
‘Will Not Those Who Have Ears, Hear?’: An Ethics of Care in Response to the Movement of the Holy Spirit

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This article analyzes the implications of the Weberian concept of a prophet through a theological lens. The analysis extends to the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Christian experience, offering insight into the fruits of the Spirit as the core of Christian ethics. With the Holy Spirit as the ‘ultimate prophet,’ and the fruits of the Spirit as the fuel for virtuous Christian behavior, the Weberian prophet is described in the form of one highly driven and authentic person, a pastor of a church located in a rural village of southern Ohio. This individual, seeking to actualize the will of God in their social context, exemplifies Max Weber’s idea of a charismatic leader, a sort of ethical prophet in contemporary culture. In offering an ethnographic account of transcendent communication and prophetic influence within the life of the church, I also considered how the Holy Spirit serves as an actor in His own right, motivating spiritual growth, emotional maturity, and prophetic dialogue among the body of believers.

Introduction

Have you ever had your spiritual sincerity questioned? Has an individual ever challenged you to deep self-reflection, laying your ethical and moral values bare before you, forcing you to reconsider the deepest parts of yourself that may have heretofore been an untouched part of your worldview and psyche? These deep emotional and spiritual realities were presented to me, quite unexpectedly, by several interlocutors during my fieldwork at a Wesleyan church in rural Ohio. Social tensions, transcendent communication, and spiritual transformation became paramount topics in my ethnography, forcing me to delve, experientially and analytically, into transcendent awareness, self-growth, and other intangible elements of the human experience. I framed my research around Talal Asad’s methodology of looking “through the shadows” (2003, 16), attempting to study the moral and ethical lives of

God’s people without getting caught in the trap of overt discussions of Christian ethics. It quickly became clear, however, that while the voice of the Spirit may be soft, the individuals He employs to bring about spiritual growth can be quite the opposite.¹

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at a large Christian church called Wesleyan Discipleship Church (sometimes referred to as “WDC”),² located in southern Ohio. My interlocutors were pastors, congregants, and members, past and present. Their worldviews, ages, social positioning, and cultural nuances were varied, offering an encompassing perspective on church life. Discipleship Church is part of the Wesleyan denomination, attributing high value to prayer, interpersonal connection, generosity, using their talents to serve, and authentic relationality. While this is an edifying mission for a body of believers to possess, these people would not be human if they didn’t have flaws, misconceptions, and the need for

¹Generous portions of this article are pulled from my thesis research, titled: “A Shared Ethics of Care: Dissemination and Development of the Holy Spirit’s Influence in the American Wesleyan Church.”

²A pseudonym. All locations and individuals are referred to by pseudonyms for anonymity.

continuous growth to adopt a greater level of godly characteristics.

As may be common in the trajectory of any church, congregants have endured trials and tribulations as church members, as well as times of renewal and growth. Instituted by significant social and religious unrest over time, this congregation has traversed seasons of uncertainty and loss in its recent history. Because of this, the Discipleship community has become receptive to ethical newness and moral growth. My research began at this turning point at WDC, “for such a time as this”;³ my insights are drawn from my informants’ separation from the old and embrace of the new.

The church, during this paradigm shift, has sought out new leadership and become receptive to a “fresh wave,” of spiritual growth, renewal, and revival in both the church and the surrounding community. All of this, while within the boundaries of a church’s general lifespan, holds a deeper meaning if one looks just behind the curtain—into the shadows (cf. Asad 2003). My goal is therefore to explore the shadows of one key figure who plays the Weberian role of a prophet, thus ascertaining the importance of Christian ethics. What if congregants utilized this time of challenge to consider their stagnant religious ideologies, engage in self-reflection, and delve into spiritual maturation? Maybe a higher power, through the presence of an interpersonal, divine Spirit, wishes to actualize a stronger practice of moral virtue within the life of the church? These are the inquiries I attempt to address, through the lens of a Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered perspective on ethics within the life of the church. I draw on both anthropological and theological sources to develop a deeper understanding of this transcendent-human interactivity, exploring how the Holy Spirit actualizes and sanctifies human souls for a unified, spiritually strong church (Adkins 2026).

The Power of Prophetic Influence

One primary actualization of growing in holiness and deeper intimacy with the Spirit was WDC’s decision to hire a young, vibrant, and energetic assistant pastor. I first met this individual prior to his hiring, and I quickly recognized his character to be a force of ethical change for the community (Weber 1999 [1922]). At the village coffee shop, the central

meeting place of our small town—Milk & Honey’s, regular worship nights were hosted. It was there that I encountered the church’s newest pastor. With the church’s worship team, their equipment, and a speaker filling one corner, everyone in the cozy coffee shop piled close, prepared to sing and pray together. I glanced around at the folks in attendance. Holding their caffeinated beverages in one hand and raising the other, many engaged in praise. There was one individual I had never seen before, someone who had just arrived in town, I supposed. His enthusiastic attitude inspired others, so full was he of charisma and authority. It seemed to help people feel more comfortable in worship when there was someone clapping more and singing louder than they were. It was almost as if this dynamic character had a unique divine connection—a powerful two-way relationship with God that superseded human judgment or hinderance. He began to call out “hallelujah’s” and stamp his feet. He sang with the rest, but his voice held a bit more passion, his handclapping louder, and his lead in for the next verse of a song apparent. His involvement drew followers, as more hands and voices rose in succession with his leadership.

I later learned his name was Dante Queens, and that he was the new assistant pastor at WDC. After this night of worship, Dante quickly became the talk of the village. Who is this guy? Where did he come from? I wrote in my notes that he brought fire; Holy-Spirit electricity that was felt by others, causing an effervescent-type energy to fill our small group. Even though few knew much about him, many were anticipatory of the “life” Dante could bring to the church; one informant said, in relation to Dante getting hired, “he would bring life, and we need life!” This person said they were anticipating the spiritual support of someone younger who would bring more passion, introduce fresh ideas, and help wage the war against religiosity. In practical spiritual application, this meant that Dante would (hopefully) counter a lukewarm Christian life and usher in authenticity; his strong personality would shed light on the areas of the church that needed deeper spiritual “fruit” (a Christian expression for the outpouring of a person’s inner heart posture/spiritual maturation). Dante’s confrontational character and desire for the Holy Spirit would help

³ Esther 4:14.

expose apathy⁴ in the body and the institution, which was a primary goal for the church (Adkins 2026).

