



**Sixth Sunday of
Easter**
06 May 2018



St Paul's Episcopal Church
Canton Ohio ♦ USA

Pentecost - Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest¹

The Col-lect Year B RCL

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

O God, ^a you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding;^b Pour into our hearts such love towards you,^c that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire;^d through Jesus Christ

our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.^e *Amen.*

LOVING GOD ABOVE AND THROUGH ALL

STRUCTURE OF THE COLLECT: [a] Address to God; [b] The doctrinal basis for the prayer - why we can ask for it; [c] The petition i.e. what we want; [d] The aspiration, i.e. what we will do with it if we get it; [e] In Jesus' name, i.e. remembering the mediating role of Jesus.

Tim Keller, <https://www.redeemer.com>

² COMMENTARY ON THE COLLECT: The inspiration for this collect is undoubtedly 1 Corinthians 2:9. The prayer is found in several Gallican books: the Missale Gothicum as an opening collect (no. 519); the Missale Francorum as a prayer to be read after the Old Testament lection (no. 121); and the Celtic Stowe Missal as one of the two prayers printed for use before the Epistle. continued on pg 9

Readings
Year B
06 May 2018

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The First Lesson

Acts 10:44-48

INTRODUCTION

Here is the 'third Pentecost', following the pouring of the Spirit on Jews, Samaritans and now Gentiles. Only on these eight Sundays of Easter (and on Palm Sunday) is the NT reading placed before the OT readings in the lectionary, inviting us to give this priority. Luke is largely responsible for the 'hourglass-on-its-side' model of the Bible, which

begins with the creation of the universe, continues with Abraham and his family, but records a story of failure and increasing absence of dramatic signs until John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus are born. From that centre point of the one faithful Jew, Luke cites Jesus in Acts 1:7 as promising the power of the Holy Spirit to enable his followers to take their witness to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The Gentile Pentecost thus inaugurates the fulfilment of Isaiah 49:6, where God's servant not only restores the remnant of Israel but is a light for the nations, so God's salvation may reach the ends of the earth. ⁴

ACTS 10: 1-8; 19-43

¹In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ²He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' ⁴He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. ²⁰Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' ²¹So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' ²²They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' ²³So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. ²⁶But Peter made

him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal.'²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled;²⁸ and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.'²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

³⁰ Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. ³¹He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." ³³Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

³⁴ *Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. *They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;* ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.*

⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

<http://bible.oremus.org>

While Peter was still speaking, *the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.* ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God



The Response

Psalm 98

Cantate Domino

INTRODUCTION

The reception reserved for the Lord, who intervenes in history is marked by a universal praise: in addition to the orchestra and the hymns of the Temple of Zion (cf. vv. 5-6), the universe, as a kind of cosmic temple, also participates.

There are four singers of this immense choir of praise. The first is the roaring sea that seems to be the constant basso of this grandiose hymn (cf. v. 7). The earth and the entire world (cf. vv. 4.7) with all its inhabitants follow united in solemn harmony. The third personification is that of the rivers, that are considered the arms of the sea which, with their rhythmic flow, seem to clap hands in applause (cf. v. 8). Finally, there are the mountains that seem to dance for joy before the Lord, even though they are the most massive and imposing creatures (cf. v. 8; Ps 28[29],6; 113[114],6).

So we have a colossal choir that has only one purpose: to exalt the Lord, King and just Judge. As mentioned, the end of the Psalm, in fact, presents God, “who comes to govern (and to rule) the earth ... with justice and equity” (Ps 97 [98],9). Pope Paul II on Psalm 98 (97), 11.6.2002.

<https://thedivinelamp.wordpress.com>

Sing to the LORD a new song, *
for he has done marvelous things.
² With his right hand and his holy arm *

- has he won for himself the victory.
- ³ The LORD has made known his victory; *
his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of
the nations.
- ⁴ He remembers his mercy and faithfulness to the house of
Israel, *
and all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of
our God.
- ⁵ Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands; *
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.
- ⁶ Sing to the LORD with the harp, *
with the harp and the voice of song.
- ⁷ With trumpets and the sound of the horn *
shout with joy before the King, the LORD.
- ⁸ Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, *
the lands and those who dwell therein.
- ⁹ Let the rivers clap their hands, *
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD,
when he comes to judge the earth.
- ¹⁰ In righteousness shall he judge the world *
and the peoples with equity.



The Epistle

1 John 5:1-6

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that Paul discusses things in a straight line, and John in a circle, which may explain why some people prefer one to the other (since they both deal profoundly with love, and with salvation). Certainly in verses 1-5, John begins with faith in Christ, and returns to the same starting point via theology, the obedience of love, spirituality and victorious living. Verses 1 and 6 are typical of John's letter in their full commitment to a doctrine of God as Trinity – while the nuts and bolts of this were to be worked out two centuries later, the flesh and bones are clear enough in the New Testament.

