

QUADRUN

JOURNAL OF THE FOURSQUARE SCHOLARS FELLOWSHIP



Volume 5

DECEMBER 2022

EDITORIAL

[*Maintaining a 'Four-Word' Focus: Finding Balance in an Imbalanced Culture*](#)1
Jeremy Wallace

ARTICLES

[*Aimee Semple McPherson: A Life of Courageous Followership*](#)6
Gretchen Abney

[*Can These Bones Live? Acts 2:42 as a Liturgical Structure for Pentecostal Worship*](#)23
James M. Henderson

[*The Ministry of Defense: Reframing Apologetics through the Lens of Service*](#)47
Jeremy Wallace

Maintaining a “Four-Word” Focus: Finding Balance in an Imbalanced Culture

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Reflection and Recollection

As many would agree, year ends are good for gatherings of family and friends, and of course, football. They’re also good for self-examination and reflection. I’ve been reflecting a good deal as I’m sure many of you have been. This is especially so after having come through a very tumultuous, unsettling, and disturbing few years, marked by a pandemic, civil unease, and political discordancy. One matter of rumination for me personally has been my schedule. How easily our souls can become cluttered with noise, distraction, and busy-ness. I once heard someone say “busy” stood for “**Being Under Satan’s Yoke.**” Point well taken! A new year’s beginning presents us with an opportunity to rightly align our calendars, schedules, and day to day lives—to reevaluate where we should be and what we should be doing. Summers and winters are the times I generally self-assess, especially in terms of my spiritual formation and practice.

Years ago, I learned of an ancient Christian (Benedictine) practice called ‘recollection.’ This, to be clear, is not to be associated with the ancient Greek pagan belief of recollection espoused by Socrates or Plato, but with the Benedictine practice which has carried on to the present. The Christian practice of recollection centers on giving increased attention to the Spirit’s presence and work deep within us. It is a discipline that seeks to pull our attention from our normal, often chaotic schedules, toward concentrated, intentional, distraction-free focus on the divine presence; indeed, the Spirit’s abiding presence within the believer. It is simply called “attending to the Spirit.” This brings to mind the very exhortation in Hebrews 12:2, which says we are to “*Fix your eyes upon Jesus . . .*” That spiritual discipline of fixing our spiritual eyes upon Jesus is incredibly

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difficult to do in a fast-paced mode of being, as we so often lead. But we *must* take time to withdraw and be alone, as Jesus even modeled for us. Luke tells us that “*Jesus often withdrew to lonely places*” (5:16 NIV). It’s become apparent to me that this oft-neglected practice is critical for my own personal, spiritual well-being. As a good Pentecostal, I love to shout from the rooftops. But my soul needs silence and solitude, as well. It needs reflection and recollection. Finding balance and healthy rhythms our souls need can be difficult. But it is necessary.

A “Four-Word” Movement

I had a peculiar opportunity a handful of years ago. A former student of mine who had a high-up position in Walmart asked if I’d be interested in talking about the importance of worldviews in the marketplace to some of the executives at their world headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas. The request wasn’t too out of the blue since he had just taken a graduate course I taught focusing on worldview studies and cultural engagement. Plus, living in Tulsa, the drive to Bentonville was just a few hours away. I happily agreed and looked forward to the occasion. Since it was going to be during Holy Week, he asked if other employees could attend with the executives. I obliged. He then notified me that most of the employees there would be attending the talk and they were going to be making the presentation available to every Walmart around the globe by way of broadcast. Stupefied, I again consented and began wondering what I was getting myself into. The following is a condensed version of what I shared.

Oral Roberts once said, “Life is like a treadmill. The moment you stop, you move backwards. And with haste!” Indeed. Life demands much of us, and it’s unclear sometimes what we should give our attention to. In my spiritual journey I’ve come to discover I must maintain a fourfold focus. There are four directions I must give proper attention, or my life will inevitably become disordered. Here are the four words I use to describe the fourfold focus we must maintain to move forward in life. Forward movement requires a “four-word” movement.

Inward. As we move forward in our journey, we must set aside special time for introspection and reflection. Too easily we can get swept up into the hustle and bustle of everyday life, rapidly moving from one thing to the next, checking off boxes, and living in a world of action and

accomplishment. But when we neglect the inner life for outer achievements, life will become disordered in one way or another. As we move forward in life, we need to engage in the practice of pondering and self-assessment. Recall Psalm 42:5—*“Why are you depressed, O my soul? Why are you upset? Wait for God! For I will again give thanks to my God for his saving intervention”* (NET). Notice the psalmist’s self-awareness. Sometimes half the battle is figuring out what’s going on within us. We see this inward movement modeled by David, as well: *“Examine me, O LORD, and test me! Evaluate my inner thoughts and motives!”* (Ps. 26:2 NET). Elsewhere he cries out, *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps. 139:23-24 NIV). After Judah’s exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah admonished his people, saying, *“Let us carefully examine our ways and let us return to the LORD”* (Lamentations 3:40 NET). Even the apostle Paul recognized the importance of looking inward. He told the Corinthian believers, *“Test yourselves and see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”* (2 Cor. 13:5 NASB). It’s probably no “shocker” that the Corinthians needed serious introspection, but don’t be too hasty in thinking that we need it any less. Regular self-examination will serve to aid us on our forward progress, for it helps to eschew an overly optimistic view of our condition.

Upward. Our journey forward also requires the ardent pursuit of God. In other words, our gaze should not only be inward, but we must regularly practice looking upwards—pursuing God, the greatest good of all. I’ve already mentioned Hebrews 12:2, which exhorts us to keep our focus on Jesus. But as you well know, the Bible is replete with exhortations to seek God. Again, the words of Jeremiah come to the fore. Yahweh tells the people of Israel, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart”* (29:13 ESV). This sentiment was penned by Moses several centuries prior: *“But if you seek the LORD your God from there, you will find him, if, indeed, you seek him with all your heart and soul”* (Deut. 4:29 ESV). Be quick to note the “if” clause here, implying conditionality. Seeking precedes finding, generally speaking. Here we should recall David’s iconic plea: *“O God, you are my God! I long for you! My soul thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. My*

soul pursues you; your right hand upholds me” (Ps. 63:1, 8 NET; emphasis added). The upward focus of David is almost palpable. The journey forward requires a delicate balance of focusing inward and upward. But there’s more.

Outward. The inner life, as you know, directly correlates with our interpersonal interactions. I know you know this. What we do matters. How we behave matters. What has our gaze matters. Hence, the Bible is saturated with guidelines and principles to guide and inform our “outward” life. The Greek word translated “one another” (*allelon*) occurs more than a hundred times in the New Testament. It’s difficult to find a more suitable word as an example of just how central ethics is to the life of a Christ-follower. Jesus instructs us to love our neighbor (Mk. 12:31), let alone our enemy (Matt. 5:44). Paul exhorts us to be gentle, to live peaceably with everyone (Tit. 3:2; Rom. 12:18), to treat others as more important than ourselves, and to be concerned about the interests of others, not just our own interests (Phil. 2:3). Peter tells us we should treat people with courtesy and respect (1 Pet. 3:16). Thus, our forward movement in life is not just one that requires our focus being inward and upward, but outward as well. But there’s one final area of focus we must consistently have.

Onward. When we’re mindful of our inner condition, it can lead us to an understanding of our profound need for God, and then on to repentance. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we find He’ll exhort us to love those around us. Seeking lives which serve God and others, we must be intentional with our movement onward. That is, we seek to formulate plans as we attempt to answer the question, “For what and whom are we living?” In other words, what is our plan for life? This points to our need to live wisely. In a prayer of Moses, he says, “*Teach us to consider our mortality, so that we might live wisely*” (Psalm 90:12 NET; emphasis added). Paul told the Church in Ephesus, “*be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise*” (Eph 5:15 NIV). “Onward movement” entails living *with purpose, on purpose*. For as the prophet Isaiah put it, “*An honorable man makes honorable plans; his honorable character gives him security*” (Isaiah 32:8 NET). Having a life-plan can curb the dreadful sense of aimlessness and encourage forward progress. Discernment of one’s ministry calling is crucial and helps to anchor the direction of one’s Kingdom affairs. Once

more, David's words are instructive. He modeled seeking the wisdom of God for his life, saying, "*Show me the way I should go, because I long for you*" (Ps. 143:8 NIV; emphasis added). Scripture in no way forbids establishing a plan for one's life, as long as God is given permission and the prerogative to redirect whatever plans are made. Proverb 16:9 reminds us that, "*A person plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps*" (Prov. 16:9 NET). Note that this passage does not diminish the value of plan-making but puts the endeavor in its proper place. Thus, a life lived well will be one with an onward focus.

In a society full of excess and imbalance, the Christ-follower embraces a life focused on the eternal within the temporal. While demand for our attention is pervasive, we must seek to balance the fourfold need to focus inward, upward, outward, and onward. May God help us toward that end and may He help us find the balance we need in our imbalanced culture.

Quadrum 5

The present issue of *Quadrum* contains three articles. The lead article comes to us from Gretchen Abney, wherein she showcases the exemplary quality of "followership" in the life of Foursquare's founder, Amy Semple McPherson. Gretchen especially highlights how McPherson's followship exhibited creativity, commitment, trust, and courage. The second article, by James Henderson, illustrates how Acts 2:42 can serve as a liturgical structure for Pentecostal worship. As one might expect, special attention is given to prayer, "the breaking of bread," the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, all from a Pentecostal impetus. The article I have offered in this issue seeks to dispel some of the unsavory sentiments held by some who question the role and efficacy of apologetics in a post-Christian milieu. Instead of viewing apologetics as inherently contentious and divisive in nature, I recommend it be viewed as a branch of practical theology and, specifically, through the lens of service. The articles contained herein have passed a blind peer-review procedure for publication in this volume. Each article, in its own way, can assist us to focus inward, upward, outward, and onward.

Aimee Semple McPherson: A Life of Courageous Followership

Gretchen Abney, M.A.²

ABSTRACT:

This article focuses on the life of Aimee Semple McPherson through the lens of followership. The term “follower” occurs 266 times in the Old Testament and 126 times in the New Testament. While several studies discuss how Aimee's beliefs, words, and actions influenced Pentecostal theological foundations and practices, this study explores how Aimee Semple McPherson's followership practices of trust, commitment, creativity, and courage shaped her ministry and the Gospel movement. The author demonstrates how followership is the natural counterpart to leadership, supporting an organizational mission, and how learning from the life of Aimee Semple McPherson can inspire followers today to recognize and implement the qualities of effective followership.

Introduction

Aimee Semple McPherson could have remained marginalized by her gender, social class, education, or religious beliefs; however, for the last century, her life has influenced modern life in America.³ Building upon the studies of her life that examined her prominent rise in leadership, Aimee's foundational posture was that of a follower of Jesus Christ first and foremost.⁴ Her motives, words, and actions were based upon a decision to

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³ Cf. V.A. Booker, “Mothers of the movement: Evangelicalism and Religious Experience in Black Women's Activism,” *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 141–164. Booker (p. 9) points out that Geister's 30-foot WWI America mural depicting 100 key post-war America influencers includes Aimee Semple McPherson. See also R. Dietrich, “Shapers of Modern America: The WWI America Mural,” *Minnesota History* 65, no. 7 (2017): 260–263.

⁴ Jack Hayford and S. David Moore, *The Charismatic Century: The Enduring Impact of the Azusa Street Revival* (New York: Warner Faith, 2006), 140. See also Aimee Semple McPherson, *In the Service of the King* (Madison, WI: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 143; Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *The Vine and the Branches: A History of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel* (Los Angeles: Foursquare, 1992), 2; D. Westover, “A Study of American Pentecostal Sanctification and Moral Praxis in the 1920s and Consequential Trajectories for the Twenty First Century.” (PhD diss., Regent University, 2018), 53.

follow her Lord's instructions no matter the cost. Previous studies have discussed how Aimee's actions have influenced Pentecostal theological foundations and practices.⁵ However, this study seeks to discover how Aimee Semple McPherson's followership practices of trust, commitment, creativity, and courage shaped her ministry and a Gospel movement.

Followership is a collaborative concept where individuals choose to implement a leader's mission or goals and are influenced by their leaders' decisions.⁶ Followership is a complex dynamic formulated through various perspectives based on individuals' motivations, values, and abilities.⁷ Chaleff correlated a connection between effective leadership and courageous followership.⁸ Followers play a crucial role in organizations concerning leadership and empowerment of others.⁹ Uniquely, followership emphasizes the yielding obedience one displays as a commitment to Christ.¹⁰

Aimee Semple McPherson's life has been reviewed from her contribution as an evangelist and celebrity. A limited number of research projects have sought to recognize the contributions of Aimee to the history

⁵ V. Chevis, "Aimee Semple McPherson: Pioneer of the Pentecostal Holiness movement." (Master's Thesis, Regent University, 2021), 1-2. See also Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Building the Old-time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 12; Leah Payne, *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism: Making a Female Ministry in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Herein Payne compares McPherson's ministry along with Maria Woodworth-Etter as two famous Pentecostal revivalists.

⁶ Nicolas Bastardo and Mark Van Vugt, "The Nature of Followership: Evolutionary Analysis and Review," *The Leadership Quarterly* 30 no. 1, 81.

⁷ A. Hamlin, Jr., *Embracing Followership: How to Thrive in a Leader-Centric Culture* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2016), 8.

⁸ I. Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders*, 3rd ed. (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 1.