As is becoming clear here, Dante is a dynamic and forceful character; a person who has shown up, made a statement, stayed, and significantly altered the order of the church. Anthropologically, if not always theologically, Dante inhabits the role of a prophet for the church community, initiating deep theological and ethical considerations, dredging up old ideologies, adding a fresh opinion, and insisting that the old order of things be re-thought. With the hiring of Dante and the changes he has brought, Wesleyan Discipleship is undergoing a season of revitalization through confrontation. A tension that seems too taut at times, this pressure nonetheless exemplifies the process of spiritual renewal. One church member expressed excitement for the new processes underway, almost like a revival, believing that the recent advancement of the church addresses what she referred to as “the spiritually dead church,” shaking up the church dynamic toward more authenticity and inclusion of all age groups in services, pushing for growth and connection, and challenging the politics that has run the church heretofore (Adkins 2026).

With this initial description of Dante’s character, I would like to compare his behaviors to Max Weber’s conceptualizations of a prophet. The concept of the prophet in anthropology is heavily influenced by the sociologist and philosopher Max Weber in his work, *The Sociology of Religion* (1991 [1922]). Weber begins this tome with consideration of human beings who act on behalf of their own interests as they understand them. In the case of Wesleyan Discipleship Church, their board was interested in greater congregational and spiritual growth, more movement of God in their local area, and modernized tech systems. Because of this, the church hired Dante Queens. He quickly became a force of religious and social change for the church, instituting a fresh approach to liturgical expressions and moral frameworks. Weber sees the prophet as an agent of breakthrough, instituting new cultural orders. This influence motivates socioreligious reflection and the implementation of religious ethics within the institution (Weber 1991 [1922], xxxiii).

The religious prophet, in Weber’s account, engages in ‘charismatic leadership,’ which I argue to be characteristic of Dante. Charisma is a powerful force

because through it the individual takes the responsibility for invoking a break in established norms and calls this break morally legitimate. It is considered a supernaturally ordained quality that provides a foundation for the leadership of a group of people. To legitimize his or her choice to deviate from social and institutional norms, the prophet must in turn invoke a source of moral authority, causing recipients to critically consider the conceptions of social meaning and religious order that they currently have (Weber 1991, xxxiv).

While all prophets derive authority from charisma, Weber describes a particular type of prophet who provides a model for a way of life, the “ethical prophet.” The ethical prophet imposes a certain demand on categories of people, insisting their precepts be followed. These precepts are not to exhort followers to emulate the prophet’s personalized example, but rather to exhort them to conform to an impersonally defined normative order. In the case of my project, this looks like transcendent ethics; ethical prodding that pushes humanity into reflection, saturating ordinary lives with deeper meaning and hidden values (Robbins 2016, 14). The reason ethical conformity is morally obligatory is due to the prophet’s conception of the nature of his or her mission. In the case of Dante, this involves the Holy Spirit leading the body into a new phase of spiritual growth. Dante perceives his push for change as justifiable because he believes his actions to be in line with the Spirit’s leading.

So, Weber’s ethical prophet believes himself or herself to be an instrument of divine will. He or she maintains a mission to promulgate an order for others; the ethical prophet legitimizes teachings by referencing a transcendental conception of divine authority. The ethical prophet has a “mission,” ordained by God, to teach, command, and generate new moral codes or social systems for followers (Weber 1991, xxxv). Prophets—biblical and Weberian—are active agents of change, typically challenging established authority. In legitimizing teachings, the ethical prophet derives a basis for authority through the power of charisma (*ibid.*).

The prophet’s authority comes from the transcendent God. Weber posits this divine authority as all-powerful and distant, expecting strict obedience to an ethical code that often disregards worldly

⁴Romans 12:11 (NIV): “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

concerns (ibid., xxxvi). Here we can draw a parallel to Dante's positionality in relation to the congregation. As will be shown throughout, he challenges the traditional order, expects congregants to adhere to his social and spiritual implementations in the church, and provides a new order for the body, based on the mission assigned by both transcendent and human leadership. This process toward growth and newness does not come without challenges, however. Deep-rooted social and moral changes do not occur without an ongoing tension between edification and frustration. One good example of this tension occurred about halfway through my fieldwork, within the first few months of Dante's hiring.

The Prophet in Practice

Picture this: two firecracker personalities arguing over church regulations, the influence of culture, and the logistics of dress codes, all while crammed together at a tiny restaurant booth, with multiple onlookers, in a small-town pizza joint. Sure enough, this is the situation I found myself in as I helplessly watched the fresh, young assistant pastor of WDC and an even younger church member spar over religious ethics. As is becoming clear, Dante holds no qualms about his own discomfort—and no qualms about making others uncomfortable either. Squished into a booth at Happy's Diner, Brooke, a valuable interlocutor and church member, teases Dante for the waitress already knowing his order. "I basically live across the street!," he defends himself, as the rest of us laugh. The lunch conversation carries tension and humor in equal measure, a balancing act that Dante manages masterfully. The table stays silent while Brooke and Dante dominate the dialogue. I feel like an itchy sock or a shirt collar that is just a little too tight—slightly out of place, mildly uncomfortable, and uncertain. The bickering continues, with Brooke typically interrupting Dante's monotonous responses to interject her point, leaving the rest of us unsure whether they are angry or simply bantering. Gertrude, another interlocutor and congregant, gives me a couple of questioning glances, until my brother Michael begins mediating the conversation.

Brooke is frustrated about the fact that Dante has come out with a stricter dress code for those who lead worship. He thinks clogs, the type of shoe that slip on but show your heel, are not appropriate. Trouble is, Brooke wears these shoes most of the time. Brooke quips, "what is this, a Dante tyranny?" He ignores this

slander, instead emphasizing that if he were under the authority of someone else, he would follow their rules. The implication is clear: he expects WDC congregants to respect his position as assistant pastor and the changes he is making.

