scientific mystery. As a result, Crystal found herself sitting in a doctor's office crying to God. And this is what she heard from God:

"Why do you think I healed you?" And I said, "Because this is an awesome testimony, and you've saved me, and now you've healed me, and people will have to accept

Christ. They'll have to get healed." And he said, "Why do you think I healed you?" "You know, because this is an awesome testimony." And I just felt like the Lord sighed and said, "Why did I heal you?" And I said, "I don't know then!" And he said, "Because I love you." He wasn't trying to get me to prove anything. This was for me.

Healing, the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of God

According to the Gospels, sometimes Jesus healed someone for the purpose of testimony (see John 9:1–41), but Crystal's recurring sense of powerful love is also consistent with scripture. For example, Ephesians 2:4–7 testifies that "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us . . . , made us alive together with Christ . . . so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (NRSV). God is here described as a God of mercy, love, and kindness who is ultimately knitting

It seems that with Jesus the kingdom was inaugurated, and it is growing and expanding, yet we are waiting for its completion in the eschaton. This is what is meant by the phrase "already, but not yet."

together history in order to lavishly bless humanity with "the immeasurable riches of his grace." These immeasurable riches seem to be part of what was poured out onto Crystal in her healing, but they are also part of an eschatological expectation made possible through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Here we find ourselves wrapped up in the "already, but not yet" nature of the kingdom of God. It is described as something that starts small and then takes over, like a mustard seed or yeast (Matt. 13:31–32). Jesus also describes it as being "among us" (Luke 17:21). And yet we are taught to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10), as if it is something we wait for. It seems that with Jesus the kingdom was inaugurated, and it is growing and expanding, yet we are waiting for its completion in the eschaton. This is what is meant by the phrase "already, but not yet."

As part of the kingdom, healing also has an "already, but not yet" status. Jesus came "with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2), and

he healed countless people during his kingdom-focused ministry (Matt. 4:23, cf. Matt. 9:35). Nonetheless, those healings were always temporal. For instance, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Yet Lazarus still died, as did all the other people Jesus healed. We experience healings now, and yet there is a greater healing to come.

God created this world as good—indeed, as very good (Gen. 1). But this world has been marred by destruction, murder, pestilence, and pain. As Paul writes vividly:

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

In this passage we see that healing is ultimately part of the cosmic redemptive plan of God to return the world to its “very good” nature, to *shalom*,⁴ which includes the healing of our bodies, the healing of the whole created order, and the healing of the nations (Mic. 4, Rev. 22). And yet we are left groaning for these things because they have yet to be realized in fullness.

Healing is part of the cosmic redemptive plan of God to return the world to *shalom*. And yet we are left groaning for these things because they have yet to be realized in fullness.

The miraculous healing Crystal experienced was a mediation of God’s love and a foretaste of the future. Her healing was mediated by the Holy Spirit.⁵ Nonetheless, she, like Lazarus, will someday go to the grave. As a result, while she stands now in the healing power of Jesus, she waits in eager

expectation for the complete healing that is to come in the eschaton. In fact, as a bearer of the Spirit, she groans inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, as she awaits redemption.

The role of the Holy Spirit in healing, then, is twofold: to mediate healing to us in the present and to make us long for the healing that is to come. It is a great discipline to pray for healing today. It is a greater discipline to remember the healing that will come tomorrow.

Notes

¹ Brenda B. Colijn helpfully discusses this topic in her chapter, “Deliverance Belongs to the Lord: *Sôtēria* as Rescue and Healing,” in *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 121–43. A work useful for understanding the terms used for healing in the New Testament is Louise Wells, *The Greek Language of Healing from Homer to New Testament Times* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998).

² Crystal Emhoff, interview by Cara L. Pfeiffer, Columbus, OH, May 31, 2011.

³ In Pentecostal circles this language is used to describe an empowering of the Holy Spirit for service to Jesus. It is usually accompanied by speaking in tongues.

⁴ *Shalom* is here understood as the peace that comes when wholeness is fully realized at a cosmic level.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:9 lists healing as one of the gifts of the Spirit. Additionally, John 14:12–18 describes the Holy Spirit as the mediator of the works of Jesus in the physical absence of Jesus.

About the author

Cara Pfeiffer is a self-described Pentecostal Anabaptist who graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) in 2010 with an MA in theological studies, with a concentration in Bible. She and her husband, Joe Pfeiffer, also a 2010 graduate of AMBS, live in Los Angeles, where Cara is working in an AmeriCorps assignment teaching peacemaking and conflict resolution skills to inner city urban youth.

Turning from scripture to Spirit

A sermon on Revelation 1:9–19
for the Sunday before Pentecost

David Driedger

I had just finished my second year of college: our papers were submitted and our exams completed. In honour of this occasion my roommates and I thought it would be good to let loose a little, so three of us headed downtown, ready for some mischief. Now we were renting a house in the small Mennonite community of

Pentecost forms the launching pad for the life of the church. The “ordinary time” that follows should be that time in which the church continues to write and enact the story of God’s work on earth.

Steinbach, Manitoba, so that limited our options. We hit the 7-11 for some Slurpees. We pulled a stuffed racoon across the street with a string when cars drove by. You know, wild and crazy college stuff.

The night wore on, and we found ourselves wandering around aimlessly. Then we heard some shouting, and we went to investigate. A man and woman were outside on a driveway, having an altercation. We were quite close to them, though hidden from view. Eventually their fight ended, and the

man got into his car to drive away. We ducked behind a bush in the neighbors’ yard, but as the man backed out of the driveway, the car paused for a moment and its headlights lit up our bush, clearly revealing the three of us cowering behind it.

The man shut off the car engine and opened the driver’s door with a yell. We took off at a run, and he gave chase. As we headed down an alley, we instinctively split up. I found myself running alone—or rather, running with an angry man in hot pursuit. I am at best a sprinter, not a distance runner, and I knew I could not keep up my pace. How big was he? How old was he? I had no clear idea, no notion of who was behind me or what his intentions were, but I had to decide what to do.

As it happened, I stopped, folding my hands behind my back as I turned to face my pursuer.

Having ears to hear and eyes to see

For congregations that follow the rhythms of the church year, there comes a point when the readings and celebrations begin to catch up with life. We are approaching that time. We have observed the feast of the ascension, marking Jesus' departure from the world. And next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit descended and the church was formed and began her mission in earnest. The weeks and months of the church year that follow form what is called ordinary time. This period of the church calendar takes up half the year and ends with Advent, when we start over. For most of us this time of year is for taking a break, going on vacation, lying low.

Theologically, however, Pentecost forms the launching pad for the life of the church. Ordinary time should be that time in which the church continues to write and enact the story of God's work on earth. Let's take a moment to reflect on the transition we are about to enter into. Here we look to see if our tradition will gain traction, or even to see the move from scripture to Spirit.

For all of my adult life I have held a high view of scripture. I held a high view of scripture even when I was confronted with my inadequate view of the Bible as a moral rule book. I continued to

One of the most important roles that scripture and Christian tradition can play is linked to their ability to *point away from themselves* so that we see and hear the movements of God's Spirit.

hold a high view of scripture even when I needed to face the war and bloodshed of the Old Testament or the seemingly multiple theologies contained within it that were difficult if not impossible to reconcile at points. While I saw others around me lower their view of the Bible or even doubt its ongoing value, I continued to find it ever deepening in texture and meaning.

I continue to hold a high view of scripture, but that view has changed fundamentally over time. This change crystallized in the words of Jesus found in John's Gospel. Jesus said to a crowd, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39–40; NRSV). Just before this Jesus tells the crowd about God, saying that they "have never heard his voice or seen his form."

Scripture continued to play a high role in my life precisely because it demanded that I lower my view of it and even put it down so that I could listen and look for the presence of God in the world and within my own spirit. One of the dominant threads throughout the Bible and particularly in the Gospels is the notion of having ears to hear and eyes to see. I am coming to believe that one of the most important roles that scripture and our Christian tradition can play is linked to their ability at crucial moments to *point away from themselves* so that we see and hear the movements of God's Spirit.

