

JOHN DRIVER



Life Together *in the Spirit*

*A Radical Spirituality
for the Twenty-First Century*

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Twenty-First Century

John Driver

Edited by John D. Roth

This book is the 2015 selection for the
Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature
of the Mennonite World Conference.



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Prologue

Life Together in the Spirit is the seventh publication in the “Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature,” an initiative of Mennonite World Conference that seeks to promote shared theological conversation across the global Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowship. For many years, Good Books, under the gifted leadership of Merle and Phyllis Good, served as the primary organizers and promoters of the series. We are grateful now for the support of Plough in helping to move the series forward.

This text began as a series of workshops led by John Driver for pastors and church leaders in Latin America, a context deeply shaped by Pentecostalism. The book that emerged from those workshops, *Convivencia radical: espiritualidad para el siglo 21* (Kairos, 2007), reflected a deep respect for the gifts of the Pentecostal movement while offering a distinctive voice regarding the work of the Holy Spirit shaped by an Anabaptist theological perspective. In 2014, the secretaries of the MWC Commissions proposed that the English translation of the book – published in a limited edition in 2011 – be revised

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for inclusion in the “Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature.” Since then, we have simplified the text in some places, added study questions, and invited responses to the text from various leaders in the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. We are pleased to offer it now to a wider readership in this revised form.

John Driver’s name is well-known in Spanish-speaking contexts for the depth and clarity of his teaching. Even more importantly, Driver is widely recognized as a person whose very life – in his generosity, simplicity, gracious spirit, and evident love for all God’s people – embodies the message of his teachings. In this sense, Driver reflects in his personal life what he yearns for in the church. That is, a witness to the living presence of the Spirit made known not because the church *has* a message, but because the church, in the quality of its life together, *is* a message. If the Spirit of the living God does not find tangible expression in the Body of Christ – if the good news of the gospel is not evident in transformed relations – the church is likely building on a foundation of sand.

In addition to expressing our deep thanks to Driver, it is a pleasure to recognize the important role that Steve Slagel, Greencroft Communities (Goshen, IN) and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (Goshen College) played in the initial translation and publication of the book. We are also grateful to Timothy J. Keiderling for his assistance with the study questions. Tim and Suzanne

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Lind translated the essay by Mvwala C. Katshinga; Elizabeth Miller translated the texts by César García, Hermann Woelke, and Patricia Uruña Barbosa; and Elizabeth Miller and Phyllis Good assisted with editing.

May this text encourage Christians of all backgrounds, in every part of the world, to embrace a fresh understanding of the Spirit in all of its fullness, so that the Body of Christ may indeed be made visible in the world today. And may all who encounter that Spirit be transformed in every aspect of their life.

John D. Roth
Secretary, Mennonite World Conference
Faith and Life Commission

Foreword

One of my first memories of a Christian worship service is of a Pentecostal evangelistic campaign one night in Bogotá. My mother, who had come to know Christ through a church of the same tradition, trusted that this meeting – advertising healings and miracles – would be an opportunity for my flat foot to obtain a normal shape, so that I could finally walk without orthopedic shoes.

That night, at a young age – I would have been six years old at this time – I looked at my mother with tears in my eyes and told her that I believed that God had healed me. From that moment on, I never needed orthopedic shoes again. God had worked in me the first of three healing miracles that I have experienced in my life thus far! Although the final two miracles occurred as an adult in contexts of Anabaptist services, the influence of Pentecostal spirituality left an indelible impact on me, from the early years of my faith. Many are the memories that testify to that period of intimacy with the Spirit.

In other settings I have identified certain dangers that I find in Pentecostal approaches that I do not consider to

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be healthy – a tendency toward excessive individualism, for example, or the materialism found in the so-called prosperity gospel. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Pentecostal spirituality has had a positive impact on many Anabaptist congregations in the present day.¹

But Pentecostal spirituality is not the only type that has intersected with Anabaptism in the twenty-first century. The spirituality of the ecumenical Taizé Community and others from the Roman Catholic tradition are also valued by Anabaptist communities in different places around the world today. We need only cite as examples the impact authors such as Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen have had on many of us.

