

**CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP:
BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC PERSPECTIVES**

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Discipleship and Christian Formation are common terms. Everyone knows their meaning; few agree on what they are. Discipleship is a term with strong foundations in the New Testament. Since the New Testament record limits its use to the Gospels and Acts I will limit my study to that record. Christian formation is a more complex concept which certainly should be approached from a Biblical perspective but lacks the convenient handle of a key word from which to draw its meaning. I will attempt to describe key elements of the early Christian understanding (New Testament and Patristic) of what it meant to be formed in Christ by probing into their understanding of what it meant to be human, what it meant to be reconciled to God, and the processes that were followed in nurturing disciples.

Discipleship in the New Testament

The New Testament meaning of the word *disciple* is best derived from the New Testament use of the word. A quick read reveals the writers to use *disciple* in at least four distinguishable ways: (1) it is a general pedagogical term referring to a pupil or apprentice, (2) it is a term assigned specifically to the followers of Jesus, (3) it is a term given special significance in the teachings of Jesus, and (4) in Acts it is the proto-term for *Christian*. In relationship to Jesus and the church, it is evident that *disciple* is a dependent concept; disciples exist only in relationship to teachers.¹

¹ This is not necessarily the case in current use of the word. In popular usage there often appears to be a lack of awareness that disciples need teachers. It is often treated as a synonym for "student" with an emphasis on the subject matter to be studied, eg., a "disciple of Freud" is merely someone who studies Freudian psychology. In some circles discipleship is little more than Christian self-help programs. Even in conservative, Evangelical materials discipleship often seems reduced to a set of disciplines and exercises.

A Pedagogical Term

The English word *disciple* in the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word μαθητη.² It's most fundamental meaning is *learner*, being a cognate of the verb μάθετε, *to learn*. In the NT the word *disciple(s)* appears only in the Gospels and Acts. The most basic use is as a general pedagogical term referring to a pupil or apprentice, predominantly for those who follow Jesus to learn from Him. However, John the Baptist³ and the Pharisees⁴ also had disciples.⁵

Little is revealed of John's disciples. The public knew them to practice fasting (Mk 2:18, Lk 5:33) and prayer (Lk 5:33, 11:1). They entered into public discourse about religious matters (Mat 9:14, Jn 3:25). They served as emissaries of John (Mat 11:2, Lk 7:18-23). Finally, their relationship with John was such that they claimed his body and buried him (Mat 14:12, Mk 6:29). The disciples of the Pharisees are similar in that they practiced the disciplines of fasting and prayer (Mk 2:18, Lk 5:33) and they served as emissaries of their teachers (Mat 22:16). It is reasonable to assert that each of these groups of disciples was characterized by a particular program of study, but nothing can be said with certainty about their curriculum or methods.

The disciples of Jesus can be compared to those of John and the Pharisees. They did not fast but would after Jesus had left them.⁶ They prayed but were not effectual at it.⁷ They entered into public discourse about religious matters.⁸ They served as emissaries and provided general assistance for Jesus.⁹ They baptized persons (Jn 4:1). At the death of Jesus, a secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, buried his body (Mat 27:57-58; Jn 19:38). Their program of study was loosely revealed in the Gospels.

² singular forms appear 30 times in the NT while plural forms appear 239 times.

³ Mat 9:14, 11:2, 14:12, Mk 2:18, 6:29, Lk 5:33, 7:18-23, 11:1, Jn 1:35, 3:25, 4:1.

⁴ Mat 22:16, Mk 2:18, Lk 5:33.

⁵ On the occasion of interrogating the blind man whom Jesus had healed the Pharisees described themselves as being "disciples of Moses" (Jn 9:28). This appears to more a rhetorical use of hyperbole than a common understanding of discipleship.

⁶ Mat 9:14-17; Mk 2:18-20; Lk 5:33-39

⁷ Mat 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 11:1; 22:39-46

⁸ Mat 9:11; Mk 9:14; Lk 5:30

⁹ Mat 14:19-21; 15:32-39; 16:5; 19:13; 21: 1-7; 26:17-19; Mk 3:9; 6:41; 8:1-10; 10:13; 11:1-7; 14:12-16; Lk 9:10-17; 18:15; 19:28-40; Jn 4:2; 4:8; 6:1-14

The disciples were taught by Jesus concerning righteousness and life in the Kingdom of God. Their instruction was often open to the public, but included private sessions. Frequently the private sessions were continuations of the public lessons. This was especially true when Jesus taught the public with parables which they did not understand. Upon retreating Jesus would explain the parables for his disciples. The curriculum included opportunities for public service (food distribution), retreats for prayer, shared participation in Jewish festivals, baptisms, and public debates. However, the central characteristics of discipleship under Jesus were attachment to Jesus, and participation in His community and His mission.

Disciples Were Followers of Jesus

The writers of the Gospels used *disciples* as the primary term for the group that followed Jesus to learn from Him. Each of the writers was somewhat vague as to what constitutes a disciple, but the central theme for each was that the disciples were followers of Jesus. They were on occasion depicted as a large group, and at other times they appeared to be collapsed into a small group, perhaps even just the twelve. It may be argued that the twelve were presented as the quintessential disciples. Some received personal calls to follow Jesus and later became his apostles.¹⁰ Not everyone who received a personal call responded (Mat 8:18-22; Lk 9: 59-60). Others were nameless, and one was named only after the death of Jesus (Mat 27:57; Jn 19:38).

Matthew and Mark did not make direct reference to large groups of disciples. They were careful instead to juxtapose the crowds with the disciples.¹¹ They made multiple other references to the crowds that followed Jesus and generally portrayed the disciples as a small number, eg., small enough to get into a boat and follow Jesus. Their narratives stressed how Jesus taught the crowds with parables and retreated with the disciples to teach them the meaning of the parables. However, the evangelists did portray the twelve as being selected from a larger group, i.e., a group of disciples existed before the twelve were appointed to be apostles (Matt 10:1-4, Mk 3:13-19). As noted above,

¹⁰ Matt 3:18-22, 9:9; Mk 1:16-20, 2:13-14; Lk 5:1-11, 27-32; Jn 1:43

¹¹ When holding the two in juxtaposition, Matthew shows a preference for the plural, *crowds* (ὄχλους), while Mark opts for the singular, *crowd* (ὄχλον). Otherwise, Matthew uses the plural and singular forms equally, but Mark uses the plural form only once. Matt. 5:1; 13:36; 14:15; 14:19; 14:22; 15:33; 23:1; Mk. 3:9; 5:31, 6:45; 7:17; 8:1; 8:34; 9:14; 10:46

Matthew identified Joseph of Arimathea as a disciple (Mat 27:57). It may also be observed that Matthew made four references to the “twelve disciples” (10:1, 11:1, 20:17, 26:20) and one reference to the eleven (28:16) suggesting a conscious delineation within a larger group of disciples.¹²

Luke carefully distinguished the twelve disciples from the crowd of disciples belonging to Jesus (ὄχλος πολλὸς μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ) and from the multitude of people (πλῆθος πολὺ τοῦ λαοῦ) seeking signs (Lk 6: 12-19; 7:11; 19:37-39). John made repeated reference to the crowds that followed Jesus (Jn 6:2, 22, 24; 7:31, 32). Among the crowd was a large group of disciples many of whom withdrew from walking with Jesus because his teaching was difficult (6: 60-66). In this account the larger group of disciples was contrasted with the twelve (67-71) who specifically chose to stay with Jesus. John also portrayed Jesus as having disciples in Galilee and Judea (7:3; 11:17).

It may be concluded that Jesus had a large group of disciples with the twelve serving as a core group of select followers who were often identified as the disciples of Jesus, but not exclusively so. *Disciple* was sometimes loosely applied to anyone who chose to follow Jesus for His teaching, but was most often used of those persons who had made some degree of commitment to Him and His teachings.

Before turning to what Jesus taught about discipleship, it will be helpful to focus on the meaning of following Jesus. The gospel writers used “follow” (ακολουθεω) as a near-technical term. Of the seventy seven uses in the four gospels all but five were made in reference to following Jesus. The central and recurring imperative of Jesus the teacher was “follow me.”

The first command of this nature was given to Peter and Andrew (Matt 4:19; Mk 1:17). This initial imperative took a different form, δεῦτε ὀπίσω, *come, behind me*, with an emphasis on place or position.¹³ Hence, this is not a call to continued following of the peripatetic Jesus, but rather a charge to take a place under his tutelage, to learn to fish for men.¹⁴ This construct appears only in this account of Jesus calling his first disciples.¹⁵

¹² The first reference to the “twelve disciples” was at their appointment to be apostles (Mat 10:1).

¹³ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, P. 578. The base meaning of ὀπίσω is behind.

¹⁴ For Pentecostals the call of Peter and Andrew is paradigmatic for every believer’s call to follow Jesus. The call is radical, demanding a reordering of family and economic ties, and it focuses on evangelism.

¹⁵ They are the first called in the Synoptic tradition. John of course recounts an earlier association with Jesus.