Turning toward the voice

In Luke's Gospel (7:18–23) we read about John the Baptist's disciples, who approach Jesus to find out if he is the Messiah who is to come. How does Jesus respond? He answers them with instructions to "go and tell John what you have seen and heard." What is going on here? What is happening at this basic level of human experience? What is it about hearing and seeing that is at once so obvious and yet so elusive, at least in the Gospels? It seems that these are senses needing to be reborn, or even to come into existence for the first time. Are we born blind and deaf? Do we become blind and deaf?

This question may seem like a minor point of interpretation, but in our reading from the book of Revelation (1:9–19), note that twice it says that John *turned*.

I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a

flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this."

The Jewish concept of repentance, shaped by the Old Testament, is linked closely to the simple Hebrew word for "turn." Repentance is simply turning toward God. In this text John reports that he was "in the spirit on the Lord's day," when he heard a voice *behind him* telling him to write in a book what he sees. The Lord's day probably refers to the weekly routine of worship, but

John turned from his spiritual practice, and he looked and saw the Son of Man, moving in the midst of the churches.

John turned *from* the practice of the church to see Jesus at work *among* the churches.

we are not told just what John was doing. Perhaps he was reading scripture, or maybe he was praying or singing. In any case, the voice came from *behind him*. It did not come from whatever his attention had been directed toward.

The voice presents John with a choice. He can continue with his religious practice, his scripture reading or praying or singing. Such practices are commended to us in scripture and testified to throughout Christian traditions, and they have their place. But if practices such as scripture reading do not remain in their appropriate role, then even if we do not consciously turn away from God, we might find that God has moved, that God is now behind us.

John must decide whether he will listen to the voice coming from behind him or remain focused on his religious practice. The narrative continues: "I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me," and then, just in case we missed his use of the word *turn*, he says: "*on turning* I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man." John turned from his spiritual practice, perhaps one that was set and

planned like our Sunday morning worship, and he looked and saw Jesus, the Son of Man, moving in the midst of the churches. John turned *from* the practice of the church to see Jesus at work *among* the churches.

We should also notice John's response on seeing the Son of Man: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." This prostration is a common response to visions of God. Think of Isaiah or Daniel, among others. Maybe the shock is in encountering something so *otherworldly*, but I suspect it is rather the result of hearing and seeing the world so clearly, of hearing and seeing God clearly *in the world*. We shut down in the face of this clarity; it is too much.

We are leaving the established seasons of the church year. We are leaving predictability, orientation, and comfort, and are now opening ourselves to hear and see from places behind, above, beside, and below our traditions and outside of scripture.

We feel unable to take in and account for what is happening, and the images seem foreign and bizarre. But perhaps they are actually clarifications and intensifications of reality. Perhaps these visions are like early works of Picasso that attempted to account for multiple perspectives on a single canvas, creating at once a sense of chaos but also an intensification and deepening of engagement.

Leaving predictability

This is what I want us to reflect on as we approach Pentecost and prepare to proclaim that the Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh. We are leaving the set and established seasons of the church year. We are leaving a sense of predictability, orientation, and comfort, and are now opening ourselves to hear and see from places behind, above, beside, and below our traditions and outside of scripture.

When I think back on that night during my college years living in Steinbach, I wonder why I made the decision to turn around when I was being pursued. Two things come to mind. First and foremost, the decision was in many ways forced on me. I simply *could not* continue as I was going. The choice became a question of *how* I would turn.

This experience came at a time when I had been thinking and reflecting a great deal about Mennonite nonviolence. If I had not wrestled with that tradition, I doubt that I would have responded

as I did. When I stopped to turn around, I deliberately folded my hands behind my back, so that I could face what was coming in a receptive, nonthreatening way.

And what did I turn to see? I saw a man who was angry, exhausted, and in pain. In colourful language he asked me what I thought I was doing. I can't remember much of what we said, but we ended up talking and not fighting.

What would have happened if my primary formation had been in running? I would have exhausted that resource and escaped—

We attack, we retreat, we entrench, we submit, we rationalize, we distract, we ignore. But what if we simply learned to listen and then turn to look into the face of the one who is speaking?

and missed seeing this man. What if my primary formation had been in some form of combat or self-defence? I would have turned to face an enemy and a target. But instead I found myself turning in a posture of strength in peace, and I believe this turning gave me the ability to see and be seen in a certain way.

It would be irresponsible to suggest that adopting such a posture will always preserve us from conflict or harm. Nor do I want to suggest that we passively open ourselves to potential violence. The question is whether

our religious resources insulate us from the world or empower us to face it faithfully. To what extent are our steps turned in keeping with the life of Jesus to face the powers of this world?

I also know that my tendency continues to be to use most of my resources to avoid turning and seeing and hearing the voice that is coming from behind me. This voice comes as a threat because it takes away our control over our traditions and patterns and securities. Whether in our relationships, in our churches, or in our workplaces, when we hear that voice behind us we employ every resource against turning. We get defensive, we attack, we retreat, we entrench, we quickly submit, we rationalize, we justify, we distract, we ignore. But what if we simply learned to listen and then turn to look into the face of the one who is speaking? I am not claiming that every such presence or voice is that of God, but I am not sure we will hear God if we don't stop and turn and look and listen.

The traditions and practices of the church and family and scripture itself are only as faithful as we allow them to be to help

us see and hear the work of the Spirit in the world. The Spirit calls us to the ongoing practice of turning, not necessarily because we have deliberately turned from God but because the Spirit of God moves. It is the voice of Jesus coming up to Mary as she continues to face the empty tomb in grief. It is the voice of the messenger telling the people not to look at the sky after Jesus ascended. The disciples did not actively turn away from God; God continued to move.

The turning that happened in my own story came when I was no longer able to avoid seeing. Scripture and tradition contributed to my turning in a certain way, but only after I had literally exhausted my other forces and resources. And mine is not the only story in which people come to the end of their resources and abilities before they begin to see. Jesus blesses the sight of those who are in poverty, because they have no resources to escape reality. They see all too clearly the realities of our world.

So the call for the church, especially amid the affluence of the West, is the call of John in the book of Revelation. He was in the

Let's allow the church's so-called ordinary time to be a time of listening. Let's allow it to be a time to experiment with acts of turning to face the voices that come from behind us.

spirit on the Lord's day, valuing the depth of what his tradition offered. Perhaps he was reading scripture. Perhaps he was in prayer. Perhaps he was in mid-song when he heard a voice behind him.

We are approaching Pentecost, when we celebrate the only resource given to the church, the Spirit of God. Let's mark Pentecost as a time of transition. Let's allow the church's so-called ordinary time to be a time of listening. Let's allow it to be a time to

experiment with acts of turning to face the voices that come from behind us.

I cannot tell you what you will hear or what you will see. I cannot tell you the outcome of your encounter. I can only point to our tradition and our testimonies both in the Bible and in the church. I can only point to them as they point away from themselves toward God, the one who moves and speaks beside, below, and behind, through the power of the Spirit who moves among us in the world.

About the author

David Driedger is an associate minister at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. David lives with his wife and son in Winnipeg's dynamic Spence neighbourhood, in which he tries to reside at the corner of rigorous thought and social concern (though more often than not, he wanders down the back alley of confusion). David is also a blog junkie who contributes regularly to *Canadian Mennonite's* blog (<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/blogs>) as well as his own personal sites (<http://thelangsides.com> and <http://thedescribe.com>).

Bread, not stone

Refocusing an Anabaptist vision

C. Arnold Snyder

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone; or if your child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then . . . know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:11–13)

My reflections on *The Anabaptist Vision* are grounded in the words of Jesus preserved for us in two slightly different versions in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In Luke 11, in a passage encouraging believers to offer nourishment to those who hunger and thirst, the evangelist concludes by saying, “If you then . . .

