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A Study of Numinous Experience

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A STUDY
OF
NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE

by
Dama C. Cofield

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

It has been said that readers of a book deserve to know the author's reasons for writing it. To the extent to which this is true, the same might be said in behalf of readers of a thesis.

For the past ten years I have worked in the area of Christian education in an ecumenical context. This has afforded me the privilege of participating in many communities of faith as well as the challenge of ministry and leadership in diverse situations. These responsibilities, involving me in the lives and personalities of fellow human beings and the necessity of personal growth to meet the demands of my own life's situations have forced me to examine repeatedly the premises of my own faith and its relevance to life. Concrete situations presented needs and strivings which could not be resolved with currently held intellectual and theological answers. The whole business of living creatively with any degree of freedom and fulfillment demanded not only a more profound assessment of the human condition but also a more relevant interpretation of the divine answer. Of what good was it to say "Thus saith the Lord" if it made no actual difference in the human situation? And,
when it did make a difference, what dynamics contributed to effectiveness?

As I presented the content of the Christian religion to different age levels and in various situations, I found myself confronted, sometimes unwillingly, by implications which the life process itself did not verify. Wherein was the lack? Why did persons in the Christian community realize limitedly the aspects of enriched personality set forth as a norm in the New Testament? Where were the streams of "living water" which should bring vitality? Was today's culture so destructive and demanding that realistically the individual and the church should not expect too much from the Christian faith? Did the transformations attributed to early followers present impossible ideals for today's society? How valid were those early claims to the power of the Gospel? Is the same power available and in evidence today? The Christian faith, as interpreted through the New Testament writings, makes some tremendous claims for the life of man. It seemed to me that we in the church were giving lip service to great promises, but serious observation revealed a lack of efficacy or a need for a more honest appraisal. As a Christian educator and teacher, as well as in personal discipleship, I sought understanding which would enable me to realize increased effectiveness in my ministry and a greater affirmation in
my personal life.

Studies in the area of personality theory and pastoral counseling have brought these questions sharply into focus for me, and I have been equipped to examine more realistically my own assumptions from which some of these questions arose. A more valid understanding of the nature of man gave rise to questions which prompted me to look for more pertinent theological answers. A broader base, afforded by psychological studies, provided me with the perspective from which I could examine more honestly and comprehensively the theological framework from which I interpreted my faith.

In the dialogue which has ensued I have been stimulated time and again to observation, study, and wonder by the dynamics of Christian growth. Why does the Christian faith effect transformation in one life, unloosing power to love and live creatively and redemptively, and leave another life relatively unchanged? What is the factor that makes the difference between two persons outwardly subscribing to the same structure of faith but at opposite poles in inner resources and affirmation of life? Man's limitations and possibilities point again and again to the necessity of the comprehension and apprehension of God-for-man and God-in-man. When this is effective, how is it psychologically experienced? What is the difference subjectively that causes one
person to respond with his whole being and realize to
great degree his essential nature while another may
strive unsuccessfully or be content with only a super­
ficial expression of Christian experience? Or is it a
subjective difference? What is taking place within
the inner man which results in the resolution of conflict,
creative expression, genuine love and self-giving for
others? How does the individual perceive what is taking
place? How does a person experience spiritual growth or
his capacity to transcend? Wherein lies the dynamics?

My interest in the growth of personality in the
context of the Christian faith has encouraged me to choose
an area for thesis research which will assist me in ex­
ploring and examining the process by which man's encounter
with God through Jesus Christ is experienced psychologi­
cally as man himself views what is happening in him,
through him, or to him. When man feels he has actually
grown beyond what he previously was or has been endowed
with that which he has not formerly possessed, how does
he feel or experience the transformation? To what does
he attribute the change?

It is my hypothesis that dynamics contributing to
the fulfillment of man's nature, resulting in creative
living and wholeness, stem from the impact of the Divine
Presence on the human personality in numinous experience.

"Numinous," a term first used by Rudolf Otto in his
book *The Idea of the Holy* is derived from the Latin word *numen* and is used by him to denote a category of value or state of mind in which man is aware, senses, or experiences the *numen praesens*, or God present. Otto uses the term to describe both man's capacity to apprehend the presence of the numen and the impact or evoking power of the numen. He emphasizes the affective states experienced by a person, especially as God is experienced as Wholly Other, full of mystery, fascination, and awe.

Numinous, as used in the following pages, will also be indicative of experiences in which man is aware or conscious of the presence of God. It will, however, be seen as the functioning of man as created spirit in encounter with God as Spirit. As such, numinous will be viewed as primarily spiritual; mental and affective responses will reflect the spiritual dynamics.

Following an examination of the theological premises on which a construction of a view of man as spirit is based, the contribution of the numinous to man in the Biblical tradition will be viewed. This will be followed by an analysis of research conducted among members of Protestant churches today in exploration of the extent and contribution of numinous experience.
CHAPTER II
SPIRIT AND NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE

A consideration of numinous experience necessitates an investigation into the nature of man. What is man that God is mindful of him? How is he constituted so that his being may feel it is invaded by his Creator? How can a created being know or experience relationship or intercourse with the One Who created him? What is the common ground of meeting? Popular theology speaks much of the meaning of persons and the I-Thou relationship and the dynamics of personal encounter; a deeper exploration into the foundation for these concepts leads one to the dimension of spirit.

What is spirit? To that question comes the traditional answer, "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."1 God is Spirit; man was made in His image; and from that point of reference spirit and man find affinity. Theologians and philosophers alike have wrestled with the concept of spirit. It has been exposed to more tortuous interpretations, greater extremes in meaning, periodic neglect, and obscurity than any other term attributed

1John 4:24.
to a dimension of human life. Consequently, it is with a great awareness of the limits of finite understanding that one explores or seeks meaning in this dimension. No study can hope to be thorough or complete, and an answer always seems to lead to another question, and arriving at any destination necessitates the exclusion of many contingent factors.

It is hoped, therefore, that the reader will bear in mind that, although for the purposes of this thesis one facet of life will seem to be lifted out of context and other very meaningful experiences may seem minimized to the detriment of all of life, this is necessary for the sake of closer examination and is not a denial of the importance of other aspects of man's life and faith.

Human spirit has found its source of meaning in the divine Spirit, and inasmuch as the Christian church has often felt safer to leave the Holy Spirit in relative obscurity, the human spirit has also lost its heritage. Doctrinal interpretations emphasizing the sole efficacy of grace to the point of annihilating man's responsibility have also impoverished the concept of human spirit. To some the eradication of human spirit completely has seemed more consistent with their views of the nature of God. Those who posit a human spirit take different views as to the nature and function of man's spirit. To some it is merely the psychological self, a constellation of
specific factors; some like to think of it as a "piece" of the divine Spirit; others, the source of freedom, the mark of transcendence, or the uniqueness of man. The Protestant church in general, while proclaiming its belief in the nature of man as spirit, has failed to realize the possibilities in man to rise to greater heights on one hand through the medium of spirit, and, conversely, through lack of understanding, has expected too much from man unaware of the dependency of created spirit.

SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Spirit is first encountered in the Biblical material in the second verse in the Old Testament: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Hebrew word used here for spirit is ruach. It is derived from a root meaning to breathe, and from the first it was used to signify not only the wind or breath, but also the spirit of life, the life-sustaining principle which pervades the cosmos as well as the mysterious, animating breath which gives vitality to the human body. In a secondary sense, it carried the idea of power or energy, both in the cosmos and in animate creation. From the

2Gen. 1:2.
context of Genesis 1:2 ruach here appears to denote the divine, vitalizing energy. This meaning is found in many of the instances in which the word is used in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 2:7 we read: "And the Lord God... breathed into his nostrils the ruach of life; and man became a living soul." From the first ruach was used to refer to the spirit or principle of life in man. The dust-formed man was inanimate until he received life from God. The ruach or spirit of life made man a living being. It enabled him to function. It was not a separate entity coming to reside in his brain or body; it was the life force which permeated or activated all dimensions of his being. Creation was sustained by the activity of spirit: "If he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust."3

In the Old Testament ruach was not limited to these two meanings or always associated with God or man. In the primitive Hebrew mind it was used to explain all kinds of extraordinary phenomena: physical phenomena, air in motion, the wind; physiological phenomena, the breath of animals and man; psychical connotations, emotional and mental experiences of human beings; and supernatural demonstrations, agencies

3Job 34:14,15.
operating upon man from without and beyond. In these primitive manifestations of spirit its marks were super-normal energy or behavior, often accompanied by ecstasy and inarticulate utterance. There were no ethical implications in the beginning.

As the Hebrew culture advanced beyond its animistic beginnings, these phenomena were brought under the control of Yahweh and the ruach responsible became that of Yahweh's and took on the same moralistic context. Whenever He was perceived to be present, His ruach was in their midst, and His presence was known by His activity. The spirit of God was an active power with purpose, achieving moral and religious ends. Its ways were beyond comprehension, inscrutable to human minds. It was not necessarily logical, predictable, or consistent.

