IV CONNECTING WITH PERSONS' GOD EXPERIENCE

Though the term "spiritual formation" has been around for a long time, it is now coming into its own in Protestant circles and today represents a movement of concern for spirituality and understanding Christian experience since the 1960s. There are now a number of centers providing short term and degree work in "spiritual direction", the facilitation of spiritual sensitivity and growth. The concern for interpreting and fostering Christian experience is crucial today because we live in a secular and pluralistic culture. The reality of God will only be sustained by one's own experience, or the experience of one's community, and not by a general cultural assumption. As Barry and Connolly point out in their excellent book on *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*:

> For better or worse, in our world at any rate, each person can only find a rock that will not give way or shatter by answering the question: In my own experience do I meet a mysterious Other to whom I can say: You are the Rock of my salvation? In the modern world where unbelief has become or is rapidly becoming "the natural or normative condition", believers have two options. One is to retreat into smaller and smaller ghettos of "true believers" who reinforce one another's "beleaguered faith." The other is to go to the heart of Christianity. That heart is the experience in faith, hope, and love that Jesus is my savior and the world's and that I want to respond to him; in other words, that heart is prayer and life based on prayer.[13]

Evangelism then can be seen as helping persons to understand their life and God's role in it so that amidst the complexity of factors in life God's reality may be perceived and God's call may be heeded. While helping persons to become aware of God in their experience is primary, and at times this might be treated simply in terms of dialoguing with them about their experience, often this cannot be done without helping persons to understand life in its complexity. Many persons seek to interpret life from an Old Testament perspective which assigns all that happens to God, directly or indirectly. Though many seek to keep this perspective because of the security it provides (whatever happens, it will be what God wants and will have meaning), this often eventuates in a loss of faith in the reality of God or a faith in a judgmental and capricious God. The New Testament, by and large understands the world as complex and God as only one factor, though expressing faith that in the end God's purpose will remain sovereign. Thus to identify God experience amidst the complexity of total life experience takes wisdom and discernment.

A Model of the Experience of Life

One might describe the world as follows, drawing upon biblical and contemporary insights:

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[13]. William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction,* NY: The Seabury Press, 1982, p. 17.

SPIRITUAL WORLD

GOD *EVIL*

NEUTRAL POWERS: HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, NATURAL CONTEXTS
(cosmos, nature, political and cultural systems, historical processes -- spiritualized in the ancient world and in NT called elemental spirits, powers,etc)

HUMAN SYSTEMS - P E R S O N S - RELATIONSHIPS
(particularly significant is the family)
(political, economic systems might also be considered as personal)

THE PERSON
influenced by the above and
c o n s t i t u t e d b y

BODY
biological-psychological organism (includes also biological basis for mind & psyche -though as SOUL we transcend our biology we are nevertheless affected by it)
described in NT as a body of flesh

CONSCIOUS - what one is aware of
Ego-self-consciousness, will
UNCONSCIOUS
Personal-from personal history and experience
Collective - Archetypal -structures of the psyche deposited by the history of human experience, transmitted genetically

OUR SOUL - SPIRIT - our eternal self

It has been the assumption of much reflection about human existence that we are conscious of all that we are and that if taught to think clearly, apply our minds, and understand ethical principles, we would successfully handle life and our human nature. However, the history of humanity does not support this. One has only to look at some of the horrors unleashed by humans upon each other in the 20th century to know that the optimism and utopiamism of the 18th century Enlightenment was a false vision. One of the great insights into human nature of the last hundred years has been the affirmation of the existence of the Unconscious. Freud saw it as largely personal, but Jung emphasized that it was also Collective, including the inherited "memory" of the human race. This means that our Conscious is only the tip of the iceberg of the human psyche and that much of our thinking and action is influenced by forces of which we are not conscious.

With this in mind it is easier to understand that the spiritual powers (God and Evil), the historical, political, cultural context, the human systems with which we have been in contact, and our life experience affect us from within as well as without., for what starts as outside us often creates corresponding structures within the Unconscious. The external world is then replicated within. The powers outside of us, including the spiritual powers, may then make use of our inner psychological structures for good or ill: a helpful way of explaining how the spiritual world impinges upon the physical.

It is also important to recognize the role of the biological-psychological organism, what is biblically called our "body of flesh". Modern studies into mental illness have recognized that normal behaviour is at times dependent on a well functioning physical organism. Schizophrenia and some forms of depression

are clearly related to body chemistry. Thus when we speak of the possibilities of human transformation, and its limits, and explore the reasons why we are as we are, we must take for granted the vast realms of human existence that are not within our conscious control.

Unfortunately, the above presents the human situation as complex. We would all like it to be simpler (e.g. as indicated in much of the OT that God does everything that happens in life and therefore life has simplicity and order, suffering and success being interpreted as due to the blessing or judgment of God). But life cannot be successfully explained that way. The above diagram also means that life involves risk and that God may not be able to fix everything. However, it is agreeable to what Paul says in Romans 8: though there are many things which may beset human existence in this world where creation is subjected to futility, yet in all circumstances God works for good with those who love him, and nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The church then is charged with the responsibility of understanding life and God and helping persons to interpret their life experience so that their living may be meaningful, so that they may grow towards wholeness and healing, and above all that they may perceive and relate to the spiritual dimensions of life for which their souls and even their humanity were destined. *Thus Christianity is a "life science" in the fullest sense,* exploring much more than the conversion experience.

The Nature of Personal Growth

The nature of personal growth is an important Christian concern related to spiritual experience. However, churches more often call persons to it than help them to understand its nature. One of the difficulties in understanding personal growth is that although the New Testament affirms it, even offering several models of it, HOW it happens is little described. Paul has reflected some on "how", but by and large we must here supplement the biblical materials with modern psychology.

Let us examine two New Testament models, including some psychological addenda. Each, interestingly enough, represents a different life-style tied to different types of early Christian community.

Matthew's Model

Christian life is a call to discipleship, to obedience of Jesus' commandments (28:16-20). It is a call to a righteousness greater than the Scribes and Pharisees (5:17-20), governing not only outward action but inward attitude and feeling (5:21-30); a call to perfection as our heavenly Father is perfect (5:48). Jesus' commands do not do away with the Old Testament Law, but fulfill it (5:17-20). He is the true Scribe, the true teacher about his Father,whose yoke his disciples are to accept (11:25-30).They are to build their lives on his words (7:24-27). He is the new Moses, bring a new law from a new mountain (Sermon on Mt., 5-7, is a collection of Jesus' sayings given an symbolic location on a mountain. These same sayings are scattered in Luke and are not on a mountain.)

The Gospel of Matthew is judged by many scholars to come from a religious community where there was a sense of equality (20:1-16). God gave all authority to Jesus (28:18) and Jesus gave authority to Peter (16:17-20) (and his successors ?), but all members were equal (20:1-16). Some gave up private property (19:16-30), were celibate (19:10-12), and all were called upon to commit themselves with singular devotion (6:19-34). There was a procedure for disciplining the brother who sinned (18:15-20). The cardinal aspects of Jewish piety were important: almsgiving, prayer and fasting (6:1-18). Scholars understand the Sermon on the Mount as representing the central discipline and way of life of this community.

Style of Life: A close-knit and supportive religious community following the teachings of Jesus as a discipline or way of life, patterned after Jewish religious communities such as Qumran (the Essene community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered). A similar Christian community was the church in Jerusalem, though the approach to the Christian life of the Jerusalem community was more similar to

that of Paul (in Gal. 2 Paul argues that he and Jerusalem were in basic agreement on their understanding of the Christian life.)

Model: Conforming or transforming the Christian life by obedience to Jesus' commandments. This might be called an "outside-in" model, following an external discipline to deal with and change what we are inside and shape our lives.

Paul's Model

Paul's model is well described in Gal. 3-5, where he discussed how God engaged humankind in a developmental process from Abraham to Christ, compared to the growth of a child to maturity. Part of God's provision for the childhood and adolescent stages of that process were: the Law, intended to point up sin and provide discipline, and the elemental spirits (the powers and structures of society and the world). Both of these functioned as "custodians" for the childhood period of humanity. When maturity in Christ is received (including receiving one's identity in Christ and the presence of God\the Spirit as a new dynamic and resource), then the "custodians" are no longer to care for life. Responsibility and life-style is the expression of what one is becoming, the fruit of the Spirit. This approach was not merely Paul's theory, but it fitted his Christian experience. His experience was not centered on Jesus as a teacher of commandments, but as one who in living form appeared to him on the Damascus Road. The experience of God continued to play an important role in his life (e.g. II Cor. 12:1-7) and that is one of the reasons why Paul developed an approach to life based upon this.

Style of Life: Paul's churches did not have the close-knit, semi-monastic life of the Matthaean community. His churches were organized like Jewish Synagogues and his people lived much of their lives in the every-day world of their neighbors. They had to be able to carry their Christianity with them and to be convinced of its reality without the continuing presence of their religious community. They had to be able to act and decide in many and complex situations where someone would not always be present to tell them what to do.

Model: This is an "inside-out" model, living out of the inner resources which God provides in Christ, living out of the presence of God (the Spirit) in life. It stresses mature and responsible behaviour from one's own initiative, rather than in obedience to commands.

If the Pauline model were applied to an individual person, the developmental process would be described in this way:

CHILDHOOD or PERIOD OF IMMATURITY

> cared for and influenced by others, instructed and disciplined for the sake of growth to maturity and independence, provided with the resources for living

MATURITY

> a sense of identity and an inner life/reality out of which one can live. What one is, is prior to what one does. The presence of God in one's life is an important part of what one is, one's resource for living. Growth, what one becomes, is a process that continues all of life.

