

Facile spirituality, profound love of God

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I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds.
(Rom. 12:1–2)

This essay has a double emphasis: reflections on contemporary culture as well as an examination of what makes spirituality Christian. With the proliferation of spiritualities today Christians ought to be quite conscious that spirituality is not their exclusive domain.

When Christians begin with their tradition-shaping text—the Bible—we are presented with two overwhelmingly strong messages: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Ps. 24:1), in other words, life and history—even our own lives—are not in our control but in God’s; and “You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48), that is, we are called to follow after the embodied word of God, Jesus Christ. It has not been easy to keep these two themes together, and the tendency has been to break them apart in either direction—God alone saves us, or work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Stephen Dintaman has argued that among the more recent adherents to the Anabaptist Vision the direction of the break has been away from reliance on God as primary agent of salvation in favour of following Jesus’ ideals and thereby ushering in the kingdom.¹ This, according to Dintaman, represents a spiritual poverty since it conflates our own works with God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The latter, and not the former, is the gospel.

However, this is not necessarily the only way of putting the matter. There is no inherent reason why divine agency and human agency need to be driven apart in this way.²

This contrast of primary agents correlates in significant ways with two broad forms of spirituality in contemporary culture—namely, fantasy spiritualities and revenge spiritualities. Following reflections on spiritualities in contemporary culture through these categories, this essay will return to discuss Christian-Anabaptist spirituality, seeking to disentangle it—especially as an *embodied* spirituality—from other expressions of spirituality in our context.

It is impossible to give an adequate definition of spirituality because of its diverse meanings. One might well wonder whether the Christian monk, the Mennonite pastor, the Dalai Lama and Oprah Winfrey are really using the term in the same way at all.

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But for clarity reasons it is also important to say a few words about the history of the term and to specify how I intend to use it in this essay.

The current use of the term “spirituality” is relatively new. In the past the church has not had much need for the term and has spoken instead of “the Christian life,” “imitation of Christ,” or simply “the faith.” In Catholic tradition one spoke of the spirituality of St. Francis, or St. Ignatius, or

St. Theresa, since each gave slightly different expression to the “*imago Christi*.” Nowadays, in contrast, the term is used not to enhance specificity but to generalize, to avoid speaking of particular faith. To have a specific faith with unique texts and traditions sounds sectarian, which is bad, but to practice spirituality is general and good.

Broadly speaking “spirituality” is often used to speak of a person’s relationship to Mystery. And since “mystery” is by definition quite vacuous of content, “spirituality” also has little content. Thus theologian Kathleen Fischer writes: “Spirituality is how we express ourselves in relation to that which we designate as the source of ultimate power and meaning in life and how we live out this relationship. It may be a personal system or organized and institutionalized.”³ I begin with this broad understanding of

spirituality not because I take it to be the best definition, but because it is general and allows us to begin with inclusivity. When we begin this way it becomes important to ask what in our society is considered to be “ultimate power” and “meaningful.”

Reflections on contemporary culture

We often think of ours as a culture of chaos. I demur. Chaos admits of little uniformity and meaning. Our society exhibits all too much uniformity of both meaning and practice. Although we should resist attempts to reduce complex culture to merely one thing, if we take a look around, plenty of evidence suggests that ours is a culture of rancour, and despair.⁴ Mark Edmundson refers to it as a “culture of Gothic.”⁵ Consider our insatiable appetite for horror and violence, evident in the popularity of these relatively recent movies, many of them award winners: *Silence of the Lambs*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the Thirteenth*, *Dracula*, *Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein*, *Godfather*, *Rocky*, *Rambo*, *Witches of Eastwick*. And I list only a few. One could point to the related genre of intergalactic war movies spawned by *Star Wars*, or the more friendly horror flicks such as *Jurassic Park* and *Dinosaur*.