As the Hebrew concept of God matured, the ethical consciousness of the early prophets seemed constrained to subdue the more non-rational elements of the Spirit even to the extent of ignoring it altogether. Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah preferred to attribute their authority to the Lord. The later Isaiah and Ezekiel reclaimed the inspiration of the spirit as the Spirit of the Lord. Its function was to accomplish the will of God and be seen in the light of His divine character. Henceforward the Spirit is controlled by developments in the Hebrew thought of God Himself.
As the word for spirit had a theological development, so also was its meaning enhanced anthropologically. Whereas at first it denoted an invasive energy coming from the supernatural realm, it gradually was used also to suggest other manifestations of energy in which man gave expression to his life. When the weary and thirsty Samson found water and drank, "his spirit returned and he lived."\(^4\) "And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom ..., there was no more spirit in her."\(^5\) The Psalmist cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."\(^6\) The term thus became naturalized in man's life as it had been supernaturalized in God's. Man's spirit was indicative of the intensity or quality of the life force in him. As an aspect of man's life, it was sustained by the spirit of God, as all of man's being is dependent on the "breath" of life. However, this sustaining spirit or principle was not identifiable with man's spirit. Man's spirit was not an extension or particle of the divine spirit which gives life to all of the creation. Psalm 78:8 refers to the spirit who is not steadfast with God; Psalm 32:2, to the man in whose spirit there is no guile; Isaiah 57:15, to the one who is of a contrite spirit.

To man himself is attributed spirit, and in this aspect

his nature is like God's.

Ruach as an element, or rather, as an aspect of human nature would always tend to suggest its origin in God's creative activity; its very use linked man to God, bridging the gulf of the Isaianic contrast of flesh and spirit by the assertion of an implicit kinship. Here, in man's ruach, was a potential contact for the inflow of new accessions of the divine ruach; to use the term was to keep the door open for God.7

God created man in his own image and likeness. An aspect of that created being was spirit, as God is spirit.

SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament the long development of the term spirit in its reference to God comes into full flower. The ruach of God becomes pneuma hagion (Holy Spirit) in the Greek, sometimes with the definite article, sometimes without it. The spirit of God in the Old Testament was termed holy only three times compared to eighty-eight in the New Testament and was always expressed with "Thy" or "His." "The spirit" in the Old Testament may have denoted only the wind or the breath; the Spirit in the New Testament became God-in-action. The common usage of the term indicated the familiarity and centrality with which the Holy Spirit was held in the thoughts and experience of the early Christians.

As in the Old Testament neither the functioning of the Spirit or the usage of the term falls into any consistent or logical pattern. We encounter the Spirit, Holy Spirit, Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of Christ. In many instances "spirit" seems to mean the working of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man, as "the spirit of adoption," "the spirit of meekness," "the spirit of revelation."

In the writings of Paul the Spirit became highly personal and ethical. In his thought all Christian experience was seen in the context of the Spirit. For him the Holy Spirit was linked explicitly and indissolubly with Jesus Christ: "Now the Lord is that Spirit."8 His language always indicates he thinks of the Spirit as a person. Fellowship with the Spirit was an intensely personal affair. The presence of the Spirit placed him in direct relationship to the living Christ. This presence was not an influence, a feeling, or a vague metaphysical something; it was the penetration of his being by the divine Person opening the door to a real, inner apprehension of the Lordship of Christ.

Although the Holy Spirit dominates any thinking regarding the term "spirit" in the New Testament, pneuma is also attributed to man, and the human pneuma

8II Cor. 3:17.
is distinguished from the divine pneuma. Romans 8:16 states "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." In I Corinthians 2:11 we read, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

The complexities of human nature are well illustrated by the variety of terms used in the Pauline epistles as the author points to man in different aspects of life. As pneuma is only one of several, a brief survey of some of the other terms may be helpful in reaching a fuller appreciation of the human spirit. Much of the following discussion is drawn from Rudolf Bultmann's exposition of the Greek words used in New Testament anthropology.⁹

Soma (body) is the most comprehensive term used by Paul to characterize man's existence. That it belongs inseparably to human existence is clearly evident from the fact that Paul sees life after death in the form of soma. However, this body will not be a body of flesh, nor is the term restricted to this use in the present life. Neither does Paul use it in the sense of body-form. Human existence, even in the sphere of Spirit,

is somatic existence. In Romans 6:12 Paul warns, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal soma," and in Romans 12:1 he tells the Romans "to present your somata as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. From these passages it is clear that Paul does not mean mere body or body-form, but by soma he means the whole person.

There are New Testament passages which indicate that soma is used at times to mean man's body in the flesh. There are people who "deliver their bodies to be burned," and Paul "pommels and subdues his body," but numerous other instances make it clear that soma is not a something that outwardly manifests a man's real self, but belongs rather to its very essence. The personal pronouns may often be substituted fittingly. "Christ shall be magnified in my body" and "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice" could be said "Christ shall be magnified in me" and "Present yourselves as a living sacrifice."

Man, as a whole, can be denoted by soma therefore, and as soma, man is able to make himself the object of his own action or to experience himself as the subject to whom something happens. Man, as soma, has a relationship to himself, and this relationship can be either an

10I Cor. 13:3. 11I Cor. 9:27.
12Phil. 1:20. 13Rom. 12:1.
appropriate or a perverted one; he may control himself or lose his control. In losing his control he may surrender it to a power which will continue his estrangement from himself or to one that will enable him to return to himself. The fact that man is *soma* is neither good nor bad. It does mean that the possibility exists for him to be either good or bad—to have a relationship for or against God.

This characteristic concept, first meaning the physical body, comes to serve, as we have shown, to denote man's person in the respect that having a relationship to one's self belongs essentially to being man. More accurately, man is *soma* when he is objectivized in relation to himself by becoming the object of his own thought, attitude, or conduct; he is *soma* in that he can separate from himself and come under the domination of outside powers.¹⁴

*Psyche* (soul), often used with *soma* to designate man in his entirety, occurs relatively seldom in Paul. His use of *soma* shows that he does not dualistically set body and soul in opposition to each other. Rather, *psyche* in Paul's writings means primarily life or the state of being alive. It is comparable to the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Arnold Come, drawing from J. Pedersen, defines it thus:

Soul is the life of anything, but it is that life in terms of its particular stamp, its special qualities, capacities, and powers which make this thing, this piece of life, a member of a particular genus of life and within that genus a unique example. "Life is

not an abstract colorless something, . . . not mere existence without any qualities. Life is always stamped." So the two are indistinguishable. To say that a thing is "alive" means that it has strength in a peculiar formation. To speak of its "soul" is to refer to its distinctive form of life. Everything has life and soul or it simply is not.

In I Corinthians 15:45 Paul quotes Genesis 2:7: "The first man Adam was made a living soul," denoting a living being, an animate person. (The latter part of this verse presents a qualitatively higher state of being in stating "The last Adam was made a quickening (life-giving) spirit."

It is not correct to think of psyche in Paul strictly as the life-giving principle. Rather, psyche is that specifically human state of being alive which is man as a striving, willing, purposing self. Although depreciated in contrast to pneuma, it still carries the meaning of full human life, the natural life of earthly man.

The usage of pneuma in the writings of Paul as he uses it in reference to man does not lend itself to sharp definition. As stated above, Paul recognizes the human spirit as distinct from the divine spirit; he also uses it to show an aspect of human nature distinct from soma and psyche. In I Corinthians 7:34

the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit," and in I Thessalonians 5:23 Paul prays that "spirit and soul and body be preserved." This is not to suggest that man is either dichotomous or trichotomous, but rather that these terms emphasize the whole man. (Paul was writing in a language developed by a people to whom the unitary concept of man was foreign. This has probably contributed to misleading interpretations of the divisions in man's nature as well as providing increased opportunity for understanding and appreciation of the complexities of human nature.)

Bultmann suggests that Paul uses spirit at times in place of a personal pronoun, such as in I Corinthians 16:18 when he says of the messengers from the Corinthian congregation, "They refreshed my spirit as well as yours." In this and other references where a substitute could be made and sense maintained, Bultmann feels no loss in meaning is involved and the use of spirit carries no connotation peculiar to itself.

He interprets pneuma as distinct from psyche in that it seems to mean the self as being conscious or aware and approaching the meaning of nous (mind). Therefore he states:

Since the human self as a willing and knowing self can be called by the same term
(pneuma) as the marvelous power of divine action, then the formal meaning of pneuma must possess this double possibility. As a matter of fact, a glance at what pneuma means as divine Spirit confirms what we have worked out for its meaning as human spirit. Paul does not conceive the divine Spirit as an explosively working power, so to say, but conceives it as guided by a definite tendency, a will, so that he can speak of its "endeavor" (Rom. 8:6, 27) or even of its "desires" (Gal. 5:17). It acts like a conscious subject certain of its goal (Rom. 8:26; I Cor. 2:10; II Cor. 3:6). Hence, to be "led by the (divine) Spirit" means to have one's will oriented in a particular direction (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18).16

Thus for Bultmann Paul's use of pneuma in its highest development points to that structure of man's being which requires living toward some goal, having some attitude, willing something and knowing something. "The goal toward which one's life is oriented is left still undetermined in the mere ontological structure of having some orientation or other; but this structure (which for Paul is, of course, the gift of the life-giving Creator) offers the possibility of choosing one's goal, of deciding for good or evil, for or against God."17

Spirit thus provides man with the possibility of relationship with God, but the fact that he has spirit does not make relationship inevitable.