⁹ B. Oc and M.R. Bashshur, "Followership, Leadership and Social Influence," *The Leadership Quarterly* 24, no. 6, (2013): 931; See also M. Uhl-Bien, R.E. Riggio, K.B. Lowe, and M.K. Carsten, "Followership Theory: A Review and Research Agenda," *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2014): 96-97.

¹⁰ Chaleff, 16-18.

of Pentecostalism and early-century revivalism.¹¹ In addition to McPherson's 1923 autobiography, four seminal biographical accounts exist as historical narratives.¹² Payne's scholarly contribution focuses on gender studies through the lens of Aimee Semple McPherson's life and leadership as a female.¹³ Specifically, Payne uncovers power dynamics through feminine expressions of Spirit-formed ministry.

Further, Aimee Semple McPherson's missional persona is characterized as the bride of Christ through her words, dramatic style, and physical illustrations. Throughout her life, Aimee Semple McPherson demonstrated followership of Christ's missional invitation in Matthew 28. Aimee's life displays her willingness to follow in obedience as she led many souls to God's grace, salvation, and healing.¹⁴ Yet, there remains a scarce connection between the dedication of Aimee's life as a compelling illustration of courageous followership to be modeled.

The central question that will guide this research project will be *In what ways did Aimee Semple McPherson demonstrate followership characteristics?* This question is open-ended to allow the research to reveal diverse perspectives. Further, this question seeks to understand the courageous followership phenomenon in relation to the exemplar.

According to Creswell and Poth, the research question provides insight for inquiry development and guides the overall research process to remain clear and focused.¹⁵

¹¹ M.J. Burchard, *Aesthetically Whole: Inner Cohesion of the Ecclesial Leader as Person as Observed in Aesthetic Action: A Companion Study of St. Francis of Assisi and Aimee Semple McPherson* (PhD diss., Regent University, 2014), 11.

¹² E.L. Blumhofer, "'That old-time religion': Aimee Semple McPherson and perceptions of Pentecostalism, 1918–26." *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 25 no. 2 (2004): 217–227 2004; R. Cox, *The Verdict Is In* (Location Unknown: Heritage Committee, 1983); D. M. Epstein, *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993); M. A. Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹³ This comes through quite well in Payne (2015), ch. 3, "Pants Don't Make Preachers: The Image of a Female Pentecostal Minister," and ch. 5, "Thunder and Sweetness: Authority and Gender in Pentecostal Performance."

¹⁴ Van Cleave, Ch. 1.

¹⁵ J.W. Creswell and C.N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2018), ch. 6.

The purpose of this case study is to explore courageous followership dynamics as witnessed in the life of Aimee Semple McPherson. Yin, along with Creswell and Poth, proposed that a case study allows the researcher to report on Aimee's life, including her historical recollections and relational influences.¹⁶ The researcher will focus on the Aimee's lived experiences to appreciate the study phenomena's human condition.¹⁷ Furthermore, Leedy and Ormrod encouraged the historical research process to present and interpret the data with clarity and balanced support.¹⁸ In addition, historical research should remain objective in analysis and interpretation.

Aimee Semple McPherson

As an answer to her mother's prayers, Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy was born on October 9, 1890, on a farm near Salford, Ontario.¹⁹ Aimee's parents, James Kennedy and Minnie Pearce Kennedy raised Aimee in loving Christian ways heavily influenced by her parents' religions of Methodism and the Salvation Army. Aimee recalls her mother's passionate plea prayed in an upstairs bedroom for God to give her a baby girl. When God answered her prayer, she would “give her unreservedly into your (his) service, that she may preach the word.”²⁰ Thus, at six weeks old, Aimee's mother's desire was confirmed at Aimee's dedication to the Lord's service at a Salvation Army worship gathering.²¹

A pivotal moment for Aimee's faith journey came one night as she gazed at the moon and stars. She was contemplating the reality of God. At that moment, as a teenage girl, Aimee felt God's presence and said, "Why!

¹⁶ R.K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2018), 14; Creswell and Poth, chs. 4, 5.

¹⁷ J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-Method Approaches*, 5th ed. (Orlando: Sage, 2018), ch. 6; J. Saldaña and M. Omasta, *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life*, 2nd ed. (Orlando: Sage, 2022), 17-20.

¹⁸ P.D. Leedy and J.E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, N.J.: Pearson Education, 2016), ch. 10.

¹⁹ Epstein, 10.

²⁰ Aimee Semple McPherson, *This Is That* (Los Angeles: Foursquare Publications, 1923), 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

How near God seemed - right now!”²² Then, throwing her arms into the air, she exclaimed, “Oh God! - If there be a God - reveal Yourself to me!”²³ This encounter shaped Aimee's life, recognizing that just as God had revealed himself to her, he would reveal himself to others because of his love for all humanity. This viewpoint set Aimee on her trajectory as a global evangelist.²⁴

After marrying Robert Semple in 1908, Aimee and her husband became missionaries to Canada and China.²⁵ Unexpectedly, Robert died on the mission field in China.²⁶ Her first child, Roberta, was born a few months before Aimee returned to the United States. Soon after, Aimee married Harold McPherson, thus becoming an American citizen. A year after their wedding in 1912, Aimee had a son named Rolf. After three years of extreme emotional and physical turmoil, Aimee responded to God's call to go and preach the word.²⁷ Aimee recalls that her pain instantly subsided when she responded to God's invitation.²⁸ Thus, Aimee's first healing was her own.²⁹

Aimee's ministry career launched in 1917 as a cross-country evangelist, traveling in her Gospel car.³⁰ Then, in December of 1918, Aimee established Los Angeles as her home base for her family and ministry.³¹

²² Ibid., 34.

²³ Ibid., 34.

²⁴ J.C. Scott, Jr., *Aimee . . . Her Heart and Work with the Hispanic People: The Untold Story of a Movement* (Los Angeles: Foursquare Media, 2008), 127.

²⁵ McPherson, *This Is That*, 61.

²⁶ Aimee Semple McPherson, *The Story of My Life: Aimee Semple McPherson* (Location Unknown: Word Books, 1973), 61-63.

²⁷ Epstein, 49.

²⁸ McPherson, *This Is That*, 78.

²⁹ Scott, 20.

³⁰ McPherson, *This Is That*, 105. McPherson's prayer was that the Lord would lead her to the locations that she was to travel, because she was receiving more invitation than her time would allow.

³¹ McPherson, *The Story of My Life*, 117.

Remarkably, in 1923, Aimee launched a worldwide ministry with three notorious endeavors.³²

First, starting in 1923, Angelus Temple became the first Foursquare Church hosting worship services in five languages. During this season, numerous miraculous healings occurred at Angelus Temple's gatherings. Second, in 1923, L.I.F.E. Bible Institute, known today as Life Pacific University, opened its doors to equip women and men as Foursquare ministers. Third, in 1924, Aimee became the first woman to own a significant radio station, K.F.S.G., and used it to preach the Gospel. A few years later, in 1927, 100 Foursquare churches were incorporated into the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.³³ The legacy of Aimee's courageous faith continues today as The Foursquare Church reports having 8.8 million members and 67,500 churches, with more than 150 nations globally represented.³⁴

The life of Aimee Semple McPherson can be examined from various perspectives; however, as a follower, Aimee's life was fueled by her ultimate task based upon Jesus's words in Luke 4:18-19 (KJV),

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Aimee's life serves as a construct of followership in several ways. First, Aimee Semple McPherson's desire to follow Christ's compelling call on her life influenced those she served, taught, and inspired. In a famous sermon, Aimee illustrated her life's mission, "What is my task? First of all, my task is to be pleasing to Christ. To be empty of self and be filled with

³² Epstein, 247, 264, 272.

³³ Van Cleave, *The Vine*, 34.

³⁴ The Foursquare Church, 2022, "History" section

Himself.”³⁵ Further, McPherson's partnership with the Holy Spirit³⁶ allowed her to courageously follow God's simple yet costly instructions, both as an individual disciple and a movement-maker³⁷.

McPherson's life demonstrates the co-created framework of followership³⁸ through God's missional purposes of salvation, healing, redemption, and restoration.³⁹ She desired to live as the ultimate bride of Christ.⁴⁰ Aimee's motive to preach, evangelize, perform, and serve was solely based on her commitment to follow Christ.⁴¹

Providing a deeper look into Aimee's motivation for Kingdom commitment, Epstein⁴² presented various overwhelming accounts testifying to the healing miracles McPherson performed. Epstein noted, giving credit to her Lord,

The documentation is overwhelming: very sick people came to Sister Aimee by the tens of thousands, blind, deaf, paralyzed. Many were healed, some temporarily, some forever. She would point to heaven, to Christ the Great Healer and take no credit for the results.⁴³

³⁵ The Foursquare Church, 2022, “Aimee Semple McPherson’s classic sermon, ‘this is my task’” section

³⁶ Aimee Semple McPherson, *The Holy Spirit* (Location Unknown: Chaplain Publishing Company, 1931), preface.

³⁷ M. J. Burchard, *Sister Aimee: A Study of Leadership Effectiveness and the Question of Personhood* (Virginia Beach, VA: Regent University, n.d.), 16.

³⁸ Uhl-Bien et al., 83.

³⁹ Blumhofer, 219; *Sister Aimee: Saint or Sinner?* Directed by Linda Garman (Carousel Films for American Experience), National Public Radio, Washington, DC, 2007.

⁴⁰ Leah Payne, “The Roar of Thunder and the Sweetness of a Woman”: Gender Construction and Titled Acts in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century American Revivalism,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 31 no. 1 (2017): 33.

⁴¹ Burchard, 49.

⁴² Epstein, 86-89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 111.

Aimee has been called a pioneer,⁴⁴ an evangelist,⁴⁵ an innovator,⁴⁶ a prolific writer,⁴⁷ an outlier,⁴⁸ a trailblazer,⁴⁹ and a racial reconciler.⁵⁰ McPherson has been described as charismatic,⁵¹ controversial,⁵² inclusive,⁵³ approachable,⁵⁴ and scandalous.⁵⁵ Yet, looking through the lens of history, her passionate followership prototype produced a culture-shifting⁵⁶ faith journey like no other Pentecostal⁵⁷ leader in the twentieth century.

⁴⁴ A.G. White, "Pentecostal Preaching as a Modern Epistle: A Comparison of Pentecostal Preaching with Paul's Practice of Letter Writing," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25 no. 1 (2016): 128.

⁴⁵ Epstein, 74.

⁴⁶ Margaret M. Grubiak, "An Architecture for the Electronic Church: Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma," *Technology and Culture* 57 no. 2 (2016): 387; S. Kaye, "Pentecostal Women and Religious Reformation in the Progressive Era: The Political Novelty of Women's Religious and Organizational Leadership" (Master's Thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2020), 117; P.E. Klassen, "Radio Mind: Protestant Experimentalists on the Frontiers of Healing," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 no. 3 (2007): 14.

⁴⁷ Burchard, 49.

⁴⁸ Westover, 53.

⁴⁹ J.C. Lyden, "Sister Aimee," *Journal of Religion & Film* 23 no. 1 (2019): 1.

⁵⁰ Sutton, 31.

⁵¹ Blumhofer, 220.

⁵² Anthony Petro, "Georges Bataille and the Sacred: Playing Pentecostal," Special Issue, *Religious Studies Review* 48 no. 1 (2022): 2-3; C. Doug Weaver, "McPhersonism? Aimee Semple McPherson and Her Baptist Opponents (and Supporters)," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 42 no. 2 (2015): 127.

⁵³ Westover, 53.

⁵⁴ Burchard, 48.

⁵⁵ P. Carlson, *American Schemers: A Semple Case of Evangelism* (Location Unknown: American History, 2018), 21; D. Ray, "Aimee Semple McPherson and Her Seriously Exciting Gospel," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19 no. 1 (2010): 156.

⁵⁶ E. Blakemore, "Aimee Semple McPherson," *TIME Magazine*, March 2020, 46.

⁵⁷ Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter for the Making of Meaning," *Pneuma* 26 no. 1 (2004): 36; W.K. Kay "Pentecostalism and Religious Broadcasting," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 30 no. 3 (2009): 1; Nel, 2021, p. 78; White, 2016, p. 128; M. Nel, "Proposing a Shift from Classical Pentecostal Bible Reading and Baconian Common Sense to a Scientific Hermeneutics," *Acta Theologica* 41 no. 1 (2021): 78.

Courageous Followership

At its core, followership complements leadership.⁵⁸ One exists because of the other, meaning that a follower is a leader's complement, not necessarily their opposite.⁵⁹ Through collaborative interactions, skilled leaders and their exceptional followers can achieve exponentially more when both parties offer their whole selves - their abilities, experiences, and perspectives.⁶⁰ This concept of collaboration for an organization's greater good creates a dynamic interplay between leadership and followership.

A shared purpose connects followers and leaders.⁶¹ This principle highlights the motives of followership to serve the vision and mission of something greater than one leader. Through an alignment of Biblical courage and humility, Aimee's thoughts, beliefs, and actions illustrate the significance of a life of followership. Specifically, there are five followership structures based upon implicit followership theories⁶² that relate to the life experience of Aimee Semple McPherson: trust, commitment, creativity, courage and social influence, and shared purpose.

Yielding Trust

As a teen, Aimee cloistered herself away to seek the Lord.⁶³ She prayed earnestly to be emptied of herself and filled with the Holy Spirit. Aimee lived a life of enthusiastic trust. McPherson vowed that she would not make a significant move without direct instruction from the Lord. She tells how

⁵⁸ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2008), xx-xxi, 9.

⁵⁹ Hamlin, 7.

⁶⁰ Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen, Eds. *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 2.

⁶¹ Chaleff, 16.