One of Paul's particular contributions to an understanding of Christian growth is that in the process of his own life he came to realize that he could never leave his humanity behind. No matter how he grew spiritually, he would always have to come to terms with and accept the limitations of his humanity. II Cor. 3-5 contains a helpful treatment of this. Though we are "being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (3:18), "we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us". All of the struggles of human existence are ours, but we are never overcome. (4:7ff) Our humanness remains until we receive our resurrection body. (5:1)

Additional Insights

Though Paul has a good sense of how God helps humanity to develop and how God's presence in his life helped him to develop, he does not provide us with much help in understanding how this happens and how we may cooperate in it happening. He knows THAT this happens and he has reflected on some aspects of it, but the understanding of HOW growth and transformation take place in persons is really left to later generations as they reflect on the mystery of human life and experience. This is why the New Testament assigns such an important role to the Spirit. God's Spirit continues to lead us into a fuller understanding of life and God so that we may grow in wisdom as to how this takes place. The mystical traditions of Christianity have explored the nature of our experience of God and Christian growth and can contribute significant insights. The mystics, long before modern psychology, were the analysts of human and especially religions experience. Modern psychology, particularly as it has been appropriated by some who have spiritual interests (e.g. Carl Jung), has also been very helpful. Some of our learnings are as follows:

1. Psychology has taught us that not all people are the same. Some are Introverts, some are Extroverts. There are different ways of thinking and perceiving. And there are also the many differences produced by our different life histories and biological constitutions. Thus when we speak of growth and relationship with God, we always have to keep in mind that all of this happens in relationship to the distinctiveness of each individual. Kiersey and Bates in *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, begin their book with:

> If I do not want what you want, please try not to tell me that my want is wrong.
> Or if I believe other than you, at least pause before you correct my view.
> Or if my emotion is less than yours, or move, given the same circumstances, try not to ask me to feel more strongly or weakly.
> Or yet if I act, or fail to act, in the manner of your design for action, let me be.
> I do not, for the moment at least, ask you to understand me. That will come only when you are willing to give up changing me into a copy of you.
> I may be your spouse, your parent, your offspring, your friend, or your colleague. If you will allow me any of my own wants, or emotions, or beliefs, or actions, then you open yourself, so that some day these ways of mine might not seem so wrong, and might finally appear to you as right -- for me. To put up with me is the first step to understanding me. Not that you em brace my ways as right for you, but that you are no longer irritated or disappointed with me for my seeming waywardness. And in understanding me you might come to prize my differences from you, and, far from seeking to change me, preserve and even nurture those differences.[14]

2. Our inner self, that self that is in contact with God's Spirit and is the "self in the process of transformation" out of which we are to live and act, is not readily accessible to our conscious mind. It is largely in our Unconscious. Therefore, we can't aggressively discover what is there. We can only discover what is there by watching what it produces:
a) *Within*, in terms of dreams, day-dreaming, exercises which use the imagination. For most persons the information which it gives us is primarily in terms of images.
b) *Without*, in terms of the actions and behavior it produces, and in what it "projects" onto other persons. We can often tell much about ourselves by our attitudes towards others.

3. Our Unconscious consists of:

a) Personal memories and experiences, many of which have been forgotten or repressed. This includes all we have learned from the attitudes and beliefs of our culture.
b) All that is part of our human nature: instincts, biological drives, and images which are inherited with

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[14]. David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates , *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, Prometheus Nemesis Books, 1978, p. 1.

our humanity (what Carl Jung calls the Collective Unconscious).
Key approaches to the Unconscious are to become as conscious or aware of its contents as possible, integrating its contents into ourselves so that we become whole persons. What we do not integrate may operate on its own and may become a destructive part of us, rather than realizing its potential to become creative.

4. Principles for transforming/changing our inner self or Unconscious:
a) *You can't* subtract from it. What you have learned you have learned. What you have experienced, you have experienced. There is no human mechanism for erasing memories.
YOU CAN:
-change the emotional charge of material in your Unconscious by bringing it to consciousness and experiencing the feelings. This diminishes the inner power of these experiences;
-add to the contents of your Unconscious so that be the adding of new and constructive materials the "mixture" of what is there becomes different;
-integrate and organize the contents in new ways;
-accept it as God in Christ has accepted you, including all of the difficulties that you experience within yourself. Your difficulties are part of your humanness. You need to regard your humanness as GIFT, not only as PROBLEM.
b) Though thinking can help, the Unconscious learns best by EXPERIENCE:
-outer life experience -- You may plan new life experiences which will change you within.
-inner experiences lived out in the imagination. In inner experiences one may produce new experiences through the imagination or may take old experiences in new directions.
c) What is happening in the Unconscious occurs below the level of consciousness so that you can't "see" what is happening, except as reflected in dreams, imaginative experiences and outward actions. Thus the transformation of the inner self is something that cannot be produced directly, but must be waited for. Many who study this compare the transformation of the inner self to the work of an artist. The artist may do many things to get ready to paint, but then there is a period of "incubation" when ideas and images are organizing themselves before the insight comes. Integration and reorganization of our inner lives happens more by attraction and repulsion (like magnets) than by being able to intentionally put things together. We feed in material and experiences that we want to be a part of us and then allow it to organize itself.
d) One of the most important needs of our Unconscious is a *focus*, *vision* or *commitment*, which may function as a central core to which other material may be drawn and around which it may become organized.
e) Last, but most importantly, the New Testament affirms that our inner self is not merely transformed by communicating Christian experience, vision and ideals to our Unconscious, but by the direct participation of God. Thus we need to be open to God's actions and leading and provide God with adequate opportunity to work within our lives.

The Nature of God Experience from a Trinitarian Perspective

Language About God

The Christian understanding and experience of God came to be defined in Trinitarian terms: Father, Son and Spirit. To describe God in this way was faithful to the church's experience of God as Father/Creator, the presence of God in Jesus Christ, and the new presence of God in the Spirit. Within the New Testament one finds the earliest church reflecting upon and seeking to explain its threefold experience of God, the raw materials out of which the doctrine of the Trinity was later to be developed.

The primary concern in early Christian theology was to define the Son , the Spirit being given less definition, consigned to the third paragraph of the Apostles' Creed along with other matters. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in the fourth century and Chalcedon in the fifth sought to define the relationship of the Father and the Son in terms of affirming the Son to be *truly* God and of *one substance* with the Father. Christ was:

> ... the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ...[15]

The Council of Constantinople added to the earlier Creed of Nicaea further definition of the Spirit:

> ... the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets.[16]

While the Trinitarian language of earliest Christianity is less a description of the *nature* of God than of the *experience of God and God's action*, as the church moved into the Greco-Roman world and the Councils sought to define the faith, there was need to describe and define in terms of the questions raised by contemporary philosophical assumptions. And so they spoke of Christ's substance and nature. Yet in Judaism and earliest Christianity the description of God does not deal with God's nature, but God's *character* (loving and faithful) and *action*, and the *human experience of this*. It was recognized that God's nature could not be described. It was also recognized that language about God was more metaphorical than precisely descriptive. Paul, our earliest Christian theologian, in I Cor. 13:8ff and 8:1-3 clearly speaks about the limitations of theological language and knowledge of God.

The metaphorical nature of the earlier Christian descriptions of the Trinity is also indicated by the fact that most of the language used was borrowed from the religious traditions of Judaism, and later of the Hellenistic world, whose religious languages and terminologies were available to describe the Christian experience, without intending precision.[17] An interesting example of this is the Christian use of Jewish language, describing Wisdom as God's agent in creation and history, to express the meaning of Jesus in John 1 and Col. 1.[18] Does this really intend to describe Jesus' actual historical involvement in creation? Or is it a way of saying that the meaning of creation is to be found in the meaning of Jesus and the Christ-event?

While appreciating the work of the Councils in formulating the Christian faith so that it made sense to their contemporaries, the humility of the New Testament descriptions of the persons of the Trinity has much to say to us. It introduces us to the earliest Christians' experience of God and their attempts to define this within the limitations of thought and language they themselves recognized.

The Hidden God

God, God's self, cannot really be examined or understood by our limited human capabilities. Thus Christians have often described God as existing within a cloud or a mystery, as hidden. This hiddenness is expressed in the biblical admonition against the making of images.[19] Though God reveals God's self in a burning bush, a pillar of fire, on a mountain, God is not to be described and God's face cannot be seen. Eventually in Judaism God's name is not even to be pronounced. The mystical vision of Judaism is the "throne vision," such as one finds in Isaiah 6, where God is only seen in heaven and only God's glory is described. The approach to God in the Bible is very much that described by the anonymous 14th century

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15. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 further defined Christ as both true God and true man.

16. The Christian East and West came to argue over whether the Spirit proceeded from the Father only, or from the Father and the Son.

17. Such use of language borrows available language to describe an event or experience without trying to refine the language and make it precisely correspond to the reality it describes. In attempts to define religious experience, one must question as to whether language is ever adequate, no matter how much one tries to refine it.

18. In Jewish Wisdom literature, Wisdom was a personified extension of God (usually described in feminine terms), and was agent in creation of the world, and God's agent of action in the world throughout history. Proverbs 8 describes Wisdom as agent in creation, and Wisdom's participation in history was further developed in two books that are part of the Old Testament Apocrypha: The Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Sirach.

19. Deuteronomy 5:8.

English mystic, author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, who saw God as living within a cloud, representing God's inaccessibility to our senses:

> ... and because of it (the cloud) you can neither see Him clearly with your reason in the light of understanding, nor can you feel Him with your affection in the sweetness of love. Be prepared, therefore, to remain in this darkness as long as must be, crying evermore for Him whom you love. For if you are ever to feel Him or to see Him, it will necessarily be within this cloud and within this darkness.[20]

The author of the *Cloud* also calls for a "cloud of forgetting," an intentional laying aside of the images and names, which both represent and hide God, in order to relate directly to God and God's mystery. It is helpful to name and represent God, but God is not equivalent to the names and representations. Only God is God.

Rainer Maria Rilke expresses this in one of his poems in "The Book of Hours":

> You neighbor God, ...
>
> Only a slender wall lies between us,
> through fate; for there could be
> a call from your mouth, or mine --
> and it would shatter,
> with scarcely a sound.
>
> Out of your images is it built. ....
>
> And my senses, which quickly grow lame,
> find nowhere to go, separated from you.[21]

Christ Jesus

It is then amazing that God makes of God's self an image in a person: the Word, "Wisdom," become flesh in Jesus, or he is described as the one in whom God's Spirit uniquely dwells.[22] However, one must be careful about pushing the "visibility" of God too far. When the Spirit dwells in Jesus one still sees the Jesus in whom the Spirit dwells. Even the *incarnation* of God must be seen as a translation, a transformation into a historic mode of expression which both reveals and veils. Even where this is described in John 1:1-18, the mystery remains. It is *only the Son* who has seen God and who makes him known; we have seen the Son's glory, not the Father's.

Whatever the mystery of the revelation of God in Jesus, that it occurred is decisive and this has affected in some way all Christian reflection about God, providing concreteness for description of what God is like. This is what the Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf expresses in his poem "Allegegenwart," describing the human search for God and its resolution:

> (The Soul)
> 1. All-Present-One! I must confess
> You inexpressibly the deep height
> Fill without being seen.

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[20]. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Introductory Commentary and Translation by Ira Progoff, New York: Julian Press, 1957, III,5.
[21]. My translation. Babette Deutsch, *Poems from the Book of Hours, "Das Stundenbuch"*, Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941, p. 12.
[22]. John 1:14 speaks of the Word/Wisdom having become flesh in Jesus while the Synoptics stress the coming of the Spirit of God on Jesus in his Baptism and its presence in his ministry.

Yet everywhere I go and stand
The trace of your almighty path,
Never to be fathomed,
Still over-all is found,
As far as mind can wander.

2. So can it not be otherwise,
Because I note you everywhere.
So with earnestness I venture,
The greatness of your might and power
Your blinding bright majesty
Before which the dark deeps shrink,
To grasp with a song
That which surpasses all song. .....

