

The Holy Gust on Skid Row—But Hardly a Surprise

Colleagues,

Brian Heinrich has been on these cyber-pages before. [Try “Brian” on the Crossings website internal Google engine to see how often.] He’s the “street priest” of the Lutheran Urban Mission Society [LUMS] on the seamy “East Side” [=Skid Row] of Vancouver, British Columbia. Brian’s a native Canadian, Semtex-grad (’83), my Teaching Assistant at that time in systematic theology. He was stellar then; even more so now. To see/read the details for yourself GO to the LUMS website <www.lums.ca> On Pentecost Sunday this year Canadian Anglicans publicly linked up with this Augsburg Confession Catholic by placing Brian on the Vancouver Cathedral roster as one of their own. We once spent a morning with him on the streets with his people. It was a different seminary from the one where I (allegedly) was Brian’s teacher. But where else can gusts blow, the Holy One included, if not out in the open, outside the walls? Which is Brian’s point below, his June 2006 LUMS message on Street Ministry. Read on. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

STREET MINISTRY ***VENI SANCTE SPIRITUS***

When the Spirit came & filled them on Pentecost the apostolic community spilled out onto the street effervescently overflowing.

The Spirit is that unconstrainable "idiom" of God that "bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8), uncaged & undomesticated. The Spirit is that idiom of God that defies being boxed & conveniently compartmentalized.

For example, while we regularly use the masculine pronoun to describe God, & we do have both the masculine gendered Father & the Son, the word for Spirit in both principal biblical languages is feminine. [Brian's apparently carried away grammatically—perhaps by the Holy Gust. "Pneuma" in Greek is a neuter noun, neither masculine nor feminine.] She refuses to conveniently fit into our limited descriptors.

Fire, Wind & Water, three of the four primordial elements, are used to represent the Spirit, & it is worth noting it is the three elements that are the most instable & mercurial that symbolize the Spirit. Neither fire, wind nor water is easily held. They slip through our fingers ungrasped. They are not as solid as earth.

Trying to grasp fire one is most likely to get singed! Cf. the prophetic text Peter exegetes in his first pentecost sermon—(Acts 2:17ff)/Joel 3:1-5 (but especially verses 3 & 4!) You can smell the smouldering doom! The Spirit isn't to be messed with! The Spirit should come with a warning label like we might see on household products: Danger! Flammable, BEWARE spontaneous combustion might occur!

Pentecost is the anniversary of my ordination ('83), confirmation ('69) & baptism ('54), & now this year I became an affiliate priest at Christ Church Cathedral [The Anglican center in Vancouver, British Columbia] on Pentecost as part of the LUMS/CCC covenant. I was invited to preach for the Pentecost liturgies at CCC, where I warned the parents & sponsors of the infants being baptized that morning of the

dangerous thing they were up to. Those baptized were immersed into Christ's death & singed by His Spirit. When my unknowing parents brought infant Brian to the font fifty-odd years ago little did they realize the potential. God took what they offered & I stand before you today as street priest. Don't mess with the fiery Spirit!

The Spirit nudged the fledgling apostolic community out from behind their locked-from-the-inside conclave, spilling them out onto the street. The Spirit shoved them out from hiding in their fears & filled & enabled them. "We are not inebriated (Acts 2:13ff) as you might suppose," Peter proclaims, "but enthused" [Greek: "en-theos-ed," God-filled]. And the whole rest of the book of Acts ("of the Apostles," but sometimes perhaps better called "the Acts of the Holy Spirit") it is the Spirit that drives & motivates the mission. It is the Spirit ("of Jesus" as the book of Acts consistently identifies Her) who directs where the missionaries shall & shan't go (Acts 13:2,3,4; 16:6-10).

It is the unconstrained Spirit of Jesus who defies the bounds of normal geography so that the newly deaconed Philip can be in the right place at the right time (Acts 8). It is the Spirit, that person of our God who colours outside the lines, who pushes the resistant early Hebrew Christian community to dare considering what was abhorrent to them, namely, welcoming & including aliens, foreigners, outsider, gentiles into the community (Acts 10ff). A huge transition, the impact of which cannot be overestimated on the fledgling apostolic community! And reminiscent of our own current struggles around inclusion of the threatening other.

At the end of the book of Acts the Spirit-driven mission reaches Rome, "the centre of the universe," but the intent is clear: this is not a terminus, but instead this is the launch

point for the continuing ramifications of the resurrection exploding out in expanding ripples to embrace the whole cosmos (cf. Mk. 16:15). So I lament as I ask myself, why is it today that the community of Jesus is popularly identified as being conservative, retrenchant, & even retrogressive, rather than Spirit nudged, peripheral & radical—almost inebriated (but actually enthused), downright edgy! Like the Spirit who animates us, wild & fierce.

We invoke the unconstrained Spirit at ordinations. There is a beautiful moment in the ordination liturgies where just before the bishop articulates the consecrating prayer the rites call for silent prayer. More is about to happen here than mere words can contain, only the ineffability of silence can say this. We dare not bind the Holy in this sacred moment.

There is a telling conclusion in the chapter “The Forms of the Ordained Ministry” in the renowned ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches: “Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry” [BEM]. After carefully couching all ministry in the context of the whole community, BEM goes on to articulate a preference for the threefold ministry of deacons, presbyters, & bishops; but then lastly it concludes under the title “Variety of Charisms”—“(t)he community which lives in the power of the Spirit will be characterized by a variety of charisms. The Spirit is the giver of diverse gifts which enrich the life of the community . . . (t)he ordained ministry, which is itself a charism, must not become a hindrance for the variety of these charisms. On the contrary, it will help the community to discover the gifts bestowed on it by the Holy Spirit & will equip members of the body to serve in a variety of ways. . . . In the history of the Church there have been times when the truth of the Gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders. Often new impulses could find their way into the life of the Church only in unusual ways. At times

reforms required a special ministry. The ordained ministers and the whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries."

In other words, we must make allowances for the uncontainable Spirit who keeps bursting out of the institutions we construct & Who will not be constrained & promises to keep taking us places beyond our imaginations, places we least expect!

In conclusion, I would be negligent if I didn't capitalize upon the detail that the Spirit nudged the first pentecosted community out ONTO THE STREET as the initial place of witness & mission. VENI SANCTE SPIRITUS, reanimate us in your mission in places we ourselves dare not go by ourselves.

*Your street priest
pastor brian*