CHAPTER SEVEN

Devotional Catholicism in the Wake of Vatican II

Of what use is it, my brethren, if a man claims to have faith, and has no deeds to show for it? Can faith save him then? Here is a brother, here is a sister, going naked, without means to secure their daily food; if one of you says to them, Go in peace, warm yourselves and take your fill, without providing for their bodily needs, of what use is it? Thus faith, if it has no deeds to show for itself, has lost its own principle of life.

—JAMES 2:14–17

Our practice of religion is too often equated with religious pictures, crucifixes, and other material things; or in lifeless formulas such as prayer at fixed times of the day, novenas, abstinence on Friday, Mass on Sunday without any participation in the Great Act of Sacrifice; and, worst of all, our running away from those places where the Catholic Action should be, or from those persons whom we should be embracing in brotherly love.

—MOTHER VIOLA, 1966, DCCW CONVENTION

THOUGH STRONG EVIDENCE POINTS TO LAYMEN AND LAYWOMEN'S increasing rejection of devotional behaviors in the 1950s, Church officials did not acknowledge any change until the mid-1960s. It is not clear whether Church officials did not see the decline before then or simply chose not to discuss it openly. But in the years after the Council they noted the decline with alarm, and sought to understand and arrest it. This chapter seeks both to chart the further demise

of lay devotional behavior and to explore the public response to this knowledge. It focuses on the Diocesan Pastoral Council's investigation of the decline as well as Diocesan Council of Catholic Women and Holy Name Society actions, the Liturgical Commission's continuing efforts to transform Catholic worship practices, and the structure of devotional practices in the parishes. We have explored the causes of the decline in devotions already. This discussion focuses on diocesan officials' discovery of lay disengagement and their attempts to arrest it.

Noting the Decline in Devotions

No one who discussed devotions in the Pittsburgh diocese in the late 1960s doubted that parishioners practiced them less than before. All debate and discussion focused on why devotions declined, how the diocese and parishes might revive them, and even, for some, whether devotions merited popularity at all. Though everyone seemed to agree that devotions declined, the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) formed a subcommittee to determine to what extent this was so and why. The subcommittee conducted a survey of retreat houses and parish pastors to ascertain the state of devotional practice, and this survey indicated that parishioners had begun to abandon devotions before 1968.

Seventy-two percent of the parishes and missions responded to the survey, and they reported an overall decline in devotions. Roughly 64 percent of the pastors who responded to the survey sponsored a retreat of some kind (for men, women, or youth), but 26 percent of these pastors perceived retreats in their parishes to be declining in popularity. Another 15 percent considered their retreats to be improving, and 59 percent perceived them to be about the same. These figures meant that 54 percent of all responding parishes either held no retreats or considered their retreats' popularity to be in decline.[1] The decline was more severe among male parishioners, as the survey report stated that more women's retreats than men's were improving (though it provided no data to support this).

A separate survey taken of retreat masters at eight area retreat houses reported similar results. Of the eight houses, five saw a decline in retreatants over the past five years (1962–67), only two saw increases, and one reported both a decline and an increase. The retreat masters saw a combination of reasons for this decline, though they emphasized most heavily the poor promotions that retreats received in the parishes and increased lay involvement in other areas. The retreat masters uniformly dismissed the possibility that the preaching that retreatants heard while on retreat had any influence on their decisions not to

return, and did not address explicitly whether some other aspect of retreats did not attract the laity.[2]

The Benedictines at Saint Vincent's Archabbey and the Holy Name Society retreat leaders took a slightly more sophisticated approach to their own survey two years later. They too had become alarmed at the decline in the laity attending retreats at summer sessions and sought to find out why it had happened. Attendance at Saint Vincent College summer retreats had fallen by over 50 percent between 1960 and 1970, from roughly 2,000 retreatants each summer to fewer than 1,000. The Saint Vincent survey targeted two groups of laity to discern answers to the question. They surveyed 502 laymen who continued to attend retreats regularly and a group of 250 lay leaders that the Pittsburgh diocese had identified for them. Both groups remained active in the Church and their membership may even have overlapped a bit. But the lay leaders favored more "modern" retreats in greater numbers than the retreatants, and they were less interested in traditional retreats. (See fig. 7.1.)