In *The Anabaptist Vision*, Harold Bender did more than challenge old historiographical orthodoxies. He also provided an inspiring historical touchstone for members of believers churches.

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

Some months ago I was preparing a graduate seminar on the place of Anabaptism in the wider Reformation. I had assigned Harold S. Bender’s *The Anabaptist Vision* as one of the readings for the class, so I reread it.¹ I was struck immediately by what a brilliant piece of writing it is. It is a classic, delivered on December 28, 1943, as Harold Bender’s presidential address to a meeting of

the American Historical Society in New York City. It was later published in more complete form in *Church History* and the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, and has been reprinted and sold continuously ever since.

Albert Keim, in his massive biography of Harold Bender, sets the context for the writing of Bender’s masterpiece.² World War II was raging, and Bender was heading up the Civilian Public Ser-

vice effort for conscientious objectors—already a full-time job. In addition, in 1943 he was acting president of Goshen (IN) College, and also was teaching two undergraduate courses at the college.³ Harold Bender was a busy man.

Keim tells us that Bender wrote *The Anabaptist Vision* in two or three days, starting around Christmas Eve, less than a week before he was supposed to deliver the address in New York City. The evening before the conference, he boarded a train for New York City, which arrived a bit late on the 28th. He arrived at the meeting twenty minutes late, opened the session with prayer, and eventually read his speech after dinner, at the beginning of the evening session. Immediately following his address, and what was described as a brief but vigorous discussion, he excused himself to catch a flight to Cleveland, where around midnight he boarded a train for Chicago. The next day, December 29, found him in Chicago at a Mennonite Central Committee meeting dealing with Civilian Public Service issues. It is a remarkable snapshot of a remarkable scholar and church leader.

Providing a touchstone for believers

In *The Anabaptist Vision*, Harold Bender did more than challenge old historiographical orthodoxies. He also provided an inspiring historical touchstone for Mennonites and members of believers churches. Harold Bender was seized by the conviction that all Christians of his time would benefit immensely from recalibrating their calling and mission with reference to Anabaptism—or, as he described it, “this consistent evangelical Protestantism” which sought to “recreate without compromise the original New Testament church.”

Reading the document today it is hard to miss a not-so-humble Mennonite triumphalism, particularly in Bender’s claim that the Anabaptists were the *only* sixteenth-century believers who saw the Reformation through to its proper ends. Luther and Zwingli come off as weak and vacillating people who lost their nerve when the road became difficult. Today, in a more ecumenical spirit, we would want to temper these conclusions.

Those of us involved as historians also know firsthand the revisionist storm Harold Bender unleashed by defining “true Anabaptism” as the pure, Swiss version that emerged in Zurich in

1525. The monogenesis/polygenesis debate and revision of the 1970s has since won the day in academic historical circles.

But these things were not what came to my mind when I reread *The Anabaptist Vision*. What struck me much more was an implicit challenge in Bender's historical work. Harold Bender was a committed member of his denomination and the wider church. He

Bender believed in the importance of doing history, and of doing it as well as one can, but then taking that work and applying meaningful lessons from the past.

clearly believed in the importance of doing history, and of doing it as well as one can, but then taking that work and applying meaningful lessons from the past. Harold Bender was certain that Christian history provides insights into truths that can be applied to the living of a committed Christian life.

Harold Bender died in 1962, when I was sixteen, but I am quite certain that he would have approved of the subsequent careful

historical study of Anabaptism, even when it modified his dearly held historical views. But I am also convinced that he would have posed a further, deeper question to those of us who have since become professional academics. When I read *The Anabaptist Vision* today, it challenges me to ask whether our academic work is offering bread or stone to our fellow believers. In our careful studies of Anabaptism and the history of the church, have we been seeking nourishment for our collective faith journeys, or have we been collecting talking points for academic debate?

Three marks of a believers church

Harold Bender clearly was inspired by the Anabaptist vision he had uncovered. He believed that the “consistent evangelical Protestantism” of the Anabaptists was to be the touchstone for a committed church of his time. The vision of the Anabaptists, Bender said, was marked by three key beliefs and practices: (1) that the essence of Christianity is *discipleship*, or following Christ; (2) that the church is to be *fellowship of believers*; and (3) that Christians will be marked by a new *ethic of love and nonresistance*.

These three marks of a believers church may seem self-evident to us today—especially to those of us in the Mennonite church, but this is really just a testimony to the widespread acceptance of Bender's vision in his denomination and outside his denomination.

As Albert Keim says, Bender's vision provided "a new self-definition of who Mennonites were and whence they had come." Harold Bender succeeded in providing a fertile "usable past" for the church of his time.⁴

Missing a mark

But has this usable past been altogether good? Or was *The Anabaptist Vision* actually an "impoverished" vision, as one critic wrote not so many years ago? My own studies in Anabaptist history lead

How are disciples made? And once a person has entered on the discipleship way, what will continue to enable discipleship? What makes it possible to do such an unnatural thing as to feel and demonstrate love for enemies, for example?

me to conclude that *The Anabaptist Vision* has been, in essence, fruitful, true, and good. It offered, and continues to offer, bread, not stone. It continues to challenge and nourish us. All the same, I have become increasingly preoccupied with one element in particular that seems to be conspicuously missing from *The Anabaptist Vision*.

The first mark of Harold Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* is discipleship. But shouldn't discipleship have been point number two? In his speech, Bender left untouched and unexplored the actual Anabaptist point of departure: there should have been a different point

one highlighted in the *Anabaptist Vision*. Discipleship, marked as a beginning point and taken by itself, raises the question of how humans beings are to become disciples in the first place. How are disciples *made*? And once a person has entered on the discipleship way, what will continue to *enable* discipleship? What makes it possible to do such an unnatural thing as to feel and demonstrate love for enemies, for example?

My own years of reading Anabaptist testimonies have led me to the conclusion that while discipleship is the clear second step for Anabaptist witnesses, it is definitely not the first. Let me quote none other than Menno Simons. In one of his first writings he describes the *process* of becoming a disciple in this way: "[Believers] are clothed with power from above, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and so united and mingled with God that they become partakers of the divine nature and are made conformable to the image of His Son."⁵

Dirk Philips said the same thing, as did countless other Anabaptist witnesses. Dirk wrote: "It is clear that the *new birth* is actually the work of God in the person through which that person is born anew, out of God, through faith in Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit."⁶ In both of these testimonies we hear a ringing appeal to

Without the making and sustaining of a disciple by the living Spirit of God, there can be no discipleship. Disciples are not simply disciplined people who display a dogged will to keep the rules.

the baptism and work of the Holy Spirit, a ringing reference to the spiritual new birth that leads the reborn into a new life of discipleship that conforms to the life of Christ.

According to these Anabaptist witnesses, it is the spiritual rebirth that is of the essence. A new life of discipleship is derivative; it follows from, and is empowered by, the living Spirit of God. Without the making and sustaining of a disciple by the living Spirit of God, there can be no discipleship. Disciples are not simply disciplined, strong people who

display a dogged and stern will to keep the rules. Disciples are those who are *enabled* to do the best they can only by God's present and continuing grace and love.

Obedience? Yes! But first and foremost, a connection to the living vine that provides sustenance to the branches, so that they are enabled to bear the fruits of discipleship. Spiritual regeneration and obedient discipleship are bound together in one growing plant: branches engrafted onto the vine, made fruitful by the life-giving sap of the Spirit.

