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CHAPTER 26

Spirit

Mark Lewis Taylor

Some of the most dramatic sites for political theology arise from the interplay between Christian views of the Holy Spirit and African beliefs in spirits and mediumship. This is not just an issue in African Christianity. It is an interplay that has also catalyzed change for many diverse peoples thrown into diaspora along the Atlantic coasts of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. These changes have been as political and revolutionary as they have been religious.

Sites of such change include revolts and revolution in England during the seventeenth century, Atlantic coast riots and the "American revolution" in North America in the eighteenth century, and resistance movements for the abolition of slavery (in the Americas and Europe) throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 327–34).

One emblem of this partnership between Christian Holy Spirit and African spirits lies in the history of a saying attributed to John the Baptist about Jesus' coming work of the spirit. It is recorded in the first century's New Testament Gospels, portions of it still sung out by Bob Marley in the twentieth. The Baptist proclaimed that the spirit's work against arrogance and pride would be like what happens when "the axe is laid to the root" (Matt. 3: 10–11). In the English revolution, Levellers and Diggers would use this biblical phrase to rally the poor against the arrogant rich. Evangelicals and secular radicals used the phrase in their movements for social justice in Britain and the Caribbean. Jamaican-born abolitionists published a journal entitled *The Axe Laid to the Root* (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 301–18), in which numerous essays against slavery appeared. Bob Marley's song, written with Lee Perry, still resounds (Perry and Marley 1973: #2):

> If you are the big tree, let me tell you that
> We are the small axe, sharp and ready
> Ready to cut you down (well sharp)
> To cut you down.

The song was just one expression of Marley's Rastafarian spirituality, an African/Caribbean movement that interacted with Christian Spirit discourse amid political travail (Murrell et al. 1998: 326ff.; Beckford 1998).

In this chapter, I first seek to explain why and how Christian understandings of the Holy Spirit could be open to this interplay with African traditions that yield a spirit of political and liberating change. Second, I will highlight how the history of this partnership catalyzed a "mystical politics" in the revolutionary Atlantic. Finally, I will conclude by noting how the presence of this partnership and its concrete history might affect a future political theology of liberating spirit.

Holy Spirit: A Mystical Politics of Liberation

While theologians often speak of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, talk of the "Holy Spirit" has been hard to formalize as doctrine. One of the early church fathers writing on the Holy Spirit, Gregory of Nazianzus, had to confess the problem of elusive subject matter. "To be only slightly in error [about the Holy Spirit] was to be orthodox" (Pelikan 1971: 213).

It will be helpful here to follow just a bit of this error of orthodoxy. Amid the struggle with the elusive discourse of Holy Spirit, we can understand how this complex notion persistently emerges to speak of liberating communal change. This liberating function comes to the fore dramatically in settings of oppression and colonization, and this is what especially opened the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to partnership with the African notions of spirits that were deployed against oppressive structures like slavery (Ventura 1985: 113).

Three major sources of theological discourse about the Holy Spirit have steeped Christian ideas of the Holy Spirit in meanings of liberating practice of one sort or another. These are certain biblical emphases, a doctrinal dilemma in debates about "the person" of the Holy Spirit, and the imperial frame of early Jesus movements.

Biblical emphases

Many still read biblical references to the Holy Spirit as primarily having to do with extraordinary signs. Believers may think of miraculous workings of God, which are thought to involve a number of extra-body or psychic experiences, all defying established Western science's views of how things happen. These can all be grouped together as kinds of "spiritism."

The Bible abounds with many references to such spiritistic phenomena. The miracle stories about Jesus have often been read as miraculous, extraordinary signs. The writer of the Acts of the Apostles pauses to marvel at the signs and wonders performed by early Christians in the power of the Spirit.

These spiritistic phenomena, however, do not capture the meanings distinctive to biblical understandings of the Holy Spirit. Spiritistic phenomena, after all, are hardly unique to the Bible. From the time of Greek dramatists like Euripides or the Greek philosopher Democritus, marvelous powers and miraculous acts were regularly believed and depicted. Similarly, extraordinary spiritistic phenomena are not limited to the past. Glossolalia, for example, is a kind of spiritistic practice known in several religions and cultural contexts (Goodman 1972). To gain understanding of the Holy Spirit, biblical scholars have had to look beyond the sheer fact of extraordinary spiritism.