Bultmann's theology seems to stop short of some of the implications which seem necessary for a fuller

16 Bultmann, p. 207.
17 Bultmann, p. 208.
comprehension of the nature of man and which seem consistent with Pauline teachings. It is the nature of man to be goal-seeking and purposive in behaviour, and this orientation would be native to the realm of spirit. As created spirit, however, unless that orientation is found in relationship to God for which it was intended, the power of spirit to make its total contribution to the life of man will not be realized. Man as spirit is free to choose. He may choose to be in relationship to God, or he may not. By virtue of his creation, it is the nature of man as spirit that requires the dynamics of the divine-human relationship for the functioning of man as a united being. Paul sees this consistently from the standpoint of the action of the divine Spirit, but this does not eliminate the responsive action of the human spirit. In Romans 8:16 he writes, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." The Spirit does not bear witness to our spirit, but with it.

Implications of man's sociality and relationships might also be derived from some of Paul's statements in which Bultmann would substitute a personal pronoun or the self. Most important is the kinship between God and man in that His Spirit communicates with the spirit of man. The kinship is not established on the basis of creation, however, but on the basis of relationship which
has come into being. The fact that man has spirit does not mean communication automatically can ensue; it does mean, with the establishment of relationship, that it is the means through which interaction will take place. Not only the relationship, but also the communication or interaction are personal.

In I Corinthians 16:18 Paul refers to the refreshing of his and the Corinthians' spirits and in II Corinthians 7:13 to the joy felt for the refreshment of Titus' spirit. It is true that the self could be substituted and meaning would remain, but there seems to be indication of the high value Paul places on this aspect of human relationships. There is a sense in which the original meanings of the words ruach and pneuma--breath of life and power--lift these polite expressions of appreciation to acknowledgments of gratitude for that which one human being can do for another through the medium of spirit. The whole self experienced the refreshment, but it was made possible because of spirit. And spirit was dynamic because it stemmed from redemptive relationship. The dynamics of created spirit are relative to this foundation or context.

Paul expresses conflict in his spirit in II Corinthians 2:13, and again the self could be meant. The choice of pneuma in place of another anthropological term might suggest that aspect of man most indicative
of unity or lack of unity. The dynamics of spirit are unifying to the personality; the contribution of peace to the wholeness of life is inestimable.

Paul's benedictions are also worthy of note. In Galatians 6:18 he says, "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit," and in Philemon 1:25, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Beatitude is having one's spirit in consonance with the favor experienced in Christ. This does not mean that Paul was only interested in the spirit of man, but rather it implies that the whole man is relative to the orientation or "condition" of the man's spirit. In other words, this is the index to man in all other dimensions. Through the medium of spirit man realizes the Good. The power of the divine spirit for transformation suggests the power of the human spirit in the life of man.

Historically, in the theological tradition, human spirit has come and gone, receiving more or less recognition in accordance with the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and divine grace and current philosophical traditions. The early church came under the influence of Greek thought which held a lofty view of spirit. This was correlated with eros depicting the aspiration of man for fulfillment found in the divine Spirit. Augustine and later Aquinas gave the human spirit this faculty—
the tendency to seek and find its beatitude in God. The Reformation, with Luther and Calvin, de-spirited man in the sense of finding nothing in man capable of aspiration. Fallen or sinful man lacked any power whatsoever to reach up toward the ultimate; the divine-human encounter was a downward thrust and the dynamics of human spirit were completely missing. The functioning of spirit in the redeemed man was also completely dominated by the divine. To a great extent it would appear that when the church has probed the meaning of spirit in the life of man it has found it difficult to get beyond this initial problem—the role of the human spirit in the reconciliation of God with man. Little emphasis has been given to the functioning of spirit in the totality of man's life as he actualizes his existence.

Emil Brunner states that human spirit can only be understood from the Godward side: "We claim that this final point of reference, for which and from which our spirit as spirit exists, is the God who reveals Himself to us in His Word."18 It is true that the human spirit can only be probed in the light of divine spirit, but this is not to say we cannot be enriched and enlightened by some probing from below.

There are many conceptions of spirit and it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a discussion or comparison of them. Relative to the contribution of numinous experience to the life of man, certain aspects seem particularly important.

Spirit is personal. This is not to equate the terms. It means rather the activities we would designate as "spiritual" are embodied in the personal. There is no expression of spirit without person. A numinous experience is not a misty, radioactive, floating sensation. It is the conscious awareness of a Person. Spirit can enter into community with another spirit, freely opening itself to another, and responding to another spirit's outreach. A spirit can withdraw from another spirit. As spirit, man has this freedom; as created spirit, however, he cannot realize his potentialities outside of community with the divine spirit. His freedom is limited by his finiteness. As created spirit, distorted since the Fall, man requires the initiative of the divine spirit before he can enter into community. He cannot seek and find the divine Spirit. Through his own spirit, however, he has awareness of the Other and can open himself to the power and presence of the Other.

Spirit is dynamic. Spirit, functioning in freedom, has power. The human spirit realizing itself in response to the divine Spirit empowers man in all aspects of his
being—rationally, morally, emotionally, and physically. Spirit suggests life—and life in the fullest sense. The response of man to the presence of God releases energies which are felt throughout the structure of his being and enable him to participate in the creative power of God. This is not to imply that the divine Spirit works on the human spirit which in turn empowers man in other capacities. Rather, the impact of the divine Spirit on created spirit is simultaneously an impact on man in totality. This may be realized in heightened mental understanding, intellectual comprehension, power to love, increased sense of physical well-being, etc. It is quite often realized most emphatically in a dimension of life where man feels strong need. Spirit gives man the power to realize existentially his essential nature. This may always be fragmentary but even in remembrance may generate life-giving power to the individual.

Not only does spirit bring power but it gives unity. The alienation of man is the theme of our culture—alienation from himself, alienation from other persons, alienation from God. The function of spirit unifies man with himself, he knows inner peace. It provides the highest sense of community with other persons and gives man that mysterious "knowing" or assurance that he is in an accepting relationship with God. Through spirit man may realize a cosmic sense of being
"at home" or belonging.

Because man was created spirit as God is Spirit he may know and be known of God as person. To him who stands at the peak of creaturely existence may come the awareness of divine Presence and the power to transcend his structure as he knows it. Because man was created spirit he may not realize fulfillment of his own nature unless he experiences the power of the divine Spirit. Because man was created spirit he must be spiritual or die.

The history of religion records the created spirit's quest for life. All the religions of the world which have included a large number of constituents have embraced numinous experience in their tradition. Though it is seen and experienced in many different forms, the universality of the experience demands recognition of this aspect of man's nature. The religions of India, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, place more emphasis on the passive aspects. The loss of personal identity in numinous experience is the goal of spiritual striving. In the Mohammedan tradition, Sufiism stresses the numinous experience with pantheistic and ascetic aspects.

The Jewish and Christian tradition has also fostered numinous experience which has not only carried the stamp of the individual personality but also the reflection of the culture and religious community from which it sprung.
St. Francis of Assisi, Aquinas, Brother Lawrence, Madame Guyon, Jacob Boehme, George Fox, John Wesley, C. S. Lewis, and many others have recorded the impact of numinous experience on their lives.

The Bible gives ample witness to the validity of numinous experience and its contribution to the fulfillment and growth of the individual and community. A brief look at man's response and record of numinous encounter in the Biblical writings indicates its integral force in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

**NUMINOUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Beginning in primitive manifestations the Old Testament records the growth of numinous consciousness from demonic dread to the experience of Job in which the response to the numinous is felt in repentance, understanding, and peace. Throughout the early Old Testament period men were called and responded on the basis of the promise of the presence of the numen. Abraham went forth and founded a new nation on the basis that God would be with him. Jacob vowed, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, ... then shall the Lord be my God."19 Joseph rose to great heights because "the Lord was with him."20 And Moses returned to Egypt on the basis of "I will be with thee."21 On this authority and the power that

they felt accompanied it, the early patriarchs and the Jewish writers expressed the foundations of their faith. Man's response to God's address meant the power of the presence of God for the realization of life's purposes and meanings. And, although God revealed Himself in these early accounts in overwhelming power and awe-inspiring happenings, man's response was not one of terrorized submission in the presence of an all-powerful force. Jacob was undoubtedly impressed with the vision of the ladder and Moses with the burning bush, but in neither case was the manifestation of "Wholly Other" the chief factor. Jacob interpreted his dream and made his decision on the basis of his reflections and conclusions. Moses stood in the presence of the burning bush and argued with God. Later, to Joshua and Gideon, the call to service is given again with the promise "I will be with you,"22 with the understanding that power through God's help would be available. Time and time again the early writings record the empowering of man beyond his natural capacities for the achievement of God's purposes and as a mark of favor to man who stood in obedient relationship. The value of these deeds did not spring from any moral or rational context.