This terse approach is characteristic of a Weberian prophet; Dante views himself as an instrument commissioned by God to preach divine commandments and ethical duties. In his perception, he is enacting an ethical standard of strict attire for worship, viewing clothing choices as reflective of modesty and respect—thus setting a standard for the congregation, as well as aligning the church with what he (Dante) believes is an appropriate and God-centered manner of conducting oneself. Dante believes his ability to hear God is legitimate and thus should be adhered to. This sort of prophet demands obedience and radical social reorientation to honor God. Obedience becomes an ethical duty ordained by God and enacted by the ethical prophet. Weber linked this concept closely to the example of the ancient Israelite prophets, showing a connection between how a biblical and socio-anthropological prophet approach ethics (Weber 1991, 60).

Wesleyan Discipleship went from a church where worship leaders wore shorts and sandals, to meeting Dante's expectation of long dresses/skirts, pants, and closed shoes. He explained to us that it seemed against church culture, to him, to worship the Lord in "house shoes." He did not view this attire as respectful enough for leading others in worship to the Creator. Dante pointed back to God for these convictions and argued that it matters for those who are representing Christ to match a high standard of physical presentation—one which aligns with the specific requirements he maintains in leading worship.

After this point was clear, Brooke and Dante moved on to discussing the key she would sing in on the following Sunday; Dante offered words of affirmation about Brooke's vocal abilities and yet challenged her to sing in a higher key. She hesitated, but Dante asked that they meet in the middle; Brooke agreed to sing a key higher than she wanted but a key lower than he wanted. The tension evaporated—the rest of lunch went smoothly.

By way of a brief summary, Dante's presentation reflects Weber's ethical prophet (1999) through a series of propositions. The authority and knowledge a Weberian prophet possess stems from the divine, rather than an institutional force. Absolute obedience to ethical principles is demanded, often

uncompromisingly. That new standard is revolutionary, challenging established social or religious structures—often revealing a new divine directive. Dante maintains an attitude of assurance behind ethical standards, which both frustrates its recipients and yet fuels respect for Dante’s spiritual fervor. While his confidence to step on people’s toes may be frustrating, Dante possesses a divine connection that incurs curiosity and uncertainty in others—motivating listeners to engage in spiritual introspection. Dante was, and is, not without his antagonists; but anger, too, is a kind of devotion.

Dante’s confrontive nature demands a response. Dante considers his personal understanding of the order of things to be in communion with the spiritual authority granted to him, and in order with his ‘right’ relationship with God. This perspective thus informs and approves the ethical changes he pushes for. In this same way, as a prophetic figure, Dante has become the point of intersection where the history of the church and its traditions converge with the future of the church. The prophet is both a product of his time and the primary agent of change within it. Prophets absorb tradition, interpret its meaning, and then project that understanding onward, actively shaping the social environment around them (Sarró 2023, 481).

The vignette above exemplifies Dante’s unexpected and unpredictable nature. One moment all is in jest, and the next is filled with theological debate. Riding on a psychological and religious rollercoaster, Dante personifies a figure who challenges the status quo, encourages congregants to consider principles they may not have questioned heretofore, and makes us wonder, “what does a Christian’s ethics really look like?”

This unexpected and suddenly pervasive assistant pastor is a figure who came to dominate my field notes as he came to dominate the communal life of WDC. With his defiance of norms, his charisma, his claims to spiritual power and presence—Dante is, at least in Weberian terms, a prophet for Wesleyan Discipleship Church. In this pivotal role, Dante helps reveal a key theme underlying my research: the presence and (out)working of the Holy Spirit. Who is to say whether

the Spirit approves of clogs or ballcaps in a worship service? Is it possible to balance the tension between respecting tradition, adhering to institutional norms, and Holy Spirit-led fluidity in church? It is a messy, layered mix of institutional teaching and expectation, interpersonal relationships, conflicts, and, somewhere in there (we think, we hope), the work of the Spirit. In this church’s pursuit of ethical living, contestations of the Spirit became the thread tying everything together.

From a Christian perspective, all these changes and challenging social dynamics are the testament of a paradigm shift on a religious scale—a change of thinking—adding new assumptions while discarding others. Jesus, from a biblical perspective, calls this “making all things new.”⁵ We see this same idea of a paradigm shift here with Dante; what seems immutable becomes subject to change (or becomes discontinuous, to reference Robbins 2007). Uncertainty ushers in rebirth. “It is the natural progression of reality from dissonance to resonance, of humanity growing towards its destiny, of growing ever more profound in the truth rather than just changing directions” (“The Center” 2024, para. 3).

It is necessary, then, for the prophet to concordantly actualize the fruits of the Spirit and motivate church members to do the same. By knowing the Spirit and walking in His attributes, believers become more naturally receptive to God’s ethical standard—and they more willingly embody virtuous living. This is where knowing the truth of God and walking in it enables believers to live a life of congruence in the church. This openness to the discontinuity that the divine may cause in a person/institution’s lifespan allows Christians to experience personal refreshment from God and receive supernatural insight⁶—when believers work in conjunction with the Spirit for greater spiritual maturity.

Aside from social relations and personal spiritual application, this process of tension and moral introspection builds upon itself in the primary way Dante leads the church—through worship. Dante presents a different type of theological engagement for WDC attendees. He interacts and engages with the

⁵Revelation 21:5 (ESV).

⁶Proverbs 3:7-8: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD [with reverent awe and obedience] and turn [entirely] away from evil. It will be health to your body [your marrow, your nerves, your sinews, your muscles—all your inner parts] And refreshment (physical well-being) to your bones” (AMP); Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (NIV).

Spirit in worship in a way that has ushered in a new implicit theology—forcing the congregation to engage in reflection of their own understanding of the divine (Percy 2018).

The timbre of worship has altered at WDC because of Dante, which has shifted the overall emotional atmosphere of the community. Dante's prayers have brought a different grammar to the worship experience. He always petitions God during worship and prayer, asking that He will enjoy the worship more than we do; Dante keeps the focus on God—continuously stating in his prayers that our worship and the service is for Christ alone. Dante keeps a balanced flow between energetic praise and reverence with quiet emotion. He encourages congregants to interact with God this way—personally and collectively, with passion, joy, and somber awe. Dante uses liturgical forms to collectively motivate congregants to adhere to a biblical ethical code—centering members on the love of Jesus and encouraging the church to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit—producing a devoted heart posture. Dante therefore creates a space for corporate worship to be engaging, involved, personal, and collective—all within the flow of a single worship set.