As Dorothee Soelle has explained,² spirituality involves personal experiences, both individual and communal, that, grounded in faith, encompass human emotions and are therefore inherently subjective. Among the many varieties of modern spirituality how do we discern what elements are in harmony with or support our understanding of a life in the Spirit from our Anabaptist tradition?

Mennonite World Conference is not called to judge the validity of personal experiences in the field of spirituality. But one of the purposes of MWC is to strengthen our Anabaptist identity in such a way that it rests on the shoulders of our ancestors in faith while also being global, multicultural, and interchurch in nature. For this reason MWC has opened dialogue spaces where our member

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churches can experience communion, interdependence, solidarity, and accountability with one another. One of these spaces is the “Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature,” where MWC periodically selects and prepares a book meant to strengthen member churches in their common Christian faith.

It is within this framework that we present *Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* by John Driver. In this book the author invites us to bear witness to a spirituality that encompasses all aspects of our lives – a spirituality based on following Christ and adopting a distinctive set of attitudes, values, and actions before the world. This form of spirituality is not measured by material riches. Nor is it individualistic. Rather the spirituality described by Driver is experienced primarily in community and involves the sanctification of interpersonal relationships. Grounding himself in Scripture and in sixteenth-century Anabaptism, Driver reminds us that our ancestors demonstrated the truth of regeneration received by grace and expressed in the integration of faith and works, service and testimony, the personal and the communal.

In this sense, Driver does not look down on other spiritualities that can serve to enrich us in the present. Instead he invites us to value the richness of our own Anabaptist tradition with the hope that, even as we engage in conversation with other traditions, “we may continue to drink from our own well.”

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By offering this text to our global family – enriched by the study questions and the responses contributed by conversation partners from different cultures and Anabaptist traditions – MWC hopes that an Anabaptist spirituality will continue to develop in our time in a form consistent with our theological tradition and with profound respect and admiration for what other traditions contribute to our own.

Nearly five hundred years ago Menno Simons affirmed:

True evangelical faith is of such a nature it cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love . . . it clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and consoles the sad; it seeks those who are lost; it binds up what is wounded; it heals the sick.

May the Spirit guide us as we grow in this type of spirituality – a deep, relevant, and challenging spirituality for our time!

César García
General Secretary, Mennonite World Conference
Bogotá, Colombia

Introduction

During the final decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, the theme of Christian spirituality has once again come to occupy an important place in Protestant thought. This has not always been the case.

As Protestants we had heard of Catholic forms of spirituality primarily practiced by the Trappist monks – known for the austerity of their lifestyle and their vows of perpetual silence – the cloistered nuns, or some of the other contemplative Catholic orders. With the general Protestant rejection of the Catholic orders that accompanied the sixteenth-century Reformation, we have generally underestimated, if not totally rejected, these and other similar expressions of Christian spirituality.

Instead, we have used terms like “devotional life” to refer to those attitudes and activities that nurture the inner dimensions of faith deep within our souls. We have tended to understand “spirituality” as a sort of inner, invisible energy that sustains and supports our lives as Christians in the world.

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Not only has Protestant thought been dominated by this inward and highly abstract concept of spirituality; it has also tended to become almost exclusively individual and essentially private. Even our congregational spirituality – expressed in practices like common prayer, Bible study, and worship – has generally been directed toward the personal edification of individual members, rather than an integration of practices into a shared missional fellowship characteristic of an authentic community of faith.

The spirituality of the first disciples of Jesus, however, seems to have included all aspects of their life. In order to fully understand a spirituality that is truly biblical, we will need to overcome the false divisions we create for ourselves: that is, separating the spiritual, inner, and otherworldly from the part of us that is material, outer, and worldly. Christian spirituality does not consist of a life of contemplation *instead of* action, nor of withdrawal *instead of* full participation in the social order. Rather, Christian spirituality is the experience of every dimension of human life being oriented around and animated by the very Spirit of Jesus.