⁶² T. Sy, "What Do You Think of Followers? Examining the Content, Structure, and Consequences of Implicit Followership Theories," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* no. 2 (2010): 80-82; Y. Yang, W. Shi, B. Zhang, Y. Song, and D. Xu, "Implicit Followership Theories from the Perspective of Followers," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 41 no. 4 (2020): 583-584, 591-592

⁶³ McPherson, *This Is That*, 42-45.

she was led by a voice asking her to go and preach the Word.⁶⁴ Her life was based on trust that God would lead and provide.

Chaleff presented data highlighting trust as the most significant factor on which followers evaluate their leader.⁶⁵ Particularly, leader reliability consists of an equal combination of confidence and ability. Trust is fundamental in the leader-follower relationship.⁶⁶ McPherson trusted God and yielded her will and preference. Evidence of a yielding trust, Aimee dedicated her life to the Sacred scriptures and their commands. Her faithful life of discipleship was tested through countless instances of uncertainty, trials, and overwhelming odds of success, yet McPherson remained a steward⁶⁷ of the Gospel's mission.

As a young mother, McPherson would often depart for a city to evangelize based on *divine communications* from God as she paid attention to clues found in newspapers.⁶⁸ Aimee would pack up her family, not knowing how she would provide the necessities of food and shelter because she trusted God to provide miraculously.⁶⁹ During the construction process of Angelus Temple, she believed that if she started digging a hole, God would build a glorious building to declare his salvation message to Los Angeles and beyond.⁷⁰

A life of yielding trust is an invitation to all God's children. Jesus simply invites disciples to lay down their way of life to follow his way.⁷¹ Choosing to yield oneself to the authority of another creates an opportunity to build an interdependence upon the leader's motives, promises, and actions.⁷² God's faithfulness to Aimee established a pattern of invitational

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52-54.

⁶⁵ Chaleff, 23.

⁶⁶ Yang et al., 592.

⁶⁷ Chaleff, 15.

⁶⁸ Epstein, 96.

⁶⁹ McPherson, *The Story of My Life*, 101-102.

⁷⁰ Epstein, 212.

⁷¹ Matt. 16:24-26.

⁷² Chaleff, 19.

followership to all disciples. Her yielding trust models significant followership by recognizing God's voice and responding willingly.

McPherson recognized the voice of God through multiple avenues. Her yielding trust illustrates an openness and intentional desire to hear God through known and unfamiliar ways. Aimee cultivated an ongoing trust through each occurrence of following God's instructions and then experiencing his miraculous displays of salvation, provision, and healing.

Commitment

As a follower, Aimee demonstrated commitment to God's missional call on her life. Aimee had a strong passion based on a vision to become a winner of souls.⁷³ She was committed to sharing the Gospel message with people of all races, ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds.⁷⁴ Aimee remarked that she had chosen to put her hand to the Gospel plow and was committed to not turning back.⁷⁵ She endured harsh living conditions, starvation, grueling hours of cross-country driving expeditions, and taxing manual labor to survive the requirements of tent preaching and evangelistic crusades.⁷⁶

A follower's commitment continuum ranges from low to high, risk-taking commitment to one's leaders.⁷⁷ Mokhber et al. emphasized high-level followers as boldly committed supporters of their leader's goals, mission,

⁷³ McPherson, *The Story of My Life*, 27-28.

⁷⁴ The Foursquare Church, *History*. <https://www.foursquare.org/about/history/>

⁷⁵ McPherson, *This Is That*, 86.

⁷⁶ Epstein, 126-133.

⁷⁷ Sajjad Nawaz Khan, Siti Mariam Abdullah, Abdul Halim Busari, Muhammed Mubushar and Ikram Ullah Khan, "Reversing the Lens: The Role of Followership Dimensions in Shaping Transformational Leadership Behaviour; Mediating Role of Trust in Leadership," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 41 no. 1 (2019): 11; also R.E. Kelley, "In Praise of Followers," *Harvard Business Review* 66. No. 6 (1988): 144.

and vision.⁷⁸ Effective followership involves an interplay of autonomy and a commitment to the organization's mission.⁷⁹

McPherson's commitment of calling models a sacrificial yet entrepreneurial-drivenness to follow God's directives at any cost. This type of commitment is not blind loyalty but rather utilizing one's competencies to further the greater organizational good. Kingdom followership invites disciples to a life-long journey of obedience even when the outcomes are not guaranteed.

Creativity

With a background in theater and music, Aimee skillfully used her vivid imagination throughout her life.⁸⁰ Aimee was a trailblazer communicator using innovative tools at her disposal. She traveled the states in her Gospel Car. Her illustrated sermons used extravagant props, visuals, music scores, and choreography. Aimee had a natural inclination to draw a crowd.⁸¹

As Epstein's⁸² opening scene depicts, Aimee would stand in a chair motionless for over an hour to attract as many spectators as possible. Her creativity was fueled by boldness, determination, and a flair for beauty⁸³. McPherson used technology as a magnet to the Gospel when she became the first woman to preach a sermon over radio waves. Her hope-filled message was broadcasted to Africa's Cape Verde islands.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Mozhdeh Mokhber, W.K. bin Wan Ismail, and A. Vakilbashi, "Effect of Transformational Leadership and Its Components on Organizational innovation," *Iranian Journal of Management Studies* 8 no. 2 (2015): 236-237.

⁷⁹ L.M. Lapierre and N. Bremner, "Reversing the Lens: How Can Followers Influence Their Leader's Behavior?" *Telfer School of Management* (2010): 22, 28.

⁸⁰ Ray, 155-156.

⁸¹ Blakemore, 46.

⁸² Epstein, 3.

⁸³ Burchard, 17.

⁸⁴ Radio Heritage, "KFSG LA Aimee Semple" <https://www.radioheritage.net/Story51.asp>

Aimee's creative innovations are highlighted by the award-winning Tournament of Roses parade float on New Year's Day, 1925.⁸⁵ Resourcefully, McPherson commissioned Angelus Temple's entry which strategically highlighted KFSG, a modern Gospel tool. With 500,000 parade attendees,⁸⁶ McPherson's missional resourcefulness became the catalyst for establishing her notoriety as an innovative forerunner of religious ingenuity.

Jaussi et al. emphasized a substantial connection between followership and creativity.⁸⁷ Further, organizations rely on followers' creativity for success.⁸⁸ Building on this foundational connection, Jaussi et al.⁸⁹ categorized four types of creative followers in correlation to Kelley's⁹⁰ followership contributions focused on engagement and dependence. McPherson's creativity would be classified as a *creative catalyst*.⁹¹ Her creativeness inspired and energized others toward innovative thinking. Specifically, McPherson challenged normalized religious mindsets concerning preaching and altruistic paradigms.

Followers today can foresee organizational needs and innovate toward a solution.⁹² The fuel for followers' creativity and drive for inno-

⁸⁵ Homestead Museum, "A Trio of Tournament of Roses Float Photos, New Year's Day 1925." <https://homesteadmuseum.blog/2019/01/01/a-trio-of-tournament-of-roses-float-photos-new-years-day-1925/>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ K.S. Jaussi, A. Stefanovich, and P.G. Devlin, "Effective Followership for Creativity and Innovation: A Range of Colors and Dimensions," 294, as cited in R.E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, and J. Lipman-Blumen Eds., *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

⁸⁸ Brian Crossman and Joanna Crossman, "Conceptualizing Followership—A Review of the Literature," *Leadership* 7 no. 4. (2011): 491.

⁸⁹ Jaussi et al., 294.

⁹⁰ Kelley, 144.

⁹¹ Jaussi et al., 298.

⁹² W.A. Williams, R.S. Brandon, M. Hayek, S. Haden, and G. Atinc, "Servant Leadership and Followership Creativity," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 38 no. 2 (2017): 179-181; L. Wang and X. Liang, "The Influence of Leaders' Positive and Implicit Followership Theory of University Scientific Research Teams on Individual Creativity: The Mediating Effect of Individual Self-Cognition and the Moderating Effect of Proactive Personality," *Sustainability* 12 no. 6 (2020): 5, 20.

vation comes from an inner motivation to constantly improve systems and people for growth.⁹³ However, creative catalytic followers should use wisdom with their energy management and timing for new projects.⁹⁴

Courage and Social Influence

Aimee broke barriers of class, race, and gender. She remarked on the miraculous nature of emerging from a farm girl to a female preacher.⁹⁵ Payne⁹⁶ described several variances that McPherson lived out in contradiction to women's traditional functions in the early twentieth century. Specifically, Aimee's preaching style, alter ministry, durable femininity, and working-mother status distinguish her from her male counterparts.⁹⁷ Thus, these outlier occurrences of ministry life necessitated resilient courage.

Aimee's Spirit-led followership practices of listening, devotion, and empowerment, in connection with her heart of service, created opportunities for social change.⁹⁸ Green⁹⁹ and Lincoln¹⁰⁰ associated courageous followership with servant leadership by correlating generosity as the overlapping theme. Aimee's genuine love for all people groups allowed her

⁹³ Carsten & Bligh, 277, 285; Kong et al., 93.

⁹⁴ Jaussi et al., 298.

⁹⁵ McPherson, *This Is That*, 52-54.

⁹⁶ Payne, "The Roar of Thunder," 34.

⁹⁷ L. Ambrose, C. Belfon, E.B. Ramirez, and Leah Payne, "Author Meets Critics: Reflections on Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism: Making a Female Ministry in the Early Twentieth Century," *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, 7 (2016): 87, 89.

⁹⁸ Aimee Semple McPherson, *Fire from on High* (Los Angeles: Foursquare Publications, 1969), 84-86. As a note of interest, the chapter title is called, "The Formula." This title indicated McPherson's pattern of ministry based on the leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁹ Bradley T. Green, "An Examination of the Relationship between the Five Dimensions of Courageous Followership and Servant Leadership within the U.S. Air Force" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2018), 38.

¹⁰⁰ Scott Lincoln, "The Impact of Servant Leadership on Courageous Followership and Supervisor-Related Commitment" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2016), 63-65.

to minister to colored migrant workers, nomadic refugees, and Hollywood's social elite.¹⁰¹

The religious tradition of her mother ingrained in her the Salvation Army's social gospel values to love people beyond words. Followership is demonstrated through McPherson's enduring service to others. In addition, Aimee is known for her generous philanthropy. Specifically, during the Great Depression, the Angelus Temple commissary¹⁰² served nearly 1.5 million individuals,¹⁰³ more than the government agencies in southern California.¹⁰⁴ In addition, services held at Angelus Temple were presented in five languages.¹⁰⁵ The importance of language diversity illustrates Aimee's value for people from all nations.

Hopper proposed that courageous followers possess self-efficacy, often connected to one's identity as an organizational representative.¹⁰⁶ Followers cannot underestimate their ability to influence others.¹⁰⁷ Specifically, courageous followers create and sustain an organization's culture and mission.¹⁰⁸ However, as Chaleff advised, courage takes risks. Yet, influence requires courage.¹⁰⁹

For the church to remain relevant, courage must be embraced. Taking risks and following the leading of the Holy Spirit will enable future generations to experience the Gospel expressions of healing and

¹⁰¹ Payne, "The Roar of Thunder," 28; Scott, 27-30, 32-33, 150-154.

¹⁰² Sutton, 186.

¹⁰³ The Foursquare Church. (2022). *The legacy of Foursquare disaster relief*. <https://resources.foursquare.org/the-legacy-of-foursquare-disaster-relief/>

¹⁰⁴ Epstein, 249.

¹⁰⁵ The Foursquare Church, 2022, "History" section

¹⁰⁶ L. Hopper, "Courageous Followers, Servant-Leaders, and Organizational Transformations," 110-111, in R.E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, and J. Lipman-Blumen Eds., *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ R. van Loon, A. Buster, "The Future of Leadership: The Courage to be both Leader and Follower," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 13 no. 1 (2019): 73.

¹⁰⁸ P.B. Blackshear, "The Followership Continuum: A Model for Increasing Organizational Productivity," *The Innovation Journal* 9 no. 1 (2004): 12; Hopper, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Chaleff, 20.

redemption. In addition, confident courage needs to be founded upon God's identity of love and purpose.¹¹⁰ Today's world needs compassion and generous giving, similar to a century ago. Following Christ's compassionate mandate restores people and communities through tangible love.¹¹¹

Shared Purpose

In a sermon based on Ezekiel 1, McPherson outlined the Foursquare Gospel message.¹¹² The term, Foursquare, represented the unchanging ministry of Jesus Christ which became a global vision and mission.¹¹³ The four cardinal doctrines, represented by the four symbols of a cross, a dove, a cup, and a crown, represent the four theological roles of Jesus as Savior, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Soon-Coming King.¹¹⁴

Aimee Semple McPherson desired that The Foursquare Church would exist to glorify God and advance His kingdom. As a follower, she felt that Jesus Christ's command to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations was a shared purpose for her life and those she led.¹¹⁵ A placard on the cornerstone of Angelus Temple reads, "Dedicated unto the cause of inter-denominational and worldwide evangelism."¹¹⁶ Through her life of courageous followership, Aimee empowered disciples to unconditionally love others like Jesus, pray for healing, and give generously.

¹¹⁰ Eph. 2:10.

¹¹¹ Matt. 10:42.

¹¹² Aimee Semple McPherson, *Centennial Edition of Aimee Semple McPherson's Original Writings: "Lost and Restored, Sermons and Her Personal Testimony"* (Los Angeles: Foursquare Publications, 1990), 29-35. See also Aimee Semple McPherson and G. Stiffler, *The Foursquare Gospel* (Los Angeles: Echo Park Evangelistic Association, 1946), 21-23.