The time of worship is collective, but I deliberately place Dante at the center of the action because he is the driving force for change at the church. And yet, bearing all the charm and charisma of Weber's archetypal prophet, I hesitate to reduce Dante to a factor of charisma or rupture. In one regard, at least, my assessment of the role of the prophet at Wesleyan Discipleship Church differs from Weber's account. Weber asserts that this revolutionary form of command will dwindle upon the initiator's absence, morphing into institutional regulations instead (1991, xxxiii-xxxiv). In contrast, however, the church has the potential for a different outcome. It seems that Dante's spiritual push may indeed provide lasting change, in part because his position is supported by the main pastor, Jake Fadeley, who said in an interview, "I thought it would be a good opportunity to [hire Dante,] who is Spirit led, Spirit empowered, and [let him] lead as an example to people here about what that looks like." Wesleyan Discipleship also has expressed openness to undergird Dante's mission. In relation to Dante's leadership, one board member stated, "I think our culture *should* be shocked." In the meantime, however, Dante's authority is still fresh, and the community is still in the throes of following a leader who challenges existing social orders.

Prophetic vs. Priestly Influence

It is necessary here to briefly expand on Weber's account of prophetic and priestly influence on the people of God. As previously mentioned, prophets utilize charismatic authority to instigate change; in contrast, Weber characterizes the priest as exercising institutional, bureaucratic authority to maintain stability (Weber 1991, 60). Normally, prophetic insight dwindles into institutional regulations, altering social dynamics from newness, challenge, and self-reflection to a more stabilized, 'conservative' way of ordering a body of believers. While prophets bring a more 'radical,' conflictual, and ethical-based social mode, priests typically operate as professionals within a permanent institution. While I am not seeking to challenge Weber's dichotomy of these two types of prophets, I do believe there is a way to merge them, resulting in a more Spirit-led, ethics-focused, and stabilized Christian understanding of the role of the prophet.

Thus far I have primarily focused on Weber's ethical prophet, arguing against the idea that Dante's prophetic movement will simply dwindle away upon the initiator's absence. Both church leadership and congregants support Dante's leadership; because of this ongoing respect for his authority, as well as his permanent residence at the church, it is likely that his spiritually geared, more 'deviant' influence on church life will continue. Dante has pushed from the very beginning of his time with the community for growth in the church. He has confronted social norms, ideologies, practices, and beliefs that he saw as outdated and spiritually hindering. The church has since become more multigenerational and interpersonal in its social dynamics, and intentionally relational among its members. These factors point to the possibility that by following the ultimate facilitator of ethics, the Holy Spirit, Christian ethics and transcendent communication among a body of believers could grow to encompass large groups of people who hear the Lord, live in tune with Him, and give divine messages to one another—rather than being confined to the influence of one prophetic individual.

Dante himself maintains a different view on the prophetic trajectory than the Weberian ideal. He holds a strong view on transcendent communication for believers, asserting that *all* Christians should hear the voice of the Lord and transmit His messages. In a phone conversation, I asked Dante if he considered himself to be a person who passes on messages from

God. He affirmed, with conviction, that this spiritual practice was crucial. Biblical knowledge and relational connection with God are paramount to correctly interpret and convey God's messages with wisdom.⁷

Building on the Aquinian idea of prophecy, including the interpretation of God's will to contemporaries, Dante's ideology is supported by John Calvin's take on the matter:

In the early modern period, humanists from various theological allegiances . . . articulated the position that prophecy is interpretation of Scripture. The magisterial reformers agreed that the core of prophecy was the interpretative more than the predictive gift . . . [some believe] prophets are not those who produce new doctrinal revelation, but rather those who rightly expound Scripture and proclaim the word of God, who . . . call for repentance and renewal of the church. (Pak 2018, 489)

Dante adopts this position. He is one who has rendered an *interpretation* of God's voice and Word, feeling compelled to proclaim it—he has done this in church, interpersonal settings, interviews, and over social media.

To mediate these diverging images of prophecy, I follow Ramon Sarró, who argues that prophecy may be less about foretelling the future as was done through the Israelite prophets in the Old Testament and more about diagnosing contradictory situations in the present (2023, 472). Abraham Heschel suggests something similar in his book *The Prophets* (1969), which centers on the divine pathos of biblical Hebrew prophets. Heschel offers a blend of the biblical and Weberian ideas of prophetic action; rather than just predictors of the future, prophets are individuals who experience and portray God's intimate concern for the moral state of society. They push for righteous governance and provide hope. Yet Heschel describes prophets as some of the most unsettling characters, challenging the larger status quo of a people and/or institution. "The words of the prophet are stern, sour, stinging. But behind his austerity is love and compassion for mankind" (ibid, 12).

One interlocutor of mine pinpointed these exact qualities of Dante. She acknowledged his conflictual presence yet also highlighted his heart for Christ and his willingness to work alongside others for the greater good of the church. Herein is the idea that a prophet, ordained by God and (hopefully) led by the Spirit, enacts greater spiritual growth in the church through confrontational, mildly aggressive, mechanisms. And yet, behind these off-putting behaviors are individuals who desire to see the will of God enacted in the body and are willing to be the forces of change that help make that happen. What might be the outcome of this charismatic, unsettling, mildly frustrating pastor in the life of the church? Or the deeper reason for Dante's push for ethical re-ordering? To address these questions, let us consider the concept of transcendent communication.

Transcendent Communication

As my research grew and the Holy Spirit became a central theme in my fieldwork notes, the idea of Dante as a prophet became increasingly prevalent. I was fascinated with the theological and anthropological implications of the concept of the prophet for explaining what Dante has brought to the community. One day I asked him, in an informal conversation, how he hears God and how he believes the people of God can or should transmit messages from the Lord. He replied that God speaks through Scripture, people, and believers' thoughts.

"That's where we have to know how to test if it's our mind or God" he told me. Dante included the importance of mental renewal,⁸ so Christians can be assured that they have heard the voice of the Lord. With a ready heart and an open mind to Christ, the Spirit can work on the individual, growing them in the faith and steeping them in truth, allowing the transformation of the mind to take place. Beyond salvation, ongoing spiritual growth matures a person until they become refined, reflecting their Creator, with a mind that is set on things above, centered on righteousness, and dead to the flesh, instead focused

⁷"Study *and* do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman [tested by trial] who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling *and* skillfully teaching the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 AMP).

