Christ Is All in All

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” – Col. 1:17

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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Christ is All and in All

Jesus Christ is the Lord. The Book of Revelation tells us that he is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. Paul the Apostle reminds us of the great plan and purpose of God to unite us in an inseparable bond of love and unity with Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. That is why the eternal Father in heaven sent his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to redeem us from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Our destiny is to be united with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a community of love and peace that will last forever.

May Paul's prayer be ours as well:

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

– Colossians 1:11-17

50th Anniversary of Charismatic Renewal
When the charismatic renewal began 50 years ago, the Holy Spirit was poured out in a very extraordinary way that spread rapidly across the world. Today we celebrate the fruits of this great work of God. Christ has come to bring us into his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. And now we experience the firstfruits of what he has accomplished for us.

This issue highlights the ecumenical call and mission of the charismatic renewal and the events from the Golden Jubilee which took place in Rome on the Feast of Pentecost.

**The Old Testament in the Light of the New**

**Dr. Dan Keating** explains the purpose and goal of Steve Clark's book:

The genius of *The Old Testament in the Light of the New* is that it teaches us how to see the narrative unity of God’s plan as revealed in the Scriptures, Old and New Testament. The focus is on the beginning, the center and climax, and the end. As with a great symphony, we only understand the individual movements once we have heard the whole work, once we have grasped how everything is summed up in the final climax.

So it is with the narrative of Scripture. We need to know God’s purpose from the beginning – and here the opening chapters of Genesis are essential. We need to know the center and goal of the plan – and this is Christ, the Word made flesh. But we also need to know where God’s purpose is going – and this is eternal life with God forever, beautifully displayed as the “marriage feast of the Lamb” in the book of Revelation.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor

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Top photo from Bigstock.com: Icon on the dome with the image of Jesus Christ as Ruler of All with the Apostles on a gold background in the basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome

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The Old Testament in the Light of the New:
The Stages of God's Plan

A New Book by Steve Clark

An Excerpt from Chapter One

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Introduction to chapter one

The Bible begins with the words “In the beginning.” That is the name of the first book of the Bible in Hebrew, because the books are named by their first words. In Greek, the name is Génesis, brought into English as our name for the first book as well. It means “coming to be.” The book is concerned primarily with the coming to be of the covenant people of God, but also with the coming to be of the world.

Genesis is the introduction to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, and to the history of the people of Israel.1 The bulk of Genesis is the account of the patriarchs (Genesis chapters 12–50). There we find a description of the origin of the people of Israel. But the people of Israel were not the first human beings, and human history did not begin with the events narrated in Genesis 12, the call of the first patriarch, Abraham.

The beginning of the human race is recounted in Genesis 1–11. These chapters form an “introduction to the introduction” and tell us briefly of the origins of the human race, of the fundamental realities we encounter as human beings, and of human civilization. But creation did not begin with the human race. Chapter 1 goes back to the very beginning of creation and situates the beginning of the human race in that context. It tells us what was there at the outset – God. As it says in Psalm 90:2:

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

God with his creative power was there in the beginning, and he was the origin of everything else.

In this chapter we will look at Genesis 1. The account of creation in Genesis 1 does not end until the first few verses of chapter 2, but for convenience, we will refer to the whole account as Genesis 1. It is here that we will begin. What comes first lays the foundation for what comes after, and we will see that this is a repeating pattern in stage after stage of God’s plan for the human race.

One of the main questions that comes up for most readers of Genesis 1 (and Genesis 1–11) is “how literally” to take what the text says. The exposition of the texts in the first part of this book simply approaches the narrations as they present themselves. The issue of how literally to take the texts is reserved to the second part of the book – in the methodological discussion “2. Scriptural Interpretation and Literary Genre” p. 447, where the position is upheld that we should only take a text as literally as the text is intended to be taken.

In that same second part of the book, we will also take up historical questions that are often raised about the account in Genesis 1. How does the account relate to what we know from modern science? Where does it fit in human history? (see “2. Scriptural Interpretation and Literary Genre,” p. 447 and “9. Historical Reliability,” p. 519).

In this book, we are not going to be mainly interested in the historical questions about the people and events we will be discussing. We will use understandings of the events narrated in Scripture that are historically defensible according to modern scholarly historiography, but we will not engage in defenses of the positions...
we have adopted. We are interested in how as Christians we should understand these people and events. For that we will primarily rely on both testaments, including the typological and spiritual interpretations they contain.

**Creation**
The Bible begins with a solemn opening, one unique in human literature for its simplicity and power. The first verse states:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

There was an origin to the universe that we live in, and that origin was due to God. He created or made *heaven and earth*. This means he created everything, since *heaven and earth* is a scriptural idiom for saying “all there is.” Everything other than himself, then, came into existence by God’s action (Revelation 4:11; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Maccabees 7:28–29). This has been traditionally described as creation out of nothing, sometimes referred to by using the Latin *creatio ex nihilo*.

Beginning with verse 3, we have the six days of God’s work of creation. Each day is described within the same verbal structure, starting with *and God said*, and ending with *and there was evening and morning, [another] day*. At the end comes the seventh day. The opening in verse 1 and the closing in verse 4a² frame the account (marked by an inclusion):³ Genesis 1, then, is the account of the creation of the heavens and earth, all things.

Before the six days of creation begin, the account sets the scene for God’s action of creation in a way that intensifies the dramatic nature of what is to follow. The second verse says,

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

The verse speaks of the earth being absent or empty – probably the former since the earth is not created until the third day – perhaps a way of saying there was no place for us. It speaks about formless waters (the *deep* or the *abyss*) that go down on and on, darkness covering everything. We are looking out, and there is no identifiable thing, no thing in particular, to be found. Moreover, there are no boundaries, no perceptible outer limits to what we see, no horizon. There is only an indistinct darkness. Then we can sense something like a breeze or a wind beginning to move. The spirit of God is starting to work.

Whether the description in verse 2 is of a pre-existent formless or unknown state as a contrast to what is to come or a way of saying that there was nothing at the outset, verse 3, the beginning of God’s work of creation, presents the incomprehensible creative power of God beginning to act:

And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

All of a sudden there is a blinding flash, something too powerful for human beings to imagine, something too powerful for human beings to endure.⁴ We are fortunate not to be there, only to be told about it by the only one who was present.

Even in modern science, light is understood to be special – pure energy. We would not want to be struck by lightning. We do not want to stare at the sun. A soft candlelight would burn us if we touched it. But behind the light that entered this world was God; for *God is light* as the Apostle John tells us (1 John 1:5). The light that appeared at the outset of creation was directly connected to God himself, who *dwells in unapproachable light*.
The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:6 quoted the words in Genesis by saying, *God...said, “Let light shine out of darkness”* or to use his next phrase in the darkness. He seemed to be saying that when God in Genesis said, *Let there be light*, he was not bringing light itself into existence. Rather, as many Christian Fathers and early Jewish interpreters have held, he was determining that the uncreated light of his own being shine in the nothingness and begin the process of creation.5

This, however, does not mean that all light is uncreated. There is, for instance, sunlight – energy of limited extent – and we exist as beneficiaries of that light. The description of the events in day 4 of creation speaks about the sun and moon and stars, created beings, as “lights.” We ourselves, when we strike a match, in a certain way bring some created light into existence.

However, the existence of created lights is a participation in the uncreated light, which is God himself and his word. His light, uncreated light, enables created lights to exist and function. Like all created things, a created light truly exists as a limited being, but only because it is sustained by the Creator God and participates in, that is, draws the kind of existence it has from, his nature as light. When God said “Let there be light,” his own uncreated power was bringing into existence the created order.

The shining forth of God’s light into the nothingness was not just a work of power. It was also a work of wisdom (Psalm 104:24; Proverbs 3:19–20; Proverbs 8:22–31; Job 28:20–28). God spoke and the created world came into existence. His speech was a word of command, and as a command it stated what the result of his speech should be. It contained in itself the nature, or plan, or rationality, of the universe. God not only brought into existence the created universe, he formed it in a wise way. The word of God was not just speech, but the speech that comes from reason or wisdom or, more likely, reason itself, the divine reason, the divine wisdom. The created result of light shining forth is not an unformed chaos, but a formed or ordered whole, an intelligible structure, a whole that is structured to be something good.

For the most part, we find ourselves occupied by particular things within our experience: a meal to eat, a task assigned by our boss, a friend to help. Some people may get no further than that. But most people, at some point, are impressed by the pervasive background of their life.

Yes, there are meals, assignments, and friends. Nonetheless, there is a world in which all these occur, and this background has an unchallengeable stability. Gravity takes over when we drop something. The sun rises and sets and gives us warmth and light. At night the stars come out and go through a pattern of movement that does not change year after year.

Now, with modern science, we have a complex and vast, though still limited, description of how these things happen, and we have found more change over time than we perceive in our ordinary experience. Nonetheless, can we affect that? Can we alter it? Can we get the star Sirius to rise a second earlier or gravity to reverse direction? We know we cannot.

God could. God simply said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. *He spoke and it came to be; he commanded and it stood forth*, as Psalm 33:9 says. We cannot imagine how there could be nothing or formless matter, then all of sudden a word from God, light bursting forth, and afterwards things coming into existence. But that, the opening description of Genesis tells us, is the ultimate fact about this universe we find ourselves in. In the beginning God already was, and it was his decision and his command that everything come into existence. Moreover it came into existence the way he said it should.

As children we slowly emerge to consciousness. At some point, if we are fortunate, we come to know about
God and we learn that we too were created. The beginning of Genesis is not merely a description of a cause and effect relationship, a metaphysical statement about the origin of the universe that indicates the existence of a First Cause. The beginning of Genesis tells us something important about our own existence as mere creatures.

Because God created everything, he has the right to determine what everything should be and do. We can see this principle stated in Isaiah 45:9–12:

“Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, ‘What are you making’? or ‘Your work has no handles’? Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ or to a woman, ‘With what are you in travail?’” Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: “Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.”

A clay pot simply has to accept the decision of the potter about what it should be and how it should function. Because a father is the source of his son, a new human being, he has an authority over his son and a responsibility for him. The same is even truer of the relationship of God and his creation. The same is true of God and each one of us.

God created everything. Because he created everything, he has authority over and responsibility for everything. He is the one who knows how everything should go, because he created everything for a purpose (Isaiah 46:8–11; Ephesians 1:11; Proverbs 16:4, etc.). Therefore, if we want to live in the way that we are made to live, we need to understand God’s mind and his purpose. If we want to live within creation and in harmony with the way creation is supposed to be, then we need to cooperate with him, the one who made it.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

The creation
The first sections of Genesis 1 have more to tell us about the nature of creation, the world we live in. After the appearance of light and the separation of light from darkness, the account says,

And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

There is a detail here, one that is easily overlooked. It says, there was evening and there was morning, one day. We would be inclined to say “the first day,” especially since we find the next days described as the second day, the third day, and so on to the seventh. Many traditional Jewish and Christian commentators, however, saw the difference in phrasing to be significant.

In this understanding, “one day” indicates that the first day, the beginning, was special. When light shone in the darkness, day began and all of creation came into existence. The rest of the days of creation unfolded what already had been done on the first day, the day that the Lord God made heaven and earth (Genesis 2:4). The shining forth of light into nothingness is in principle the creation of everything.

The first three days of creation recount the beginning steps of creation. Light appears. Then heaven appears, creating a space in the middle of the waters. Then the dry land appears in that space, separating the earth and the seas. All three of these are described in terms of a division or separation. God lets the light shine in the
darkness and separates the light from the darkness. God then creates the “firmament” (RSV), perhaps a “dome” (NAB) or an “expanse” (NIV), and separates the waters above and the waters below. God then creates the earth and separates the land from the seas. In all three days there is a shaping of creation into distinct realms.

The starting point is emptiness or at least formlessness. Then God steps in, and as he creates, he makes a separation here, a separation here, and a separation here, and so brings order into his creation. Creation is the bringing into existence of an ordered whole. The very word cosmos, the word derived from the Greek that we use for the totality of material creation, means that it is an ordered whole.

The second three days – days 4, 5, and 6 – involve the creation of beings who populate the places created in the first three days. The fourth day, when the sun, the moon, and the stars were created, seems somewhat different from the fifth and sixth days. We would not think the sun, moon, and stars to be living beings in the same way as other creatures. Nonetheless, they move, even though their movement is limited to a set path. In fact, what we see in the text is a progression from the creation of things in the first three days that do not move but are the spaces in which things can move, to things that move in a set path, to things that have freedom of movement (birds, fish, and land animals), and then to things that not only have freedom of movement but also can choose how to live and so where to move (human beings).

The first three days of creation and the second three days of creation roughly correspond to one another. On the fourth day, we have the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars. They are the beings that “rule over” what had been created on the first day, the day and the night. They are the beings that mark off the units of time, especially the times for the sacred observances within each year and from year to year, the divisions that should be the background of human life. They are also the beings that give light to the earth.

Then on the fifth day we have the creation of the fish and birds, who occupy what had been created on the second day, the sky and the sea. On the sixth day we have the creation of the animals that live on the dry land, which had been established on the third day, and the human race, which also lives on the dry land but is intended to rule over all living creatures.

The result is a habitable, limited dry land in an ordered, formed creation. But outside of that cosmos, as far as we can see, there is only darkness and the abyss. In creation, the Lord formed an ordered world of definite things, something good, in the midst of the kind of nothingness that prevailed in verse 2. As a created world, it only stays in existence, is sustained rather than falls back into nothingness, by the action of God, but, as we will see, is constantly threatened by that nothingness.

The later Scriptures indicate that from the darkness and abyss comes an opposition to God’s work that produces corruption and destruction, what is described as the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:13). The Apostle John, speaking of the course of God’s work of creation and salvation, going on even now but begun on day one, said the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). Other places in the Scriptures speak of conflict with various beings in the course of the work of creation (e.g., Psalm 74:12–14; 89:8–10; Job 26:11–12; Is 51:9–11). From the abyss [RSV: the bottomless pit] can come various hostile beings (Revelation 9:11; 11:7; 20:1–3).

As we shall see, at the end of this present time night shall be no more (Revelation 21:25, 22:5), and the action of God will triumph and secure the existence of his good creation. But in the meantime not everything goes smoothly. In Genesis 1, however, this opposition does not appear and all is simply the good work of God. As the first chapter of the Bible this is the overriding perspective, the background within which all subsequent challenges to God’s plan need to be seen (Psalm 89:11).
In summary, creation is an ordered whole. Even as the creation itself is described as an imposition of order, so the narrative, the very way the creation is described, is seeking to present the creation story in an orderly fashion. The account seems to be written in a way that itself makes a point about the creation that it is describing, namely, that the creation in its initial goodness flows from God, that the creation has an order and harmony that comes from God himself, and that God’s work involves actively forming and establishing the creation in the face of the alternative of chaos and nothingness.

**Reading the Old Testament in the Light of the New**

**The presence of the Trinity**

There is a long-standing Christian perspective on the beginning verses of Genesis that many Christians nowadays are not familiar with, what we might call a Trinitarian perspective. To begin with, in the text of Genesis, God’s creative work is connected with his word and with his spirit. Verse 3 says, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Things happen as God speaks through his almighty word. In verse 2 we also see the presence of the spirit of God: the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. The spirit of God is present and at work; the word of God goes forth; the realities of the universe are created.

This description of creation is developed further in Psalm 33, which contains a short summary of the truth stated in Genesis 1. In Psalm 33:6 we read,

> By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

The word “breath” is another English translation of the words for “spirit,” both in Hebrew and in Greek, and it was through God’s breath or spirit and through God’s word that the heavens were made.6

There is an obvious connection between the breath and the word. When people speak, they breathe out and form the breath into sounds. The word and breath come out together from the speaker and belong to him, the word expressing the meaning or reason of his action and the breath the power behind the speaking. Psalm 33, probably based on Genesis 1, understands God’s word and his spirit as his agents of creation. God acted by speaking a word, and therefore acted by sending forth his word and spirit (breath).

Many Christian teachers have seen these verses as a reference to the action of the Persons of the Trinity in creation. To some extent this view is based on Old Testament texts like Psalm 33, as we have seen, and Psalm 107:20 which speaks about God sending forth his word,

… he sent forth his word, and healed them And delivered them from destruction

and Psalm 104:30 which speaks about sending forth his spirit:

> When you send forth your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth.

Although the Old Testament speaks about God’s word and his spirit as if they were agents of creation, seemingly somewhat separate from God, they are his own word and spirit, and therefore also divine.

In the New Testament we see even clearer statements. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6 that the Spirit gives life. The Spirit of God then, is a life-giver and so a creator.

The word of God is also a creator. The key place where we see this is in John 1:1–3, a commentary on Genesis 1:1, beginning with the same words as Genesis 1:1—*In the beginning.*
In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

This Word (of God) was the one through whom all things were made, or in whom all things were created (Colossians 1:16). To say, then, that the Word was the one who created all things is to say that he is divine, because the one true God is the one who created all things, and the only one who created all things. Therefore, the Gospel of John says the Word was God [RSV] or the Word was divine.

What was God’s word when he created all things? God said Let the light shine out of (or in) the darkness. The Word of God was the light that shone in the darkness. This Word was “true God from true God, light from light,” as the Nicene Creed puts it. This was the Word who became flesh (John 1:14) in Jesus Christ.

When we say that Genesis 1:1–3 contains a Trinitarian reference, we are not necessarily saying that the authors of Genesis or Psalm 33 conceived of God as three hypostases or three persons in one substance (being), to use the formulae of the early Christian creeds. We are, however, saying that now that we know about the Trinity through Christian revelation, now that we understand that there is one God in three hypostases or persons, we can go back and ask whether the Trinity was manifested at all in the Old Testament.

Many of the Fathers said that of course the Trinity was manifested, and one place we can see that is in the first verses of Genesis. When Genesis talks about God speaking (with his word and his spirit or breath), it is speaking about a threefoldness in God. We now know, as a result of the Incarnation of God’s Son, the Word, and as a result of the outpouring of the Spirit, that the Trinity was being spoken about in the first chapter of Genesis. The threefoldness to which these verses refer is manifested more fully in the New Testament, and was understood better after the discussions of the early Christian Fathers that led to the creedal statements of the early ecumenical councils.

To read the Old Testament in the light of the New, then, does not mean that we necessarily think that Old Testament authors understood things the way Christians do. Probably they did not, unless they had some special revelation. It means, however, that we now understand some things about God and his plan that they did not. As a consequence, we can see some things in the Old Testament that old covenant readers would not have seen, either because we know something more about the realities of which they speak or because we know something more about what God was aiming at. In doing so, we are not adding anything to the text or reading anything into it.

To use an example, when whalers three hundred years ago said that there were great fish called whales in certain areas of the world, and their blubber gave useful oil, we know perfectly well what they were talking about and agree with what they said. However, we would not describe whales as fish but as mammals, because they take their oxygen from the air, not from the water, using lungs, not gills. Earlier, anything that swam in the waters and used fins for locomotion was called a fish.

We have changed our terminology because we have a more developed (and useful) understanding of biological structure, so we would not classify whales as fish anymore. But the whalers of old and writers who passed on what they said were talking about the same animals we are, and saying true things about them. We have no trouble in finding those animals and verifying what those older authors said about them, even though we have a more developed knowledge of the animals — and we rightly read what they said in the light of our more developed knowledge about whales.

In a similar way, as a result of the coming of Christ and of the Trinitarian discussions in the patristic period, we would now speak of the Spirit of God as a distinct hypostasis or person in the Trinity. But the human
author of Genesis was talking about one and the same Spirit of God we are, and saying true things about him, things that we can recognize and accept. He was in fact talking about the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit Christians believe in. And likewise he was talking about the same Word of God Christians believe in. So when we say that the Triune God was at work in the creation, we are not contradicting what the text of Genesis is saying or reading something into it that was not there. We understand it in a fuller way because we have more knowledge about the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN RACE

The human
Day three and day six correspond to one another in the order of account of creation because they both have two acts of creation, not just one. On day three God makes earth (the dry land) appear, separated from the sea, and then in a second action God creates plants to cover it. On day six God creates the land animals and then in a separate action creates human beings to rule the fish, birds, and animals. Days three and six seem to be a center of focus toward which the account is leading. On the third day the place of main concern, earth (dry land) covered with plants, the source of animal life (Genesis 1:29–30), is created. On the sixth day, the living beings of main concern, land animals and human beings, are created. The goal of the work of which God did in creation (Genesis 2:3) is human beings who live with animals on the vegetation-covered earth.

The completion of the work of creating material beings in Genesis 1, then, occurs in the second part of the sixth day with the creation of the human race. Not only does it describe the last act of creation, but it is also the lengthiest account and one that is special in several ways. It begins this way:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Verse 26 [RSV] says, Let us make man in our own image. The Hebrew word translated as “man” is “adam.” “Adam” can be used as a corporate term in Hebrew, meaning “human race” or “humanity,” as well as the proper name of an individual human being. Sometimes, in fact, the word translated in the RSV as the proper name “Adam” is translated by others as just “human,” because the meaning of the name of the first human being in Hebrew is “human.”

In addition, the text shifts back and forth from the singular to the plural: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air. God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. The word adam, then, is the antecedent of both a singular and a plural pronoun. This implies that Adam was an individual, but he also was humanity. This first individual human being sums up and represents – and begins – the whole human race.