¹¹³ McPherson, *The Story of My Life*, ch. 21.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Stanley Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick Alexander, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); McPherson & Stiffler, 13-14, 36-37.

¹¹⁵ Mk. 16:15; Matt. 28:19.

¹¹⁶ McPherson, *This Is That*, 544.

Past paradigms may have categorized followers as passive and only imitators of their headship oversights. However, according to Alcorn,¹¹⁷ dynamic followership is linked to high organizational functioning and participation levels. Specifically, cooperation, resourcefulness, and problem-solving skills are associated with followers who feel empowered to serve the organization's mission.¹¹⁸

Aimee solicited, empowered, and trained others to make disciples. She believed that her empowerment was a gift from the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁹ and this emboldening gift would be available to all believers.¹²⁰ Because of her followership formation, McPherson was motivated to “get the gospel around the world in the shortest possible time to every man and woman and boy and girl.”¹²¹ A followership posture remembers that the Gospel mission is beyond the abilities of any individual leader. A unified collective, together on mission, is needed to expand God's redemption story.

Conclusion

The life of Aimee Semple McPherson cultivates a deep desire to become a courageous follower. Her life of creativity, courage, yielding trust, and brave commitment to Christ's Gospel message of hope, love, and redemption challenges and inspires leaders and followers alike. Aimee's followership practices not only continue to glorify God but radically challenge patterns of egocentric leaders today. Replicating McPherson's motives of boldly preaching the Word and compassionately serving others seems apropos. Finding the same desire to please her King is relevant to all followers a century later.

¹¹⁷ D.S. Alcorn, “Dynamic Followership: Empowerment at Work,” *Management Quarterly*, 33 no. 1 (1992): 9–10.

¹¹⁸ Olga Epitropaki, Ronit Kark, Charalampos Mainemelis, and Robert G. Lord, “Leadership and Followership Identity Processes: A Multilevel Review,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 28 no. 1 (2017): 110–111; and McPherson, *Fire from on High*, ch. 20.

¹²⁰ McPherson, *The Holy Spirit*, 48.

¹²¹ The Foursquare Church, “Aimee Semple McPherson’s Classic Sermon, ‘This is My Task.’” <https://resources.foursquare.org/audio/aimee-semble-mcphersons-classic-sermon-this-is-my-task/>

Can These Bones Live?

Acts 2:42 as a Liturgical Structure for Pentecostal Worship

James M. Henderson, Ph.D.¹

ABSTRACT

This article argues a need for an order of service, a liturgy, that is both biblical and flexible. The article begins by examining the four-fold emphasis for the assembly in Acts 2:42—the Apostle’s doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. It then applies these elements to a Pentecostal context as a biblical structure for the worship service. The article concludes that a focus on these elements allows believers to follow the Spirit’s spontaneous leading yet provides a structure sufficient to maintain an overall focus on God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Pentecostal worship is generally characterized as unrestricted by any particular form, emphasizing spontaneous, free-flowing worship. The manner of worship can change at any time, as the worship leader feels led by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, a number of writers have recently suggested that Pentecostals should adopt the more structured idea of “liturgy” in order to have a fuller, and perhaps a more authentic or effective, worship experience.² To Pentecostal ears, the idea of “liturgy” can conjure up a vision of pre-packaged rote performance so that the imagination defaults automatically to an understanding of a highly structured service that privileges order and sameness to the elimination of spontaneity. To Pentecostals, such liturgical worship seems like dead men’s bones.³

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² In his survey of “the sacraments in Pentecostal perspective,” Chris E.W. Green notes the “‘turn’ to the sacraments among Pentecostals” and examines recent movements and authors. See Chapter 2 in Chris E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), especially pages 71-72.

³ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes the paradox of Pentecostal fear of limiting the Spirit even while we cannot avoid constructing ecclesiastical institutions. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “A Full Gospel Ecclesiology of *Koinonia*: Pentecostal Contributions to the Doctrine of the Church,” in *Renewal History and Theology: Essays in Honor of H. Vinson Synan*, eds. S.

At the same time, Paul tells us that “since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor. 10:17 NASV). “Partake” means to “participate,” expressed by the Greek word *koinonia*, a participation or sharing in something. If we had here an enormous pizza and we all had a slice, we would have *koinonia* in the pizza. If we all shared in building or gardening the same thing, we would all have *koinonia* in the work.

Therefore, the individual is not the sum of the church nor individual prayer the sum of prayer. From the beginning, the church has gathered to pay attention as a body to the apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship, the prayers, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). We find these four elements in our corporate gathering most every Sunday, yet we often do not acknowledge them, we do not pay attention to them as they deserve, and, I believe, this means that we do not benefit from these elements as much as we should. As C. S. Lewis observed, “[T]he ready-made modicum [of the liturgy] has also its use . . . First, it keeps me in touch with ‘sound doctrine.’ Left to oneself, one could easily slide away from ‘the faith once given’ into a phantom called ‘my religion.’”⁴

Indeed, few Pentecostals embrace a complete spontaneity in the worship service, and so most groups impose some sort of order. I assert that we should ground our worship in God— Father, Son, and Spirit—by becoming more intentional in emphasizing the four elements of Acts 2:42, or it becomes something that is less than Christian and something unempowered by the Holy Spirit. Rather than losing spontaneity, by framing our worship within the corporate emphasis and expression of these four elements as more formal elements in the service, we give the spontaneous expression of Spiritual words and gifts greater meaning and force.

David Moore and James M. Henderson (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2014), 2. For aesthetic reasons, I will use the term “Pentecostal” to indicate Pentecostal, charismatic, “third wave,” and other movements that derive from or are associated with the Pentecostal revival of the early 20th century. I will use “Pentecostal” to indicate the church organizations that derive directly from the Azusa Street revival of 1906.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963, 1964), 12.

The question becomes, then, “can these bones live?” Is there some way we can structure a more ordered liturgy for our corporate worship that is both biblical and flexible? Can we discern a New Testament structure for worship upon which the Spirit may blow, thus clothing the bones of order in worship in the flesh of authentic spiritual and culturally effective worship? The four-fold order of Acts 2:42, that perhaps goes behind even ancient liturgical expressions, allows us to follow the Spirit’s spontaneous leading, yet provides a structure sufficient to maintain a focus on God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. I will first discuss the need for a liturgical structure as the ground of Pentecostal communal worship.

The Need for Liturgy

Pentecostals understand worship as creating a “sacred space,” and the vehicle for an experience of communion with the Holy Spirit.⁵ As part of this, Pentecostals can emphasize spontaneity in following the lead of the Holy Spirit in any particular situation and so reject any sort of a liturgical structure.⁶ They can regard any particular order or set of elements that one must observe as reducing the ability of the Spirit to move among the congregation, or perhaps restraining the congregation from following the Spirit. As Chan notes, this can go so far that Pentecostals focus solely on the Spirit and lose touch with the Father and the Son, leaving the realm of the charismatic and becoming enamored of “charismania.”⁷

This can become dangerous for the Christian congregation because worship is ultimately transforming. Coming together into community for the purpose of worship is a formational event. If the church is to be formed in the image of God corporately, then we must consider what should become the “normative components or structure” of our worship.⁸ We cannot avoid

⁵ According to Green, early Pentecostals from both of the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished Work movements saw sacramental worship as creating such sacred space. Green, 177-178.

⁶ Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 110.

⁷ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 34.

⁸ Chan, 15.

being formed by our worship experiences, for the habits of our worship become a “thick” practice by which we train soul and spirit (and perhaps even body).⁹ We must consider the habits of our “liturgy” because the habits of worship become the habits of the heart.¹⁰

If it is true that, “Pentecostals attend church to encounter the Holy Spirit,”¹¹ it is also true that an encounter is not enough unless our worship leads us into an encounter with the true God, and not some in-curving formation according to our own desires, or some counterfeit spirit. “Given the history of Christian practice, it would appear that without predetermined rites and practices shaped to focus attention on the God of the once-delivered faith, celebrants run the risk of losing themselves in their own world, effectively alienating themselves from the gospels concreteness and specificity.”¹² Thus, we must be deliberate in crafting the forms of our Pentecostal worship, and our worship must be deliberately more complex than a simple focus upon the “altar service” of encounter.¹³ While we can and should make room for the Holy Spirit who can choose to surprise us,¹⁴ God is also a God of order (1 Cor 14:33, 40). The church as a community always has traditions, and our traditions train us not only in rational perception, but also in affective habits of the heart. “Liturgies” of worship (all liturgies and not just the formal, written order of a church service) teach

⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 85-88.

¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 152.

¹¹ Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, TN: Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2010), 101.

¹² Green, 252.

¹³ Pace Tomberlin, who asserts that the center and focus must be the altar, but he then also adds sacramental worship to the altar service. See Tomberlin, 101.

¹⁴ James K. A. Smith calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of Surprise” in his *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*, Pentecostal Manifestos, ed. James K. A. Smith and Amos Yong (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 39. While I see the Holy Spirit as free, and more than willing to shake up those at ease in their religion, this seems to go a bit far. The Holy Spirit is not the Spirit of novelty.

us about God and ourselves in all sorts of cognitive and precognitive ways. “Hence every liturgy is an education, and embedded in every liturgy is an implicit worldview or ‘understanding’ of the world.”¹⁵ Worship not only provides an experience but also ideally puts us into “perichoretic union with the triune God,”¹⁶ where our worship experience shapes our ultimate desires and forms our primary identity and our divine purpose (*telos*) as the Church itself.¹⁷ “Pentecostal understanding of Christian life and Church ministry is embedded and anchored in a dynamic encounter with Christ as Christ is being depicted in his manifold role of Justifier, Sanctifier, Baptizer with the Spirit, Healer of the Body and the Soon Coming King,”¹⁸ and so a proper New Testament order of worship will form in us a strong identity as those living out the triune life of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. A lack of such order can only move us away from our true identity into an ineffective and inauthentic self-made religion. Christian worship must then be intentional in its practices in order to counter the “mis-formation” of the practices or “liturgies” of the age and culture in which we live.¹⁹

Pentecostals, then, need a liturgy. Perhaps it would be better to say that Pentecostals need to examine the liturgies that we use. Smith points out that Pentecostal worship actually includes a number of elements that are liturgical, in that they are habitual practices.²⁰ Although unwritten, we tend to follow a common routine. It appears that we cannot avoid being liturgical in some sense, but even writers who are asking questions about liturgy appear to give little attention to the content and form of any such liturgy. Perhaps this is because the authors have in mind the existing liturgies of, for example, the Anglican Church. However, as people of both Word and Spirit, Pentecostals would do well to be sure that we adopt practices taken primarily from the New Testament, and secondarily are informed by the

¹⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

¹⁶ Chan, 14.

¹⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 87, 85.

¹⁸ Kärkkäinen, 6.

¹⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

practices of the church over time, rather than uncritically adopting a liturgical structure similar to Roman Catholic or Anglican practices.

We can discern a four-fold structure in Christian worship at the very beginning of the church. Given that Paul writes much earlier than Luke, the similarities between the concepts of 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 and Acts 2:42 indicate, to me, that Luke records not just Christian daily life, but the earliest liturgical practice of the church, which we may fruitfully adopt as an order that provides structure and yet does not limit spontaneity. Green considers Paul, John, Luke, and the communities associated with them, to have a common understanding of at least the Eucharist in worship, indicating that the early Church had a considerable unity of thought regarding worship.²¹ I turn, then, to consider the fourfold structure of Acts 2:42.

Acts 2:42 as a New Testament Church Order

This passage in the book of Acts emphasizes four discrete but associated emphases in which the new believers persevered, acting them out daily as they met for worship in private homes. Luke recounts these elements as the teaching of the apostles, the “fellowship,” the “breaking of bread,” and the prayers. This list is a summary of the things to which early Christians “devoted themselves” in daily life,²² but few commentaries appear to give this passage any extended analysis beyond stating that they were social and cultural practices followed by the community.²³ The one thing that commentators appear to notice the most is the early practice of selling property

²¹ Green, 240, 242.

²² Justo L. Gonzalez, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 50; Green, 208.

²³ For example, see Brad Blue, “The influence of Jewish Worship on Luke’s Presentation of the Early Church” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds. I Howard Marshall, and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 477, 497; Nicholas Cernokrak, “L’Église d’Après la Liturgie du Nouveau Testament,” in *La Liturgie Témoin de l’Église: Conférences Saint-Serge; LVIIe Semaine d’Études Liturgiques, Paris, 28 juin-1er juillet 2010* (Città del Vaticano : Libreria editrice vaticana, 2012), 31; and William S. Kurz, S. J. *The Acts of the Apostles*, in the Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), *in loc.*

in order to provide for other believers. Most commentators give little or no attention to this passage as an order of worship.²⁴

To understand Luke's summary properly, the first correction we must make is to understand that the early church's assembly in homes was not a matter of civic life, or even cultural (or counter-cultural) practice. It was primarily the gathering of the people of God to form the church. While common life and community in the sense of society were no doubt features of these gatherings, the primary characteristic of these gatherings was that they were *ecclesia*, the gathering of the people of God to form the covenant community of God.²⁵ God is here building a new community which would serve as a "model of what could happen when people were bound together by a belief in the gospel, an understanding of its implication, and an enjoyment of its blessings."²⁶ As such, it would seem odd if these communities did not also gather for worship. The stress on the community underscores that assembling is vital to the life of the church, and that we must not consider these four elements in isolation from the assembly. As Gonzales points out, "a purely private faith, no matter how apparently orthodox, is not Christian!"²⁷ While we can honor the idea that private devotions will build up the individual Christian, the emphasis on these four elements is an emphasis on the corporate life of the church and, I believe, the assembly for worship.²⁸

²⁴ For example, two recent commentators who do not see any of these elements reflecting home worship are Darrell L Bock (*Acts*, in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007]), and David G. Peterson (*The Acts of the Apostles*, in the *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009]). I find inconsistencies between evidence that they cite from the text of Acts and their conclusions that there is not liturgical implications in the summary of Acts 2:42.