⁸Romans 12:2

on building the Kingdom.⁹ This spiritual growth encompasses what ethical living looks like for the life of a Christian; it is only achieved through intentional time spent with the Spirit, and openness to the inner reflection and growth that is required in the process of sanctification. This process not only involves transcendent communication but develops and matures through the fruits of the Spirit.

Alongside this process of trust, growth and change, Dante articulated his desire that *all* Christians be able to clearly hear the voice of the Lord. During an interview with this prophetic pastor, I asked Dante if he considered himself to be a person who passes on messages from God. He said he believed, strongly, that he should indeed be practicing this. I then inquired if this was a personal conviction, to convey God's will to others. He countered this notion, stating that all Christians should engage in this level of spiritual insight and articulation. Through the process of discernment to hear God and communicate messages, Dante believes that God uses human observations and experiences to prepare the individual. This is an example of direct relationship with the supernatural and two-way involvement in transcendent communication. An individual seeks after God, hears from Him, considers how their existential experiences have developed spiritual maturation and wisdom through the Spirit's oversight, and then shares this growth the Spirit has nurtured with others, to aid in making disciples and edifying the Church (Adkins 2026).

This conversation from Dante answered a question I had had previously in my research, namely: is "prophetic insight" (i.e., hearing God and proclaiming His Word) a spiritual practice open to all Christians? Listening to the voice of the Spirit comes with attentive time spent in prayer, Scripture reading, separating one's life from sin, purifying one's inner soul,¹⁰ and developing discernment, which equips a Christian to hold the spiritual weight of accurately and effectively conveying divine-sent messages with truth

and tact.¹¹ According to one who has been used by the Spirit to bring about change for his assigned church, this means that *all* Christians *can* and *should* serve as an intermediary between the supernatural realm and humanity.¹²

It can be further argued that, rather than Dante's prophetic influence dwindling into bureaucratic authority, the status quo could continue to be challenged through congregants themselves, if they were to adopt and actualize Dante's example of transcendent communication and an interpersonal relationship with the divine. This would create an entire congregation of people who act on the spiritual gifting of prophecy, where prophetic insight and influence merge into the daily lives of the body of believers. In this way, the people of God are *all* in tune with the Spirit, listening for "words from the Lord" and transmitting these messages in a way that is edifying to the Church. Thus, prophecy does not diminish, but expands into a plethora of Spirit-led individuals, who present truth in a manner that is structured and yet authentic (cf. Percy 2018).

The Holy Spirit as an Ethical Actor

In much the same overwhelming way that I encountered Dante, the Holy Spirit met me with the same, if not greater, intensity, forcing a consideration of His influence to the forefront. Myself a Christian, I committed my research to God—and the Spirit began to open my eyes to His work behind the scenes. Through conversations with informants, participant observation, and the gift from my interlocutors of a deeper understanding of biblical wisdom, I came to understand that the Spirit is the force behind the ethical realities I was witnessing. The Spirit was revered by congregants at WDC; my interviewees pointed to His prevailing will in the new things occurring at the church; including Dante's hiring, Pastor Jake's

⁹2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT): "So all of us . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit;" Galatians 2:10 (ESV): "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

¹⁰James 4:8: "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded."

¹¹Ephesians 4:15

¹²Jeremiah 1:7: "for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak."

motivation for change, and a renewed attitude among church members.

I can testify first-hand to this transformative influence of the Spirit at WDC, as well as how He guides those who live in accordance with Him. For example, when I began my research, I focused heavily on the liturgical aspects of religious life, and how the church's spiritual practices represent scriptural-based ethics. What I was unknowingly missing, however, was consideration of the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit himself as the source of ethical insight. Through prayer, reflection, contemplation, and a thorough study of my fieldwork notes, I understood what my research was missing—attention to the One who initiated the moral, social, and liturgical elements I was studying—the Holy Spirit.

In gearing my inquiries toward the Spirit, my research opened into a new realm of spiritual, and indeed social, realities. I noted informants' attitudes, behaviors, and expressions of worship. Those who were gentler in demeanor, humble, and servant-oriented attributed their meekness of character to the Creator. Likewise, those gifted in music and speech, and others who imbued graciousness, all mentioned their desire to align with Christ's character. Interlocutors who exhibited the fruits of the Spirit talked about the presence of the Holy Spirit, although few specifically mentioned the fruits directly. Of course, in seeking after the heart of God, this growth occurs naturally.¹³ As such, with increased time spent at WDC, I came to understand that those who live in tune with the Spirit emulate a deeper level of virtuous living than individuals who are less conscious of the fruit of their heart posture and behaviors.¹⁴ Each Christian maintains an ethical responsibility before God; will believers fulfill this call to be biblically learned and personally transformed by the Spirit? And how committed are the people of God to live out this kenotic love?

My justification for talking about a Spirit-led human reality from an ethical standpoint is quite simple—I have witnessed and can attest to the transformative power of a relationship with God; those who invite the Holy Spirit to flow through them emit a

lasting peace, joy, and humility that those without transcendent influence do not experience so freely. The Holy Spirit flows through believers, dwelling in them to renew them, to replace worldly desires with godly ones through the study of Scripture and prayer; with this comes the hope of a perfected church.¹⁵ This process of sanctification shifts perspectives to align with God's will, enabling the fruits of the Spirit to replace carnal behaviors (Tarrants 2016).

Now, I understand that the transcendent experience is hard to explain—larger than humanity yet expressed through our human souls. How to properly articulate a divine encounter? How to know when the Spirit is speaking, and when/how to obey? From my experience, most, if not all believers, question if we hear God at times. It is pushing yourself out there to know if we have discerned God's voice correctly, and to ensure that we follow His will as He intends. The experience—and challenge—of transcendent communication can be illustrated by an event that occurred during my fieldwork, when I participated in a spiritual practice called intercession—facilitated by humans but guided by the Spirit.