The reference to water and blood in these verses is not altogether clear to us, though it was obviously picking up a live issue for John's readers. A simple interpretation is to take it as a reference to the double baptism of Jesus, in water in the Jordan and in blood upon the cross. The writer of the epistle has generally been understood to be the same as the writer of the gospel, and probably also the writer of Revelation – though scholars like Richard Bauckham have argued that this John (the anonymous disciple of the gospel) is not the same as John Zebedee, the brother of James.⁴

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God



The Gospel

John 15:9-17

INTRODUCTION

Friendship was such a key relationship in the ancient world—the glue binding free persons to one another and a community—that friends ideally might sacrifice their lives for one another and the common good. What is so remarkable is that Jesus fully lives out this cultural ideal.

<https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/61816.pdf>

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. -

<http://bible.oremus.org>

9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The Gospel of the Lord
All praise to you, Lord Christ.



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The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/sixth-sunday-easter>

NOTES:

¹ <http://www.textweek.com/art/pentecost.htm>

² <http://liberlocorumcommunium.blogspot.com/2010/08/deus-qui-diligentibus-te-bona.html>

³ http://lectorprep.org/easter_06_yrB.html

⁴ <http://www.textweek.com/yearb/easterb6.htm>

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Jock Stein, retired Minister, formerly of Tulliallan and Kincardine, for his thoughts on the sixth Sunday of Easter. churchofscotland.org.uk_6_May_Jock_Stein_6_in_Easter

²Collect, Sixth Sunday of Easter.

In the Gelasian sacramentary it is the first in a series of propers for ordinary Sundays (no. 1178), and in the supplement to the Gregorian for use on the sixth Sunday after (the) Pentecost (octave) (no. 1144). In the Sarum missal and earlier Prayer Books this collect was used on the sixth Sunday after Trinity.

In 1549 Cranmer substituted 'such good things as pass all understanding' for 'invisible good things.' The Latin original had 'loving you in all things and above all things;' the 1549 version retained only the phrase 'in all things' and the 1662 revision substituted 'above all things.' The present revision moves the collect appropriately to the Easter season with the original phrase restored.

In the Latin there is a distinction between the uses of the word 'love' in this collect. The word in the phrases 'those who love' and 'taht we, loving' is related to the verb *diligere*, the root meaning of which is 'to choose.' This has to do with an act of the will. We pray that God may pour into our hearts the affect of such love (tui amoris affectum), which is rooted in an emotion (amore—love), that we may obtain the promises. The prayer recalls 1 John 4:19, 'We love, because he first

loved us" (Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer book* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1980), 182).

Deus, qui diligentibus te bona invisibilia præparasti, infunde cordibus nostris tui amoris affectum, ut, te in omnibus et super omnia diligentes, promissiones tuas, quæ omne desiderium superant, consequamur.

The earlier "translation" ran as follows:

God our Father, may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

<http://liberlocorumcommunium.blogspot.com/2010/08/deus-qui-diligentibus-te-bona.html>

LECTOR'S NOTES YEAR B 6 MAY 2018

First Reading, Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

The Literary Background: One of the church's first struggles was to decide its scope. Was God calling the early Christians to be a sect within Judaism, or to reach further? The Acts of the Apostles has a clear opinion about this, and today's first reading dramatizes it. The episode begins earlier in the chapter, where both Peter and the Roman officer Cornelius have separate visions. A heavenly messenger instructs Cornelius, a good man though a pagan, to summon Peter, whom he doesn't know, to a meeting. In Peter's trance, a voice bids him eat non-kosher foods. Peter calls this unthinkable, but the voice insists that what God has purified, no one is to call unclean. Then Cornelius' messengers fetch Peter. When the Jew and the Roman meet, Peter says, "You must know that it is not proper for a Jew to associate with a Gentile, or to have any dealings with him. But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any person unclean or impure."

The Historical Situation: Acts was written for people quite like the people described there. That is, the late first-century skeptical Gentile converts were surprised to find themselves drawn into a new religion with manifest roots in ancient Judaism. They had questions. So the evangelist Luke tells them the story, in his gospel and then in Acts, of their new faith's origins. The decision to yoke Jews and Gentiles together was still remarkable, so Luke shows how it was a struggle for those who

had first reached the decision a generation or two earlier. Luke's goal is to burn into the hearts of the new converts the same zeal for the spread of this faith that overcame the traditional exclusivity of the first followers of Jesus.

Proclaiming It: Before you proclaim this, try to understand the astonishment of the already-Christian, ethnically Jewish characters like Peter and "the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter." Read all of Acts, Chapter 10. They've been asked to accept that:

- Although for centuries they had hoped for a Messiah, specifically another David, military hero and undisputed king, the Messiah who came was a poor itinerant rabbi.
- Their Messiah was promptly crucified.
- Some believers met Jesus after he had risen from the dead.
- And now, they have to let down ancient barriers to fellowship with pagans.

This is a lot for anyone to accept. You can be sure they didn't discuss it in hushed tones. Use the whole range of your voice to capture the controversy and drama. And when you say, "The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles," sound **astounded**.