Divine Answer
8. Cease to seek what is so far,
Cease to seek what flees you;
You have the Kernel which matters,
Don't trouble with externals.
Torment not your soul's light
To reach what is eternal.
You might capture darkness
And still find me nowhere.

9. Why, thou foolish child,
Will you fetch me from the depths?
Where do you think I can be found?
Do you seek me at heaven's poles?
Do you seek me in the creature?
My nature, which no eye can see,
Has built itself a body
And still you miss my presence.

10. O! Come here and see
The concealed abyss
The hidden majesty
In Jesus, the humble child, see
Whether humanity in grace is free,
See whether He your praise deserves!
Whose heart with love for Him is filled,
Who believes, from all care becomes free.

The Soul
11. O Eternity! Beauteous Light!
Reflection of the glorius king.
O love, which pierces heaven
To dwell in my small inn,
Here I find myself, here I lay hold.
Of course I have not seen you,
Yet that will one day be.
Now I love you, believe and rest.[23]

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[23]. *Graf Ludwigs von Zinzendorf Teutscher Gedichte*, Erster Theil, Herrnhuth:, 1735, pp. 106-108.

Though the mystery of God has been revealed in the person of Christ, to know the mystery is *not so much a matter of knowledge, but of relationship*. God offers God's self to be known in relationship. One may know God relationally without knowing all about God. This is important, for the variety of New Testament descriptions of Christ as revealer of God make uniformity in description difficult. In different sources there are *differences in foci*. These differences had to do not only with different religious traditions and perspectives that Jesus' followers brought to the experience of and reflection on him, but central questions had to be satisfied from the presumptions of each tradition. Primary was: *What in the Jesus' tradition makes relationship with God possible and removes the barriers to it?* Among the varied *foci*, one encounters the following as central to the possibility of relationship with God:

- in Matthew, knowing Jesus' teaching and obeying it;
- in Luke, accepting Jesus as provider of the Spirit and prophet for social transformation;
- in Mark, accepting Jesus as proclaimer of an understanding of the Kingdom (presence of God) which should be seen as the mystery of God's generous presence to all, calling for a mission to the Gentiles;[24]
- in John, accepting the life and knowledge of God experienced through Christ, unknowable otherwise;
- in Paul, accepting the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection which provided experience of transformation of one's nature and status, enabling relationship with God and others;
- in most of the Gospels, following the pattern of the Gospel story which also describes the life of believer.[25]

One then finds that the early Church saw in the totality of the Christ-event a wealth of dimensions, episodes, teachings, and implications from which Christians could draw what was necessary to enable and receive God's relationship and to remove the barriers to such relationship. What were the perspectives of the believer, and the barriers that needed to be dealt with, affected what was chosen from the tradition. But *it was always the relationship with God which saves and into which one was saved*, not some particular aspect of the Christ-event. Where relationship with Christ was a central saving element, it always saved one into a relationship with God.

Regarding the barriers to relationship which needed to be removed, different cultures and traditions had different needs, and some within the early church were consciously aware of this.[26]

Paul, in I Corinthians 9:19-23, says that in telling the Gospel he became at times as one "under the Law" (a Jew) and at other times as one "outside the law" (a Gentile). He even mentions that he became as "the weak" (those with limited knowledge of the implications of the Gospel, as in I Cor. 8:7-13). The first two distinctions were cultural, and this would mean that Paul addressed the Gospel to cultural needs. The Jew needed to come to terms with the requirements of Law, taken seriously as *God's* gift, and had to deal with the problem of sin as perceived in Post-Exilic Judaism. This is exactly what one finds in Galatians 3, a letter addressed to Christians either Jewish in background or struggling with their relationship with

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[24]. This was over against other understandings which saw God's kingdom as a call for political revolution. Such debate on the nature of the Kingdom was not only significant within the life-time of Jesus, but the Gospel of Mark was written about the time the Jewish War with Rome began, posing again political questions..

[25]. : Most of the events described in Mark have direct relationship to issues in the life of the believer, even outlining the development of the Christian life. In John the events of Jesus' ministry are described as "signs," events of significance, and are arranged in an order related to their significance (i.e. a theological rather than a chronological order).

[26]. Though I would like here to cite Paul, I believe that it is legitimate to conclude, from the different forms and implications of the varied sayings of Jesus, that Jesus also may have consciously spoken differently to different audiences. Thus some "disagreements" within the Jesus' tradition in the Gospels are due to Jesus speaking contextually.

Judaism.[27] Here the Law is removed only by Christ bearing upon himself in his death the curse pronounced upon those who disobey the Law. This is the significance of the cross in Galatians 3.

Now in Colossians, written for a Christian community largely Gentile, in chapters 1-2 Christ is the cosmic redeemer in whom the fullness of the deity dwells. In Col. 2:8-15, Christ cancels the bond of slavery to sin and flesh by nailing this bond to the cross and leading the conquered cosmic powers in triumphal procession like a victorious emperor. For the Greco-Roman the issue was their sense of being determined, beyond their control, by the cosmic powers and being imprisoned within their fleshly humanity. There is no treatment of Christ's death as a means to be freed from the Law. The Law was a non-issue for the Gentile.

Sometimes the treatment of Christ's death is affected by the *analogy* that is chosen. In Romans 3:21-26 the analogy is the Jewish festival of the Day of Atonement (as in Hebrews), the major sacrificial ritual dealing with intentional sin. Now God sets forth Christ *publicly* as an expiation for sin, while on the Day of Atonement the high priest took the blood of the sin offering secretly into the Holy of Holies, an offering no one actually ever saw. One must ask here how far the analogy should be pushed. Should one make of Christ's death an actual sin offering? In I Peter the ransoming of Christians from "foolish ways" is effected by Christ's death, described as that of a sacrificial lamb, without blemish or spot (I Peter 1:18-19). Does this then mean that Christ's death was actually a sacrifice, and that in order to be an adequate sacrifice he was really "without blemish or spot," i.e., separated from what it means to be truly human?

In Acts, Luke's Greek perspective neglects the death of Jesus and its meaning, rather calling for a focus on the resurrection of Christ and the action of the Spirit. In Acts 2:23 Peter says that Jesus' death occurred at the hands of lawless men and no saving significance is mentioned. It is in the resurrection that God acts in a saving way. Even in the sermons of Paul in Acts the death of Jesus has no significance, other than that it happened -- which has caused scholars to ponder whether Paul's message was being fairly described by Luke.

Thus it seems that the early church drew upon the richness of the Christ event to indicate how God has drawn near for relationship, and how all of the obstacles, in whatever way perceived in one's cultural heritage, have been dealt with. In our dealing with the Christ event we must do the same. We are mistaken if we seek to present to Christians today the need to receive Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin, providing freedom from the Law, -- unless the recipients of such a message have been acculturated to assume these needs (as have many traditional Christians). It would also seem to be backwards to try to preach a perception of the problems (e.g., sin) before proclaiming the goal to which the problems' resolution was to lead: namely, reconciliation with God. We should start with the goal first and then explore the barriers which need to be stripped away.[28] *As we draw upon the Christ-event to free persons for God, let us at least know the issues with which persons today actually struggle. We must know how to draw upon this deep well of the Christ-event and be as culture specific as was the early church. The needs within the many cultures of our world may not be the same, but the well is adequate.*

The Spirit

The appearance of the phenomenon of the Spirit, after the very short period of Jesus' life, ministry, and resurrection appearances, confronted the church with another manifestation of God's presence. *The*

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[27]. Galatians, so I believe, is a letter which contains within it an earlier Pauline statement on Jewish Christian theology, beginning at 2:15, and can be reconstructed by eliminating inserts added when this statement was used as a basis for the letter to the Galatians.

[28]. Zinzendorf, the major Moravian theologian of the 18th century, said that all in the Christian life should be approached from the joyous redemption and reconciliation that God provided in Christ. One should never start with an analysis of all the problems people have. Because God has offered such a great redemption, one can assume that there are problems and then leave it at that. Dwell joyously on the redemption. Thus Moravians were called "happy pietists" in contrast with the pietists at the University of Halle which believed in careful introspection of one's sinfulness.

church was just discovering how to describe the presence of God in Jesus when it had to learn to describe the Spirit. This was to mean that it could not fully describe its experience of God without saying: Father, Son, and Spirit.

One might say that the Spirit is the experience of new possibilities of relationship with God in the post-Jesus period, but in some way dependent upon and related to the Jesus, his life, and his mission. This same Spirit had come upon Jesus in his baptism and ministry, and Jesus was described by John the Baptist as one who would baptize with the Spirit. In the departure discourses of John, chapters 14-16, Jesus says that it was necessary that he go away in order that the Spirit come, probably indicating that the presence of God was not to be tied to the location of his ministry, but universally available. In Luke 11:1-14 Jesus promises the giving of the Spirit by the God who is a good "Father," and in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5 tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come after his departure. However, much of the New Testament stresses that the receiving of the Spirit after the time of Jesus is somehow connected with what Jesus had done and the symbolic acceptance of what Jesus had done in baptism.[29]

Luke's treatment of the Spirit deserves special consideration because of its importance in his writings. He uses the Spirit to describe how God lives in the world through persons and engages the world in transformation. The Kingdom of God is not primarily coming, in the future, but is *within*, and by being within is also *in our midst*.[30]

In the Infancy narrative of Luke, after the announcement of the coming birth, Mary replies, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" and the angel says:

> The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.[31]

The word "overshadow" is very important in understanding what Luke is saying by this story. It comes from the narrative about the presence of God at the tabernacle (sacred tent), the temporary place of worship for Jews during the journey out of Egypt (Ex. 40:34-38). A cloud, indicating God's presence, covered the tent and the glory of God dwelled within. The words of the angel mean that the presence of God (the Holy Spirit) will come upon Mary and the glory of God will dwell within her. *Her womb will become the temple of God, and the child to be born will be holy, will belong to God* (which is what "holy" means).

This event is not only significant to Mary. The angel had implied that it would continue to be significant to all of God's people. Luke places it in the first chapter of his Gospel as an introduction to all that he is to say. The clue to how this event was to be significant to all is to be found in Luke's understanding of the Spirit, the presence of God, throughout both the Gospel and its companion volume, Acts.

The Spirit comes upon Mary (1:35); Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41); the Spirit comes upon old Simeon in the Temple who announces that God's salvation has now appeared in the infant Jesus (2:25-27); the Spirit descends upon Jesus in his baptism (2:22); Jesus begins his ministry full of the Spirit (4:1,14); in the Nazareth synagogue Jesus announces that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18). Jesus then promises the coming of the Spirit (24:49, Acts 1:8), and the Spirit comes upon the Church in Acts 2, the experience of Pentecost. From the perspective of Luke, the history of the early church, as written in Acts, is the story of the Spirit.