Biblical texts do not easily yield up a unified position on the meaning of the Holy Spirit, and certainly not all relevant passages can be examined here. Those who survey the whole range of biblical discourse on spirit, however, discern in it what I will term a "mystical communalism," in which "Holy Spirit" refers primarily to the mystery of God as intrinsic to, immanent in, communal life and development.

For the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, for example, there is a remembrance of the Hebrew scriptures' supposition that the Holy Spirit is God's power to perform special acts in history and community. These include acts of deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 3–14), and human acts of craftsmanship and artistic design (Exod. 35: 31–2). Here, the mystery of the spirit of God is not so much *above* as *in* these special and ordinary acts of history and culture.

When the writer of Luke and Acts summarizes diverse spiritistic wonders (healings, speaking in tongues, deliverances from prison, among others), the emphasis falls even then on the Christian *community's* specific power to execute concretely its basic tasks. New Testament scholar G. W. Lampe summarizes this tendency: "The Spirit *links together* and *binds into a single operation* of God, the whole series of events that began in the Jerusalem temple with the annunciation to Zechariah and reached a climax in the free proclamation of the kingdom of God in the capital city of the Gentile world by the leading apostle" (Lampe 1962: 633, emphasis added).

The notion of Holy Spirit as empowerer of community, a community that proclaims Christ, is also stressed in the writings of Paul and John. Paul, even when writing about seemingly individualistic and spiritistic phenomena, takes the Spirit as primarily Christ's presence in and among the faithful. A summary of Paul's logic here was ably given by New Testament theologian Herman Ridderbos:

> The thought is not that the Spirit first shows himself [*sic*] to individual believers, brings them together into one whole, and thus constitutes the body of Christ. . . . The sequence is accordingly the reverse: those who by virtue of the *corporate bond* have been united with Christ as the second Adam, have died and been buried with him, may know themselves to be dead to sin and alive to God, may also know themselves to be "in the Spirit." They are, *because included in this new life context*, no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. (Ridderbos 1975: 221, emphasis added)

The Johannine literature, although often referring to the Spirit as "from above," nevertheless presents the Spirit as personal presence and comforter,

dwelling with and in the community of love. It was the writer in the Johannine epistles who stressed that the one who does not love cannot love God (1 John 4: 20).

These biblical emphases, then, stress a biblical notion of the Holy Spirit that is integrally bound up with the creation and nurture of communities of agapic love (Outka 1972). The effect of this emphasis on community is not to override the mystical meanings of spirit, but to envision them as located in the experience of love in a communal ethos, and hence ethically relevant. It is a mystical practice, where transcending experiences of the sacred, paradoxically, spring up most dynamically in ways immanent to concrete human experiences of agapic community.

This is not a social reductionism, either in the sense of reducing the mystery of God "down to" *only* the social, or in the sense of reducing the mystery of the human individual to *only* social functions. Instead, both God and individual are located in, found in, known in, and come into their own fullest meanings within humans' relational ethos of agapic love. Thus these biblical emphases have blended the mystical with the social, in a mystical communalism.

A doctrinal dilemma

Centuries of doctrinal development have been devoted to explaining claims that the Holy Spirit is a unique "person" in a divine Trinity. New Testament analysts have routinely pointed out that the term "Holy Spirit" is, in the scriptures, less "a person," and more a "mysterious power of God," "mode of God's activity," "distinctive endowment of God to people," or again, a "mode of God's operation in the church" (Lampe 1962: 626).

What is particularly striking about the attempts to develop the Holy Spirit as person is their arrival at a dilemma, the only way out of which seems to be through a return to some of the biblical emphases summarized in my previous section, thus underscoring a mystical–communal interpretation of the Holy Spirit.

Consider the nature of the dilemma. On the one hand, Christian theologians, in accord with orthodox trinitarian formulas, have long discussed the Holy Spirit as one of three "persons" in a Godhead. On the other hand, most efforts to fill out a view of the person-like quality of this "third person" flounder, providing, mainly, various portrayals of a general, divine force and presence.

Both horns of this dilemma are problematic. If one holds to the claim of the first horn, one fails to give the Holy Spirit a persuasive sense of being a "person." It certainly does not have the symbolic clarity given by terms like "Father" and "Son," the names used for the other two persons in the Trinity. Those theologians who do reason their way to some argument that the Holy Spirit is a person usually display doctrinal argumentation so complex and intricate that it is graspable only in the rarefied atmosphere of a dogmatic elite.