Adam, then, is “The Human.” Throughout the Scripture a name often reveals something of the identity and significance of the person (as the name Abraham means “the father of the people” and the name Joshua or Jesus means “the one who brings salvation”). So the name of this particular individual – Adam, Human – indicates who he is. He is the human race, the beginning of the human race, the head of the human race, and the father of the human race. He is, simply put, “The Human Being.”
Two truths
In this text we have two facts about the way Adam is created and therefore about the way the human race is created: first, that the human race is created in the image of God, and second, that the human race is created male and female. These are the two primary truths that we are told about God’s creation of the human race: God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

These two facts are connected in a parallelism to two commands. The first command is, Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth (Genesis 1:27). This first command, to rule or exercise dominion, is connected to the first fact: The reason that the first human beings can and should rule is because they are created in the image of God and so are capable of representing God. Human beings, the human race, were created to share God’s rule over his creation.

We can see something of what it means to be in the image of God by looking at Genesis 5:3, where we have a reference to the birth of Seth, born as the son of Adam and described as in Adam’s “image and likeness.” Image and likeness, when used in regard to human beings, can be a way of speaking about sonship and so a sameness of nature. Therefore, as Seth was the son of Adam, Adam (the human race) was the son of God.

Such an understanding can also be found in the Gospel of Luke, which traces Christ’s genealogy back to Adam, and then traces Adam’s back to God himself. Luke makes God part of the genealogy, concluding the genealogy by saying: … who was the son of Adam, who was the son of God (Luke 3:38). The reference to image and likeness in Genesis 1:26, then, is an indication that Adam is created to be the son of God and to be like God as a son is like his father.

To see what is involved for a human to be in the image of God, we should begin by looking at what God is like in Genesis 1, the text that describes human beings as in God’s image. God orders creation. He determines what things are and how they are to act. He names them and so can identify them. He speaks in a personal way to those who are capable of understanding speech. He acts with a purpose in mind, a final vision of what he is trying to bring about. The result of his action is good.

To be in the image of God does not mean that we are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, that is, all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere present, and so on. If we were, we would be God, not one of his creatures. We do not have the same (divine) nature as he has. But we are nonetheless like him. To be created according to God’s image is to be like him in the ways he acts in Genesis 1, that is, to be a rational agent, an agent who can act with wisdom and understanding, deliberately bringing about a good world.

There is, however, another aspect of being in the image of God that we might miss. It does not have to do solely with intelligence and with power to do things, but also with good character. Good character is the developed orientation to seeking that the things we do are good (desirable). It especially involves seeking that the things we bring about are morally good (desirable because they uphold the good order of the universe). We can see this in the book of Colossians in an exhortation about being in the image of God:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature [literally, old human being] with its practices and have put on the new nature [literally, new human being], which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ... Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:9–14)
This exhortation begins with encouragement to put off the old nature, the one we are born with, and put on the new nature. The new nature is one that is renewed after (in accordance with) the image of God. Then, when the passage continues to explain what that is like, we have a list of good character traits, moral virtues, traits that God has and that we need to have if we are in his image. Therefore, the human race, if it is renewed in the image of God, should be like him in his character and as a result make use of the power and authority that God gives to order the world in a good way, a moral way, a beneficial way. If we make use of our nature to rule but rule in a bad way, we may not have destroyed but we have certainly marred the image of God in us – as fallen human beings regularly do.

Many of the early Christian Fathers distinguished between the image and the likeness of God in human beings. They understood the image of God as the nature given us and the likeness of God as something we need to attain by growth in character. In such an understanding, we are in the image of God, but we need to grow in the likeness of God.

The extent of good human responsibility in a situation, then, depends on the extent to which we are like God in the way we exercise the responsibility we have been given. The more like God we become in the way we act, the more we do what is good, the more effectively we can govern as his representatives, bringing creation to the purpose for which he made it. Our exercise of the authority God has given us has important consequences for what happens on earth, and if we exercise this authority the way he would, we will see good results, results that will fulfill what his purpose was in creating the world in the first place.

The second command to the first human beings is be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The second command is connected to the second fact, namely that the human race is created male and female. After human beings are created male and female, they are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. The creation of sexual differentiation is connected to the command to be fruitful and multiply, or, as we might put it, a primary purpose of sexual differentiation, certainly the primary purpose according to Genesis 1, is to have children. That in turn should result in human beings filling the earth.

It is not only human beings that are created male and female. The animals are as well. Being male and female is a characteristic human beings share with the animals, a manifestation of their animal nature, because both humans and animals reproduce sexually. God, on the other hand, is not male and female. Unlike human beings and the rest of the animal kingdom, unlike Pagan gods, he does not increase and multiply. There is only one God and never will be another.

To say that human beings were created male and female is to say that they, unlike God, but like the animals, can and should have offspring in order to fulfill the purpose for which God created them. Being male and female, the second fact in this passage contrasts with being in the image and likeness of God, the first fact in the passage. Both put together say that we are animals (with emphasis on the way that we, like other animals, reproduce), but at the same time transcend animality by our rationality. To use another biblical wording, we are both earthly and heavenly in the way we were created.

The second command also tells us something important about the developmental role of human beings in God’s creation. God created Adam and Eve good in themselves, and he created both of them in his image and likeness. But he did not create them in a way in which they could fulfill his command to rule the earth all by themselves. They had to increase and multiply and fill the earth with a race of human beings. This would take time. In other words, the human race was made to complete God’s work of creation and, in a process of development, to make his creation as a whole into what he intended it to be. The world was not created perfect or complete – although it was created good in principle – but was created to eventually become completely
what God had in mind.

The connection of the two commands to the two facts about human nature shows us something additional about the way God’s commands function. God commands us to do things that are in conformity to the way we are made. His very first two commands are not just arbitrary requirements, but follow from the nature of human beings. We cannot say that all of God’s commands can be tied precisely to the way we are created. In fact, we shall see in the next chapter of Genesis that he does give a command that does not seem to be tied to our nature. But for the most part God’s law is a reflection of his creation. His commands are not usually arbitrary or simple tests of obedience. And the most important ones are not commands just to deal with a temporary situation. They are for our own good and the good of others, given to enable us to express, by how we act, the way in which we are created, and they enable us to accomplish the purpose for which we and the things around us were created.

This illustrates another important fact about God’s creation. Genesis 1 could seem as if God simply does everything that needs to be done: he speaks the word and creation simply comes into existence. But Genesis 1 makes equally clear that there is more to it. The plants bring forth seeds that become more plants; the birds, fish, and other animals increase and multiply; the human beings do likewise. All his creatures take an active role in furthering the work of creation.

God brought into existence a set of creatures, a part of his creation, to represent him by ruling over that creation on his behalf. He made those creatures with an animal nature and so capable of reproducing so they could gradually fill the earth. And he made them capable of ruling over creation by bestowing on them his image and likeness. As the corporate son of God, the human race was to be God’s viceroy in creation.

Presumably, God put the human race in such a position so that in a certain way creation could develop itself, since human beings were part of creation and could act as created beings, who could lead in the development of creation – although, of course, not without God’s providential sustaining power. But he constituted them in such a way that they would not rule by their own arbitrary or selfish decision, but as his ministers, ruling according to true wisdom, the wisdom that God gives to those he made in his image and likeness to be partners with him in bringing creation to its full purpose.

Let us . . . There is another feature of the text on the creation of the human race that seems small, but that has been the source of much discussion. The passage starts off by saying, Then God said, “Let us make man ...” This itself marks off the creation of the human race from the rest of creation as something of special importance. Instead of just commanding something to come to be, God addresses “us” and calls “us” to make man. This, however, raises the question: to whom is he referring when he says “us”?

There have been a number of proposals about the “us,” both over the centuries and now in scholarly writings. None of these has received universal agreement, especially among modern scholars. One of the better proposals is that God is here addressing his heavenly court, made up of angels, the hosts of heaven. This has the advantage that the rest of the Bible has many references to such beings. It has, however, the difficulty that these beings have not been mentioned in Genesis 1 as either created or involved in creation. It would be strange to just refer to them as if readers – perhaps readers who are reading the Bible for the first time and start at the beginning – would understand that the members of his heavenly court were the “us.” Moreover, they are never spoken of as involved in the work of creating human beings.

The Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, representing a common view, held that this opinion was “perverse.”¹⁰ He said this because most traditional Christian interpreters saw “us” as a reference to the Trinity. This view has the significant advantage, especially over understanding the reference being to the angels, that the “us” is involved in an act of creation, and the Hebrew verb for “create” (at least in the forms used in our
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passage) is only used of God. Moreover, after speaking of creating the human race in “our” image and likeness, the text speaks of the fact that the human race was created in the image of God. Such a phrasing has the consequence that the “us” was God. In other words, as Aquinas thought was important, the “us” has to be divine. As a result, the passage lets us know that there is some kind of plurality in God.

We do not have to see Aquinas’ view as any more than a common Christian interpretation. We do not have to see it as the only one interpretation a Christian teacher can take and be a faithful Christian teacher. However, it is likely the leading interpretation in Christian tradition, deserving of special respect. More important for our purposes here, it shows the importance Christian teachers have placed upon the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.

God’s good work
After the creation of the human race, God establishes the relationship of the human race (and of all animals) to the plant kingdom:

And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (Genesis 1:29–31)

This passage describes God’s provision for human beings (and animals). God provides for human beings as a father provides for his children (and his domestic animals), in this case giving them food. In fact, several elements of God’s fatherly care are shown in this chapter. He provides a place for the human race to live; he gives them work, the responsibility of ruling the material creation; he calls them to take his place of authority; and finally he gives them physical provision.

At the end of God’s work of creation, which was accomplished in the six days, the text says, And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. The results of all he did were very good, not only intrinsically worthwhile but also fulfilling the purpose he set out to accomplish.

The goodness of all creation is an important Christian (and Jewish) teaching, one that has often been a point of controversy. In the early church, one of the greatest heresies was Gnosticism, and a fundamental tenet of many forms of Gnosticism was that the created, material world was evil. However, the Christian teaching is that all creation, including the material world, was good when it first came from the hand of God. The origin of evil in human history first comes up in Genesis 3, and we will discuss that in the next chapter.

THE SEVENTH DAY
The first three verses of the second chapter of Genesis form a literary unit with the first chapter. They have the same style and also connect by content with the material in chapter 1. They describe the last day of the week of creation:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God [had] finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. And [RSV: so] God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.
The text then adds, as we have seen:

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

The *generations of the heavens and the earth* seems to mean the elements – or elements in a series – that made up the heaven and earth.

Creation is here presented as having lasted a week. The seventh day comes at the very end of the section we are referring to as Genesis 1. When God created the world, he worked for six days until he finished his creation of heaven and earth, and then he rested (ceased) on the seventh from all his work which he had done.

But what did God do when he “rested” on the seventh day? With modern ideas of rest, we might be tempted to think he slept in to recover from his work week, or at least took a long nap, or perhaps headed for the beach. But a study of the use of “rest” in the Scriptures shows that it does not usually imply inactivity, much less engaging in entertainment or refreshing recreation. Therefore, here it most likely does not refer to complete inactivity but to a different sort of activity than “work” does.

“Rest,” the translation of two different words in the Hebrew Bible that are rough synonyms (see Gen 2:2–3 and Ex 20:11 where the two Hebrew verbs are interchanged), is used in a somewhat different way than in ordinary English. As in English these words can be used for ceasing work, mainly for ceasing difficult or laborious work. In Isaiah 14:3, the Hebrew Bible describes a rest God would give his people as “rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve.”

“Rest” in Scripture is especially used to speak about the state in which an individual or people has become free from enemy attack, either because they have fended it off and so been victorious or because the enemy has lost the ability to be dangerous. For instance, Second Samuel 7:11 reads, *and I will give you rest from all your enemies.* Fighting, whether in attack or defense, was a very strenuous effort. To say, then, that God rested on the seventh day seems to imply that he was able to cease from what we would understand to be the difficult or burdensome work of bringing the creation he wanted into existence, perhaps with a certain amount of fighting.

“Rest,” however, is commonly used in a broader way in the Bible. It is used, for instance, for the kind of rest that involves creating a space for celebration. Esther 9:17 describes the celebration after the deliverance of the Jewish people by saying, *And on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.* In other words, resting (from work or fighting) creates a space for feasting and gladness. Many overlook the important truth that the sabbath day in the Jewish calendar is a feast day – the primary feast day (Lev 23:1–3) – and so is not “a day off,” but a day of celebrating the goodness of the Lord.

“Rest” can even be used as a synonym for delight (enjoying a good result that is finished). Proverbs 29:17 says, *Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.* In Genesis 1:31 we possibly see a similar indication as to what God did on the sabbath feast day. There it says, *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* In other words, at the end of the sixth day, he had completed his work of creation and, so to speak, stepped back, looked at it, and was satisfied with what he had done. He then took a day to rejoice or to celebrate or to delight in what he had done. To say that God rested on the seventh day therefore seems to indicate that it was a time for God to contemplate and enjoy a successful accomplishment after striving, even fighting, to reach his goal.

Genesis 2:3 adds that God *blessed and hallowed* (made holy) the seventh day. This could mean that he set it apart for a special purpose. He made it a special day, the way he set apart feast days for special observance (cf. Nehemiah 8:9, 11). We probably most naturally think that the phrase *blessed and hallowed* means he set the seventh day of our week apart so that we would observe it as a day of rest.
Certainly God has set apart the sabbath for a day of rest, for the Jews especially, but also for Christians. We find the commandment to do so in Exodus 20:8–11 when he requires it as part of the law. This commandment is linked to the fact that God rested on the seventh day:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy…. for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

The reason for the observance provided in the text is the Lord’s example, and this has been a very common reason given for God’s action as described in the Genesis 1 account of creation. God, in this view, intended to give a good example of resting after a work week, and we therefore should follow that example.

But Genesis 2:1–3 does not contain a command to do likewise. It does not tell us to set apart one day in seven for a day of rest. That only comes after the Exodus, when God provided manna for his people in the wilderness (Exodus 16:22–30) and then when he commanded them to observe the seventh day as a sabbath to the Lord (Exodus 20:8–11). This likely indicates that the main significance of the hallowing of the seventh day of Genesis 1 has to do with God and not with us, even though later on it was to be taken as an example to imitate.

To hallow or to “make holy” or to “consecrate” or to “sanctify” – all possible translations of the Hebrew verb with slightly different connotations in English – can mean to set something created apart for God. Setting something apart makes it a holy thing, something that especially belongs to God. But something becomes holy not only when human beings set it apart for God, but also when he becomes spiritually present in it, as when he becomes present in a temple. In this case it is made holy by his presence, as the Lord, speaking of the door of the tent of meeting, said,

There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. (Exodus 29:43)

If this is an aspect of the meaning of hallowing the seventh day, the fact that God hallows the seventh day would indicate that he becomes especially present in it. This meaning would also go along with the fact that he blesses and hallows the seventh day. We can see in Exodus 33:14 that God’s presence is a source of blessing and rest.

Making the day holy then is connected to God’s rest on the seventh day. When someone or something spiritual becomes present in some place or thing, especially when they become present in an ongoing or abiding way, they are said, in the Hebrew idiom, to “rest” there. Such an idiom is commonly used of temples. When God established a tabernacle or temple, he then came to rest in it and dwell in it (Exodus 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11, Psalm 132:5, 8), hallowing it, setting it apart as something that was especially his. In so doing he filled it with his presence and power, and from it came salvation and blessing for his people (Psalm 132:13–18).

The fact that God rests (dwells) in a temple is significant for understanding the seventh day because in the Torah the old covenant teaching from God, the temple and the sabbath are connected. In Leviticus 19:30 it says, You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD, linking the two as if they were similar holy things. The laws in Exodus about the building of the tabernacle are linked with laws about keeping the sabbath (Exodus 31:12–18; 35:1–3), indicating that the two are related. The likely implication is that the sabbath is like a temple in time, that is, a time when God is especially present. It, then, is the time when the purpose of a temple is most fully achieved and the time when those who observe the sabbath receive blessing from God.
Finally, the description of the completion of the temple seems to contain allusions, or at least parallels, to the completion of the work of creation. If that is so, then creation itself is intended to be a kind of temple, a place where God intends to dwell. This truth is expressed more directly in Isaiah 66:2, a passage that will be discussed in the next section. These considerations about God’s seventh day rest might well indicate that the seventh day of creation is a time when God rests in his creation and makes it holy. These considerations raise the question: when did God begin to dwell in the temple of his creation?

The sabbath and the age to come

The most common interpretation of the seventh day given now by Christian teachers is as a description of God ceasing work and resting at the end of the first week of creation, a time in the distant past. From that is taken the understanding that we are to imitate him in observing the sabbath once a week, and he will bless our doing so. But there is another view of the seventh day in Genesis 1, namely, that it refers to something that has not yet happened: the age to come. God’s work of creation is not yet completed, but will be in the age to come.

There is a special feature of the text that seems to point toward the seventh day as something that will happen in the future. All the days so far in Genesis 1 have been described by saying there was evening and there was morning, a limited period of time. But there is no evening and morning on the seventh day. Some traditional commentators have said that this indicates that the seventh day is an eternal day. In addition, the text, though similar, is also quite different from the texts of the previous days. It simply says three times, emphatically, without the usual features of the descriptions of the other days, that God ceased from his work, indicating that the work of creation was now all done.

Many have interpreted these things to mean that the seventh day is an image or symbol, perhaps even a prophecy, of the age to come. In such a view, we are in the sixth day. And there is something yet to come, something that will last for all eternity: the day of God’s rest.

This understanding seems to be stated in some places in the New Testament. Christ himself spoke about God “still working.” He said, My Father is working still, and I am working (John 5:17). He said this after having healed the paralytic on the sabbath (and also having warned him not to sin again). In doing this he was imitating his heavenly Father who even on sabbaths now brings human beings into existence and judges them, as Jewish teachers of the time would admit. But, he said, the hour is coming (John 5:28–29) when there will be a last judgment. This seems to imply that after the Christ comes again and summons the dead from the tombs, God will then cease from his work—at some future time.

Likewise, Second Peter, after describing the Second Coming of Christ, which brings the day of God, the new heavens and new earth, concludes with a doxology to Christ,

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (3:18)

The day of eternity probably refers to the age to come that occurs after the redeeming work of Christ will be completed.

The view presented in these passages builds upon a prophecy in Isaiah. Isaiah 65:17–25 speaks of the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth to come, and then in Isaiah 66:1–2, the Lord, probably speaking of the dispensability of the earthly temple building, says:

Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for
me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, …

In other words, the heaven and the earth are a temple in which the Lord rests, that is, a temple in which he dwells and from which he rules, seated on his throne. If the Lord speaks of heaven and earth (the cosmos) as a temple, then the seventh day of Genesis 1, the day of the completion of his creation, is the day on which he rests in the temple of the cosmos.

In such a view the seventh day then would be the day of the new creation in which God dwells or takes up his full residence in all of creation, having completed his work of bringing it into existence, filling it or ruling it, so that it is fully his and fully pleasing to him (Rev 21:1–8). It is the age to come when all of his creation is fully a holy place in a holy time, the day when he will be everything to everyone or all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

It is perhaps not common for Christians or Jews now to look at the seventh day of Genesis as a symbol or prophecy of the age to come. Many Jews, however, have done so. In the time of the second temple in Jerusalem, during the liturgy of the daily offering, “On the Sabbath they [the Levite singers] sang A psalm: a Song for the Sabbath Day, a Psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in life everlasting” (Mishnah, Tamid 7:4). Many of the Christian Fathers have done so as well. For example, Ephrem, the Syrian Church Father, said of the seventh day in Genesis, “It was given to them in order to depict by a temporal rest, which he gave to a temporal people, the mystery of the true rest, which will be given to the eternal people in the eternal world” (Commentary On Genesis 1.32–33.2).

We can therefore see the seventh day as the completion of God’s work of all creation – when he does not just rest in a single place (a temple) or on a single day to be present to bless his people as he does in the old covenant (and in a different way in the new covenant). Rather, he rests or fills all of his creation, making it his, making it holy, and making it something that is completely according to his will, completely his kingdom, completely a realm of blessing. We will see the significance of this in chapter 11 of our study, when we look at the end of the book of Revelation.

Genesis 1 is a mysterious part of Scripture. It first of all speaks about the beginning, so it is not surprising to find it speaking in a hidden way of all of God’s work of creation. But the end is the time when the beginning is fully established and complete, so it would not be surprising to find it speaking of the end as well. We might add that the first and the last together are a scriptural designation of God as Creator of everything (e.g., Isaiah 44:6; Revelation 22:13), the one who begins all things and brings them to completion.

Moreover, as we have seen, the first chapter of Genesis is presented in the form of an orderly account. It is described as a week of seven days, and it is encoded with the number seven, the number of completeness or perfection.13 The use of the number seven for the seventh day, then, indicates the complete and perfect order of creation and of its goodness in the way God has planned it and will complete it.

If the seventh day of creation refers to the age to come, then we can see Genesis 1 as the affirmation of God’s good creative work. Whatever defects we may see now in his creation, God is not finished. When he is done, everything will be very good and his full intention will be accomplished. When Christ comes again and raises the dead, the human race will enter into a life that is life indeed. If we take this interpretation, we can see Genesis 1 as the summary of all of God’s work and read the rest of the Scripture in the light of it.

There are, then, two understandings of the seventh day, one that sees it as the last day of the first week, the original creation; and the second that sees it as prophetic of the completion of all creation at the end. We do not, however, need to choose between the two understandings of the seventh day, especially if we note the
significance of the sabbath day and the tabernacle/temple in this age. The sabbath and temple together in this age are the first fulfillment of the seventh day of creation. They are the feast time and holy place that are a step toward establishing what God was aiming for when he created material things. They were therefore ordained when the old covenant was established on Sinai. They also, however, point toward and symbolize the completion of all creation at the end, when God will fully “rest” in this space–time world. A fuller understanding of that link will be presented in chapters 8 and 11.