Why stick with movies? The mere mention of the names of their main characters instantly calls to mind “real life” stories that offer as much terror: Karla Holmolka and Paul Bernardo, O. J. Simpson, the Menendez Brothers, Susan Smith, John and Lorena Bobbitt, Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, Timothy McVeigh, to cite just a few of the most notorious. We are a people who are fed a daily diet of terror by a well-groomed anchorperson in an all-is-as-it-should-be voice. We witness with zoomed-in closeness the molesters, the abusers, the serial killers, the psychopaths, the mad bombers, the massacres, the environmental catastrophes, the local and foreign wars, and the drug busts. This “and that’s the way it is” “report” on reality assures us that wherever on earth something terrifying is taking place, the cameras will be there in order never to deprive us of knowing the “real world.”

Then when “the news” gets boring (that is, not violent enough), we can always tune in to “true police-stories, true rescue-tales, documentaries about every crime, tragedy, sorrow, disease, mistreatment, humiliation, and loss under the postmodern

sun.”⁶ And when it’s sports we crave, our 100-plus channel TVs supply us with almost continuous coverage of Roller Derby and World Wrestling Federation. Switch to the daytime talk shows and see more of the same, but this time in the lives of “ordinary citizens.” We are now looking at ourselves, and we witness lives as dreadful as the newsworthy and Hollywood-produced ones. And I have not even mentioned the Internet yet, with its proliferation of pornography and violence.

Intermixed with all of this violence and rancor is a deep longing for transcendence. Poet Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, has emphasized the need for transcendence in a world where, he suggests, we know more and more about most things but less and less about ourselves.⁷ The yearning for transcendence may seem antithetical to our preoccupation with horror, but it is not. Ironically, violence as entertainment entails its own form of transcendence, redemption, and spirituality. It

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speaks of power and meaning. Virtually without exception these productions stress deliverance and overcoming. The themes are strongly present, though in a form that may seem warped.

Human beings have a hard time living on a single plane, without transcendence. Deep down we seem to know that the ordinary is not final, that what we see is not really what we get. At least we hope not. Yet we are far less clear about what is ultimate, and so we tend to grope toward a facile transcendence. Although this phenomenon is too complex to analyze fully here, I want to look at two expressions of the contemporary quest for transcendence, two common modern approaches to spirituality: fantasy and revenge. These are not opposites; they interrelate in direct ways. Revenge relies on fantasizing new beginnings in which wrongs are righted, and fantasies often entail reliance on higher powers to exact retribution or justice. Neither can cope with reality as it is experienced, so both invoke greater powers. Yet I differentiate between these two modes of spirituality for purposes of contrast with what I will later claim to be appropriate forms of Christian spirituality.

Fantasy spiritualities

Spirituality books adorn our bookstores and libraries in abundance these days. And they are being read perhaps more than any other literature. I am writing this in a public library in

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Cambridge, U.K. I have searched the computerized catalog for a dozen well-known books on spirituality. All are checked out, and all have waiting lists. Most of these books proceed quickly to a list of “10 easy steps in the spiritual quest.” Whether they advocate New Age spirituality or something more traditionally rooted, all promise a life with purpose, design, and meaning.

Many of these books offer such overcoming through flights from reality; they are fantasies. They help us precisely because they provide a diversion from the real, a

holiday from the ordinary, a form of fiction. Great books for summer cottage reading, they belong to the genre of retreat. They remind you of how little time you have taken for God and yourself, how inconsiderate you have been of others, how unloving of your spouse, how inattentive to your children. They suggest how you can become a happier person through meditation. They describe how you can love more, get in touch with the real you or with nature, align yourself with the forces through tarot cards or horoscopes or rituals, rid yourself of cultural conditioning, or whatever the operative imagination and the corresponding spirituality prescribe. Not that these books are without value and should not be read. On the contrary, we need vacations for survival, because they constitute a form of rest and revitalization. Many (but not all) of these books are fantasies and can help us with ordinary life only insofar as they offer us a vacation from it.

It could be argued that fantasy spirituality was the great experiment of the 1960s. The youth of the '60s knew that something was wrong with the status quo. They gave it a name—The Establishment—and placed themselves over against it. They saw the need for transcendence, and had a solution: create an alternative imaginary culture. “Tune in, turn on, and drop out!”