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[29]. Note how the coming of the Spirit and baptism are connected in Acts and the relationship of receiving the Spirit and putting on Christ in baptism in Galatians 3:6-4:7.

[30]. Luke 17:21 may be translated as indicating that the Kingdom is both "within" and "in your midst." The demands of Lukan theology make it necessary to see Luke as intending that we take seriously this double meaning.

[31]. Luke 1:35.

The coming of the Spirit upon Mary and the birth of her child then becomes the model, the paradigm, of the Christian life. *It is not merely the story of Mary, but the story of how God comes to us and what God may birth within us. It is the birth which produces many children.* What happened in Mary was unique, but not intended only for her. It was intended to be the pattern for all. Jesus was born by God's presence within the temple of Mary's womb. Luke intends to say that there is such a womb within us all, female or male, within which God can dwell, out of which may be birthed God's life.

Now it is important to look carefully at what is often a misunderstanding of the Spirit. Though the experience of the Spirit in Acts seems to be regarded as one of *power,* releasing the phenomena of Pentecost described in Acts 2, a careful reading of the New Testament will reveal that this is not often so. Luke's theology at the time he wrote Acts seemed to assume that all manifestations of the Spirit would be powerful.[32] Even in Paul's connection of the Spirit with the various spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12), not all the gifts result in powerful phenomena. *The connection of the Spirit with power has perhaps caused many to look for the Spirit to come, when it is already present.* It must be realized that when one is speaking of the Spirit's presence, one is really speaking of the same thing as the presence of God, the presence of Christ, or even of the nature of the Kingdom of God and the power of the Gospel. Thus one cannot speak of the *strong* power of the Spirit while forgetting what Jesus said about the mysterious presence of God's Kingdom (Mark 4:11) which was small as a mustard seed (Mark 4:31), or the strange weak power of the Gospel (the message of the cross), which was a stumbling block to those who wanted a sign of power and foolishness to those who wanted wisdom (I Cor. 1:18-25). Nor can we forget how the treasure we have from God is contained in our earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (II Cor. 4:7). Thus we learn that the power of God finds it possibilities in our weaknesses (II Cor. 12:8-10). Luke's paradigmatic Mary is a real flesh and blood woman, partaker of our humanity.[33] However the power of God may be defined, it is God's power, not ours. Zinzendorf, in the Moravian tradition, with his belief that the cross is the key to understanding God, indicated that in the cross God forever renounced the use of coercive power and affirmed gentleness.[34]

Rather than speaking of the Spirit as power it would seem best to speak of the *Spirit as relationship*. In Galatians 3-4 the Spirit represents the giving of relationship, the giving of God's self, which enables us to be God's children and to express this by saying, "Abba, Father." It is out of this relationship that the Christian life grows (Gal. 5:16-25) and we are helped in our weakness (Rom. 8:26-27). This is the gift of God's self which is far beyond the giving of good things by an earthly father (Luke 11:13).

Though present history is the time of the Spirit, Christ also has a role which is variously described. In I Cor. 15:24, Phil. 2:9-10 and elsewhere the Christ ascends into the cosmos to subject all its powers to himself: thus he continues his Messianic mission in the heavens. In Rev. 1 the ascended Christ, like "a son of man," stands in the midst of his churches, caring for them on earth. In Gal. 4:6 the *Spirit of the Son* does what he did historically, helps persons to speak of God as "Abba, Father".[35] Though the Spirit is usually seen as the giver of spiritual gifts in the life of the church, in Ephesians 4:8ff Christ is the giver of spiritual gifts.[36] Even though in John it is said that Jesus had to go away for the Spirit to come, Jesus does not seem to be away since there is talk of abiding in him (e.g. John 15:1-11) and the pattern of Johannine spirituality is to come to Jesus, see him, and stay with him (John 1:25-29). It is clear from Gal. 1:12 that Paul's decisive religious experience on the Damascus Road was a "revelation of Jesus Christ," an

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32. Acts represents an early stage in Luke's theology which was naively optimistic and portrayed the Spirit as always powerful. After the deaths of Peter and Paul and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, he came to see life and religious experience more realistically and modified his perspective in the later version of the Gospel, our present Luke.

33. The elevation of Mary in Roman Catholic theology loses her as a paradigm for us, for she is no longer like us.

34. Nicholas Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, *Vier und dreissig Homilien über die Wunden-Litaney der Brüder, gehalten auf dem Herrnhaag in den Sommer-Monathen 1747*, n.d., (5/14/47), pp. 60f.

35. It is a central element of Jesus' teaching that God can be addressed as *Abba,* Aramaic for *Father,* a familiar form of address. This is equivalent in the New Testament to the revelation of God's name to Moses in the Old Testament.

36. In Rom. 12 the giver is unclear. In I Peter 4:10-11 God gives spiritual gifts.

experience of Christ after his Ascension.[37] Thus for many Christ continued to play an active role in their experience after the giving of the Spirit *and even in the Spirit*. However, the author of Hebrews understood that Christ after his ascension ceased his activity: having ascended, he sits down at the right hand of God and waits for someone else to subject the cosmic powers (God ?), *while the Spirit bears witness to what Christ has done* (10:12-18). Thus Hebrews clearly distinguishes the time of the Spirit from the time of the Son, a distinction not clear in other New Testament literature.

All of this indicates the variety of early Christian experience of the presence of God and the varied language used to express it. In analyzing the language of the New Testament one is brought to say: *Yes, the period following the ascension of Christ was the time of the experience of God in the Spirit, but at times the experience of the resurrected Christ was mediated through the Spirit (or apart from it).*

The struggle of the church to define its spiritual experience after the time of Jesus did not have clear results. "Spirit" seems to have been used for the ongoing activity of both the Father and the Son, and, in some New Testament traditions, almost to have been treated as a third person of the Godhead. Like the use of "Wisdom" as an personified expression of God in Judaism, we are not clear how far to take this personification. The later church was also more concerned to define the "Son" than the "Spirit," which was placed in the third paragraph of the Apostles and Nicene creeds, along with other articles of belief. It was not given a separate paragraph as was the "Father" and the "Son." The very term "Spirit" seems to indicate its more nebulous nature.

Though the early Church knew the life- and gift-giving qualities of the Spirit, it recognized that, as in all religious experience, *discernment* was needed to define what was being experienced in one's religious experience.[38] This essentially involved being able to see within the experience *continuity with Jesus*, a manifestation of *love*, and *responsibility to the Christian community*.

The Nature of the Post-Resurrection Experience of Christ in the New Testament

I would like to point up that the New Testament language about the experience of Christ may be understood in three ways, two of which are implied above. *The first is that it refers to an actual, objective experience of the resurrected Christ.* When one analyzes the description of Paul's Damascus road experience in his own literature and in Acts, it seems clear that it could not be understood in the two other ways I will suggest. It was an experience of One who encountered him unexpectedly, objectively, and which (according to his own description) did not have antecedents in a psychological process.[39] Such experience of the resurrected Christ continues to be part of the experience of Christians. Even though the Johannine community in the Gospel has Jesus speak of the other Comforter, the Spirit, who comes to re-present him, it is clear from the style of spirituality advocated in John, and the handling of the Jesus tradition, that Christians are still to come to him and abide in and with him.

Secondly, experience of Christ may be understood as an appropriation of the meaning and understanding embodied in the historical Christ event which expresses the Christian's self-understanding "in Christ.". Wherever baptism is discussed in the New Testament it becomes clear that the baptized, in the dramatic process of the baptismal experience, took to her/himself the dying and rising of Christ, finding identity in

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[37]. It must be remembered, however, that in I Cor. 15:8 Paul joins his Damascus Road experience of Christ to those of the early disciples which occurred immediately after the resurrection, but for him was "as to one untimely born." Thus the revelation of Christ to him "apostled" him (Gal. 1:1) and, even though later, belonged to those experiences which apostled others, but which were primarily limited to the period immediately after the resurrection and before the giving of the Spirit.

[38]. In I Cor. 12 and I John 4 it is made clear that spiritual experience may be deceptive and that one must discern its legitimacy: whether it is the Spirit of God or is something else.

[39]. Paul says this clearly in Gal. 1:12. In Philippians 3:3-6 he describes his clear satisfaction, before conversion, in his Jewish heritage and his obedience to the Law. Rom. 7, which describes Paul's struggle with the Law and with his inner life, is now understood by many not as a description of his inner struggle as a Jew, but of his struggle with the Law as a Christian as he became aware of the call of Christ to purity of inward life as well as external obedience.

being "in Christ" or "putting on Christ." Such an appropriation of the meaning of Christ can be a very powerful experience. Because baptism for many is now in infancy, Confirmation and Eucharist (Holy Communion) should provide the same type of occasion for appropriating the Christian self-understanding. Certainly the Eucharist functioned in this way in the New Testament Church. Paul, who gives us our earliest account of Jesus' "Last Supper" with his disciples, indicates that the elements were taken "in memory" of Jesus. Jesus was memorialized by the telling of the story of his last days, much as in Judaism the Passover was memorialized by the telling of its story. Such remembrance enabled the participant to enter the history of Jesus, be present there, and the history of Jesus to define identity. [40] Such presence of the believer within Jesus' history became also a "real presence" of Jesus to the believer.

The third way in which the experience of Christ may be understood is as a psychic introject, the person of God who is taken into us in a concrete form. Of the persons of the Trinity, it is largely Christ who has the concreteness through his historic life and the sacraments to form the basis for an introject. Modern psychology has made clear how this happens with the introjection of significant others in childhood. I believe that this process continues throughout life wherever we are provided with experiences and materials significant enough to become a part of us. In leading meditations on Scripture I have frequently encountered religious introjects which appear in the meditative exercise. In fact, such introjection is really an intent of religion, that what is brought to us from outside of us in our religious tradition may be interiorized. Here *our religious traditions bear a great responsibility as to the quality and nature of what becomes introjected*. The difficulty regarding introjecting Christ is that defining Christ is no simple matter. We have four Gospels and the presentation of Jesus in Paul, not to mention other New Testament literature. The understanding of Jesus which we transmit is the result of a selective and critical appraisal of these varied sources. This is work that the church should do for its members. Hopefully, what is introjected, if appropriate, will contribute creatively to the life of the person and become linked with the action of God, the Spirit and the resurrected Christ (external to us) within our lives. Carl Jung also suggests that the person of Christ provides an appropriate image to activate the structures built into our psyche to lead us to wholeness.[41]

Although the introjection of Christ is important for our spiritual lives, it is not appropriate for all. There are some for whom Christ does not play a significant experiential role. But more important, we must be aware that those persons who have a history of abuse are not going to let another someone from outside them invade their psyche. Thus it is important to recognize that there are many ways to describe the relationship of Christ to life. We need to offer persons a sufficient variety so that they can identify with some. Christ may be in us, but we may be in Christ. Christ is coming to us from the future, and so impinges on our present. Christ becomes part of our past, our identity. Christ is our companion in the present. We communally represent Christ to the world, and so are the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). We set our minds on the things above, where Christ is (Col. 3:2). We imitate Christ (I Thess. 1:6). Christ is the original Human (Man/Adam) after whom life may be patterned and by whom life may be restored (Phil. 2:5-11). Christ is our Lord, to whom we give obedience.