For this reason, we dedicate the first two chapters of this little book to a review of Christian spirituality during the first century. There we discover a holistic spirituality that consisted of following Jesus, under the impulse of his Spirit and in the context of a messianic community radically living out their faith together. It was a spirituality

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deeply rooted in God's grace, nourished and shared in the common life of the community of faith, and incarnated fully in its participation in God's mission in the world.

The third and fourth chapters describe the essential characteristics of Anabaptist spirituality in the sixteenth century. The Anabaptist movement was only one of many movements of radical renewal that have arisen throughout the church's history. Oriented by a commitment to Jesus and the example of the primitive Christian community of the first century, these movements have recovered to a remarkable degree – in their own life and within their own historical contexts – a spirituality amazingly similar to that of the Christian communities of the first century. In addition to the Anabaptists, a list of those movements could include groups like the Waldensians and the Franciscans of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the seventeenth century Quakers, the classic Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century, the base communities within Latin American Catholicism of the past generation, and many more.

Finally, this brief study of radical spirituality concludes with a series of reflections on the possibilities for inter-church dialogue among the variety of spiritualities in the twenty-first century – reflecting a range of visions, convictions, and lifestyles – but especially between the present day heirs of historic Anabaptism and other traditions. We have the obligation to engage continually in warm and

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generous ecumenical dialogue with Christians from other traditions. We reject as false the idea that unorthodox belief or leaving the church is permanent or hereditary. Likewise, we reject the idea that authentic faith is automatically passed on from one generation to another. For that reason, our churches must always remain in dialogue with Christians whose history has been different than ours, and who have other ways of thinking and acting, even if their spiritual ancestors in others times and contexts may have persecuted our spiritual forebears for honestly held differences.

Study Questions

1. What is your perception of Catholic forms of spirituality? Why have Anabaptists often rejected them?
2. What has been our Anabaptist understanding of spirituality, in contrast to what the author calls “Catholic”? What is most important about Anabaptist spirituality?
3. How, according to the author, is the spirituality of Jesus’ disciples different from spirituality as it has been generally understood by Protestants?
4. What do Anabaptists have in common with other radical Christian movements that have sprung up since the time of Jesus?
5. Why should churches – or fellow believers across denominations – remain in dialogue with one another? What is most important about Christian dialogue?

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As already noted in the introduction, the spirituality of Jesus' disciples touched every dimension of their lives. The biblical terms “flesh” or “carnal” and “spirit” or “spiritual” do not refer to two separate dimensions of human life – one outer and the other inner – but rather to two different ways of living, two orientations, two lifestyles. To be “spiritual” is to live every aspect of our lives inspired by and aligned with the Spirit of Christ. To be “carnal” is to be oriented by a very different spirit.

The community of faith in which Mother Teresa of Calcutta participated offers an example of a fully integrated spirituality. For her, “touching the untouchables” meant to “touch the body of Christ.” To love in this utterly unselfish way was a form of prayer. One does not stop praying in order to serve; neither does one stop serving

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in order to pray. Authentic spirituality is “all-pervasive,” affecting every area of daily life.³

This is the same vision we find reflected in Matthew 25, where the nations will be judged according to how they responded to the needs of the hungry, the resident aliens (that is, the undocumented immigrants in their midst), the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and the outcasts in their land. To the surprise of all, Jesus reminded his hearers by saying, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

Recovering the Essence of Christian Spirituality

The cross of Jesus offers us the clearest model of an authentically Christian spirituality, reflected in the teachings of the New Testament. The cross is both a sign of complete identification with God and of total solidarity with the world. The cross reflects with absolute clarity the spirit of Jesus as well as the spirituality that his disciples would be called to imitate.