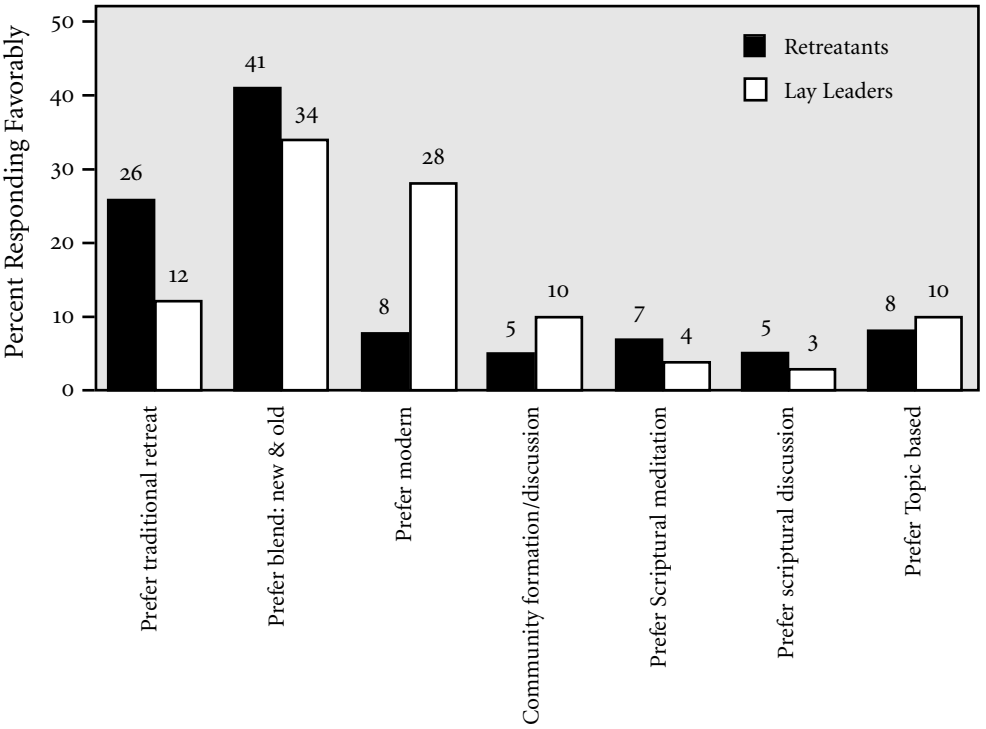
In addition to seeking to understand what kinds of retreat these two groups of laity wanted, the survey asked what kinds of devotions each group wished to participate in while on retreat. The results suggest strongly that the retreatants remained far more interested in devotions generally than did the lay leaders. By 1970, only a third of active lay Catholic leaders sought holy hours and benedictions, and the numbers for rosary recitation, Stations of the Cross, Bible vigils, and adoration dropped below even those levels. The results indicate that even when active lay Catholics were interested in retreats, they did not wish to participate in devotional rituals. (See fig. 7.2.)

The DPC devotional survey revealed that attendance at those devotions that constituted the mainstay of the pre–Vatican II religious practice, such as first Friday devotions, novenas, and forty-hours devotions, was declining in more parishes than it was increasing. In fact, attendance at devotional liturgies declined in at least twice as many parishes as it increased in 1968. (See table 7.1.)

But not all Catholics abandoned devotions. A significant minority of pastors perceived participation in devotions to be about the same in 1968 as it had been in previous years, and a generally smaller but still significant number of priests believed devotions to be on the rise. Perhaps the most interesting question that this survey inspires, but which the surviving summary report cannot answer, is which parishes saw the decline and which did not?

Despite the evidence in 1968 that devotions did not decline in all parishes, all the examinations of devotional life that the subcommittee solicited and the discussion in the Diocesan Pastoral Council took as their premise that the decline was universal.

FIGURE 7.1 Lay Retreat Survey: Retreatants and Lay Leaders (1970)



Source: Saint Vincent Lay Retreats file # 48c, Lay Summer Retreats box, Saint Vincent Archabbey Archives.