Concluding comments
The first chapter of Genesis from its literary form appears to be a special work. It is highly structured, especially forming the whole around the number seven. It has strong regular features combined with variation that provides an orientation to the nature of the universe and of God’s work. It is, moreover, placed at the beginning of the Torah (the Pentateuch) and therefore at the beginning of the whole Old Testament and of the whole of the Bible, the Holy Writings. It seems designed to be a statement about God’s work as a perfect whole in the light of which everything else should be understood.

When we look at Genesis 1 as a whole, however, at least two things stand out. The first is that God is the Creator of the universe; he made everything by a word of command or by himself making particular things. That means that the beings the pagans worshipped – the sun, moon, stars, and the animals – are simply creatures of God. A main purpose of the Genesis account is summarized in Deuteronomy 4:15–20:

“Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the LORD has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own possession, as at this day.”

The second thing that stands out is that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God himself, and they are placed in the world to have dominion over all of material creation. They are not to worship and serve God’s creatures. Rather, they are to develop creation, bringing it to the purpose for which God created it. As we will see in the next chapter, they were created to be the priests within the cosmic temple of this creation.

If we look at the New Testament references to Genesis 1, these are the main things that the New Testament picks out as well. The New Testament, however, adds an important truth: Creation happened in and through Christ by the Holy Spirit. The one true God is threefold, and the Son of God, the true image of God, took on human nature and began the human race anew, now re-created in the image of God, and he did so through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This, too, we will look at more fully.

Notes:

1 For “Some Terms for Parts or Versions of the Bible,” see the glossary on p. 392.

2 Here we follow the view that Genesis 2:4 is a transitional verse, ending the previous section and beginning the new section, but expressing a unity to the two sections by the chiastic way the verse is constructed.
For “chiasm,” “inclusion,” and other technical words for biblical style that will be used in what follows, see the glossary “Some Literary Terms for Describing Biblical Style” on p. 394.

The physicist Robert Jastrow, quoted in Francis Collins, _The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief_ (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2007), 67, describes the “Big Bang” by saying, “the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy.” Many nowadays hold, with some good reason, that Genesis 1 should not be interpreted by concordism with modern science (see the discussion of “Scriptural Interpretation and Literary Genre” on p. 447). Nonetheless it would seem strange to ignore the fact that the scientific description of the origin of the universe of which we are now confident—the Big Bang—conforms so well to Genesis 1:3, and also gives us some further understanding of what Genesis 1 so succinctly describes.

For a fuller presentation of the view in Old Testament, Christian, and Jewish tradition that the light on day 1 was uncreated light, see Mark S. Smith, _The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1_ (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 73–77.

See also Judith 16:14, probably quoting and developing Ps 33:6: “Let all your creatures serve you, for you spoke and they were made. You sent forth your Spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist your voice.” See also Wisdom 9:1; 16:12; and 18:15 for the portrayal of the word as an agent of creation.

Rather than speaking about God’s word as describing the agency of Christ in creation, some of the Christian Fathers said that Christ was the beginning, and all things were created in him, that is, in him who is the beginning. All of the Christian Fathers who wrote about the creation were convinced that Christ and the Spirit had to be agents in the creation, and that their presence could be traced in the text of Genesis 1.

The question of what constitutes eisegesis (reading something into the text that is not there) is discussed more fully in the section “Eisegesis and Ideological Exegesis,” on p. 507.

See Stephen B. Clark, _Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences_ (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1980; East Lansing, MI: Tabor House, 2006), 11–13 (hereafter cited as Clark, _MWC_), for a general presentation of “image and likeness”; see Fergus Kerr, Twentieth–Century Catholic Theologians: _From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism_ (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 194–5, for important observations on how the idea has functioned in traditional and contemporary theology.


A summary of this understanding can be found in the technical note “Numerology, The Number Seven” on p. 419.

Augustine of Hippo in _De Trinitate_, 4.4.7: “Sacred Scripture commends the perfection of the number six to us especially in this, that God completed his works in six days and made man in the image of God on the sixth day. And the Son of God came in the sixth age of the human race and was made the Son of man, in order to re-form us in the image of God. This is the age in which we are at present, whether a thousand years are assigned to each age or whether we settle upon memorable and notable personages as turning points of time. Thus the first age is found from Adam to Noah, the second from that time to Abraham, and after that … from Abraham to David, from David to the carrying away to Babylon, and from then to the birth of the Virgin. These three ages added to those make five. Hence the birth of the Lord inaugurated the sixth age, which is now in progress up to the hidden end of time.”

There is also a pervasive numerology in the text that indicates we are being given a statement about the completeness (including, likely, the future completion) of the universe. In addition to the seven days that structure the account as a whole, there are seven Hebrew words in 1:1; 14 (7 x 2) in 1:2; and 35 (7 x 5) in 2:1–3. In Gen 1:1–2:3, God is mentioned 35 (7 x 5) times, earth 21 (7 x 3), heaven/firmament 21, and the phrases “it was so” and “it was good” 7 times. Seven is the number of completeness and probably also the number of divine action. It is coded into the Israelite festal calendar as well and into the account of the building of the tabernacle (see the technical note “Numerology” on p. 419). The coded numerology indicates that we are reading an account of the complete work of creation.

> See related article _Reading the Old and New Testaments Together With Christ as the Center_
Living Bulwark

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Steve Clark is past president of the Sword of the Spirit and founder of The Servants of the Word.

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“Steve Clark’s The Old Testament in the Light of the New is a welcome and well-done contribution to the Church’s ancient tradition of understanding what in the Old Testament anticipated and prefigured what is only fully realized in the New. This work helps us more clearly understand everything written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and the Psalms, precisely in the light of Christ.”

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Living Bulwark

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“Stephen Clark has done careful, scholarly work for many years. His new book is no exception. Many Christians are perplexed about how to understand the relevance of the Old Testament to the Christian life. While the first half of the book is accessible to the general reader, the second part is included for those interested in its scholarly underpinnings. Stephen Clark has made a useful and ecumenically sensitive contribution to understanding this important issue.”

– RALPH MARTIN, S.T.D. Sacred Heart Major Seminary Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization President, Renewal Ministries

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Reading the Old and New Testaments Together
With Christ as the Center

by Dr. Daniel Keating

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How are Christians supposed to read the Old Testament? Is it still a book that we can use? Some critics claim that the Old Testament presents a dark view of a violent and selfish God – and we must leave behind these primitive myths and stories. Other critics seek to erect an impenetrable barrier between the Old and New Testaments, saying that we are not justified, historically or theologically, in reading the Old Testament in the light of faith in Jesus Christ.

In *The Old Testament in the Light of the New*, Stephen Clark shows us how as Christians we can (and must) read the Old Testament in the light of the New. And of course this means that we must read the New Testament in continuity with, and as the fulfillment of, the Old Testament.
**Christ as the center and focal point**
This focus on reading the Old and New Testaments together with the figure of Christ as the center and focal point is entirely in keeping with Pope Benedict’s approach. In his work, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict writes: “You can see that the Old and New Testaments belong together. This Christological hermeneutic, which sees Jesus Christ as the key to the whole and learns from him how to understand the Bible as a unity, presupposes a prior act of faith.”¹

The genius of *The Old Testament in the Light of the New* is that it teaches us how to see the narrative unity of God’s plan as revealed in the Scriptures, Old and New Testament. The focus is on the beginning, the center and climax, and the end. As with a great symphony, we only understand the individual movements once we have heard the whole work, once we have grasped how everything is summed up in the final climax.

**Seven stages of God’s plan**
So it is with the narrative of Scripture. We need to know God’s purpose from the beginning—and here the opening chapters of Genesis are essential. We need to know the center and goal of the plan — and this is Christ, the Word made flesh. But we also need to know where God’s purpose is going – and this is eternal life with God forever, beautifully displayed as the “marriage feast of the Lamb” in the book of Revelation.

The book divides the narrative of God’s plan into seven stages: (1) Adam and creation; (2) Noah and a new creation; (3) Abraham and the patriarchs; (4) Moses and the covenant on Mt. Sinai; (5) David and the foundation of the kingdom; (6) the coming of Jesus Christ and the dispensation of the Spirit; (7) the return of Jesus Christ and the new heavens and new earth. The author is respectful of other ways to distinguish the stages of God’s plan, each of which brings out something important. He elects to follow these seven stages because they show in greater detail how the Lord God has fulfilled his plan in discreet stages, each of which is fulfilled in the figure of Jesus Christ.

Importantly, Clark maintains that, though the stages follow one upon the other, they are also overlapping – that is, the Lord God may continue to relate to people according to one stage even as another stage is underway. And so, even though we now live in the stage of Christ and the Spirit, God can continue to relate to non-Christian Gentiles according to the way he related to Noah and his sons (the Noahide covenant), and to the Jewish people according to the covenant on Sinai (the Old Covenant). This makes for a complex relationship between the stages: we are able to discern the discreet stages but we have to be careful about using this knowledge to make specific judgments about the work of God in history.

*The Old Testament in the Light of the New* makes ample use of typology in showing the interrelation of the stages. Again, Pope Benedict witnesses to the indispensability of typology as an interpretative lens to read the unified narrative of Scripture. In *Verbum Domini*, he writes: “From apostolic times and in her living Tradition, the Church has stressed the unity of God’s plan in the two Testaments through the use of typology; this procedure is in no way arbitrary, but is intrinsic to the events related in the sacred text and thus involves the whole of Scripture.”² Instructing Christians about what typology is and how it can be used to see God’s plan in the Scripture (chapter 3) is a priceless component of the book.

**A conscious ecumenical reading of the Bible**
Part II provides greatly helpful explanations on special topics and technical issues. How historically reliable is the Bible? How can we interact with modern scholarship? How does literary genre affect our interpretation of the Bible? These are the real questions that readers of the Bible consistently face. Clark has provided clear and readable explanations of these challenging issues.

Three qualities in particular mark the achievement of *The Old Testament in the Light of the New*. First, it
Living Bulwark provides (indirectly) a liturgical reading of the Bible. In the liturgy of the Mass and the liturgy of the hours, the Church adopts a typological reading of the Bible, allowing the Old and New Testaments to mutually illuminate each other, with Christ always at the center. This is precisely the kind of approach expounded here. Thus, this book provides considerable help for reading the Scripture in a way that supports active and full participation in the liturgy.

Second, this volume offers a conscious ecumenical reading of the Bible. Though the author writes as a Catholic, he warmly welcomes Orthodox, Protestant, and Messianic Jewish readers and contributors, because he is convinced that a unified, narrative reading of the Old and New Testaments is something that unites Christians and enables them to live and worship in greater unity.

Third, this work offers a Christ-centered but non-supersessionist reading of Israel, the Old Testament and the Jewish people. The author combines in a remarkable way a clear and sharp focus on Christ as the fulfillment of God’s plan without disparaging Israel, the place of the Law, or the ongoing role of the Jewish people. Jesus brings everything to fulfillment and there is genuine newness in him, but Israel, the Law, and the Old Covenant retain their value and importance. One could say that this is a “law-friendly” and “Israel-friendly” account of the stages of God’s plan. Not only does the author see Israel before the coming of Christ in a positive light but he believes that the Jewish people continue to participate in God’s ongoing plan.

In all of this, what is the final goal of God’s plan that Clark perceives in the entire narrative of Scripture? It is to create a people, sons and daughters, made (and reformed) in God’s image and likeness, living freely in his presence in the world, sharing a way of life together. The only-begotten Son of God became flesh and won our redemption so that we could become through the Spirit sons and daughters in the Son.

Notes:


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Steve Clark is past president of the Sword of the Spirit and founder of The Servants of the Word.

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Christ in All the Scriptures

The Long Common Thread of Christological Interpretation

by Dr. John Yocum

What a difference a century makes when it comes to interpreting the Bible. A hundred years ago, as G. W. H. Lampe has pointed out, the English reader of the Bible took for granted that the imprecatory (“cursing”) psalms (e.g., Psalm 58) applied to the enemies of Israel, and so to those of the Church, and to the spiritual enemies that assail the individual Christian in temptation. He knew that in the Song of Songs Christ addressed the Church, wooed her, and made her beautiful by virtue of the love for her that led him to the Cross. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah was, of course, Christ himself. These views were shared by most Christians regardless of denomination.

But now we are told that the imprecatory psalms are not suitable for Christians, because, in light of Jesus’ command to love our enemies, they manifest a sub-Christian attitude of vengeance. And is not the Song of Songs best read as what it most simply appears to be: an erotic love poem? To spiritualize it is to miss its wholesome, earthy message. Finally, the Servant Songs of Isaiah do not really speak of Christ, but of Israel, or
perhaps of the prophet himself and his sufferings.

We also now use “study Bibles” in which the Old Testament is cross-referenced in the New Testament, but New Testament citations are absent from the Old Testament. We are told, both directly and more subtly, that it is not quite kosher to find Christ in the Old Testament, especially where the New Testament does not explicitly apply a particular passage from the Old Testament to a New Testament reality.

**Christ the Cornerstone**

The christological interpretation of the Old Testament, however, is not expendable. It is the foundation of the Christian attitude to the Bible and the New Testament’s understanding of the Old Testament. It is the normative, unitive, and uniquely biblical hermeneutic, by which the Old and New Testaments are fused into a single book with a coherent message.

Christological interpretation is normative in that some form of this species of interpretation has characterized Christian biblical interpretation since the first century, despite the modern challenge to this norm by the historical-critical method, first in the academic world, and recently even on a popular level, as the historical-critical method influences culture.

Christological interpretation is also unitive in that it binds together the Old and New Testaments—both of which are made up of diverse literary material—into a single Bible that can be published between two covers as something more than an anthology.

This biblical hermeneutic is also unique in that there is nothing else like it in all the world of literature. This is apparent even to secular literary critics, who often view the Bible in a more sober and reasonable way than the enlightened purveyors of a pure historical-critical method. For the Christian, to lose such a reading of the Old Testament is to lose much of this capacity to have his heart and his perception of the world shaped by the Word of God spoken to his people in every age.

**Two Testaments, One Bible**

The New Testament claims a continuity with the Old. The God of the people of Israel and the God who has made himself known in Christ are one and the same. Christ is understood in the context of the revelation of God to his people beginning in the Old Covenant. In 1 Cor. 15:3–5, Paul sets out the basic lines of the tradition handed on to him:

> Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything
> accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (RSV)

The phrase “in accordance with the Scriptures” occurs twice, in order to underline the assertion that all this is in fulfillment of the plan of God, his action, and his promise, as set out in the Old Testament. The same thrust appears in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, which centers around Joel 2, Psalm 11 and Psalm 110: Christ’s death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit are a fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament.

Perhaps the most important single presentation of the Old Testament as a “context of understanding” is Luke 24:44–47, in which Jesus responds to the disciples’ puzzlement over the events they’ve witnessed:

> Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything
written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their
minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on
the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to
all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

It was through the understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures that the disciples came to understand the person and
work of Christ. The quotations of the Old Testament are not simply used to back up a prior understanding—
they create understanding. Yet, while the Old Testament establishes the framework for understanding Christ,
Christ is also the interpretative key to the Old Testament. Leonhard Goppelt sees Luke 24:27 and 24:45 as, on
the one hand, a frame of reference for understanding Christ in light of the Old Testament, and on the other, an
interpretive key to the Old Testament. Paul portrays the Jews as having a veil over their eyes when they read
the Law, “but when a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Corinthians 3:16). To read the Old
Testament with understanding is to read it as fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, Christ himself was present in the life
of the people of Israel, as Paul makes clear:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through
the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same
supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the
supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1–4)

**Biblical Types & Narrative**

Paul goes on to say that what happened to the people of Israel was the genuine contemporary action of God,
but that those events are recorded in the Scripture as “warnings” (RSV) or “patterns” or “types” (tupoi) for us
on whom the end of the ages has come. The history of God’s dealings with men have reached their climax in
the age of the New Covenant. The history of the people of Israel is a pattern for God’s dealings with the
Church of this New Covenant. The Old Testament sets up a temporal horizon of understanding, a framework
of history over which God rules, and within which his revelation or purpose may be achieved.9 This
understanding is found not only in Paul, (“when the time had fully come, God sent forth his
Son...” [Galatians 4:4]), but also in other New Testament writers. One notices the recurrence in the New
Testament of such phrases as “in these last days” (Hebrews 1:1), “it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18), etc.

This much is apparent even to secular literary critics. There is broad agreement that the New Testament itself
takes a temporally based interpretative approach to the Old Testament. This approach is commonly called
“typological,” from the Greek word tupos, by which the New Testament designates people, institutions, and
events in the Old Testament as “types,” or patterns, of realities that are fully revealed in the New Covenant, as
Paul does in 1 Corinthians 10:6. (Cf. Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 3:21.)

Even where this terminology is not insisted upon, there is still an underlying notion of a temporal progression
from the Old Testament realities to their fulfillment in Christ. Speaking strictly as a literary critic, Northrop
Frye frankly states:

This typological way of reading the Bible is indicated too often and too explicitly in the New Testament for us
to be in any way in doubt that this is the “right” way of reading it—“right” in the only sense that criticism can
recognize, as the way that conforms to the intentionality of the book itself and to the conventions it assumes
and requires.10

It would seem reasonable, then, if one accepts the New Testament as authoritative, that one
would read the Old Testament in this typological framework, not only as the “right” way in the literary-critical sense, but also as the true interpretation of the history of God’s dealings with his people.

**Calvin, an Exemplar**

The reading of the Old Testament in christological perspective was the normative Christian approach up until sometime in the eighteenth century. Hans Frei has shown in his magisterial work, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, that the era of biblical interpretation preceding the rise of eighteenth-century rationalism was characterized by a reading of the whole Bible as a narrative of salvation. This narrative, since it rendered the world as it actually is, embraced the experience of any age and any reader. The reader fit his life and his experience into the biblical narrative, both by typological interpretation and by his manner of life. This narrative reading is not all there is to reading the Bible as a Christian, but the conviction that the Bible tells the true story of the human race, in which God has personally and decisively intervened, serves as a foundation for all else.

Frei’s study is important in that it takes John Calvin (1509–1564) as an exemplar of the precritical tradition. Calvin is a pivotal figure in the history of biblical interpretation, important for discerning points of agreement in the precritical approach to the Bible. He came upon the scene when the humanist renaissance in language and literature was in full flower, and, in vigorous reaction to the theological teaching of the Schools, demanded a new approach to the relationship between study of the Bible and doctrine. He was a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation, which denied scriptural warrant for the authority of the pope, the sacrament of confession, and many other doctrines. He stood for a new relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical powers, based on principles derived from biblical exegesis. Calvin is thus rightly identified with a radical change in the order of Christendom and with tumult and reform in Western theology.

Yet, as a biblical exegete, Calvin—Protestant Reformer, humanist, and standard-bearer for change—is more akin to his Roman Catholic and Lutheran opponents in outlook and presuppositions than to the historical critics who emerged later in the Protestant tradition. Calvin stands in a broad tradition that holds to the divine authority of Scripture, which, when interpreted under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reveals the historical plan of God to bring about redemption in Christ, a plan consummated in the coming of the New Jerusalem, and worked out in the life of every individual believer. This outlook is evident in his treatment of Old Testament figures that the New Testament does not explicitly cite as types...

**Finding the Voice of Christ**

This christological mentality allows Calvin to see Christ throughout the Psalms and to apply the Psalms to New Testament realities. Calvin applies this principle to one of the Psalter’s starkest imprecatory psalms in his preface to Psalm 109:

> . . . although David here complains of injuries which he sustained, yet as he was a typical character, everything that is expressed in the Psalm must properly be applied to Christ, the Head of the Church, and to all the faithful inasmuch as they are his members; so that when unjustly treated and tormented by their enemies, they may apply to God for help, to whom vengeance belongs.

Similarly, not only are the grace, beauty and virtue of Solomon, and the riches of his kingdom are described in Psalm 45, but also
At the same time, there can be no doubt, that under this figure the majesty, wealth and extent of Christ’s kingdom are described and illustrated by appropriate terms, to teach the faithful that there is no felicity greater or more desirable than to live under the reign of this king, and to be subject to his government.34

Calvin’s preface to Olivetan’s New Testament is a striking example of his christocentric attitude to the Scripture. He views a number of characters as figures of Christ, who are not explicitly so interpreted in the New Testament—Isaac, Joseph, Jacob, Solomon, Samson. The whole of the Old Testament is viewed as finding its fulfillment, directly or indirectly, in Christ:

For, this is eternal life; to know one, only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, whom he has established as the beginning, the middle and the end of our salvation. He [Christ] is Isaac, the beloved son of the Father who was offered as a sacrifice, but nevertheless did not succumb to the power of death. He is Jacob, the watchful shepherd, who has such great care for the sheep which he guards. He is the good and compassionate brother Joseph, who in his glory was not ashamed to acknowledge his brothers, however lowly and abject their condition. He is the great sacrificer and bishop Melchizedek, who has offered an eternal sacrifice once for all. He is the sovereign lawgiver Moses, writing his law on the tables of our hearts by his Spirit. He is the faithful captain and guide Joshua, to lead us to the Promised Land. He is the victorious and noble king David, bringing by his hand all rebellious power to subjection. He is the magnificent and triumphant king Solomon, governing his kingdom in peace and prosperity. He is the strong and powerful Samson, who by his death has overwhelmed all his enemies. . . . This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father. If one were to sift through the whole Law and the Prophets, he would not find a single word which would not draw and bring us to him.

Furthermore, Calvin is able to cite an allegory with approbation.