With the giving of the law and the subsequent development of a moral and ethical religion, the numin-

22Josh. 1:9; Jud. 6:12.
ous experience took on a moral color, becoming more rational in its import. The sense of fear, mystery, and the unpredictable was not lost but was greatly reduced by the sense of the "holy" and power conditioned by goodness, wisdom, and truth. Consequently, man expected and realized the dynamics of divine action in more highly developed processes of living and understanding.

From the beginning, however, the experience of the numinous was dynamic for man. It enabled him not only to go beyond himself but also to know and rightly judge himself. In the very act of transcendence he was aware of his dependence. In the presence of the numen he realized the power to become what he was. The encounter "enlarged" the self in some aspect of life when the self encountered was responsive as a created being to the Creator. The many instances in the Old Testament give various types of personal enlargement attributed to the energy of God loosed in man. Samson knew great physical strength; Joshua knew great skill as a military strategist and was victorious in battle against almost impossible odds; the prophets were given wisdom and the gift of eloquence; Bezaleel knew great artistic skill; etc.

Dependent upon the level of development of the concept of God, some principles seem indicated
throughout. The dynamics arising from the experience of the presence of God were purposive. God revealed Himself to man with intentionality. God-in-action resulted in man-in-action. In early Biblical history this would seem to serve the individual's good alone, but with the rise of moral religion the good of the community became foremost.

Man realized the development of his nature, the enhancement of himself, the employment of divine power, to further ends greater than his own pleasure. Although this was seen as the divine pleasure, it was in correspondence with man's responsibility. Initially God may have come upon man unsought and even unwanted; the degree to which this experience became operative in the life of man depended upon man's response. Man always retained his identity in the face of numinous experience. It was never God's intent to reduce man to nothing, although He might utilize affliction to bring him to something.

NUMINOUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, primarily in the Gospel of John and the writings of Paul, numinous experience becomes normative for disciples of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of the divine in human flesh heralds the fulfillment of God's accommodation to man. God not only
reveals Himself as the loving Father, Redeemer, and Seeker of Man, but becomes the Embodiment of the Personal Who calls to man in his aloneness and barrenness and reveals Himself as the One in Whose Presence the desire and power to respond and transcend the human limitations of sin and guilt could be realized.

The early Christians experienced this as the Holy Spirit functioning in their behalf:

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.23

Through the medium of spirit they knew themselves in personal relationship with Jesus Christ, they were aware of His presence and knew themselves to be changed and empowered by the dynamics implied. The incarnation was an ever-present fact and they experienced redemption and transcendence through the power released in response to the presence of the numen.

That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,

23Gal. 4:6.
according to the power that worketh is us. 24

Man not only knew himself "accepted," but also in
the process of becoming more acceptable. To be "in Christ"
was not only a rational theological proposition but a dy-
namic way of life. Their life and being reflected the
activity of a God Who so loved that He encountered them
personally and they knew it.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless
I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:
and the life which I now live in the flesh I
live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved
me, and gave himself for me. 25

This knowledge and interaction abounds in the
New Testament. It was realized vitally and specifically
in various ways by different individuals, but always in
the sense of man realizing his personal destiny and the
purposes of God with His creatures.

New Testament men witnesses concretely to the
power of the numinous. Stephen faced death victori-
ously in the presence of His Lord. 26 Saul of Tarsus
encounters himself and knows the truth. 27 Ananias
receives guidance and divine commission. 28 Power is
given to break the sway of sin and the flesh, 29 to
heal physical infirmities, 30 to produce Christian
character, 31 to assist in prayer, 32 to bear pain and
tribulation for the cause of Christ, to aid in understanding, to provide guidance for ministry, etc. Awareness of the presence of the numen, known by man through the Person Jesus Christ, experienced in a loving and creative relationship, is the New Testament criterion for Christian discipleship.

33 I Pet. 4:14.  
34 I Cor. 2:10-14.  
CHAPTER III
NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE CHURCH TODAY

A study of man's nature as spirit and the record of numinosity in the historical foundations of the Christian faith gives rise to questions concerning the nature and contribution of numinous experience to members of the Christian community today.

In an effort to investigate this area research was conducted among members of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, and Society of Friends churches in Kokomo, Indiana. To the extent to which it could be controlled, persons were chosen as subjects who were actively committed to the life of their particular community of faith. Information was obtained through interview, questionnaire, and group discussion. Anonymity was extended where it seemed desirable but was not observed where the subject evidenced no desire for it. Subjects fell mainly between thirty-five and forty-five years of age and were evenly divided between men and women; they represent a wide range in social, cultural, and educational development. The following study is based on information supplied by 130 persons; of these,
114 stated that they felt they had experienced an awareness of the presence of God in various degrees of intensity; 16 stated that they had had no such experience.

Of the 114 persons who felt they had experienced the presence of the numen, their experiences included dreams in which God or Christ was present, visions, supernatural light, healing, and less intense states of abiding peace and well-being. The experiences reported varied considerably, as could be expected from the standpoint of the uniqueness of each personality and life situation involved. A wide variation in descriptive terms indicates the diversification in religious backgrounds. However, there are elements common to most of the experiences described.

The presence of the numen was experienced as personal. The presence of God was that of another Person encountering the man or woman in a personally responsive situation. As the divine presence was felt to be personal, so did the person respond personally. In some situations the divine presence was perceived to be Jesus or the Lord.

A loved one was in surgery and a voice very near said to me, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." It was as if you were standing next to me saying these words. I knew this loved one would never live through this operation. This person was very dear to me but even so the Lord comforted and gave peace and assurance that this person was with
Him. He assured me that He knew what was best and that He would be near me and give comfort.36

I was crossing the Continental Divide in the Wind River Range of Wyoming when I came upon a small mountain lake surrounded with pine trees. A lofty peak arose immediately behind the lake. Snow had fallen the night before, and it was still clinging to the pine boughs. The surface of the lake was like a mirror reflecting the beauty of the whole scene. There was peace and quiet in this spot that defies description. As I stood there I knew that God was by my side. I felt this was a place He might have made for Himself, and He was sharing it with me. I had mixed emotions as I witnessed this view. First it was clean and unspoiled by the hand of man. Only God could have created such beauty, and it filled me with awe. I felt so small and unimportant. Then I was conscious of my shortcomings and how unworthy I was to stand in the presence of God. It finally came to me that I was a child of God and my sins had been paid for by Christ on the cross. Never in my life had I wanted more to be a good Christian. My short stay there was an inspiration I'll never forget.37

Once that I remember my child was very ill, near death in fact. I was completely responsible for her and she had a relapse. Complete panic overtook me and then I seemed to feel some other presence. Almost as if one was saying to me, "Be calm, I am with you. I became aware of another being besides me and the child. As real as a person but taking no form at all. I became very secure in feeling the child would be fine. I was able to get the nurse after I put the child back into oxygen and this calm remained. The presence must have been God. There was no form but a definite realization that another spirit came into the room with me. The nurses remarked about my

36F-1. (Code letter indicates denomination: B--Bapt., DC--Disc., F--Friends, M--Meth., P--Pres.)

37B--16.
unusual calm but I did not feel able to speak of it to anyone. The emotions were calmness, security and relief plus a feeling of no longer being alone. Some other times to a much lesser degree but in situations which would require less help I have felt that some spirit was helping and was present.38

There are times when I feel I must talk to God. That no one else would understand or be able to help me. During these times I pray and everything and everyone else seems to be miles away. There is just myself, my thoughts and prayers for others and God. Jesus is also there, for somehow he seems closer and more real to me than God sometimes.39

Some years ago I was very sick with double pneumonia, so bad the doctor forbade even the pastor's visits. I prayed earnestly, not only for my healing, but for a clean heart. Saturday at 6:30 A.M. the Lord came to me. He stood by my bed and spoke these words to me: "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth you from all sin." How did I feel when I knew it was the Lord there with me? Before He came it was hard for me to breathe or speak. After He spoke to me and touched me I was able to breathe and I felt wonderful and asked my husband who was sitting by my bedside if he had heard the voice and when he said he had to say no I could understand those wonderful words were just for me. I got out of bed, changed my wet clothes and bed and was better. When the doctor came the next morning he could not believe what he saw. But I was there when it happened and I ought to know.40

In some instances physical or human characteristics were attributed to the personal impact of the divine presence.

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I closed my eyes, held out my hand to God to take and slept free from fear and worry for the first time for three or four nights.\textsuperscript{41}

Once when returning from a revival meeting I felt very close to God. I was sure Jesus was sitting on the seat beside me in the car. At first I was afraid to turn and look. After awhile I finally looked and saw nothing.\textsuperscript{42}

\ldots And I could feel his presence as though he had laid his hand on my shoulder. I just knew he was there.\textsuperscript{43}

There are times when I bow my head and feel as if I'm whispering in his ear.\textsuperscript{44}

The personal character of the encounter with the numinous is accented in instances where the human spirit rebels or wrestles with the divine address.