Then pause. Your pause expresses the quandary of the people described, thinking "Whoa! what does this mean and where do we go from here?" After two beats, assume the confident voice of Peter, who now knows, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people ..."

http://lectorprep.org/easter_06_yrB.html#otr

Friendship. What a wonderful thing it is!

In good mature friendships there is a mutuality of respect in which no one is enslaved or overly dependent upon the other. Whether friends are equal in status, or in age or whatever, is not the main point: their relationship is governed by mutual confidence in the care they have for each other. It was that mature kind of friendship that Jesus offered his disciples (John 15:13-15).

Yet his willingness to serve them did not contradict his leadership (John 13:12-14). He could retain his authority as a servant leader.

That the status question can be set aside is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the way that the ancient leaders of the nation of Israel were called friends of God. Eg Moses - (Exodus 33:11: *And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.*); Abraham - (2 Chronicles 20:7: *Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?*); Jacob - (Isaiah 41:8: *But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.*); James 2:23: (*And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*). So it is not surprising that when Jesus called the disciples his friends, and was even prepared to die for them, at the same time he said: You are my friends **if you do what I command you.**

Jesus made a point of saying that he did not expect their loyalty simply because they were his servants who must obey him, but more because they understood what he was about. (John 15:15). His willingness to be friends and share his meals with all sort was one thing that marked him out as different. (Matthew 11:19 cf. Luke 15:6-7, 9, 29).

<http://www.beswick.info/rc/resources/E6B97OS.htm>

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The Holy Spirit and the Arts

This essay examines the Christian's interaction with the Holy Spirit in the creation of art. We reflect on our shared doxological goal, then consider the difficult question of process, how we are to depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us from concept through production, to help us reach that goal. We consider two utilitarian approaches to dependence before endorsing an organic approach that emphasizes union with the Savior as the source and sustaining influence of our creative work. Finally, we illustrate the difference between subjectivism and objectively-based spirituality in the persons of Thomas Munzer and Martin Luther.

In the beginning of any artistic¹ enterprise, we Christians who also happen to be artists brood over the unformed mass before us in much the same way as the Spirit of God hovered over the chaos at creation. The canvass, the stage, the page, stand empty. The rough-hewn stone squats undraped on the studio floor, awaiting the creator's touch. As God's

Spirit brought order out of the confusion, so are we called to transform the emptiness before us—to spread onto the canvass, truth in living colors. To shape the formless stone in a way that will remind the world of the Rock that contains and inspires all form. To compose music that captures the echo of God singing. To direct a play or shoot a film in a way that opens a window into heaven rather than merely holding a mirror up to nature. And we share the Spirit’s purpose who, along with the Father and the Son, created the heavens and the earth: we want our art to glorify God.

“I made the earth, I created the people who live on it. It was me—my hands stretched out the sky, I give orders to all the heavenly lights” (Isa 45:12).

“The heavens declare God’s glory; the sky displays his handiwork” (Ps 19:1).

“For all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him.

He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things” (Col 1:16, 18).

I enjoy reading my King James Bible where the Holy Spirit is called the Holy Ghost. I realize the occultish connotation in the word “Ghost” even when capitalized in the middle of a sentence. But it helps me think of him in new ways. I long to be Christ-haunted by the heavenly Muse, our *Holy* Ghost. It is he who not only hovers over us, but actually indwells us, patiently forming our spiritual substance into the image of Christ Jesus even as we try to put a spit shine on a scuffed up world. He lives in us somehow. Never leaves us. Never sleeps. He is here now, aware that I am typing, aware that you are reading. So immediate. So hauntingly available, it seems he should make more of a difference in what I produce. Patience isn’t my strong suit, and it may not be yours either. Nor is the humility that is part and parcel of not being God, even though the Lord graciously reminds us of it on a daily basis.

Where God the Holy Spirit expressed the immaterial thought of God perfectly as objective reality (the material universe), we human artists, even though filled with the same creative Spirit, struggle with an imperfect understanding of beauty, imperfect skills, and imperfect tools: is the chisel sharp enough, is the paint the right shade of red, how hard

should we strike the key, how much pressure should we exert on the bow? Given our imperfections, how can we ever hope to honor God in our work? It isn't that we don't try hard. In fact, trying so hard is actually part of the problem. Oddly enough, we artists who wish to communicate a worldview consistent with our Christian beliefs often attempt to produce our art using the same process the world uses.

By “process” I do not mean the technical aspects of production. The tools of the trade are available to Christian and non-Christian alike and are amoral. The Christian filmmaker uses the same film stock as the agnostic. The Christian pianist uses the same piano as the atheist. No instrument, no tool has any moral quality in and of itself. These tools will simply serve to translate the artist's immaterial thoughts into something more corporeal and sensate.

