



Spirituality and Community

Although the term “spirituality” can suggest the cultivation of one’s inner life in detachment from community, it need not, and it should not. A spirituality that is recognizably Christian, at least, is formed in community and cares about it. The writer of 1 Peter speaks of longing for “spiritual milk” and growing up unto salvation, but he prefacing that with exhorting his readers to put away those vices which destroy community (malice, envy, slander, etc., 2:1-2). Paul wrote that every Christian who participates in the Lord’s Supper should discern the body, the church (1 Cor 11:29). Much later, St. Benedict (ca. 480-542) prescribed his well known *Rule* for the monastic life. He directed the observance of no less than eight services of worship per day, plus various other means of discipline, but he also envisioned the creation of a community in each place that would be self-supporting through its fields and workshops. Spirituality and community go together in the classic Christian tradition.

In his book on *Christian Spirituality* (Westminster, 1983), Wolfhart Pannenberg shares the insight that one of the most important developments of our times is the attempt of people to realize the experience of human community, and that this is essentially a religious quest (p. 34). He goes on to suggest that the church, particularly in its celebration of the Eucharist is a community which “symbolizes another community, the community of all human beings in a society of perfect justice and peace, the global village, the kingdom of God” (p. 35).

Combining this insight with the classic Christian tradition, it seems that thinking about spirituality in our times should be ordered in such a way that it takes community as both the matrix for spirituality’s very existence, if it is to be healthy, and the arena for its fulfillment, if it is to be meaningful. Apart from community, spirituality that is Christian cannot flourish. And falling short of being a vital spiritual community, the church will not meet the genuine religious needs of our time. People will simply look elsewhere.

If all this is so, there are many issues to face. How might congregations and other Christian communities become more intent on being places for the nurture of spirituality? How might they become more recognizably places in which the quest for human community is realized? How might they, at the same time, avoid becoming insular? How can they revitalize their symbolic character of anticipating the new world of perfect justice and peace, the kingdom of God?

How might they then conduct themselves in the present world in anticipation of that new world to come? And how might persons involved in ministry develop a spirituality or—in language more familiar to most readers of this journal—a piety that is conducive to the nurture of others? Essays in this issue of the journal touch on various facets of these concerns.

Joel Wiberg introduces us to the subject of spirituality by defining it, discussing attitudes

toward it, and providing glimpses of the various shapes it takes in the literature. *Alvin Rogness* and *Henry Horn* draw upon their respective reservoirs of experience, both deep and wide, to speak of the devotional life and piety in the context of the church. Although quite different in temperament, experience, and ways of expressing themselves, these two persons have had a profound influence on countless readers of this journal and beyond through their preaching, lecturing, and writing. Their contributions here continue that wholesome influence. *Joan Timmerman* discusses ways in which spirituality and theology differ, and even stand in tension with one another, but then she goes on to contend that there is today a “new respect and dialog...between practitioners of spiritual art and theological science” and draws out some implications of the new situation. Going back a hundred years (1888), when the Common Service was created to unify worship among English speaking Lutherans in America, *Michael Aune* reviews the debate that took place when it was produced. He also discusses ways in which this debate continues today and how it challenges current concerns for liturgical contextualization. The name of Matthew Fox keeps emerging in conversations about spirituality. *Jane Strohl* introduces us to his writings and provides a critique of his “creation spirituality.” *John Schramm* discusses the contribution small covenant groups can make toward healthy spiritual development; not least of all, he says, they can provide an alternative to the prevailing individualism of our culture. Perhaps no other biblical book exhibits and emphasizes spirituality and community as much as the Gospel of John. *Gail O'Day* explores these facets, concentrating primarily on the dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus (including the prime text on “born againism,” 3:3), and frequently she takes up current issues of spirituality prompted by the text.

The Resources section opens again with “Face to Face” essays written by *Frederick Reisz* and *Walter Pilgrim*. They address the issue of infant communion. It also contains two essays on preaching. *Richard Lischer* reviews various approaches to preaching and proposes that it reclaim the center, the heart of the matter, by grounding itself in God’s own speech act; he also discusses and demonstrates the form this kind of preaching takes. *Donald Juel* and *Patrick Keifert*, in the Texts in Context essay, discuss texts which appear in the Epiphany Season to come.

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