I once knelt at the altar rail of a college auditorium seeking God's guidance for my life. I was completely alone in the building. A lighted picture of Sallman's head of Christ was in the front of the building. Somehow I heard the words "This is the Way" over and over in my mind. Unfortunately, I didn't follow the Spirit's leading and my life has been cursed ever since.\textsuperscript{45}

\ldots So after wrestling with God all night I finally gave him my heart, all of it.\textsuperscript{46}

I had prayed earnestly for many months about a personal problem and seemed unable to receive a clear-cut answer. Then one morning while driving to work--and without any further
seeking—an answer came that startled me. It was an answer that surprised and brought a strong sense of pain. Yet it was unmistakably God's voice and must not be ignored. I felt a desperate need for God's help to enable me to obey what I had just heard Him say. There were tears, a heart-breaking, and finally strength to pledge my obedience. Then came a profound sense of wonder and gratitude that God should be so near and speak so plainly to me. I felt a deep joy and peace. The certainty of God's presence and speaking gave me feelings of confidence and assurance.47

I had been in rebellion for some time. My problems seemed more than I could bear. I could not go on. I would not go on. I felt as though accepting the situation would rob me of my identity. I knelt by my bed and literally pounded the bed with my fists crying out my anger, fears, and despair to God. If he wanted me to continue He would have to do something, I couldn't go on. As I knelt there weeping I knew He was there. I suddenly felt as though my being were arrested in its agitation. I was quiet, waiting, and something happened. There was no message, no feeling that things would be better, no promise, but I knew I could go on, I could live in the situation without being demoralized. I became obedient but I did not become nothing as I felt I would. And it was not as though God forced Himself upon me, and demanded that I give in. It was rather as though His presence said "I am here" and my being seemed to draw something from the quality of that which put everything else in a different perspective. I do know that from that time on I was able to live in what had been an intolerable situation with a new degree of love and acceptance.48

The presence of the numen was dynamic. It contributed to change in the person involved. No one encountered by the numen was quite the same afterwards.

It had made a difference in some aspect of being. Energies were released or integrated so that the person knew self-alteration in some form.

The first time this happened I was on my way to the court house in Kokomo and it was a beautiful spring day in May, 1956. I suddenly had the feeling of exhilaration and happiness and a feeling that God was with me. I breathed deeply of the spring air and said to myself, "I'm the happiest man alive!" And I had a feeling of assurance that if I continued my present positive outlook on people around me that I would always experience this true happiness. Yes, I felt a nearness to God and felt that He was with me for that fleeting moment. Since then I have felt this nearness many times. I find that I have been given the ability to help others to overcome fear and gain self-confidence. Helping others to overcome their inhibitions is one of the finest feelings that I could have... I feel that He is near me. I feel greatly inspired. I feel like no task is too great to accomplish. I feel that His presence is helping me to "give of myself" much easier with no thought of great return. I feel like He helps me generate enthusiasm in my work.49

I think I have been more aware of the Presence in times of trouble. I remember when our little four year old girl was in the hospital with a respiratory infection. She was having penicillin shots every four hours. It was taking a long time for the congestion to break. I was staying with her night and day. It came to me one night that the Spirit was with us. There seemed to be a canopy over the child's bed as if it were a sheltering and protecting covering. Next morning Eleanor was much improved--she was placed in the nursery and I was sent home rejoicing. There was another time of deep hurt when I experienced a feeling of being held up and of being sustained by a strong and reliable power. More recently when my husband passed away, I seemed to move through

49P-1.
the necessary activities with a lighter step and less effort than I had ever experienced before.50

This awareness of God's presence usually happens in periods of silence in which the mind is turned toward God, though sometimes it happens without a conscious striving on my part. Emotional element most normally is that of awe; there is a sharpening of the senses in these moments with a new awareness of both myself and the world around me. The world around me includes both the immediate surroundings and world of my total living experience. God's presence seems to surround me, but this is not being caught up into a seventh heaven. Instead of an erotic or frenzy experience as seen in those who "speak with tongues," feeling the presence of God around me I am able to face up to the tasks which God would have me do. In some of these moments, it seems as if God is telling me what to do, not by talking in my ear, but by directing my thoughts.51

The numinous experience was felt to be purposive. There was "reason" for the occurrence. It was not just a pleasant, soul-satisfying interlude. It related to personal destiny and ultimate ends.

This experience came as I was cleaning house. I must have been thinking of God; I only remember a great climax in feeling and a certainty remained that this was a turning point in my life. The scripture came strongly, "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find." And I felt I had found, after seeking in earnest for about a year. I suddenly became aware that God had been seeking me and I was finally responding—that God was real after all. A flood of joy and gratitude swept over me and I wept for joy. It was a tremendous emotional release.52

An experience I have long remembered, because it was so dramatic, happened on Easter

50F-30. 51DC-14. 52M-3.
morning either the second or the third year that the Easter pageant was presented in Kokomo. I had attended the pageant one year, but this time I had decided the night before that I would not arise so early—for after all it was but a pageant, only a play, and what real meaning did it give one as he regarded Easter anyway? In other words, I was feeling just a little cynical. So, to bed with the feeling that tomorrow was just another day, another Sunday, and everybody would be out in their finery crowding the church; but what meaning did it really have for mankind anymore? I was awakened before dawn—probably about 5:00 A.M.—by a voice which was repeating something to me, over and over again. Then I was suddenly fully conscious as I heard the message clearly: "The Master's touch! The message of hope." I had the feeling of being surrounded by an enveloping warmth of love such as one feels when he knows he is secure under the protective guardianship of someone who loves and cares for him deeply. Also, I had the distinct feeling that God wanted to make me aware of his living presence, and to reassure my faith. I had no feeling of fear, but I felt a deep consciousness of God presenting Himself to my mind with His love and promise. In a way I felt as though I were a child being chided by a parent in a loving manner. I felt a sense of wonderment that such a message would come to me when I had been experiencing a period of cynicism, doubt, and lethargy. I have pondered this experience many times. Since then I have had a greater feeling of peace; and a deeper faith; also, a reminder now when I feel doubt that God has given me a "message of hope" through Christ. 53

Numinous experience was an empowering experience. Through the experience the person realized new strength, resources, ability, creativity. Persons transcended the bounds of human limitations. The power was manifest in physical strength, moral strength, mental ability beyond that known before.

53p-4.
At one time, on Formosa, I was not feeling well. My strength was sapped and I was very weak. We had played two or three basketball games a day and preached in the same number of services. The food and water that I had consumed did not agree with me and I felt awful and feared that I could not possibly continue the grind. In quiet prayer to God I asked for strength to be able to continue. I earnestly wanted and needed help. God's presence was real. My tired feelings were lifted and a new source of strength was found—God's strength. I really believe that God took over—when I exhausted all that I had. The remainder of the summer's basketball evangelism tour was completed and I know that God was with us each step of the way.54

As I've prepared for teaching adult Sunday school classes, I have felt direct help—sometimes the words flow to me faster than I can write. The same thing happens as I've taught and discussed with the group later; I have sometimes felt such a flow and such a response from persons that afterwards I feel completely drained; and wept as with emotional exhaustion—although bodily I felt fatigue, my spirit has been lifted and I experienced a great exhilaration. (The weeping is because I feel such a wonder and gratitude that God has chosen to use me.55

At the time of my mother's death (fifteen years ago) we six children felt a great loss. Just before her funeral the six of us gathered in mother's bedroom and each of us renewed our covenant with God. As we were praying we felt that we were in the presence of God. He was there to comfort us, to help us, to strengthen our prayer life, to give us direction, guidance, and courage to follow through. This experience has been a sacred memory through the years.56

Many numinous experiences arose out of life's situations. Crisis situations and intensely emotional states served as thresholds to awareness of God's

54B-14. 55M-3. 56F-29.
presence. Particularly in times of stress, loss, or suffering did He make Himself felt. Some of these circumstances were the death of a loved one, surgery and illness, divorce, mental illness, spiritual struggle, miscarriage, relinquishment of personal goals. In these circumstances the created spirit knows himself most in need and is most aware of his creaturely limitations. Consequently he is most responsive to the address of the divine presence. The vicissitudes of life becomes the means of grace.

Not only in trouble, however, did the created being recognize his Creator. Numinous experience also arose out of the context of situations of great joy and appreciation. Awareness of His presence and power was experienced at the birth of a child, in meaningful sexual fulfillment, in participation in the beauty of nature, in the experience of love in community, corporate worship, in communication with meaning in human encounter. To a few numinous experience came quietly in periods of silent meditation, but generally it was concomitant with a life experience in which the individual was greatly involved.

Numinous experience was always felt to be desirable. Even when it was the bearer of unpleasant revelation concerning the individual or brought a message involving death or grief-bringing change, the person felt he was enriched. Painful revelation in the presence of the numen was better than being blind.
Numinous experience was felt to be self-authenticating. The fact of the experience itself was not a matter of doubt, although a few stated they weren't sure they understood it all. Even in these situations, however, there seemed to be the feeling that they had participated in something of great value.