The allegory of Ambrose on this passage is not displeasing to me. Jacob, the younger brother, is blessed under the person of the elder; the garments which were borrowed from his brother breathe an odour grateful and pleasant to his father. In the same manner, we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from Him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odour, procures his favour; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place.35

Calvin’s typological reading of the Bible has been vindicated on literary grounds, as Frye demonstrates. But there is more here. The exhortation above is a manifestation of a religious attitude. The reader of the Scripture, while attending to the grammatical structure of the text, the literal meaning of the words, does not function simply as a human interpreter. As the spiritual man reads the Scripture, the Holy Spirit moves in his heart so as to render to him the pattern of his dealings with the world.36 Calvin does not simply read the Bible as a text; he hears in it a Voice.37 He is convinced that Christ is to be sought in the whole Bible, and that he who seeks, finds.

**The Implications of Christ in All the Scriptures**

These observations are not meant to demonstrate that there was a precritical hermeneutic that was wholly unified in its approach to christological interpretation. There are admittedly differences in emphasis between
Calvin’s approach and the approach that underlies the “proto-evangelium,” for example. We can, however, see the gulf that divides even Calvin from the modern historical-critical approach. That gulf separates those who take a fundamentally christological approach to the Bible, seeing it as intended by its divine Author to speak to men in every age of Christ, and those who see christological interpretation as something tacked onto the text, perhaps with impressive creativity and skill, by the New Testament authors and by later exegettes.

The implications of a christological approach to the whole Bible are broad and deep. Its significance may be sketched out in at least three areas: spirituality, culture, and ecumenism, the last albeit only briefly.

The importance of a christocentric mentality for spirituality is especially striking in relation to the Psalms. Scholarly discussion of the Psalms over the last seventy-five years has centered on theories concerning their Sitz im Leben (i.e., their original setting in the life and worship of the Hebrews). This is an important question insofar as it touches on the history of Israel and its cult and contributes to an intelligent reading of the Old Testament as history. Yet, the Psalms are prayers—that is their literary genre—and this must be taken into account in interpreting them. All historical hypotheses must be tentative, reflecting an awareness that the documents in question are not written as religious history, but as dialogues. It follows from this that a christological reading restores to the Psalms their existential significance. For the purpose of prayer, the original Sitz im Leben of the psalm is well-nigh irrelevant; one must not so much enter the mind of the original psalmist, as learn to make the psalm one’s own. Indeed, the value of the Psalms as prayers lies in their applicability to an almost infinite variety of human situations.

Furthermore, if a Christian is to sincerely pray the Psalms, he must do so as a Christian. A twentieth-century Norwegian Baptist cannot pray as a sixth-century–B.C. Israelite. Some kind of analogy is required. The land for a Christian has the same significance that it had for an Israelite: security, provision, and identity. Yet, the Christian prays Psalm 37, for example, with a clearer prospect of the reception of those gifts in the age to come, when “the meek shall inherit the earth.” This christocentric framework has enabled Christians throughout the centuries to sincerely pray even the imprecatory psalms, knowing that, while the Israelite who first prayed Psalm 137 may have applied it to the hated Babylonians, one may pray this same psalm, with full sincerity, in the light of the Sun of Righteousness, against the evil inclinations of his own flesh—an enemy just as real, and far more deadly than the might of Babylon.

**A Reading of Scripture for All Christians**

The mentality that undergirds this kind of prayer has been transmitted through Christian culture built upon a christological, narrative reading of the Bible. This mentality, while perhaps not sufficient to allow for the full expression of the traditional “spiritual interpretation,” is necessary to it. The fundamental conviction of the Christian is that God has acted in history and has come to us in Christ. One must accept the biblical story in its fullness as the story of our world, of my world, in order for spiritual interpretation to be genuine, and not simply a literary game. George Lindbeck has noted the decline of narrative Bible reading and its coincidence with the erosion of a common mind in the Church. The traditional narrative/typological/spiritual reading of Scripture is unitive. It is a myth, in the anthropological sense of the term: a story that explains the world and forms the worldview of a people, among whom it is passed on.

Now, the power of a myth is in proportion to its acceptance as a depiction of reality. Carl Amerding has pointed out that the story that the Bible tells gives its own indications that it is meant to depict actual events—to be taken seriously, accepted as a true depiction of reality, it must be seen to have some relation to actual historical events. In Amerding’s view, that they took place, and are typically related, is the claim of the Bible itself. To carry the weight of conviction, the typological, and thus the christological, reading of the Bible must be rooted in faith that the central events the Bible narrates—Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection, and
the central events of the history of Israel in their general outlines—actually took place. The tools of historical-critical method cannot be ignored, but must, rather, be employed in an even-handed way that does not blithely dismiss the extraordinary, or indeed the miraculous, and remains aware of its own limitations.

Thus, a new synthesis is demanded, one which unites modern historical-critical tools, literary alertness to the Bible’s self-interpretation, and systematic theology in a way that feeds spiritual life. As Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI] has put it:

> The time seems to have arrived for a new and thorough reflection on exegetical method. Scientific exegesis must recognize the philosophic element present in a great number of its ground rules, and it must then reconsider the results which are based on these rules. . . . What we need now are not new hypotheses on the Sitz im Leben, on possible sources, or on the subsequent process of handing down the material. What we do need is a critical look at the exegetical landscape we now have, so that we may return to the text, and distinguish between those hypotheses which are helpful and those which are not. Only under these conditions can a new and fruitful collaboration between exegesis and systematic theology begin. And only in this way will exegesis be of real help in understanding the Bible.

Such a new synthesis may yield both greater interest in the study of the Old Testament, (a field the critical issue for which, as Amerding has suggested, is, “Is anybody listening?”) and greater conviction about what C. S. Lewis described as “a myth that really happened.”

Thus, a return to christocentric interpretation means a return to the text as it understands itself; to the Bible as the primary source of dogma (as both Reformers and their predecessors held); to an exegesis built on faith; and to a reading of the Bible aimed at nourishing spiritual life.

The current climate is a far different one than that in which the sixteenth-century polemic occurred, and far more conducive to perceiving the common assumptions and approaches that both Roman Catholics and Protestants brought to their debates. The call for a postmodern hermeneutic of faith comes from quarters as diverse as the Tyndale Fellowship, the Evangelical Orthodox Church, and the Cardinal Prefect of the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In this enterprise, the dividing lines may no longer separate Roman Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox from one another, but separate those who approach the Bible with trust from those who follow “a radical hermeneutic of suspicion.” That can only be a happy prospect for the rebuilding of Christian unity and culture.

This article is excerpted from the article, “Christ in All the Scriptures,” by Dr. John Yocum, which appeared in the March/April 1998 issue of Touchstone Magazine. Used with Permission.

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**Notes:**

1. G. W. H. Lampe, “The Reasonableness of Typology” in G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe, Essays In Typology(Studies In
Living Bulwark


5. Frye, p. 80. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 16 and passim. The observations of these two authors are especially interesting and important, because they are approaching the Bible as literary critics, not as theologians. They have no prior commitment to a particular “biblical theology”—nor are they seeking to establish one. They base their conclusions on what they see in the text itself as a literary work.

6. Ibid., p. 149.

7. Ibid.


12. T. H. L. Parker sees three main streams among the various sixteenth-century views of the Old Testament. He groups the Reformers and Roman Catholics together, in opposition to both the freethinkers and Anabaptists. The second group were a small minority, but Calvin sees them as the main threat in some of his commentaries. (T. H. L. Parker, Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986, p. 44.) Yet, because of their emphasis on the investigation of the author’s intention, and the use of what we would now term “critical tools,” many see the Reformers as the forerunners of historical-, form-, and redaction-critics. (Anthony C. Thiselton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics, London: Harper/Collins, 1992, p. 158.)


14. Ibid.

15. Thiselton, p. 158.

16. Ibid. Manlio Simonetti claims that in order to understand the allegorical interpretative method among the Greeks, it is important to recognize the prestige of Homer’s works, so great that divine origins were attributed to him. Manlio Simonetti, Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church, John A. Hughes, tr., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.


19. Ibid., p. 16.

20. The reformers were also concerned to reestablish the Scripture itself as the immediate source for theology. As G. R. Evans concludes at the end of her two-volume study, The Language and Logic of The Bible: “Perhaps the essential difference between the sixteenth-century view and that of the late medieval centuries is the bringing together again of speculative theology and exegesis, which had become separated for the purposes of study into two parallel tracks in the late twelfth century. After some practice Luther could use the Bible as a source-book for theological discussion, without reference to sentences or summa. This new complexion of exegesis undoubtedly contributed to the polarization of Protestant and Roman Catholic views of the nature of the enterprise which took place in the sixteenth century. Polemical treatises from either side reflect upon the assumptions and principles of the other. . . . Yet this awareness of differences covers, as we have seen, a vast bulk of common endeavour and hides from view the preponderance of common assumptions about the nature and purpose of Scripture on which apologists for both sides were in fact proceeding.” G. R. Evans, The Language And Logic of the Bible: The Road To Reformation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
21. Not all, nor perhaps most, of the Roman opponents of the Reformers approached the debate from this angle. Peter Canisius is a notable example of one who also held that the Scripture is self-interpreting, that appeal to tradition is made only to deal with the most difficult and disputed passages, and that in that case it has primarily something of an adjudicating role. (James Broderick, Life of St. Peter Canisius, pp. 404–405.)

22. Calvin uses perspicuitas as a rhetorical term. The interpreter allows the text to become perspicuous by allowing the author's intentions to flow from it. He uses the term "effectiveness," much as Luther uses "perspicuity" (Thiselton, p. 185.).

23. Ibid., p. 156.

24. Ibid., p. 155.

25. Ibid., p. 179.


34. Commentaries, Psalm 45, preface.

35. Commentary on Genesis. 27:27.


37. Runia, p. 151.

38. “Dialogue” here is meant to reflect the prophetic element, by which God is the direct speaker in, for example, Psalm 89.


42. This raises grand issues that are well beyond the scope of this paper. Joseph Ratzinger brings out some dangers inherent in criticism that is unaware of its own prejudices, using Bultmann and Dibelius as examples. (Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in Biblical Interpretation in Crisis, cited above.) In the field of Old Testament criticism, one might point to the likely demise of the Four-Source Hypothesis as a foundation for Old Testament study, to the increasing interest in the study of the text in its final form. One thinks also of the archaeological evidence uncovered in the last sixty years that points to a large-scale invasion of Palestine around the time the Conquest of the land would have begun: the idea of any kind of conquest had previously been dismissed as the imaginative product of later generations.

43. Ratzinger, pp. 22–23.

44. Amerding, p. 31.

45. Amerding points to the importance of two elements in exegesis: the working of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter and the use of the faculty of imagination, which, of course, is deeply affected by the attitude that the interpreter brings to the text. Amerding, pp. 37–38.


47. Thiselton, p. 141.
• How to Silence the Scriptures, by Soren Kierkegaard
• Reading the Scriptures with the Early Church Fathers, by Don Schwager
• Scripture Study Course, by Don Schwager
The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12

The Scriptures Are One Book in Christ

edited by Don Schwager

Part 1: The Witness of the Early Church Fathers

The Spirit of Christ is present in the Old Testament

“[Christ's words] are not only those which he spoke when he became a man and tabernacled in the flesh; for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets… [their words] were filled with the Spirit of Christ.”

– Origen of Alexandria, Bible scholar and teacher (184-254 AD)

The hidden meaning of Christ's coming

All Scripture describes the coming of the Lord. The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New. Those who are unspiritual have always failed to see this hidden meaning. Yet even before Christ those who were spiritual could find the Words of God hidden in the words of the prophets, and so through this understanding could be set free.
The Scriptures Are Singing of Christ

“You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time... In any passage you care to choose, the Scriptures are singing of Christ, provided we have ears that can pick out the tune. The Lord opened the minds of the Apostles so that they understood the Scriptures. That he will open our minds too is our prayer.”

– Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

Christ is foreshadowed in the Old Testament

“Every part of Holy Scripture announces through words the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, reveals it through facts and establishes it through examples... For it is our Lord who during all the present age, through true and manifest foreshadowings, generates, cleanses, sanctified, chooses, separates, or redeems the Church in the Patriarchs, through Adam's slumber, Noah's flood, Melchizedek's blessing, Abraham's justification, Isaac's birth, and Jacob's bondage.”

– Hilary, bishop of Poitiers (300-368 AD)

God has said everything in his Word

“In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son.

Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.”

– John of the Cross (1542-1591 AD)

Part 2: The Unity of the Old and New Testaments

Christians recognize the Old Testament (Jewish Scriptures) and the New Testament as one book, commonly called the Bible or Sacred Scriptures. Both the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired by one and the same Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

Kallistos Ware, a biblical scholar and Orthodox bishop, states succinctly,

We believe that the Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative Witness to God’s revelation of Himself – in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. And as such they express the word of God in human language. While divinely inspired, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is a whole library of different books written at varying times by distinct persons.
Each book of the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does nothing in isolation, divine grace cooperates with human freedom. God does not abolish our individuality but enhances it. And so it is in the writing of inspired Scripture. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture. We are to value both.

Alongside this human element, however, we see always the divine element. These are not simply books written by individual human writers. We hear in Scripture not just human words, marked by a greater or lesser skill and perceptiveness, but the eternal, uncreated Word of God Himself, the divine Word of salvation.

– from *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 2008

The New and Old Testaments are intimately linked together. Over one third of the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament. Jesus stated unequivocally, “Do not think I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but fulfil them” (Matthew 5:17). The New Testament does not replace the Old – rather it unveils and brings into full light the hidden meaning and signs which foreshadow and point to God’s plan of redemption which he would accomplish through his Son, Jesus Christ.

**New hidden in the Old – Old unveiled in the New**

A very common expression, dating back to the early beginnings of the Christian church, states that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New – the two shed light on each other. The Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who came not only to redeem the people of Israel but the whole world as well.

All Scripture describes the coming of the Lord. The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New. Those who are unspiritual have always failed to see this hidden meaning. Yet even before Christ those who were spiritual could find the Words of God hidden in the words of the prophets, and so through this understanding could be set free.

– Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

There are a number of symbols and events in the Old Testament that foreshadow and point to the coming of Christ and his saving mission. When interpreted correctly they can also shed light on the significance of what Christ has done for us. For example, when the people of Israel were saved from death by passing through the waters of the parted Red Sea, the early Christians saw in this Exodus event a symbol of the “new birth” and “regeneration” through the waters of baptism that cleansed us from sin, and delivered us from death to new life in Christ, thus making us a new creation in Christ and co-heirs with Christ in the promises of a restored Paradise and New Jerusalem – the city of heavenly glory where we will dwell with God in his everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness.

Jesus, in a number of places recorded in the Gospels, refers to the Old Testament figures and signs, such as Jonah (Matthew 12:39), Solomon (Matthew 12:42), the Temple (John 2:19), the brazen serpent of Moses in the wilderness (John 3:14) that pointed to himself and to his work of redemption.

**How to read the Scriptures**

From these examples, we can hopefully see two important truths for how Christians ought to read the Scriptures. The New Testament must be read in the light of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament must be read in the light of Christ’s saving death and resurrection.
In the beginning

Another example of how the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and how the Old is unveiled in the New Testament can be seen by reading both the first chapter of the Book of Genesis and the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Genesis 1 describes the work of creation involving the Spirit of God, the Word of God which was spoken, and the eternal Father who breathed the “breath of life” into Adam, making him a “living soul” and son after God’s likeness and image.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth… And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1,3).

Then God said [the word of God], “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Genesis 1:26)… Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7).

Why did God speak in the plural (let us make man in our image) when he created humankind in his image? The Gospels reveal a Trinity of Persons perfectly united in the one Godhead – the eternal Father, the only-begotten Son (who is the eternal Word of God), and the Holy Spirit. John’s Gospel, chapter one, brings out the hidden meaning in the Genesis account of creation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:1-3).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father (John 1:14).

And John bore witness, “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and remain on him [Christ]” (John 1:32).

The New Testament revelation sheds light on God’s work of creation and on how God determined to restore and fulfill his plan after Adam’s disobedience and the downfall of the human race. God sent his only-begotten Son who takes on human flesh for our salvation. The Lord Jesus is both fully God – the eternal Word of God, and fully man – conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary who bore him (Luke 1:26-35), and anointed by the same Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22) to carry out the eternal Father’s plan of redemption and restoration through his death and resurrection.

Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ

From the beginning of the early church to the present, Christians have understand the importance of personally encountering the Risen Lord Jesus in and through the living and active Word of God in the Scriptures.

Jerome (347-420 AD), an early church Bible scholar who translated the entire Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into the common language of his day (Latin), said that “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”
you into his home, saying to you, “Enter into the joy of your Master.”

**In the Bible it is God who speaks to us**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a German Lutheran pastor and theologian, who wrote extensively and preached widely from the Scriptures on the centrality of the cross of Christ and on ethical demands of the Gospel message, paid the ultimate price with his life when he was imprisoned and executed by the Nazi regime in 1945. His writings and the witness of his life and martyrdom continue to have significant influence on generations of Christians – Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox – throughout the Christian world. In a letter he wrote in 1936 to Dr. Rudiger Schleicher, his brother-in-law and close friend, he explains his approach to the reading of the Bible:

One cannot simply read the Bible the way one reads other books… That is because in the Bible it is God who speaks to us…If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where he will be, then that will truly be a place that at first is not agreeable to me at all, that does not fit so well with me. That place is the cross of Christ. And whoever will find God there must draw near to the cross in the manner that the Sermon on the Mount requires. That does not correspond to our nature at all; it is, in fact, completely contrary to it. But this is the message of the Bible, not only the New Testament but also the Old (Isaiah 53!). In any case, Jesus and Paul understand it in this way – that the cross of Jesus fulfils the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The entire Bible, then, is the Word in which God allows himself to be found by us. Not a place that is agreeable to us or makes sense to us a priori, but instead a place that is strange to us and contrary to our nature. Yet, the very place in which God has decided to meet us.

(translated from the German by David McI. Gracie, *Meditating On the Word*)

**Encountering the face of Christ**

In our own present day many Christians are witnessing a renewed interest and rediscovery of the great treasure and power of God’s Word in the Scriptures. Benedict XVI [Joseph Ratzinger], who has devoted his life to the study of the Scriptures and to the biblical teaching of the early church fathers, has written extensively on the importance of encountering the 'face of Christ' in the profound and intimate unity of the Scriptures:

Christian tradition has often placed the Divine Word made flesh on a parallel with the same word made book. This is what emerges already in the creed when one professes that the Son of God "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man", but also a profession of faith in the same "Holy Spirit, who spoke through the Prophets"... as Saint Ambrose affirms (*In Lucam VI, 33*) – and clearly declares: "For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men" (*Dei Verbum* 13)...

In this rediscovered harmony, the face of Christ will shine in its fullness and will help us to discover another unity, that profound and intimate unity of Sacred Scriptures... "At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ thus retrospectively sheds his light on the entire development of salvation history and reveals its coherence, meaning, and direction.
Reading the Scriptures spiritually

In conclusion, it is important that when we read and study the Old and New Testament passages of the Bible, we must be very attentive to the unity and the content of the whole Scripture. It is also important that we learn to discern the full sense of Scripture both in its literal and spiritual senses together. Hence, the importance of learning how to both read Scripture prayerfully and interpret it spiritually – through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

[Don Schwager is a member of The Servants of the Word and author of the Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation website.]

See related articles:

- The Unity of the Scriptures, An introduction by Don Schwager
- Christ In All the Scriptures, by Dr. John Yocum
- How to Read the Bible, by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware
- The Authority of Scripture, by Steve Clark
- The Scriptures Are One Book in Christ, quotes from early church fathers
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An Ecumenical Pentecost:
The Future of Charismatic Renewal after the Jubilee
by Fady Noun

A “current of grace” for the whole church
The Golden Jubilee of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church just held in Rome (31 May-4 June 2017) has been described by many as “an ecumenical Pentecost,” with Pope Francis being the foremost to insist on the “ecumenical character” of this renewal from its inception.

Historically, the 1960s saw an extraordinary convergence of two currents of grace that led to the charismatic renewal of the Catholic Church – an extraordinary spiritual heritage that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, with a depth in the church that is both Catholic and Evangelical. There is Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903), who on the advice of a nun, Elena Guerra, consecrated the 20th century to the Holy Spirit. And there is also a small Protestant evangelical congregation established in Topeka, Kansas USA.

Sister Elena Guerra is the founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Holy Spirit in Luca, Italy. At the age of 50, she wrote to Pope Leo XIII under special inspiration and, encouraged by her spiritual director, urged Pope Leo to ardently call on the Holy Spirit for the renewal of the Catholic Church. Elena Guerra’s correspondence with the Pope also resulted in a religious ceremony led by Leo XIII on 1 January 1901, the first day of the first year of the 20th century, in which he invoked the Holy Spirit and in the name of the whole church sang the hymn Veni Creator Spiritus (Come Creator Spirit).

On that same day, another key event took place at about 11 pm, thousands of miles away in the town of
Topeka, Kansas USA. The Reverend Charles Fox Parham had set up the Bethel Bible College and in it a chain of uninterrupted prayer had been going on to invoke the Holy Spirit. And a student asked Rev Parham to lay his hands on her and pray. She was then baptised into the Holy Spirit and began to pray in tongues. In the days that followed Rev Parham and others had the same experience. This event is generally considered the starting point of Pentecostalism in the Protestant churches.

Christ, in order to renew his church, he who had made Peter a fisherman of men, threw his nets among humble black people and white people in a nation that was to become the world’s super power. He did so far from the established churches of a sleepy Reformation – churches that ended up persecuting the emerging “Pentecostalism” and forced it to become a tradition on its own. Such is the story of this historical and mystical link that binds the Catholic Church to the Pentecostal movement, a link confirmed by subsequent developments.