FIGURE 7.2 Retreats Should Include Specific Exercises (1970 Survey of Retreatants and Lay Leaders)

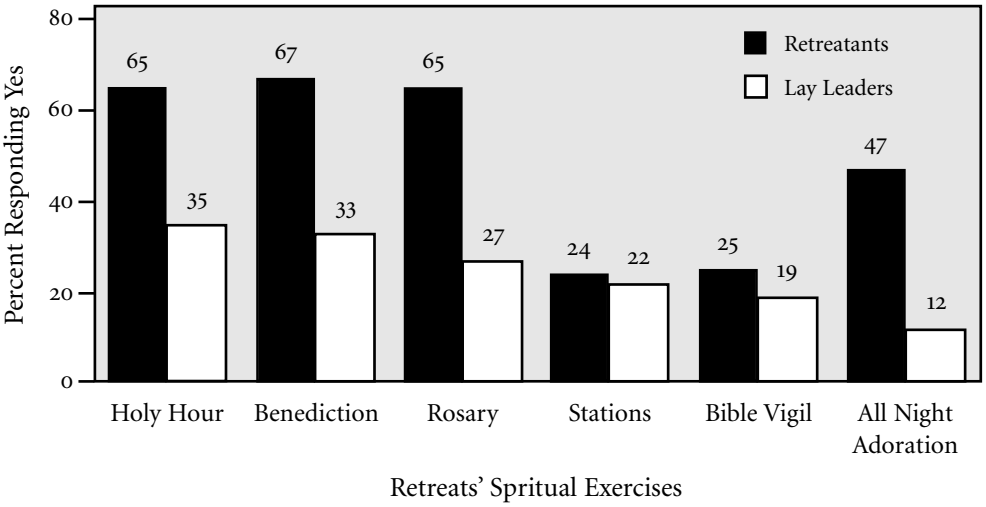


TABLE 7.1 Diocesan Pastoral Council Devotion Survey Results, 1968

	Number of Parishes	*% of Parishes*
Forty Hours		
Attendance is improving	54	22
Attendance is declining	109	43
Attendance is the same	47	19
No response	15	6
Total parishes sponsoring devotion	225	90
Total parishes with no devotion	24	10
Surveyed parishes with no devotion or decline in devotions	133	53
First Friday		
Attendance is improving	49	20
Attendance is declining	107	43
Attendance is the same	52	21
No response	15	6
Total parishes sponsoring devotion	223	90
Total parishes with no devotion	26	10
Surveyed parishes with no devotion or decline in devotions	133	53
Novenas		
Attendance is improving	23	10
Attendance is declining	58	23
Attendance is the same	42	17
No response	13	5
Total parishes sponsoring devotion	136	55
Total parishes with no devotion	113	45
Surveyed parishes with no devotion or decline in devotions	171	69

Source: Survey on Devotional Life in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Diocesan Pastoral Council Collection, HADP.

In addition to conducting the survey, the committee sought explanations from various people for the decline in devotions, and then submitted its own analysis. The examinations and analyses the committee solicited and produced itself represent the first explicit study of devotions in the Pittsburgh diocese since at least 1950. No one attempted to fit devotions into the larger context of Catholic life while they flourished, though the laity learned from a wide range of sources that devotions were beneficial, expedient, and even necessary.

The explanations generally agreed that parishioners had undergone, or were currently undergoing, a dramatic transformation in their perceptions of God, themselves, their Church, and the world. They also agreed generally that popular devotions grew from *popular* cultural practices, often with the hierarchy's encouragement, but sometimes not, and that they occupied no official place in official Catholic teaching. The hierarchy did not give retreats, adoration, benediction, and rosary recitation the same status that it bestowed on the Mass, confession, or other sacraments. Yet the hierarchy considered devotions to be in some way intrinsic to proper Catholic formation and deportment. The Rev. Raymond Utz, the Diocesan Spiritual Activities Commission spiritual adviser, noted, "It goes without saying that these devotions are both valid and necessary." The Devotion Committee at least attempted to say why they were valid and necessary when it concluded that "The purpose of true religious devotions is to intensify the soul's dedication to know, love, and serve God."[3]

If the explanations did not all articulate the devotions' purpose, they generally agreed that devotional popularity depended upon forces within and outside of the Church itself. Catholic liturgical reforms filled the void the old liturgy had left with parishioners; they no longer needed "extra-Mass" liturgies for a rich and relevant Catholic experience. The material prosperity Americans enjoyed after World War II filled the physical and material void that poorer Catholics had sought to mitigate through petitional devotions. They no longer had to ask for divine intervention to achieve financial stability or physical healing.