Woodstock, the symbol of their society, emphasized nature, pleasure, love, and overcoming the old rules the youth credited with producing a selfish and violent society. But the “the Age of Aquarius” seemingly could not do more than dawn. Why? Because it remained a fantasy!

I am a product of the '60s and I remember the era with some nostalgia. Yet, truth be told, its value was its critique of what was, not its plan for what could be. It was unable to embody anything socially because it lacked a common vision. What this generation shared was only its condemnation of the establishment. That is, it remained fantasy.

The spirit of Woodstock is not dead; it has taken on a different form. This is seen in part in the popularity of the recent film *Woodstock*. And nature is still high on the agenda of transcendence seekers. Witness, for example, Robert Bly's use of the ancient nature myth “The Story of Iron John” to explain the steps males must go through to become authentically male and to shed the “Blondie and Dagwood” image of the weak and foolish man.⁸ Note the varieties of women's spirituality that explore what it means to have a body that changes with the natural lunar cycles, and to be alone among humans to birth new life.⁹ Native spirituality as fostered by some aboriginal religious leaders links the richness of their lives to the animal spirits such as the wolf and the bear.¹⁰

Consider other lingering Woodstock effects. The drug culture is certainly not in decline. Rock music is perhaps even more popular today than it was in the '60s. Now technology lets us hear our favorite rock musicians through our headphones as we walk or ride to and from our places or work and study; we no longer need to gather en masse to hear them. Yet the effect is the same: all who listen to the music are transported from our world into the world of the musician. But these worlds remain fantasies.

Fantasy does have its value. But fantasy alone cannot save us. It can only divert us, and delay the inevitable, and therein lies both its value and its limit. Fantasies cannot deliver on their promise to fulfill, precisely because their promises, when they are not rooted in reality, are lies. Deliverance is embodied in truth, not the truth of empirical observation nor the truth of imagination, but the truth of living God. When fantasy enables us

to see this truth, which it sometimes does, or when fantasy can help us embody this truth in real life forms, it can be saving. But in themselves fantasies cannot save us.

Revenge spiritualities

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lives with the forces that are. The premise of revenge spirituality is that we are in charge and therefore must make the best of it. Here there is no talk of otherworldly realms. Instead there is engagement with this world on its own terms, and total reliance on superior prowess. This approach realizes what spiritual fantasies do not, that evil can be dealt with not through flight into facile transcendence but only by overcoming it with social and political forces that actually change things. Hence while evil may hurt you, even cause death, it can never have the last word. The last word must come in the form of victory exacted by greater powers than were earlier available, and by using them ruthlessly, in the extreme, if necessary.

Sylvester Stallone has been a Hollywood symbol of revenge-redemption for several

decades. His portrayal in the *Rocky* and *Rambo* series of a battle hero with the biceps for the job gives the viewer the immediate assurance that all is well. In the end, though it may take time, Stallone will win the day. Why do we enjoy watching this sort of film? Because it lets us participate in a revenge-redemption fiction. Again, note that revenge and fantasy spiritualities are not mutually exclusive. Every revenge scenario contains within it a redemption fantasy. Revenge is to bring the world back to justice, to a level starting point. Revenge is necessary precisely because we cannot bear to play the game handicapped. So watching Rambo get tortured is tolerable and even enjoyable since we know that it is only temporary, that the tables will turn.

Furthermore, the torture serves to justify the violence Rambo will use against his enemies when payback time comes. The evil that is done sets up revenge. In this framework, revenge, no matter how extreme, is never evil; it is redemptive of evil.