The claim of the other horn of the dilemma, which may seem like a necessity given the failures to clarify the "person" of the Holy Spirit, is also unsatisfactory. This is because the language left over for referring to the Holy Spirit, that of a general divine force and presence, depersonalizes Christian discourse about divine spirit. Talk of the Holy Spirit as "person" at least had a virtue of satisfying people's need for symbols of God and of Spirit, which deployed personal imagery. As anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion have emphasized, there seems to exist, interculturally, a human drive to order social life in accord with some symbol system that relates that social life to an ultimate reality portrayed in terms of personal spirits (Douglas 1970: 45). Some theologians, however, actually prefer impersonal pronouns for the Spirit, to signify the Spirit's work in all creation – as force, power, the movement of the non-human. Paul Tillich's comprehensive correlation of "Spirit" with "Life" is just one well-known example (Tillich 1967: III, 11–294).

Discourse about the Holy Spirit as person did not speak to this need for impersonal metaphors, unless it was articulated in relation to the power of the Creator in the creation. Yet the Holy Spirit as person persisted, in spite of its troubling dilemma and rarefied doctrinal conceptuality, because it was a key place in Christian symbols where the faithful located those aspects of their personal talk about God that could not be adequately included under the personal imagery of Father and Son.

Resulting from this dilemma is a challenge to theologians: how to acknowledge the failure of traditional talk about the Holy Spirit as person, without depriving Christians of a person-like symbolic imagery of spirit. Such a deprivation may seem to be no loss, except that not only does it tend to consign the Holy Spirit to becoming something like what Joseph Haroutunian called an "oblong blur," it also leaves many to reach for repersonalizations of spirit discourse that yield superstitious notions of the Holy Spirit, as "friendly ghost" or personal "guardian angel" (Haroutunian 1975: 319–20). Ghosts and guardian angels may be welcome in some personal mythologies, but they rarely enable a communally shared understanding of the Holy Spirit.

The way forward to meeting the challenge posed by the dilemma is to allow the notion of person, when used for the divine life, to be reconstructed by the "personal" mystical communalism of the biblical narratives. That is to say, the "personal" nature of spirit is understood less as discrete ego, and more in the cultural terms of relation. In these latter terms, a person is constituted by the mutual relations to others. To be a person is to be a self within multiple and changing relations, in nature and diverse human contexts (Tillich 1967: I, 168–70; MacMurray 1961). On this model, the Holy Spirit is "inter-person." It is divine personal presence, but a presence that is interpersonal, relational, inter-subjective. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the flourishing of such a view of the self lies in the tendency in Jamaican vernacular to refer to one's self in conversation as "I-an'-I" (Murrell et al. 1998: 107ff.). St. Augustine is exemplary of doctrinal debate already pointing in the direction of this interaction

between beings as constituting the "person(s)" of the Holy Spirit. In his *De Trinitate*, he experimented with imagery of the first person (the Father) as the "Lover," the second person (the Son) as the "Beloved," giving to the third person, the role of "Love" between them (Schaff 1956: 215–17).

More recently, other theologians have proposed renderings of the interpersonal meaning of Holy Spirit. One of the most radical formulations of the social character of the mystery of Holy Spirit was given by Schleiermacher who even seemed, at points, to identify the Holy Spirit with the church's life (Schleiermacher 1976: 560–1). In the twentieth century, Tillich is well known for frequently discussing the Holy Spirit as "Spiritual Community," an ideal community realized in history as one of faith and love, under the impact of "the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ" (Tillich 1967: II, 86–245 *passim*).

Twentieth-century liberation theologians, such as those in Latin America, or contemporary feminist theologians, have also stressed the interpersonal as the locus of the Holy Spirit. For Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Holy Spirit refers primarily to divine presence in the "specific fabric of human relationships, in persons who are in concrete historical situations" (Gutiérrez 1988: 109). Feminist theologian Sallie McFague argues that feminists see the Holy Spirit as "a central, if not primary, 'name' for God," but emphasizes the spirit of God as "basically and radically immanent" and *in relations* of "love and empowerment, of life and liberty, for people and for the natural world" (McFague 1996: 147).