Christocentrism

One of the major issues in the Trinitarian nature of the Christian experience of God is Christocentrism. Can legitimate experience of God and "salvation" be said to occur *only through Christ*? Paul Knitter, in *No Other Name?*, pursues this as a contemporary question about the relationship of Christianity to other world religions.[42] In examining the New Testament it seems to be the case that Jesus is presented in Mark and Luke as being theocentric (God centered: proclaiming the "Kingdom of God") while the later

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[40]. Form Critics indicate that the reason the passion story of Jesus' last days occupies one-third of the Gospels is that this material was assembled even before the writing of the Gospels to serve as narrative at the Eucharist.

[41]. Jung speaks of the archetype of the *Self* which responds to religious symbols, such as Christ, almost as an image of God within the psyche. See John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*, NY: Paulist Press, 1982, pp. 119ff.

[42]. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985.

Gospels, reflecting the apologetics of Christian communities and the struggles of Christianity with Judaism, moved in a Christocentric direction. This is clearly notable in the Gospel of John. [43]

It may be suggestive to hear the Pauline presentation of the role of Christ in I Corinthians, a letter accepted as genuinely Pauline by most. Here the church is the church of God, not Christ, and God is the source of the church's life. It is the Lord (God) of whom we should boast, and it is just as problematic to say that we belong to Christ (without recognizing the source of our life *in God*) as it is to say we belong to Paul, Cephas, or Apollos.(I Cor. 1) In I Cor. 15:20-28, Paul points out that while the resurrected Christ plays a significant role in the interim before the End, in the End he will deliver over everything to the Father so that God may be all in all.

Romans implies similar ideas. In 1:1-7 the Gospel is the Gospel of God, concerning his Son, and the church is God's beloved. The Gospel is the power of God (1:17). In 3:21ff Paul indicates that what God did in Christ was to set forth *publicly* what he had been previously doing. In Gal. 4:6 it is the work of the Spirit *of the Son* (the resurrected Christ) to help persons to utter "Abba, Father," doing as he did historically when he taught his disciples to pray "Father."

The interesting thing is that Paul's treatment of Christ, mentioned above, seems to be an attempt to preserve Jewish monotheism, to preserve God as source of all, while assigning to Christ a unique role in this present age, a role which would be surrendered to God in the End. Paul's treatment of this shows a closer relationship to the presentation of Jesus in the earlier Synoptics where Jesus is one who preached the Kingdom of God and taught his disciples to pray to the Father.[44] His understanding of the role of Christ in this age draws upon the description of some of the earthly and heavenly "mediators" in Jewish religious literature: Messiah, Son of Man or Heavenly Man of Apocalyptic literature,[45] and possibly Wisdom as a personified extension of God.[46] As with all of the early church, much of Paul's Christological language is "borrowed" from his culture to express the meaning of the reality he encountered in Christ. One must always question how literally he would desire us to understand it: i.e. whether the language serves functional or ontological purposes (whether it describes what Christ *does* or what Christ *is*).

The several letters in which it is most difficult to see the Pauline perspective outlined above are Colossians and Ephesians. Here not only is the church Christ's body (as in I Cor. 12), but Christ is *head* of

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43. Though Jesus in the earlier Synoptics, Mark and Luke, preaches a message calling persons to the "Father" and God's Kingdom/Rule, there are ways in which his unique understanding of the Jewish tradition, his understanding of his relationship with God, his use of religious terminology (e.g. "son", "son of man"), and his personal connection with his message would have eventually placed him within the center of the later church's message. To indicate that Luke represents an early tradition assumes that the original version of the Gospel was written in the early 60s and then went through several revisions, eventuating in its present form. Mark is generally accepted as being written in the mid 60s. In John there is no salvation outside of Christ and one only comes to the Father through him.

44. That this should be so is not strange when one remembers that Paul is actually our earliest source of information about Jesus, antedating the Gospels. Thus he seems closer to our earlier Gospels (Mark and Luke) and differs in various ways from Matthew and John which represent later first century perspectives. Though this is not the place to argue evidence for Paul's interest in the historical Jesus, it is the writer's conviction that Paul saw himself as responsible to Jesus and in agreement with the Jerusalem Church. One has only to read Galatians to hear Paul's argument that he was in theological agreement with Jerusalem. The Judaizing antagonists, who came from Jerusalem and urged circumcision and obedience to the dietary law in Galatia, did not so much represent a different theological position, but a desire to avoid Jewish persecution of the Mother Christian Church in Jerusalem by asking submission to basic requirements of the Law (Gal. 6: 11-13). Thus Paul understands himself to be a responsible and reliable source of the perspectives of earliest Christianity.

45. The Apocalyptic "Man" or "Son of Man" (a periphrasis for "Man") was probably patterned after the "Man" of Gen. 1 who was made in the image of God. Gen. 2-3 was seen as being about the earthly "Man", patterned after the original "Man" of Gen. 1. We know that Philo interpreted the two creation narratives in Gen. 1-3 in this way.

46. Wisdom literature is crucial to understanding how a "high" Christology developed not merely in a Hellenistic context, but a Jewish one. Many of Paul's Christological ideas can be understood as coming from the earliest "Jewish period" of Christianity.

the church, the source of the church's life.(Eph. 4:15-16) Particularly striking is the great Christological hymn of Col. 1:15-20 where Christ, like Wisdom, is the origin of all. "He is the image of the invisible God." In Col. 2:9, it is said, "the whole fullness of deity dwells in him." [47] Yet is always the invisible God who is beyond him.

These differences within the Pauline literature may indicate that Ephesians and Colossians may not have been by Paul (as some conclude), or they may represent a modification or development in Paul's views, or they may contain a different expression of the nature of Christ in the context of a different cultural situation where there was need for the cosmic Christ and less need to discuss Jesus in relationship to Jewish monotheism.

An Argument for Breadth

The conclusion of this presentation on the Trinitarian nature of the Christian experience of God is to argue for breadth in what is to be viewed as legitimate personal expression of God experience. The contemporary church must embrace as much variety in the expression of faith as one finds within the New Testament Canon. Everyone does not experience God the same way, nor does any individual experience God the same way at all times in life. To allow for individual experience and expression, within general responsibility to the biblical tradition, is to allow faith to be living and personal. Moreover, in the church's sacred task of preaching the Gospel to the world, persons are allowed to come to God as they are able (or as God enables them), rather than in a stereotypical pattern with constrictive faith formulas.

Christocentrism says a great deal about the meaning and significance of God's action in Christ. For some religious experience will be focused on the person of Christ. But I have known those whose religious experience is first of God (the Father) as the source and font of the Godhead, not of Christ.[48] Only later have some appreciated the meaning of Christ. Yet they could not deny that they had *first* come to the "Father" and have come to the Son by the "Father," rather than the other way around. Then there are those whose religious experience is centered in the Spirit.

Rather than trying to narrow the nature of religious experience through our definition of the Trinity, it would seem that the Trinity offers Christians a way of broadening their perception of the richness of religious experience as embodied in the Christian tradition, and legitimizing this variety for others. It also offers a way of viewing various dimensions which need to be preserved in our relationship with God: we need a sense of God's participation in life (the Spirit), we need a way in which God may become concrete and in this concreteness become an operating dynamic within our lives (the Christ), and we need to preserve the ultimate mystery and indescribability of God (the God above and beyond our experience and the historical and conceptual expressions of God). If we understand humans as created "in the image of God", such richness in God also helps us in exploring the mystery and richness of being human. Such an approach maintains an openness for feminine images which also play a role in the biblical tradition.[49]

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[47]. In contrast to Colossians and Ephesians, Paul in Phil. 2:5ff says that though Christ was in the form of God (probably alluding to the "Man" of Gen. 1 made in the image of God), he "did not count equality with God" something to be seized (as did Adam in Gen. 2-3). Because he emptied himself of his heavenly position and assumed the form of a servant, he was consequently exalted to a higher position. This later exaltation to a cosmic position does not quite fit with the presentation of Christ in Eph. and Col., but it can fit with the function of the ascended Christ in I Cor. 15.

[48]. Christocentrism is often based upon an understanding that God is only to be known through revelation, with Christ as the epitome of this revelation. Accompanying this is the assumption that relationship with God is not possible without the atonement effected in Christ. Thus one can come to God only through Christ. Yet both some of the biblical materials and experience have long indicated that God does not confine Godself to one way of relating. See the previous discussion of Christocentrism.

[49]. Wisdom is a significant feminine image that early Christianity borrows from Judaism, which becomes a basis for the Christology of John 1, Col. 1, and Heb. 1. The birthing image is used in the New Testament in such places as John 3:1-15, I Peter 1:3,23, and Romans 8:18-25. As has been noticed by Zinzendorf within the Moravian tradition, the Holy Spirit functions as a Mother and so it can be called "Mother." Then there is the significant way in which Mary becomes the prototype of one

All of the above means that to communicate the Gospel we need knowledge and skills which assist in dealing with spiritual experience in the context of total life experience. This means not only the ability to help persons become aware of God's participation in life, but the knowledge of spiritual disciplines which will open persons to the possibility of new spiritual experience that may confirm the message of the Gospel and support the new life possibilities about which it speaks. This has far reaching consequences for the education of Christians, both on the congregational level and in theological education. It has not been the practice of the churches and schools to help persons deal with spiritual experience. Rather has the focus been primarily intellectual and historical. If the church is not equipped to deal with spiritual experience it may not be equipped to evangelize in our times.

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who bears God's Spirit in the Lukan infancy narratives, while in Rev. 12 there is the heavenly Woman who bears a child who fulfills the expectations of Psalm 2.

V WHO IS WELCOME ?

Who is welcome? When have some done what needs to be done, become what needs to be, believed what must be believed, in order to be welcomed into the Christian community? We need to think this through as we proclaim the Gospel to others and speak to them about what is essential and what is peripheral.

The churches' understanding of election and inclusion are greatly affected by their interpretation of the biblical tradition, as they should be. However, the Bible contains within itself a variety of traditions and approaches to inclusion. These traditions are partially adaptations of perspectives of the religious culture within which Christianity developed and not necessarily integral to Christianity itself. What one should take seriously, in the way the Christian message is framed in the New Testament and the implications of the Christian acceptance of the Old Testament, must then be solved in the process of interpretation. But this is no simple task.