With Levi (Mat 9:9, Mk 2:14, Lk 5:27), the rich, young ruler (Mat 19:21, Mk 10:21, Lk 18:22), Philip (Jn 1:43), and the “would-be” followers (Mat 8:22, Lk 9:59) he said ἀκολουθεῖ μοι, *follow me* with the sense of *accompany, go along with*. The underlying image of ἀκολουθεῖ is that of a path or roadway so that the concept is one of a journey. Bauer correctly sees this charge as a figurative challenge to become a disciple.¹⁶ Jesus also expressed this thought with the words “come after me,”¹⁷ and “come to me.”¹⁸ He extended the invitation to children (although passive in form) who are not to be prevented from coming to him (Mk 10:14, Lk 18:16).

Jesus’ Teachings on Discipleship

The correlation between *follow me, come after me* and *discipleship* can be seen in the teachings of Jesus. The synoptics agree that Jesus taught his disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”¹⁹ Matthew and Luke offered other parallel sayings about discipleship. In Matthew Jesus prepared the twelve to be sent out saying,²⁰

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt 10:37-38).

In Luke, Jesus, speaking to a large crowd traveling with Him, said,

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:26-27).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁷ Matt. 16:24, Mk. 8:34, Lk. 9:23, Lk. 14:27. These texts include ὀπίσω which is translated “after.” All but Mark use a form of ἔρχομαι, to come. Mark uses ἀκολουθεῖν, to follow.

¹⁸ Mat 11:28; Jn 5:40, 6:37, 44, 65, 7:37 In Matthew 11:28 the text is a promise of rest to those who come to Christ. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” *Come* (δεῦτε) centers on the call to come be with Jesus! The charge in John, ἐλθεῖν πρὸς με, stresses the movement of coming.

¹⁹ Matt 16:24, Mk 8:34, Lk 9:23. The three authors are not exact in their citations. Luke adds the amplification that the cross must be taken up “daily.” They also differ in the wording for “come after.” Matthew quotes Jesus as saying Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν. Mark renders the citation Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν. Luke offers Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι. For “come” Matthew uses ἐλθεῖν, the aorist active infinitive of ἔρχομαι, to come. Luke uses ἔρχεσθαι, the present middle or passive deponent infinitive of ἔρχομαι. Mark renders the infinitive as ἀκολουθεῖν, the present active infinitive of ἀκολουθέω, to follow.

²⁰ Unless otherwise noted Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard translation (1995).

In the same conversation Jesus summarized "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Lk 14:33). **To follow Jesus and to be a disciple of Jesus require the same things; they require that a person be with Jesus and follow him down the path of self denial, forsaking possessions, and bearing a cross.**

John also offered parallel thoughts. Jesus said "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (10:27). Later, the theme of following Jesus in self denial was uplifted.

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (Jn 12:23-26)

In a similar vein, Matthew recounts how Jesus warned the twelve disciples before sending them out.

"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish *going through* the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. "What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:22-33)

Jesus understood discipleship to be a process in which the disciple endeavors to become like his teacher. He offered as a parallel the slave becoming like his master. The context seems especially significant; Jesus was giving the twelve authority to do the works He had been doing, i.e., to cast out unclean spirits, and to heal every kind of

disease and every kind of sickness (10:1).²¹ They should expect opposition and Jesus expected them to face the opposition in the manner He does. Further, He expected them to boldly proclaim what they had been taught. **Disciples are to become like Jesus, do the works of Jesus, proclaim the words of Jesus, publicly confess Jesus, and overcome like Jesus.**²²

The question that begs to be resolved is does this text apply to all disciples or just to the twelve on that occasion? Luke appears to have addressed this question with a series of related stories some of which have parallels in Matthew and Mark. First, after the twelve returned and Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found a crowd around his disciples, a father and his demonized son. The father complained the disciples were unable to cast out the demon in spite of his pleas.²³ The father appears to have expected the disciples to be able to deliver the boy.²⁴ Shortly afterwards, in Luke's account, John was troubled by someone who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus without belonging to the group of His followers.²⁵ Next, the disciples James and John were ready to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan city that did not receive Jesus (Lk 9:51-56). Finally, Luke offered the story of the seventy being sent out; their instructions, authority and results were similar to those of the twelve (Lk 10:1-20). **Clearly, at least for Luke, the power of the disciples to overcome demons and disease was not limited to the itinerate ministry of the twelve.**

On the occasion when his mother and brothers came looking for him but could not get to him because of the crowd, Jesus expressed a familial nature for discipleship.

²¹ see also Mk 6:6-13, Lk 9:1-6.

²² This will no doubt be a point of discussion. Pentecostals have understood this text to refer to all Christians. Pentecostals have tended to read these pre-Pentecost works of power by the apostles as dependent on the explicit authorization of Jesus and therefore analogous to the miracles performed by the Old Testament prophets, i.e., temporary empowerment until the Spirit comes to stay. This conclusion is based on a lifetime of hearing sermons on these texts. Regretfully, I have not had the time to document to normalcy of my experiences.

²³ Lk 9:37-43; see also Mat 17:14-21; Mk 9:14-29.

²⁴ In Matthew's account the disciples also seem puzzled at their inability to cast the demon out. Jesus explains this kind requires faith. In Mark's account faith is also stressed, but the faith of the father rather than the disciples. These are also favored Pentecostal texts; the disciples' powerlessness lay in their lack of faith. Anyone who believes can overcome the devil. The father needs faith for his son; Anyone who believes can receive deliverance for themselves and their families.

²⁵ Lk 9:49-50, see also Mk 9:38-41.

And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."²⁶

Disciples of Jesus are his family because they do the will of the Father who is in heaven.

The final teaching of Jesus on discipleship contained in the Synoptics is planted in the Great Commission of Matthew 28. On that occasion the eleven disciples went to Jesus on a mountain in Galilee. Some worshipped (prostrated themselves before) Him, others doubted (stepped back). Jesus stated, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He issued a central command "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." All authority embraces all people groups. But how?

The process of making disciples would be two-fold. First disciples must be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? What does it represent in the life of the disciple? Second, they must be taught to observe all the commandments of Jesus (including the present one to make disciples).²⁷ How were these two to interrelate? What is their function in Christian formation? Are they sequential? Does baptism precede instruction? Further, these processes are to be done while remembering Jesus is "with you always, even to the end of the age."

John adds three other teachings of Jesus on discipleship. **First, discipleship requires faith in Jesus and abiding in his word.**

So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed

²⁶ (Mat 12:49-50, see also, Mk 3:31-35; Lk 8:19-21).

²⁷ From a Pentecostal perspective the commandments of Jesus are fully represented in the commission itself. Love for God and neighbor is the driving force in evangelism. However, it should be noted that Pentecostals historically drew more from the alternative ending of Mark's Gospel for their understanding of the commission,

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. (Mk 16:15-20)

Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (Jn 8: 28-32)

Corollary to being a true disciple is knowing the truth and becoming free. The issue of freedom was contentious for these descendants of Abraham. Jesus clarified that they were slaves to sin and only the son could set them free (8:34-36).

In his final discourse with his disciples, Jesus taught them

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34-35).

The evidence of genuine discipleship is love between the disciples.

In the same discourse Jesus added "My Father is glorified by this; that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love" (15:8-9). **The proof of discipleship is fruit.** While the nature of the fruit was not explicated, Jesus did lay out the process. Discipleship is a relationship with Jesus that is so intimate he characterized it as abiding in Him as a branch abides in a vine. Whoever abides in Jesus will bear much fruit (15:1-5). Such a relationship with Jesus involves a relationship with the Father; The Father is the vinedresser who removes unfruitful limbs and prunes the fruitful ones so that they bear more fruit (vs. 2, 6). Jesus included a stark warning; branches that do not abide and bear fruit are cut off and burned (v. 6).

A Synonym for *Christian*

In Acts *disciples* is the most prominent and unambiguous nomenclature for Christians. It is the proto-term for *Christian*, for, it was at Antioch that "the disciples were first called Christians" (11:26). It is never used in any sense other than disciple of Jesus. It appears twenty five times in the plural, plus five times in the singular. The five singular uses are all applied to prominent believers: Ananias (9:10), Saul (9:26), Tabitha or Dorcas (9:36), Timothy (16:1), and Mnason of Cyprus, "a disciple of long standing" (21:16). Only the familial *brethren* appears more often in reference to Christians but it is also used to address non-Christian Jews. Christians are also frequently referred to as those who have believed, eg. "the congregation of those who believed" (4:32). There is

no basis for an analysis of how these disciples were discipled except for a broad look at their Christian formation.

The Other Teacher Sent From God²⁸

In its New Testament usage *disciple* is a dependent concept. It requires a complement; a disciple (μαθητής) does not exist without a teacher (διδάσκαλος). In the gospels Jesus is that teacher. Before his ascension, He promised to be with His followers until the end of the age (Mat 28:20). Yet, He went away. In Acts His disciples exist but in His physical absence. How do people exist as disciples of Jesus when Jesus is not physically present?