In this sense, the cross is the most eloquent intercessory prayer to the Father on behalf of the world. At the same time, it is the most energetic and convincing response of God to the powers of evil. Therefore, in the cross of Jesus – as well as in the cross that his followers are called to assume – we find the very essence of Christian spirituality.

Christian spirituality is the process of following Jesus Christ, animated by his Spirit, in the context of a truly radical (i.e., Christ-rooted) fellowship of faith experienced

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within the Body of Christ. This process leads into an ever-growing solidarity with Christ, in which Christians identify themselves fully with the life and death of Jesus. For followers of Jesus, the primary symbol of this living, dying, and rising again is baptism, by which we are introduced and welcomed into a truly Christian spirituality (Rom. 6:4). This spirituality is marked by our following the Jesus of history within our own historical contexts. It is by the power of the living Spirit of Jesus himself, freely given to his followers, that this radical spirituality becomes a possibility.

It is a spirituality of the road.

Biblical Characteristics of Christian Spirituality

The New Testament offers the following descriptions of spirituality that provide guidelines for assessing the authenticity of any particular Christian spirituality.⁴

1. A truly Christian spirituality is based on the divine initiative of God's promise. The God of the Bible is the God who promises to save his people, freeing them from the powers of evil. No single historic expression of God's saving intervention on behalf of his people completely exhausts this divine promise. With thankful hearts we embrace every sign and symbol of God's transforming grace within human history that points in the direction of the kingdom of God. However, for Christians, these historic expressions are only partial and temporary. With Jesus, we continue to pray for the coming of God's

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kingdom in all of its fullness. Our commitment to follow Jesus must always be in anticipation of God's kingdom still to come in all of its saving glory.

2. *This spirituality is an expression of hope.* It consists of believing that which sometimes seems to be impossible: namely, the reconciliation of humans among themselves and with God in a truly radical fellowship characterized by justice and peace. For this reason, joy is one of the principal characteristics of the messianic community – the community that trusts more in the power of God than in its own possibilities. This joyful hope fills followers of Jesus with the confidence and security that they need to live out the distinctive values of God's reign against the current of our culture. Within the economy of God's kingdom no effort that is aligned with God's rule of justice and peace will be lost (Rom. 5).

3. *A truly evangelical spirituality implies solidarity with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.* Just as Jesus lived and died – “the just for the unjust” – so also the salvation of the oppressors will come about through the nonviolent actions and suffering of the oppressed on behalf of the oppressor. It has been the experience of the messianic community that its salvation comes alone through Jesus' suffering on its behalf. Therefore, we confess freely that although the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are truly unique in their saving power, they are not Christ's alone. In our innocent suffering on behalf of others we are

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“completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body” (Col. 1:24).

4. *According to the New Testament, the purpose of the saving work of Christ is the restoration of communion among a humanity alienated from God and from one another.* The restoration of relationships within the family of God requires the transformation of self-centered men and women into brothers and sisters shaped by a radically new fellowship of love. We experience this communion when we share our possessions for each other’s well-being or when true authority is expressed in the form of mutual service (Matt. 20:25–28; Acts 2:43–45; 4:32–35). The example of Jesus, as well as that of the early Christian community, reminds us that authentic communion is characterized by a radically new understanding of the exercise of power, both in socio-political relationships and economic interactions.

5. *All spirituality that is authentically Christian will be characterized by this radical fellowship of love.* At stake here is not merely avoiding anything that might harm our neighbor, but rather actively pursuing our neighbor’s well-being. To love as God has loved us in Jesus Christ is to offer our life itself for the neighbor in very concrete ways (1 John 3:16–17). The love of God, of which the New Testament speaks, is much more than merely God’s love directed to us. It is also bigger than the love that we should have for God. At its deepest level, it is to love as

God loves – that is, a willingness to lay down our lives for the neighbor in acts of unselfish heroism, as well as in the long process of yielding ourselves and our interests to the well-being of others in ordinary daily relationships.