It is my belief that we need to look to the biblical material not only for answers, but for an understanding of the struggles of the early church with the questions. In viewing its struggle with issues one may find a variety of answers and insights into the issues within the struggle, and thus we are informed -- but not by a simple singular answer.

I would like to consider this as it affects the basis for inclusion into the Christian community. However, in our pluralistic society it is important to also consider it from another perspective, that of the attitude towards the world and those outside the Christian community for whom inclusion within the community may not be a question. The question of the relationship of Christians to non Christians and non Christian religious traditions has become a very important question in our time.

I Peter, A Biblical Paradigm

I would like to use I Peter, a favorite letter for me, as presenting a model from which to approach inclusion. It is a letter written to help the Christian churches in Asia Minor work out their identity in the face of a society that did not hold their values. If Peter is behind it, which I understand him to be, it represents a tremendous personal transformation of one who resisted dealing with the same issues at his confession of Jesus.[50]

In I Peter the Prescript to the epistle reminds the Christians of Asia Minor as to their identity. The Greek text is clearer as to the intent of the author than most of the English translations. The letter is addressed to the "elect exiles of the Dispersion". Usually elect and exiles are separated in the translation, but they are intentionally together to indicate that what elects one also exiles one. For the sake of simplicity I will leave out the Roman provinces mentioned in the address to the churches so that it is clear how the following prepositional phrases qualify "elect exiles":

Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ
to the **elect exiles** of the Dispersion (of provinces)
according to the foreknowledge of God the Father
by the sanctification of the Spirit
for obedience to and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

To understand the language it is important to recognize that there is allusion here to the covenant ceremony of Exodus 24 regarding the pledge of obedience and sprinkling with blood. Each prepositional

[50] Peter in his confession seems to have understood Jesus as a traditional Messiah, one who would apply God's power against Israel's overlord, Rome. Jesus' treatment of his suffering causes Peter to object, and Jesus identifies him with Satan, the prince and establisher of the world's values. See Mark 8.27-33.

phrase qualifies "elect exiles." One becomes an "elect exile" by the knowledge and intent of the Father, by the setting apart action of the Spirit, and the purpose of this is obedience to Christ and the establishing of the covenant bond in his blood. What is to be clearly noted is that **the same action of God which elects one also makes one exile within his/her world**. The letter is clear that this means that one derives one's values from God, not the world. In the section on Christian citizenship in 2:13-17, the state is not divine in origin, but a human creation which one subjects oneself to not because of the state but "for the Lord's sake."

That the Christian is exiled within his/her world is further made clear by the opening prayer:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter calls the Christian to live from God's action and God's world, and not this world and its values.

The structures and values of this world (2:13-14) seem to be regarded very much as Paul regarded the social, political and cultural structures which he called "elementals"(Gal. 4:3). They were necessary structures of the world, not inherently bad, given by God for the sake of life in the world, but not necessarily representing God's values. In I Cor. 2:6-8 the "rulers of this world," now passing away, did not understand what God was doing in Christ and so crucified him. But this is not all that one encounters in the world. There is "your adversary the devil" who "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour." (5:8)

Thus the Christian is called upon to distance herself/hinself from both the society and the power of evil within the world. I have come to believe in the reality of evil, have seen this as a factor in the experience of some persons I have counseled, and certainly would regard this as a factor in the tragedies of our present world. Yet evil itself always has to be distinguished from the personal and societal structures and characteristics which it may use. To judge either factors within the psyche or within the society as inherently evil makes it impossible to deal with them in a transformative way. One must distinguish between psychic and societal structures which are destructive, ignorant of and at times hostile to God, and that which is inherently evil.

What Peter then calls us to is *awareness of our primary world, which is God's,* and a critical appraisal of our secondary world which has ways of ordering life that may not reflect God's values and may be used by evil. *The same act of God which elects us to God's world exiles us within our historical cultural context.* Those who are included within God's world, and therefore the Christian community, are those whom God has set apart. God's action is the basis for inclusion. Yet those so included, exiled from their secondary world, cannot reject their responsibility for this secondary world. The Household Code in I Peter is the only one in the New Testament that is primarily focused on the relationship of the Christian to the non Christian world. The gist of this code is that the church must live redemptively for the world as did Christ, so that the world might be brought to God (see particularly 3:18). This meant much more than the evangelism of the world. To bring the world to God involved the living of God's life in relationship to others and drawing them into this life. Above all it meant to "honor" or respect all humanity (2:17, my translation):

> Honor all, love the community in which we are brothers and sisters, reverence God, honor the emperor.

Thus the Christian freedom from the world is a freedom, and responsibility, for the world. I find it interesting that the word "church" is not used at all in I Peter and that the language about the Christian community describes it more as the people of God (see 2:9-10). The identity of this people of God is determined by the actions of God and not its institutional life and history. *Thus the action of God which exiles them from their secondary world does not distance them from it:* For me this is important in trying

to indicate the need of the church to find ways to be inclusive of the world as well as to include all those who belong within the Christian community by virtue of the acceptance of Gospel.

Inclusion Within the Christian Community

I Peter provides a striking model in which God-given identity calls the Christian to the inclusion of those similarly called and to the inclusion of the world and all humankind within God's redemptive concern.

Yet though God is inclusive, there are also standards of exclusion and inclusion within the Judaeo Christian tradition which have been shaped by the tradition's understanding of God's nature and what God requires. *The standards of God as perceived within the tradition are often in paradoxical tension with God's desire to include.* These standards are debated within the tradition and Jesus himself seems to have challenged some of them. Thus the question needs to be raised as to how much these standards represent God's intention or how much they are derived from cultural influences, human misunderstanding or institutional interests. I will try to make the point that whatever way the church understands standards of inclusion and exclusion, the church must consider two things:

> 1) The Gospel is for all and its symbolization in baptism is for all who would receive it. Thus in Christ all other distinctions pass away or are minimized (Gal. 3:27). The standards of inclusion-exclusion can only be considered *after* one has remembered that God's grace has been given prior to the raising of issues related to the standards.
> 2) One must look for the direct action of God in persons' lives where God's involvement would seem to indicate some type of inclusion and God's challenge to the standards.

Righteousness and Holiness

Righteousness and holiness are biblical standards on the basis of which inclusion or exclusion often took place. To chose to take seriously parts of the Bible which advocate these as standards of inclusion/exclusion means that these standards determine who may be included within the embrace of the Christian community and its concern. Though righteousness and holiness may be explicitly described, I believe that it is important to recognize that these standards of acceptability are not always explicit, but become part of the deep structures of the unconscious and so present us with feelings and intuitive responses to others which we confuse with the reality which is external to our subjectivities. Thus when others are not as we are, the way they are excludes them and makes them less human than we.

Righteousness, on the level on which it is lived out in life and human experience, has to do with behavior. It is the life and morality which God requires of those who are in covenant. God, as supreme judge, determines all righteousness and thus declares whether one is righteous or not. God sets the conditions and determines who has met them. God has given the Law so that persons might keep God's way according to God's word (Ps. 119:9). In the Sermon on the Mount, "righteousness" consists not only of what one might call moral behavior, but is the word in the Greek of 6:1 used for "piety" (described in Matt. 6 as alms-giving, prayer, and fasting). Paul in Romans 1-3 and Galatians 3 indicates that humans cannot meet God's conditions for righteousness, and so God declares one's righteous as a generous gift, though in some New Testament traditions this is not well understood or valued. Matthew calls for a righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, perfection as God is perfect (Matt. 5:17, 48) involving even control of the inner dynamics of lust and anger. Thus Matthew tightly draws the boundaries of righteousness and therefore inclusion/exclusion.

While perceived standards of righteousness often have been used as a way of determining inclusion/exclusion, holiness lends itself to this even more so.

Holiness in the Bible is the character and nature that all takes on when it belongs to God.[51] Holiness makes something essentially different and it has a power and glory which affects whatever it touches or which the profane and common can disturb. The primary discussion of holiness in the Old Testament is in the priestly book of Leviticus. Israel is called upon to "...distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean..." (10:10) To be holy as God is holy (11:44-45) is then to allow oneself to become a part of the reality which is God's, to belong to God's sphere of existence, and to separate oneself from every possible contaminant to this holiness. Anyone who profanes a holy thing of the Lord should be cut off from his people (19:8). One cannot approach the holy things dedicated to the Lord when one has an uncleanness (22:3). "An outsider shall not eat of a holy thing."(22:10) Anything dedicated to the Lord cannot be sold for it is "most holy to the Lord" (27:28) Too intimate a contact with God's holiness is overwhelming and could produce death (16:2) In Jesus day there were signs posted between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women in the Temple warning any non-Jew of death who went beyond that point and intruded into the holy areas of the Temple.

In Deuteronomy holiness is a primary description of God's people, and their holiness of necessity separates them from what is not.

> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. (14:2; see also 7:6, 26:19, 28:9)

In the New Testament the theme of holiness as the character of God's people is picked up primarily in I Peter where the theme of Leviticus is quoted: "

> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1:14-16)

In I Peter the emphasis is primarily ethical, but there are other implications, such as the separation of the Christian from the society as an exile. Yet for Peter this holiness also means that one must be for one's world, for this is the character of God's holiness. Thus holiness does not have to be protected from foreign contaminants and persons who by their previous life could be regarded as unclean, nor does holiness need to separate one from others in the world. In Paul it is even implied that holiness may have a redemptive character, for an unbelieving spouse or one's children may be incorporated into God's holiness through the believing partner. (I Cor. 7:12-16) This is quite different from Rev. 2-3 where the line is clearly and firmly drawn between those who belong to God and those who do not.

The implication for holiness in I Peter and I Cor. 7 is that holiness may be regarded as more than a "state," rather indicating a reaching out towards and a turning towards the world: that which is not yet holy but needs to be hallowed. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in their famous translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into German, which sought to preserve the oral character and idiom of the Hebrew, used "hallowing" instead of "holy" to translate the Hebrew *kadosh*. Holiness indicates a state which separates the one who is holy from others (as indicated in the Levitical approach) while hallowing indicates a transformative outreach towards the world which does not separate the world into sacred and profane.[52] It does, however, indicate that that to which holiness reaches out needs transformation rather

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[51]. Holiness has its parallel in cultural and political attempts to claim uniqueness and to exclude others as dangerous to the society's well-being. Such was the case with National Socialism in Germany during the Hitler period.

[52] . As Maurice Friedman comments about the Buber-Rosenzweig translation:

> *Kadosh* does not mean a state of being but a process: that of hallowing and of becoming hallowed. Moses stands before the thornbush not on holy ground but on the ground of hallowing. When Aaron is consecrated as a priest, he is clothed in the garments of hallowing and anointed with the oil of hallowing. The Sabbath is a festival of hallowing, and the sons of Israel are called by God to become people of hallowing (not a holy people).
>
> This rendition at one stroke changes the whole meaning of the relationship of God tothe world and of the sacred to the

than being able to be incorporated as it is. The same active meaning is given to God's rightousness in some passages in Isaiah which comes to mean God's reaching out in salvation (Is. 43:5-6, 45:8; cf. Rom. 3:21-26).