It is worth noting that Elena Guerra was the first woman to be beatified by Pope John XXIII, the pope who also summoned the Second Vatican Council and asked the church to pray to the Holy Spirit to renew his wonders “as in a new Pentecost.” It is thanks to the faithfulness of the Pentecostal churches through many persecutions that the buds of a new spring came to flower in American Catholic academic circles at the University of Pittsburgh in 1967, two years after the Vatican Council ended. From there, a spiritual renewal spread like wildfire throughout the world, to the point that the “members” of prayer groups and communities claiming to be part of the Charismatic Renewal now numbered 150 million.

It is the very fact that those Catholics who were baptised in the Holy Spirit refused to leave the Catholic Church, and that the Catholic Church took an inclusive approach to this renewal, which made possible the Charismatic Renewal as we know it.

In welcoming the “charismatics” in Rome at Pentecost in 1975, Pope Paul VI said that in view of its fruits, “How could one not believe that this renewal is an opportunity for the whole church?” Thus Paul VI issued a warning to bishops not to reject the renewal, since bishops in the early days had mistrusted it. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and now Francis have confirmed this prudent and courageous judgement of Paul VI.

With the Golden Jubilee just held in Rome, Francis completed the task and officially accredited the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church as “a current of grace” for the whole church and the experience of baptism in the Spirit as a rule in the life of every Christian.

Clarification

During a symposium held at the Pontifical Urbaniana University during the Jubilee in Rome, four significant authors and theologians of the charismatic renewal – Raniero Cantalamessa, Ralph Martin, Peter Hocken and Vinson Synan – made some informative statements that developed what Pope Francis had said.

In his warm voice, Fr. Cantalamessa, the Preacher of the Papal Household, said that the charismatic renewal is, since Vatican II, “the most remarkable sign of the awakening of the Catholic Church to the action of the Holy Spirit and to its charisms.” He also spoke about the contribution of the charismatic renewal to the renewal of theology in the Western Catholic Church and in the Protestant churches.

Fr. Cantalamessa, quoting St. Augustine – and Nietzsche as a counterpoint – as well as Protestant theologian Karl Barth and Saint Basil of Caesarea, spoke of a “theology of the third article” of the Creed (I believe in the Holy Spirit) – a theology that has renewed the spirituality of the Western church by “restoring to the doctrine of salvation its positive content, namely the constant and inward presence (indwelling) of the Holy Spirit and the new life in Christ” in contrast to the negative, repressive and guilty content.
This is why, Fr. Cantalamessa insisted, the “charismatic renewal” must not be reduced to a pious devotion or belonging to a group or movement, but must be understood as “personal openness to the Holy Spirit” or as a “current of grace flowing in different forms” throughout the church.

Fr Peter Hocken and Vinson Synan both insisted on the “radical equality” of all those who receive the baptism in the Spirit. Fr. Hocken also spoke of a “charismatic ecumenism” that brings together all those who have experienced baptism in the Spirit, as opposed to the theological ecumenism in the institutional church.

For his part, Ralph Martin shed new light on the sacrament of confirmation, considering that the experience of the inward presence (infilling) of the Spirit can be regularly renewed, that it is not “given once and for all times.” For him, there will be no “new evangelisation” without “a new Pentecost.”

What is happening in various forms in the Catholic Church is good. In it, the “baptism in the Spirit” is spread by a thousand ways through the body of the institutional church, well beyond the visible boundaries of charismatic groups, communities or fraternities with their more permanent or less permanent structures.

The future of charismatic renewal, a prophetic breath

What is the future of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church? Speaking on 1st June in St John Lateran Basilica on behalf of Christian Renewal communities, Bruce Yocum, who was there at the beginning of the Renewal among the thousands of students at the University of Michigan, began by telling the crowded basilica that the Psalms are entrusted with “the task of sacred memory”, that of remembrance and the “repetition of all the wonders of God” from “generation to generation.” Afterwards, he thanked Patti Mansfield Gallagher for the fervour and fidelity with which she described in her book As by a new Pentecost the famous “weekend in Duquesne” in 1967, when the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church was born.

Witness to the sudden process with which charismatic renewal went beyond the geographical and ecclesial (denominational) boundaries towards a basic ecumenism, Bruce Yocum also gave thanks for “the hundreds of currents” (neocatechumenals, focolarini, Sant’Egidio, Communion and Liberation, Cursillo, etc.] that the Holy Spirit brought forth within the Catholic Church in the 20th century, along with the charismatic renewal. Looking into the future, Bruce suggested that this renewal appears to be the early stages of an unprecedented evangelisation in the context of the world’s deep spiritual darkness.

Ralph Martin and then Bruce Yocum had announced this ambiguous “time” on Pentecost Monday in 1975 at the height of Pope Paul VI’s pontificate. That year, he welcomed the “expanding” charismatic renewal to the Vatican, including some 10,000 of its members – a multiform but still united current of grace that had come to Rome. On that Pentecost Monday, the Pope had celebrated a special Mass for the “Renewal.” After he had left the altar, there was a problem with the other microphones during the time for prophetic utterance, and only one was working, the one at the high altar, that had been used by the pontiff.

Moved by a sense of prophetic urgency, first Ralph Martin and then Bruce Yocum took to that microphone to speak the prophetic words in St Peter’s. “Because I love you,” said Ralph Martin’s prophecy, “I want to show you what I am doing in the world today. I want to prepare you for what is to come. Days of darkness are coming on the world, days of tribulation….Buildings that are now standing will not be standing….A time of darkness is coming on the world, but a time of glory is coming for my church….I will prepare you for a time of evangelism that the world has never seen….And when you have nothing but me, you will have everything….Be ready.”

The year 1975 was already at some distance from the prayer with which John XXIII opened the Council (1962), the first gust of wind into the sails of Peter’s boat moving it away from the rocks of the Sea of Tiberias.
and making it regain the deep waters where a new miraculous catch was awaiting. Pope John XXIII, who had called the Second Vatican Council had prayed, “Renew your wonders, as by a new Pentecost,” not knowing what the future of the Catholic Church would be like. But we know a bit better today. The oil of renewal is conquering the Catholic world, in parallel with the devastation of secularism that is gradually emptying the churches of Europe and causing a new, massive exodus of Christians from the East that was Christ’s birthplace.

**An Orient emptied of its Christians**
The echo of the prophecies had not yet stopped resonating amongst the marble and colonnades of St Peter’s when some buildings began to crumble in Lebanon. Without going too far into the analysis of the pros and cons of what happened, it is clear that the war that broke out in Lebanon on 13 April 1975 was the turning point in a spiral of violence that during the next 40 years would empty the Middle East of much of its Christian population – something that is still ongoing.

Along with other religious minorities, Christians were among the first victims of the mortal rivalry that broke out in the 1970s and 1980s between two Islams: the militant Islam of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and a Salafist revival that aimed at conquering the world – a rivalry that has its effects, from mosques in Europe to the Nineveh plain in Iraq.

Speaking privately about the “darkness” announced in 1975, Bruce Yocum answered with surprising depth. For him, the word darkness is to be understood above all in a spiritual sense, and the darkness that has appeared, he said, is not comparable with the one that is yet to come. Author of a reference work on the conditions and the exercise of the charism of prophecy in charismatic renewal, Bruce Yocum said in essence: “Listening to Ralph Martin [in St. Peter’s], the faithful were astonished. We looked at each other, and then looked around us, thinking first of all about Saint Peter’s. The war in Lebanon broke out soon after. The twin towers came later (2001).”

“In my view, the prophecy of 1975 has not yet been fully realised. I think the difficult times we talk about are more of a spiritual nature. In fact, in the draft of a book I’m writing, I make a clear distinction between prophecy and prediction. This is a general principle. Prophecy does not tell you what’s going to happen. It points to it; it indicates a direction. Only when it is fulfilled can we say: Ah, that’s what it was all about! The best examples are the Old Testament prophecies. The most important prophecies of the time pointed to Christ and the New Covenant. But no one could have predicted the Incarnation.”

What matters in these prophecies, Bruce Yocum said, is that the foretold “darkness” is also associated with a time of “unprecedented evangelisation”. Lebanon’s experience is prophetic in this sense, because the charismatic renewal and its various outreaches in Lebanon and the Arab world have flourished even in times of war. “Of course, those were dark times, everything was hard, but at the bottom of all this,” he added, “something very positive happened at the spiritual level.”

**An appeal to the faithful**
In conclusion, what can we say? The future of the charismatic renewal is the same as that of the whole church and the world. For a believer, the celebrations in the Circus Maximus could simply be a “Christian Woodstock.” But the future of humanity is at stake as well, namely the “final battle” of the Lord against “the spirit of darkness in action in the world.” To win this battle, unity is indispensable, as the network of communities that came to Rome to the jubilee seem to have understood.

Bruce Yocum’s final advice is simple: keep an open mind and stay true to your calling. Do not be surprised at the abundance of movements and say that we are only part of a larger whole. Finally, be open to the charisms and live your life in the Holy Spirit, always remembering that the Lord’s faithfulness is “forever and forever” and that “it is renewed every morning.”
Fady Noun is a long-time member of the People of God community in Beirut, Lebanon and a contributor to the main French-speaking newspaper in Lebanon, “L’Orient le Jour“.

Article source: Fady Noun (author) and Sword of the Spirit
I will pour out my Spirit on all people

A Report on the Events at the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

by Bernard Stock

The 50th Anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was celebrated in Rome at the Feast of Pentecost, 4th of June [2017]. The event attracted tens of thousands of members of the renewal, and many came early for days of prayer events, talks and seminars.

The Sword of the Spirit was well represented at the Jubilee, with members from more than 30 communities and all regions. On the evening of the 31st of May, some 200 people from Sword of the Spirit communities from various parts of the world gathered for an evening of prayer and fellowship.

The evening began with a delightful time of mingling with brothers and sisters from all over the world, greeting old friends and making new acquaintances. This was followed by an hour of worship and listening to the Lord. In spite of the travel weariness of many the prayer time was lively and fervent. Jean Barbara spoke to us, encouraging all to engage what we have been hearing from the Lord most strongly in the past few years – unity and mission.

A time of restoration and outpouring of the Spirit
During the prayer meeting there were several strong words of prophecy. Here are two of them:

“I’m coming like a dove but I’m coming like a lion as well. I’m coming to take my territory back – everything that was stolen by the enemy.” And I sensed that there was something eager in the Lord’s voice. It was like a roar. Territory in the life of our communities, as well our personal life – he wants to take back every piece of land that the enemy has taken over, and the
loss of it has robbed us of our joy and peace, bringing depression, loss, sadness. God wants to restore. And this is the invitation: to cry out to him and not settle on this piece of land that is remaining but eagerly cry out to him for help and for restoration, for him to rule and to be enthroned. The Lion of Judah is eager and ready.

For some years I’ve had a growing sense of encouragement, comfort, hope and joy when I see what God is doing for and through young people in our midst. The Lord is being faithful to his promises and is also answering our prayers in raising up a generation of believers who are deeply committed to proclaiming the kingdom of God. His spirit is being poured out powerfully on them.

These verses come to mind: Acts 2:17-18: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions…”

But I think God has an equally strong word for older and old people: “…your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

**Coming together of three major networks of communities**

The following day there was an informal meeting of some leaders of the three major networks of communities which have grown from the charismatic renewal: the Catholic Fraternity, the European Network of Communities (the ENC), an ecumenical network and the Sword of the Spirit.

I was privileged to attend this and was encouraged to hear the brothers from the other two networks expressing their gratitude for the input they had received from the Sword of the Spirit in their beginning years.

Leaders from these three networks had prepared together and then led a meeting for members of the communities which have grown from the charismatic renewal. It took place Thursday afternoon, June 1st, in the Lateran Basilica, the pope’s parish church. About 2,000 people attended.

**Prayer vigil and refocus on ecumenical roots of the renewal**

During Friday and Saturday mornings, several meetings and workshops were offered. The highlight of the events that weekend was an open-air vigil in the Circus Maximus on Saturday evening, with around 30,000 people attending. It started at 1pm with praise and worship, exhortations and talks, with a general celebrative tone. Around 6pm Pope Francis joined the event and gave a strong and engaging address, especially emphasizing his desire for the charismatic renewal to return to its ecumenical roots.

Participating in the jubilee in Rome was encouraging and upbuilding – seeing how the work of the Holy Spirit has grown over fifty years, and especially for me as a member of a community, seeing how many blessings have sprung from the call God has given us to build charismatic and ecumenical community all over the world. May we all – including those who couldn’t be there – experience the grace of a renewal of our first love and commitment to follow the Lord.

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Photos by Maria Paula Arce
50 Years of Charismatic Community

Reflections on a Remarkable Work of God

by Bruce Yocum

Intro: The 50th Anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was celebrated in Rome at the Feast of Pentecost, 4th of June [2017]. The event attracted tens of thousands of members of the renewal, and many came early for days of prayer events, talks and seminars.

Three streams of the charismatic renewal communities, the Catholic Fraternity, the European Network of Communities (the ENC) an ecumenical network, and the Sword of the Spirit held a common event for the Golden Jubilee which took place on Thursday afternoon, June 1st, in the Lateran Basilica, the pope’s parish church. About 2,000 people attended. Bruce Yocum was chosen by the three groups to give the main address. The follow is an adapted transcription of Bruce's presentation.

Looking Back – Looking Around – and Looking Ahead

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name for ever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and praise your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
It was a great blessing to be gathered in Rome to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the charismatic renewal. And we have to begin by thanking Pope Francis for inviting us here and giving us the privilege of celebrating both the Vigil of Pentecost and the solemnity of Pentecost together with him.

We thank Michelle Moran and the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS), and Gilberto Barbosa and the Catholic Fraternity for organizing this event for us.

We have had the remarkable blessing of four successive Popes who have been great supporters of this renewal – even to the point of Pope Francis recommending the Life in the Spirit Seminars to the whole Church.

Fifty years is a good moment to take stock of where we are. It is long enough that we have a genuine history to look back on, a history of great acts of God, but the renewal is young enough that we can look ahead to even greater things that God will do.

So I invite us to look back, to look around and to look ahead.

Looking Back: Remembering the Works of God

We are here to acknowledge and to give thanks for the remarkable things God has done in our midst over the past fifty years.

As the liturgy tells us - or rather, as the Church proclaims in the liturgy of the Eucharist:

   It is right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, Holy Father, almighty and eternal God, Through Christ our Lord. (Preface of Sundays in Ordinary Time, 1)

We are instructed in the Psalms to

   Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to
him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works! (Psalm 105/104:1-2)

Remember the wonderful works that he has done, (Psalm 105/104:5)

To proclaim the great deeds of God, to tell of His saving acts is to worship Him. We can consider our days here in Rome, as we remember and recount what God has done in this outpouring of His Holy Spirit, as one great act of worship.

But there is more. We have a duty to proclaim these great deeds of God to our children and our children’s children.

We will not hide from their children, but will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders which he has wrought.... that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, (Psalm 78/77:4, 6-7)

We have a duty to pass on to coming generations our testimony to what God has done among us.

Proclaiming the great works of God is an incitement to faith for all who hear of them.

Here let me publicly thank Patti Mansfield Gallagher for the remarkable gift she has given to us and to future generations in her new edition of As By a New Pentecost. It is a superb testimony to what God did to bring into being this work of grace, and an excellent means for passing on to the next generation the story of what God has done for us. – And I hope that it is soon translated into many languages.

Patti has captured the extraordinary ecumenical dimension of this renewal, detailing the prayer of a Pope, answered within hours by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on a small group of Protestants Bible school student in Kansas, USA.

We here today are heirs of the Pentecostal movement. Let us not forget that.

But we have not only to remember, but to remind ourselves again and again of what God has done for us so that we do not turn away from or lose the great gift He has so generously given. Forgetting led the Israelites to sin:

But they soon forgot His works... (Psalm 106/105:13)
They forgot God their Savior who had done such great things in Egypt... (Psalm 106/105:21)

So let us take this as an opportunity also to ask the Lord to keep alive in our minds, hearts and spirits gratitude for the great gift of this unexpected and remarkable outpouring of His Holy Spirit.
Looking Around: Getting Perspective on God's work

The early exhilaration
I hesitate to confess it, but I am so old that I was around at the beginning of charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church. It was an extraordinary, exhilarating time. When I attended my first charismatic prayer meeting on March 8 1968, in the apartment of Steve Clark, Ralph Martin, Jim Cavnar and Jerry Rauch (who were all at that time working for St. Mary's parish at the University of Michigan) there were perhaps a dozen people attending. By the end of February - three weeks later - there were 90! By May there were 300 or more attending every Thursday night. By 1969, only two years after the earliest Catholic charismatic prayer groups began, the Bishops of the United States issued a statement in support of the movement. This was a sign and a wonder: bishops never do anything so quickly!

The renewal was spreading worldwide with a rapidity that was head-turning. Within the first few years the renewal had become a far-flung international phenomenon, with rapidly growing centers in Europe, Latin America, Asia, the South Pacific and Africa. New Covenant magazine was being mailed throughout the world. The national conferences in the United States had become so large there were being held in the football stadium at the University of Notre Dame.

This was wildfire!
Not only was the renewal crossing national boundaries, it was crossing ecumenical boundaries, creating a grass roots ecumenical movement. Under the masterful leadership of Dr. Kevin Ranaghan, a very broad-based ecumenical committee prepared and led an ecumenical conference of over 50,000 in Kansas City, Misourie in 1977.

Building a Fire
So what we saw in those years was wildfire.

But God had been at work for years gathering sticks for this fire, and Patti also tells a part of that story, showing the importance, for example, of the Cursillo movement in the preparation for what God would do in Charismatic Renewal.
Getting Perspective

Back in those years I often went camping in the springtime in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, where melting late winter snow and spring showers can turn the many steeply tumbling mountain rivers into raging torrents. The current was often so swift and strong that if one attempted to cross, even where the water was only waist deep, one could be swept away downstream. That was often for me an image of what had happened in the renewal. I, and many millions of others, had been caught up in the powerful current of this new work of God and were swept along in it. The current was so strong that we were engulfed by it, our lives being swirled around by it, all of our attention absorbed by it.

In those early days the current of charismatic renewal and covenant community had such a strong hold upon my life that I thought that it was what God was doing in the Church.

These racing rivers are landscape-changing - pushing around boulders and breaking down banks, transforming the landscape.

When a mountain river gets a good ways down the mountain it becomes deeper, broader, even more powerful but less violent. You can get your head up and look around. After the charismatic renewal had become an accepted and ubiquitous aspect of the life of the church I began to notice that it was not the only river on the mountain! There were in fact, and literally (not an exaggeration) hundreds of these powerful currents: Neocatechumenate, the Focolare, the St. Egidio movement, Communion and Liberation, Cursillo and many, many more. They are all new, all products of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church in the 20th century.

We rightly appreciate the great work of God that is the charismatic renewal, and for us in particular charismatic community. But When we lift up our heads out of the roaring, rushing waters of the action of God that has formed us and carried us, we see that we are one of many powerful currents rushing along, many other new forms of life in the church which began contemporaneously with us and are both like us and quite different from us.

I had the great privilege of attending “Together for Europe” Stuttgart 2007, a gathering of leaders of more than 250 new communities and movements just from Europe, all beginning within the last 50 years.

**Great variety and diversity of charismatic communities**

Even within this great stream of charismatic communities there is a great variety and a great diversity.

As all these rivers of God’s life and action go crashing and racing along they are transforming the landscape of the church.

We must be grateful to God for what he done for us in charismatic renewal and in community, and we must faithfully live out the call He has given to us so that it can bear the fruit in the life of the Church that God intends. At the same time we have to be aware, as the Lord said through prophecy to us in our communities in the Sword of the Spirit many years ago, we are Aa part and not the whole.”

We need that perspective so that we can look ahead with clarity of vision to see where God is leading us.
Looking Ahead

What does the future hold? I don’t know much, but - Days of trial, days of darkness, certainly.

But also as that same prophetic word said, a time of glory for the Church

A time of darkness is coming on the world, but a time of glory is coming for my church, a time of glory is coming for my people. I will pour out on you all the gifts of my Spirit. I will prepare you for spiritual combat; I will prepare you for a time of evangelism that the world has never seen.

But in what form that will take place, and what our role will be.....

God will continue to pour out His Spirit

In 2013 ICCRS sponsored a “prophetic consultation” in the Holy Land, and on one of those days we prayed together in what some believe to be the “upper room” where the disciples were gathered on the day of Pentecost. We had an excellent time of prayer, and during that prayer time we received a prophetic word, a promise from the Lord that He was not finished pouring out the Holy Spirit in this renewal. It was very much like a prophetic word we received many years ago:

The Lord says, “when I poured out my Holy Spirit upon you how did I pour it upon you? Did I pour it upon you in small measure? No, I poured it upon you as the beginning of a river which I intend to widen and to deepen and to grow in its strength, its current, its volume. I am zealous for my people's sake. I am zealous to save them and to change them, to restore them. And I will pour out my Holy Spirit upon you more and more until it is accomplished.”

Three simple points

1. Throughout the history of the Church, from the very beginning, God has used renewal communities as a source of strength and fresh vision. If you ask "Why has God suddenly raised up so many new communities in the Church?" the answer surely is that He is about a work of renewal.

2. Stay clear on and faithful to your call. God always takes the initiative to bring renewal and new life. He gives the call - but we must respond to the call, we must heed and answer it, the call that He has given to us. 
But why so many new forms of community, so many distinct callings?

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The members of the body. Not all are the eyes or the hands or the feet.

3. **Live your call charismatically, with expectant faith**, looking for God's word, God's intervention, God's miraculous power.

**Conclusion**

God has given us the great privilege of seeing His powerful action

- In our individual lives
- In our communities
- In the Church

The Church has encouraged and supported us in a remarkable way.

Let us celebrate these blessings, remember them and look with great expectation to the future.