²⁵ Chan, 48. Darrell L. Bock downplays this aspect, seeing worship happening primarily at the temple. However, Bock finds it necessary to qualify this in his discussion of all four elements, saying repeatedly that the community could have expressed worship activities also in their home settings. See Darrell L. Bock, 149-151.

²⁶ Peterson, 158, 159.

²⁷ Gonzales, 54.

²⁸ Chan, 48. Peterson denies that the local homes were places of assembly for worship, since the four elements are employed in other places (by which he apparently means worship in the Temple and the distribution of goods outside the assemblies). However,

The second thing that we must consider is that Luke tells us that these gatherings for worship had a distinct fourfold structure. If Cernokrak is correct that the focus and center of Christian worship moved from the temple (and the Jewish synagogue) to the Christian home, then this fourfold structure in Acts is actually an order of worship.²⁹ While Cernokrak does not draw out the implications of this as an order for worship, he does demonstrate that the synagogue and temple were primarily places of evangelism—the outward work of the church—where the Christian home was primarily the place of Christian worship. Since Luke presents all four elements equally without any subordination, we must consider all four elements of Acts 2:42 rather than focusing only on the Lord’s Supper as the primary, or sole, rite of worship. We see a very similar pattern of worship, including all these elements, in the earliest records of Christian worship, where the Lord’s Supper is a major element but not the center of worship.³⁰ Whether or not we conceive these elements as consecutive actions or as elements that must be included in any Christian worship,³¹ all four actions highlighted in Acts 2:42 are the foundational aspects of all of Christian worship.

No doubt what we pray, or how we worship, affects the way we believe (*lex orandi est lex credendi*), yet it is also true that our beliefs will shape the way we worship, and worship that is founded on a non-biblical or extra-biblical foundation may in fact lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. As Chan reminds us, “The primary theology expressed in a heterodox *ordo* will quickly overwhelm an isolated orthodox belief, making

Peterson seems to assume that the Temple was the primary place for worship and instruction (the Apostles’ doctrine) and does not offer much in the way of evidence for his view. See Peterson, 160.

²⁹ Cernokrak, 53. Bock disputes this, but then notes that the text of Acts 2:42 emphasizes each of the four elements by designating them with direct articles, *the apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship*, etc. Bock, 150.

³⁰ See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, *Apostolic Christianity AD 1-100* (1910 reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 461-465; and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity AD 100-325* (1910 reprint Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 222-228.

³¹ Blue, 118f.

it totally irrelevant to the life of the church. Right belief and right practice (orthopraxis) can only come from right worship (*orthodoxia*) and vice versa.”³² It seems obvious to me, then, that we should begin by grounding our theology of worship in the New Testament. I shall explore, therefore, the character and nature of these four elements, and how they may or may not have been understood by Luke in the early church, before we discuss how these elements can be incorporated into contemporary Pentecostal assemblies.

The Apostle’s Doctrine

The early disciples “persevered” in the Apostle’s doctrine, and not just in the sense of remaining statically orthodox. “It means also that they persevered in the practice of learning from the apostles – that they were eager students or disciples under them,” studying in order to deepen their faith and understanding.³³ Bock notes that the construction indicates a persistent, ongoing devotion.³⁴ Green describes Luke’s language as “emphasizing the believers’ energetic intentionality and diligence in these activities.”³⁵ Although the example of the Apostles, particularly in working wonders and miracles, remained accessible to the house assemblies,³⁶ it is especially the *teaching* of the Apostles that early Christians persevered to grasp. “The apostle’s teaching was authoritative because it was delivered as the teaching of the Lord *through* the apostles.”³⁷ The church is constituted first by the Word and then by the sacrament, or by experience.³⁸

³² Chan, 52.

³³ Gonzales, 50, 52.

³⁴ Bock, 149.

³⁵ Green, 209.

³⁶ Kurz, *in loc.*

³⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 100; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leon Morris, gen. ed. (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 88.

³⁸ Chan notes that this is the standard understanding among the Reformers and cites Calvin’s *Institutes*, 4.1.9 (“*The marks of the church and our application of them to*

We should note that Luke lists the Apostle's doctrine first among the four elements, which may indicate that Luke was emphasizing this element in worship. Whether or not this is so, any Christian liturgy is first the people of God's response to the revelation of God, primarily given through the Apostles. It is the Word of God that calls us out to form the assembly, the *qahal* of the people of God. Our response to this call is what constitutes the Church as God's new covenant people and forms our chief characteristic. "*To be church is to be the worshiping community making a normative response to the revelation of the triune God.*"³⁹

In saying this, I am not privileging the rational or cognitive element in worship. Although what is new or renewed in Pentecostal thinking must be grounded in what has been understood in the great tradition of the church throughout the centuries if it will remain faithful to the belief of the early church, Pentecostal theology is certainly "more than creedal confession."⁴⁰ In fact, I am asserting that orthodoxy is as much a matter of a worship that affectively communicates a distinctly Pentecostal understanding of God and the world.⁴¹ Transformation is at least as much affective as it is rational. James K.A. Smith argues that we are oriented by our affections, and so the transformation that comes in an encounter with the Spirit must engage our "emotional core," because discipleship "is not a matter of knowledge as much as it is a matter of will and desire."⁴² On the other hand, teaching in

judgement"). John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 21 of the Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). While some may insist that Pentecostalism does not grow out of the Reformation, I believe that an examination of the roots on both the Wesleyan and the Finished-Work side of Pentecostalism demonstrates that the Pentecostal stream flows out of and perhaps parallel with the stream of Reformation thought, including the Reformation concern for the primacy of the word of God. See Chan, 63.

³⁹ Chan, 42. Emphasis original.

⁴⁰ Tomberlin, 55.

⁴¹ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 30-31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 77.

the rational sense is one of the primary means we are commanded to use in fulfilling the church's commission to make disciples (Mat 28:19-20).⁴³

The Fellowship

Luke does not describe or explain the “fellowship” element in any detail, and there is considerable difference in understanding this term among authors.⁴⁴ Luke uses the term *koinonia* in Acts only here in verse forty-two.⁴⁵ *Koinonia*, “fellowship” or “communion,” can include the sharing of goods, as Paul appears to use the word in 2 Cor. 9:13.⁴⁶ Blue connects 2:42 to Acts chapter six, where the Christian community adopted the synagogue practice of a daily distribution of food to widows.⁴⁷ Bock also reads the passage this way, but then states that *koinonia* often refers to “the type of mutuality that takes place in a marriage,” which means that “[material support] is only part of the sentence, not a whole, as verse 44 will indicate explicitly by using other terms.”⁴⁸ Peterson agrees, yet also points out that the provision of goods came out of the new relationship between members of the church, moving them to take responsibility to each other.⁴⁹ Polhill, on the other hand, would link fellowship here to sharing in the Lord's Supper—a Eucharistic meal—perhaps because of Paul's use of *koinonia* in his description of the Eucharist⁵⁰ in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, and he comments that it could have the meaning of a sacred meal in secular Greek.⁵¹ Marshall also sees this as fellowship in a “common meal or to a common religious

⁴³ Bock so links the Apostles' teaching in Acts 2 to the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28. Bock 150.

⁴⁴ Green cites several examples on page 209, note 131.

⁴⁵ Bock, 150. See also John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of the *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 119.

⁴⁶ Polhill, 119.

⁴⁷ Blue, 489.

⁴⁸ Bock, 150.

⁴⁹ Peterson, 160.

⁵⁰ The terms Eucharist, Lord's Supper, and Communion are used interchangeably throughout this article.

⁵¹ Polhill, 119.

experience.”⁵² However, as we will see below, the Eucharist is what Luke probably meant by “the breaking of bread,” the next element in the series, rather than the idea of *koinonia*.

Given the example that Luke uses in the next few verses—that of selling property in order to distribute needed money or goods to the poor members of the church—we should see fellowship here as a reference to the common life of the worshiping assembly, of sharing among the body of Christ in concrete ways, rather than as the Eucharistic meal.⁵³ Gonzalez would restrict the explanation of the meaning of *koinonia* to that of the sharing of goods spoken of in versus 44 and 45, although he expands this into the sharing of “feelings” and “actions” as well as goods.⁵⁴ Given that this element of fellowship is one of the characteristics of the assembly (rather than social life outside of the gathered church), it seems better to view this as the expression of “body life,” a wider sharing and communion among God’s people, rather than restricting Luke’s use of to the distribution of goods.⁵⁵ We will consider further what such fellowship may include when we discuss fellowship in the contemporary worship context.

The Breaking of Bread

Along with the apostle’s teaching and a participation in a common life, the Lord’s Supper is part of the foundational rites of the church. Luke may be speaking here of a communal meal commonly practiced by Christians, but we should note that the phrase “breaking of bread” is “a metonym for the prayer of blessing and the distribution” of the bread at the beginning of a

⁵² Marshall, 88.

⁵³ On the other hand, Green considers the description of sharing goods with the poor that follows in Acts to be a description of “the economies and politics of ‘breaking bread,’” Green, 218. “Because the Spirit makes us one at the Table, we find ourselves compelled to live lives of radical hospitality – feeding the hungry, protecting the widow and orphan, inviting the weak, poor, and diseased to share with us in the life God gives,” Green, 241; see 322.

⁵⁴ Gonzales, 50, 51.

⁵⁵ For a reflection on the Church as the Koinonia of the Holy Spirit, see Kärkkäinen, 16-19.

religious meal in Jewish practice.⁵⁶ This phrase carries a special sense of breaking bread in both Hebrew and Aramaic.⁵⁷ Arrington points out that a simple meal would be “out of place among the other such weighty matters as ‘teaching,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘prayer.’”⁵⁸

Green sees this phrase as speaking of the theme of Jesus sitting at the table with different marginalized and unclean people, which he considers perhaps the “definitive” theme in Luke’s Gospel. “Narratively, these meals provide critical context for the account of breaking bread with his disciples at the Last Supper, and prepare the reader for Acts’ description of Jesus’ post-resurrection meals and the church’s post-Pentecost practice of breaking bread.”⁵⁹ Additionally, the phrase, “breaking of bread” is a Lukan formula, occurring only here in Acts 2 and in Luke 24:35. Luke 24:35 links this breaking of bread with the revelation that it was the resurrected Jesus who had served them the bread.⁶⁰

It appears most probable, therefore, that the ‘breaking of bread’ more than likely refers to the celebration of Communion in this instance, “. . . [which] signifies the Lord’s death; but it also reminds us that Christ’s blessings are constantly being appropriated.”⁶¹ Thus, “the breaking of bread,” is probably the Lukan term for the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist.⁶² It is clear the early church celebrated the Eucharist as a celebration of the death, resurrection, and future glorious return of Christ.⁶³ Luke’s reference to the breaking of bread would appear to be the logical place to

⁵⁶ Blue, 486.

⁵⁷ Bruce, 100.

⁵⁸ French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

⁵⁹ Green 211; see also 215.

⁶⁰ Bock, 150, see 151. Bock, himself, would not see any Eucharistic meaning in the phrase, however. Peterson also denies any link to worship services, but says that these meals “were given a special character by the fact that they were associated with teaching, prayer, and praise.” Peterson, 161.

⁶¹ Arrington, 34.

⁶² Green, 216.

⁶³ Gonzales, 51, 53; cf. Schaff, I: 461-465, II: 222-228.

see the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is especially so in view of Jesus' words at the Last Supper. We can take the phrase "the breaking of bread" as "an early Palestinian name for the Lord's supper in the proper sense."⁶⁴

The Church has joined the celebration of the Eucharist with the Word from the earliest times, and each is indispensable from the other. To isolate the Eucharist from the Word would be to remove "the eschatological tension so crucial for the churches' experience."⁶⁵ The Eucharist both reaches back to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ—linking to the Apostle's doctrine as a Spirit-empowered Word—and reaches forward as a "proleptic anticipation of the future eschatological banquet."⁶⁶ As Chan contends, "This actualization takes place in the Eucharist, where the 'already' and the 'not yet' are held together. In the Eucharistic worship of the church, the Spirit actualizes the past through remembrance (*anamnesis*) and anticipates the future (*prolepsis*) when created things are transfigured."⁶⁷ "The Spirit given the Church is a foretaste of the coming fullness of salvation in the eschaton."⁶⁸ Hence, "Word without sacrament remains incomplete, and sacrament without Word becomes an empty sign."⁶⁹ Thus, it seems certain that one of the four elements is the celebration of the Eucharist, but it is also certain that the Eucharist does not stand alone as a singular rite in worship.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Marshall, 89.

⁶⁵ Chan, 64.

⁶⁶ Green, 217; see also 322.

⁶⁷ Chan, 37, cited in Green, 257.

⁶⁸ Kärkkäinen, 14.

⁶⁹ Chan, 66.

⁷⁰ Green calls the Eucharist the "hub" and "hearth" of Christian worship, the center around which everything else is arranged. This seems more drawn from Medieval worship than from Acts. Even early accounts of church worship seem to balance all of these elements rather than making the Eucharist the central and more important rite. See Schaff, *History*, I: 461-465; II: 222-228.