Many explanations for the decline emphasized non-Catholic, or nonreligious causes. For example, the Devotional Committee stressed the Catholics' rise from the laboring and "subjected" class, the relative absence of material and physical needs, and increased competition for leisure time. J. Richard Gomory argued in his explanation of the devotional decline that wars, especially wars that placed significant numbers of Catholics in "battle areas," drew Catholics to "weekly holy hour devotions for the boys overseas." Vietnam did not qualify—there were not enough combatants—and devotional life suffered. The Rev. Raymond Utz expanded Gomory's explanation to suggest that devotions thrived during periods of great distress and need: "War, depression, sickness, even strikes,

stimulate these practices."[4] These factors would have dampened devotional participation even had the Second Vatican Council not met.

But these same people rooted other explanations for the devotional demise in a changed religious sensibility as well. The Devotional Committee determined that the new Mass met crucial lay psychological, social, and theological needs to participate in the Church's public prayer life which the old liturgy did not. Raymond Utz noted a "growing apathy toward religion" among all Americans as they shifted from an "ideational value-system" to a "sensate value-system," a more sophisticated theology among the laity which went beyond a "giver-receiver" relationship with God, a new "more refined taste in matters spiritual" which stressed prayers of praise, the correction of devotional abuses (too frequent benediction), and the decline in popularity of those devotions that emphasized quantification (the accumulation of indulgences).[5]

The Mass in a Postdevotional Church

The explanations for devotional decline noted a changed lay understanding of religious expression and sensibility, and rooted these changes in the laity's new social and political experiences. To a lesser degree, the explanations noted the laity's greater satisfaction with the newer Catholicism emerging from efforts in the local parishes, lay organizations, the diocesan Liturgical Commission, and, especially, Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council gave a coherent voice to a strong reform impulse among the laity and hierarchy which transformed American Catholicism. A closer examination of the messages Catholics received and the behaviors they undertook in these organizations and parishes clarifies the process by which Catholics came to abandon devotions, and illuminates the new conception of Catholicism from which that abandonment resulted.

The Liturgical Commission entered the Vatican Council years at the forefront of reform, pushing recalcitrant priests toward a more democratic, informed, and participatory liturgy. Bishop Wright, who was largely sympathetic and clearly supportive of the commission, often had to restrain the commission members in their efforts. He was not always successful. But the commission changed its role as well as its composition in 1966, so that over the next few years it served as a "moderate" reform organization that more often criticized reform advocates than entrenched resisters. Though the Liturgical Commission had ardently and actively pushed for a new liturgical understanding and practice in its early years to complement more fully the changing lay religious sensibility, by

1966 the forces it helped unleash had largely passed it by. The dynamo of reform activity moved to the parishes and to the national bishops organization.

The commission continued to present themes it had advocated for half a decade. The laity must participate in and understand the Mass, they must experience internal participation through meaningful external actions. In February 1967, for example, the *Newsletter* argued against introducing a cultivated "sacral language" into the Mass. The commission members worried that some pastors and lectors were attempting to subvert the vernacular movement by creating a sacred English that differed in diction and voice from everyday English. The *Newsletter* announced that

> our position is still that the most sacral language, the speech understood best by God and man, is the language of the commonplace. Language on this level is the "leveler" that reduces all to a common denominator that must be pleasing to God, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit.[6]

Similarly, the Liturgical Commission pushed for music in Mass that everyone could sing, and urged pastors and choirmasters to eliminate special hymns that originated in the cloistered abbeys.[7]

The *Newsletter* announced and explained the introduction of three major Mass transformations in this period immediately after the Council, each of which introduced more English into the liturgy. In June 1967 the American bishops introduced changes that so reduced the singing at "High Mass" that a distinction between High and Low Mass disappeared officially. This new Mass also reduced the Communion interaction to a shorter, simpler exchange of words. Once the *Newsletter* fully explained the new liturgy it declared that the bishops would introduce no major changes for a long time.[8]