There are times in which I experience the immediate presence of God with great intensity. At such moments God is tremendously real and close and personal. The feeling is good and deep and rich with meaning—not meaning that can be explained or described in words—but meaning that is because it is experienced. It is difficult to recall what I think at these moments because for the most part I just feel. I feel this is so real—this is what life is meant to be. I am participating in that which is whole and eternal but not quite total participation. I always remain me. I am unique and God recognizes that. Even during unhappy times—this is a moment of joy—I feel so very thankful—I feel loved.

I should perhaps add that I do feel the presence and closeness of God almost continually. I usually find myself communicating with God several times during the day. This occurs as a sharing of thoughts—often an expression of thanks for this life. The greatest difference between this continual awareness and the occasional experiences previously described is for the most part a matter of degree and intensity. However, there does seem to be some qualitative difference. These intense experiences bring a feeling of joy which lingers for some time. A feeling that I am on the "right track" in life—that my life has purpose and I am moving in the right direction. I am participating creatively.

... I have thought long and hard about this incident, and although I can not explain

57 p-23.
all the involvements, I feel that I was in contact with God on that Sunday morning, and that my prayer was answered. I became more serious about life and my religion from that time.58

This feeling of confidence in the reality of the experience was of particular interest in view of the attitudes revealed as the experiences were recounted. Several stated that they had never told anyone else about these experiences because they were "afraid of the skeptics," "people wouldn't understand," "they might think I was losing my mind." There also seemed to be the feeling that the experiences were too meaningful to share where they would not be appreciated. Some asked if others had similar experiences and seemed pleased to learn it was not uncommon. Their pleasure did not stem from having their own experiences validated, but, rather, as one stated, "It's nice to know you're not the only odd-ball around."

Numinous experience was a unifying experience. This was sometimes manifested in a unification of the self, sometimes in the man-God relationship, and at times in the person's feelings toward others. Peace—the result of the unification of the self, the resolution of inner conflicts—was the most frequently mentioned response to the presence of God. It enabled man to "feel" his reconciled state with God; in a sense,
it seemed to give the seal of assurance which the created being needs. In the empowering to love, persons felt at one with other human beings. In no situation did the numinous experience cut the person off from community. Many spoke of increased desire to serve and love after a numinous experience.

Ever since this happened I feel that He is with me. . .60

Through a series of evangelistic services I came to feel a need to try to conform my life to Christian teachings. I had the longing for God to become a part of me. I became aware of God's presence, and though He never became part of me in the sense I desired, there was for me a greater understanding of God, of what he expected of me, and of what I could do for God in my life. This awareness was "peace" in that there was no longer the confused thinking about God and my relationship to Him.61

Numinous experience witnessed to the unitive nature of man. The presence of the numen was felt in all aspects of man's being. Many related physical sensations under the impact of the spirit. A physical sense of warmth was experienced by some, a chilling by others. Some reported a tingling or vibrating sensation. Some felt their body functions were heightened; others felt an

59 One person related that she felt at one time God withdrew His presence from her personally because of conflict and dissension in her church, however.

60 F-3. 61M-5.
arrest or slowing down. Greater fluency for teaching and ministry was felt to result from the power of the encounter; a few were speechless. Understanding, wisdom, love, desire to help others, resolution to live more purely were among some of the changes attributed to the power of the numinous. The wide diversity of changes resulting from the activity of the spirit indicate its integration in the whole.

**Numinous experience was given meaning and interpretation through Biblical material.** In describing the experience or their feelings, persons would resort to Biblical phrases or terms such as "the hem of His garment" and "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Often the communication which they felt came from God was in the form of a quotation from the Scriptures, such as "Lo, I am with you," "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find," "Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee."

**Numinous experience was indicated to be a primary factor in the motivation and development of Christian personality and community.** On the basis of this research it would seem that a large number of the contributing members of the Christian communities now in existence have participated in numinous experience and feel it was vital to their growth and well-being. Although the words used to describe the experiences varied greatly, the
dynamics bore a close resemblance to those recorded in the Biblical account of the early church.

The objective validity of these experiences would rest mainly on the fact that these persons are found in community and participate positively in its life. Many of them represent outwardly the height of development in their particular churches in terms of personal character, service to their own community of faith and to the church-at-large.

Three intensely numinous dream experiences were found in this research study. In one dream Christ was walking on the water toward the dreamer; in another, Christ appeared as the Shepherd; in the third, the voice of the Lord was heard saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." The significance of these dreams lies in the lives of the persons to whom they occurred. All three are outstanding lay persons whose faith and service witness to deep personal commitment and power.

One of these three is a member of my own denomination and is greatly respected for her teaching ministry and unselfish work in many areas. To the degree to which one person can judge another, I would state that this person is representative of a high level of Christian character, service, and wholesomeness. In the context of her life, the contribution of numinous experience was of
I am almost constantly aware of the presence of God. What I mean is that He is always there, and I have only to direct my attention toward Him to feel His presence. When I am faced with a difficult task, an important decision, when I am preparing a Sunday school lesson, etc., I concentrate upon God (sometimes for a long period of time, sometimes only momentarily) and feel His strength and His guidance. At these times, He seems to be within me; in fact, sometimes, it seems He is taking over the job for me. Always, He is there, and it is comforting and reassuring to know that He is.

I have had some "mountain-top" experiences also which may come nearer what you are seeking. I will list a few of these, and I will try to explain the emotions I experienced:

When I was about 15 years old, I was spending two weeks at an Indiana lake with a group of Job's Daughters and their sponsors. One day, three of us were out on the lake in a rowboat when a terrific wind came up. We started rowing for shore, but the wind was against us, and it seemed as if we were standing still or even being blown the wrong direction. One of the girls felt sick and doubled over in pain (we discovered later that she was having an attack of appendicitis); she did try to bail out some water as it was thrown over the side, but she couldn't have taken over the rowing chore. The other girl and I sat side by side, each pulling one oar and trying to keep the boat headed the right direction. (The opposite shore was an uninhabited swamp, so we couldn't just go with the wind.) I was praying (or rather, concentrating on God without saying any words) and suddenly the solution came to me--don't try to row in a straight line against the wind, but follow a triangular course, rowing diagonally toward the end of the lake, but always getting closer to your shore; then when you are in shallow water near shore you can follow the shoreline back to the cottage. We changed course and found it much easier to row in this diagonal direction, only partially opposed by the wind and waves. This was one of the times when I felt God was within me, lending me more physical strength.
than I normally had, as well as guiding my thoughts to the best solution of our problem.

When I was a freshman in college I had a ruptured appendix, and by the time they operated peritonitis had set in. As this was before the discovery of the sulfa drugs, penicillin, etc., I was expected to die. I was kept under sedation and fed intravenously for about four days. During this time, I had an intense experience of the presence of God. Perhaps the drugs I was being given had something to do with this, but at the time I was convinced that God had communicated with me. It was something like a dream, in which I had fallen off a high cliff, but was hanging by my fingers, my body hanging at full length and nothing beneath my feet. A "shepherd-figure" appeared above me, reached down and lifted me up to the path and set me on my feet. I don't remember hearing a voice or any specific words, but I was aware of the following thought: "You can't die yet; I have lots of work for you to do." The emotion I experienced was thankfulness for life itself, and a determination to make something worthwhile of my life. This was not a turning point in my life, but a recommitment to the path I had been following all my life.

At an Officers' and Teachers' Retreat, a few years ago, at the closing service I felt that the Holy Spirit was moving among the people; the feeling of His presence was so strong that He was almost tangible. I felt awe, joy, and peace at this time. He was within me, but at the same time apart from me, moving about the room encompassing us all with a feeling of unity, of fellowship with one another and with all other Christians in all times and all places, as well as fellowship with Him. In fact, this experience could better be described as "fellowship in Christ" than "fellowship with Christ."

I felt this same spirit at a Congregational Meeting when we were deciding whether to build a new church or remodel the old one. There was a great deal of conflict in ideas, and many members rose to express themselves on one side or the other, but throughout the meeting, no personal animosity was shown, and I felt strongly the presence of God, actively working with us toward
a solution to the problem. I did not feel the emotion of peace at this time, but rather something like joy that He was concerned and present even in conflict. The conflicting ideas were presented within the framework of love because He was there.

I have felt God's presence many times in the sanctuary during stated worship services. At such times, when I am engaged in a formal act of worship, pouring out my adoration before Him, He seems apart from me, as I think of Him as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. At other times, such as during the Communion Service, He is within me. I think He is within me all the time, but I mean that I am aware of His presence within me at these times.

I am the person I am today partly, at least, as a result of these experiences. 62

Here, in the context of a productive life, can be seen numinous experience contributing in a variety of ways to a person's relationship to herself, to others, and to God.

Would these persons be the same had they not had these numinous experiences? From their subjective evaluation, the answer could only be negative.