A Spirituality Deeply Rooted in the God of Grace

A truly Christian spirituality is rooted deeply in the God of grace who has been most fully revealed in Jesus Christ. It is through the Jesus of history and his Spirit, that we can best know the Father, for Jesus “is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Instead of speculating about the divinity of Jesus – based on the attributes systematic theologians have traditionally assigned to God – would it not be better to proceed just as the church in the first century did? They caught a vision of the invisible God before their very eyes in the person of Jesus and in the life he lived.

God has taken the initiative in our liberation from the powers of evil. God has first loved us! In reality, this has always been God’s way of acting. The people of God were freed from slavery in Egypt, thanks to God’s merciful initiative. Classical Protestantism has sometimes asserted that the Old Testament is characterized by the law and a righteousness of works, while the New Testament is characterized by grace and the good news of the gospel. But in reality, Israel was redeemed out of Egypt by grace and the people of the New Covenant are invited to live according to “the law of Christ.”

It has always been God’s intention to form a people

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in his image, a people that bears his name. Jesus not only teaches the character of God; he is also the perfect image of what God has always intended humanity to be. This divine project, which points toward the restoration of all creation to its original purpose, will culminate in the restoration of God's reign of justice and peace in every aspect of life. An authentic Christian spirituality is in complete harmony with this divine purpose and participates fully in its saving process.

As we know, the powers of evil and the dominant values of the fallen world conspire to distort the true image of God revealed by Jesus. We are prone to create idols that take the place of God. These idols lay claim to our loyalties, and we dedicate our time and our energies to them. But the God of Abraham, of Moses and of the prophets is a God who is active in human history, liberating his people from these false gods and the false loyalties that enslave us. In this, God was at work especially in the Messiah, who is the culmination of God's self-revealing acts throughout history: "No one knows who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Luke 10:22). This is a God who is truly different from all false gods. Only an authentic Christian spirituality will be able to experience God fully and to show God's good news to others without twisting or distorting the message.

A Spirituality of Following Jesus

Since God has revealed himself uniquely and fully in

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Jesus, the way to know God is by following Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–3). Hans Denck, a radical reformer of the sixteenth century, said, “No one can truly know Christ unless he follow him in his life,”⁵ a conviction that the heirs of the Anabaptist movement continue to hold. Therefore, following Jesus concretely is, without doubt, the most fundamental element of a truly authentic Christian spirituality.

Segundo Galilea, a leading Chilean theologian of the past generation, has expressed it this way:

The originality and the authenticity of Christian spirituality consists in following a God who has taken on our human condition; who had a history like ours; who has lived our experiences; who made choices; who dedicated himself to a cause for which he had to suffer; who experienced successes, joys, and failures; and who yielded his life. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is like us in every way except that he was without sin. In Jesus, all the fullness of God dwelt; so he is the only model for our life, as humans and as Christians.⁶

Lamentably, Christians have not traditionally thought about spirituality in these terms. Catholic spirituality, as well as that of classical Protestantism, has generally thought of the divine nature of Jesus as the Final Judge to be worshipped or as a sacrifice to appease divine wrath – but only rarely as a Lord to be followed in daily life. This has contributed to the emergence of a highly inward, abstract, and otherworldly spirituality.

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Yet according to the vision of the New Testament, the words, deeds, ideals, and commandments of Jesus of Nazareth offer the only path to a knowledge of God (John 14:5–11). Jesus has revealed the true nature of God to us – all-powerful precisely in his longsuffering love and compassion. In Jesus we discover the qualities of God’s reign and the model for our lives. This is not a legalistic or slavish imitation – wearing sandals, for example, or working as a carpenter, or remaining celibate – but rather following him by adopting his attitudes, his Spirit, his values, and his way of being and actions in the world. True Christian spirituality will focus especially on the manner in which we embrace the attitudes, the Spirit, the deeds and words of Jesus in the concrete expressions of discipleship in daily life.