The answer lies in the final discourse section of John's Gospel. The Holy Spirit will be another teacher for the disciples. In the Gospel of John the Spirit was carefully distinguished from Jesus and his ministry in a fashion that suggested intentional comparisons of the two divine persons. Only three references were made to the Spirit outside of the final discourse.²⁹ But in that unit Jesus spoke freely of the Spirit as another Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth. A personal identity for the Spirit was suggested by the use of the personal title, Paraclete, the use of personal pronouns for the Spirit, and the functions ascribed to the Spirit.³⁰ But the personhood of the Spirit was most strongly implied by the personal similarities between Jesus and the Spirit.

Parallels between the Paraclete and Jesus are unmistakable. Jesus has come from the Father into the world (5:43; 16:28; 18:37); the Paraclete will come from the Father (15:26; 16:7, 8, 13). The Father gave the Son (3:16); the Father will give the Spirit (14:16). Jesus was sent by the Father (3:17); the Father will send the spirit (14:26). Jesus came in the name of his Father (5:43); he will send the Spirit from the Father (15:26; 16:7). Jesus is the truth (14:6); the other Paraclete is the Spirit of Truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Jesus is the Holy One of God (6:69); the Paraclete is the Holy Spirit (14:26).

²⁸ This section draws heavily from my doctoral dissertation *The Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit According to Early Christian Tradition*. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Louisville, Kentucky, 1987.

²⁹ Two references were parallel passages in which Jesus spoke of the Spirit as the antithesis of the "flesh." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3:6). "It is the Spirit who gives life and the flesh profits nothing" (6:63). In the third passage John vividly portrayed Jesus' consciousness of the Spirit's relationship to him when he breathed on his disciples and said, "receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22).

³⁰ Moody, *Spirit*, p. 164. Moody concluded, "It is in the Paraclete sayings that the personality of the Spirit is most pronounced, and the pattern of a Holy Trinity is highly developed."

Raymond Brown has concluded from this type of comparison that the Spirit was thought of as another Jesus who was considered the presence of Jesus when Jesus was absent. The Spirit was for the church what Jesus would be if bodily present. For John, the Spirit was a person sent to take the place of the ascended Jesus.³¹

A great variety of backgrounds have been postulated as the source of meaning for the Johannine "Paraclete." The most common theory relates the Paraclete of John to those of ancient Greece who served as legal advocates or defense attorneys. The *paracletos* was literally one called alongside to help.³² But the functions attributed to the Spirit-Paraclete were predominantly non-forensic and those which were legal in nature did not follow the Greek pattern. He was a witness (John 15:26), not a counselor; a prosecutor (John 16:8-11) not an advocate.³³ A more general Greek understanding of a paraclete was that of any intercessor, mediator, or spokesperson. But the Paraclete of John speaks to and through the believers, not for them³⁴ J. G. Davies argued for the authorized translation of "comforter" on the basis of the *LXX* usage of the verb *parakalein* as the dominant translation of the Hebrew concept of counseling.³⁵ But the Johannine usage does not suggest the role of a consoler. Rather, he was one sent from God to be an active helper.³⁶ Eskil Franck suggested the answer rests in the consideration of the macrostructure and microstructure within which the term was used. When looking at the whole there is a legal structure which runs throughout the Gospel of John. The forensic background of *paraclete* thus served to tie the Paraclete sayings to the macrostructure of the book. When looking at the immediate context *paraclete* must be defined by the function it fills. In the microstructure Paraclete is what the Paraclete does.³⁷

Raymond Brown also argued for an understanding of the Paraclete based on literary use. He suggested Jesus and the Paraclete in John fell within an established pattern of tandem relationship in Jewish history such as Moses and Joshua, Elijah and

³¹Raymond E. Brown, "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, 13 (1967), p. 124.

³²W. Bauer, "Paracletos," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, (Chicago: University Press, 1957), p.d 624.

³³George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 85.

³⁴Brown, "Paraclete," p. 117.

³⁵J. G. Davies, "The Primary Meaning of *Paracletos*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 (1953), pp. 35-38.

³⁶Bauer, "Paracletos," p. 624.

³⁷Franck, *Revelation Taught*, p. 21.

Elisha. The transference of spirit was a noted element of those cases. Thus, Jesus and the Paraclete represent a tandem relationship of two salvific figures.³⁸ The Paraclete was, as it were, a second Jesus. Through him Jesus was experienced in the life of the church and the later Christian, as for understanding, was no further removed from the ministry of Jesus than the first generation of believers.³⁹ Inasmuch as the Johannine portrait of Jesus was that of a rabbi, or teacher,⁴⁰ it follows that the Paraclete would assume the role of a teacher.

Another possible solution to understanding the meaning of *paracletos* rests in the New Testament usage of its possible cognate forms. If *paracletos* was understood as a verbal adjective used as a noun then the way is open to the semantic field made up by the verb *parakalein*. Davies used this process to find the meaning of "consoling" in the *LXX*. But in the *LXX* the semantic field of the verb embraced comfort, encourage, reprove, exhort, teach, and preach.⁴¹ In the New Testament it also embraced several meanings: call, invite, ask for help, plead, make an inquiry, comfort, exhort, reprove, etc..⁴² In certain passages the verb was clearly connected with the concept of preaching-teaching (Acts 13:15; Hebrews 13:22; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:13) and elsewhere with prophecy (Acts 2:40; 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3, 22, 31).⁴³ It follows that *paracletos* may well have been understood as both a forensic and didactic term by the early readers of John. The precise meaning rests in the functions of the Paraclete in the context of the five sayings.

Jesus made five references to the Paraclete. All five references contained pedagogical overtones and two of the five cast the Paraclete into the specific role of a teacher. Each passage portrayed the Spirit as responding to the needs of the disciples of Jesus as an extension of Christ's own relationship with them and thereby unveiled aspects of the early Christian perception of the role of the Spirit as teacher.

³⁸Brown, "Paraclete," pp. 120-123.

³⁹Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁰Jesus was referred to as rabbi five times in John 1:38, 49: 3:2, 26; 6:25. It should be noted that the references were in the opening section of the Gospel where Jesus was being introduced as the one sent from God and the parallelisms between Jesus and the Paraclete were being set.

⁴¹Kenneth Grayston, "A Problem of Translation: The Meaning of Parakaleo, Paraklesis in the New Testament," *Scripture Bulletin*, 11 (1979), pp. 27-31.

⁴²Bauer, "Paracletos," p. 624.

⁴³Franck, *Revelation Taught*, pp. 30-35.

The first Paraclete saying (14:15-17) was given against the background of the disciples' pending loneliness (14:18). The basic concept of another Paraclete was introduced. Jesus was the first Paraclete who was about to leave the disciples to go where they could not presently go (13:33, 36). The second Paraclete was to be given by the Father to be with them forever (14:17). He was a person and a power. He was the Spirit of Truth (14:17).⁴⁴ He was "another" in the sense of "the same kind" as Jesus.⁴⁵ The difference between the two was to be their locations. Jesus would be with the Father (14:2-4, 28) while the Spirit would be in the disciples (14:17).

The second Paraclete saying (14:25-27) addressed the need of the disciples for a deepened knowledge of the teachings of Christ. The primary function of the Paraclete was set forth; he will teach.⁴⁶ The identification of the Paraclete with the Spirit was repeated as was the Spirit's role in continuing the ministry of Jesus. The Paraclete will be sent in the name of Jesus and will teach "all things" and "remind" the disciples of everything Jesus had said. These two clauses were parallel thoughts, that is, the reminder of everything Jesus had said was synonymous to the teaching of all things.⁴⁷ Also, the "all things" which the Spirit will teach (vs. 26) serve in contrast to "these things" which Jesus has already taught (vs. 25) so that the role of the Spirit as teacher will be to add to what Jesus has taught. Jesus as teacher in human flesh had been limited to the time of his "abiding with" the disciples but the Spirit will not be limited.⁴⁸

But what was the intended extent of "all things" (vs. 26)? What would the Spirit add to what Jesus had taught? Would the Spirit teach quantitatively more than Jesus, literally all things? Since the teaching of all things was synonymous with the reminding of everything Jesus had said then the answer is no. Rather, the function of the Spirit-teacher would be to interpret the sayings of Christ so as to enable the disciples to see the

⁴⁴Georg Brauman, "Advocate, Paraclete, Helper," *NIDNTT*, I, 90.

⁴⁵Moody, *Spirit*, p. 165.

⁴⁶The etymological root of "to teach," *didasko*, meant to repeatedly extend the hand as if to give or receive something. Hence the primary meaning was to pass from one person to another. Knowledge, opinions, facts, and skills could be transferred from the teacher to the pupil through repeated activity on the part of both. In the LXX the word meant chiefly instruction in how to live, the subject matter being the will of God especially as expressed in moral and practical terms. In the NT the meaning is almost always to teach or instruct in the patten of the OT. Klaus Wegenast, "Teach," *NIDNTT*, III, 759-765.