62P-19.
CHAPTER IV
A POINT OF VIEW

Men, as created spirit, is encountered by the divine Spirit in numinous experience and knows growth and fulfillment as a result. He experiences for a brief time that which transcends time and space and permits him to participate with the core of his being in that which he feels is ultimate reality. In this experience of true being dynamics are released which bear fruit in creative living and constructive resolution of conflicts and issues met in the crises of life. Man experiences redemption, he feels himself called to be that which man can be but is not because of his alienation from God. Fragmentarily he knows himself to be what he was created to be and his existence is colored by these essential experiences. Man in faith realizes the mystery of the Incarnation as he himself experiences his own incarnation through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Through numinous experience man knows the glory of being man--made in the image of God--as he comes in contact with the Original. He apprehends both his limitations and possibilities. He knows himself as creature, dependent, malformed, and
unfulfilled; he knows himself as spirit, free, transcendent, with an infinite frame of reference.

This is not a solitary matter; it is a community affair. Each man's life is enhanced or made less by the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment in the persons with whom he is in community. As the bell is said to toll for all when it tolls for one, so may it be said that it peals for all when it peals for one. The fact that man is spirit means that he lives not only unto God but also unto his fellowmen. Consequently, numinous experience is of community interest and responsibility, particularly to the church community who bears witness to the truth that the numen is revealed through Jesus Christ.

Traditionally the church of Jesus Christ, in its beginnings, placed great value on numinous experience. It was a normal way of spiritual life, not only individually but corporately. Research indicates it is still a way of life for many Christians; however, the attitudes and statements of a large number suggest a reluctance to share these experiences in community. This reluctance would appear to stem from the feeling that such experiences are more apt to be regarded with suspicion than acceptance. This attitude and the joyless and powerless lives of many church members, as well as the aridity of many church services, would seem to
indicate a lack of genuine spiritual activity and awareness of numinous experience. It would seem that the community of faith could benefit from the witness of those who are enriched by God. There are those persons who do bear witness, and there are churches receptive; but research and observation point to these as being in the minority. As a general trend it would appear that the rational aspects of faith have greatly eclipsed the non-rational.

However, modern man remains man with spirit, and he cannot approach his destiny without spiritual experience of his own. He is not satisfied with a rational espousal of someone else's spiritual experiences even though he may not be aware of the source of his discontent. It may be that he will have to learn he is a being with spirit before he sees the truth that "man cannot live by bread alone," or by the intellectual assent to the most comprehensive theological concepts of God. The nature of spirit is life, so man must spiritually live, and this can't be done by proxy. Neither can it be done in isolation; the church is called to be the context in which man can live spiritually. As it is aware of man's needs, it can provide the environment conducive to his fulfillment. As man brings his experiences to the community, he can be guided in his search for meanings. Too often perhaps the lack of
understanding and fear of the unknown has caused the church to look with disapproval and rejection on individual numinous experience. How necessary it is though to aid the individual in interpreting and translating his experiences that wholeness and balance may be achieved. And how vital for the church that the individual bring the power of his experience to give meaning to the creed. Numinous experience generates a lot of power. It may find irrational manifestations. The individual may need help from the community in harnessing it.

Recognition of these irrational elements in the numinous have sometimes made it seem wiser for the church to ignore or discount such experiences. A strictly rational religion is much easier to handle and much less embarrassing, particularly in an age dominated by the scientific. The fly in the ointment in this age of science and reason is its chief victim—man. He hasn't become scientific himself, although it has been said that three more centuries of evolution will purge him of his primitive, non-rational needs!

The church may defend its attitude toward the non-rational by pointing to the oft-seen pathological religious hallucinations with the question, "How can you tell the difference?" This question is justified for often there is a marked similarity. (For example, the stages of
development in acute schizophrenia resemble closely the stages of normal thinking resulting in insight.)

Two persons may have a similar numinous experience—at least verbally it may be similar. One is an inmate of the state hospital, divorced from reality; the other, an average church member. Both may have felt they had a message from God. What measure for validity can be applied to such subjective experiences? The nature of spirit would seem to supply the criteria, and the forces or energies released in the individual would indicate the validity of the experience. Genuine numinous experience would contribute to unification of the personality, an openness to community, or some measure of growth.

Some difficulty lies in how we may perceive growth. Disruption may often be necessary for future growth, and numinous experience may provide the disruption. It may then seem to be alien to the good of the individual and that of the community. Superficial analysis may condemn that which in the continuum is very necessary and beneficial.

It has been shown that spontaneous awakenings and the eruptive breaking up of evil habits and turning of the vital forces along new channels may be part of the process of growth, and that nature often seeks to heal the breach between the present self and the ideal self not by lessening the conflict but by heightening it. Studies of autobiographies of certain great mystics in whom pathological manifestations are a marked feature have shown that such manifestations were merely incidental
to acute conflict and change, and that the end of mysticism is not feeling states but the transformation of character in the direction of socialization and unification.63

Reorganization of personality may require the strong dynamics of crisis experience which the numinous may provide. The human tragedy is that we cannot build this into our curriculum.

The intense nature of the numinous experience as well as its supernatural reference makes it liable to suspicion. It may well be that true numinous experience will contain some pathological elements because of the depth of man's involvement and the nature of his own personality. A confrontation of one's true self with the Most Holy God might temporarily unloose a few bolts in the most stable personality! This makes it even more important that the church be prepared to accept and help structure these experiences.

Man as spirit possesses the capacity for infinite expression. If not realized positively, man will be impoverished through lack of fulfillment or a prostitution of the energies not called forth in spiritual living. The absence of joyous life and the search for intense emotional experiences speak of man's frustrations to realize himself in depth. The stifling or repression

of non-rational elements which should find expression normally may force man into seeking satisfaction through other mediums in an effort to know the wellsprings of his being have been tapped, or he may go to non-rational extremes in reaction.

The psychological law of compensation teaches us that the hypertropy of one set of functions and attitudes, and the consequent atrophy of their opposites, call forth the compulsive domination of those opposites. Thwarted in its centrifugal flow into an external world which it is unable to assimilate and integrate, the libido of necessity is forced to flow back, centripetally, to the interior world of the collective unconscious.64

A current interest in speaking in tongues among the more rational "main-line" denominations may indicate this. Excessive demands also may be made on human relationships, sex, and even religious small groups to curb man's feelings of alienation in his world.

How then can the Christian community assist its members in creative participation of the spiritual life without fostering highly individualized emotional experiences? The harm and abuse that could result from the latter are already evident in some communities and give legitimate cause for concern. They bear ample witness to the fact that the non-rational can never be divorced from the rational without undue emphasis and exploitation of man's emotions. Likewise, the rational

without the non-rational demands more from man than he has the power or motivation to give.

Perhaps the primary way the church can open the door to more numinous experience without encouraging unstructured private revelations is an emphasis on context. The Spirit was given to the Church; though He meets a person on individual ground and in personal relationship, that encounter can only find ultimate meaning in the community of faith. Created spirit never finds realization in encounter with the divine Spirit for its own sake; in true encounter the dynamics released and the nature of spirit propel toward community. The transcendence of one member of the Body of Christ is of necessity edifying to the whole, and it is for the building up of the whole that the individual person knows redemption. Consequently it is vital that numinous experience be viewed in total context.

Within this context only can the church safely increase awareness of the possibility of numinous experience. Sex provides illustrative parallels. When encouraged for the fulfillment of basic drives and from the individual standpoint, it becomes a destructive force and loses its unitive meaning. In the proper context of love, community, and responsibility, however, it may be the medium of rich joy and fulfillment. Sex, like spirit, like murder "will out," so constructive expression becomes
The acceptance of numinous experience as a legitimate part of man's life gives rise to certain observations and implications for the members of the Christian community as they might seek to recognize and give meaning to this expression of man's spiritual life.

In the area of Christian education, recognition that power to call forth faith lies in the work of the Spirit does not lessen the church's responsibility to teach the data of the faith which becomes the medium through which the Spirit works. The historical background on which the Christian faith rests provides a base encouraging to the growth of faith and may give a sense of direction and confidence to aid the person assailed by personal spiritual struggle. Acknowledgment that human efforts are the channels through which the Divine works increases rather than diminishes the human responsibility to be the most effective channel possible.

Awareness of the numinous is inevitable if the Gospel is not only taught but portrayed in the lives of the teachers. The fact that God cared enough to participate in the life of man so that man might care enough to participate in His life, experienced in the person of another, is a dynamic witness to that beyond ourselves.
The power of created spirit to call forth another is undeniable.

The facts of the faith should be true to the nature of men as well as the nature of God. It is tempting, particularly in the teaching of children, to minimize the scandal of the Gospel: the recognition of sin, man's helplessness, the awful demands of righteousness, and the need for radical transformation. Groundwork should be laid to prepare a person to confront himself as well as His God. Western Christianity has sometimes whitewashed man's plight to the frustration of a person who does not realize the necessity for a radical answer.