The movie *The Patriot* is but the latest revenge story. The set-up is familiar. War hero Benjamin Martin decides to abandon “the life of principles” (i.e., self-defense, fighting for freedom) for the life of a family man. “A family man cannot afford principles,” he boldly announces. But then evil is done to him. The enemy shoots his younger son in cold blood as he tries to keep his older brother from being taken to execution. His house is torched and his family becomes destitute. Eventually he seeks revenge big time. And the audience cheers and feels profound empathy. He single-handedly destroys a militia of twelve men en route to his son’s execution. Revenge and counter-revenge continue until the end of the movie. When he finally loses his second son to the enemy,

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Martin ponders life’s bigger questions. “Why,” he asks, “do men have to justify death?” Profound question, no answer! But there is another theme in the movie. Revenge does not just reside in human hearts; it is the very order of the world. Repeatedly the movie makes the point that their past sins will revisit the guilty in the form of revenge. It is a spiritual law. And this is Benjamin’s struggle

as he constantly receives the evil done to him, albeit in manageable doses (because he is the hero of the movie).

This Hollywood drama also gets played out in real life. The Persian Gulf War in 1990 was a profound spiritual catharsis in North America, especially in the U.S., where the ghost of Vietnam still haunted the nation’s psyche. After their humiliation in Vietnam, this war gave the American people back their dignity. It was not enough to know that they were *able* to wreak devastating defeat on a nation like Iraq. That would have been mere fantasy. It had to be concretely demonstrated. Without the demonstration, “America” would not have attained the redemptive bragging rights it so desperately needed to be happy. The display of power in Iraq showed Americans and their enemies that America is the true medium of salvation.

I was in Baghdad some four weeks after the bombing stopped. I was riding down Main Street in a taxi when the driver, who knew I was an “American,”¹¹ stopped his Toyota Crown, and began lecturing me on what the American smart bombs were able to do. He was awed with the pinpoint accuracy that enabled them to utterly destroy one building while leaving the one beside it intact. He denounced the leadership of his own country not because he was unpatriotic but because, he screamed (to my embarrassment and fear), “Unless my own country becomes like the Americans in its military strength, it deserves the fate it has received.” He had learned what this war was intended to teach: the American military is supreme. Under its dominion you can rest safe and secure. If you tangle with it, sooner or later you will pay the price.

But revenge spirituality functions not only in war and overt violence. The movie *Erin Brockovitch* displays it in another form. Here the beautiful Julia Roberts moves from client to client promising compensation for the harm done them by a company guilty of serious pollution. As one victim, Mrs. Jensen, a cancer sufferer, puts it, “We’re going to make them pay, aren’t we?” When the 30-million-dollar settlement is announced (her portion is 5 million), Mrs. Jensen rejoices that “justice” has been done.

I have chosen fantasy and revenge as two forms of spirituality with which Christians should contend, because they are the most enticing and also because they provide some fertile cross-referencing with the Christian versions. Disentanglement is crucial and it is also so intricate that this essay can only hint at it.

Christians and the spiritual quest

Whatever form they take, Christian spiritualities are neither fantasy nor revenge, though they admit of fantasy and revenge in specific ways. There are clearly revenge-like themes within the biblical language: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). But note that the point of the passage is to emphasize that vengeance is not ours but God’s. Likewise, one cannot understand the Christian faith without an active imagination envisioning constructive practices rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. But historically the ways in which fantasy and revenge have found expression in Christian life and

practice have been points of tension and disagreement. To begin to sort this out requires a rereading of crucial parts of the Christian story, especially where the spiritual/physical dichotomy gets formulated.

The debate over how to formulate an appropriate Christian-Anabaptist spirituality has often centred on how one understands the human person, and especially on how one understands the relation of body and spirit. Some interpreters assert that a holistic anthropology must repair what false ideologies have broken apart. They may blame the ancient Greeks for promoting a spiritual flight from the body, resulting in a socially disembodied piety. Whether we attribute our lack of integration of spirit and flesh to the influence of Greek philosophy, Enlightenment thought, or more contemporary logic, we know that our structures of meaning and purpose and even salvation cannot remain abstract if they are to be Christian. Unless we embody our spirituality it will remain theoretical, abstract, and unchristian. The Christian faith is an embodied faith, an incarnational faith. “For God so loved the

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world” that God in Christ has touched the earth and its people. Hence, as Paul states, how we present our bodies determines our spiritual worship.