But just four months later the *Newsletter* explained a new role for choirs and Holy Week revisions that constituted a "RADICAL departure from the ways of old," and which confirmed that "our liturgical progress has been so rapid, beyond all expectations, that what was considered progress last year must now be subjugated to just another step in the ladder of liturgical progress."[9] On January 1, 1969, a new "English" Canon, which the bishops designated "Eucharistic Prayers," took effect for all American parishes.[10]

As the Mass became more and more accessible for ordinary Catholics, more understandable, more in line with principles applied universally, the older devotions became less comprehensible. Some, which had long contradicted official canon law, could not withstand the scrutiny Church officials focused on all

formal rituals. Efforts to bring them into line liturgically and theologically necessarily entailed changes in some devotions.

But the decline in devotions' popularity did not result so much from official liturgical scrutiny as it did from changed lay perspectives. It came more as a result of the new sensibility that the emphasis on more democratic and participatory liturgies reinforced. Church officials were in a sense catching up to the laity on these matters. The Liturgical Commission helped to meet this new lay understanding of Catholicism through its reform efforts, despite the commission's increasing efforts to moderate the pace and extent of the transformation.

Devotional participation owed its decline as much to changes within those organizations that had long supported devotions as to those that grew up outside the devotional tradition, however. These organizations, such as the Holy Name Society and the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, came to focus heavily on social justice in part because of the influence that reform bodies such as the Liturgical Commission and the *Pittsburgh Catholic* wielded. But Bishop Wright also steered them consciously toward change.

Devotional Organizations in a Postdevotional Church

Members of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women met each year for a convention in which they listened to speakers, attended Mass, and interacted in workshops. They produced a yearbook for each convention and dedicated either the book, the year, or a large body of already recited prayers to a person, group, or cause. The DCCW's annual convention yearbook dedications provide a concise outline of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women's transformation from devotions to social justice, and then, later, its demise as an organization. (See table 7.2.)

A brief examination of these "dedications" sets the tone and parameters of the transformation that the DCCW underwent. The members worked each year from the organization's revival in 1954 until the middle of the 1960s to collect large amounts of prayers for the bishop himself, so that he might expend the power of those prayers toward increased vocations or some other goal that he chose. These gifts of prayers reflected the members' heavy devotional behaviors and the deference this devotional faith produced for ecclesiastical elites. The members donated prayers to the ordinary of the diocese, but limited the bishop's ability to apply them as he chose by further specifying that he should invest them toward garnering additional vocations only. Bishop Dearden was not to use these prayers for world peace or domestic harmony, but rather for

TABLE 7.2 Diocesan Council of Catholic Women Yearbook Dedications

Year	*Prayer/Actions*	*Total Prayers*	*Recipient/Cause*
1954	Rosaries	Many thousands	Bishop Dearden, vocations
1955	Rosaries	20,197	Bishop Dearden, vocations
1956	Rosaries	24,855	Bishop Dearden, vocations
1957	Rosaries	37,051	Bishop Dearden, vocations
1958	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Dearden, vocations
1959	Rosaries	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1960	Rosaries	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1961	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1962	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1963	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1964	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1965	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1966	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright, his intentions
1967	Hail Marys	Undisclosed	Bishop Wright and clergy
1968	Hail Marys	1,000,000	Bishop Wright and brothers and sisters
1969	Hail Marys	1,000,000	Bishop Wright and brothers and sisters
1970	Hail Marys/prayers & cooperation	1,000,000	Bishop Leonard /Auxiliary Bishop Bosco
1971	Prayers and cooperation	Undisclosed	Bishop Leonard for his prayers
1972	Prayers	Undisclosed	Msgr. Schultz on 25th anniversary
1973	Prayers and cooperation	Undisclosed	Priests of diocese
1974	Dedication		Sanctity of all Life
1975	Dedication		Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton
1983	Prayers	Undisclosed	Fr. John Price (DCCW moderator)
1984	Hail Marys	1,000,000	Bishop Bevilacqua
1985	Dedication	Undisclosed	Youth of World (UN Youth Year)
1986	Dedication	Undisclosed	Mother, Good Counsel/Past Presidents
1987	Dedication	Undisclosed	Fr. John Price, year after death
1988	Love, prayers, respect	Undisclosed	Bishop Donald Wuerl

Source: Diocesan Council of Catholic Women Annual Convention Yearbook.

the enlistment of more priests to hear confessions and lead Catholics in devotional rituals.