⁴⁷Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 650-651.

⁴⁸Moody, *Spirit*, p. 166.

full meaning of Jesus' words.⁴⁹ His reminding would be re-presentation in a living manner; the words of Jesus would through the Spirit be freshly applied to the lives of the disciples.⁵⁰ "All things" refers to their level of understanding. The Paraclete would bring the words of Jesus to bear in a meaningful way on all the situations of life.

The third Paraclete passage (John 15:26-27) addressed the needs of the disciples as persons exposed to the hatred of the world (15:18-26) and projected the Spirit into the role of a witness. The Paraclete was to be sent by Jesus from the Father as a witness of him. This saying has been generally interpreted as forensic in nature. Either Jesus is on trial before the world and the Spirit-Paraclete is the chief witness in his behalf, or conversely the world is on trial before Jesus and the Spirit is the chief witness against it.⁵¹ However, Franck argued convincingly from John's other uses of "witness" (*marturiu*) that the primary meaning is didactic in nature. The objective of Johannine witnessing is to create knowledge and thereby increase faith. Thus, instruction is the objective of the Paraclete's witness while judgment lies as a consequence in the background. In the absence of Jesus the task of the Spirit is to reveal "an actual, living, and authoritative knowledge about Jesus, which provokes a response in people."⁵² The disciples will also be witnesses of Christ. However, their witness will not be in addition to that of the Spirit. It will be because of the witness of the Spirit. As Raymond Brown has stated, "the disciples' witness is simply the exteriorization of the Spirit's witness. . ."⁵³ Together they witness of the supreme revelation of God to men, Jesus Christ.

The fourth Paraclete passage (16:4-11) is given against the backdrop of the disciples' sorrow over the removal of Jesus. The Paraclete is presented as one who confronts the world. When he comes he will "convict" the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The intent of this saying is difficult to ascertain.⁵⁴ The Greek word *elenchein*, translated "convict," means "to expose"⁵⁵ with the sense of proving wrong.⁵⁶

⁴⁹Brown, *Anchor Bible*, p. 650.

⁵⁰Brown, "Paraclete," p. 129.

⁵¹Brown, *Anchor Bible*, p. 699.

⁵²Franck, *Revelation Taught*, p. 56.

⁵³Brown, *Anchor Bible*, p. 690.

⁵⁴D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979), pp. 547-566. Carson gave a concise review of the major interpretations of this passage and the problems encountered by each.

⁵⁵C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John, An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), p. 405.

Dale Moody associated the phrase with the work of the Roman judge in cross-examining three times the one charged.⁵⁷ The idea being to expose the guilt within. Barrett suggested that the Paraclete was promised here to help the disciples by intensifying the work of the conscience of the world.⁵⁸ R. E. Brown argued for the meaning of "to prove wrong" but concluded from the grammar that the disciples are the object of the convincing.⁵⁹ That is, the Paraclete will help the disciples by convincing them of the guilt of the world. In either case the Paraclete will function to clarify the presence of wrong in terms of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Thus the forensic function has at its core the teaching function.⁶⁰

The final Paraclete passage (John 16:12-15) addressed the disciples inability to instantly embrace the full revelation of Christ and produced the most extensive pedagogical imagery of the Spirit. The role of the Spirit as teacher which had been set forth in the second passage was in this passage expanded.⁶¹ Jesus repeated a statement on his inability due to time to teach the disciples everything they needed to know and he also repeated his promise that the Spirit of truth will come to them to complete their instruction.

The two primary functions of the Spirit in this passage were to guide into all truth and to bring glory to Christ. He will guide into all truth by speaking what he hears and proclaiming what is yet to come. He will glorify Christ by proclaiming that which belongs to Christ.⁶²

To guide (*hadagasei*) is to lead in the sense of showing the way.⁶³ Textual differences allow for either "in" or "into" all truth. The difference in meaning is slight and the context suggests that whichever the reading the disciples will by the Spirit come to exist in the whole sphere of truth.⁶⁴ Their existence within the truth will be actualized by the Paraclete's speaking what he hears from the Father and the Son. Jesus has many

⁵⁶Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete," pp. 549-551.

⁵⁷Moody, *Spirit*, pp. 172-173.

⁵⁸Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 405.

⁵⁹Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete," pp. 551-553.

⁶⁰Franck, *Revelation Taught*, pp. 58-65.

⁶¹C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), p. 415.

⁶²Franck, *Revelation Taught*, p. 66.

⁶³Brown, *Anchor Bible*, p. 707.

⁶⁴Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 407.

things to tell (*legein*) the disciples. The Spirit will speak (*lelein*) only what he hears. The speaking function of Jesus focuses on the content of what has been said. The speaking function of the Spirit focuses on the vocal and speech-function itself. The implication is that the Paraclete will guide by serving as a mouthpiece of the absent Jesus.⁶⁵ Likewise, to proclaim (*anagelei*) what is yet to come focuses on the task of repeating an announcement or delivering a message.⁶⁶ One task of the Paraclete will be to declare to the disciples a message from Jesus concerning future events. The message will contain new information and will not be limited to recalling the words of the historical Jesus. The Paraclete will extend the message of God in Christ to cover details of the future.⁶⁷

The Spirit will glorify Christ by receiving that which belongs to Christ and proclaiming it to the disciples. To receive (*lambanei*) is to take up which implies the Spirit will function as a messenger whose delivery is from Christ to the disciples. His method of delivery will be the same as when he reveals what is to come; that is, he will proclaim (*anagelei*) in the sense of announcing that which belongs to Christ.

That which the Paraclete receives of Christ is also of the Father. He thus serves to instruct the disciples in the divine relationship between Jesus and the Father.⁶⁸ The Spirit was to bring the mission and being of Christ into the present reality of the church.⁶⁹ The good news of the incarnation would find fulfillment in the return of the resurrected Christ to the Father from whence he would by the Spirit direct his followers to their ultimate end.

In summary, the Johannine Paraclete was the Spirit-teacher who was to be sent by Jesus and the Father in order to continue the mission of Christ by serving as a helping-presence within the disciples. The Paraclete would serve as another Jesus, doing what Christ would do if bodily present. In fact, the presence of the Spirit meant the presence of Jesus as well.

The primary function of the Paraclete would be to serve as a teacher continuing the instruction begun by Christ while on earth. The didactic activities of the Spirit were to include reminding, witnessing, exposing, guiding, speaking and proclaiming. The

⁶⁵Franck, *Revelation Taught*, p. 67.

⁶⁶Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 408

⁶⁷Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 352.

⁶⁸Johnston, *Spirit-Paraclete*, pp. 86-87.

⁶⁹Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 408-409.

reminding activity of the Paraclete would involve the interpretation and re-presentation of the words of Jesus in a fresh and living manner. As a witness the Spirit would reveal an actual, living and authoritative knowledge of Jesus which would provoke a response in people. This witness would be a direct action of the Paraclete but would also be actualized through the witness of the disciples. The Spirit was to teach by exposing wrong in a manner that created a consciousness of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The act of guiding within the sphere of all truth would be accomplished through revelations of the continued mission of Christ. Jesus would be glorified by the Spirit serving as his mouthpiece whereby he would continue to speak of that which he shares with the Father. Likewise the Paraclete was to proclaim the message of Christ concerning things which were yet to come. His task was to receive and reveal.

The Paraclete sayings of John reveal a well defined understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit as teacher in the life of the early church. The Paraclete's status as teacher was based upon his intimate, tandem, and ongoing relationship with Jesus. He was of the same nature as Jesus being sent by Jesus and the Father to help the disciples in their needs. His primary teaching function was to speak after Jesus. This task was fulfilled through the living interpretation of the words of Christ and the announcement of things yet to come in the ongoing revelation of Christ.

By the personal presence of the Holy Spirit the personal presence of Jesus the teacher will be known. In participation with the Holy Spirit the mission of Christ will continue. By the Holy Spirit the disciples will become like Jesus, do the works of Jesus, proclaim the words of Jesus, publicly confess Jesus, and overcome like Jesus.

Christian Formation: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives

Unlike discipleship, there is not a root word for Christian formation that can be explored in the Bible. The concept is clearly present, but illusive. There is a recurring concern expressed in the epistles for transformation and renewal, but typically the use of those words is highly contextualized. Words like *transformed* appear infrequently and about divergent aspects of the Christian life. Therefore, I have chosen to follow a

thematic approach and ask a series of interrelating questions. The first question is simply what does it mean to be human? According to early Christians thought what was the nature of human existence that needed to be formed? Secondly, what were the focal points for transformation according to early Christian literature, especially as associated with the Holy Spirit as agent of transformation? Finally, what were the processes of formation as overseen by the church? In this section I have attempted to hold the Scriptures together with the writings of the Ante-Nicene period, giving preeminence to the Word of God as the standard for interpreting the Fathers.