Characteristically those who make the spiritual/physical distinction have assumed that the spiritual pull is upward to God and the physical pull is downward away from God. Those of us who want to follow the incarnate (enfleshed) Christ should experience some discomfort with this formulation. We need to develop the

language of the spirituality of the embodied community of faith. Moving in this direction can help us avoid pitfalls that arise from a dichotomy of the spiritual and the physical. And on this matter our Anabaptist forebears have something to say.

To give Anabaptist tradition its say on spirituality we need to review briefly how it differed from the mainline theological imaginations of both Protestants and Catholics. Luther argued that all of life tended in two directions: upward to God and downward to the devil.¹² In his view, life is a struggle between

these two forces. The Anabaptists agreed. Luther went on to say that in Christ God has called into existence a special people who are to be signs of a kingdom that God intended for all of humankind. But sin has corrupted our world. God has providentially arranged this world of contending powers so as to help us cope with the reality of sin. Until God brings total redemption, Christians therefore live in two realms: the church

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and the world. Again the Anabaptists agreed with much of this divine cosmology.

But from here on their views diverged.

Luther claimed that since God had ordained both realms, in each realm Christians should

behave according to the norms appropriate to that realm. When acting on behalf of the church, a Christian cannot inflict death on an enemy through capital punishment. Why not? Because in the church forgiveness is the answer to sin. On the other hand, in the world a Christian not only may but sometimes must inflict death on the enemy, because the state has the God-given mandate to maintain order and keep the power of sin in check by using the sword. For Christians to refuse to do what God has mandated for the state is inconsistent and, worse, apostasy.¹³ Here the Anabaptists disagreed.

Why the disagreement? The answer impinges directly on how they understood the Christian life. Luther divided the world between the spiritual and the physical in a way the Anabaptists could not accept. For Luther both are God's realms. In the physical world God works in a hidden manner, giving temporal authorities power to curb sin. In the spiritual realm God works through the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to this model, to be spiritual is to maintain a certain inner disposition towards God even as one lives in both arenas, acting in each according to its own norms, forgiving in one and killing in the other. Spirituality does not determine the way Christians "present your bodies" (Rom. 12:1); in the temporal realm it is laudatory for Christians to behave in ways that would be absolutely wrong in the spiritual realm. Spirituality is a private, interior disposition toward God as the body outwardly does what it must do in this sinful world.

Anabaptists in the main were too Catholic and too ascetic to accept this approach. For them profound love of God included

profound love of the physical. To say that the Anabaptists were ascetics in love with the physical is not a careless slip but an intentional juxtaposition. It carries within it a critique of both Protestant and Catholic spirituality. Their Christian faith entailed a new way of ordering life in all its dimensions. All was to be brought under the lordship of Christ. Neither the person nor the world could be carved up in a manner that justified loving enemies spiritually while killing them physically. To love enemies

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simply meant that you couldn't kill them and if killing had to be done it would need to be done to them.

This holism of body and spirit was not the Anabaptists' invention. They saw it in Jesus Christ, who had the power to destroy his persecutors but nevertheless prayed for their forgiveness and allowed them to kill him. And they saw this unity in the great tradition of Christian monasticism, in which renewal meant an entirely new orientation to the world. When one becomes a Christ-follower one no longer does what the world does.

Imitation of Christ, renunciation, and discipline had been watchwords for ascetics such as St. Benedict, Hildegard of Bingen, and St. Francis. Like them, the Anabaptists believed that people become Christian not because of what they believe about God but through the power of God's Spirit. And God's Spirit transforms the whole person. Only people who have been so transformed are able to live the renewed life, of loving enemies, humility, peace, and joy. Spiritual rebirth—the driving force of God's regenerating Spirit—empowers people to live as followers of Jesus Christ and in communion with one another. The heart of the gospel is not commitment to an ideal, not passion for justice, not the benefits of living in community, but the personal experience of God acting in this world transforming individual lives and whole communities. And the invitation is to a set of spiritual disciplines that can sustain such a commitment to renunciation and community.