The DCCW broadened its efforts with the arrival of John Wright as bishop in 1959. Though women still gave their hours of prayer to the bishop, he could do what he wished with them. (No evidence of what he actually did remains.) By 1967 the DCCW members dedicated their prayers to the clergy as well as to Bishop Wright, which reflected the second widening in the members' scope of concern. In 1968 and 1969, the members prayed on behalf of Bishop Wright and all other Catholics in the diocese, and further specified in 1968 that they did so that "we may ever see Christ in one another and love one another as brothers and sisters."[11] These two years, 1968 and 1969, mark the climax of the DCCW's concern for social justice. In addition to the widely addressed dedications, the DCCW newsletter boasted that 700 women attended the 1968 and 1969 conventions, and even more remarkably, 350 women attended the 1969 annual business meeting.[12]

Bishop Wright moved on to Rome in 1969 and his replacement, Bishop Leonard, did not share Wright's keen interest in, and capacity to inspire Catholics to work toward, social justice. Because the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women more than any other lay organization followed the ordinary's directions, the DCCW quickly reverted to a more devotional mode. Members donated prayers only to Bishop Leonard and his newly appointed auxiliary in 1970, and to Bishop Leonard alone in 1971. The 1971 dedication reflected the DCCW's own troubles, as members donated all their prayers to Leonard in the hope that he in turn would devote his prayers back to them.

Even this later devotional tenor carried some of the postdevotional influences, however. DCCW members devoted their prayers to the bishops only in each bishop's first year of service in the diocese, and dedicated other years for causes (against abortion) or people more closely connected to the DCCW itself (moderators, past presidents). But by this time the organization had withered substantially. The devotional emphasis did not attract new members or hold old ones. The DCCW was largely a paper organization in the 1980s with little influence on women's lives in the Pittsburgh diocese.[13]

The move from a devotional emphasis to one on social justice within the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women reveals an important part of this transformation in the Pittsburgh diocese. Though the DCCW had from its revitalization in 1954 emphasized Catholic Action, members had always balanced this with a strong emphasis on devotions such as adoration, retreats, and especially rosary recitation. In addition, the Catholic Action emphasis had centered largely on charitable enterprises and issues that tended to support rather than question ex-

TABLE 7.3 DCCW Annual Retreat Offerings

Year	*Number of Retreats*	*Houses*	*Total Retreat Days*
1955	6	6	18
1956	7	7	21
1957	7	7	22
1958	7	7	22
1959	7	7	21
1960	7	7	21
1961	5	6	15
1962	9	6	27
1963	7	6	21
1964	5	5	15
1965	8	4	24
1966	22	3*	66
1967	24	1	68
1968	32	1	76
1969	25	1	71
1970	42	1	66
1971	17	2	25

*This marks the first year that the Cenacle Retreat House opened for retreats.
Source: The Echo, newsletter of the DCCW.

isting institutions and structures (such as hosting foreign students and working for traffic safety). But the DCCW shifted the balance quickly away from devotions during the years the Vatican Council met and by the mid-1960s came to focus almost exclusively on social justice.

The DCCW moved rapidly away from devotions once the Council got under way, so that even by 1963 its newsletter recommended only retreats from among the range of devotional behaviors that it had once supported. Over the course of the next few years, even the number of retreats from which women had to choose declined. (See table 7.3.)

The decline in retreat offerings reversed slightly in 1965, and offerings then rose dramatically in 1966 when Bishop Wright finally succeeded in bringing the Religious of the Cenacle, an order of sisters devoted exclusively to providing retreats for women, to the diocese. But even this retreat revival reflected the new emphasis on acting in, rather than apart from, the modern world. Bishop Wright