Nor do I mean by “process” the discipline required to use these tools effectively. Technical excellence requires disciplined study and rehearsal even among the gifted. By “process” I mean the way in which we draw upon the inner resources that inspire and ultimately guide our exercise. The question before us regards the “how” of art at a deeper level. Not “upon what or whom do we depend?” for the Christian's facile answer is, “the Holy Spirit, of course!” But “how, in what way, do we depend on him?” The temptation for the Christian artist is to depend on the Holy Spirit of God in one of two ways: either as another tool or as a lackey.

The Holy Spirit as Holy Tool

Here, he functions as a sort of magic brush—given by God to make our art “special” in some spiritual sense that we secretly hope will translate into a larger advance, a bigger contract. So our attitude toward the Holy Tool can be as banal, as utilitarian as our attitude toward any of the other useful implements in our bag of tricks. It is a syncretistic business, this blending of a worldly approach with a spiritual purpose, and one that is doomed to produce little of eternal value, and if so, only accidentally. We are no alchemists, though we continue to use the base metals of this world in a vain attempt to create the heavenly gold of the next.

Such a mechanistic view of the Holy Spirit fails to satisfy, and it's no surprise, given the organic union of Vine to branch in [John 15](#). The issue isn't really whether or not we should depend on the Holy Spirit in the artistic endeavor, but “how should we depend on him?” If we look to [John 15](#) for an answer we discover there is no independence at all.

There, the branch is either connected in a consistent, vital, life-sustaining union with the vine, or it is dead.

Even when we recognize our own frailty, it is easy to think that if we just open ourselves to the control of God’s Spirit, then we will achieve greatness as artists, producing work that will glorify God. Then God reminds us once again that he is, and we are not, sovereign. The degree to which our art will glorify God does *not* vary in direct proportion to our dependence on the Spirit of God in its production. That would make the “success” of our work thoroughly dependent on our own efforts. By depending on him in this way, we may achieve works of art that possess an imaginative resonance otherwise unobtainable. But that doesn’t guarantee that God will choose that work to honor himself. He may decide to honor himself through a less “Spirit-dependent” man or woman such as Balaam (Num 22), or he may work through a Spirit-filled person like Bezalel (Exod 31). God can and often does work in spite of us.

While we have no idea of how or if the Lord might choose to glorify himself through our artistic offerings, we still have an obligation to produce our works in a way that would please him. The artistic process must be spiritually based, and spiritually driven if we are to realize a spiritual purpose. We must allow God to produce his art through us—not as if we were limp gloves waiting to be filled by the Divine hand, nor as lifeless instruments waiting to be manipulated, but as children who actually participate with our heavenly Father in a dynamic creative process. And he has given us everything we need to accomplish our purpose.

God, the Master Artisan², provides in this phenomenal universe limitless material for contemplation, as well as the material tools fit for the work of composition: palette, brush, chisel, pen, and in the person of the artist, balance, voice, imagination, a sense of timing. Artists learn the discipline of their craft to manipulate these and a host of other tools in a wide variety of media in order to achieve the desired effect—the translation of an immaterial idea into objective reality. Virtually any dedicated individual can gain access to these tools and learn how to use them. One needn’t be a Christian to master the techniques, the mechanics of the artisan. It is simply a matter of learning how to draw the brush across the canvass.

But humankind is more than a robot, and art is more than the result of assembly line mechanics. God has breathed into humans the breath of life, and in that breath we have absorbed the image of God in the

immaterial essence of soul, spirit, mind, heart, and conscience, each contributing to the development of intellect, emotion, and will. Among all the animals that inhabit the planet, we humans possess the unique ability to think God's thoughts.³ A man or woman may produce a work of art, but a dog or a canary never will.⁴ We are the only ones with a conscience to which God often appeals to exert a profound influence on the will. The degree to which we yield to his appeal is the degree to which we will enjoy blessing and reward. Conversely, the degree to which we resist his appeal to conscience is the degree to which, among all creation, we will suffer loss and shame. I can picture Mark Twain's words chiseled into foundation of the bema of Christ as I stand watching my mound of wood, hay, and stubble consumed by the flames: "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to." The immaterial/spiritual components of humankind, which together make up the *Imago Dei*, are resident in all humans, saved or unsaved.

Where then, does the artist who is a Christian enjoy an advantage over the unsaved artist? In the indwelling Holy Spirit. The very God who formed the world, who brought order out of chaos at creation, also filled men like Bezalel (not a New Testament Christian, but an Old Testament believer) to produce works of art.

Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has filled him with the Spirit of God—with skill, with understanding, with knowledge, and with all kinds of work, to design artistic designs, to work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in cutting stones for their setting, and in cutting wood, to do work in every artistic craft (Exod 35:30-33).

For the artist who is a Christian, and indwelt by God's Spirit, the creative process calls for more than the acquisition of the disciplines of his or her craft. It even calls for more than the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit. The carnal Christians in Corinth remind us that the mere presence of God's Spirit in the life of the believer is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. Paul reminds us in Eph 5:18 that, as in all the other facets of the Christian life, the creative process requires a consistent, conscious *reliance* on the Holy Spirit.