Shifting Views of Human Existence

The early church was confronted by two basic understandings of the nature of human existence. Greek thought focused on the material and nonmaterial aspects of life. At the heart of the varying Greek systems was a deeply-rooted dualism which contrasted matter and reason and distinguished between the person as body and the person as mind.⁷⁰ In general the result was to understand the individual as a composite of two or more parts which worked against each other.⁷¹

The Old Testament View of Human Existence. Hebrew thought began with the presupposition of a personal God from whom the identity of human existence was taken. In the Old Testament the different aspects of human existence were always seen as dimensions of a whole. People were not composites of diverse elements. They were an order of creation which had specific diverse features, the chief of which were flesh, soul, heart, and spirit.⁷²

The concept of "flesh" conveyed the transitoriness of being human. The aspect of humanness referred to as "soul" designated life and vitality as being bound up with the body. The dimension of human existence referred to as the "heart" described the essential

⁷⁰Harold B. Kuhn, "The Nature of Man," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), IV, 53-55.

⁷¹The Greek language provided three primary parts: the body (*soma*), the soul (*psyche*), and the mind (*nous*); Herwart Vorlander, "Anthropos," *NIDNTT*, II, 564.

⁷²Edmond Jacob, "Psyche," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), I, 617-631.

inner nature of the human being. And the concept of "spirit" portrayed people as living, breathing beings.⁷³

Human nature found its focal expressions in the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. At creation they were said to be made in the image of God and it was his breath which made them living souls. As originally formed, they existed in dignity with sovereignty over nature in a fashion analogous to God's own dignity and sovereignty. In the absence of sin, they enjoyed an unimpaired relationship with their maker and each other.⁷⁴ In sum, the Hebrew view of the first humans was conveyed with the words, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31 *NAS*).

The impact of the fall on human nature was illustrated rather than spelled out in the Old Testament. The choice to disobey God resulted in alienation and tension in relationships. Adam reproached Eve in an attempt to escape responsibility. Eve was destined to cleave to her husband and in time brother slew brother. Driven from the face of God, succeeding generations knew him not and turned their hearts toward evil continually (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). In gist, the Old Testament view of human nature stressed its original design for fellowship with God and its distortion due to sin which made it inclined toward evil. To be human was to need redemption unto God.⁷⁵

The Early Christian View of Human Existence. The early Christian view of human existence was primarily an extension of Hebrew thought but was clearly influenced by interaction with the Hellenistic world. The Greek word for the human species was *anthropos*, a masculine noun generally translated "man" but inclusive of the more generic "human being."⁷⁶ According to Joachim Jeremias, in the New Testament *anthropos* almost always expressed "the limited nature of human thinking and conduct in contrast to God and His revelation."⁷⁷ Herwart Vorlander further deduced from the New Testament that the human being, always appears as man vis-a-vis God: in his

⁷³Vorlander, "Anthropos," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), I, 564-565.

⁷⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), pp. 207-220.

⁷⁵G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. James E. Davidson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 20-32.

⁷⁶W. Bauer, "Anthropos," *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* trans. and ed. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University Press, 1957), pp. 35-37.

⁷⁷Joachim Jeremias, "Anthropos," *TDNT*, I, 364.

creatureliness (as distinct from other creatures and from God), in being addressed and chosen by God, in his transitoriness and disobedience, and as subject to the wrath and grace of God.⁷⁸ Thus, the essential questions of human existence were those concerning sin and redemption.⁷⁹

Perhaps the most clear distinction between Hellenistic anthropology and Hebraic perceptions of human existence was in the area of epistemology. Dualism creates an unbridgeable gap between the knower and the known, the subject and the object. Greek epistemology thus stressed observation and interpretation as the foundation for knowledge. The Hebrews approached life and therefore knowledge (*yada*) more holistically. Hebrew usage connoted knowledge as an experience of an object in relation to an object. To know is to encounter; to encounter is to be transformed by that which is known. Knowledge is possessed only in its exercise or actualization. Rudolph Bultmann demonstrated this Hebraic understanding of knowledge to be the New Testament understanding.⁸⁰

Largely in response to Hellenistic dualism as seen in gnosticism, the patristic writers stressed the application of the redemptive work of Christ for the total human being. However, in the process of apologetics they accommodated themselves to a partite view of the species; humans were a composite of body, soul, and spirit. Precedence for this shift in thought was taken from New Testament passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23 ("and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved . . ." *NAS*) and Hebrews 4:12 ("as far as the division of soul and spirit . . ." *NAS*).⁸¹ The body was composed of mortal flesh and was the receptacle of the immortal soul and spirit.⁸² Irenaeus expressed the relationship of the three as follows:

There are three things out of which, as I have shown, the complete man is composed—flesh, soul and spirit. One of these does indeed preserve and fashion (the man)—this is the spirit; while to another it is united and formed—that is the flesh; then (comes) that which is between these two—that is the soul, which sometimes indeed, when it follows

⁷⁸Vorlander, "*Anthropos*," p. 565.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰Rudolph Bultman, "Ginosko," *TDNT*, I, 697.

⁸¹Tertullian, "On the Resurrection of the Flesh," *XLVII, ANF*, III, 581.

⁸²Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* XIII, *ANF*, I, 540. Mathetes even described the soul as imprisoned in the body; Mathetes, *Epistle to Diognetue* VII, *ANF*, I, 27. Origen accepted the Platonic view of the pre-existence of the soul. However, Tatian held that the soul was mortal and could obtain immortality by union with the Holy Spirit, Tatian, *Admonition to the Greeks* XIII, *ANF*, II, 70-71.

the spirit, is raised up by it, but sometimes it sympathizes with the flesh, and falls into carnal lusts.⁸³

However, it should be noted that in this passage Irenaeus adopted the basic New Testament understanding of the soul as the seat of life, or, as Gunther Harder stated, "the soul is simply that area in which decisions are made concerning life and death, salvation and destruction."⁸⁴ Furthermore, consistent with the Scriptures, the Spirit was understood to be the life force which had its origin in God. The thrust of this and other ante-Nicene references to the body, soul and spirit centered on the totality of God's redemptive work in Christ Jesus. The entire substance of the believer was destined to salvation.⁸⁵

Early Christian thought also accommodated to the Greeks in its perception of humans as having the ability to improve themselves through reason as a faculty of the mind. Paul used the words *nous* and *noema*, both translated as "mind," to portray the conscious and rational dimension of human existence.⁸⁶ However, he understood the mind (*nous*) of sinners to be depraved (Rom. 1:28), vain (Eph. 4:17; Col. 2:18), corrupt (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8), defiled (Titus 1:15), and therefore in need of renewal (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). The god of this age has blinded the minds (*noena*) of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4) and believers must have theirs guarded by God (Philippians 4:7). Indeed, at the heart of the New Testament understanding of becoming a believer was the concept of repentance which was taken from the word *metanoia*, literally meaning "change of mind."⁸⁷ For the earliest Christians the mind was but one aspect of human existence which, like all others, needed transformation. Humanity had forfeited the right and ability to know God and thereby attain unto eternal life (Rom. 1:18-32).⁸⁸

The patristic writers maintained the orthodox position that the knowledge of God comes only by grace,⁸⁹ but they also developed an elevated view of the human capacity for reason as complementary to the work of the Spirit. So Irenaeus termed "spiritual"

⁸³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9, ANF, I, 534.

⁸⁴ Gunther Harder, "Soul," *NIDNTT*, V, 686.

⁸⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9, ANF, I, 534.

⁸⁶ Vorlander, "Man," *NIDNTT*, II, 567.

⁸⁷ Bauer, "Metanoia," *Lexicon*, p. 513.

⁸⁸ D. M. Lake, "Mind," *ZPEB*, IV, 229.

⁸⁹ So Justin asked, "Will the mind of man see God at any time it is uninstructed by the Holy Spirit?" Justin, *Dialogue* IV, ANF, I, 196.

those who "walk according to the light of reason."⁹⁰ Athenagoras hinted at this when he wrote that God was, "apprehended by the understanding only and the reason"⁹¹ Tertullian appealed to reason as God's gift whereby believers understood the "why" of church tradition.⁹² Clement of Alexandria represented ante-Nicene thought when he repeatedly proclaimed believers the true gnostics of the world because they superseded other systems of learning:

I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth; so that, from geometry, and music, and grammar, and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault And how necessary is it for him who desires to be partaker of the power of God, to treat of intellectual subjects by philosophizing!⁹³

Later in the same work he reiterated,

. . . philosophy, being the search for truth, contributes to the comprehension of truth; not as being the cause of comprehension, but a cause along with other things, and co-operator, perhaps also a joint cause.⁹⁴

In gist, for Clement individuals should exercise the soul through reason so that it might become susceptible to the reception of knowledge.⁹⁵

Origen displayed a similar view of the benefits of academic pursuits. For him humans drew their existence from God the Father, their rational natures from having been created by Christ, and their holiness from the Spirit.⁹⁶ As reason comes to all from Christ, "Truly it is no evil to have been educated, for education is the way to virtue. . . ."⁹⁷

While there was no unanimity in the value attributed to pursuits in the realm of reason and the knowledge of God retained its subjective character, obviously the church was rapidly influenced by the Greek understanding of personal knowledge as an intellectual looking at in which the object of knowledge was externalized and contemplated from a distance.⁹⁸

⁹⁰Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.8, ANF, I, 534.