On a rather warm September day, my friend Jane and I drove up to the nearby city of Crete's college campus, where Brooke had set up a spot for those who wanted to intercede for the upcoming Liberation Night, an organized time of prayer, sermons, and worship orchestrated by all the college ministries. We parked on campus, passed the college chapel where our friend Magnolia was married last year, and saw Brooke sitting with a few other members of WDC on a stoop in front of a large portico with columns. Upon our arrival, everyone sat down on the steps and Brooke asked that we huddle and pray.

Brooke suggested that we take time to hear what God might say we needed to pray about for Liberation Night. All of us present "heard" something as impressions in our minds; I heard "spirit of fear." This spirit could be affecting my participation as a prayer person, the other leaders of Liberation Night, and those who may come to hear the Good News. Another church member heard the name "Peter," who we all petitioned together would encounter the Spirit on this

¹³Hebrews 11:6; Jeremiah 29:14

¹⁴Matthew 7:16: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (NIV).

¹⁵Ephesians 5:27 (ESV): "that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

upcoming night. Someone else was impressed with the idea that Crete and its college should become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Crete is known by the Christian community for its connections with the occult. We each shared what we had heard with one another and discussed the possible interpretations of these messages. Through our conversation, we helped one another discern what the Lord was saying. For example, we had prayed God would speak about who or what needed intercession, so we considered the possibility that the name “Peter” might be someone who would be present and would hopefully encounter the Lord. We thus leaned on one another as ‘counselors’¹⁶ who offered spiritual discernment for the things we heard.

Here we see a powerful example of Christians girding each other up in the faith but also connecting with the Spirit on an individual level. This fulfills the biblical ethical mandate of representing Christ’s body as a unified whole, while also stepping into individual gifts/words from the Lord.¹⁷ As mentioned, Dante said to me that he thought all Christians were called to proclaim messages from the Lord. Precisely the qualities that I had identified in him as prophet-like. But was that not what was happening here? Could a body of believers, not just an individual, act in a prophetic capacity? A bold claim, certainly. But I think my informants would agree that during this prayer session, they heard God, strove to transmit His message(s), and interceded for the upcoming Liberation Night. The Holy Spirit surely worked through the shadows of this gathering; He guided our hearts and minds for the function, purpose, and posture of the worship night.

This ethnographic example sheds light on the reality of the Spirit of God as an ethical actor. Not only

does the Spirit guide virtuous living and inner transformation, but He also embodies the concept of an ‘ultimate prophet.’ As the facilitator and supplier of prophetic insight, spiritual challenge, and moral growth, the Spirit serves as a prophetic force that is unmoved by bureaucratic guidelines and institutional regulations, instead breaking up the status quo and encouraging believers to engage in divine-led acts of social deviance—for the sake of ethical strengthening and the fulfillment of scriptural righteousness. It is truly the Spirit, then, who is utilizing His people to call attention to social barriers, strengthen spiritual maturity, and create more effective witnesses.

Within this dynamic interplay between the body of believers and the prophet, the Holy Spirit acts as the crux. Working through the shadows, the Spirit is the glue that allows these social and religious forces to dwell together. Spiritual gifting, edification, and care for one another are dependent on the work of the Spirit within a willing body.¹⁸ The Holy Spirit is the sanctifying force within the church, forming believers into the body of Christ. To do this, the Spirit distributes diverse spiritual gifts, as well as matured character traits, for the purpose of communal edification, facilitating worship, and producing fruit that reflects Christ. The Holy Spirit is the crucial element for transforming a group of individuals into a flourishing, unified community (Tarrants 2016). The Spirit is the “spirit of prophecy,” essential for revealing moral truth. As the *ultimate* prophet, the Spirit reminds believers of Jesus’ teachings and provides wisdom on how to interpret spiritual and ethical realities.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit motivates and influences prophetic knowledge. He feeds prophetic insight into a church by empowering believers to

¹⁶Proverbs 24:6 (NKJV): “For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”

¹⁷“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many . . . But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body . . . God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:12-27 ESV).

¹⁸Galatians 5:16, 25 (NLT/ESV): “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit;” Romans 8:14 (ESV): “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God;” 2 Corinthians 3:17 (TPT): “Now, the ‘Lord’ I’m referring to is the Holy Spirit, and wherever he is Lord, there is freedom.”

discern God's voice and direction, often delivering messages through inspiration, Scripture, and spiritual gifts. He acts as the source of revelation, interpreting God's heart, and He leads the church. This supernatural wisdom guides larger decision making and aligns the body of believers with Jesus' lived example in the gospels. The Holy Spirit acts as the "Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation," enabling God's people to operate in the tangible realm with supernatural insight (Tarrants 2016).

The Fruits of the Spirit

The Spirit thus actualizes His fruits in the church and through prophetic influence. God's people, however, must allow themselves to be led by the Spirit.¹⁹ While an individual may not always vocalize how the Spirit leads their life, it is through the fruits of their behaviors that the Spirit's ethical mandate is articulated. Transcendent influence speaks *through* the individual, flowing through their minds, expressions, and actions. The Church must continuously yield itself to the desires of the Spirit, whose leadership is always diametrically opposed to the desires of the flesh. This is where Dante's position is impactful—he has encouraged WDC to engage with the fruits of the Spirit, sometimes in ways even he might not anticipate. Though Dante is human and can make mistakes, church members must practice patience if they feel tried by him, kindness/goodness in embracing his new position at the church, love by welcoming a new brother in the body, and self-control in mitigating one's own opinions on his new changes—instead submitting to his charismatic authority.²⁰ The fruits of the Spirit therefore evoke wholehearted, worshipful surrender and obedience in one's heart and life; this produces a kenotic love that is rooted in honoring our neighbor's best interest and highest good (Tarrants 2016).

To include an ethnographic vignette of this lived faith in action, through the active presence of the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of believers, I describe here an interview I had with a married couple, devoted attendees of Wesleyan Discipleship—Danielle and

Trevor. We met at Tommy's BBQ, a local hole in the wall, for an informal conversation about the logistics of a Spirit-led life. When the waitress brought Trevor's chicken salad and Danielle and my sandwiches, Trevor looked at her and asked, with eyes full of understanding and interest, if there was anything he could pray for her for. I quickly learned from this couple that they value intentional interpersonal connection and encourage a gentle and effective witness. "It's important to keep at the forefront that we're doing this for God, not man," Trevor stated. Danielle agreed, "it's all about the heart for us;" this couple exemplifies what an ethics of care looks like when it's truly embodied. They heavily prioritize *living out* their faith by putting the Bible's commands into practice. Their heart for the church, for outreach, for care, does not stem from institutionalized rules or influence from others—their personal relationship with God has transformed their hearts and changed their behaviors.