"And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit" (Eph 5:18).

It is interesting that the very next verse considers the righteous effect of such a Spirit-dominated life.

“speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord” ([Eph 5:19](#)).

The presence of the Holy Spirit is assumed. Paul’s focus is on the Christian’s relationship to the Spirit. The first response of a Spirit-controlled Christian, Paul says, is thoroughly artistic and relational. We are to express ourselves to one another and to the Lord through the artistry of music. The words translated “speaking” and “singing” are present active participles, suggesting an ongoing process. The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to celebrate, and thereby exalt God through discourse with other Christians and through private worship (“in your hearts”) to the Lord. The content of the musical celebration is dictated by the nature of the controlling Agent. The Holy Spirit inspires (in the non-technical sense) “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs,” all terms which denote music that honors the Lord. The ultimate purpose of the Christian artist, then, as it is for all Christians, is doxological; that is, we are to honor or glorify God in all that we do. We realize that purpose aesthetically, and in the context of relationship as we reveal ourselves through our art to the world.

All art is revelatory. What we reveal and how we reveal it demonstrate our devotion to the discipline of our craft (material technique) and to our awareness of truth (immaterial or spiritual sensitivity). The degree to which material discipline and spiritual sensitivity complement one another in a work of art is the degree to which the artist may achieve greatness *qua* artist, but here we must offer a caveat. Such correspondence may say little or nothing regarding the spiritual maturity of the individual artist. Caravaggio, the 17th century painter, provides a chilling example. His paintings reveal the truth of Christ’s deity (in his *Raising of Lazarus*, for example) more powerfully than any other artist of the Baroque period does, and yet he lived a stormy and often dissolute life. Given the piety of the subject and the excellence of the technique, the casual observer would have no clue as to the quality of the artist’s relationship with the God he revealed on canvass. Caravaggio’s technique was impeccable. His spiritual sensitivity, that is, his ability to discern spiritual truth, was highly developed. It was his unwillingness to submit to the control of God’s Spirit in the rest of his life that left him miserable and broken, and finally dead at the age of 36.

We are, in our moments of artistic composition, either under the control of God’s Spirit, or under the influence of our own “soulishness” (Jas 3:15), that natural tendency to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

When we submit to the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit, we Christians who are artists function most effectively as intermediaries, as spokespersons, or to use a biblical metaphor, as ambassadors. We are truth-bearers, though our message is at times couched in the poetry rather than the prose of life, and so it may be a bit more difficult to absorb on a first reading/hearing/viewing. At other times it is our privilege to unlock, all at once, the beauty in the everyday treasures of our world, and the viewer finds himself almost overwhelmed in a dynamic rush of truth and beauty. There is truth in a water lily, but who among us, gazing out over a pond full of green on green, unimpressionable and static as the scene before us, has experienced that truth in the same way as Monet? He recreates the fact of the green plants, painting unfocused images that captured an honest and multicolored—in short, a kinetic impression of that truth. Monet, as all artists, allows the audience to participate in the translated event so that they may vicariously experience the truth of the lilies in the same way he experienced it.

This world of common water lilies is the world we seek to reclaim, to recreate, for one simple reason: it is the world we have inherited. Adam lived in a world where he was connected to God (in the creation), then disconnected (through the fall), then reconnected (through the promised redemption in Christ, the last Adam). The world itself, however, remains disconnected and awaits redemption from the curse (Rom 8:22). Paradoxically, there is a need for a kind of detachment (another disconnect) in order for the artist who is a Christian to see the world, not only as it is—on its tired journey back to chaos, but as God wills it to be in the future—a new world taking its first breath.

Our God-given hope provides us a new set of lenses through which we can see these two worlds (the phenomenal, space/time world and the spiritual world) as distinct realities. So the Christian artist is left to discover in a ruined world the blush of beauty he had while virtuous, and which he will regain when redeemed. Ours is a task at once nostalgic and prophetic, and it requires that we work with what we have, i.e., within the limits imposed by our mortality. We cannot create something out of nothing. While God created what is *actual* out of what is *imaginary*, we creative artists must create what is imaginary out of what is actual, and the Holy Spirit works through us to create a work of art.

But then I think, how am I relating to him? If not as a Holy Tool to be picked up and set down at my discretion, then how *should* I relate to him? Like most artists who are Christians, I can honestly say that I depend on the Person of the Holy Spirit to help me. Then it hits me. When I say I depend on the Holy Spirit as a Person to help me, I find myself treating him, not as God, but as if he were a Best Boy on a movie set whose job it is to make me comfortable so that I can do my best work.

The Holy Spirit as Holy Lackey

As spiritually obtuse as it seems, we often exhibit a guarded, almost defensive attitude toward the Holy Spirit's invasion into the creative sphere, into our domain. He is there to help, we insist, not to take over. We expect him to serve us, we remind him, just as Jesus did who came not to be served, but to serve. And isn't the Holy Spirit subservient to the Lord Jesus and the Father?