While they had much in common with the ascetics, the Anabaptists also rejected some aspects of their theology and

practice. They accepted separation from the world, but saw little of Christ in the way anchorite monks cloistered themselves in remote places in an effort to hide from evil. After all, evil follows you wherever you go. And Christ calls us to serve one another. Whom can you serve if you are a desert hermit? They agreed with the cenobites—the monks who lived communally—in their emphasis on the formation of an alternative society as a sign to the world of how Christians ought to live. How can the world know what it means to be Christ-followers unless a community gives concrete expression to discipleship? But the Anabaptists could not accept an ecclesiology that divides the church into two kinds of Christians: serious ones who become ascetics, and everybody else. All Christians are regenerated believers. Also, the monastic embrace of celibacy suggests a diminution of physicality (sexuality) that seems inconsistent with Jesus' love of the world. Sexuality is not antithetical to spirituality; it is a gift from God. Sexuality may have many aberrant distortions, but that's another matter. Physicality is not to be shunned but brought under the lordship of Christ. For related reasons, wealth, power, and forms of governance are all *spiritual* issues within this tradition.

The spirituality of the Anabaptists was more like that of the cenobitic monks, yet they did not limit it to a special class of Christians. It entailed creation of a community of believers who have experienced regeneration and are committed to a life of separation from the world while being in it. Like the monks, theirs was a life of renunciation and discipline. Sin would be with them so they needed to find a way of dealing with it, as Jesus had instructed. And all in the community of saints would work at the common quest of faithful living in the midst of a degenerate world. The understanding of Christian faith advocated here is not a greater spirituality contra physicality but rather a clear holistic communal politic based on servanthood and an openness to God's transforming spirit in all areas of life. In this Jesus Christ was their model.¹⁴

Defining spirituality through politics, through ecclesiology, has implications for Mennonite practice to this day. For example, the spirituality of the church of my upbringing conceived of sin as a matter between God and us, and among us. Hence, forgiveness and reconciliation were matters between God and us and also

among us. We practiced communion not every Sunday but four or five times per year, because celebrating the Lord's Supper required an elaborate communal process of repentance and healing. Preceding every communion Sunday was a Sunday of preparation, on which preachers invited and admonished the congregation to make things right with God and with each other. The week before communion was a time of confession and

making things right. Individuals sought out those they had sinned against to repent and ask for forgiveness. Communion was the healing of the body; it was a social activity and embodied a unique spirituality of the whole community.

In mainline Catholic and Protestant churches the politics of communion is different. Every Sunday morning worshipers confess their sins and celebrate God's love in the feast of the Eucharist. The act is fundamentally between God and the individual. God alone forgives their sin and redeems their souls, and no one needs to confess anything to another person. There is no talk of the healing of the body.

These two different spiritualities are grounded in two different ecclesiologies. As North American Mennonites struggle with how to embody community, especially in the

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cities, the pressure is on to shift to alternative practices, away from the communal asceticism of our tradition and toward a dichotomized spirituality. We are tempted to break apart what we have been taught belongs together in one body politic—the spiritual and the physical. We need to resist moving toward a spirituality that is directed to God on the basis of one dimension and to humankind on the basis of another. Because the church as a whole is an alternative body politic it must work at presenting itself to the world and under God as one whole body. How one acts in the world is a matter of church discipline. Christians have but one norm, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Back to Fantasy and Revenge

The communal asceticism/spirituality that I am suggesting is integral to the Mennonite/Anabaptist tradition interrelates with fantasy and revenge in direct ways. This communal spirituality acknowledges that a higher power than we can see is at work in the world—living God. In this way it is similar to many of the fantasy spiritualities discussed earlier. We are not alone. Living God is among us. Such a view does not advocate retreat from the world, leaving it to its own self-destruction (fantasy/asceticism). It is interested in changing the world. Yet the strategy of change is participatory with God, unlike the revenge spiritualities in which one takes matters into one's own hands. God is the primary agent of redemption, the world's and ours. We are but secondary agents. Our task is to point to the power of God's redemptive activity and to embody it as best we can. It is not our task to accommodate ourselves to the best available strategies, given our realistic assessment. The imagination we embrace is the story of the cross and resurrection.