Holiness, as described in the Levitcal code and practiced by some within Judaism, moves beyond the ethical concerns of righteousness and is more closely related to one's identity and being. For the Jew of Jesus' day and the Jewish Christian in the early church, the question was how anyone from the Gentile world could be incorporated within God's people and their sphere of holiness. There were the God-fearers, the Gentile hangers-on in the Jewish synagogues, who did not wish to be circumcised and to obey all the Law, but their participation in the life of God's people was quite limited. Judaism in the time of Jesus debated how Gentiles could be included in God's people. What was to be required of them? A normal process involved preparation, circumcision and usually a form of ritual baptism which would cleanse them from their former Gentile life. By this they became new persons, born anew, separated from their previous world. But then were they fully God's children even after all this? To be a child of God was to be a child of Abraham, the father of all Jews. Some felt that the first generation convert was not far enough from the Gentile world to be allowed to call Abraham his father. Only the second generation could be fully incorporated into the people of God and call Abraham "Father".

When the question of holiness is raised we are raising a question about another's way of being, not just a persons behavior. That we sanctify our way of being by claiming for it divine/religious sanction gives blessing to the ways we would separate ourselves from others, for whatever reason (fear, economics, etc.), and prevents *our* way of being from being challenged by the differences of others.

Moreover this identity of being, because we view our way of being as holy or incorporated into God's way of being, does not just grant us identity in God, but identity *over against* others whose being is not so incorporated and blessed. This is one of the destructive ways in which identity seems to take shape: over against others. This is relevant to frequent exclusion of persons of other races whose ways of being and appearing may be different than ours, it is relevant to our sense of difference from the mentally and physically ill and the handicapped and mentally disadvantaged. We have often identified true humanity with Euro-American ideals and a sense of our manifest destiny.

There are some New Testament traditions which seem to speak of the possibility of a state of pure holiness, without imperfection. In Ephesians holy, blameless, without blemish, are linked (1:4, 5:27). This is similar to the passages in I John which argue that there was no sin in Jesus and whoever abides in him does not sin (3:6, 5:18). There can be nothing more dangerous than a person who thinks they no longer sin and have reached holy perfection. I John also indicates this in a passage which contradicts the sayings in chapters three and five (1:8).[53] *The greatest arrogance can be spiritual arrogance.*

What I am suggesting is that the biblical concerns for both righteousness and holiness must be looked at in terms of the perspectives they encourage and the ways in which they legitimize separation from others. Questions about this need to be raised. According to Acts 10 it took a vision from God to convince Peter

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> profane and lays the groundwork for Buber's later characterization of Hasidism as regarding the profane not as an antagonist of the holy but as the not-yet-hallowed, the not-yet-sanctified. No separate spheres of sacred and profane insulated from one another by taboo can endure before the onrushing *Geistbraus* of the God of spirit and nature. If we apply this change to the translation of a familiar Hasidic tale, the power of his understanding of hallowing the everyday or sanctifying the profane becomes unmistakable:
>
> > The rabbi of Kobryn taught: God says to man, as he said to Moses: "Put off thy shoes from thy feet" - put off the habitual which encloses your foot, and you will know that the place on which you are now standing is ground of hallowing. For there is no rung of human life on which we cannot find the hallowing of God everywhere and at all times.
>
> Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber,* NY, Paragon House, 1993, p. 169.

[53]. I John 1:1-2:29 is probably the original document to which other community traditions were added in 3:1-5:21. In these sections which were added later the attitude towards perfection is different than in the original document.

that “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” And this had to happen three times before Peter was finally convinced. (Acts 10:15-16) Peter never seemed to find it easy to change his perspective. This action of God as portrayed in Acts on behalf of the inclusion of the Gentiles and I Peter’s emphasis on God’s holiness as indicating not only separation from the world’s values but God’s being for the world (especially in the light of God’s being in the world through Jesus), would call upon Christians to interpret holiness and righteousness as moving the Christian towards the world rather than away. *God is the God for whom no ontological otherness can create separation from others nor diminish their dignity. Then if God is for the world, is God not also in this world? And if God is in this world, is it not also in some sense holy.*

The Essential and Variety

The church, from the very beginning, has struggled with the question of what is essential and what is legitimate variety: the question of where the boundaries should be drawn which include and exclude. The answers have been varied because the perspectives, convictions and experiences which one brings to this question are varied. It is also not merely a theological question, but this question is affected by cultural factors. For some forms of liturgy or music characteristic of one church are unacceptable in another. Charismatic expressions of some seem strange to others.

There is recognition of the issue of what is essential and what variety is legitimate in Paul's attempt to cope with cultural factors and differences of perspectives mentioned in I Cor. 9:19-23. He says he addresses himself as a Jew to the Jew and as "one outside the Law" to "those outside the Law," dealing with differences of culture and religious expression. He also says, "To the weak I become weak that I might win the weak." The "weak", as defined in I Cor. 8-10 and Romans 14, are those who do not understand the full implications of the Gospel and seek to maintain, as essential, cultural or personal practices which are not essential. In relation to this passage Arndt and Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon* defines the Greek word for "weak" as "a weakness in faith, which, through lack of advanced knowledge, considers externals of the greatest importance." [54] This is an important distinction, though I feel uncomfortable with Paul's terminology because it is derogatory of those who do not understand the way he understands or the fully knowledgeable Christian understands. However, along with this one must recognize that Paul warns against the dangers of thinking that one *knows*: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (I Cor. 8:1) He recognizes the limitations of human knowledge (I Cor. 13:8-13), knows he can be wrong (I Cor. 4:1-5), and acknowledges that only Christ in the final judgment, as the master of us all, can determine what is right and wrong and therefore we should not pronounce judgment on one another. Whatever differences we have, we live them out in honor of the Lord (Romans 14). The place where Paul takes an absolute stand is on the Gospel which announces God's grace, and he pronounces an *anathema* on those who would preach a different Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul's argument in Galatians is that one loses the heart of everything if one loses the Gospel.

There is also a variety of gifts (12:8-10) and of appointments or offices (12:28-30). This variety is for the common good and much is lost when this variety is not preserved (12:7). The analogy of the church as the body of Christ indicates the importance of each member to each other, and to the whole, and the need of each member to care for and respect the other. This is, of course, the message of the chapter on love (I Cor. 13) It is also made clear that the identity, giftedness, and life of each is derived from a common source:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (I Cor. 12:12-13)

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54. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 115. The Lexicon refers to this use of this term in Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher around the end of the first century. Thus Paul may be using a term others used to deal with this issue.

The Boundaries are God's

To whatever extent we feel others may not fit our standards of righteousness or holiness, to whatever extent we are uncomfortable with others' differences, one ultimately must raise the question of *who sets the boundaries for inclusion*. We may very well admit that in the finally analysis this is God, but often this means God's boundaries as understood within the Bible or within the established traditions of the church, not as determined by the *contemporary action by God who now accepts and includes and whose actions must therefore be discerned.*

One might regard the church (or God's people) as something God got started but which we should now take over and manage (much as the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*). This is often done with no sense of maliciousness, but with a recognition of the difficulty of running an institution when you have to depend on something as nebulous as God's guidance. Related to this is the transition in the early church from a charismatic ministry to an ordered ministry. If we feel the need to take over that things might be clear and in order, then we assume responsibility for the boundaries. We know what God expects and we will maintain the standards. However, there is a lot of disconcerting material in relationship to this in the New Testament.

In I Corinthians 1-4 Paul deals with divisions within the Corinthian Church related to loyalty to various leaders who by their personal styles have gathered followings. He says that it is wrong to define faith around Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even Christ. The church is the *church of God*, sanctified in Christ (I Cor. 1:2), and God is its source (1:30) and therefore, "as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.'" The passage Paul quotes is from Jer. 9:23-24.

By making it clear that the church has its origin in God, not in certain leaders or gifts or perspectives, Paul indicates that for him only God, as source, determines the boundaries of the church even when the persons belonging to the church might determine the boundaries in other ways.

Much of the literature in the New Testament is uncomfortably clear that God continues to play a significant role in the ongoing life of the church, not just turning it over to its leaders.

It is true that those responsible for the on-going life of the church and the preservation of its institutional and spiritual life do have to deal with boundaries, but there is always the question of how our boundaries relate to God's boundaries and how we will come to terms with those whom we would exclude but God would include. The biblical assumption is that God's action and the relationship with God is foundational to the process which constitutes the church. The constitution of the church was never delegated to the church itself, for God did no more take a rest after God's saving action in Jesus than God did after God's creative action in Genesis (John 5:17). The action of God in the Spirit in Acts 1-15, to include the Gentiles in a church that was up to that point largely Jewish, continuously drove the church beyond its boundaries which were conditioned by the Jewish tradition and its understanding of boundaries. God's words to Peter in his vision are profound in their implications: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." (Acts 10:15)

The concerns of God expressed in the Spirit-driven church of Acts are similar to the concern of Jesus expressed in the mission on which he took his disciples into Gentile areas: Tyre, Sidon, the Decapolis, Caesarea Philippi. One might call this a *mission beyond the boundaries*. The description of this is to be found in Mark 7-8. Here the sequence of events is:

> The Pharisees observe that Jesus and his disciples do not ritually wash their hands before eating and so raise the question of defilement. Jesus'criticises their keeping of tradition over against the basic moral requirement of the Law and then goes on to broaden the question of defilement in dealing with food that was clean or unclean. Jesus indicates that it is what comes out of the heart, not what goes into the mouth, that defiles. Jesus then took his disciples to the area of Tyre and Sidon and entered a Gentile home where he encounters a Syro-Phoenecian woman whose daughter is possessed by a demon. Jesus makes a strange, and seemingly offensive, reply to the woman's

> request to heal her daughter which I can only understand as his attempt to portray to his disciples the consequences of the Jewish attitude towards Gentiles: “Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Jesus praises the woman’s faith and her daughter is healed. He then proceeds to the area of the Decapolis where he heals a deaf and dumb man and then engages in a second feeding, probably in a Gentile area. The confession of Peter then climaxes these pericopes and this occurs in Gentile Caesarea Philippi. In 8:14-21 Jesus indicates that the meaning of the two feeding miracles (5,000 and 4,000) is to be found in the baskets of pieces taken up (twelve and seven). Twelve may be symbolic of the gathering of the 12 tribes of Israel. Seven could represent the number of completion and the gathering up of the Gentiles, which is what it would seem to mean when it is placed next to all of the stories about Gentiles in chapter 7.