In all these ways, the person-like imagery of divine spirit is preserved but the notion of "Holy Spirit as person" is refocused as *inter*personal. The liberation and feminist readings, however, draw from still another source, one giving to Holy Spirit not just a mystical communal interpersonalism but also a pointed and liberating focus. To this we now turn.

Imperial framing of early Jesus movements

The imperial context of the Jesus movements tends to give their spirit discourse another trait. The biblical narrative's view of the Spirit as an agapic mystical communalism can be seen as related to conflicts of power. Hence, the Spirit's mystical communalism is also a mystical politics.

Consider the imperial frame. Jesus' life and work were played out in Galilee and Judea, under a Roman rule and occupation fusing local Herodian kings and religious elites into a ruling apparatus centered on a temple–state system in Jerusalem (Mack 1995). Jesus' closeness to agrarian life and Galilean peoples gave his work a distinctive spiritual character that put him in tension with this ruling apparatus and its religious supporters (Sawicki 2000).

Galilee was a site that was a crossroads of imperial conflict, and its agrarian peoples were long subordinated to meeting the economic and political needs of empire. They also had generated years of resistance to empire (Horsley 1995: 275–6). Jesus, too, would be seen as marginal to the ruling religious and political elites centered on the temple-state in Jerusalem.

Many official churches have stripped their message of much of its political meaning, but it was intrinsic to the early Jesus movement. The very notion of "Gospel," as applied to Jesus' message, for example, was derived from the Roman imperial discourse, where it was used for the "glad tidings" that conquering generals would announce to the citizens after battle (Myers 1988: 123–4). Its appropriation for Jesus' basic message suggests an overall challenge to the religion and politics of the standing imperial order.

There are many more signs of the anti-imperial character of the Jesus movement than can be treated in this essay. We might list just a few: the Gospel presentations of Jesus as contesting the temple-state; Mark's not-so-veiled suggestion that Jesus was in opposition to Roman occupying soldiers with his story of Jesus' exorcism of a demon named "Legion"; Jesus' death by crucifixion, a mode of execution reserved for the seditious who threatened the religiously backed imperial order; the apostle Paul's centering his message on the imperially distasteful notion that a shamed crucified one could be "Lord" (*kyrios*) or "Savior" (*soter*), terms traditionally used for the Caesars.

Even in the well-known passage about the Holy Spirit descending upon believers on the fifth Sunday after Easter ("Pentecost"), we can note the counter-imperial implications of the Spirit's emergence. As narrated in Acts 2, people from many lands are described as hearing the new message about Jesus, and hearing it in their own languages. Most traditional interpreters focus on this event in its "extraordinariness," i.e. the strangeness of many hearing in their own diverse tongues. The real marvel, however, is not the surprising translation of a message into many tongues, but that the multilinguistic understanding among many peoples proceeds *from Galileans* (Acts 2: 7). This suggests also a new polity, one present and emergent from the striking anti-imperial space of tiny resistant Galilee.

When one recalls the content of the message of the Jesus figure, whom the writer of Luke and Acts says was working in the "power of the Spirit" (Luke 4: 14), the Galilean interest in contesting the political reach of empire is strong indeed. Luke's Jesus is dramatically portrayed as one who reaches back to the prophets in order to advance a radically inclusive message of liberation.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4: 18)

This liberating message etches into the Bible's mystical communalism of agapic practice a strong anti-imperial posture and practice.

The community of spirit in the Jesus movement, therefore, was profoundly anti-imperial in nature, indeed was such almost by definition of context. It tended to develop a communal ethos that rejected the establishment of hierarchical power (Schüssler Fiorenza 1993: 94; cf. Horsley and Silberman 1997:

163–83). It was marked by a restless political contentiousness; a series of large and small daily resistances to oppressive powers, and a building of new community for and among repressed groups (Sawicki 2000: 172–4). This gave the Spirit of God in Christian community a liberationist character, and this means that the mystical communion of agapic praxis had a strong political element.

That the Spirit was liberating or freeing signified also, of course, that the divine life was, in itself (and not just for the world), distinguished by that freedom. Hence the divine life that is believed to act in history, etched deeply into the dynamism and structure of all creation, is a veritable pulsing of freedom, a resource for catalyzing change in the present (to varying degrees) or change in an eschatological or apocalyptic future (Tillich 1967: I, 232–3).