To use a different metaphor, sometimes we subconsciously assign the Holy Spirit the job of Holy Editor. His touch should be light, and under no circumstances should he attempt a major revision. As a rule, immature artists put up with human editors (in their various incarnations) as necessary contractual evils. For the artist whose soul is wrapped up in his or her work, editors are the cutters of words, the redefiners of vision, the guardians of market-driven standards of mediocrity. It's easy to impute our distrust for human editors (whose motives may be mixed) to the Holy Spirit (whose motives are pure, but which we suspect nonetheless).

A more ominous vision: the Holy Spirit as Divine Executive Producer—the Supreme Suit always on the set during rehearsals. He may be a really nice Guy and all, but if he's always there, looking over our shoulder, how can we really create? He needs to stay in his office and write the checks, dispense the blessings and let us get on with our art. We shudder to think—what happens if, on the next to last stroke of the brush, he decides he doesn't like the chiaroscuro effect? What if he says the invited dress stinks and we should cancel the show and return the advance ticket sales? What if he pulls the plug in dozens of other ways on our artistic creation? That's the risk we run, we tell ourselves, by allowing him total control, final say, absolute authority. It's a kind of Hobbsian view of the Holy Spirit as despotic monarch, a necessary Governor because without him we spiritually antisocial artists would be throwing paint at each other rather than at the canvass.

And even if we were to seek his guidance, as we seek the guidance of a favorite director, how can we really know it is his voice we are listening to? How can we be sure we are being guided by the Holy Spirit and not by public pressure to conform (the world), our own insecurities (the flesh, or our corrupted/imperfect soul), or the evil one himself (the Unit Production Manager—or the devil, whichever you prefer). The Lord no longer carves out messages in tablets of stone. He doesn't thunder in a voice that shakes mountains or *Paramountains*.

We would settle for a still small voice, a whisper even. But no. We are not told to seek something audible, but we must trust him to lead through his word, the Bible, and through a yielded heart to obey that word. That requires discernment, refined by careful study of the scriptures and long visits with the Lord in prayer. Spiritual discipline. Hard work with a spiritual twist that calls on us to rest in him. But we have such trouble putting the two together. We don't like that tension. We want it to be one way or the other. We either want to work ourselves into an early grave and drag the Holy Spirit in after us, or we want to abandon all responsibility to work and let God dial the phone. Conservative evangelicals fall more easily into the error of works-righteousness than into the error of irresponsible passivity. But that doesn't mean we don't fantasize.

“Life would be so much simpler,” we sigh, bone weary, “if we could just shuck our left-brained rational, intellectual robes, and dive buck naked into the right hemisphere of creativity.” There's an antiseptic security in an emotional vacuum. There we convince ourselves that spiritual decisions are best made inductively: gather the information, isolate the factors, weight the consequences, and engage the will. And yet, how arrogant to assume that our more intellectual, reductionistic approach to the Spirit-filled life is superior, when in fact that kind of 20th century asceticism leaves us intellectually puffed up and emotionally shriveled at the same time. Still, it's a safe life. Our God is pretty tame most of the time: boxable, predictable, housebroken, servile. The alternative—the idea that the rock-splitting God of the Old Testament might still be lurking in the shadows of the Cross of the gentle Jesus, is too unsettling, too threatening for many of us seeker-sensitive types.

So we stand with the publican in the shadows of the temple, thanking God that He didn't make us a woman or a charismatic, equating total surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit with a knuckles-dragging-the-ground, swinging-from-the-chandeliers, Neanderthal approach to the spiritual life. Why? Because we're scared. Scared of emotions. But, as

Howard Hendricks says, “we needn’t fear emotions. Emotions are God’s gifts. What we should fear is emotionalism, which is emotions out of control.”⁵ Our irrational fear is that the Holy Spirit might excite in us a fleshly response! So we try to keep him on a leash. We tend his holy fire, and of course wind up quenching him altogether, and living a life that isn’t spiritual at all. It is a life thoroughly fleshly and rotten to the core, with only the robes of spirituality to make it respectable in public. We refuse to risk embarrassment. We will protect ourselves at all costs.

But we shall be disappointed if we persist in this childish spirituality. Like children playing at the seashore, we build our theology of the spiritual life on the beach of our own personality, and then we’re stunned when it turns out to be nothing but a sandcastle. The cares of this world, or Satan, or God himself will wash it away. If we produce our art in the strength of the flesh, we shouldn’t be surprised if it has a fleshly half-life. We need balance between passive dependence on the Holy Spirit and responsible, obedience to his will. Two men from the Reformation will provide illustrations of lives in and out of spiritual balance: Martin Luther and Thomas Munzer.