Wary of pietism

How did Harold Bender miss spiritual regeneration in his *Anabaptist Vision*? Why did that stirring speech have only three points of emphasis, instead of four? Albert Keim gives us an historical clue. At the time of writing Bender was strongly influenced by Robert Friedmann's work on Anabaptism and pietism, published in 1940. According to Friedmann, pietism and Anabaptism were antithetical, polar opposites. Pietism, Friedmann said, focuses on an inward experience of new birth, but in Friedmann's view, this pietist new birth leads only to a quietistic joy. Friedmann wrote that the pietistic experience of rebirth "does not call into question the life of this world." By contrast, Friedmann wrote, the

Anabaptists *were* ready to follow the difficult road of discipleship. There was a new birth for the Anabaptists, Friedmann said, but the Anabaptist focus was not on the spiritual birth but rather on following Christ. Friedmann stated, emphatically: “The central word of the Anabaptists is Following Christ.”⁷

Albert Keim notes that Bender borrowed significantly from Friedmann’s work when he wrote *The Anabaptist Vision* speech three years later. Bender himself called Friedmann’s “Anabaptism and Pietism” article “one of the most significant pieces of work in Anabaptist history in recent years.”⁸ This may explain why mention of rebirth and the work of the Holy Spirit is so notably absent in *The Anabaptist Vision*. Following Friedmann, it must have seemed that emphasizing a spiritual rebirth might be taken as pointing to an inward, quietist Pietism. Pointing emphatically to discipleship, on the other hand, called for a robust activism. The Anabaptist disciple was a strong and active follower of Jesus, not a spiritually focused, navel-gazing pietist.

Not Anabaptist enough

On this point, I believe *The Anabaptist Vision* needs to be substantially refocused, simply because it did not manage to be Anabap-

***The Anabaptist Vision* needs to be substantially refocused, simply because it did not manage to be Anabaptist enough. The original Anabaptists could not conceive of a new life of following Christ without the empowerment of the living Spirit.**

tist enough. The original Anabaptists could not conceive of a new life of following Christ without the empowerment of the living Spirit. And neither should we. A life of discipleship, committed to a life of fellowship with other believers, and guided by an ethic of love and nonresistance calls, above all, for the continued gift of God’s grace and enabling power. The first Anabaptists knew this very well, and said so, again and again. What they said was fundamentally sound and true, and we should learn from them.

But I am by no means the first one to notice the Anabaptist insistence on the living Spirit of God creating disciples. In fact,

Harold Bender himself came to the same realization some years later. The last article Harold Bender published in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* is dated 1961, a year before his death. It is titled

“Walking in the Resurrection’: The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship.”⁹ This article provides the spiritual corrective to the earlier, ethically focused *Anabaptist Vision*. You will have noted the inclusion of the significant word *regeneration* in this title—a word that played no significant role in *The Anabaptist Vision* speech.

In his last published writing, Harold Bender describes a life of discipleship as one “in which the Holy Spirit works with power.”¹⁰ Here the voice of Menno and Dirk comes through. The life of

In his last published writing, Bender emphasizes that the life of discipleship “is not one of moral self-endeavor and legalism, but one in which grace, faith, and the Spirit’s power unite with the human will to produce a life of holiness.”

discipleship, Bender now emphasizes, “is not one of moral self-endeavor and legalism, but one in which grace, faith, and the Spirit’s power unite with the human will to produce a life of holiness. . . .”¹¹

At the end of his life, Harold Bender recognized that it is the working of the Holy Spirit, and the human response to the Spirit, that results in a new fellowship and a renewed church. It is the Spirit of God who produces disciples empowered to live lives of nonresistant love. To this one can only say Amen! and again, Amen!

The Anabaptist Vision has been immensely influential in shaping a church that takes seriously a life of following in the footsteps of our Lord. And this has been a good thing. I only wish that Harold Bender’s “Walking in the Resurrection” would have been equally influential. Perhaps, in its many subsequent reprintings, *The Anabaptist Vision* could have included the much less well-known “Walking in the Resurrection” as an appendix. I believe the spiritual corrective would have added important and profound dimensions to an Anabaptist-inspired ecclesiology.

If the essence of the Anabaptist understanding of the Christian life is the presence of God’s enabling grace and Spirit, and a life of discipleship which follows also depends on the living power of God, then clearly, a central focus of an Anabaptist-inspired church will be—must be—the cultivation of a deep spiritual life.

Fed by the living Word

A focus on the spiritual life of abiding in the vine does not mean,

as some in our church today seem to fear, that one no longer cares about the fruit. It is a false logic that makes it an either/or issue. And it was a false dichotomy that labeled a spiritual birth as entailing a quietist pietism, and opposed it to an active life of discipleship as a polar opposite. In fact, the two must exist together, and this leads to a re-visioning of the concept of discipleship beyond what *The Anabaptist Vision* speech described.

If we take the case of what Bender called earlier “the ethic of love and nonresistance,” for example, we can refocus the phrase with his later spiritual insight in view. The truly profound point is spiritual, not ethical: we are called, in Christ, to become loving and nonresistant **persons**, transformed by the power of the living

I commend to you the profound and nourishing truth expressed by our Anabaptist faith parents—a truth they shared with medieval Catholic reformers and activist pietists alike—that at the centre of a disciple’s life is a heart open to the word of the living God.

Spirit of God, in all of our relationships—not just in times of war, but at all times, places, and circumstances. Becoming truly just and loving persons involves a continuing process of spiritual growth and renewal. One does not become transformed into a loving, nonresistant person by dint of human will; the transformation cannot be accomplished without prayer, without meditation on scripture, without worship and encouragement from the fellowship of believers, without the cultivation of a vital relationship to the living vine.

We need not be so worried about pietistic quietism. Loving, nonresistant people act in loving, nonresistant ways. In fact, a blinkered emphasis on ethical absolutes is simply a

mistake on the opposite side of the spectrum from quietism, as Bender himself noted. The commands of Jesus cannot take the place of the Spirit of God. More profoundly, the nonresistant love, truth telling, and generosity to which we have been called need to become a part of our daily spiritual disciplines. The deep truth, as the Anabaptists knew, was not in keeping rules but in becoming *transformed persons* intent on growing into the nature of Christ. Such people, they noted correctly, act in Christ-like ways because their natures have been changed.

I know that in saying these things I am preaching to the converted. Nevertheless, just because something has been said before

does not mean that it shouldn't be repeated. If this were so, we historians would have precious little to say. Allow me then to

Our God is ready to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for it. Let us ask for this gift with heartfelt sincerity, confident in the knowledge that being thus empowered, we can indeed mix the flour, water, and leaven; knead the dough; and bake the loaves that will nourish the hungry.

commend to you this refocusing of *The Anabaptist Vision*, not as something original or new, but simply as a reminder of something you undoubtedly already know.

I commend to you the profound and nourishing truth expressed by our Anabaptist faith parents—a truth they shared with medieval Catholic reformers and activist pietists alike—that at the centre of a disciple's life is a heart open to the word of the living God.

With such open hearts and minds, fed by the living Word, we can go forth in the confidence of offering bread, not stone, to those who hunger for both spiritual and material food. As the gospel assures us, our

God is willing, able, and ready to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for it. Let us ask for this gift with heartfelt sincerity, confident in the knowledge that being thus empowered, we can indeed mix the flour, water, and leaven; knead the dough; and bake the loaves that will nourish the hungry—both spiritually and physically.

This is a vision of the Christian life that can and will endure, for it points first and foremost to the bread of life come among us, in its historical reality of Jesus, in its spiritual reality of the Holy Spirit among us, and in countless life-giving manifestations in the lives of those who sincerely ask, receive, and have been inspired to follow. May it be so, in abundance!

Notes

¹ Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944); also published in *Church History* 13 (March 1944): 3–24; and in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944): 67–88.

² Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897–1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998). Details on the writing of *The Anabaptist Vision* are found beginning on page 310.

³ A year later Bender became dean of Goshen College Bible School, which a few years later became Goshen College Biblical Seminary—and eventually merged with the Mennonite Biblical Seminary to become Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

⁴ Keim, *Bender*, 327.

⁵ *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. L. Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 58.

⁶ *The Writings of Dirk Philips*, ed. and trans. C. J. Dyck, W. Keeney and A. Beachy (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 296.