The Prayers

Like *koinonia*, “the prayers” do not have any specific content in Acts 2. Such prayers could include prayers for provision—for material goods, for deliverance, or power—for both the individual and the community, as we see in the examples of Acts 4:24-31, Acts 12:5, 12, and elsewhere. The phrase might denote a set of prayers used habitually, or just the entire range of praying.⁷¹ Prayers could also show a perseverance in praising God, in thanksgiving for what the church has already received as the result of God’s grace.⁷²

Prayers also indicate the response of the community to the revelation and provision of the Spirit in the event of Pentecost. The Spirit of the Father is the Spirit of sonship, and the same Spirit who acts through the church to return love and thanksgiving to the Father in answer to his gifts of salvation and the Spirit. It is by that same Spirit that the church cries “Abba” (Rom. 8:15), and it is by the help of this same Spirit that the church prays beyond its own limited capacity (Rom. 8:26-27). Thus, in its own way, the prayers spoken of in Acts 2 “confirmed the Spirit’s presence among the people.”⁷³

I conclude, therefore, that the four elements of Acts 2:42 form the structure of the worship service for the primitive church. The earliest church persevered in the teaching of the apostles in “body life” (which certainly included taking care of the physical needs of others and should not be limited only to the distribution of goods), in the Eucharist (perhaps in the context of a common meal), and in various kinds of prayers (which could include prayers by the president of the assembly, as well as prayers by the people themselves). If Pentecostals wish to be people of the book, then we should allow these four elements to be the primary emphases that shape our worship service. On this note, I turn to suggestions about how the contemporary Pentecostal assembly can employ these four New Testament elements.

⁷¹ Bock, 151.

⁷² Gonzales, 54.

⁷³ Arrington, 15.

Fleshing Out the Bones: Suggestions for Pentecostal Worship

As we discussed the four primitive elements of early church worship in the section above, the reader will no doubt have noticed that these elements are not completely foreign to contemporary Pentecostal worship, yet they by no means describe what we do in worship assemblies today. The question is: What would it mean for our worship assemblies if we privileged these four elements in a way that paralleled their use in New Testament worship? How can we flesh out the “bones” of a four-fold liturgical structure?

My aim in this section is twofold. First, I wish to suggest how these elements may be applied, and second, I wish to suggest that practicing these elements may require some transformation in the way we approach the worship assembly. The nature of my remarks is necessarily suggestive and experimental. I do not attempt to lay down an order of worship in any explicit sense. What I do not suggest is any necessary order for these elements of worship. Since these elements are grounded in the New Testament and conformed to the example of the early church, all of these elements must be present in our worship in order for us to experience transformative, Spirit-empowered worship. Being persistent in these practices was transformational for the early church, and they can and will be transformational for those saints who join in our contemporary worship assemblies.

Apostolic Teaching

I do not have space for a discussion of contemporary preaching. The reader will have abundant access to books which both praise and critique modern or postmodern styles of preaching. My contention is that, whether we examine the deistic, therapeutic preaching of some mega-pastors, the fire-and-brimstone rage against sin and compromise popular in the earlier twentieth century, and continued by some into the twenty-first, or simply what seems to be, in my experience, a near universal reliance on topical messages which tie a verse of Scripture around an attempt to address the problems of contemporary life (rather like the note someone ties to a rock and then throws into the next yard, or through a window), we less frequently find teaching—the systematic explanation of the meaning of the Bible—in today’s church. In my assessment, the thoroughgoing lack of teaching and exposition of Scripture, rather than that of the preacher’s concerns, is the

greatest single reason for the weak and worldly state of the American churches.

This means that the contemporary Pentecostal church must preach less and teach more. Preaching to move a group of people toward decision-making—whether evangelistic or parenetic—is a relic from our revivalistic roots that we should shy away from except for special occasions. Our habit of thought seems to be that, as church leaders, we have to help the Holy Spirit move our lethargic, sinful, worldly congregations to make biblical choices, week after week or they simply cannot live as Christians. This seems to me to be quite hubristic, if not bordering on pastoral narcissism. In practicing this bad habit, we run the risk of substituting our own voice for the voice of the Holy Spirit in the text of Scripture.

In order for the authentic voice of the Spirit to sound in our sermons, we must return to explaining what the apostles teach us in the New Testament (or in the Old, as we understand it through the lens of the New), exegeting and explicating whole verses and entire passages of Scripture, *before* we dare to make a contemporary application. For example, we must return to explaining who Jesus is by reading the words of the Gospels. We must lead our people to consider how they must live their lives in light of Christ by explaining the moral teaching found in the Epistles. We must re-examine and perhaps discard the cultural commonplaces that we learned in place of the living Word in Sunday school or from our favorite preacher. We must acknowledge that the Church encounters the triune God in Scripture and not chiefly in our glorious preaching. In this way, our teaching will once again become transformational, leading us to fulfill the commission of Matthew 28 each Sunday in each of our assemblies.⁷⁴

This requires that we lead our congregations through the difficult passages as well as the easy ones (in our cultural estimation). Teaching the Apostles' doctrine tasks us to explain the wider picture of salvation-history and the kingdom of God, rather than focusing on one narrow slice of the Bible in each sermon, which atomizes and alienates the Scripture from itself

⁷⁴ The commission is to make disciples. It may be that, in our zeal to take the gospel to other nations, we have neglected to fulfill the commission to disciple our people here at home.

and from ourselves. This means that we have no choice but to lead our people in a consideration of basic theology.⁷⁵

Although I suspect that Luke is emphasizing the teaching of the Apostles' doctrine to the assembly, this does not demand any particular placement of the sermon in the worship service. While we must prioritize teaching, the Scripture leaves us free to follow the Spirit in constructing our worship assemblies. Whether we open with song, for example, or praise God after (and for) the revelation of the Word is entirely up to us as we seek to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The Fellowship

Under the rubric of "fellowship," I would include a number of the things that the church does in order to foster and participate in "body life," sharing out of what one has, and participating in what others bring to the assembly. Such disparate activities as giving, testimonies, and worship in song may fit under the term *koinonia*. As Acts 2 appears to demonstrate, part of this would certainly include the taking up of monies given for the maintenance of the people of God, whether given as tithes or as free-will offerings. The NT includes some clear testimony that the people of God took care of each other out of the funds that were collected every Sunday.⁷⁶ The Church can use these monies for the upkeep of pastors and elders (1 Tim 5:18), for the relief of poverty among the church's poorer members (Acts 6: 1-4), and for other charitable giving. What is not clear in Acts is whether these monies can be used for the upkeep of buildings and/or properties, but I am not equipped to join that discussion at this time.

Fellowship can also include many other aspects of corporate life. For example, times of testimony to the goodness of God and his work among the people of God would certainly fit under Fellowship. It is possible that altar calls would also fit in this category of Fellowship, although I think that we would do better to place them under the rubric of "the prayers."

⁷⁵ In the interests of full disclosure, I should explain that I am a theologian and church historian, so I may be excused for thinking that theology is important for the Church and the worship assembly.

⁷⁶ As well as Acts 2, we can adduce 2 Corinthians 9 in support of collecting monies from and for the Church.

Another contemporary practice that would fit under Fellowship would be worship in song, where the congregation joins in one song to extol God and praise him for his glorious deeds. Whatever promotes sharing of life together, children's presentations our worship and dance, or many other things might come under the idea of Fellowship. The key would appear to be the idea of participation or sharing, whether it is one person sharing a testimony, or the entire congregation participating in song.

The one element that I would suggest separates this aspect of "fellowship" or *koinonia* from the merely mundane business of life is that we should deliberately aim our experience of fellowship in any of these activities toward transformation. A good example might be the all-church picnic or supper, what we sometimes call "all day dinner on the grounds." In this example, transformative table fellowship means that the leaders of the congregation teach and then lead in sharing the life of others in the congregation who are not already part of their social circle, as an act of unity and hospitality. Those on the fringes of the community might be given special welcome or special invitation, warmly welcomed to the table rather than left to find a seat somewhere on the margin.

The Breaking of Bread

I have explained above why I consider this phrase to refer particularly to the rite of the Eucharist. I have already observed that Pentecostals have tended from the first to give the Lord's Supper a high order of priority in the worship service. In the last decade or so, several writers have sought to free appropriate Eucharistic practices for the Pentecostal worship assembly.⁷⁷ I intend my remarks in this section to be experimental and suggestive, not authoritative or legislative.

The first consideration concerns the frequency of participation in the Eucharist. As I noted above, table fellowship is an extremely important idea in the gospel of Luke and in Acts. Acts chapter 2 seems to indicate that

⁷⁷ See, for example, such works as that of Chris Green and Daniel Tomberlin, who each gives a chapter to the discussion of Eucharistic practice in a Pentecostal context (Green, chapter 5, pages 243-325; Tomberlin, chapter 5, pages 153-192), as well as the works by Simon Chan (who discusses the Eucharist throughout his work on Liturgical theology), James Smith, and Wolfgang Vondey cited above.

every meal that the house congregations took in common they treated as table fellowship with the Lord himself. Our worship experience is lacking if any of the elements are neglected or relegated to occasional usage. The Lord's Supper, as a sharing in the life of Christ, is an important aspect of the assembly sharing life together, so much so that without a regular participation in the Lord's Supper, I'm left to question just how deep and transformative the common life of an assembly can be. While I understand that many have concerns about Communion becoming merely an empty rite, without a weekly celebration of Communion, perhaps there is an even more acute danger that the life of the body assembled will begin to suffer, falling into a lifeless set of religious habits.

A Pentecostal celebration of the Eucharist must also be a celebration of the power of the resurrection life of Christ that works in and through us by the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper is a powerful moment of heaven meeting earth, of the Age to Come being already present in This Age by the power the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist does much more than remind us of the tension between the "already now" and the "not yet in fullness" of the Kingdom of God. It is held by many believers that the Lord's Supper is a way of participating in the life of Christ hidden in God as we lift our hearts up and, by the power the Holy Spirit, feed upon all the promises of Christ.⁷⁸ Even when using the language of "ordinances" rather than the language of "sacrament," Pentecostal churches can appropriate the powers of the age to come for provision, healing, deliverance, and other daily needs. In my own church,⁷⁹ I often find pastors lifting up the bread of Communion and telling the congregation that, if they have a need for healing, or other miraculous provision, they should appropriate God's grace for this provision as they eat the bread.

As an appropriation of the resurrection life of Christ, the Lord's Supper also brings us a powerful anointing to live our lives as Christians among our society, whether that society is Christian, nominally Christian, or neo-pagan. The Lord's Table brings us comfort in the middle of

⁷⁸ I find Calvin's understanding of a real spiritual presence in the Eucharist to be compelling in this regard. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.1-11, 38-44.

⁷⁹ The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

frustration or sorrow, teaching us that Christ will indeed come to bring a glorious completion, a *telos*, to our lives. He gives us patience in our struggle to experience and live out the sanctification to which we are called in the midst of a broken world. Knowing that God the Father completely accepts us at Christ's table without works, and without perfection, we may then accept others in the hospitality of table fellowship, despite their differences and imperfections.

Because of these things, and much else, the Eucharist is in itself a transformational experience. Communion mystically communicates the life of Christ to each member of the congregation, and perhaps also to the assembly at large as a people. As such, we would do well to consider including the Eucharist as a regular element in our worship assemblies.

The Prayers

In my estimation, authentic prayer is first and foremost an individual prayer. No matter what is said in public, prayer is what is expressed by the interior person, the heart, and not necessarily what is expressed by the mouth. However, that is not to say that prayer cannot also be liturgical, common, corporate, composed as an orderly expression of the assembly. But to be valid, the liturgical prayer must become the prayer of the heart. The individual must assent to it, submerge in it as a *koinonia* in the body of Christ, the church.

In this sense, prayer is truly a *koinonia*. But it is not merely a participation of ourselves in the divine, but also a participation of the divine in ourselves. For we also pray what God desires for us as our own prayers, especially the unutterable prayers of deepest need which are enabled by the Holy Spirit (Ro 8: 26). Paul tells us that we cannot pray as we really ought to pray, as we need to pray, but this is not a source of despair. For the Holy Spirit helps us to pray in the sense, I believe, of praying through us. In the context of Romans 8 this praying is also eschatological, but here it is not we who are drawn forward, but the perfect that is drawn back to us to be made manifest within our own good (in some sense glorious) yet broken existence in this age.

Since we are "one body," and never more so than when we are assembled together, we must pay attention to the prayers of the body in

assembly including the prayers that the assembly prays together (“liturgical” prayers). “[Liturgical prayer] reminds me ‘what things I ought to ask’ (perhaps especially when I am praying for other people). The crisis of the present moment like the nearest Telegraph-post, will always loom the largest. Isn’t there a danger that our great, permanent, objective necessities — often more important — may get crowded out?”⁸⁰ In liturgical prayer, praying one prayer together, we submerge our individual emphases and orientation in the collective work of the Church interceding for each other and the world.

Prayer is likewise *confessional*. By this I am encouraging congregations to make both “positive” and “negative” confessions. In forty years of ministry, including over thirty years of teaching and mentoring, it appears to me that the greatest hindrance to Christians living effective and abundant lives has been a general ignorance of who God is and who believers are in Christ. A positive corporate confession of the Apostles Creed or an affirmation of such Scriptures as Romans 8:1-4 would remind us and rehearse us in the truth.