What does the cross/resurrection story teach us about Christian spirituality? The cross comes about as a result of evil. There is real death, unjust death. Is there revenge? No. Jesus accepts death without inflicting any violence on his enemies. Enemies are loved. Not destroyed. But Jesus is victorious. How? Not through

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retribution, but through openness to God's action. God raised Jesus from the dead. This is actual resurrection, not fantasy. Unless we comprehend that God still acts in this world transforming individual people as well as whole communities into bodies of Christ, we cannot properly understand the spirituality of the biblical faith. We need to re-imagine how we can discipline ourselves to be open to God acting in our lives. How can we resist the temptation to read the world otherwise?

The invitation of the gospel is to become profound lovers of God. Yet this is but a response to God's profound love of us. This love does not take us out of this world; it puts us into the world in a particular way. Immanuel Kant once said, "Out of the crooked timber of

humanity, nothing straight can be made.” He was wrong. Perhaps Enlightenment logic prevented him from seeing the transforming power of God. Perhaps rationalism prevented him from experiencing divine mystery. He may have been right in his implicit critique of a facile transcendence, but the love of God, which passes all understanding, is able to do abundantly more than Kant’s comment suggests. Profound love of God can overcome facile spirituality, but only if we discipline ourselves to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. That is our spiritual worship.

Notes

¹ Stephen Dintaman, “The Spiritual Poverty of Anabaptism,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 205–208.

² For a fuller discussion of divine and human agency see my essay, “Moral Agency as Embodiment: How the Church Acts,” in Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 189–212.

³ Quoted from Thomas Hart, *Spiritual Quest: A Guide to the Changing Landscape* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1999), 39.

⁴ We might well wonder whether society has not always been rancorous. Consider, for example, the Roman gladiators. (For a current Hollywood rendition, see the recent movie *Gladiator*.) But my interest here is not in a comparative analysis.

⁵ Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1997). Edmundson uses “Gothic” in the literary sense made popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the “Gothic novel” with its complex plot of horrifying supernatural drama.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ See Vaclav Havel, “The Need for Transcendence In the Post-Modern World,” from the website magna.com.au/~prfbrown/v_havel.html.

⁸ Robert Bly, *Iron Man: A Book about Men* (New York: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1990).

⁹ See for example, Rev. Frodo Okulam, “Why Women’s Spirituality?” *Spirited Women Magazine* (May 1998), on line at <http://www.teleport.com/community/nonprofit/sister-spirit/magazine.html>.

¹⁰ These three examples are, of course, not the only way of speaking of these spiritualities—male, women’s, and native. There is a vast body of literature in each of these areas. I list these three forms because they are all varieties of nature-based spirituality.

¹¹ Arabs tend to call all North Americans “Americans” though they are well aware of the U.S./Canadian distinction, and will invoke it whenever it suits them.

¹² For a helpful analysis of Luther’s doctrine of the two realms see Jürgen Moltmann, *Following Jesus in the World Today: Responsibility of the World and Christian Discipleship*, Occasional Papers, no. 4 (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1983).

¹³ See Martin Luther, “On Governmental Authority (1523)”: “You ask whether a Christian too may bear the temporal sword and punish the wicked. Answer: You have

now heard two propositions. One is that the sword can have no place among the Christians...[and the other] that you are under obligation to serve and assist the sword by whichever means you can.... Therefore, if you see that there is a lack of hangmen [and] constables...you should offer your services and seek the position.” Quoted from Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 51.

¹⁴ Two helpful resources on Anabaptist spirituality are Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism: Classic Devotional Resources* (Scottsdale: Herald Pr., 1995), and Daniel Liechty, trans. and ed., *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1994). See John J. Friesen’s review and discussion of these books in this issue, pages 87–91.