⁷ See Keim, *Bender*, 322–24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁹ Harold S. Bender, “*Walking in the Resurrection: the Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship*,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35 (1961): 96–110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

About the author

C. Arnold Snyder is professor of history (emeritus), Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario, and co-editor, with John Lapp, of the Global Mennonite History series. “Bread, not Stones” is adapted from an address Snyder gave as Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) commencement speaker, May 22, 2010.

Learning to trust the Spirit

Lessons in mutual transformation

David B. Miller

Luke's narrative of the early church reveals this significant dynamic of missional engagement: the bearer of the gospel is as likely to become a convert to the wisdom and purpose of God as is the "object" of the missionary encounter (see Acts 10:34). This dynamic is a significant sign and reminder that we are witnesses

The bearer of the gospel is as likely to become a convert to the wisdom and purpose of God as is the "object" of the missionary encounter. This dynamic is a reminder that we are witnesses to—not managers of—the work of God.

to—not managers of—the work of God. For a church that is trying to get over the habits and legacy of Christendom, this dynamic is critical for reforming our attitudes and forming us for witness and ministry that are Spirit empowered.

In the pages that follow, I will examine this dynamic in three scenes from my work as a pastor. In each instance, mutual transformation has been one of the most profound lessons I have experienced. It has been the source of significant and frequently humbling reflection on the (in)adequacy of my understanding of and attentiveness to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in human transformation and regeneration.

Little did I know, when I first came among Mennonites as a college student in the mid-1970's, that I was coming into a faith community undergoing significant changes, not the least of which were the lessons, healing, and empowerment of charismatic renewal, and the tensions resulting from its impact. I was a liberal "dispensationalist," raised in mainline Protestantism. Our conservative and fundamentalist counterparts put strict limits on the possible valid manifestations and actions of God's Spirit according to the historical periods or "dispensations" of God's covenant as construed and constructed by J. N. Darby. In contrast, liberal dispensationalists literally dispensed with manifestations of the

activity of God's Spirit (other than through human progress!) attested in scripture; these were explained away by means of rational and largely psychologized explanations of what we considered premodern descriptions of phenomena. The work of the Spirit was largely supplanted by rational explanation and managerial technique.

This preempting of the Spirit's work (save in categories that could be rationally controlled and managed) that was a prior part of my heritage had a certain resonance in a Mennonite Church formed by H. S. Bender's story of Anabaptist origins and vision. The spiritualists had been rather neatly excluded from the denominational narrative, in part in order to redeem Anabaptist history from its association with the Münster debacle. However, the suspicion and relative silencing of the spiritualists was a potentially costly act, making space for legalism to displace the fruit of regeneration.

In his commencement address to the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary class of 2010, historian Arnold Snyder named this tendency, calling his listeners to refocus the Anabaptist

Anabaptist insistence on a lived discipleship was for me a gateway into the church. But in time I began to see the effects of inattention to and even suspicion of the work of the Holy Spirit in transformation and regeneration.

vision, "simply because it did not manage to be Anabaptist enough. The original Anabaptists could not conceive of a new life of following Christ without the empowerment of the living Spirit. And," he said, "neither should we. A life of discipleship, committed to a life of fellowship with other believers, and guided by an ethic of love and nonresistance calls, above all, for the continued gift of God's grace and enabling power."¹

In his address Snyder pointed toward a far more nuanced perspective from Bender, communicated in Bender's last article published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. In that

essay, "Walking in the Resurrection: The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship,"² Bender noted the fact that Menno himself made a large space for the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Snyder in calling for a refocusing of the Anabaptist vision, declared: "The commands of Jesus cannot take the place of the Spirit of God. More profoundly, the nonresistant

love, truth telling, and generosity to which we have been called need to become a part of our daily spiritual disciplines. The deep truth, as the Anabaptists knew, was not in keeping rules but in becoming *transformed persons* intent on growing into the nature of Christ.”³

I was drawn to the Mennonite Church in large measure by Anabaptist ethics—particularly nonviolence—and by a tidy rendition of Anabaptist history, so it has taken me some time to understand the danger inherent in this ethical reductionism.

Anabaptist insistence on a lived discipleship was for me a gateway

The experience of survivors of sexual abuse threatened the narrative of a pure church I had adopted, while the tenacity of their faith in the face of such damnable contradictions instructed and reformed my own reliance on the power of God’s Spirit to effect God’s purposes in the world.

into the church. But in time I began to see the effects of inattention to and even suspicion of the work of the Holy Spirit in transformation and regeneration. Sans the Spirit, discipleship too easily becomes the expression of sheer will and determination, and sometimes a club wielded against the most vulnerable.

Scene 1: Did I trust the Spirit’s sufficiency?

I had not long been in ministry in the Mennonite Church when I was invited into an unsettling and reorienting pastoral involvement with survivors of abuse. Over a period of several years, a significant amount of my energy and time as a pastor was dedicated to ministry with survivors of abuse.

These survivors, most of them women who had grown up in Christian homes, both entrusted and challenged me with their experience and stories. In faith they hoped against hope that their experience would be acknowledged and named, while in wisdom they learned to deconstruct the stories of ethical righteousness that kept hidden the abusive use of power over their bodies and minds. Their experience threatened the narrative of a pure church I had so easily adopted, while the tenacity of their faith in the face of such damnable contradictions instructed and reformed my own reliance on the power of God’s Spirit to effect God’s purposes in the world.

These survivors raised for me a host of questions of faith. Some of these questions revolved around forgiveness, and especially

forgiving one's abuser. I struggled with these questions. On the one hand, I could not at the same time claim the Christian gospel and jettison forgiveness. Arriving at a place of forgiveness seemed crucial to ultimately breaking the captivity fashioned by abusers to continue to enter and control the body, mind, and spirit of

I heard stories about pastors who enjoined survivors to forgive, in a desperate search for a quick solution to “the problem.”

Sadly, the problem they wanted to solve appeared to be the anger of the survivors rather than the reality of the abuse and the conditions that permitted it.

their victims. Yet it was clear in the experience of survivors of abuse that calls to extend forgiveness—especially those voiced by the church and its predominantly male pastors—only served to reviolate the victims. I was entrusted with more and more unsettling and disorienting stories about pastors who had enjoined these survivors to forgive, in what seemed to be a desperate search for a quick solution to “the problem.” Sadly, the problem they wanted to solve appeared to be the anger of the survivors rather than the reality of the abuse and the conditions that permitted it.

I fell into silence, albeit an uneasy silence, on the matter of forgiveness. I had run out of satisfactory answers. I was caught within the limits of what could be humanly effected. I would soon learn that I lacked an adequate pneumatology, and I needed a teacher and mentor to tune my ear and open my eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit. Sarah⁴ was to become such a teacher.

We had walked together for some time in the face of the agony, mistrust, and rage that were the fruits of her abuse. As her anger became more directed at her abuser, she simultaneously became freer and more trusting in her other relationships. The fear and woundedness that had been generalized became focused, and less an impediment to her other relationships. In this journey we would often pray together. Then came the day when Sarah exclaimed in the midst of prayer, “I am not to pray anymore.” When I asked what this meant, she said that God had told her that she needed to forgive her abuser, and she was not ready to do so. I accepted her words and said nothing more.

The next time we were together, Sarah opened our conversation by declaring, “It is time. I am ready to forgive him.” She

prayed, “God, do not hold this against [my abuser], but deliver him from his captivity and let him harm no one else.” With this movement, her recurrent nightmares ended, as did myriad other manifestations of the way the past abuse had continued to impinge on her present experience.

Sarah became my teacher and mentor in understanding and trusting the work of the Holy Spirit to accomplish what God desires in the life of another person. The Spirit of the Lord was bringing release to a captive (Luke 4:18). In my underdeveloped trust and understanding of the work of God’s Spirit, my liberal dispensationalism kept kicking in and seeking ways to manage Sarah’s healing. It was not my place to demand—or even urge—forgiveness, but it was my place to be present in the anger and wounds of the abuse, validating that Sarah had been sinned against and reminding her that the violations of her body and mind were also violations against God. These uncomfortable things I could do, but I was incapable of effecting or forcing forgiveness, and to try to do so would have been to presume to stipulate conditions for God’s presence with her.