It is becoming increasingly clear that care and connection, actualized through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, is what unifies believers, encouraging inner transformation for church members to become more Christ-like. This is how the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control are actualized. It is a lived example of faith that provides a basis for Wesleyan Discipleship's moral order—a shared social energy that accompanies a sense of belonging among believers. This effervescent-type reality (cf. Durkheim 1912) continuously shapes everyday moral thoughts and behaviors through supernatural encounters. Ethical desire thus becomes intertwined with the One who created humankind in His image, making moral maturity and spiritual discernment reliant on transcendent awareness and communication. As Joel Robbins describes in his discussion of transcendent positioning within the anthropology of ethics, "It is that the sometimes insistent but often rather more gentle ethical desires various values set in play in the everyday that tip us into reflection . . . Ultimately, these desires and the moral energies they produce have their roots in the . . . face of transcendence" (Robbins 2016, 14).

¹⁹Galatians 5:18

²⁰Hebrews 13:17 (ESV): "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you;" 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NIV): "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work."

At Wesleyan Discipleship, it has become clear that an embodied exemplification of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life and heart is the church's 'ethics in the shadows.' This is expressed in daily acts of interrelational care, communication, and connection—with Christ and with one another. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45 ESV).

Thus, if Christians are aligning their lives with the Spirit, their relationship with Christ, others, and self culminates in an ethical balance that generates deep care for God through service and love toward others. Individual Christians must measure up their behaviors with the Word of God and reflect on the edification of the church in their spiritual walk. This places significant responsibility on each believer to live in step with the Spirit, practice spiritual/emotional maturation, obey God's commandments to the fullest,²¹ and strive to live a life of holiness unto the Lord.²² In living day-in and day-out this way, individuals can effectively be in tune with the Spirit and convey His words to others (Adkins 2026).

In summing up the importance of knowing the Spirit and communicating with the body of believers in a manner that glorifies Jesus, Ephesians 4:11-12 teaches that Christ gifted the church with leaders. These apostles, *prophets*, evangelists, and pastor-teachers are meant to equip *all* believers for works of service "so that the body may be built up" (v. 12). The goal is for church members to strengthen one another toward maturity.²³ Once, when I asked Dante what the pastoral role meant to him, he told me, "The pastor exists to equip the saints for the work of ministry." He cited Ephesians 4, looked up the chapter, and read portions to me. "The Christians are the ones in ministry. I don't do ministry, I'm not in ministry," he stated, tapping his fingers on the table, "I train for ministry. Big difference."

Pastor Jake seconded this statement in a separate conversation, "part of our role as pastors and leaders

in the church is to help people become self-feeders so that they go and study the Scriptures on their own, [get] involved in a small group, [and do] a Bible study . . . our job as pastors isn't just to spoon feed everybody. It is to help them learn to feed themselves and grow spiritually." The Ephesians passage above emphasizes that the church operates best when leaders train and empower church members to use their gifts, ensuring the strength of the entire body. These gifts are given to prevent spiritual immaturity and to foster a healthy, fruit-filled church.

Given this information, obeying the voice of the Spirit and maturing together is a prolonged process that requires humility, intentionality, and devotion. By noting how the body (behaviors), soul (attitude/mood), and spirit (heart posture) all intermix in congregants—the unity of these three elements is what must remain congruent within a person to exemplify the fruits of the Spirit. The character traits of the Spirit are what *must* be genuinely experienced/actualized. In living out this trajectory and following Dante's model of allowing the Spirit to challenge growth areas, the body will assuredly grow spiritually/emotionally, increase in unity, and witness to the secular world with increased power.²⁴

Anthropological Implications

Communicating with the divine has numerous implications for anthropology. Accepting the reality of transcendent communication—direct, subjective experience with the supernatural—would require a fundamental shift in anthropology's ontology. Researchers might shift from merely studying belief systems to actively engaging with them. This notion heavily challenges traditional, secular methodologies (Adkins 2026).

However, it also forces a reevaluation of the boundary between mundane reality, cultural imagination, and religious experience. It disrupts the traditional "hands-off" approach of a detached

²¹Matthew 5:48

²²1 Peter 1:16

^{23a}Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. . . . We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:13-16 NIV).

²⁴2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV): "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

observer, instead suggesting a cognitively sympathetic, religiously/experientially “open” approach to scientific study (Gorbanenko 2024). From my perspective as a Christian and a student of anthropology, this approach comes quite naturally. I can worship amid the people I study, pray with my interlocutors, and discuss (with full belief and trust) the ways the divine is enacting powerful spiritual experiences among church members. I have prayed with congregants, done Bible studies with them, and taken communion alongside them. This cross between spiritual experience and scientific study creates an existential tension that needs to be addressed in the professional realm.

Especially in the case of shared ontologies and values, transcendent communication bridges the gap between the researcher and the studied, where an anthropologist experiences the same phenomenon as their interlocutors. This occurred for me when I engaged in spiritual intercession with some of my informants, also hearing a word from the Lord alongside them. This personal experience validates the supernatural as part of the human experience and encourages interlocutors to share more.

Rather than framing such experiences as mystical or irrational from an anthropological standpoint, I suggest that these encounters are part of normal cognitive, social, and religious experiences. This relationship with the supernatural, referred to as “supernormal” or “extraordinary experiences,” moves the spiritual from the fringe into the focal point of human studies (Shanafelt 2011). Consider researchers like Timothy Larsen (2014), Edith Turner (1978), and Bruce Grindal (1983)—all of whom acknowledge spiritual experiences as viable anthropological inquiries, respect religious tradition, and engage with the supernatural as a part of legitimate human experiences. By normalizing divine encounters, the anthropological field is more consistently fulfilling its call to engage in cultural relativity, instead of positing that spirituality is mystical or fabricated by human emotion (Durkheim 1912). To dismiss and detach oneself from the spiritual is in direct opposition to anthropology’s commitment to engage in respectful, engaged epistemological analysis of culture.