A confession of sins, that we have not loved God or our neighbor as we ought, would also serve a positive purpose. Although God knows our every thought and deed, we can seek to hide these to our own harm, for we hide them only from ourselves. Setting God apart as holy, and submitting ourselves to His will, publicly and corporately, reminds us that we also wish to be delivered from the degradation of our sins and the deadly poison of continuing in them. This confession is an act of trust. We enter God’s presence and trust we will emerge alive and forgiven.⁸¹

Liturgical prayers, then, can be true prayers. It does not matter that they are pre-formulated and reiterated. “It does not matter very much who first put them together. If they are our own words they will soon, by unavoidable repetition, hardened into a formula. If they are someone else’s, we shall continually pour into them our own meaning.”⁸² On the third hand, the words of the liturgy can become the vehicles of our own hearts’ prayer

⁸⁰ Lewis, *Letters*, 12.

⁸¹ Lewis, *Letters*, 23.

⁸² Lewis, *Letters*, 11.

as we join with them devotionally, submissively, practically, and adoringly. For spontaneous or practiced prayers all become true prayers as we pour out our true selves and receive back the very presence and act of God.

Luke does not specify the content of the prayers in the early worshiping assemblies of the book of Acts, although he provides a number of examples of saints praying and the Holy Spirit answering powerfully. Certainly, the prayers here can include all the sorts of prayer that the congregation can make, such as supplication, intercession, praise, etc., we can include in this, the prayers prayed over others with the anointing of oil and the laying on of hands. Prayers for healing, deliverance, empowerment, and consecration, or ordination can certainly be included in the category of the prayers. In the assembly, no less than in the private closet, to pray is to participate in a direct encounter with the Holy Spirit. Prayer with a sincere heart is always transformative. While the transformation may not be outwardly manifest at any given time of prayer, praying to the Father in the name of Christ to the power of the Holy Spirit can only be transformational for those who pray sincerely.

In this category. I think it is appropriate to include three kinds of prayer. The first would be prayers made by the congregation for each other. Many worshiping assemblies give time for the saints to pray, perhaps altogether for a particular need in prayer, or perhaps for one another as individuals would share their prayer needs with others in the congregation. We may also include prayers made by a pastor or elder on behalf of the congregation. Prayers and benedictions by those who lead the service are certainly among “the prayers” of Acts 2. The third would be congregational prayers of confession or recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in the worship assembly.

It is into this context of “the prayers” that I think that the Pentecostal practice of the “altar call” fits best. Although I reject manipulative preaching used to call the saints to an altar service, I enthusiastically embrace the idea of a special time for calling upon God, for consecrating oneself, and for meeting the need of God’s people to be prayed for by other members of the congregation. Whether in the midst or at the end of a particular worship assembly, whether called spontaneously, according to the leading of the Spirit, or planned by the leaders of the assembly in response to a particular

message, the altar call can be as powerful a liturgical moment as any of the other three elements of primitive Christian worship.⁸³

Conclusion

In this article I have highlighted the need for a considerate and deliberate employment of four liturgical elements in our contemporary worship services, drawn from Acts 2:42. I first discussed the need for a liturgy, the benefits for deliberate consideration of elements that have always existed in Pentecostal worship, and the possibility of adopting four elements of primitive Christian worship. Next, I discussed the four elements that Luke summarizes for us in the Acts 2:42. I survey the prospective meanings of each of the rubrics of “the apostle’s teaching,” “fellowship,” “the breaking of bread,” and “the prayers.” Finally, I suggested ways in which Pentecostal assemblies could employ each of these four primitive aspects of worship. While my remarks are suggestive and experimental, and are by no means exhaustive, I have sought to point out what I consider to be some important benefits and/or possibilities of including these four elements of primitive worship in our contemporary worship assemblies.

All of the four primitive elements are transformative and are not merely meant to be aids in discipleship, but the very modes of discipling themselves. Perhaps the first thing we must disciple ourselves in is the reassessment of our worship practices. Do we follow New Testament practices authentically congruent with primitive Christian practice, or do we employ cultural practices that must be re-imagined, or perhaps abandoned, if we wish for our worship assemblies to be renewed and transforming events that centered themselves on Christ and appropriate the promises of the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit?

⁸³ Although I would not subsume the other liturgical elements into the altar call, Daniel Tomberlin makes a strong case for the altar call as a distinctly Pentecostal liturgical practice. See Tomberlin, 1-30 and 31-72.

The Ministry of Defense: Reframing Apologetics through the Lens of “Service”

Jeremy Wallace, D.Min.¹

ABSTRACT

The discipline of apologetics has a long history and has gained renewed interest among believers in Western culture, especially from the latter half of the twentieth century. At the popular level, responses to apologetics are mixed, as some believe it is inherently combative and divisive. Acknowledging that apologetics is often defined primarily as a philosophical or theological discipline, the author contends that Scripture portrays it more as a practical ministry to the Church and unbelievers. Hence, as practical theology, apologetics should be viewed best through the lens of service.

Introduction

I was one of those people who, right out of high school, went to Bible College for four years and then decided to continue three more years to complete a Master of Divinity. All I knew was that I wanted to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to serve Him and the Church. Little did I know that the first church to hire me would be my home church in the Northwest. Originally hired as a College Age pastor, I started teaching at our small Foursquare Bible Institute soon after. Early in my pastorate I recognized my profound need to refine some of my weaknesses. Seminary was immensely helpful, but it cannot prepare someone for all the eventualities that “real life” in pastoral ministry encompasses.

What was I to do? I began reading scores of books on leadership, practical theology, pastoral ministry, and apologetics. Introduced to the ministry of Ravi Zacharias, I found myself listening to his podcasts daily. His book *Deliver Us from Evil*² reminded me a great deal of Francis

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² Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997).

Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*.³ He challenged me to recognize that American culture was shifting in some notable and distinct ways. As I began to appreciate the dangers of *secularism* and *pluralism* with new fervor, I came to respect how these were antithetical to the flourishing of the Kingdom of God. I found myself to be in deep need of better understanding the Christian worldview and, certainly to a greater degree than before, to grapple with various methodological approaches to both evangelism and apologetics. What appeared to “work” before did not seem to anymore. I felt as if I had to go back and re-read and re-tool for the task of commending and defending the faith. That was over twenty years ago.

In 2005 I was asked to be the director of a small Foursquare Bible Institute which eventually grew into a two-year church-based Bible college offering an Associate of Ministry degree. Over the seventeen years that I served there, twelve as the Dean, the pressing need I sensed to be trained, and to train others, in the area of apologetics never subsided. The work of pre-paring emerging ministers for ministry required a strong component in apologetics. Perhaps this has always been the case, but I became acutely aware of it the more I served in a Bible College context.

I admit, at the outset, that a strong motivation for this article comes out of a heart to see God's people better equipped to understand, articulate, and defend the truly Good News of Jesus. I come at this as a pastor and practitioner, not merely as a theorist or academic. My goal is not merely to persuade with eloquent words or lofty ideas, but to offer an exhortation to pastors, students, and academicians to not only appreciate and value the content (i.e., theory) of apologetic arguments, but to value the very act of Christian defense-making to the same degree. Christian apologetics not only entails theory, but practice, and as such should be viewed just as much as practical theology, as ministry, indeed, as service. How can we equip saints for the work of the ministry of defending the Christian faith? In what ways can we help them to think through theistic arguments as they have been presented through the centuries, as well as prayerfully and thoughtfully

³ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981).

developing their own *personal* apologetic? In what ways should we think of apologetics less in philosophical terms, and more in terms orthopraxy?

Defining Apologetics

To begin, one must ask the simple question: *What is apologetics?* That is, what is its *nature* and *objective*? One simple way for us to explore this question is to examine several definitions provided by reputable scholars in the field. One of the first Protestants to provide a taxonomy of apologetics was Bernard Ramm. In his book, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics*, Ramm defined it in the following way: “Christian apologetics is the strategy of setting forth the truthfulness of the Christian faith and its right to the claim of the knowledge of God.”⁴ One should observe two things about his intriguing definition. First, according to Ramm, apologetics entails *strategy*. In other words, the content of apologetics pertains to what is true about the Christian faith, but additionally, a person must be strategic. Secondly, notice that Ramm takes Christian apologetics to be, at least in some sense, a vindication of the claim that Christians can know (and know *about*) God. Before proceeding, we must understand that Ramm’s basic schematization of various systems of apologetics boils down to three main approaches: 1) *Existential* (Pascal, Kierkegaard, Brunner); 2) *Philosophical* (Aquinas, Butler, Tennant); and 3) *Revelational* (Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper). A clear matter of “authority” is at stake here. Namely, what authority will be invoked in a person’s *apologia*? Ramm suggests an “appeal to authority” will be made either to reason, experience, or revelation.

Ramm’s work was seminal and laid the foundation for a kind of revitalization in taxonomizing Christian apologetics. Some decades later, Gordon Lewis evaluated various epistemologies utilized in apologetic systems in his influential work, *Testing Christian Truth Claims*. In this important work, Lewis defined apologetics as “the science and art of defending Christianity’s basic truth claims.”⁵ It is a helpful definition for apologetics for it incorporates both the theoretical aspect (as a “science”)

⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), 13.

⁵ Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody press, 1976) 21.

and the human element (as art) at work in the procedure. Continuing further, two decades later, Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman, Jr. compiled an apologetics handbook entitled *Faith Has Its Reasons*.⁶ In this august work, they define apologetics simply as “The defense of the Christian faith.”⁷ They admit, however, that such a simple definition “masks the complexity of the problem of defining apologetics.”⁸ Their candor in admitting the difficulty in defining apologetics is refreshing. Steven Cowan, in his well-received book *Five Views of Christian Apologetics*⁹ says that “Apologetics is concerned with the defense of the Christian faith against charges of falsehood, inconsistency, or credulity.”¹⁰ Cowen highlights some of the nature of the conflict between a Christian view of things and the nature of objections which are made against the Christian worldview: namely, that Christian truth claims are false, demonstrate rational inconsistency, or are downright superstitious and ridiculous. The thrust of what is being addressed is epistemological in nature.

When one examines definitions provided by individuals who have popularized the discipline, more diversity becomes apparent. For instance, William Lane Craig, who might be the most familiar evangelical face representing apologetics, is well known for his public debates and is taken by many to be the gold standard of Christian apologetics today. Craig has defined apologetics as “that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”¹¹ Interestingly, apologetics is rooted in the discipline of theology, according to Craig. Apologetics, then, may be understood as the statement of what Christians believe about the nature and person of God. But his definitions

⁶ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr, *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Steven B. Cowan, gen. ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 15.

of apologetics demonstrate variance. Elsewhere, he has defined apologetics in the following way: “Christian apologetics involves making a case for the truth of the Christian faith.”¹² What appears to be a subtle, yet significant nuance to understanding the field in his former work, takes on a more normative definition in his later work. One of Craig’s professors, Norman Geisler, was himself well-known as a promulgator of all things related to apologetics. In his *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, he states that “Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith.”¹³ Here his qualifier “discipline” is instructive. “Discipline” denotes a “field of study,” a “body of knowledge,” or “domain of inquiry.” It does not take much to see what is being said here. The nature of apologetics is, one might presume, predominantly “theoretical” or “rational.” Whereas Craig and others may anchor apologetics in the field of theology, yet others have advocated that apologetics is inherently a matter of Christian philosophy. Ronald Nash, the long-time professor of philosophy at Western Kentucky University (and then RTS) maintained that “Apologetics [is] the philosophical defense of the Christian faith.”¹⁴ Nash represented more of the Reformed tradition, as did his former professor, the famed Gordon H. Clark, a presuppositional apologist. Others from the Reformed tradition have classified apologetics as philosophical as well. The controversial Cornelius Van Til, the so-dubbed “father of presuppositional apologetics” and interlocutor with Clark, maintained that “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”¹⁵ K. Scott Oliphint, who sits in Van Til’s “seat” (position) in apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary offers a unique alternative in the offerings of diverse definitions: “Christian

¹² William lane Craig, on guard: defending your faith with reason and precision (Colorado Springs call Lynn David cook, 2010), 13.

¹³ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 37.

¹⁴ Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 14.

¹⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 1.

apologetics,” he says, “is the application of biblical truth to unbelief.”¹⁶ If what Oliphint maintains is correct, what then should we take to be the “application of biblical truth” to belief, or believers, for that matter?

As we stop to reflect upon these divergent definitions of apologetics, it appears that a clear majority of the definitions take it to be a discipline focusing on the veridicality of the Christian worldview over against the fallacious contentions of unbelieving thought. Make no mistake; this certainly is an essential component of the discipline. However, as important as Christian truth-claims are to the field of apologetics are, we must not divorce apologetics from the personal and relational dimension of defense-making. The *art* of defense-making is just as much apologetics as the arguments utilized in the act of providing an *apologia*. This is one reason I much prefer to define apologetics as the “art and science of defending one’s faith,”¹⁷ much in the vein of Gordon Lewis’s definition. If apologetics entails not only theory but practice, we would do well to explore its relation not only to philosophy and theology (proper or systematics), but also to practical theology.

Apologetics as Practical Theology

It is well known that pastors are concerned with many things, not the least of which is the high task of making disciples of Jesus Christ. “Gospel communication” is at the center of the Great Commission and therefore pastoral ministry. When I reflect upon the nature of “Gospel communication” at depth, I observe that it comes in one of at least five different

¹⁶ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 14.