Luther and Munzer at Spiritual Odds

Here at the end of the twentieth century, the artist who is also a Christian finds himself in somewhat the same position as Luther in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Luther confronted a church that claimed a spiritual purpose, but which had become infected with a worldly heart. Historically (and biblically) the church’s purpose has been to glorify the Lord through making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then guiding those believers to spiritual maturity (Matt 28). Instead, the medieval church had decided to glorify God by edifying St. Peter’s and making disciples of the clergy. Luther recognized, as we must, that in order fulfill a spiritual mandate, the church had to be reformed. Likewise, we believe it is time for a spiritual reformation in the arts.

The suspicious attitude of many evangelicals toward our charismatic brethren can be summed up in an observation Martin Luther made concerning Thomas Munzer, his more volatile protestant counterpart in the Reformation: Munzer (along with Karlstadt), Luther said, had swallowed the Holy Spirit, “feathers and all.”⁶ It would be difficult to find two more different men in their views on bibliology, pneumatology, and sanctification. Munzer’s sole authority in matters of faith and practice was the inner light given by God’s Holy Spirit, and so was subjective in extremis. Luther’s far more objective standard of authority

was the Bible. Munzer advocated fiery rebellion and swords. Luther pushed for dialogue and the armor of God (at least prior to 1525). If the Reformation had been played out on a baseball diamond and Luther and Munzer had been opposing pitchers, Munzer would have been the finesse pitcher, throwing curves, sliders, and a knuckler that never landed in the same place twice. Luther would have smoked you with a barrage of fastballs—his only pitch. But his accuracy would leave you shaking your head as he repeatedly nipped the outside of the plate for a called third strike.

But lest we see in these two men a clear dichotomy between a “right-brainer” (Munzer) and a “lefty” (Luther) we need to consider a couple of incontrovertible facts: 1) besides being an emotional zealot with a rainbow emblazoned on his flag, Munzer was a linguistic specialist in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and a recognized scholar of ancient and humanistic literature. He was particularly known for his work in the Old and New Testaments. Doesn’t fit the stereotype of the creative artist, does it? 2) Luther, our “typical left-brained dominant, logical, linear, academic” was a musician. Sometimes we forget that he was just as passionate about getting music into the hands of the people as he was in getting the Bible into the vernacular.

The main difference between the two men wasn’t their basic personalities. They were cut from the same temperamental cloth. Both were zealots. Both were capable of cruelty and of passion bordering on frenzy. Both were headstrong, with volatile, combustible spirits. Both felt compassion for the struggling peasant-class in Saxony, Thuringia, and beyond. Both were Christians as far as I can tell, though both exhibited plenty of flesh from time to time, and Munzer may have been merely a political opportunist wrapped in a holy shroud. These two fought each other, tried to destroy each other—Munzer, using the weapons of war; Luther, relying on prayer and dialogue. What led one man to pick up a pitchfork and the other to pick up a prayerbook? The issue is one of control. Two different forces controlled these men. It is paradoxical that Munzer, who professed such a dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide him, was ultimately blinded by pride and controlled by his flesh. Luther, I believe was, for the most part, controlled by the Holy Spirit. He “walked in the light” more than Munzer, even though his standard for discerning the will of God was the objective revelation given in scripture rather than Munzer’s subjective “inner light.”

Now, what do Luther and Munzer have to do with the topic of the Holy Spirit and the arts? Neither man was a champion of the arts as such.

Oddly enough, both men were iconoclasts during the High Renaissance, that period when the arts in particular glorified man and during which the humanistic artist began to recast God in his own image. But the Renaissance was a double-edged sword. On one side the Renaissance with its secular humanism elevated and glorified man. But on the other side, as humanism replaced scholasticism as the principle [*principal*] school of thought, men like Luther and Munzer enjoyed the intellectual freedom to explore, exploit, and expunge long held doctrines. Both men used the new intellectual freedom to attack the moral depravity of the corrupt ecclesiastical system they had inherited as well as many humanistic tenets of the Renaissance that gave them the freedom to explore those ideas in the first place.

In other words, both were more than willing to bite the humanistic hand that fed them. Or simply to ignore the hand altogether. While in Rome to appeal a decision in the Observantist/Conventual controversy, Luther expressed little or no interest in seeing any of the great art of the city (Michelangelo was painting the Sistine at the time, less than two modern city blocks away from the debate hall). After the Holy See rejected his appeal, Luther had a lot of time on his hands. At that primitive point in his theological development, he was far more concerned with earning as many indulgences as he could before beginning the six-week hike back to Wittenberg. At the same time, Munzer was too busy whipping up the peasantry to a bloody rebellion to be distracted by the arts.

And yet both men recognized the value of the arts as utilitarian engines to drive their respective causes. Ultimately, Munzer used the arts to manipulate the masses. His dramatic tirades against scripture would have made Billy Sunday blush. On one occasion he threw the Bible down and stomped on it. Munzer understood the importance of visual symbols. His colorful flag was emblazoned with the rainbow, perhaps to signify the overturning of the old order as well as the blessing of God on the new. His fiery oratory was designed to inspire reverential awe and obedience.