In less dramatic but no less significant ways, I witnessed this cycle repeated in other survivors. They taught me again and again that God’s Spirit was already present and working, and that my place was simply to embody, patiently and persistently, what the abusers had systematically denied: that God was indeed present

On September 11, 2001, as I prayed I heard a persistent voice that said, “Go to your neighbor.” I knew immediately who the neighbor was: the president of the Islamic Society of Central Pennsylvania.

with them in the face of the evil they had experienced. The unspoken questions these survivors posed for me were: Did I extend the same trust in the wisdom and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit in their lives as I did in my own? Or did I feel compelled to orchestrate—or worse, mandate—the timing and nature of forgiveness?

Scene 2: “Go to your neighbor.”

I am not given to experiences of auditory revelation, so even now it is with some

trepidation that I write that on September 11, 2001, as I prayed about the horrors that were unfolding at the twin towers in Manhattan, I heard a persistent voice that said, “Go to your neighbor.”

Whether this was an audible voice or an inner one, the effect was the same. I knew immediately who the neighbor was: the president of the Islamic Society of Central Pennsylvania. We lived on the same street, our children walked to school together, and we had worked together on interfaith dialogue. The nature of that

Ibrahim said, “I have told our family, ‘The Christians have come to us and extended hospitality and offered safe sanctuary, and now are holding a picnic for us.’ I want you to know that rumors of this picnic gathering are spreading through family networks in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.”

dialogue, prior to 9-11, was the kind of polite conversation that sought some common principle to which we could both give assent from our faith traditions without daring to risk offense. But the desperate realities of 9-11 served to strip away such superficiality.

Late in the afternoon of 9-11, I found myself on my neighbor’s doorstep, uncertain about what I would say when someone answered my knock. Ibrahim came to the door, and I asked how he and his family were doing. Then I added, “I want you to know that if in the days and weeks ahead your children or any member of your family is taunted or threatened, our home is a safe place to come to.” He responded, “David,

come in.” For the next two hours we discussed the events of the day and plumbed the depths of our faith. He quoted from the Quran, I from the Gospels, not to argue or debate but to seek direction in this terrible moment.

At the close of our conversation, he said, “David, you know that we are taught that when the prophet Mohammed was fleeing for his life, the Abyssinian Christian kingdom provided him sanctuary. Therefore we are to always treat Christians with respect.” I had never heard such words before. In the weeks that followed, our congregation, University Mennonite Church in State College, Pennsylvania, prayed, discussed, and discerned what our testimony that Jesus is Lord meant in such a time as this. One of the outcomes of our discernment was to invite the Islamic society to a picnic at one of the city parks in the community. The society graciously received and accepted our invitation.

Ibrahim, as president of the Islamic society, opened our time together with these words: “Over the last weeks, I have had repeated calls from family members in Egypt and Saudi Arabia

concerned about our welfare as Muslims in America. I have told them that while I cannot speak for all Muslims across America, in our community the Christians have come to us and extended hospitality, offered safe sanctuary if that is needed, and now are holding a picnic for us. I want you to know that rumors of this gathering are spreading through family networks in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.”

When we began this journey, we had no idea what we were doing. We started with two premises: because of the incarnation we cannot turn our backs on the world, and the means of our engagement with the world are determined by the teaching and example of Jesus. Into this realm of conviction, the Spirit of God opened us to new encounters and engagement. What did our relationships with our Muslim neighbors mean? How were we to think about them? These questions were no longer abstract and hypothetical. We asked them in the face of genuine relationships and a common crisis. As we pondered the categories into which Christians frequently place Muslims—brothers and sisters (for the more liberal end of the spectrum of Christian response), neighbors, strangers and aliens, enemies—we mused that the Bible has

What did our relationships with our Muslim neighbors mean? These questions were no longer abstract and hypothetical. We asked them in the face of genuine relationships and a common crisis.

significant things to say about each of these categories of persons, the distillation of which is the instruction to love. God hems us in on every side, allowing us no categorical excuses for indifferent or hostile behavior but rather giving the categorical command to love.

We came to see that the search for categories into which to place “the other” is largely a vestige of Christendom-shaped thinking. Categories are necessary if one is called on to manage and order the world. But if our principal calling is to live as the first fruits of a new order inaugurated by Jesus—it is the transcending rather than the reification of categories that is our vocation (see Gal. 3:28 and Col. 3:11).

Scene 3: “Become more assertive in your witness.”

Some months after our picnic, I delivered a loaf of homemade bread to another Muslim neighbor. He greeted me at the door of

his home, invited me in, and put on water for tea. We spoke for some time about the events that had been unfolding since 9-11 and the concerns we shared for what appeared to be a widening war. After some time, he leaned forward in his chair, placed a

A Spirit-directed ministry and missional engagement almost by definition will take us outside our comfort zones and beyond the scope of our readily formulated answers. In my experience it has resulted in as much transformation and continuing conversion in the bearer of the gospel as in the “other.”

hand on my knee, and declared, “David, you Mennonites must become more assertive in your witness.” I have over the years been challenged by missionaries and evangelists to a more assertive witness, but their calls have always ultimately rolled off my back to little effect. This charge caught my attention in a whole new way.

Not long before this encounter, a member of our congregation told me about being cornered in a hardware store by several Christian brothers from another congregation. They wanted to know about this picnic we had had for the “the Muslims.” Thinking they wanted to hear the story of the event, George was effusive in his recounting of the evening. Finally one of them put up his hand to interrupt the narrative. “Yeah, but did you

witness to them?” George paused, “Let me see. We have offered safe sanctuary, and we have extended hospitality.” “No,” another brother interrupted. “Did you witness to them—that they are sinners.” George smiled as he recounted his reply: “It is interesting that you should ask that question. Yes, we found that on that score we had much in common.”

A Spirit-directed ministry and missional engagement almost by definition will take us outside our comfort zones and beyond the scope of our readily formulated answers. In my experience it has resulted in as much transformation and continuing conversion in the bearer of the gospel as in the “other”—whether that person be an insider or an outsider to the church as we know it. I find the epistle to the church in Ephesus to be a vital instructor and guide to such mission and ministry.

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians makes the bold claim that God’s purpose is to “unite all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10; RSV.) This was a bold counterclaim to the Roman imperial claim

that it was the genius of Caesar that held all things together. Both the empire and the church saw the cross as the instrument of unification. For Rome it was the threat of the cross as an instrument of humiliation and death that kept the peace (Pax Romana), while for the epistle writer the cross was (and is!) the instrument of reconciliation, breaking down the “wall of hostility” and creating one new humanity (Pax Christi). The church of Christendom in large measure adopted the imperial version of the narrative of unification as the necessary means of ordering society.

But the illegal church of the first centuries saw a different purpose, a different way of being in the world. This vulnerable existence would require the same power that “raised Christ from

This ministry requires a robust understanding and embrace of the Holy Spirit as the power of God and the continuing witness to the way of Jesus in our midst. This Spirit rarely leaves well enough alone but continues to shape and remake us.

the dead” (see Eph. 1:20; Rom. 8:11). The appropriation of this power and perspective is the aim of the apostle’s prayers for the church (Eph. 1:17–23; 3:18–21), for it will take such empowerment to break through the imagination, vision, and ethically limiting totalitarian claims of the empire to reimagine the church’s vocation to “make known the manifold wisdom of God to the powers and principalities” (3:10).

Such a view of ministry requires a robust understanding and embrace of the Holy Spirit as the power of God and the continuing witness to the way of Jesus in our midst. This Spirit rarely leaves well enough alone but

continues to shape, convert, and remake us. It is a source not of power over but of empowerment for the means that we are taught by our Lord. Hence, even our obedience is not our claim, but the fruit of the Spirit at work within us to “to bring good news to the poor. ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19).