Leveling Spirit: Liberating Struggle in the Revolutionary Atlantic

Because the mystical political strains of Christian spirit discourse cannot be missed, it should not be surprising that restless and repressed groups throughout history should find Christianity's spirit discourse pertinent to their struggles.

In this section, I have two aims. First, I seek to give some examples of how the mystical political dimensions of Christian spirit discourse have actually been present as historical practice, not merely as only a plausible conceptual theology as presented in the first section of the essay. Second, I want to show that the concrete history of a mystical politics can be found within and in close contact to Western Christianity, especially in the spirit discourses that unite African and Christian themes, as I noted at the outset.

Both of these aims can be achieved by looking first to the Levellers and Diggers of the English revolution and then following ways in which they were brought into contact and mutual dialogue with African peoples during the history of "the revolutionary Atlantic" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). This is a long and complex, multicultural history, and I cannot do full justice to it here. I highlight just a few features.

We might introduce the mystical politics at work in history through the lament by James Madison, a key architect of the US Constitution and one of the early US presidents. In 1787 he warned of certain groups who had an excessive love of liberty, a "leveling spirit." Who were these folk? According to Linebaugh and Rediker, they were a "motley crew" of secular and religious radicals who had been fomenting revolutionary change all around the Atlantic coasts for nearly two centuries (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 211–47). Madison was not the only one nervous about the leveling spirit. British admirals worried about rebels and sailors steeped in revolutionary spirit, "almost Levellers," said one admiral (pp. 215, 236). Let us follow this talk of "leveling spirit" into the contexts of religious radicalism of seventeenth-century England.

The English fight for the commons

In late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English merchant classes and landowners took advantage of new national and international market opportunities. To do this, however, they had to forcibly evict masses of people from their homelands and redeploy their labor power for other economic projects at new sites (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 17).

In England, this occurred in a most tumultuous way when the more powerful classes began the practice of enclosure, that is, enclosing and claiming possession for their own use of arable lands previously held in common. Enclosure required the eviction of many smallholders, the displacement of rural tenants, and the casting out of thousands from their land. This was a colossal shift: "a quarter of the land in England was enclosed" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 17). The land was cleared of trees, marshes were drained and fields were hedged, resulting in an overall "obliteration of the commoning *habitus*," such that by the end of the seventeenth century "only an eighth of England remained wooded" (p. 43). For those who were not "redeployed" to other locations or sent off across the seas, there was the terror of being abandoned without work, land or credit to a life of vagabondage, becoming subject to "the merciless cruelty of a labor and criminal code as severe and terrifying as any that had yet appeared in modern history" (p. 18).

It was in this setting that the Levellers and Diggers were born, and "the leveling spirit" that Madison warned about took rise. "Levellers" was a name first used in the Midlands Revolt of 1607, when many threatened by the expropriations took direct action to remove the enclosures. Their direct actions often merged with those who became known as "Diggers," so named because their actions as soon-to-be dispossessed people included filling in the ditches newly dug for the enclosing hedges, and working common land after enclosure (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 18; Bradstock 1997: 72–5).

The Levellers and Diggers disseminated their ideas in several tracts and manifestoes of the seventeenth century: *A Light Shining in Buckinghamshire: A Discovery of the Main Grounds and Original Causes of All the Slavery In the World, but Chiefly in England* (1648); *The True Leveller's Standard Advanced* ("The Digger Manifesto") of 1649; and, in May 1649, the *Agreement of the Free People of England* (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 85, 101, 235).

A key writer during this period, and exemplary of the mix of political radicalism and spirit discourse, is Gerard Winstanley. He is often described as "the most articulate voice of revolution during the late 1640s" in England:

> He opposed slavery, dispossession, the destruction of the commons, poverty, wage labor, private property, and the death penalty. He was not the first person to come up with a rational plan for social reconstruction, but he was, as Christopher Hill has noted, the first to express such a plan in the vernacular and to call on a particular social class – the common people – to put it into action. (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 140)

It was Winstanley who, referring to the hedges of the vicious enclosure process, saw that "The teeth of *all nations* have been set on edge by this sour grape, the covetous murdering sword." He linked expropriation *in England* to Gambia's and Barbados' suffering worked *by England* and so "moved toward a planetary consciousness of class" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 141). He preached a future deliverance arising "from among the poor common people" in his texts, for example *A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England* (1649).