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Bruce Yocum is a former President of Christ the King Association and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit.
Ecumenical Call and Mission of the Charismatic Renewal

Address by Pope Francis

During the Vigil of Pentecost and ecumenical prayer on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal on June 3rd 2017, Pope Francis was joined by the leaders of Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the representatives of the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches and other religious confessions. The encounter was preceded by hymns, readings and testimonies, and introduced by meditations by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the Papal Household, and Pastor Giovanni Traettino of the evangelical Church of the Reconciliation.

Pope Francis’s outreach to Pentecostals and evangelicals has been marked his insistence that the “current of grace” represented by the renewal is fruit of the Holy Spirit calling Christian Churches into unity, not through proselytism or purely intellectual dialogue but in revealing their oneness in diversity.

The following is the text of the presentation which Pope Francis delivered on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee:

Called Together in Unity to Proclaim "Jesus is Lord"

Brothers and sisters, thank you for your witness today, here: thank you! It is good for all of us, it is good for me, for all!

In the first chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles we read that:

“And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but
you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1: 4-5).

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2: 1-4).

Today we are here, as in an open-air Cenacle, because we are not afraid: in the open air, and also with a heart open to the promise of the Father. We are gathered, “all believers”, all those who profess that Jesus is the Lord. Many have come from different parts of the world and the Holy Spirit has gathered us to establish bonds of fraternal friendship that encourage us on the path to unity, unity for the mission: not to be static, no! for the mission, to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord – Jesús es el Señor – to announce together the love of the Father for all His children! To announce the Good News to all peoples! To demonstrate that peace is possible.

The Holy Spirit has gathered us to establish bonds of fraternal friendship that encourage us on the path to unity – for the mission to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord – and to announce the Good News to all!

It is not so easy to demonstrate to this, today’s world, that peace is possible, but in the name of Jesus we can show with our witness that peace is possible! But it is possible only if we are at peace among ourselves. If we accentuate our differences, we are at war with each other and we cannot proclaim peace. Peace is possible starting from our confession that Jesus is the Lord and from our evangelization on this road. It is possible. While showing that we have differences – but this is obvious, we have differences – but that we wish to be a reconciled diversity. Here, we must not forget this phrase, but say it to everyone: reconciled diversity. And this phrase is not mine, it is not mine. It is from a Lutheran brother. Reconciled diversity.

And now we are here, and there are many of us! We managed to pray together, to ask the coming of the Holy Spirit upon each one of us to go out into the streets of the city and of the world, to proclaim the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The book of the Acts affirms that we are “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2: 9-11). Speaking in the same language, listening, understanding… There are differences, but the Spirit enables us to understand the message of the resurrection of Jesus in our own language.

Catholic Charismatic Renewal is an ecumenical work born of the Holy Spirit

We are gathered here, believers from 120 countries in the world, to celebrate the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, that took the initiative fifty years ago and gave rise to … an institution? No. An organization? No. To a current of grace, to the current of grace of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A work that was born … Catholic? No. It was born ecumenical! It was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit that creates unity and the same Holy Spirit that gave the inspiration for it to be thus! It is important to read the
works of Cardinal Suenens on this: it is very important!

The coming of the Holy Spirit transforms men wrapped up in fear into courageous witnesses of Jesus. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, full of the strength of the Holy Spirit proclaims: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus Whom you crucified” (Acts 2: 36). And this is the profession of faith of every Christian. God constituted as Lord and Christ that Jesus Whom you have or has been crucified. Do you agree on this profession of faith? [Answer: “yes”]. It is ours, everyone’s, all of us, the same!

The Word continues, saying, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2: 44-47). The community was growing, and it was the Spirit that inspired it. I like very much to think of Philip, when the Angel said to him, “Go on the road to Gaza and find the proselyte, minister of economy of the Queen of Ethiopia, Candace. He was a proselyte and was reading Isaiah. And Philip explained the Word to him, proclaimed Jesus, and the man converted. And at a certain point, he said, “But here there is water: I want to be baptized”. It was the Spirit that drove Philip to go there, and from the beginning it was that the Spirit that drove all believers to proclaim the Lord.

“We celebrate the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the Church – the current of grace of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A work that was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit that creates unity.”

– Pope Francis, vigil of Pentecost 2017

Today we have chosen to gather here, in this place – as Pastor Traettino said – because here during the persecutions, Christians were martyred for the enjoyment of those who were watching. Today there are more martyrs than yesteryear! Today there are more martyrs, Christians.


Today there are more martyrs than in the early times. And this is the ecumenism of blood: we are united by the witness of our martyrs of today. In several parts of the world Christian blood is being shed!

Today the unity of Christians, united by the work of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and in action for the weakest, is more urgent than ever. Walk together, work together. Love each other. Love each other. And together seek to explain the differences, agree, but on the path! If we stay still, without walking, we will never, ever agree. This is how it is, because the Holy Spirit wants us to be on the move.

Fifty years of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A current of grace of the Spirit! And why a current of grace? Because it has neither a founder, nor statutes, nor organs of governance. Clearly in this current multiple expressions have been born that are certainly human works inspired by the Spirit, with various charisms, and all in the service of the Church. But this current cannot be dammed, nor can the Holy Spirit be enclosed in a cage!
Fifty years have passed. When we reach this age, perhaps our strengths begin to decline. It is the halfway point in life – in my homeland we call it “el cincuentazo” – wrinkles become deeper – unless you make yourself up, but the wrinkles are there – the grey hairs increase in number and we begin to forget certain things…

**Go Forward with greater strength and trust in the action of the Holy Spirit**

Fifty years is a good moment in life to stop and reflect. It is the moment for reflection: halfway through life. And I would say to you: it is the moment to go ahead with greater strength, leaving behind the dust of time that we have allowed to accumulate, being thankful for what we have received and facing the new with trust in the action of the Holy Spirit!

Pentecost enabled the birth of the Church. The Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father announced by Jesus Christ, it is He Who makes the Church: the Bride of the Apocalypse, a single bride! As Pastor Traettino said: the Lord has one bride!

The most precious gift that we have all received is baptism. And now the Spirit leads us on the path of conversion that all the Christian world follows, and which is another reason why Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a special place for following the way towards unity!

This current of grace is for all the Church, not just for some, and no-one among us is the “master” and all the others servants. No. We are all servants of this current of grace.

Together with this experience, you continually remind the Church of the power of prayer and praise. Praise which is the prayer of acknowledgment and thanksgiving for the gratuitous love of God. It may be that not everyone likes this form of prayer, but it is certainly fully integrated in the biblical tradition. The Psalms, for example: David who danced before the Ark of the Covenant, full of jubilation … and please, let us not fall into the trap of the attitude of Christians with the “Michal complex”, named after she who was ashamed of how David praised God [dancing before the Ark].

Jubilation, cheer, joy, fruit of the same action of the Holy Spirit! Either the Christian experiences joy in his or her heart, or there is something wrong. The joy of the announcement of the Good News of the Gospel!

Jesus in the Synagogue of Nazareth reads the passage of Isaiah. He reads. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (cf. Lk 4:18-19; Is 61: 1-2). The good news: do not forget this. The good, the joyful news: the Christian proclamation is always joyful.

The third document of Malines, “Charismatic Renewal and Service to Man”, written by Cardinal Suenens and Dom Helder Camara, is clear: charismatic renewal and also service to man.

*Baptism in the Holy Spirit, praise, service to man.* The three things are indissolubly joined. I can praise profoundly, but if I do not help those most in need, it is not enough. “There was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4: 34), said the Book of the Acts.

We will not be judged for our praise but for how much we have done for Jesus. But Lord, when did we do this
for You? “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers” (cf. Mt. 25: 39-40).

Dear sisters and dear brothers, I wish you a time of reflection, of remembrance of your origins; a time to leave behind all the things added by the self and transform them into listening and joyful welcome of the action of the Holy Spirit, which breathes where and how He wishes!

I thank the Catholic Fraternity and the ICCRS for organizing this Golden Jubilee, for this Vigil. And I thank each one of the volunteers who have made this possible, many of whom are here. I wanted to greet the members of staff of the office when I arrived, because I know they have worked hard! And without payment! They have worked a lot. The majority are young people from various continents. May the Lord bless you.

I am thankful in particular for the fact that the request I made to you two years ago to give the Charismatic Renewal worldwide a single international service based here has started to take shape in the Constitutive Acts of this new single service. It is the first step; others will follow, but soon unity, the work of the Holy Spirit, will be a reality. “Behold, I am making all things new”, says the Lord (Revelation 21: 5).

Thank you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, for what you have given the Church in these fifty years! The Church counts on you, on your fidelity to the Spirit, on your willingness to serve and your witness of lives transformed by the Holy Spirit!

Share with all in the Church the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, praise the Lord ceaselessly, walk together with Christians of different Churches and Christian communities in prayer and in action for those most in need. Serve the poorest and the sick, this is what the Church and the Pope expect of you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but from all of you: all, all of you who have entered in this current of grace! Thank you.

Official source of text by Pope Francis by Vatican Press: https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/06/03/170603g.html

Top image credit:
The Ecumenical Vocation of Charismatic Renewal

by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

The following address was given during the Pentecost Vigil and Ecumenical Prayer at the Circus Maximus in Rome during the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, June 3rd 2017

Pentecost - A Revolutionary Work of the Holy Spirit

From the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2:

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:5-13)

This scene is repeating itself among us today. We too have come “from every nation under heaven,” and we are here to proclaim together “the mighty works of God.”
There is, however, something else to discover in this part of the story of Pentecost. Since ancient times it has been understood that the author of Acts – and this means first of all the Holy Spirit! – through this insistence on the phenomenon of tongues, wanted to make us understand, that at Pentecost something takes place that reverses what happened at Babel. The Spirit transforms the linguistic chaos of Babel into a new harmony of voices. This explains why the account of Babel in Genesis 11 is traditionally inserted among the biblical readings for the Pentecost Vigil.

The builders of Babel were not, as it was once thought, wicked people who intended to defy God, a kind of equivalent of the Titans of Greek mythology. No, they were pious and religious people. The tower they wanted to construct was a temple to the divinity, one of those temples with layered terraces called ziggurat, whose ruins can still be found in Mesopotamia.

What then was their sin? Let us listen to what they said among themselves when they started to work on it: “They said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth’” (Genesis 11:4). Martin Luther makes an illuminating observation about these words:

“Let us build ourselves a city and a tower”: let us build it for ourselves, not for God... “Let us make a name for ourselves” – let us do it for ourselves. The people take no concern for the name of God to be glorified; they are concerned with making their own name great.

In other words, God is being exploited; he must serve their desire for power. They perhaps thought, according to the mindset at that time, that by offering sacrifices from a great height they could win victories from the divinity over the neighboring peoples. This is the reason God was forced to confound their languages and derail their project.

This suddenly brings the matter of Babel and its builders very close to us. How many of the divisions among Christians have been due to a secret desire to make a name for ourselves, to elevate ourselves above others, to relate to God from a superior position in comparison to others! How many have been due to the desire to make a name for ourselves or for our own church more than for God! This is where our Babel comes from!

Let us turn now to Pentecost. Here too we see a group of men, the apostles, who are preparing to build a tower that goes from earth to heaven, the Church. At Babel they still spoke one single language, but at a certain point people no longer understood one another; at Pentecost all the people are speaking different languages, but everyone understands the apostles. Why? It is because the Holy Spirit had brought about a Copernican revolution in them.

Before this moment the apostles were also preoccupied with making a name for themselves, and they often discussed “who among them was the greatest.” Now the Holy Spirit has shifted their focus away from themselves and refocused them on Christ. The heart of stone has been shattered, and in its place beats “a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). As Jesus had promised before leaving them, they were “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (see Act 1:5-8), that is, they were completely submerged in the ocean of God’s love that was poured out upon them (see Romans 5:5).

They are dazzled by the glory of God. Their speaking in diverse languages can also be explained by the fact that they were speaking with their eyes, with their faces, with their hands, with the amazement of people who have seen things too lofty to put in words. “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” The reason they all understood the apostles is that they were no longer speaking about themselves but about God!
God is calling us to bring about that same conversion in our lives – a conversion from ourselves to God, from the smaller unity of our parish, our movement, our own church, to the greater unity that is the unity of the whole body of Christ, indeed of all of humanity. It is the bold step that Pope Francis is urging us Catholics to take and that representatives of other churches assembled here demonstrate they want to share!

St. Augustine had already made it clear that ecclesial communion takes place by degrees and can occur on different levels: from a full degree which consists in sharing both the sacraments and the interior grace of the Holy Spirit, to a partial degree that consists in sharing the same Holy Spirit. St. Paul included in his communion “all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2). This is a formula that we perhaps need to rediscover and go back to appreciating. Today that communion also includes our brothers and sisters who are Messianic Jews.

The Pentecostal and charismatic phenomenon has a specific vocation and responsibility in regard to the unity of Christians. Its ecumenical vocation appears even more evident if we think back to what happened at the beginning of the Church. What did the Risen One do to prompt the apostles to welcome the Gentiles into the Church? God sent the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household in the same way and with the same manifestations with which he had sent the Spirit on the apostles at the beginning. Peter could therefore only draw the conclusion that “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). At the Council of Jerusalem Peter repeated this same argument: God “made no distinction between us and them” (Acts 15:9).

Now we have seen this marvel repeated before our very eyes, this time on a worldwide scale. God has poured out his Holy Spirit on millions of believers who belong to almost all the Christian denominations and, lest there be any doubt about his intentions, he has poured out his Spirit with the identical manifestations, including the most unique one of speaking in tongues. We too are left to draw the same conclusion that Peter did: “If God then has given them the same gift he gave us, who are we to continue to say that other Christian believers do not belong to the body of Christ and are not true disciples of Christ?”

The Charismatic Path to Christian Unity

We need to look at what the charismatic path to unity involves. St. Paul outlined this plan for the Church: “speak the truth in love” (see Ephesians 4:15). What we must not do is bypass the issues of faith and of doctrine in order to be united in the sphere of shared action in evangelization and social issues. Ecumenism experimented with this path at its beginning and experienced its failure. Divisions inevitably resurface quite soon, even in the sphere of action. We must not substitute charity for truth but rather aim for truth with charity; we need to begin to love one another in order to understand each other better.

The extraordinary thing about this ecumenical path based on love is that it is possible at once; the way is completely open before us. We cannot “cut corners” concerning doctrine because there are indeed differences that are to be resolved with patience in the appropriate settings. However, we can skip some steps concerning love and be united right now.

It is the only “debt” that we have toward others (cf. Romans 13:8). We can welcome and love one another despite our differences. Christ did not command us to love only those who think the way we do and who fully share our creed. If we love only those people, he warned us, what is special about that since the pagans also do that? (cf. Matthew 5:46)

We can love each other because what already unites us is infinitely more important than what divides us. What unites us is the same faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Lord Jesus, true God and true man; the shared hope of eternal life; the common commitment to evangelization; the shared love for the body of Christ,
the Church.

Another important thing also unites us: the shared suffering and shared martyrdom for Christ. In so many parts of the world, believers from different churches are sharing the same sufferings and enduring the same martyrdom for Christ. They are not being persecuted and killed because they are Catholic, or Anglicans, or Pentecostals or from some other denomination, but because they are “Christians.” In the eyes of the world we are already one single group, and it is a shame if we are not also that in reality.

Unity and Love

How do we concretely put into practice this message of unity and love? Let us recall St. Paul’s hymn of charity. Each of his phrases acquires a new significance when applied to love among the members of the various Christian churches in ecumenical relationships:

Love is patient...
Love is not boastful...
Loves is not rude....

Love does not seek its own interest (in our case, the interests of other churches as well). Love keeps no record of wrongs (in our case, the wrongs suffered from the hands of other Christians, but rather the wrongs done to them) (see 1 Corinthians 13:4ff)

St. Francis [of Assisi] in one of his Admonitions says, “Blessed is the servant who rejoices in the good that God does through others as if he had done it through him.” We can say, “Blessed is that Christian who is able to rejoice at the good that God does through other churches just as he is for the good that God does through his own church.”

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The prophet Haggai has an oracle that seems to be written for us in this moment of history. The people of Israel had just returned from exile, but rather than rebuilding the house of God together, each of them was building and adorning their own houses. God thus sends his prophet with a message of reproof:

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little.... Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the Lord. (Haggai1:4-8)

We need to hear how this same reproof from God might be addressed to us and to repent. Those who listened to Peter’s discourse on the day of Pentecost “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, ... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:37-38). A renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit will not be possible without a collective movement of repentance on the part of all Christians. It will be one of the main intentions of the prayer that will follow this time of sharing.

After the people of Israel set about rebuilding the temple of God, the prophet Haggai was once again sent to the people, but this time with a message of encouragement and consolation:
Now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you. My Spirit abides among you; fear not. (Haggai 2:4-5).

That same word of consolation is now addressed to us Christians, and I dare to make it resound again in this place, not just as a biblical citation but as the living and efficacious word of God that is bringing about here and now what it signifies: “Take courage, Pope Francis! Take courage, leaders and representatives of other Christian confessions! Take courage, all you people of God, and work because I am with you, says the Lord! My Spirit will be with you.”

Translated from Italian by Marsha Daigle-Williamson
Source: http://www.ccrgoldenjubilee2017.net/fr-raniero-cantalamessa/
An Ecumenical Pentecost and Golden Jubilee of Charismatic Renewal

The Root and Ecumenical Vocation of the Entire Charismatic and Pentecostal Movement

A reflection by Pastor Giovanni Traettino

presented at the Pentecost Vigil and Ecumenical Prayer - 2017

During the Vigil of Pentecost and ecumenical prayer on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal on June 3rd 2017, Pope Francis was joined by the leaders of Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the representatives of the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches and other religious confessions. The encounter was preceded by hymns, readings and testimonies, and introduced by meditations by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the Papal Household, and Pastor Giovanni Traettino of the evangelical Church of the Reconciliation.

Pope Francis’s outreach to Pentecostals and evangelicals has been marked his insistence that the “current of grace” represented by the renewal is fruit of the Holy Spirit calling Christian Churches into unity, not through proselytism or purely intellectual dialogue but in revealing their oneness in diversity.

The following is the text of the reflection by Pastor Giovanni Traettoni on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee:

God's Passion of Unity, Intimacy, and Love
Greeting and good evening brothers and sisters! I greet with affection all the bishops, pastors, and leaders! Good evening beloved and dear Papa Francesco / Pope Francis! Thank you for having conceived this [ecumenical] event! Thank you for inviting us to this vigil of Pentecost. Thank you for inviting us evangelicals and Pentecostals on this 50th anniversary of the birth of the charismatic movement that also coincides with the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation.

And lastly, thank you because the mere fact of having called us here at Circo Massimo, the first site of Christian martyrdom in Rome, stresses the relationship that you see between our movements, their membership – despite the diversity – to the same current and source of grace, “the root and ecumenical vocation” of the entire Charismatic and Pentecostal movement.

**God’s dream**

I am here “transfixed” by a dream. I speak of the dream imagined before the Foundation of the world; the dream that captured – I am sure – even your heart. That of God who is a relationship, that of God who is “loving communion” (koinonia) in its deepest essence. That of a God, who is love before loving! Because he lives – inside before outside - in an incessant movement of love. Paraphrasing the beginning of the Gospel of John, we could say: in the beginning it was the communion!

**The Gospel of desire**

At this point, I would speak about this Gospel of desire! God wanted every time to extend his interior movement of love, this communion to his creatures. He wanted to migrate into the human heart and made it his house in the fullness of time! And he came! He visited us in Christ. He visited us personally. He blew upon us! “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5). And it was Pentecost! The irruption of God in our hearts. Love! Desire for love! In dwelling as for a new incarnation, desire for intimate and profound communion, passion of unity, intimacy, love! So it is written: “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him”, and: “do you not know that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1Corinthians 6:17.19). Because he wanted a temple / house / dwelling made of flesh instead walls of stone. Because he wanted to experience us from within each of us!

**The visitation of God**

On Pentecost, the inner life of God, has visited us. It finally came and broke in that day through our pierced hearts. And Ezekiel’s prophecy was fulfilled: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove the heart of stone from your body, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and I will make sure that you will walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them practice” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

He initiated an “internal dialogue” with each of us, made us capable “from inside” to a fraternal embrace between us. Now that life is engaged. An essential part of the very nature of God is conveyed to us. Now, watered by the river of the Spirit, we can fall more and more in love with the Lord, and grow in love for the brethren more and more every day. This revelation leads to revolution! Now, rooted and grounded in communion with God, we can grow together in unity and community with God’s children.

**The vocation of the Pentecostal movement**

So I continue to be convinced that the movement of the Spirit, known as Pentecost, the Pentecostal or charismatic movement, has in its genes – for the shared experience of the Spirit - not only the call to renewal, upon awakening, to “life”, but has also in itself, in its mandate, the vocation to build unity among God’s children. And it shall not finish to give all its contribution to God’s purpose for having stirred up to that, appropriating its (the movement ) whole vocation, until it becomes also a movement of reconciliation for the
Living Bulwark

Lord.

Pentecost is life and peace
Because Pentecost is life and peace! Not only life. Peace! I am thinking of the Pentecost and of the Acts! Spirit and life for the person. Spirit and peace for relations. I think of the Valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Spirit and life to the resurrection. Immediately after the reconciliation. Or at the Pentecost of Caesarea. The spirit descends on Cornelius, the wall of division falls between Gentiles and Israel. Life and peace. Resurrection and reconciliation. A combination that is always accompanied with the action of the Lord.