Notes

¹ Snyder’s address is published in this issue of *Vision*; see C. Arnold Snyder, “Bread, not Stone: Refocusing an Anabaptist vision,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 64–73; the quotation is on page 69. A link to the podcast of

Snyder's address can be found at <http://www.ambs.edu/news-and-publications/iTunesU/Public-Presentations> (AMBS Commencement 2010 Address).

² Harold S. Bender, "Walking in the Resurrection": The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (April 1961): 96–110.

³ Snyder, "Bread, not Stone," 71.

⁴ Not her real name.

About the author

David B. Miller joined the faculty of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) in August of 2009 as associate professor of missional leadership development. He has served as pastor of congregations in State College, Pennsylvania, and Goshen, Indiana, and he taught at Hesston (KS) College. He is married to Mary Kathryn Schmid, and they have four adult children.

The Holy Spirit in the world

Jeremy M. Bergen

According to the biblical witness, the Holy Spirit is at work within the church, and the Holy Spirit is at work in the world. But for the contemporary church, to ask whether or how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world is to pose a potentially loaded question. This question is especially troubling if it is specifically about the Spirit's work outside the church, or even about the Spirit's work over against the church. To ask this question is to remind the church that the Spirit is not under our control and that it may even challenge us to repent and reform.

Partly because of the elusive character of the Holy Spirit, anxiety often accompanies pneumatology (what we say about the Holy Spirit). We confront the danger that we will judge the presence of the Spirit by our own human standards or declare our own work to be that of the Spirit. When a security guard stopped a gunman at a megachurch in Colorado by shooting him, she credited God for guiding her response.¹ She seemed to imply that

To ask whether or how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world is to remind the church that the Spirit is not under our control and that it may even challenge us to repent and reform.

the "good result" was proof that the Spirit had guided her hand. Some Christians have interpreted significant world events, such as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 or the 9/11 attacks, as means by which the Spirit was exacting God's judgment on particular peoples.

Is the cultural and legal recognition and affirmation in Canada and the United States of homosexual persons and same-sex unions/marriage a movement of the Spirit which the

church ought to recognize? Or are same-sex marriages, for example, the work of a spirit other than the Holy Spirit of God? Is the Spirit saying one thing to the world and another to the church? How do we discern?

Of course, discernment of what the Spirit is doing *within* the church may also be controversial. We might generally agree that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of individuals, transforming them into disciples of Christ and members of Christ's body. The Spirit is working in the common proclamation and ministry of the church, in practices such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, and in

These theologians are arguing that the Spirit is at work in places and ways Christians have often not noticed. Attending to what has often been missed demands some change in the faith and life of the church.

the interpretation of scripture, which was written and compiled under the guidance of the Spirit. We might agree *that* the Spirit is active in all these spheres but disagree about exactly *what* the Spirit is doing or saying in any one of them. Recent apologies for what churches once believed was right are reminders that the actions of the church do not automatically reflect the leading of the Spirit.

As I examine three notable ways Christians have recently understood the Spirit to be active outside the church, I do so from the perspective of Christian theology, which I take to be ultimately a practical discipline that aims to help Christian communities be faithful in their contexts. In putting the matter this way, I assume that whether and how the Spirit is at work outside the church remains a question *for the church*. The world may be interested in trends, prognostications, unseen forces, or the “invisible hand” of the market, but only the Christian church inquires about the activity of the Holy Spirit of the triune God.

My thesis is that where and how we perceive the Spirit's presence outside the church tells us something about the state of our churches. It tells us more than this, certainly. But it also identifies some gaps in the church's practice. The theologians I discuss below are trying to get the church's attention. They are arguing that “the Spirit is here” or “the Spirit is there”—in places and ways Christians have often not noticed. And truly attending to what has often been missed demands some change, adaptation, or reform in the faith and life of the church.

The Spirit in creation

The ancient prayer “Come, Creator Spirit” is a reminder that the Holy Spirit is an agent of creation. The Christian doctrine of

creation affirms that God didn't just create in the past, at the point of origin, but is continuously creating. God is always creating and recreating. If God ceased to be creator at any moment, all of creation would in that instant cease to be. Early Christian bishop and theologian Irenaeus wrote about God creating through his Word and Wisdom, which he identified with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, respectively. These, he said, are God's two hands.

Denis Edwards, an Australian theologian, is representative of renewed attention to the Spirit's role in creation. The juxtaposition of the first two chapters of his *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* exemplifies his approach to and his vision for the kinds of conversations he urges the churches to have. In the first chapter Edwards relates a story that science tells of the universe, starting with the first microseconds after the Big Bang and continuing through the formation of atoms, the development of galaxies and stars and planets, and the emergence of life on earth through the biological evolution of which we are products. The Spirit of God does not arrive on the scene only at Pentecost but must be understood as the presence of God and the power of life in this whole process. The interconnectedness of all things, perhaps a central conclusion of a scientific account of the world, is the Spirit in action.

In the second chapter, Edwards draws from Basil of Caesarea, fourth-century bishop and theologian, whose writings helped settle the debate about whether the Holy Spirit was truly and fully God. Basil's vocabulary is not that of an expanding universe or evolution but that of relation and communion. The triune God is, for Basil, persons-in-communion, and the Holy Spirit as breath of God (never apart from the Word of God) gives life and holds all things together in God.

Weaving together these theological and scientific accounts of the world, Edwards makes a case that the Spirit always creates relationally. As breath, the Spirit is God is going out to what is not God. As breath, the Spirit is the life-giving presence of God in all creation, "uniting creatures in communion with the trinitarian God, saving them from nonexistence, sustaining, renewing, and directing them toward their fulfillment."²

This dynamic and life-giving Spirit is evident in what the physical and life sciences call "emergence." In emergence, some-

thing new arises that is greater than its constituent parts and not reducible to them. For example, molecules come together to form cells, and organisms come together to form ecosystems. Emergence exemplifies reality as thoroughly relational, and this relationality as the field through which the Spirit creates.

Calling the church's attention to the Spirit in creation entails implicit and sometimes explicit challenges to the churches. First,

The Christian doctrine of creation affirms that God didn't just create in the past, at the point of origin, but is continuously creating. God is always creating and recreating.

Edwards and others³ are responding to the ecological crisis with theological resources that affirm the intrinsic value of each aspect of creation rather than seeing the world in terms of its usefulness for humans.

Furthermore, many authors advocate a new relationship between science and theology, which are sometimes seen to conflict but more often simply proceed in isolation from each other. Science and theology need each other in order to give a true account of the

world and our place in it. The agenda for the church (which also contains many scientists!) is not to be insular but to be engaged in many disciplines of human knowledge. As shown in the example of emergence, it may be that what we say about the Spirit provides a bridge to the way science describes the world God creates.

The Spirit in religions

If God is at work in the world, it follows that God must be, or at least might be, at work in non-Christian religions. US theologian Amos Yong proposes that “the religions of the world, like everything else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes.”⁴ Yong is quick to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ, so Christology will eventually enter the discussion. In the categories Yong wants to get beyond, his position is generally inclusivist: salvation is through Jesus Christ, but the Spirit of Christ is active, perhaps even salvifically so, outside the church. Yet, the Spirit may be a more “neutral” point of departure that helps resist premature closure of dialogue.

Underlying Yong's approach is a conviction about the universality of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the source of grace available

to all, because it is the source of life itself. In the Spirit, God is present in a more expansive way than in Christ. Starting with the Spirit enables us to ask about the divine purposes that might be manifest in other religions, without immediately rushing to the christological question of salvation—that is, whether members of other religions are saved in the sense that Christians understand the term. It is not “all or nothing.”⁵ Rather, the task is the discernment of the Spirit, the Spirit of life, in particular religions.