¹⁷ It is an “art” in that it entails skill, ingenuity, and personal creativity; it is a “science” in the more traditional meaning of the Latin word *scientia*, i.e. dealing with a claim to “knowledge.”

modes: 1) articulation;¹⁸ 2) explication;¹⁹ 3) proclamation;²⁰ 4) demonstration;²¹ and 5) vindication.²² Pastoral theology, in particular, values each of these modes of Gospel communication, for we help (or at least attempt to help) our congregants to *understand* the Good News, to *accept* the Good News, to *embody* the Good News, to in turn *share* the Good News, and, when necessary to *defend* the Good News. When I speak of Gospel Communication as *vindication* I am here talking about apologetics. Certainly, as practitioners we need to not only think through these five dimensions of Gospel Communication, but we also need to engage in them through hands-on training, equipping of saints to share the Good News, to live the Good News, and to defend the Good News.

Through the lens of practical theology, apologetics is not viewed as a mere discipline or study but rather as an expected practice of Christian discipleship. Acts 1:8 states that followers of Christ are to be his 'witnesses.' Unquestionably, there is much to be unpacked in this passage—more than I can address here—but at the very least, Jesus himself the expectation of his followers to "testify to" and "bear witness of" his lordship not only in their lives but over all of creation. Let us now consider what is included in the magna carta of apologetics texts. Perhaps in review we can gain a fuller appreciation of what the apostle Peter had in mind when he speaks of

¹⁸ What I have in mind here is something akin to evangelism in its more literal sense; namely, someone sharing, by means of articulation, the Good News of Jesus (i.e., who He is, what he did, and why it matters).

¹⁹ By “explication” I mean the act of teaching and expounding upon the Good News, whether it is in a classroom, a living room Bible study, or at Sunday school.

²⁰ What I have in mind for “proclamation” is something along the lines of what occurs through the act of preaching, whether it is via pulpit ministry, a revivalistic meeting, or at a modern crusade. It is *declarative* in nature.

²¹ Here I mean the act of encountering God’s people embodying fruits of the Gospel in daily life. Such activities may include beholding sacrificial giving, a genuine community of *apape* love, acts of altruistic kindness, etc. Such a dynamic calls to mind the well-known saying attributed to Francis of Assisi: “*Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary.*”

²² “Vindication” would be the act of defending, “proving,” or providing rational justification of Christian truth claims. This clearly aligns with what is usually entailed in giving an *apologia*.

apologetics. I have claimed here and elsewhere that in this passage we are able to get at the “heart of apologetics.”

1 Peter 3:15-16 is foundational text for Christian apologetics.²³ It is considered by most to be the *locus classicus* for Christian defense-making. What does the apostle Peter say?

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.²⁴

First, notice Peter's admonition to the dispersed churches regards perseverance amidst being persecuted for righteousness' sake. The immediate context in which believers are to give "an answer back" appears, at least in this passage, to be one that is hostile. The apostle Peter recognizes that although we bear the message of hope, many will despise the very one we represent. Peter's counsel to be prepared at any moment to give witness to the Lordship of Christ flows from a heart upon which Christ rightly sits enthroned. Furthermore, one should notice that the apostle Peter expects a negative reaction to the very reasons set forth for one's hope in Christ, for he states, "*when* you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ" (emphasis mine). Peter assumes, in a sense, that many, if not most, will reject the Lordship of Christ. In this brief text I observe at least four key features which follow from Peter's admonition.

Motive. A believer's offer of "reasons for the hope within" should flow from a desire to honor Christ *as Lord* and *as holy*. This, one could say,

²³ See Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated & Defended* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008), 4.

²⁴ 1 Peter 3:13-16 ESV

is one's "reasonable act of worship."²⁵ The defense-making is part and parcel with what it means to be a disciple of Christ. To be a disciple is to worship the Lord with one's life, and this life includes "reasons" which ground one's personal faith in Him. One may give an *apologia*, but if his/her motives are askew in the process, such "worship response" is tainted.

Manner. Not only is there a motive behind our "reply," there is also an overall tone, or way in which we ought to give an answer back. In Peter's words we are to "do so with gentleness and respect." Such a qualification is insightful, for it demonstrates that the very manner in which we make a defense nonverbally communicates something about our message and the One about whom the message revolves. One could make the argument that *how* we say what we say is almost as important as the *reasons* we believe, or *why* we are contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Material. Our apologetic certainly posits truth content; that is, there are propositional truth claims we make regarding the Good News of Christ. Any (and every) worldview does the same. Indeed, we may have many reasons for the hope we bear in Christ, but apologetics cannot—*should not*—be reduced to "reasons" per se. Defense-making is much, much more than that. Please do not mistake what I am saying. Certainly, we should *affirm* only that which is in keeping with Scripture and sound doctrine, but we should also stress the apologetic power of a personal testimony. Our "reasons" should be personal and *personalized*. Theistic arguments *are* helpful at times. Historical evidence concerning the historicity of the resurrection is significantly important. Upholding the intelligibility of human experience as possible only through the Triune God of Scripture is, in my view, immensely invaluable. And though these may in fact be some of the reasons which help to anchor our hope in Christ, the most important "answer back" to be shared *in the moment* is what the Holy Spirit, through us, intends for us to share, no matter how sophisticated or erudite it may seem. Indeed, the Spirit empowers that which He inspires.

²⁵ This phrase harkens back to Romans 12:1. The apostle Paul concludes this verse with τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν (lit. "the reasonable service of you" or "your rational worship/service.")

As Christian leaders, pastors, and academicians, we must be careful not to give the impression to our “peers in the pews” that to be effective in Christian defense-making we must be experts in the philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, or biblical studies (though praise God some of us may be). Inasmuch as we ought to be vigilant to share and defend the Gospel, we must also, in turn, be careful not to reduce Christianity down to a set of principles, facts, or abstractions. Christianity is relational at its core, and so should be our defense-making. This, I reckon, is perhaps, in part, what folks are looking for from us in our *apologia*. This may be in fact what Peter is driving at: not “give reasons for faith” but “give *your* reasons for *your* faith.” This individualized, personalized *apologia* carries tremendous value, as is what the Spirit may empower most in the act of defense-making.

Method. Finally, Peter does not offer directions for how the “reasons” ought to be conveyed by believers; rather, he simply gives a directive for believers to be ready to give reasons in a moment’s notice.²⁶ Peter gives no instruction as to what apologetical method should be utilized, but this may be implied, when he states that we are to “be ready.” Part of “being ready” may assume an approach or method of defense-making. We all would do well to be self-reflective in searching our own hearts with respect to the various reasons for the hope in *us*. Few things could be more practical than that.

In light of what we see in 1 Peter 3:13-16, let us return to the consideration of apologetics as practical theology. At the risk of not assuming everyone knows what I have in mind by the term “practical theology,” allow me to provide a few definitions. James H. Railey, Jr. and Benny Aker define practical theology in the following way:

Practical theology is the division of theology that puts the truths of theological investigation into practice in the life of the community. Included in this division are preaching,

²⁶ Recall that these “reasons” are to be given to *anyone* who inquires. This qualifier is instructive, for it negates the option of “personal selectivity” on the part of the believer.

evangelism, missions, pastoral care and counseling, pastoral administration, church education, and Christian ethics.²⁷

Furthermore, Stephen Pattison and James Woodward explain that:

Practical theology is a term that emerged in the German protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late 18th century. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology, its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education, and church government. The purpose of practical theology was to apply theological principles to these activities.²⁸

An important differentiation between pastoral theology and practical theology should be made. Namely, pastoral theology is one of many expressions of practical theology. Admittedly so, "pastoral theology and practical theology are sometimes talked about as if they're completely different things; at other times as if they were exactly the same."²⁹ Pattison and Woodward proceed to point out that "nowadays, there's a lot of common ground between pastoral theology and practical theology. Ultimately, both are concerned with *how theological activity can inform and be informed by practical action in the interests of making an appropriate, effective Christian response in the modern world.*"³⁰

Ray Anderson, offering a helpful definition, describes practical theology as

a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and

²⁷ Stanley Horton, ed., *Systematic Theology*, rev. ed., (Springfield, MO: Logion Press), 48.

²⁸ James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis mine.

tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge. As a theological discipline its primary purpose is to ensure that the church's public proclamations and praxis in the world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God's continuing mission to the world and in so doing authentically addresses the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister.³¹

These definitions, though limited in scope and number, at the very least help us to see three things: (1) Practical theology seeks to bridge (if not unite) theory and practice; (2) Practical theology utilizes and pulls from multiple fields of study; (3) Practical theology critically evaluates and critiques the methodologies employed in a wide range of ministries of the church in/to the Church as well as in/to the world.

In light of Anderson's comments, how might we think about contemporary Christian apologetics through the lens of practical theology? How might a practical theology assist in bridging the theory of apologetics with the efforts of the layman in the act of defense-making? How might practical theology's utilizing multiple fields of study broaden the discussion of apologetics?³² Such questions, in my view, are both relevant and important, and they present us with clear potential for further exploration and research.

Apologetics through the Lens of "Service"

Among the many standardized definitions of apologetics stands an unusual one; one set forth by John Frame. In his classic, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, he offers up a wholly unique definition: "Christian apologetics seeks to serve God and the church *by helping believers* to carry out the mandate of 1 Peter 3:15-16. We may define it as the discipline that *teaches Christians*

³¹ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 22.

³² I recall a stimulating conversation with Dr. John H. Coe, director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation and faculty member at the Rosemead School of Psychology, wherein he mused at the potential for "*therapeutic* apologetics." His point (via experience) was clear: many, if not most, people have spiritual/psychological roadblocks behind much of their resistance to Christ and Christianity.

how to give a reason for their hope.”³³ I believe that professor Frame is on to something here. He acknowledges the importance of 1 Peter 3:15-16 as it relates to all believers. But notice what else Frame contends in this definition. Apologetics first and foremost seeks to serve God. Second, it seeks to serve the church. How exactly might Christian apologetics be understood in these two ways? Presumably, for Frame apologetics is to be understood in the context of worship. Everything is to be done to the glory of God. Furthermore, the task of “helping believers to carry out the mandate of one Peter 3: 15- 16,” ought to be seen as a task of ministry. Instead of couching apologetics under the rubric of a discipline, such as a mere field of study, Frame calls it a discipline that *teaches* Christians *how* to give reasons for their hope. This is an eminently practical task. It certainly has theoretical content, but the emphasis here is on preparing Christians such that they are capable of identifying and articulating their particular reasons which ground their hope in Jesus. This may or may not be highly intricate, complex, analytical, philosophical, or even overtly theological in appearance. Frame's suggestion here is worth serious consideration. How so? Consider how apologetics is presented to us in the scriptures. Much of what we see in various biblical passages is apologetics in action, or imperatives commending and defending the faith. One example comes to mind, as the apostle Paul standing before Felix, Festus, and others, answering the accusations set before him. Yet, as he is doing so, he is testifying to the lordship of Jesus while walking in the ministry of the proclamation of the gospel. It is this very ministry of evangelism which should cause us to consider apologetics equally as a ministry. If evangelism is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and apologetics is defending the Good News of Jesus Christ, are not both of these two separate sides of the same coin? If they are, then may I contend that both should be considered a viable service.

So in what way is apologetics service? At this point it may be helpful to consider some of the ways “service” appears in the New Testament. Several Greek words address service of some kind. For instance, service akin to slavery (*douleuo*) appears throughout the New Testament. A much

³³ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 1. Emphasis here is mine.

less common occurrence is service for wages (*latreuo*). Two types of service are especially relevant to our current study. Religious service for and on behalf of people (*leiturgeo*) is replete within the Septuagint, and sparingly within the New Testament. By far, the most common form of service mentioned in the New Testament has been characterized by Verner Foerster as “a service of love”³⁴ (*diakonia*). In fact, this kind of love is so central to the Christian way of life that the word “deacon” still looms large in various Christian traditions to this day. A *diakonos* is a leader but is a kind of “servant-leader.”

When apologetics is viewed through the lens suggested by John Frame, through the lens of service, this opens up some intriguing prospects for discussion. Consider how apologetics might relate to *leiturgeo* and *diakoneo*. If apologetics is the act of communicating the truth as it has been revealed to the world, this incorporates both an internal and an external function. Internally, the content (“material”) of apologetics, namely the philosophical, theological, and biblical data which arises from Scripture, can arguably take on a liturgical function. Broadly speaking, understanding, articulating, and exegeting the truth of God’s Word can be viewed as an act of worship. Of course, within the broader understanding of worship, what can’t be considered worship? Within the context of church practice, especially biblical and Christian education, apologetics may entail not only the tactics utilized in commending and defending the faith, but the very personal and practical side of assisting the regenerate with skills to identify their own personal reasons which ground their faith in Christ. Externally, any form of truth-telling may be understood as a form of service. For instance, telling people the truth they need to hear is morally appropriate, and when this is done out of a motive of love and genuine concern, it is arguably a form of service. If evangelism is viewed to be a ministry of the church, certainly apologetics is a ministry as well. And if it is a ministry, it is undoubtedly a service.

In conclusion, defining the nature of apologetics presents a challenge for many scholars, but for the most part, it has been defined as something roughly equating to “providing the rational justification for

³⁴ Verner Foerster, “*diakoneo*,” vol. 2, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 81.

belief in Christianity.” While this is certainly true, after examining the *locus classicus* of apologetics we see observed that apologetics is more than simply a matter of answers or facts. It entails material, motives, methods, in a particular manner in which the answers/facts may be offered. In fact, a biblically consistent understanding of apologetics appears to entail less about providing *answers* as it does the *providing of* answers. In the words of Toby Mac and DC Talk from the early 90s, “love is a verb.” True enough. Perhaps despite our penchant for thinking of apologetics in terms of a field, a discipline (a mere noun), by viewing apologetics through the lens of ministry/service, we can conclude that apologetics is a verb. As an action word, apologetics is not just philosophical or biblical theology, but practical theology.