⁹¹Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* X, ANF, II, 133.

⁹²Tertullian, *The Chaplet* IV, ANF, III, 95.

⁹³Clement, *The Stromata* I.9, ANF, II, 309-310.

⁹⁴Clement, *The Stromata* I.20, ANF, II, 323.

⁹⁵Clement, *The Stromata* VII.12, ANF, III, 543.

⁹⁶Origen, *De Principiis* I.3, ANF, IV, 255.

⁹⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* III.49, ANF, IV, 484.

⁹⁸Rudolph Bultmann, "Ginosko," TDNT, I, 697.

In summary, the early church defined human existence in terms of relationship to God. To be human was to belong to a race of creatures living in rebellion against God their creator. It was to be a personal entity answerable to a personal God, a multi-dimensional entity retaining something of the image of God but marred by sin so as to be totally incapable of self-deliverance. Yet, to be human was to be the object of God's love and redemptive act in Jesus Christ. It was to have the potential of knowing God in the highest sense of being united to him; the potential of being transformed from sinner to saint, from an enemy of God to a member of his family. This was the essence of Christian formation.

Transformed by the Spirit

The results of redemption through Jesus Christ were for the early church a total transformation of human existence. To be joined to Jesus was to become a whole new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The Holy Spirit was understood to be the powerful presence of God in the world whereby he was effecting the new creation and ushering in the new age. In this the Spirit was perceived to principally work with people.

Early Christian writings used a variety of concepts and images to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the redemption of persons. In general they fell into three categories; (1) those which portrayed the new life obtained in redemption, (2) those which portrayed cleansing or sanctification as an aspect of redemption, and (3) those which connoted personal encounter with God by the Holy Spirit.

New Life. Perhaps the most comprehensive image associated with the Holy Spirit and Christian transformation was that of regeneration, or new life. Hendrikus Berkhof has identified this as the dominating concept of the Spirit and the individual in the Scriptures:

The Spirit is the life-giver; he is God breathing the breath of life into man. That is the essence of his work in redemption as well as in creation. Redemption as the work of the Spirit means "rebirth." The heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), breath comes into the dry bones (37:10). So we become children of God, not born of the will of man but of God (John 1:13).⁹⁹

⁹⁹Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 9.

However, in the mind of the early church the term "regeneration" did not stand for a sharply defined concept.¹⁰⁰ It was generally associated with water baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Hippolytus referred to baptism as the "laver of regeneration by the Holy Spirit" by which sins were remitted.¹⁰¹ It was the Spirit according to Novatian "who effects with water the second birth, as a certain seed of divine generation. . ."¹⁰² Likewise Cyprian rejected the baptism of schismatics because they should "consider and understand that spiritual birth cannot be without the Spirit . . ."¹⁰³ So with Irenaeus, the individual who "receives the quickening Spirit, shall find life."¹⁰⁴

The new life associated with the Spirit permeated the inner and outer realms of the individual affecting both soul and body. Hence Pseudo-Clement spoke of the life given to the flesh, "So excellent is the life and immortality which this flesh can receive as its portion, if the Holy Spirit be joined to it."¹⁰⁵

Cleansing. A second image of redemption and transformation closely associated with the Holy Spirit by the early church was sanctification or cleansing. The New Testament understanding of sanctification was largely derived from the Old Testament concept which had its basis in the Hebrew word *qadosh*. The root meaning of *qadosh* was to "cut off" or to "separate" which conveyed the spiritual message of holiness or apartness.¹⁰⁶ The Greek term for sanctification was *hagiasmos* which connoted a state of sanctity in the sense of consecration or holiness.¹⁰⁷ The verb *hagiazō* expressed the act of sanctifying and in several cases meant moral purification.¹⁰⁸

In early Christian thought the Holy Spirit was the agent whereby the individual was sanctified (2 Thes. 2:13; Rom. 15:16).¹⁰⁹ It was the Spirit who gave believers "an

¹⁰⁰L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 465.

¹⁰¹Gregory Dix, ed. and trans., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: S.P.C.K., 1937), p. 38.

¹⁰²Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* XXIX, ANF, V, 641.

¹⁰³Cyprian, *Epistles* LXXIV.8, ANF, V, 392.

¹⁰⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.12.2, ANF, I, 538.

¹⁰⁵*Second Epistle of Clement*, XIV, in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁶Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds., "*Qadosh*," *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 871-873.

¹⁰⁷Bauer, "*Hagiasmos*," *Lexicon*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, "*Hagiazō*," pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.11, ANF, I, 537. Origen, *De Principiis* I.3.5, ANF, IV, 255; also I.1.3, ANF, IV, 242. Tertullian, *On Baptism* IV, ANF, III, 671.

insatiable desire for doing good,¹¹⁰ having remitted their sins¹¹¹ and returned them to the pristine nature for which they were created, refashioning them into the very likeness of God.¹¹² In the words of Irenaeus, those who establish the Spirit of God in their hearts,

shall be properly called both "pure," and "spiritual," and "those living to God," because they possess the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man, and raises him up to the life of God.¹¹³

By the Holy Spirit the individual was understood to participate in the very holiness of God.¹¹⁴ Origen wrote

On this account, therefore, is the grace of the Holy Ghost present, that those beings which are not holy in their essence may be rendered holy by participating in it.¹¹⁵

For Clement of Alexandria this was actualized in the Eucharist for "they who by faith partake of it are sanctified both in body and soul."¹¹⁶ But most often sanctification was associated with baptism, "the mark of complete purification."¹¹⁷

Transforming Encounters with the Spirit. The dominant images of formation held by the early church were those which portrayed personal encounter between the individual and the Holy Spirit or, at the very least, contact and interaction between the two. New life and cleansing were results of the Spirit's work on the believer. But they were in one respect only means toward an end. The objective the Spirit worked toward was redemption unto union and communion with God. Early Christian literature abounds with references which connote personal interaction with God through the Holy Spirit.

Intimacy between the believer and the Spirit was foreshadowed in John's prophecy, "I baptize you with water but he (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:17; John 1:33). Other images of interaction included the Spirit coming upon the believer, the Spirit being poured out on the believer, the Spirit filling the believer, the believer receiving the Spirit and the believer having the Spirit dwell within. Modern scholarship has generally interpreted these images from the

¹¹⁰Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians* II, ANF, I, 5.

¹¹¹Tertullian, *On Baptism* VI, ANF, III, 672.

¹¹²Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.10, ANF, I, 536. Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, ACW, 16, 73-74. Tertullian, *On Baptism* V, ANF, III, 672.

¹¹³Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9, ANF, I, 535.

¹¹⁴Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.14, ANF, II, 548.

¹¹⁵Origen, *De Principiis* I.33.5, ANF, IV, 255.

¹¹⁶Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* II.2, ANF, II, 242.

¹¹⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* III.51, ANF, IV, 484.

perspective of Pauline theology without consideration of their Old Testament antecedents or recognition of the fact that they were predominantly Lukan terms.¹¹⁸

The early church interpreted its experience of the Spirit in light of Old Testament experiences and prophecies. Two dominant themes emerged. First, the Spirit of God was at work in the church empowering its members for messianic activity accompanied by signs. Second, the Spirit of God was indwelling the members of the church that they might achieve the fullness of life in the kingdom. The first theme gained prominence in the writings of Luke, the latter in the writings of Paul. Both themes were rooted in the Old Testament as filtered through the common experiences of the church.

In the Lukan tradition the believer's baptism in the Spirit was clearly associated with the reception of power, the fulfillment of mission, and the glorification of God.¹¹⁹ These themes were also portrayed by other images of the Holy Spirit interacting with believers. What Jesus had promised in Acts 1:5, Luke recorded in terms of being "filled" with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4. This latter phrase was for Luke a dominant description of believer-Spirit encounters.¹²⁰ It was especially related to prophetic-speech activity¹²¹ which glorified God (Luke 1:41-45; 61-68; Acts 2:4-11) and pronounced the arrival of the eschatological age (Luke 1:15-17, 41-45, 61-79; Acts 4:8-12, 31; 7:55-56; 13:9-12). It was further used in conjunction with individuals being directed by the Spirit in confrontations with forces opposing the kingdom of God (Luke 4:1; Acts 4:8-12; 13:9-12).¹²²

Closely associated with the image of being full of the Spirit were those of having the Spirit "come upon" the individual or having the Spirit "poured out" upon the believer. These images were also connected with prophetic speech activity especially in relation to

¹¹⁸Clark H. Pinnock, "Forward," in Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), p. 7-12.

¹¹⁹James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 152-156, 163-170; James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit, Holy Spirit," *NIDNTT*, III, 698-670; Eduard Schweizer, "Pneuma," *TDNT*, VI, 404-415.