While I am not claiming that an anthropologist must engage in religious practices they are not comfortable with, it is worth considering the powerful impact of the transcendent realm. Theology and

anthropology complement one another quite well if a researcher is willing to remove the blinders of bias against religion and fully immerse themselves into the power of the Spirit’s influence. By looking at biblical texts, my research shows that Christian ethics stem from character traits that are only actualized through the fruits of knowing the Holy Spirit. Without living in step with Him, love is not sustained, joy is not maintained, peace is not continuous, kindness runs out, goodness is flawed, gentleness gives way, faithfulness fades, patience vanishes, and self-control is only temporary. “Will not those who have ears, hear?” (Matthew 13:9, in Dreyer 2021, 14). I implore that it be made clear that Christian ethics can never be fully realized without the living presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, studying and knowing the Holy Spirit provides a fundamental understanding of moral integrity and virtuous living, and without Him, one cannot truly understand Christian ethics (cf. Dreyer 2021, 13).

However, while it is not surprising that the secular world rejects the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit,²⁵ I must inquire—what deep-rooted moral, ethical, and spiritual truths are lost without an ongoing relationship with the Spirit? What realities of human interactivity and cross-cultural understanding may the anthropological field be missing? If knowledge of the Spirit feeds comprehension of truth, reality, and morality, consider how much anthropological research might be enhanced by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. “To understand the sanctified experience . . . one [must] understand—and ultimately *feel* the power of the Spirit. Otherwise . . . one can only sit there and look” (Hinson 1999, 2). In the same way, without engaging with the Spirit and becoming sanctified into deeper holiness, an anthropologist can only sit there and look through a dark glass—capturing a muddled understanding of human realities. It is critical, therefore, that the scholastic realm respect diverse sociocultural experiences (including religious ones) and remain open to the spirit realm as a plausible portion of the human experience.

Conclusion: The Ethical Responsibility of Spiritual Awareness

My academic research challenges both the body of believers and the secular anthropological realm. I encourage both entities to go deeper; to consider their

²⁵1 Corinthians 2:14

own ethical and practical realities, to open themselves up toward a more transcendent-led way of life. In doing so, the field of anthropology could benefit from a Christianized outlook on religious studies. The Holy Spirit offers moral clarity, practical wisdom, ethical insight, and interpersonal guidance—as both the source of compassion and the root of ethnographic and scholastic knowing. Through interpersonal communication and time spent with interlocutors, the Holy Spirit revealed Himself as the initiator of moral standards, working through the inner life of the individual and the collective body to actualize deeper levels of congruent biblical behaviors. My research, then, seeks to show how a system of ethics that relies on the precepts of the Bible enacted through the power of the Holy Spirit is not only logically sound and conceptually true, but also practical, beneficial, and effective when applied to real-life situations.

In considering implications for the life of the Church, several encouraging challenges for a greater practice of ethics arise. How intentionally are the people of God striving for an infilling of the Spirit? How deeply are congregants seeking after the heart of God, with the goal of intentionally embodying the fruits of the Spirit?²⁶ How willing is the body to engage in critical self-reflection (Percy 2018), humble servitude (Backues 2017), and active denial of self (Luke 9:23)? While these are complex, epistemologically challenging questions, they are necessary for the people of God to consider if they wish to testify for Christ powerfully, live in-tune with the Spirit of God, and intentionally impact believers and nonbelievers with spiritual truth.

These ethical challenges are primarily for the health and benefit of the Church, so God's people may be unified, peace-filled, gracious, kind and giving—building up a strong body, one secure and capable of fulfilling God's role for each person.²⁷ Yet, if a Christian wishes to experience the depths of Christ's character, these intense ethical inquiries must be debated within the life of every church. Scripture acts

as a light that exposes human hearts and provides discernment (Hopper 2025).²⁸ To attain this wisdom, one must align one's own life with God's character, obey His commandments, and live righteously rather than hiding in sinful darkness. I must ask, stepping back, what is darker than a church unaware/closed off to spiritual truth? Let me confirm here—I am not claiming that my church of study is walking in darkness. Rather, I hope to encourage the body to take seriously their spiritual position before Christ. It is necessary for individuals and the body at WDC to concordantly embody the fruits of the Spirit and build treasures in heaven. This is where knowing the truth of God and walking in it sets believers free,²⁹ allowing them to live a life of congruence, institutional clarity, and individual joy before God—where believers effectively follow righteous statutes.³⁰

The Spirit works through people, including those who function as prophets in the church. In my research, this was seen through Dante, the Weberian prophet who instituted notable change. Every story has a wildcard, and Dante was that wildcard for Wesleyan Discipleship. While some may argue he is used by the Spirit and others may not agree, it is undeniable that, like a prophet, he has operated somewhat outside established Wesleyan institutional structures, claimed to receive personal revelations from the supernatural, and acted as an intermediary, delivering messages to the community. Arriving at a time of social change and a desire for renewal within the church, Dante has contributed significantly to restructuring the status quo and motivating congregants to engage in spiritual reflection. All of this allows the community to consider individual and collective ethical practice and re-engage in self-growth through the Spirit more deeply.

Therefore, the Spirit is the crux of it all, working through the shadows of church life to create a unified body of believers. The Holy Spirit, the initiator of righteous living, strives to mature His followers into strong (emotionally, spiritually) servant leaders, who can maintain an ongoing transcendent-human

²⁶Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, self-control, see Galatians 5:22-23.

²⁷Ephesians 4:15-16; Romans 12:4-6

²⁸Psalms 119:105

²⁹John 8:32

³⁰Psalms 19:8-9

relationship, as well as a collective, smooth-flowing dynamic with other Christians.³¹ All of this is for the growth and spiritual maturity of the church, meant to be actualized because of love for God and care for one's community. These dynamics may emulate Martyn Percy's perspective on the varied reality of a theological environment: "its strength may still lie in its apparent paradoxes: its unity in its diversity, its coherence in its difference, its shape in its diffusiveness, its hope in a degree of faithful doubt, its energy in passionate coolness" (2018, 311). In much the same way, WDC may in fact be growing stronger, even with its increase in tension between the liturgical, social, relational, and spiritual aspects of the church.

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³¹ "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4 NIV); "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18 ESV).



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