A personal Pentecost
I had this revelation on my personal Pentecost. During a Cenacle of prayer in the living room. One winter evening forty years ago! We were looking for the presence of God. We were invaded by rivers of joy and great harmony. Fresh outpouring of life, a deeper revelation of the embrace of God for all his children. Regardless of geography, race, confession or liturgy. That ‘deposit’ grew in me for several years. Until the real turning point upon the invitation of Matthew to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the birth of the charismatic movement. The Lord surprised us. He opened a door in vision and encouraged us to enter. Once in Bari we had a word: “Tomorrow you will wash the feet of a charismatic”. We obeyed and there was the washing of the feet of Friar Antonio. The process had started. I never imagined then, what the Lord would do in later years. Glorious springs but also sudden frosty ones. Dissent and resistance on both sides. But in the autumn of that year, in Terlizzi the Lord had prepared us. With a vision: “a path that ran, as no man’s land, between two fields separated by barbed wire. A man was advancing along the path and hurt himself here and there... at times his clothes, but at others his flesh was strapped. He fell, then got up again, then continued. Down the trail a cross. After the cross only one field and no more barbed wire.”

In the spring of 1996 at the gathering of the renewal in Rimini.... again the cross. After asking for forgiveness for the persecution of the Pentecostal charismatic movement by the Italian leaders, back in my room, a voice. It was the Lord behind my back. Asking me to give him my arms. He stretched them in the shape of a cross. Asked me for my feet and held them so, for a short and infinite time... And I cried, I cried, I cried... I realized then that all vocations of the Lord go through the verification of the cross. This will be followed by a fruitful season. The CCI in Italy and CRECES in Buenos Aires. Several meetings and relationships, so many contacts. Until the 2006 meeting between Catholics and evangelicals, and the meeting with Cardinal Bergoglio, at Luna Park in Buenos Aires. Prepared by the fruitful relationship of communion and prayer between the Cardinal and our Pentecostal pastors. Some of them are with us tonight: Himitian, Mraida, Saracco. Another important prayer meeting between Catholics and Pentecostals will follow in 2007 in India with father Cantalamessa, prepared by Bishop Komanapalli and the Catholic Archbishop of Hyderabad. In 2013, to our great joy and surprise, the election of Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope.

A new season
With the election of the Pope as Bishop of Rome, a new season has clearly opened. In particular with regard to the relationship with us. The unprecedented development of relationships with many pastors, the visit to the community of Caserta with the request for forgiveness to the Italian Pentecostal. The encouragement to drive initiatives, in the United States and elsewhere, between Catholics and Pentecostals. Up to this amazing day. Dozens of pastors are present here tonight, as evidence of the fruitfulness of the road traveled in just a few years. For me, who has been walking for forty years in the Pentecostal experience, I think it is legitimate to speak of a real Kairos [moment] of God!

Our responsibility
If this is true, we are certainly encouraged. But we’re together challenged to get even better in the historic vocation of our spirituality. To contribute to the awakening and the unity. It seems to me that the method
Although suggested by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians is for us. Pursuing the truth in love, we start from the Foundation of the unity of the spirit, to walk with confidence in the unity of faith, towards a full realization, also visible, of the unity of the body of Christ. Jesus is the Lord!

A Prophetic Word Given at the Pentecost Vigil - 2017

“Brothers and sisters as we were praying in the Spirit the Lord gave me a [prophetic] word and it was this:

Lift up your eyes and see, that the fields are white for harvest. And if you would obey me, and if you would obey the prompting of my spirit, you will yet see, infinitely more than you can ask or imagine. You will yet see the power of my Spirit descend upon the human race.

I tell you, the fields are white for harvest, but I need your obedience, I need your docility, I need your faith, and you will yet see marvels that will astound you, infinitely more than you can ask or imagine, for the glory of my name.”

– Patti Gallagher Mansfield, vigil of Pentecost 2017
A Little Bethany History

Ten years since we first gathered from around the Sword of the Spirit in Lansing, USA. Tentative steps were all we felt able to take together in 2005, we were not yet sure of ourselves as a unit, back then we were only a collection of community women from around the world, each having in common a call from God to be his alone, alongside a call to be local community members.

We had no idea the adventure God had in mind for us...

Now, what I feel most is mutual love and confidence in our sure and shared hope that our individual and corporate Bethany offering to God is, in some mysterious way, pleasing to him. In 2015 at this Conference, when we prayed and shared together, there was a unique warmth and deep understanding as we listened to one another, in the prayer and fellowship of Bethany.

- Mags Tierney (Antioch Community, London)
Living Bulwark

**Women in Love with Jesus**

What a joy being asked by the Bethany Association if I would contribute to their newsletter. It has been my privilege these past few years to be chairman of the Bethany committee in Europe. The road these ladies tread is narrow and long, a rocky path so easy to trip and stumble, but they are never alone, for together they travel for the One they love. Yes I see others joining them on this special trail, infected by the hunger of these women in love with their Lord.

What a huge gift to us all in the Sword of the Spirit. We have the men’s brotherhood, the Servants of the Word, and we have experienced the overflow of fruit from their calling. We now likewise have an expression for those ladies who would consider a life set apart, single for the Lord.

So I would like to thank God for this grace he is lavishing on our communities, and I would like to thank these ladies for answering this call, and deciding to “give him their all.”

- Trevor Perry (Former Senior Co-ordinator, Antioch Community, London)

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**Such a Time as This**

"For such a time as this..." Esther 4:14. This quote has become a theme for us in the Sword of the Spirit, especially among our youth. But I think of this passage in a special way when I think of my sisters in Bethany.
who have chosen to live single for the Lord in the midst of our communities throughout the world.

In the story of Esther we read that she has been placed in the King’s court, alone and away from her family. She has been called upon to stand for her people and intercede with the king in order to save the Jews from destruction.

For such a time as this, we in Bethany Association have been called to live and serve the mission of the Sword of the Spirit within the context of our local community and to intercede with the Lord for those who need his salvation. Sometimes it feels hidden and alone but knowing my sisters are serving in the same way throughout our communities brings strength and courage.

May all of us do our part to respond to his call on our lives to share the good news of Jesus Christ in such a time as this!

- Sherry Snyder (President of International Bethany Council)

See related articles:

- 40th Anniversary of Three Bethany Women Living Single for the Lord: Sherry Snyder, Jeanne Kun, Sue Cummins
- A Step of Joy and Gladness in Response to God's Call, by Christiane Lewerentz and Tadgh Lynch
- A Bride of Christ, by Beth Melchor
- Bethany News: A Little Update on Bethany history, by Mags Tierney
- Women in Love with Jesus, by Trevor Perry
- Such a Time as This, by Sherry Snyder

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40th Anniversary Celebration for Three Members of Bethany Association

“The Lord has never failed to show us His love and mercy as He’s accompanied us along the way”

It has been a great joy and blessing for us – Sue Cummins, Jeanne Kun, and Sherry Snyder – to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our lifelong commitments to live single for the Lord with many of our friends and brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit.

In 1971 each of us made an individual “initial (youthful) decision” to live single for the Lord, and over the next few years we frequently met – along with several other women – to share and seek the Lord together about how we might live out our desires. Thus it was that in 1975 we established a sisterhood, living a common life together. In the summer of 1977 the three of us, as well as Sr. Dorcee Clarey, made our lifelong commitments to live single for the Lord.
By the grace of God, we are still gladly and faithfully living out the commitments that we made forty years ago. Any sorrows we experienced (and there were some deep ones!) during the past years have been greatly overshadowed and brightened by the countless joys and blessings we have known – the Lord has indeed never failed to show us His love and mercy as He’s accompanied us all along the way.

We also want to take the opportunity now to thank all who have encouraged and supported us over the years. We are grateful to the Servants of the Word for the love, prayers, and brotherly support that they have given to us. Some of them we have known for almost fifty years now while others are newer brothers to us, but each have helped sustain us by the witness of their life and singlehearted dedication to the Lord.

Here we would like to share with you a portion of our Statement of Ideal from our “original” sisterhood covenant that is now in our Bethany Association Charter. This statement expresses well what it is that we are about in living single for the Lord:

We want to actively search for and seek out God in the entirety of our lives, embracing a way of life in which everything that separates us from him is diminished and all that brings us nearer to him is cherished and integrated into our lives, carrying us towards him. We want to let go of ourselves and be drawn to God alone. Therefore, we choose a way of life in which we give up marriage and bearing children – holy and valued Things – as a freewill offering of love to God. We choose to take up a life of prayer, service, and simplicity. We choose all this in order to give ourselves to God as freely as possible; to offer our attention, love, and devotion, to him as fully as possible; and to exist for his pleasure and praise. We want to live with undivided hearts and undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:34-35).

We are deeply grateful for the calling that we share together in Bethany Association and the Sword of the

http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/august2017p13.htm (2 of 3) [02/08/2017 19:41:54]
In Christ,
Sue Cummins
Jeanne Kun
Sherry Snyder

See related articles:

- **Bethany News: A Little Update on Bethany history**, by Mags Tierney
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- **Such a Time as This**, by Sherry Snyder
- **40th Anniversary of Three Bethany Women Living Single for the Lord**: Sherry Snyder, Jeanne Kun, Sue Cummins
- **A step of Joy and Gladness in Response to God's Call**, by Christiane Lewerentz and Tadgh Lynch
- **A Bride of Christ**, by Beth Melchor
Christiane Lewerentz (left center) is joined by her Bethany sisters as she celebrates her lifelong commitment to live single for the Lord on May 27, 2017 in Belfast, N. Ireland.

A Step of Joy and Gladness in Response to God's Call

God's Generous Love and Provision for the Call and the Journey

by Christiane Lewerentz

When I think of my lifelong commitment, I'm deeply grateful and almost speechless at the love and care of those around me. The celebrations were a moving witness to me of God's generous love and provision through my brothers and sisters in Christ – in the Charis community in Belfast and other communities in Europe, in my Church, the Servants of the Word, neighbors, friends & family from Germany, friends from my orchestra.

What touched me the most was how joyful the day was, how much joy I experienced. God's presence was tangible. His love abundant. Seeing over 200 people come alongside me, serving and loving me was as if God was putting on a rich display of His love and commitment to me.

I received a word earlier in the year about God putting a 'shield of people' around me. On my commitment day, I was able to see this 'live' as a reality and as a promise for the future.

I am excited when I think of the future – and often terrified of the greatness of the adventure God has taken me on, and sometimes afraid of the cost. My heart's desire is that many men and women dare to love the Lord with all they are and have, and expect of Him life to the full, no less. I made this commitment because God won my heart for Himself and
for His people. The Father is worth our love and our all for His own sake. Jesus is enough for this our pilgrimage on earth till we come home.

I think God has given the Bethany sisters a special place and calling in the Sword of the Spirit to be servants of His love and to witness to the joy of loving Him – whatever the service, whatever the gain, whatever the cost, as a simple response to His incomprehensible generous love for us and to be bringers of His resurrection life to the world.

I want to be one of these servants of love for God and his people, alongside the sisters who have lived this call faithfully for many years, and alongside the women who will hear this call to celibate life in years to come. And God gives all the grace needed, and promises a shield of brothers and sisters in Christ to uphold me. The commitment celebration was only the beginning - see ya on the journey from here on!

On Christiane's Offering of Her Life to the Lord

by Tadhg Lynch

When the woman at Bethany anointed Jesus with a flask of pure nard – she prepared him for his sacrificial offering on the cross. She used her act of love to show to everyone that what this man is about to do is extravagant, costly, beautiful, sacrificial and healing. The step that Christiane has taken is a reflection of the beauty, love and sacrifice that the Lord Jesus showed for his people. It is a step of joy and gladness in response to God's call for her, it is a sign and a witness to us his people, of what he has done for all of us and it is a step of hope pointing to the life that we will one day live in heaven with him.
friends and family members gathered to celebrate Christiane's commitment

See related Bethany Association articles:

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"I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me." (Song of Songs 7:10) These are the words inscribed on my ring – a ring given to me by Jaime Cardinal Sin on August 13, 1989 during my consecration as a virgin - a woman living single for the Lord - and living in the world.

Growing up I never dreamt that I would become a bride of Christ, but it is such a blessed privilege if we respond to God’s call. I dreamt of being a scientist who could help my country rise from its underdeveloped state. But when I encountered God in Lourdes, nothing made more sense but to give my life fully to Him who loved me first and was deserving of all my love. From that point on, I began to think about entering the convent and specifically becoming a Religious of the Assumption. I spent much time with the Assumption nuns and they expected me to join them. In my prayers I would ask God to just say the word, and I would enter. But God seemed to have other plans for me.
"The Plans I have for you"

As a college student, I helped give retreats to students. As I shared my experience of God with them, they told me: "What you say makes sense because you are one of us. If a nun told us that, it wouldn't mean much because that's what a nun is supposed to say." On another occasion when I was with the nuns watching a film on Vocation Sunday, the closing lines of the film spoke to me: "Christ does not accept all who offer themselves to Him. He leaves some capable individuals behind for tasks that are perhaps less glamorous, but just as important." Soon thereafter, I was approached by a leader of a lay brotherhood in our community who invited me to consider serving God as a lay consecrated woman within the Ligaya ng Panginoon (LNP) community. As I brought this to prayer over several months, it became clear to me that God was inviting me to consider this “road less travelled”.

When Mother Angela, the Provincial of the Religious of the Assumption in the Philippines, told me they were waiting for me to enter, I had to explain to her what I had been hearing in my prayers. She then shared with me that even Mother Foundress, St. Marie Eugenie, chose to follow God's leading not to join an established religious congregation, but to pioneer the founding of a new congregation. God was doing something new in her time, just as He was doing something new in my life and in our community.

Later I was told of another woman who was prayerfully considering "living single for the Lord" in community. It was not long before we were part of the first community household for single women that would later on support us in this call. We received much help from an established lay sisterhood based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Each year they would send a pair of sisters from Michigan for a month as part of a mission team that helped with the formation of our community, and at the same time they helped those of us who were interested in living single for the Lord in the community. Soon there were more than a handful of young women living in Jerusalem House, as our household was later called, actively serving in the various ministries of LNP and joyfully living the life of single blessedness alongside our many brothers and sisters in community.

Little did I realize that God was faithfully fulfilling a word He spoke to me when I went on an Ignatian retreat upon graduating from the university. The grace sought during the retreat was to know God's will for my life. During the meditation on John 21:1-23, God's words were so clear that it is written out in my prayer journal, excerpts of which read:

"Little one, do you love me?" "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." "Then carry me in your heart and treasure me above all and bring me to all men. You must not look to the world or things of the world. You belong to me." then He spoke that which I waited to hear, "Yes, you will live single for me," and He spoke of the great joy that I would experience with this calling. But He also said it would take a long time moving into this and that I need not concern myself about this because He would always be there."

Another entry in my prayer journal reads:

“Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time presses on to fulfillment and will not disappoint; if it delays wait for it. It will surely come, it will not be late.” (Habakkuk 2:2-3). Indeed it did come and it did not disappoint. Ten years after I made an initial promise to live single for the Lord on the Feast of Our Lady of the Assumption in 1979, at long last the day did come when I would be totally consecrated to the Lord in the eyes of Mother Church and before my community. The words of St. Therese of Lisieux were used for the invitation which reads:
“In her great delight and excitement in having been chosen to become Jesus’ bride, St. Therese of Lisieux amusedly composed the following wedding invitation to show her sisters in Carmel what incomparable honor it is to live as a woman consecrated and espoused to God.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**
Creator of Heaven and Earth
Supreme Sovereign of the Universe
and
**THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY**
Queen of the Court of Heaven

announce to you the spiritual marriage of their August Son

**JESUS**
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

with

Little Therese Martin

As with any bride, the joy of that day could not be described. Professing my promise in the presence of community, family and friends made it all the more special. But that day was just the beginning of a beautiful covenant relationship that is beyond compare to anything the world could offer. It is a foretaste of heaven even now, living the life of the Kingdom, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage.

I have been asked, “How do you experience Jesus concretely as your Spouse? Wouldn’t it be easier to enter a convent?” Entering the Convent would definitely be something I would have embraced, if God did not call me to live the consecrated life in the world in the midst of my brothers and sisters in community. Jesus is very present in my daily life and I experience Him concretely in many ways; primarily in communing with Him in prayer and in the sacraments. But Jesus shows His love and care, too, in many daily practical ways. There were so many instances when I was alone driving through the streets of Metro Manila when the car would break down with some mechanical problem. These happened at the time when mobile phones were not commonplace. The car would always breakdown in front of a car repair shop or in a place where I could easily get help. One time as I was making my way to join the family after the Christmas Eve mass of our community, the fan belt broke and the car had just enough inertia to enter the gate of my parent’s village halting in front of the guardhouse where I could easily call home for someone to pick me up.

There were other times when my token salary as a staff worker for Christ’s Youth in Action was wiped out by the need to purchase antibiotics. Gone was my plan to host a dinner at home with a few friends to celebrate my birthday after returning from China. But lo and behold, without asking in prayer, an unexpected check arrived in the mail that would exactly cover the expenses for the dinner. No other spouse can compare to Jesus.
It has been 25 years now since that wonderfully blessed day that Jesus claimed me as His bride and I would not exchange a minute of it for anything else. As I continue on the pilgrimage of life as a bride of Christ, the prayer of Therese of Lisieux resounds in my heart: "I want, O my beloved, at each beat of my heart to renew my offering to you an infinite number of times until I may be able to tell you of my love in an eternal face to face."

**My Vows to The Lord**

“I desire to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. I desire to follow Jesus as my Lord and Savior and to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. I desire to live a life of singlehearted devotion to the Lord and His service. I desire to love and serve God in a life of daily prayer and service, to praise and worship Him always, to ever seek His face – desiring always to grow in the fervor of that ‘first love.’” I desire to offer my life to the Lord so that He may use me in any way He wishes to advance His Kingdom. I desire to consecrate my life completely to the Lord that I might exist for His pleasure and praise.

I choose a way of life in which I give up marriage and bearing children – both good and valued things – as a free will offering of love to God.

I choose to live a life of service and simplicity in order to more closely imitate Jesus who for our sakes became poor and was the servant of all.

I choose to live out these commitments in the midst of the people God has called me to and to embrace the way of life and mission of this community. I will respect and obey the authority of the community and the form of pastoral leadership provided for me by the community.

In all this, I stand in awe of the great mercy and the gracious love and faithfulness of God, He who has called me by name and has loved me first. I desire only to make Him known and loved by all, and to
ever grow in my love for Him in this life, hoping to enjoy Him forever in the life to come – He who is my all.”

This article is excerpted from *Taken by Love: From a Rebellious Youth to a Missionary in China*, Chapter Six, (c) 2015 by Elizabeth Melchor, published through Shepherd's Voice Publications, Inc., under its self-publishing arm: lifedreams books, Quezon City, Philippines. Used with permission.

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Community of Christ the Redeemer: Taking the Call Seriously
an interview with Jim Kolar

When and how did your community begin?

The community of Christ the Redeemer has its origins in a prayer meeting that started at a youth center in St. Paul MN, USA in the fall of 1972. From that same prayer meeting, two outreaches also developed: an international evangelistic ministry to high school students: NET Ministries, and an evangelistic and discipling ministry to University students: St. Paul’s Outreach.

From its very origin the community of Christ the Redeemer has had a strong orientation to bringing youth and young adults closer to Christ, which has been both a great blessing and a great challenge –striving to keep the overall vision and call in its rightful balance. There have been two brotherhoods that trace their origin to the Community: the Franciscan Brothers of Peace, and the Companions of Christ, a public association of Diocesan priests.

In the early days, the Lord spoke to us through the prophet Isaiah:

“Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples...They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord.” Isaiah 62. 10-12

Where are you located?

We are located in the greater metropolitan area of St. Paul/Minneapolis MN, USA. There are a number of clusters or neighborhood areas with a higher density of community folks.

Tell us a bit about community demographics:
– Number of members: 429 adults and roughly 450 children

– Rough ages of adults and kids: ages range from newborns to 81

– Ecumenical make-up: We are a Catholic Community, established as a Private Association of Christian Faithful since June of 1985.

– Kinds of professions: full range of professions and jobs. Law, medicine, academic, IT, construction, and more.

How often do you meet, and in what configurations?

A normal month would have:

– An overall Gathering – including children

– A second gathering for everyone – except for young singles/professionals who would meet separately

– A meeting of the Covenant members or a district meeting or a family formation night

What do you as a community feel the Lord is saying to you just now?

– “I have gathered you here and I will tell you what I am doing. I am knitting you together. I am forming you as members of my Body; not just any body – but the body of my son. For I tell you, this night, this very night, I am raising up a body for my son to inhabit and to dwell in.

– “I’ve chosen you for this time. I had this time in mind for you when I created you and brought you into being. And so I say, draw confidence from me.”

– “Take seriously the call I’ve given to you – to bring others to me.”

– “Remember that I have called you to be together – to be a people. It is no accident that I have called you together in this time. There is power in being together. There is also a cost in being together.

– “I call you to identify yourselves more deeply as a people – as a people with a particular way of life; you are the Community of Christ the Redeemer.”

– “I am making you ready to bear the call I have for you – even to the offering of your lives. I will call you to an ever more radical life together – a deeper laying down of your lives for one another.

– “I have invested in you. I have called you together. I have revealed myself to you. I say, invest yourselves in me and in the call I have for you.”
Some reflections that come to mind as I think about these words/senses:

The stress on God’s initiative, God’s plan to gather and bring us together; to be a people, a people in whom He can dwell and through whom He can act – to bring others to himself.

This call is “forward moving”, or to use a different image “downward moving” – it is directional – leading us to go more deeply into it.

The call has to do with “this time”. It has to do with the ongoing “incarnation” in this day and age.

Saint Paul’s Outreach hosting a retreat for students

What areas of community life or service do you feel are a focus for the community, things you all are working to strengthen or take new strides in?