¹²⁰In the New Testament the image of being filled with or full of the Spirit is almost exclusively Lukan. The single Pauline reference was Ephesians 5:18.

¹²¹For Luke the phrase "filled with the Spirit" always described an experience of inspiration. Even in Acts 13:52 the recorded outcome of "joy" connoted inspiration, see Luke 10:21. Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology in St. Luke*, p. 54.

¹²²Compare the functions of the Paraclete, above, chapter 2, pp. 54-62.

the proclamation and activities of the kingdom of Christ (Luke 4:18; Acts 1:8; 2:17-18; 10:44, 45; 11:15; 19:6).

An inverse description of the Spirit-believer encounter used by Luke was that of the individual "receiving" the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15, 17; 10:47; 19:2). This act by the believer was concomitant with the Spirit's coming upon or filling the believer.¹²³ The encounter was mutually participatory. The image was one of God embracing the individual in a manner that allowed the human to accept the embrace as God's eschatological gift (Luke 11:13; Acts 2:38; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8) and thereby participate in God's eschatological activity, that is, the ushering in of the kingdom. The experience was an act of grace which in no wise detracted from the believer's humanness but rather served to fulfill and perfect the creature through the restoration of communion with the Creator.¹²⁴

In the development of the theme of the indwelling Spirit, Paul also made reference to believers "receiving" the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 14; 1 Cor. 2:12).¹²⁵ His meaning has been widely debated without clear resolution.¹²⁶ However, it is noteworthy that both Galatians passages tied the reception of the Spirit to faith, a condition of the believer. Also, in the same context, the gift of the Spirit was associated with miracles (Gal. 3:5).¹²⁷ Furthermore, the Corinthian passage emphasized the affects of receiving the Spirit; believers gained a knowledge of "the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12 *NAS*) and they spoke of those things taught by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:13). Thus, for Paul, like Luke, the reception of the Spirit was associated with both knowing and speaking things learned from God.

¹²³The 120 were "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 2:4) which Peter described to the multitude as "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) which they too could receive. Because the Holy Spirit had not yet "come upon" any of the Samaritans, Peter and John prayed that they might "receive" the Holy Spirit. As they laid their hands upon the people they did "receive" (Acts 8:15-17). The encounter between the Spirit and the people at the house of Cornelius was described as the Spirit being "poured out" and "coming upon" the people (Acts 10:44,45) and their having "received" the Spirit (Acts 10:47). The images of "receiving" and "coming upon" were also used of the Spirit and the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).

¹²⁴The imagery of "receiving" was built upon the Greek word *lambano* meaning literally "to take," "to take hold of," "to grasp," and is used of persons and things. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, "*Lambano*," pp. 465-466.

¹²⁵Possibly also Rom. 8:15, "you have received a spirit/the Spirit of adoption."

¹²⁶For a polemical review of the major arguments see Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 107-109.

¹²⁷Erwin, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 85.

However, the prevailing Pauline image was that of the Spirit dwelling in the believer (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Tim. 1:14) which closely resembled the image of the believer being the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). On this point Paul was emphatic, one could not belong to Christ without the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). To be an heir of the new covenant was to have the Spirit within the heart crying out, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6). In this

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, . . . (Rom, 8:16-17 *NAS*).

Furthermore, it was the indwelling of the Spirit which brought new life to the believer (Rom. 8:2, 5-6, 9-10) and gave hope for the resurrection (Rom. 8:18-25). On these points the indwelling of the Spirit was virtually synonymous with regeneration.¹²⁸

In other passages Paul depicted the indwelling Spirit as facilitator of sanctification helping believers separate themselves from evil and participate in the righteous will of God. The Spirit served as a helper and intercessor between the believer and God

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27 *NAS*).

It was the Spirit within which helped the individual overcome the weakness of "the flesh" (Rom. 8:1-14). And the Spirit preserved sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1:13-14) by working within the believer to provide understanding of the grace of God (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

Both images were evident in the didactic portrayal of the Spirit as Paraclete in the Gospel of John. The Paraclete would be *in* the disciples communicating the words of Jesus (which were words of life) in a fresh and living manner. He would also work *through and with* the disciples in their confrontations with the world. In the mission of the church the two themes were complementary and inseparable. God was by the Spirit calling forth a people to be his own, a light set upon a hill to make manifest the glories of his kingdom (1 Peter 2:9).

The patristic writers of the ante-Nicene period reflected both Pauline and Lukan priorities in describing encounters between the Holy Spirit and individuals. The Spirit

¹²⁸Lampe, *Seal of the Spirit*, pp. 3-18.

who regenerated and sanctified was also the Spirit of prophecy and power. Hermas vividly portrayed both themes. The indwelling Spirit was sensitive to the condition of the believer's spirit which affected his function as intercessor and confessor.¹²⁹ On the other hand the traveling prophet-teachers were said to have the divine Spirit "attached" to them at their arrival at a meeting and were "filled" with the Spirit during the gathering which resulted in their speaking "as the Lord willeth."¹³⁰

By the early third century the two themes on Spirit-believer encounters were associated with distinct institutions of the church. The work of the Spirit within the individual to give new life, sanctify, transform into a child of God, and illumine with divine truth was tied to the act of baptism. The reception of the Spirit as a source of divine impetus was linked to a separate ceremony immediately following baptism. A distinction between the two rites was maintained and clarified by Cyprian,¹³¹ Tertullian,¹³² and Hippolytus.¹³³

In summary, the patristic writers maintained the two prevailing images of Spirit-believer encounters with varying degrees of synthesis. On the one hand, individuals were understood to encounter the Spirit as a source of internal regeneration, sanctification and fortification. Closely associated with that image were the Spirit's functions of interceding for the believer before God and communicating the knowledge and righteousness of God to the believer. On the other hand, individuals were understood to encounter the Spirit as an indwelling power for service making the believer a channel for gifts from God to others, especially gifts of prophetic utterance. By the early third century the two images were incorporated into the rites of baptism and holy unction. However, the continuing testimonies of conversion and the charismatic gifts indicated the experiential basis for the two themes on Spirit-believer encounters remained an existential reality in the church throughout the ante-Nicene period.

¹²⁹ *Shepherd of Hermas* II.10.2, *ANF*, II, 27, Swete has pointed out that there is no biblical basis for the Spirit accusing the believer before God. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 26-27.

¹³⁰ *Hermas* II.11, *ANF*, II, 25.

¹³¹ Cyprian, *Epistles* LXIX-LXXII, *ANF*, V, 375-382.

¹³² Tertullian, *On Baptism* IV-VIII, *ANF*, III, 671-673.

¹³³ Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, pp. 33-42.

Methods of Formation

Reason had its place, but for the early Christians all truth, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding came from God. The highest expressions of each could only be attained by union with him. In the church, especially at baptism, believers were understood to see God and receive eternal illumination.¹³⁴ The act was instant and in some mysterious way all encompassing.¹³⁵ Yet, there was for the early church a sense in which the Spirit taught in gradations, individuals gradually progressing to levels of greater understanding.¹³⁶

The church classified learners in terms of relationship to God and the church. Individuals were either (1) outside of God and the church, (2) attached to the church as catechumens seeking to know God, (3) preparing for divine illumination and the acts of infoldment into the church, or (4) spiritual persons going from perfection unto perfection.

Each stage represented a progression toward the ultimate goal of life in the presence of God. In as much as the presence of God was realized in the church, the stages also represented a progression toward the individual's salubrious union with the body of Christ. Functionally, the two goals were synonymous. Advancement from one stage to another represented a change of relationship with God and the church. It further represented a fundamental change in the character of the individual. Therefore, each stage had its own goals, content and methods for learning.

The methods of formation utilized by the early church were carefully selected to lead the individual through the stages of relationship with God and the church. In general the Holy Spirit working through the church was understood to gradually but powerfully engage the individual with divine truth in a manner that meticulously transformed the individual into a truly spiritual person, one who enjoyed union and communion with God. The methods were those of controlled inculturation and followed the pattern of Jewish proselyte initiation. The focal point of the process was entrance at baptism into the covenant which defined the church as the people of God.

¹³⁴Hinson, *Evangelization*, p. 177.

¹³⁵A common reference was to obtaining "perfection" through baptism.

¹³⁶The church maintained a view of gradual progress toward God even in the midst of its battles against gnosticism. See especially Origen, *De Principiis* 1.3.8, *ANF*, IV, 255; *Against Celsus* III, 59, *ANF*, IV, 487.

The Call to Repentance. The first stage of Christian pedagogy was one of confrontation through proclamation, dialogue, and demonstration of the power of the Spirit. Through these methods the church instructed those outside of its sphere of influence. In essence the church went everywhere preaching the good news of Jesus Christ and calling on all persons to repent and believe. Of great significance was the church's desire to teach all classes of people including slaves and soldiers.¹³⁷ Academic skills were not a prerequisite and the proclamation was not in words alone. It incorporated all that the church was, said, and did by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁸ Ramsay MacMullen concluded it was the witness of ongoing miracles, especially the driving out of spirits and healings, which had the greatest affect in the evangelization of the Roman empire.¹³⁹

Persons who wanted to inquire further found the church anxious and ready to present Jesus as the answer to every noble human quest. The Old Testament Scriptures were the primary basis for dialogue with prospective converts. Jews were shown how they pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Persons given to philosophy were challenged to discover from the writings God's incarnate son, the source of all truth.