The future deliverance Winstanley preached depended on the coming of an "age of Spirit" that he awaited (Knott 1980: 86). This Spirit, for all its radical, transformative potential, was seen as a markedly communal set of events (Bradstock 1997: 89). The Spirit lived in a "glorious liberty," which the Apostle Paul wrote of in Rom. 8, but which was already present in people's "groaning," enabling their moving from the "first fruits" tasted now to a future realization. This passage on the Holy Spirit was crucial to Winstanley's millennialism, and he interlaced quotations of the Spirit passages in Rom. 8 throughout all his writings (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 110–11). He closed one of his tracts with these words: "And here I end, having put my Arm as far as my strength will go to advance Righteousness: I have Writ, I have Acted, I have Peace: and now I must wait to see the Spirit do his own work in the hearts of others." (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 103).

Winstanley's work and hope were vigorously Spirit-oriented. Other words of his about the Spirit take us to the next section. Elsewhere, he wrote: "Now the Spirit spreading itself from East to West, from North to South in sons and daughters is everlasting, and never dies: but is still everlasting, and rising higher and higher in manifesting himself in and to mankind" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 142).

The Levellers at sea

This religious radicalism was disseminated all around the Atlantic in the late seventeenth century, especially when the English ship attained the notable distinction of being "the engine of commerce, the machine of empire." Ships were floating factories that united several of the major modes of production organized by new capitalist forces for the exploitation of labor (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 149).

The ship, however, also became a factory producing interaction between rebels and disenchanted workers from all around the Atlantic. The Levellers and Diggers, displaced from their commons in England, entered this mix of radicals at sea. They were an astonishingly diverse lot, yet shared a fundamental sense of exploitation and rage, especially provoked by the injustice of forced impressments into navies (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 228–36). Africans and African Americans, escaped from slavery and/or always vulnerable to it, added additional vigor and determination to maritime resistance.

Sailors' resistance often culminated in the mutinies and organized resistance of piracy. Pirates, much maligned by centuries of European scholars and story-tellers, have been re-presented by recent historians like Linebaugh and Rediker as having some surprising traits. Pirates' ships were democratic spaces in an undemocratic age, making their captains' governance dependent upon majority vote. They were egalitarian in a hierarchical age, dividing their loot and stolen goods in a new equal fashion, "leveling" the wage inequality that existed in almost all other maritime workplaces (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 162–7). Many free blacks and runaway slaves found refuge in the pirate ships, "multiracial maroon communities, in which rebels used the high seas as other [runaways] used the mountains and jungles" (p. 167).

In new radical community with the spiritualities and radicalism of the peoples of the sea, the Levellers kept alive the dream of the commons which had been lost not only in England but in other contexts as well.

> the commons were more than a specific English agrarian practice or its American variants: the same concept underlay the clachan [Scottish and Irish hamlet], the sept [branch of a family clan], the rundale [a joint occupation of land, also in early Irish and Scottish contexts], the West African village, and the indigenous tradition of long fallow agriculture of Native Americans – *in other words it encompassed all those parts of the Earth that remained unprivatized, unenclosed, a noncommodity, a support for the manifold human values of mutuality.* (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 26, emphasis added)

The valuing of the commons here is no mere romanticization of organic solidarity and communal utopia. On the contrary: for those with leveling spirit at sea and in seaports around the Atlantic, the commons was a way of life adopted for survival. The alternative, which had so cruelly been meted out to them, was displacement, torture, and death.

Thus it was that diverse groups of the Levellers at sea, in tandem with groups from all around the Atlantic, formed a multicultural "motley crew" of the world's displaced peoples, a "hydrarchy" (rule of the waters) from below, which grew up to rival the hydrarchy from above, British maritime and military systems. The leveling motley crew helped mobilize mass resistance to poor wages and unjust working conditions either side of the Atlantic. They led urban mobs in London, fomented many of the riots in seaport towns of the North American colonies, and built the revolutionary climate that informed the less revolutionary sorts like Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson.

Indeed, Linebaugh and Rediker describe this motley crew of the world's enspirited slaves, sailors, and commoners as "the driving force of the revolutionary crisis in the 1760s and 1770s" (2000: 212). This "motley crew" of the displaced, English and African, slaves and sailors, were the real architects of American revolution in the late seventeenth century, creating a revolutionary ethos all along North America's Atlantic coast (p. 214). It was among such as these that Madison feared a "leveling spirit."