In his last great battle against the assembled forces at Frankenhausen he dared the assembled armies of catholic princes to fire on his unarmed peasant army, boasting that he would catch their bullets in his sleeve! These techniques and others betrayed a reliance on theatrical gimmickry to sway an uneducated public. Munzer welcomed the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source of authority, but only he could interpret the Holy Spirit's message rightly. Anyone suspected of disagreeing with Munzer's

leadership was automatically guilty of disagreeing with God the Holy Spirit, and that person suffered painful consequences.

Luther on the other hand eagerly sought the illumination of the Spirit in his study of the scriptures. His prayers are saturated with petitions that God would lead him, guide him, direct him in his study of the Bible. Luther was a brilliant debater, and a dynamic preacher, but he also enjoyed tremendous influence as a communicator of God's truth through music. A few scholars have read the translations of his debates with Eck and others. More are familiar with some of his sermons, and, of course, with his translation of the Bible. But the music he composed continues to move and inspire congregations and their leaders, even today. And to teach. Music was for Luther the art of choice. Through music he could educate and build up the hearts of the common people he served. Through music he encouraged his parishioners to obey God's word in the power of the Spirit.

For Munzer, the arts were a tool for touching the masses with the message of God as he received it through visions and dreams and direct command. His own imagination, however, was the *sine qua non* of revelation. For Luther, the arts, and music in particular, were a tool for touching people with the message of God as found in scripture. Each man claimed to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance, but in the final analysis, Munzer sought to use religion to enhance the mood² necessary to advance his own political agenda, while Luther sought to be used by the Holy Spirit to advance God's spiritual agenda. Luther's more objective scriptural basis proved to be more reliable and a stronger safeguard against doctrinal perversion than did Munzer's thoroughly subjective basis. An imaginative use of the arts was a part of the *modus operandi* for both men; however, due to their different approaches to the Holy Spirit, Luther's imagination was essentially different from the Munzer's. Coleridge addresses this difference in his famous definition of imagination:

The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will which we express by the word *choice*.⁸

In distinguishing between the secondary imagination and fancy, Coleridge draws the line between Luther's artistic imagination and that of Munzer. Where Munzer was fenced in by the boundaries of his own fancy, the word of God freed Luther to explore the frontiers of heaven and what Coleridge would call the primary imagination of the infinite *I AM*.

Christian artists in the Reformed tradition, and especially those of us who have been burned by the fires of subjectivism, may tend to shy away from a direct appeal to the Holy Spirit to fill and to guide us in our aesthetic enterprises. Our theology tells us that those "tongues of fire" in Acts are legitimate expressions of an irruptive Spirit, but our experience has emerged from an orthodoxy that, in too many cases, has grown cold. We fear doctrinal error—as if calling on the Spirit means abandoning the word—and that we might wind up with our metaphorical heads on the block as the pitiful Munzer did. That fear, however, will paralyze us into a clinical, bloodless, plastic exposition of life—a rhetorical narrative that would have been better left untold. The word under the influence of the Spirit guards us from that kind of error. May we artists who are Christians embrace the word prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to help us to see through deception to truth, and to enable us to render that beauty in a way that will honor the Creator.

1 . "Art" in this article signifies any work of beauty wrought by the divine will or by human hands, which serves to reveal in objective/sensate form the idea of the artist. The category of art under consideration is limited to the "fine" or "liberal/contemplative" arts (logic, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, sculpture, music, etc.) as differentiated from the "useful" arts (e.g., agriculture, medicine, education, government, war, industrial arts).

2 . For the purpose of this article we acknowledge God as divine Artist, though we recognize that any comparison with human artists is merely analogical. The Lord is creative in the absolute sense, calling his creation into being out of nothing, whereas the human artist may be more accurately described as being re-creative in that he must manipulate pre-existing materials in order to give form to his imaginative idea.

3 . While Montaigne strains to make a case for the ability of animals to reason alongside man, and thereby to produce sensible art, we would agree with Kant that such references to animals as artists must be metaphorical since “no rational deliberation forms the basis of their labor, [but] we see at once that it is a product of their nature (of instinct), and it is only to their Creator that we ascribe it as art” (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. Creed Meredith, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 42.523 [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990]).

4 . “A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will” (Karl Marx, *Capital*, edited by Frederick Engels, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed. 50.85 [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990]).

5 . Class notes, Dallas Seminary, 1977.

6 . “Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments.” Luther's Works. Vol. 40. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1958) 83.

7 . I am indebted to Gregory Wolfe in his brief exposition of Coleridge for the idea of “enhancement” as used here (“Editorial Statement: Image Vs. Fancy,” *Image: a Journal of the Arts & Religion* 7 [Fall 1994] 3).

8 . Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*. ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 1:295-296.

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<https://bible.org/seriespage/holy-spirit-and-arts>



Holy Spirit and Gentiles

<http://www.pitts.emory.edu/dia/bridge.cfm?ID=5547>



Pentecost
Canadian artist Gisele Bauche

<http://spiritualityandart.ca/gallery.html>