An acknowledgment of the child's right to experience—at his level of growth—would cultivate an attitude of expectancy and awareness that would enrich the meanings and content. Surely the Spirit of God is willing to accommodate himself to the heart of a child and it behooves adults to be in constant remembrance of the child's unalienable right to work out his own salvation. Respect for his right to make his own response, accepting and not manipulating, does not eliminate the human responsibility for being an agent in confrontation. The necessity and responsibility for decision or response is inherent in the message of the Gospel. The church can not and should not try to dictate the human response,
but it can make it apparent that deliberate and meaningful response is imperative. How, when, and where belong to the individual and His God; but the fact that divine address implies a personal response lies within the province of the educational objectives.

Numinous experience has implications for the use of the Scriptures. Inasmuch as it may be the bearer of the Spirit, it is vitally important that its true nature be recognized so the Spirit is not restricted in speaking to human hearts today. A strict, literalistic interpretation or its reduction to a source book of religious experiences minimizes its implementation by the Spirit in creative activity. Whether we say it is or contains the Word of God, it must be the Living Word, and recognition that it becomes that through the Spirit makes it vital that the church give itself to serious study. Large portions of the Christian community seem to possess meager knowledge of the Scriptures or are still reading and interpreting without the benefit of the last one hundred years of church scholarship. This is not an indictment of the church's ministry in preaching; rather, it is a reflection of resistance conditioned by an age in which the human mind is constantly being called to give heed to the many voices calling to it through many means of communication. The voice from the pulpit often becomes another salesman's pitch to a consumer audience which, by habit, the
listener renders invalid by refusing to hear. It may be that small group study may be one means which can be utilized to induce more openness and willingness on the part of persons to be confronted by and to wrestle with the Word of God in the power of the Spirit.

Participation in small groups, a learning to respond genuinely and honestly on a personal level, in the context of the Christian church may also serve to prepare a person to make response in the divine-human dimension as well as the human. Man needs opportunity to hear, identify, and explore meanings with other significant persons before he can open himself to numinous experience and in integrating such experience in the total fabric of his life.

The resources of worship have a vital contribution to make to the numinous experience of the church. Although worship is often considered the summit or consummation it may also serve to awaken and call forth the created spirit. The sacraments, the great hymns, and prayers speak to man of his lack as well as his fullness. Through the liturgy the individual may be enabled to approach God with the whole church when alone he might not have the courage. The response of created spirit in worship and joy in unison with others to the presence of the numen may be man's closest approximation to true being. Thus, the means of worship always stand in need
of scrutiny and reappraisal that they serve the purposes of the spirit. It may be that the preponderance of rational elements could at times serve to obscure rather than call forth the things of the spirit. The church might well benefit from renewed research in this segment of its life.

The high degree of numinous experience in crisis situations in hospital settings, family deaths, and illnesses speaks strongly for clinical pastoral education, the role of the pastor or theologically trained counselor on the clinical staff, and the need for the pastor to be aware of the potentiality in these circumstances. His ability to help interpret and support in these situations may contribute greatly to the meaning, strength, and creativity realized. This may also be true in settings and situations involving mental illness. Just as the genuinely numinous may be accompanied by some pathological elements, a preponderance of the pathological does not rule out the possibility of the numinous. It is not by accident that the disorganized personality may seek numinous experience or hallucinate in this medium. The ruptured self may indicate more insight into the true nature of being than we may think possible; research in this area may continue to contribute to our understanding of man's basic nature, struggles, and needs.
The mood of our culture is one of alienation and estrangement. Contemporary art and literature are dominated by the theme of man's loneliness and helplessness. Jean-Paul Sartre is the spokesman for many in his book Being and Nothingness when he states that man must learn he can count on no one but himself. He is abandoned in the world, alone and without help. He is condemned to be wholly responsible for himself with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself.\textsuperscript{65} It would seem that no message could be more relevant than that of the Christian Gospel which comes to say, "You are not abandoned, you are not alone, and you are not without help." How beautiful the words of Luke in this respect: "Through the tender mercy of our God . . . the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."\textsuperscript{66}

Because man is spirit he knows he sits in darkness, in the shadow of death. He goes to great lengths to avoid confronting the knowing, for with the knowing comes the despair of realizing his inability to create his own light and to find his own way of peace. In the face of this realization, however, he finds his greatest


\textsuperscript{66} Luke 1:78,79.
opportunity—the opportunity to respond to the proclamation that a divine visitation two thousand years ago may become a personal visitation today through the grace of God.
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Books


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Other Sources

Personal interviews with selected persons.

Notes taken in small group discussions.

Questionnaires completed by members of Protestant churches.
APPENDIX

I


II

In conducting research for the material presented in Chapter III, "Numinous Experience in the Church Today," three methods were pursued: questionnaire, personal interview, and small group discussion.

The following church denominations were chosen for sampling: Methodist, Presbyterian, Disciples of Christ, Baptist, Society of Friends, Foursquare Gospel, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic. The response from the last three named was very meager and was not included in the analysis.
Approximately fifty of the questionnaires were given personally by me to individuals willing to complete them. This enabled me to introduce the questionnaire briefly and to answer some of the questions posed by the subjects. Inasmuch as the questionnaire covered several areas of concern I endeavored to be general in explanations so I would not consciously or unconsciously influence the subject to respond in a specific way which he deduced I "wanted." A number expressed difficulty in interpreting the questions and requested an example or explanation of what I desired; in these instances I asked them to interpret and make response from their own point of view, emphasizing that I was interested in how they felt about these matters.

Approximately 200 questionnaires were placed by lay persons and ministers. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. In three situations teachers of adult Sunday school classes asked for volunteers and the response was excellent. Four ministers assumed responsibility for a sampling of their congregations; in two of the four situations was found the highest percentage of response; the other two represented the lowest. In all situations where another person distributed the questionnaires I attempted to discuss it briefly in an effort to arouse interest and encourage cooperation. The response and interest aroused indicated this was time well-spent.
Personal interviews were conducted with persons I chose on the basis of evidence of spiritual growth, personality development, and contribution to others and the community. This was sometimes done in conjunction with the questionnaire and sometimes after the person had completed it.

Group discussions were only attempted in those situations where there was already established a great deal of freedom in sharing and expression. These included a Bible Study Group, several informal social groups, and a bridge club. The stimulation of discussion in these situations seemed to greatly enhance the richness of the material later volunteered by these persons in the completion of written questionnaires.

Each of the above methods used seemed to have its own advantage. The questionnaire enabled me to obtain a wider sampling than would have been possible otherwise. The anonymity it afforded contributed to greater freedom to those who might otherwise have declined to share their experiences in this area. It was limited in that there was little dialogue or opportunity for further exploration. The personal interview, usually used with the questionnaire, seemed of highest value. It granted privacy with the opportunity for more extensive probing and sharing. Group discussions carried the advantage of stimulation of one
person upon another and the granting of freedom in some cases by the participation of others; in some cases, however, the group situation restricted the freedom of some.

III

The questionaire used as the research instrument was mimeographed on two pages with space left following each question for the subject to use in making his response. It was as follows:

Personal information in answer to the following questions is being sought as an aid to research in the area of emotions in religious experience. If enough space has not been left between questions, please feel free to use the back of the page. Your helpfulness and cooperation are much appreciated.

1. Do you ever experience the feeling that you are in the immediate presence of God? If you do, please describe one such experience in detail giving primary consideration to the different emotions you may have felt as you were aware of His closeness.

2. Were there any "after effects" resulting from the experience (e.g., behaviour change, feeling of happiness, peace, a "let-down" feeling, etc.)?

3. Underline the word that best describes how often you have had the experience of feeling very close to God: often occasionally rarely once never.

4. If you have not known an experience such as this, do you feel it is possible or desirable?

5. Underline the following words which best describe your emotions when you have felt confronted by the living God. Add words which might better describe your emotions. Fear Reverence Joy Love Shame Dependence Terror Fascination Peace Thankfulness Remorse

6. Has personal experience with God occurred when you were praying or seeking His presence or has it come upon you unexpectedly?
7. When you feel close to God, do you feel He is near you, within you, or somewhat apart from you?

8. Do you feel any sense of dissatisfaction with your religious experience? In what way?

9. What do you consider the most enriching aspect of your religious experience, or what do you feel gives you the most enjoyment in your relationship with God?

10. What makes you most keenly aware of the presence of God? (e.g., nature, music, art, other persons, sacred symbols, clergy, church, communion, etc.)

11. Do you find it easier to feel close to God when you are alone or when worshipping with others?

12. If you find group worship meaningful, what parts of the service are most likely to stir you?

13. What part(s) of the church service has little or no meaning for you? What part(s) of the church service do you think could be completely omitted?

14. What would you like to see added to the church worship service to enable you to find it more meaningful?

15. Aside from experiences in which you were aware of the presence of God, have you had any other type of experience which gave you a feeling of awe or the sense of being "lifted out of yourself" or beyond yourself? (e.g., military ceremonies, lodge rituals, the presence of death, etc.)

AGE _______

DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION:

Present ________________

Past (if different from above) ________________