Historically, the fusion of Christian and African mystical politics, that liberating spirit of the Levellers, is dramatically present in the Jamaican Robert Wedderburn. I have already referred to the journal he edited, *The Axe Laid to the Root*, which "gave life to a transatlantic intellectual dialogue that synthesized African, American, and European voices" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 306). The newspaper's title was found preached from Jamaica to New York, where runaway slaves are said to have heard of the inspiring "small axe." In his writings, not only did Wedderburn remember and record his own slave family's personal terror in Jamaica, he also witnessed the disciplinary terror and horrific punishments meted out to defenders of the commons, whether on the Caribbean plantation or the maritime ship. In England, he joined a number of workers' movements, abolitionist efforts, and mutinies. Coming from Jamaica to England, and journeying back to the Africanized Caribbean (also a site for Asian and indigenous peoples), Wedderburn imbibed the leveling principles and spirit, and enriched them with the spiritual life and vitality of African peoples. In correspondence back to Jamaica from England, he challenged his readers to recall "the purity of the maroons," that is, their intrepid struggle for abolition and freedom.

Wedderburn was a crucial linchpin in an emerging spiritual politics of the revolutionary Atlantic. Through his writings on African spirituality, early Christianity, Caribbean revivalism, and slave religion, Wedderburn

> linked through time the communist Christian in the ancient Near East with the Leveller in England and with the Native Baptist in Jamaica. He linked through space the slave and the maroon with the sailor and the dockworker, with the commoner and the artisan and the factory worker; . . . he linked the slave with the working-class and middle-class opponent of slavery in the metropolis. He was the kind of person for whom "the idea of abolishing the slave trade is connected to the leveling system and the rights of man." (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 326)

Wedderburn is a dramatic figure who not only displays the mystical politics of liberating spirit to be very much a historical phenomenon, but who, in his person, also embodies the multicontinental working of Spirit in which Winstanley had put his hopes.

Toward a Political Theology of Liberating Spirit

I conclude by briefly noting four major lines of inquiry that invite further development, given the partnership of Christian, African, and other spirit discourses of liberating struggle in the revolutionary Atlantic.

Liberation theology in the North Atlantic

The political orientation of this legacy of Christian spirit discourse means that there are vital and longstanding traditions of "liberation theology" in the North

Atlantic that need to be explored. This has two consequences. First, it should blur the distinction often made between so-called first world "political theology" and third world "liberation theology." The traditions of the North Atlantic have long had their liberation theologies among communities of the displaced and poor. Many theological educators in North American settings often view liberation theology as having its primary focus "abroad" in developing countries of, say, Latin America. We need to acknowledge not only the black theologies of liberation and feminist liberation theologies, but also the existence of many elements of liberating spirit at work among communities of the poor in the United States and Europe. It is time for theologians to acknowledge that reality, perhaps following the important work of Andrew Bradstock's study of Müntzer and Winstanley in *Faith in the Revolution* (1997).

Second, contemporary political and liberation theology stands to be enriched by the content of these North Atlantic spirit traditions. Following in the spirit discourse of the Levellers and Diggers, for example, theologians today might start thinking anew on theological ideas that were crucial to their spirituality of liberating struggle: (a) the antinomianism they cultivated from scriptures like "All things are lawful for me" (1 Cor. 10: 23), which African slaves and abolitionists read as license to foment change for the enslaved and exploited everywhere (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 81, 235); (b) the notion of "the glory of God," a bestowal of Spirit that was interpreted as breaking every yoke of oppression, held dear by Africans throughout the revolutionary Atlantic, such as the so-called "Blackymore Maide named Francis" in Bristol, England (pp. 83–4, 99); (c) the belief that "God is no respecter of persons" in the sending of the Spirit, a notion found in the Digger Manifesto of 1649 and in the denunciations against racism by Marcus Garvey in 1926 (p. 100); and (d) the biblical notion of jubilee, which Christian spirituality established as a panethnic and international discourse (p. 320). The message of jubilee was part of a "discourse of deliverance," flowing through the Leveller/Digger liberation theologies and well "fortified by African-American preachers such as Sambo Scriven, who traveled to the Bahamas, George Liele, who went to Jamaica, and John Marrant, who preached in London and Nova Scotia" (p. 268). Historians have good cause to link the biblical "trumpet of jubilee" to the "shell-blow jubilee" of Jamaica and Haitian slave resistance (p. 326).