This material which Matthew includes, but misunderstands by having Jesus tell his disciples not to go to the Gentiles, indicates that Jesus is taking his disciples on an experimental mission into Gentile areas, much as he speaks of God’s action among the Gentiles in his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4, a Gospel that does not include this Gentile excursion.

The location of this material within Mark would seem to say that Jesus' mission to the Gentiles is the climax of his public ministry before turning towards Jerusalem and that the Gentile mission is an experience to which he, with clear intention, introduced his disciples. The mission to the Gentiles is not just something that happened after his resurrection. Jesus in Mark will later reiterate this when, while Cleansing the Temple, he says: "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all nations*." (Mk. 11:17, italics mine) Though this passage from Is. 56:7 is quoted in the Cleansing of the Temple in all the Synoptics, Mark is the only Synoptic which includes "for all nations" which is in the Isaiah text. Strangely, though Matthew has this material from Mark 7-8, he does not understand it and has Jesus saying to his disciples: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (10:6) The mission to the Gentiles is given in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). Oddly, though the mission to the Gentile world is so much a part of Luke's theology, this Markan section is not included in Luke. Mark 7-8 is often called Luke's "Great Omission". For me this omission can only mean that Luke probably did not know and use Mark, while Matthew did but avoided or did not understand the implications of this section. [55] Thus all Synoptics see the commission to the Gentiles as coming from Jesus (as did Paul in Gal. 1:16), while *Mark has Jesus within his public ministry pushing his disciples to this mission as does the Spirit in Acts*.[56]

The Church’s Struggle with the Boundaries

Jesus in Mark 8:14-21, a passage related to the discussion above, prefaces his interpretation of two feeding miracles with the comment: "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." This is, like so many passages in Mark, not explained, and one must assume that the community for which Mark was written understood the meaning of such passages which today are enigmatic to us. A guess at the meaning of this would be: *beware of the leaven of the Pharisees who present a very narrow gate into God's kingdom and the leaven of Herod who in his compromise with contemporary culture would lose what is essential*. If this interpretation is correct, it is very relevant to the subject with which we deal. How do we provide for variety and breadth to the way into the Christian community and for the life within it and yet preserve what is essential?

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[55]. The common view of the sources of Luke and Matthew is that both had in common Mark and Q. However, only about 50% of Mark has a parallel in Luke (in contrast to about 90 percent of Mark having a parallel in Matthew), and where Luke has material that is in Mark and Q (sayings material common to Luke and Matthew) it will often have sufficient distinguishing features to question its dependence on Mark and Q. This, together with the Great Omission makes it difficult for me to believe that Luke used Mark. I rather believe that Luke had access to his own lines of tradition, as indicated in Luke 1:1-4.

[56] . Luke also presents this, but without the Markan materials. Especially significant is Jesus’ comments on God’s concern for the Gentiles in his programmatic sermon in the Nazareth synagogue, Luke 4.

As we read through the literature of the New Testament what is essential is presented in various ways. In the earliest of the Gospels, Mark, the emphasis seems to be on the proclamation of the Kingdom and a call for repentance and faith. To proclaim the presence of the Kingdom of God is to proclaim the presence of the God of the Kingdom in a world where, until all would be set right by God, it was believed that Satan ruled. In the Judaism of Jesus' time God's presence was limited to the Law and the Temple, but really not to be found within the world.[57] Thus in Mark 4 Jesus' proclamation is a call to be confronted by God in the real world where God, like a generous sower, sows seed upon all types of soil with no consideration of response or receptivity. The presence of such a God is like a small and seemingly insignificant mustard seed in a vast field. It is a "mystery" which even though known is not always understood.[58] Of course, he called his disciples to come after him, but his message seemed to be more about his Father than himself. Jesus' disciples seem to be a motley group which continuously misunderstands or fails to grasp his message. He seems to place minimal demands upon his disciples for perfection or explicit forms of faith. The memory of his conflicts with the Pharisees and his association with "sinners" within the Gospel tradition would seem to support this. His primary requirement is that they be willing to respond to the presence of the Kingdom of God, follow him and accept his way.

The Gospel of Matthew presents the Sermon on the Mount as the characterization of discipleship and oddly enough for one who associated with sinners, here Jesus calls upon his disciples for a righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees and perfection as God is perfect (Matt. 5:20 and 48). It also indicates that "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (10:27) This has been called the Johannine thunderbolt in the Synoptic sky, for it is clear in John that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (14:6) The gate has become narrower and the boundaries clearer.

What happens in John and Matthew also happens in the deutero Pauline materials. In I Timothy, which many doubt as Pauline, the disciples could not meet the requirements of bishop and deacon.[59] There is no trust of recent converts (3:6) nor of women under 60 (5:9). Women are seen as unreliable because Eve, the original woman, was deceived. Thus the line is drawn against woman's public participation in the life of the church (2:12), and only older women may have a role in the order of widows (5:9). In I Corinthians there are two later inserts, 11:3-16 and 14:33b-36, diminishing the public role of women.[60] This is presented as being by the Paul who said that in Christ there was no male or female (Gal. 3:28).

In the book of Revelation the latitude allowed by Paul in eating meat offered to idols (I Cor. 8-10) is forbidden (2:14, 20). While in I Peter, though one may live as an "alien and exile" within the world (2:11), one must live *for* the world as did Christ; in much of the Johannine literature the stance is against the world.[61] While in I Peter all humans are to be held in honor (2:17), not only the brotherhood, in I John a Christian is not to love the world (2:15) and certainly not to love "those who went out from us" (2:19), believing they were called upon *only to love those in their community* as God loved only those in their community (4:7-12).

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57. Jewish Wisdom literature was much more positive about God's relationship with the world than was Jewish Apocalyptic, though Wisdom literature also came to see that the rewards of righteousness would happen in the after-life.

58. Mark 4:11 is often translated "secret of the kingdom", but the Greek is really "mystery of the kingdom". With a secret you understand once it is told you. A mystery you do not necessarily understand even when you know about it. Thus the kingdom remains enigmatic, even if one accepts that it is here.

59. It is my understanding of I Timothy that it had its beginning in an authentic letter of Paul to which later additions were made regarding requirements for deacons, bishops, widows and materials limiting the public role of women.

60. The reader should read I Cor. 11 and 14 without these inserts to see how they break the logic of otherwise related materials. The full argument for these materials being deutero Pauline cannot be included here. The late first century church wanted the authority of Paul for a more conservative role for women, and thus inserted these materials.

61 . When the final author of the Gospel of John adds the Prologue, he advocates interpreting the attitude to the world in John through the more world affirming perspective of the Prologue.

Not only is there a narrowing of the gates on who might be included, but there is also a narrowing of perspective because of the stories that are told and the stories that are not told. In the book of Acts there is a focus on the spread of Christianity from Palestine to the North and West, with the ultimate destiny being the preaching of the Gospel at Rome. Acts is really a story of Paul and his mission. But since this is the only history of the church included in the New Testament, the spread of Christianity East and South is not treated and much of the story is left untold. Thus we think of Christianity as European rather than Palestinian, Indian or African.

Inclusion of the World

In the discussion of I Peter as a model it was indicated that he found a way of including the world, even though separated from the world. In a pluralistic and secular society we are confronted with the need to do this. Confronted with our more intimate connections with the rest of the world, we are also confronted with the need to do this. Though we may have lines we draw which separate us from those who are other, God is not separated from the world and calls upon us for a type of worldly inclusion.

Our difficulty in doing this as Christians lies in the particulars which constitute us, before which we often place the word "**only**." This is particularly true of the church's assertion that salvation is only through the Gospel and only through Christ, which can lead to the invalidation of other religious experience and other religious traditions --- and the invalidation of other persons in a type of Christian imperialism. There has been previous discussion of the need of Christians to move towards a fuller recognition of our God as Trinity as a way of dealing with this.

There is no simple solution for this for many Christians, but Christians today are called to reflect on how the world is God's and God is present to and for the world. Thus religious traditions outside Christianity and the world itself deserve some type of inclusion after the pattern of God's presence to the world. Our ability to include other religious traditions is also an ability to include persons of other races often identified with these religions. I think in sadness of the long hostility of the Western Christian to the Muslim world and consequent estrangement from Africa.

In Summary

If inclusivity is to be determined primarily by the action of God, then the person in whose life God works and whom God calls to Christian community must be included in some way, not allowing personal differences, racial differences, sexual differences, differences of intellectual capacity, differences of moral development or spirituality, to exclude those whom God seems to include. To be included does not mean to be given responsibility one cannot manage, leadership one is not ready for, or to be given opportunity for behaviors harmful to self and others (though one must be careful how these matters are decided in order to maintain the power of those in power). It does mean to be fully included *as one is* in a community of those gifted, called, and committed to being the presence of God to others and to enabling the Christian life. It does mean to take seriously that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, Afro-American, Euro-American, Asian American, native American, mentally ill or handicapped, but all are God's children.

Ultimately, only God can determine inclusion. The church which is able to be inclusive can provide a welcome place for those who are on spiritual journey and whom God is drawing to God's self. Thus its ability to do evangelism is enhanced. The church which is able to be inclusive can call upon the creativity and devotion of persons with varied gifts and of varied backgrounds and races. Thus its inner life and ministry is enhanced. The church which can be inclusive will seek to provide the life, love and fellowship which God offers to humanity, and thus it can be the place of God, the body of Christ, and the hesitating start towards a new humanity. In such a church there will be conflict, but the conflict which is part of relationship and difference, not the conflict which by its very nature seeks to divide, exclude and destroy. In such a church there will be human imperfection, but persons who are struggling with and for growth and responsibility. In such a church variety will feel at home, as will the sacred obligation to live with difference and with love and with God. Such a church cannot be a "homogeneous unit", a community of

the like and similar. Any human community can be that. *God's community is more*. The Pentecost experience called together "devout persons from every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5)

If inclusivity is determined primarily by the action of God, then the world and those "other" than us outside the church must in some way be included (if we take seriously our experience of and the biblical witness to God's action on behalf of this world). This does not mean the sacrificing of Christian insights and traditions, but it also must be an inclusion which does not diminish the way others, their spirituality, and their identities deserve to be honored. Perhaps the best word for the church's inclusion of the world is *hospitality*. This is not condescending, for it recognizes the value of the other. The church also needs to receive the hospitality of the other, with graciousness and appreciation. Certainly there will be tension and difference with the other in the world as there is with the other in the church.

With those inside the church Christians will usually sense the sharing of something common in spite of differences, but in the case of those outside the church the other is more fully other and often seems "strange." And yet God calls us to be for this world, and if God is in this world, then God is also being there for us. *By receiving the other we may in some way receive God.* Perhaps the strangeness of the other is a paradigm of the strangeness and difference of God from us, a God who in strangeness is present to us.

> O God who, by your grace,
> does make me yours,
> that being yours,
> I may be free
> to be
> for all
> for whom you are;
> let me
> most truly be.