One of the best summaries we have of a spirituality that reflects the reign of God, inaugurated by Jesus, is found in the Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew 5. As a synthesis of the entire Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes capture the qualities that Jesus taught and modeled. Unfortunately, in the centuries following Christ’s death and resurrection, the church has tended to assign a utopian character to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount so that they came to be understood as “counsels of perfection,” appropriate only for a small minority, like those in religious orders, who take the Christian life extremely seriously.

The early church of the first century, however, used the Beatitudes to instruct new disciples. They clearly must

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have expected that these qualities would characterize the lives of all believers. And the way in which the Beatitudes summarize the spirituality reflected throughout the entire New Testament indicates that they were never intended as unrealistic ideals.

To be sure, the Beatitudes are truly prophetic in their character. As such, there will always be tension between the spirituality that they reflect and the level of understanding and practice achieved in the Christian community. We need to be honest – these values clash with our human tendencies. There is an element of scandal in the gospel with its understandings of mercy and forgiveness, non-violence, sexual chastity, and spiritual poverty. This should not surprise us, because these are the values that characterize the kingdom of God, and they are possible only thanks to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Beatitudes summarize the blessedness of life under God’s rule. Foundational for the spirituality of the messianic community, they assume a shared life within the community of God’s reign rather than heroic efforts to live them out as solitary individuals. The spirituality of the Beatitudes is “good news” in the fundamental sense of the word *evangelium* – the full-orbed good news of social, political, and economic well-being. The eight beatitudes listed in Matthew 5 are therefore not merely isolated spiritual virtues offered to disciples of Jesus as options to be chosen or disregarded according to personal preferences. Rather, they describe a truly messianic spirituality in a

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global sense. All of them, taken together, describe a fully integrated spirituality that characterizes life under the reign of God.

1. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*” A posture of spiritual poverty is fundamental to all Christian spirituality. Spiritual poverty consists of freely assuming the spiritual condition of being a child in the family of the Father. It is both the attitude and the practice of absolute dependence on God, trusting in God’s providence as well as God’s protection. It is that intimate relationship of utter confidence in God that Jesus himself demonstrated so clearly when he dared to call God *Abba* and taught his disciples to do the same.

But the Gospels do not permit an abstract or spiritualized understanding of this poverty. Sharing life together in the new community of the Messiah and living in radical dependence on God’s providence cuts off all of our idolatrous and materialistic attitudes and practices at their very roots. “Choosing to be poor” (as the translation of the Nueva Biblia Española reads) in a world oriented in the opposite direction implies solidarity with Jesus – with the spirit and practice of poverty that he assumed freely and concretely in his mission in the world.

2. “*Blessed are those who mourn . . .*” Living out the values of God’s reign in the midst of the world necessarily assumes solidarity with human suffering. It involves living in *sympathy* (literally, “to suffer together with”) with those who

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suffer – indeed, freely assuming suffering on behalf of others. This innocent and vicarious suffering is absolutely central to an authentic Christian spirituality.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of the saving virtue that is found in innocent suffering freely assumed on behalf of others. But in Jesus we encounter the fullest expression of this reality. Our identification with Christ and our solidarity with fellow humans who suffer from all the various consequences of evil in the world calls us to take up the cross, even on behalf of our oppressors, with full confidence in what the resurrection of Jesus Christ promises to us – namely, that our innocent suffering for the sake of others will not be lost in God’s salvific plan to restore creation.

3. *“Blessed are the meek . . .”* The meekness of the third beatitude is intimately related to the poverty of spirit noted in the first beatitude. It includes the inner strength that enables us to steadfastly resist the pressures of sin without yielding to its claims. It is the capacity to stubbornly resist evil without doing violence to the evildoer. This kind of meekness is rooted solidly on our hope and confidence in God. The meek person is one who truly believes that evil can be overcome with good. It calls us to reject the temptation to avenge ourselves with any form of violence or retaliation – to renounce all violence in the quest for justice and to struggle against evil with “clean hands” and a “pure heart.” Far from being an ineffective

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strategy, this is, in fact, the strategy of the cross, uniquely and powerfully incarnated by Jesus of Nazareth.