Intercontinental and intercultural community

The sites analyzed as "spiritual" communities, inviting the work of political theology, need to become intercontinental and intercultural ones. The spirit that thrives among peoples in resistance is associated with their roles as shifting, often forcibly displaced, moving from place to place, mixing cultural ways from continent to continent. This was certainly the case for the spirit at work among the Levellers, Diggers, slaves, and sailors in Africa and the Americas. There is sometimes a tendency to see liberation and political theology through the lens

of a kind of contextualism, which links theological discourses to bounded and landed settings. To follow the spirit of resistance, however, theologians will also need to analyze the culturally and continentally hybrid worlds of peoples on the move across lands and seas. Future political and liberation theologies, perhaps especially in the age of globalized culture and power, will need to work from a much more fluid sense of contextuality.

Charismatic and pentecostal groups

The work of this chapter suggests that political and liberation theologies would also do well to intensify their studies of various charismatic and pentecostal groups, especially in communities of the poor, in order to explore new fusions of spirit with liberating politics. Especially in the United States, there has been a tendency to see pentecostal emphases on the Holy Spirit as fusing with politics only on the political right, but the history explored in this essay suggests otherwise. Indeed, for some time now scholars have had to take note of how pentecostal discourses, usually seen as "other-worldly" actually have political functions, including liberating ones. The groundbreaking work of Robert Beckford in Britain – *Jesus is Dread* (1998) and *Dread and Pentecostal* (2000) – is just one example. Recent actions by neopentecostal indigenous evangelicals in Ecuador, jousting with neoliberal policies of the transnational market, suggests that this Spirit-led radicalism is alive as a mode of resistance elsewhere as well, and deployed by diverse peoples (Ainger 2001; Batista 2000).

The interreligious character of the Spirit

Finally, the interactive and fluid locations toward which I have sent political theology in this essay require that the Spirit be reflected on, even by Christian liberation and political theologians, in its fully interreligious character. Recall that as the "leveling spirit" arose amid English Levellers and Diggers, and then interacted with political and spiritual aspirations of slaves, indentured servants, sailors, soldiers, and the disenfranchised from around the Atlantic, the "Spirit" or "spirits" invoked rarely belonged to any one religious tradition. They certainly were not simply Christian, Yoruban, Quechua, or Vodun, though all of these could feed the spirit discourse of a mystical politics of resistance. As with Marley's "Small Axe," and the centuries of tradition that lie behind that song's idea, the Spirit of resistance fused its vitality and character by crossing the many religious languages, just as cultures and continents were crossed. The revolutionary Atlantic challenges political theology, then, to enter into the full and creative syncretism of religious expression deployed by communities in struggle for liberation.

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CHAPTER 27

Church

William T. Cavanaugh

In one way or another, all political theologies at the end of the twentieth century can be read as so many attempts to come to grips with the death of Christendom without simply acquiescing in the privatization of the church. Nevertheless, Christian political theology has strangely neglected the topic of the church. This neglect is strange from the point of view of theology, but perfectly understandable from the point of view of politics in the modern liberal nation-state. From the latter point of view, politics has been emancipated and properly differentiated from theology. Politics takes place in an autonomous, secular sphere, established on its own foundations. The church may or may not contribute to this process in various ways, but secular history and salvation history are two distinct processes. Even for most theologians who do not accept the Enlightenment story of secularization, the end of Christendom is to be accepted as the proper separation of the church from worldly power. The politics of the nation-state appears as a universal, encompassing all citizens regardless of their other affiliations. The church, in contrast, is a particular association, one of many that inhabit civil society. To base a politics in the church would be to set politics on a particularist and sectarian footing. The church may therefore make some contribution to the larger political life, but is not itself a political body.

In this essay I contend that a full theological understanding of the church requires us to refuse this political marginalization of the church. Any adequate ecclesiology must acknowledge the political implications of two crucial theological data: first, there is no separate history of politics apart from the history of salvation; and second, the church is indispensable to the history of salvation.

Israel and the Body of Christ

Unless we anachronistically read a Weberian definition of politics – that is, the idea that politics is defined as having to do with attaining and maintaining power