The blessings and challenges of growth – how to work with and respond to that; the challenges of our culture and its impact particularly on younger folks, children, and families.

What particular strength or call do you feel you as a community have been given by the Lord just now?

The young people in community are doing well. They are stepping up and taking their place in the life and work that God has called us to.

Why is it a help being part of the larger network of communities of the Sword of the Spirit?

The benefit of solidarity and the sharing of wisdom and experience.

What is your community doing right now to express our ecumenical call in the Sword of the Spirit?

We have speakers from various church backgrounds come to the community for various events and conferences.

If people in your area wanted to contact you, what’s the best way for them to do it?
We have a website: www.ccredeemer.org

Jim Kolar is a coordinator of Christ the Redeemer Community.

Article source: Sword of the Spirit
The brothers and sisters from Emmanuel Community in Aleppo Syria have recently finished a long-awaited retreat in the first week of June where they came upon a renewed commitment to the vision and mission they have from the Lord. There are about 60 people in the core community. Earlier this month an additional 19 made their commitment to join this core group.

Fortunately, there is a lot of good news to report, even if not much has changed concerning the prohibitive basic necessities’ prices. The community continues to operate with the support of local clergy, both priests and bishop and there is also a parish Priest who has joined as a member and is helping with the pastoral care of the community.

The focus this year has been the establishment of a community center. A large donation from a benefactor church is being used to refurnish a five-bedroom apartment located in a safe area of the city even for evening meetings. The members specially the sisters can safely get there to attend small group meetings, formation courses and evangelistic prayer events.

The main job is to convert this property to serve as a community center which includes purchasing office
furniture and chairs for large meetings. It also will entail upgrading toilets, revamping the kitchen, enhancing security of the building, and putting in air conditioning which is currently not there. This type of conversion is quite typical in Aleppo, and following the devastation of the war very much needed.

This process will realistically take many months to achieve since most of the skilled labor has left the city and those who have remained are swamped with work and they have to work slowly by hand; why? Because many machines have been destroyed by the fighting during the last five years in two thirds of the city.

The Emmanuel Community is running their regular schedule of evangelism and formation courses as the renovation of the center is slowly getting under way. They have even more people participating since the cessation of fighting last December. There are about 120 people who have lately attended their prayer meetings. The feast of Pentecost was celebrated with a week end retreat where rich worship, and strong community relationships were strikingly evident.

The Community sends their special thanks to all who have prayed and supported them over the last five years. They assure everyone that their work is touching many around them and ask that you continue to pray for them and their supporters. Come Lord Jesus!

 Andre Codouni is a member of the People of God community in Beirut, Lebanon.

Landscape watercolor by (c) David Kurani

Article source: Sword of the Spirit
The Cost and The Fruit of Forgiveness

by Tom Caballes

"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."
- Matthew 18:21b-22 ESV

We are a sinful people, and we hurt each other with or without intent, especially those close to us; that is why God wants us to forgive and reconcile with one another. But it is extremely difficult to forgive. We need to get out of our comfort zone and talk with people if we have been offended. We need to give up our self-pity and pride. We need to give up our desire for justice and revenge. We need to release people from being unforgiven. It is just so easy to sweep the issues under the carpet - until one day it will just haunt us and burst unexpectedly. But if we forgive, we experience reconciliation, love, freedom, joy, and restoration of relationships. We release ourselves from the bondage of anger and resentment. We stop clinging to the past and live in the present. More importantly, we stop damaging ourselves. Are you willing to pay the cost of forgiving to enjoy its fruits? It is well worth doing.

So How Do You Forgive Others and Move On In Life?

1. Look at your past – are there any backlog of unresolved anger or grudges against anyone, especially those close to you? It might involve people who have already passed away or those who you are not in
contact with anymore. You need to look at the different stages of your life and see if you had any resentment against anyone. You need to release them from the heart and surrender them to God. Forgiveness is a decision, and you can forgive even if you do not feel like forgiving.

2. If the issues are with those who are close to you – spouses, family, and close friends - you need to deal with the issues on hand. Ideally, you should ask them to ask forgiveness from you – and then forgive them. If they make excuses and justify their side, you should still be ready to forgive them from the heart and release them from your anger or hatred. Ask God for the grace to forgive from the heart.

3. Look also at your life and see if you have hurt or offended anyone – and ask forgiveness from those you have hurt. Do not justify or make excuses – ask forgiveness to them. Accept responsibility and be humble. A true apology does not make excuses. Offer and make restitution if needed to reconcile fully with them.

4. Deal with the issues directly. Do not share to lots of people who can do nothing about it. The symptoms of anger and being hurt will go away slowly once the issues have been resolved.

5. Small hurts can build up and can explode one day. Try to deal with and diffuse those small hurts, so they do not build up. Practice forgiving and asking for forgiveness daily, especially with those close to you.

6. Forgiveness has the power to heal, but it may take time for the healing to complete. It is like a wound that needs time to mend. Forgiveness and healing can be a process. Be willing to last it out.

7. Talk with a trusted person if you need help and guidance in dealing with forgiveness.

Other Scripture passages:

1. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. [1 Corinthians 13:4-5 ESV]

2. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. [Ephesians 4:31-32 ESV]

3. Other references: Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:26; 1 John 1:9 and James 5:16.

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. How easy is it for you to forgive and ask for forgiveness? Are you convinced of its importance?

2. Are you living a spiritually debt-free life? If not, what do you need to do about it?

Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Is Life Diminishing or Advancing?

by Tom Caballes

"Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison..."

- 2 Corinthians 4:16B-17 ESV

In 2013, both my parents died a few months apart. My brother-in-law said to me, “we are next in line.” He made me realise that sooner or later, just like anyone else, death will knock on my door. In my whole life, I have also seen the passing away of many relatives and friends. I can see my body getting more wrinkly, slower, and sickly. It looks like life is slowly diminishing. On the other hand, my life in God is advancing – as I get more mileage in life, my salvation is getting nearer that when I first believed [see Romans 13:11]. My blessed hope, my ultimate joy, my priceless treasure, my greatest dream, and my greatest purpose in life – to go to heaven and see God face to face – is getting closer day by day. Yes, my earthly life is fading, but my life with God is progressing. How about you – do you experience the same irony as well?

So What Do You Do Now, Knowing Your Life is Both Diminishing and Advancing in Different Ways?

1. Take good care of your physical well-being. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [1 Corinthians 9:25 ESV] Aim to have a
regular exercise. Visit your doctor regularly. You only have one physical body – take care of it well!

2. Do not lose focus on life. Life can be very challenging, and different trials can throw a spanner on your focus. Keep your eyes dead-set on heaven, no matter what. Do not compromise heaven!

3. Be renewed in the Spirit regularly. Invite the Holy Spirit to draw close to you. Shed away the sins that cling close to you – see Romans 12:1. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. [James 4:8]

4. Build spiritual treasures, not earthly ones. How? Focus on loving God and serving His people. Become Christ-like. Be generous with your material things, especially to those in need and your brothers and sisters. Share the gospel in season and out. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. [Galatians 6:9-10 ESV] Share the gospel with others.

5. Be ready to “go” any time the Lord calls you. Settle all finances, insurance, wills, and trusts, so that those whom you will leave behind can carry on living well after you have gone. Leave all your earthly attachments behind. Travel light as a transient in this earthly life; your real home and destination is still to come.

6. Never give up and lose hope! Stand your ground to the end. Expect hardships and suffering to come in your way with God on this side of eternity. Sin and temptations will not stop bothering you until your last breath. When all is said and done, look forward to the day that you can say, “It’s all worth it – all the troubles and all the sufferings that life can throw at me – because heaven is my home and my reward.”

Other Scripture passages:

1. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV]

2. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. [Romans 13:11B ESV]

3. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” [Revelation 21:4 ESV]

4. Other references: 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Romans 8:18; Matthew 6:19-21; and 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. In your life, do you experience both its physical recession and spiritual growth? In what ways?
2. What is the one thing that can make you give up and lose hope in your spiritual journey?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Two and a half years ago, my wife and I decided to sell our house. We followed commonsense wisdom: we decluttered closets, upgraded appliances, and replaced old wallpaper with fresh paint.

Then we put our beloved house on the market. And nada. Well, not quite nothing. We had multiple almost-buyers, couples who claimed they would make an offer by the weekend. But an obstacle always cropped up, a pregnancy, an illness, a job change, and a declined loan.

We were bewildered. The price was reasonable (based on comparable homes), the house was gorgeous (no bias on my part), and the Ann Arbor real-estate market had taken off like a ballistic missile (houses often received multiple offers the day they were listed).

Where was God in the seemingly senseless delay in selling our house?

Last week we finally got a good offer which we accepted. My immediate thought was: God must have waited for the perfect family to buy, or else God was waiting until the right home came on the market for my wife and me. This morning I read,

“Just as you cannot know how a spirit comes into the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman, so you cannot understand the work of the God who created all.” (Ecclesiastes 11:5)
I thought: *Is it possible for me to know even a fraction of the purposes of God?*

**The Old Heroes Never Knew**

The book of Job begins with a series of tragedies. Most of its forty-two (42!) chapters deal with ignorance of God’s plan: Job continually asks God “Why?” and his friends continually offer stupid answers. In the book’s conclusion, God never answers Job’s question.

Some characters in Scripture, however, are given a hint of God’s plans, but their understanding of his rationale is a shadow of its true substance:

- After Joseph saves his family (and hundreds of thousands of others) from starvation, he says to his brothers, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” (Genesis 50:20)
- When David realizes that God taught him fighting skills while he was a mere shepherd, he writes, “You trained my hands for war and my fingers for battle.” (Psalm 144:1)
- Esther wins a beauty pageant and becomes Queen of Persia, her people are threatened, and she realizes she was brought to the palace “for such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14)

Job never heard God’s purpose, while Joseph, David, and Esther got hints. But none of them thought for a moment that millions of people would be reading their stories thousands of years later. Did they have a clue of the hope their lives would bring us?

I think not.

**For Our Own Good, God Can’t Tell Us**

Imagine that God told Job: “You are about to undergo suffering. Be patient. It will only last six months. Afterward you will be blessed even more than beforehand. And you will be revered by millions of people for millennia.”

If Job knew of that future for his life, he wouldn’t have learned to rest in God; he would have rested his heart in that impressive calling. He would never have said God is enough; instead of finding life in God’s presence, he would have found self-fulfillment in his own glorious legacy.

Our purpose on earth is friendship with God, to be united with him for his purposes, and to believe that God knows what he is after. In God’s wisdom, he guides us one step at a time, so we walk in humility and faith, connected to him, never knowing his manifold plans.

I don’t know why our old house didn’t sell for two years, and I don’t know why we can’t find the next house we so desperately want.

The question for me is connection not purpose: *Can I walk with God into the unknown?*

Sam
Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.

Praise for Hearing God in Conversation

“In this book, Sam Williamson shares his deep spiritual wisdom with a kind of disarming humility that will help readers hear God’s extraordinary voice as an ordinary life experience.”
– Jean Barbara, president of Sword of the Spirit

“I’ve just finished reading Sam Williamson’s compelling book on hearing God. Sam treats this crucial subject with wisdom, humor, and deep conviction. His highly readable personal stories and spiritual insights will surely inspire many to pursue with greater confidence the life-changing experience of daily conversation with God. Hearing God in Conversation is a helpful and well-balanced spiritual guide which I would not hesitate to recommend to men and women from all the Christian traditions who hunger to walk more closely with God.”
– John Keating, Servants of the Word elder

It is a tragedy that so many Christians believe that God does not speak to them. This book is one of the best I’ve seen at equipping ordinary people to listen to God in everyday life. I especially loved the description of how to “brainstorm with God” – what a wonderful way to demystify the process of seeking guidance. Most importantly, the author puts the emphasis where it should be: on a biblically grounded, conversational relationship with God in which we let God take the lead. If you’ve ever secretly longed for your friendship with God to be much more interactive than it is and you are finally ready to do something about it, read this book.
– Thomas E. Bergler, Professor of Ministry and Missions


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Living Wholeheartedly

by Emily Stanewich

During the spring of 2016, my love story with Detroit began. I had just gone on my first Urban Encounter in the renaissance city and was blown away by how raw and vulnerable everything and every person was. When I prayed with total strangers, they seemed to pour their heart out to me with such ease and such grace. The people of Detroit I met on that trip were simply unapologetic and real. I admired the how eloquent each and every testimony was that I heard. I was inspired by the genuine humility of people I had the opportunity to speak to. No one attempted to hide the suffering both they and the city had experienced. After that trip, I felt the Lord place a longing for Detroit in my heart. My heart’s desire for this city started off small and convenient, however it would blossom dramatically over the course of the next year.

Within my studies of Urban and Regional Planning at Michigan State University, I have declared an informal cognate discipline of city revitalization. I’m fascinated by social science and the study of people and would love to use what I learn to help people in urban areas strengthen their communities and restore the unique beauty of their cities. Due to Detroit’s close proximity to East Lansing and significant impact on the development of urban planning, it became a prominent case study we have used in most of my classes. This made my heart swell even greater for the city. I couldn’t get enough of documentaries, history books, heck even city almanacs if they were centered around the City of Detroit.

As fall of 2016 rolled around, the Lord had developed my desire for Detroit into a call that would not go unnoticed. During that time I prayed to the Lord about my desire to serve in Detroit Summer Outreach (DSO). I asked Him to renew this desire if it was His will for me to spend my next summer in Detroit or transform it if He had another path in mind. I waited earnestly for a sign and ended up being offered an internship in the city that I would commute to one day a week. I was overjoyed at the prospect of spending more time in Detroit but soon discovered that the tasks I completed while working in a small Midtown office did not resemble the service and interaction with community members I had in mind. I still craved more of Detroit which led me to finally apply for DSO.

This summer, I fell head-over-heels in love with Detroit. You can’t truly fall for something unless you delve deeper to uncover what’s below the surface. I needed to discover the good, the bad and the ugly before I could love the ‘real’ Detroit. I didn’t want a sugarcoated version of the city and DSO allowed me to dive head first into the ravnness Detroit has to offer. This past week I had the most eye-opening experience of my time in
Living Bulwark

DSO. I had the opportunity to assist Sister Judy pass out lunches around the Eastside of Detroit which truly humbled me. Through this eye-opening experience, I watched as my love story with Detroit had come full-circle in order to teach me a lesson in humility that I sorely needed. I came to Detroit to serve and to love but found that I was served, loved, and taught more than I was ever capable of giving. The Lord blessed me with countless meaningful encounters that striped my empathy down to its core and taught me what it means to love wholeheartedly. Through the Lord’s grace, I came to know Detroit in an intimate way this summer and I look forward to falling deeper in love with the city and its people each and every day.


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This past year in Detroit has certainly brought about a good bit of spiritual growth in my life, and I think that there has been a definite theme from the Lord this summer that has served to order this growth correctly. During this year I have grown in my prayer life, and in my knowledge of God, I have developed some skills, and have gained wisdom through experiences, but so far this summer I have felt the Lord urge me to prioritize relating with people.

1 Corinthians 13 says that if I have all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and tremendous wisdom and great faith, but do not have love then I have nothing. No matter how much I may have grown this past year it is worthless if it does not produce love. I am so often concerned with programs running smoothly and with plans staying orderly that I forget that the priority is people, and in the case of Detroit Summer Outreach (DSO), the priority is the youth. If the programs run with complete order, but the objective, which in this case is that the youth come to know Jesus, is not accomplished then it was a complete waste.

In the past, and especially during my freshman year of college, I failed to make relating well with people as priority as I should have done. I would put my headphones in on the bus so that people wouldn’t talk to me, I would make little or no effort to make friends with the people in my classes, and I certainly acted cowardly when any opportunity for evangelism arose. I was more concerned with being comfortable than I was with sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

Thankfully, throughout this year and especially this summer the Lord has shown me how vital it is to make people a priority and to invest in relationships. He has shown me that I need to invest in and love these young people, for that is precisely the reason why I am here. 1 John 4 states simply that we are to love, because God loves us and because God is love. When things seem to get complicated or chaotic it is so helpful for me to be reminded that I am here in Detroit simply to love God and love His people.

As convicted as I may get that loving people is of paramount importance I know that I am actually incapable of carrying this out on my own. No matter how much I understand the importance of loving and prioritizing people, if I rely on my own strength and my own love to carry it out, I will fail. I need to rely on the Lord in order to love people as He calls me to, and that is a great relief. My own love is pretty feeble and pathetic, but I
can let God love others through me and being apart of that is incredible. God has blessed me with some great relationships with the youth this summer, and I am very thankful for the opportunity to be used by Him in this way.

My Own Flesh and Blood

by Elena Weaver

“Well, what if?”

This was the question that began my whole approach to coming to Detroit for the first time in 2016 for the summer. It was a moment that was subtle: I was just coasting into planning my summer, but in the midst of considering summer jobs at the local gym and babysitting my brothers, I let my mind wander a little bit. “What if I did something different?” “Could I really do that?” These thoughts, coupled with a random link sent to me by a wise woman, ended up with me packing my bags and traveling to a place very foreign to my suburban-Kansas City way of life.

Since that summer, many things have changed. Detroit has been not only the most adventurous thing I’ve ever been a part of, but one of the most cherished parts of my testimony. I have never been so stretched in my capacity for love; I am amazed at how quickly these cheeky teenagers sneak into my heart. They aggravate you, irritate you, and make you change every single one of your plans every day, but you end up loving them more than life itself. It’s what I imagine having your own children would be like, your own flesh and blood.

So that’s why I’m back for a second summer and a subsequent mission year beginning in the fall. These children are my children and I am at home in this foreign, chaotic, and fearless city. And this kind of story shouldn’t make sense, but it’s perfectly possible when you begin saying ‘yes’ to the Lord as often as possible—a breathtaking adventure awaits those who accept His invitation. So here I am, loving my work and thrilled for more children to add to my family; please keep myself as well as all of the other interns in your prayers (we totally need them!)


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Exhortation and Invitation

by Joel Pepmeyer

An invitation is a powerful thing. I have seen and experienced the joy that follows an invitation to a birthday party, and the excitement of being invited to a wedding. Regardless of the event, you cannot help but feel giddy when you realize that someone out there is thinking about you, that someone cares. And there is always someone who cares.

There is a God who cares for us more than anyone else. God cares so much that he sent his son Jesus to deliver an invitation to us. His offer is new life in Jesus, freedom from sins, and a vanquishing of fears. His invitation will be life challenging, life renewing, and life giving. Jesus understands the power of the invitation. He does not commandeer followers but invites them saying, “Come follow me.”

He knows his disciples, both past and present, cannot do anything to earn a place in his kingdom. Thus, he offers all peoples the invitation freely. One can accept or reject the invitation, but everyone receives the invite. This begs the question, why does God choose invitation as a way to draw people in? In what does the invitation find its strength? In large part, an invitation offers an opportunity. It is an opportunity that is freely given, one that cannot be earned.

Society often teaches that opportunities must be fought for, worked for, and grasped onto when they present themselves. We praise opportunities that have been earned through an intense struggle, yet we can often scoff at opportunities that are merely handed to us. Invitations break up the monotony of this world view. An invitation gives us an opportunity to be part of something that we have not earned. In fact, a good invitation needs nothing more than the sender’s desire for the invite to be accepted. God’s invitation is a good one, it is offered freely, it is offered to all, and God desires that we accept it. Understand that God is infallible, and thus makes no mistakes in the delivery of his invitation. Some may choose not to open the invite, or pretend to have missed the delivery, but God’s invitation will be received. It is up to us, we either accept or decline the call. I encourage you to accept.

Perseverance in Invitation / Getting Out of the Comfort Zone

My journey to Detroit started, in large part, due to one man’s persistent acknowledgement of the power of invitation. Three years straight, my friend Brian would make a trip from Michigan to Pittsburgh, and he would take time out of his busy schedule to meet with me. Each year he had a similar message, “What are your plans
for the summer. I have been praying about who the Lord wants to do Detroit Summer Outreach, and your name keeps coming up. I believe you should consider this”. The first two years I more or less ignored his, and the Lord’s, invitation. Yet, he was persistent and, due to my brother’s faithfulness to me and to Christ’s call in his life, I accepted his invitation after round three. Perseverance pays off, especially in spiritual matters.

The biggest thing God is working in me, through Detroit, has been getting me out of my comfort zone. My comfort zone includes Pittsburgh, my family, my community, and honestly all things that are “me” centered. I left Pittsburgh, my family, and my community when I came to Detroit, but I still managed to bring my self-centered mentality. I am too comfortable in myself, and I need to learn to be comfortable in Christ and what he has instore for me. Every day the Lord is drawing me further out of my own wants and desires, and is giving me a more loving heart for my neighbors. Whether I am working with my fellow interns, serving the household, or attempting to relate to a squad of high schoolers, God is showing me that I need to be more focused on the needs of others. It is a process, but I am finding that there is freedom to be had in giving of myself and serving humbly as Jesus did, for he “came not to be served, but to serve”.

Two Quick Stories

My roommate Jason and I had the opportunity to pray for people and pass out bagged lunches in downtown Detroit. We met a wonderful woman named Mrs. T who shared about her life with us for about 30 minutes. We were able to pray for her, but it was her prayer for us that was certainly inspired by God. What a beautiful testament to the faith it was, as we stood in a small circle, heads bowed in prayer, on a busy street corner in Detroit.

I was blessed to attend a local soup kitchen and an AA meeting run by Ed Conlin. The addicts and former addicts at these meetings are so real and their faith is so strong. They both convict and inspire me at the same time. One woman came to the meeting and shared, through tears, that she had recently relapsed on heroin. She came to the meeting searching for help, and she found love and hugs from a family who supports her.