4. “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*” Biblical justice consists of healthy relationships with God and with our fellow human beings in the context of a community that is absolutely dependent on the saving actions of God, both for its life together and for its very survival. Biblical justice includes the full range of interpersonal relationships and is anchored in the faithfulness of God reflected in the common life of the human community that bears his name. This justice is visible only in the context of God’s righteous (or just) reign.

Biblical justice, in contrast with what is generally called retributive justice, consists in giving people what they *need* rather than what they may *deserve*, be that reward or punishment. For this reason, we read over and over again in Scripture about God’s justice for the widows and orphans, for the stranger in the land, and for the poor and oppressed. Authentic Christian spirituality expresses itself through our participation in the saving activity of God that leads to the restoration of just relationships among humans. It is within this community of salvation that the “hunger and thirst for righteousness” – just relationships among all – will be satisfied.

5. “*Blessed are the merciful . . .*” It is in showing mercy that we become most like God. The story of the Good Samaritan provides us with a clear and concrete example of a

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spirituality characterized by mercy. To the degree that we are able to show mercy we will be in a condition to receive God's mercy for ourselves.

Mercy in the Gospels means, first of all, to forgive wholeheartedly in the same way that God forgives us (Matt. 18:35). In the second place, to be merciful is to unselfishly come to the aid of the afflicted and the needy. The limits of this mercy are not found in the one who extends acts of mercy, but in the capacity of the "neighbor" to receive mercy. What Jesus has taught us about the nature of mercy simply underscores the fact that a true Christian spirituality is characterized by our willingness to freely heap forgiveness upon our enemies and to share lavishly with the needy.

6. "*Blessed are the pure in heart . . .*" The "purity of heart" evident in all authentic Christian spirituality can probably be best understood in light of Psalm 24:3–5:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? . . . Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord.

This purity of heart expresses itself in acts of integrity and in relationships characterized by faithfulness. Biblical spirituality is characterized by a close relationship between our inner attitudes ("purity of heart") and our external practices ("clean hands"). To know and to experience

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God is to obey and accompany God in his salvific actions, without divided loyalties.

7. “*Blessed are the peacemakers . . .*” Those who work for peace are children of God, especially in the sense that in doing so they are like their Father, who is the Peacemaker, par excellence. The God of the Bible does not rest in his efforts to restore wholeness, or shalom, to all areas of brokenness in creation. Jesus was fully committed to the restoration of peace – reconciliation with enemies occupied his attention throughout his lifetime as well as in his death. Activities oriented toward the restoration of shalom will characterize all authentically Christian spiritualities.

8. “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake . . .*” The Beatitudes conclude with the innocent suffering of God’s people. The spirituality that they reflect was countercultural, then as well as now. Persecution for faithfulness to God’s reign of justice and peace was the lot of the prophets, it marked the fate of Jesus, and it continues to characterize the community faithful to its messianic calling. Biblically speaking, witness and martyrdom go hand in hand (*marturía* is the Greek word for witness).

When we remember that there have been more martyrs in our lifetime than in any other period of Christian history we recognize the contemporary relevance of the Beatitudes and their importance for our understanding and practice of authentic spirituality. This is true for the

Christian Spirituality in the Gospels

entire church, not merely for the church in the global south. The powers of death – arrayed as they are against God and his intention for the restoration of justice, peace, salvation, and life in our world – remind us that the spirituality of God’s people is inherently countercultural.

The spirituality of the Beatitudes is not an unattainable ideal, but rather a realistic and visible reflection of the Spirit and the words and the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. The Beatitudes express the central values that characterized the life of the messianic community of the first century.

To follow Jesus is not a purely spiritual matter in the sense of being an inner or invisible reality in the life of the disciple. Rather, discipleship is a visible and concrete reality that expresses itself through the attitudes and