These learners were assigned one fundamental task, to repent. From the inception of the gospel, a penitent heart was a prerequisite for membership in the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2, 8; Mark 1:4, 15; Luke 3:8; Acts 2:38). As the church infiltrated pagan societies and sought to serve the destitute it became necessary to distinguish the sincere from charlatans.¹⁴⁰ Before entering the tutelage of the church individuals were to show themselves sincere about achieving a virtuous life.¹⁴¹

Training in Righteousness. Formal preparation for initiation into the covenant began when the individual was accepted into the Catechumenate. The aim of this stage was preparation for baptism and the holy unction through moral transformation and

¹³⁷Hinson, *Evangelization*, p. 38. Origen boasted that wool and leather workers, fullers, and uneducated persons were spreading the gospel everywhere; *Against Celsus* III.55, ANF, IV, 486.

¹³⁸So the Apostle Paul proclaimed his preaching was not in word only but in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:6-7; 1 Thess. 1:5).

¹³⁹Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 36-40.

¹⁴⁰Origen stated the church was careful to "first invite all men to be healed, and exhort those who are sinners to come to the consideration of the doctrines which teach men not to sin. . . ." *Against Celsus*, III.59, ANF, IV, 487.

¹⁴¹See also Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions* in Dix, pp. 24- 27.

indoctrination. Entrance into the divine kingdom required a life that had ceased to sin and an understanding of the precepts and responsibilities of membership in the family of God.¹⁴²

Catechumens were carefully infolded into the life of the church through limited participation. Each received close personal supervision from a sponsor who daily gave advice, instruction and encouragement. These sponsors served as spiritual umbilical cords in that they provided a direct link between the unborn child of God and the body of Christ.¹⁴³

Catechumens were prompted through a process of limited participation to seek birth into the church. At the agape feasts they could see the impact of Christian fellowship but were forcefully reminded of their own status as outsiders when required to eat a different bread and drink from a different cup. During Sunday gatherings they sat as a group in the presence of the church for the reading of the Scriptures, sermons, hymns, and prayers but were ejected prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁴⁴

To be a catechumen was to enjoy limited access to the kingdom of God. They received ongoing instruction in proper behavior for the kingdom. The primary content was the Scriptures and the guidebooks on Christian behavior such as the Didache. Progress in discipline indicated the Spirit's presence within having begun the process of healing their souls and forming their characters.¹⁴⁵ If sincere in their faith they were protected by the grace applied to the church.¹⁴⁶ They received a steady diet of instruction which bore the markings of control by the divine Spirit. They had things revealed to them through prophet-teachers who spoke in a form of ecstasy. In short, the Kingdom of God was at their finger tips.

Acts of Infoldment. In the events surrounding baptism the individual was infolded into the family of God. In this process the Spirit was understood to become the immediate instructor of divine truth. Thus the primary objective specifically associated with baptism was illumination. The church existed in the era and realm in which light

¹⁴²Hinson, Evangelization, pp. 38-40, 76-77.

¹⁴³Clement of Alexandria makes extensive use of the imagery of the church as mother and the catechumens as unborn children. He also describes them as infants nursing at the breast of the church, drinking the sincere milk of the Word; see his The Instructor, ANF, II.

¹⁴⁴Hippolytus, Apostolic Traditions, in Dix, pp. 27-31.

¹⁴⁵Clement of Alexandria, Instructor I.6, ANF, II, 216-222.

¹⁴⁶Cyprian, Epistles XII, ANF, V, 293.

was overcoming darkness. In that context, to be born again was to be born into a kingdom of light.¹⁴⁷ The light was from above and connoted the glory of the face of God. Thus, to be illumined in baptism was to see God, to know him.¹⁴⁸

Baptism was engulfed in a period of intense study and preparation. Candidates were expected to make a pledge of faith based upon the essential doctrines of the church. The covenant they were about to enter required absolute commitment. The learners were drilled in the Rule of Faith and its rational foundations in the Scriptures. With the passage of time memorization of credal forms took on increasing significance but understanding remained the primary concern throughout the ante-Nicene period.¹⁴⁹

Preparation for baptism also included fasting. Persons were expected to have ceased sinning and to have their own flesh under control. They presented themselves as morally clean and above reproach in conduct. Sponsors and others were called upon to testify in their behalf.¹⁵⁰ These activities served to make more distinct the boundaries of the kingdoms of Christ and Satan. Entrance into the covenant would begin, not end, their warfare with the demonic.¹⁵¹

Following baptism the individual was taken to the place where the church was gathered and received the holy unction, an anointing with oil symbolizing the reception of the Holy Spirit. This event signaled the individual's entrance into the charismatic community and served as ordination for ministry within the church. For the first time the converts were allowed to pray for the saints (with the laying on of hands?) and give the pure "kiss of peace" to others.¹⁵² These rites of initiation culminated in the believer's first participation in the Eucharist indicating full acceptance at the table of the Lord's kingdom.

Tutelage of the Spirit. After their salubrious incorporation into the body of Christ, believers were understood to live under the careful tutelage of the Holy Spirit. The objective of this stage was to carry the believer on unto perfection as members of

¹⁴⁷Justin, *Dialogue* VII, ANF, I, 198.

¹⁴⁸Hinson, *Evangelization*, p. 81. Justin, *First Apology* XLI, ANF, I, 183. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* I.6, ANF, II, 215-216; *Exhortation to the Heathen* X, ANF, II, 198. Cyprian, *Epistles* I.3-4, ANF, V, 275-276.

¹⁴⁹See Origen, *Against Celsus* III.51, ANF, IV, 484-484.

¹⁵⁰Justin, *First Apology* LXI, ANF, I, 183.

¹⁵¹Hinson, *Evangelization*, p. 78.

¹⁵²Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions*, trans. Dix, p. 49.

God's new creation. The process included all the avenues of instruction open to the catechumens plus those associated with the restricted ceremonies. The principle diet of study for the baptized believer was the Scriptures but these were supplemented by prophecies and heroic testimonies. The sacramental rituals of the church served to help each person recapitulate the fundamental truths of the kingdom. Through personal study, private meditation and the shared experiences of the church the Holy Spirit was perceived to be working within the believer to provide deeper understanding of the things of God especially as revealed in the Scriptures. As spiritual persons they were also possible recipients of visions, dreams, and prophecies.¹⁵³

Thus they understood themselves to be perfected and yet striving after perfection. They were the true gnostics of the world. Clement of Alexandria said of them: "The gnostic is consequently divine, and already holy, God-bearing, and God-borne." Origen clarified this state by insisting the believer must grow in blessedness, ". . . the more we perceive its blessedness, the more should be increased and intensified within us the longing for the same, while we ever more eagerly and freely receive and hold fast the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."¹⁵⁴ Failure to grow would result in a gradual falling away.¹⁵⁵

Reflections of a Pentecostal

This treatment of Christian formation and discipleship from Biblical and Patristic perspectives reflects the thought patterns of one Pentecostal. This is reflected in the topics of discussion and the methods of approaching those topics. It is further seen in the choice of concepts to be highlighted, or passed over, or omitted due to the restrictions of the enterprise. From my perspective there are a few topics that should have been included if time and space were available. There are also some interpretations of the information that also need amplification.

¹⁵³Novatian, Treatise Concerning the Trinity XXIX, ANF, V, 640-641. Irenaeus, Against Heresies III.241, ANF, I, 458. Tertullian, Against Praxses II, ANF, III, 600.

¹⁵⁴Origen, De Principiis I.3, ANF, IV, 255.

¹⁵⁵Ibid. Also, Cyprian, Epistles LXXV.14, ANF, V, 401.

Pentecostal Reflections/Perspectives

1. The radical teachings of Jesus concerning what it means to be one of His disciples are intended to be applied to every believer. Personal knowledge (*yada*) of God through Jesus is not optional in Christian conversion.
2. While comfort may be taken in the slow growth process of the disciples, their shortcomings must not be viewed as reason for our exemption from total surrender to His Lordship. Radical commitment should precede gradual development in faith and understanding rather than vice versa.
3. The New Testament is less concerned about formation than it is about transformation through personal relationship with Jesus.
4. Both of the New Testament themes of believer encounters with the Holy Spirit (transformation and empowerment) should be considered normative and actualized (in contrast to assumed) in the processes of initiation.

For Further Consideration/Amplification Topics that might have been added or amplified include ...

1. the significance of the community in the processes of formation.
2. the role of the human teacher in the processes of Christian formation.
3. the content of religious instruction.
4. the nature of covenant as formational.
5. the experiential/transformational nature of baptism .
6. the relationship between knowledge/insight and faith.
7. the relationship between formation and transformation as reflected in childhood and faith development.