Yong’s proposed criteria—divine presence, divine absence, divine activity—remain quite general. While his Pentecostal

If God is at work in the world, it follows that God might be at work in non-Christian religions. Amos Yong proposes that “the religions of the world, like everything else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes.”

orientation inclines him to consider evidence of the Spirit’s presence, he rightly resists any single formula. Formation in Christian community by the Word of God cannot result in a definitive statement that the Spirit of God is absolutely this or that, so we are called to discern degrees and be open to revision.

Despite the title of his book, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*, Yong hasn’t actually moved beyond the impasse of a Christian account of other religions. His plea for a disciplined search for the Spirit outside the church highlights the importance for Christians of going beyond

binary options and keeping the conversation going. He urges us to look at particular religions in all their concrete differences. Yong’s challenge to the churches is to be open, attentive, dialogical, and discerning together with a willingness to make sometimes difficult judgments about the spiritual realities we encounter.

At the 1991 Assembly of the World Council of Churches, two keynote speakers developed the theme “Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation.” The first, Patriarch Parthenios of Alexandria, echoed traditional themes. For him, as for many Orthodox, attention to the Spirit counters a perceived Western overemphasis on Christology, and thus points to the mission of the Holy Trinity in all of creation. “All of this is familiar to all,” he insisted, “having been said a thousand times over.”⁶

By contrast, the address of South Korean Professor Chung Hyun Kyung was both new and controversial. She spoke about

listening to the “cries of creation and the cries of the Spirit within creation,” especially the *han*-ridden spirits.⁷ The Korean concept of *han* names anger, resentment, bitterness, and grief, as well as energy for liberation. According to Chung, the Holy Spirit’s compassion and wisdom is spoken through many *han*-ridden spirits; the Spirit’s presence is discerned over against a culture of death. The Spirit is life-centred and sustains the interconnection of all beings.

Some delegates charged that Chung failed to distinguish between private spirits, even evil spirits, and the Holy Spirit. Some participants called her approach syncretistic, especially in her suggestion that Kwan In, the goddess of compassion and wisdom in popular East Asian religion, is a kind of image of the Spirit. Yet she proposed one concrete way that the Spirit of God works through the spirits of other religions.

While her claim about the Spirit in indigenous cultures and religions generated the most controversy, her address was primarily

The Holy Spirit as agent of justice and liberation is a third general way the Spirit may be understood as active outside the church. Lee Cormie likens the proliferation of social movements of resistance and hope to a new Pentecost.

a call to the church to attune itself to justice and liberation, wherever these are needed. To the extent that the spirits of many peoples, cultures, and religions are crying out for wholeness, healing, and justice, we may hear in those spirits the Holy Spirit. Significantly, the Holy Spirit is discerned at the margins of society and church, rather than identified with church authority. For Chung, the reality of the Holy Spirit in the world demands a more egalitarian ecclesiology, fully attentive to the excluded. At least part of the negative reaction to her address was surely a

result of her claim that those elites who have claimed to be speaking for their churches were not necessarily speaking with the authority of the Spirit.

The Spirit in social movements

The Holy Spirit as agent of justice and liberation is a third general way the Spirit may be understood as active outside the church. Using an approach deeply resonant with Chung’s, Canadian theologian Lee Cormie likens the recent proliferation of social

movements of resistance and hope to a new Pentecost. As in the Pentecost reported in Acts 2, these social movements represent the irruption of new voices from the margins of the church, and in sociopolitical realms. And, as in Acts 2, what might otherwise be sheer cacophony is rendered intelligible and purposive by the leading of the Spirit.

Cormie celebrates peace, feminist, eco-justice, and racial justice movements as calling into question previous assumptions about a single hegemonic perspective. The emergence of the World Social Forum—which imagines that “another world is possible,” one different from the world neoliberal globalization assumes—is a recognition that the flourishing of life on this planet requires many voices and many perspectives. These are signs of

At times Christians may decide that participation in coalitions with non-Christians entails too great a compromise, but at other times the mission of the church may be embodied by giving up control and seeking the Spirit outside church confines.

the “ongoing Divine mission of creation and redemption/liberation in history.”⁸ He might well add the Arab Spring (2011) and the Occupy movement to this list. For Cormie, the Spirit is present as the genuinely new and creative in history, working through, among other things, human agency at the margins of power.

Of course, some see in movements toward greater involvement of women in church leadership, and in the church blessing of same-sex unions or marriages, the work of the Spirit in the world finally being realized also in the church. Others see one or both of these developments as moving away from the

demands of the gospel. Neither novelty itself nor the presence of many voices is automatically a sign of the Spirit’s work. But Cormie, like Chung, quite rightly calls the churches to the hard work of discernment in social movements outside the church.

The Spirit challenges the church to work with non-Christians on initiatives the church does not control. Coalitions for social justice typically bring together around a common cause people who see the world in quite different ways. At times Christians may decide that participation entails too great a compromise, but at other times the mission of the church may be embodied by giving up control and seeking the Spirit outside church confines.

Anselm Min argues that the biblical account of how the Spirit relates to the Father and the Son provides the key for understanding the Spirit's work in social movements. In the Bible, the Spirit does not call attention to herself. She empowers and bears witness to another one—Jesus Christ (for example Matthew 1:20 and Luke 3:22)—and through him to the Father. Min argues, “The

The church has a place in God's mission but by no means exhausts that mission. By looking at the church through the lens of the Spirit's work outside the church, the church may well find itself more deeply in the Spirit's care.

Holy Spirit is self-effacing, selfless God whose selfhood or personhood seems to lie precisely in transcending herself to empower others likewise to transcend themselves in communion with others.”⁹ Social movements seeking to overcome classism, sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism are not separate from God's mission but derive from the solidarity and reconciliation the Spirit effects between humans and Jesus Christ.

Like Cormie, Min pushes the church to be radically outward looking and open to the movements of Spirit in history. The church, like the Spirit, exists not to call attention to itself but to serve the other-oriented mission of God. Yet Min also reminds the church of the christological character of this God as the unsurpassable lens through which we see the shape of God's justice and God's liberation.

All the approaches described above are open to criticisms I do not have space to develop adequately. In all cases, there is a danger of turning the Spirit into a principle and thus a formula. The temptation to assume the identity of the human spirit with the Holy Spirit is a perennial one. The self-effacing character of the Spirit ought to lead us to be cautious about expecting that pneumatology will *finally* be the solution to inadequate beliefs or practices.

I have argued that *where* we turn to see the Holy Spirit at work, or to test for the presence of the Spirit of God, tells us something about what kind of church we think we have and what changes, reforms, or renewed emphases are needed for the increased faithfulness of the church. I don't intend for this focus on the church to reflect insularity. The effect of using this lens ought to be precisely the opposite. The church has a place in God's

mission but by no means exhausts that mission. By looking at the church through the lens of the Spirit's work outside the church, the church may well find itself more deeply in the Spirit's care.

Notes

¹ D. Brent Laytham, "Introduction," in *God Does Not . . . Entertain, Play Matchmaker, Hurry, Demand Blood, Cure Every Illness,* ed. D. Brent Laytham (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 9–10.

² Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 127.

³ The writings of Mark I. Wallace on the Spirit and ecotheology are particularly important.

⁴ Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 46.

⁵ Exclusivism holds that there is no salvation apart from explicit confession of Christ. Some versions of pluralism hold that many/all religious traditions are valid paths to salvation or "the real."

⁶ Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, "The Holy Spirit," in *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia*, ed. Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 32.

⁷ Chung Hyun Kyung, "Come Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation," in *Signs of the Spirit*, ed. Kinnamon, 38–39.

⁸ Lee Cormie, "Movements of the Spirit in History," in *Talitha Cum! The Grace of Solidarity in a Globalized World*, ed. Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare and Gabriela Miranda García (Geneva: WSCF Publications, 2004), 253.

⁹ Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 118.

About the author

Jeremy M. Bergen is assistant professor of religious studies and theology at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, and the author of *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (T&T Clark, 2011).