

Again, A Personal Opinion!

(A Concluding Article on the Gifts of the Spirit according to 1 Corinthians 12: 8-10)

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On the third of January I posted my first in what has become a series of articles on the *charismata* and the Holy Spirit titled "A Personal Opinion". It was first written as an "opinion" to the Bishops of my Communion to re-examine the Charismatic stream in what we call as part of the Convergence Movement. At several past House of Bishops meetings we spent considerable time reviewing the previous years, our loss in the number of churches and members, the ratio of clergy to parishioners, and ways in which we might promote church growth. I felt a conviction from the Holy Spirit that we are to re-examine who we are as the International Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church. Many of us came into the ICCEC because it was openly charismatic, and we came from denominations in which we were seen as "different" and out of the mainstream of Christianity. I was delighted to find in the ICCEC my Patriarch and other Bishops prayed in tongues, gave prophetic utterances, and were not embarrassed to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There are numerous ways in which the *charis* (grace) of the Holy Spirit is manifested to the Church. Some of these manifestations we may fail to acknowledge or recognize. One was pointed out by Archbishop Bates in response to my first article. The prayer in the Eucharist asking the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus is such an example. Just as the Holy Spirit changes a human life when surrendered to Jesus as Savior and Lord, so the Holy Spirit works in numerous ways to give Grace to God's people. The Holy Communion is one! These must never be ignored, and as a Three Stream Church we acknowledge the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in a person's life when surrendered to Jesus (evangelical), and in the Eucharistic feast as God and man sit down at table (catholic).

At the same time in reflecting on my short years as a supervising Bishop in Rwanda, Tanzania and Burundi I wonder if the charismatic emphasis may have been neglected in my teaching Convergence to those whom I would later ordain. In my bishopric I have ordained 303 men and Confirmed 3,809 adults. This does not say the teaching on Sacraments and liturgy was unimportant, but perhaps there were times I assumed these men coming

from evangelical and pentecost backgrounds were knowledgeable about the working of the Holy Spirit, and were themselves Baptized in the Holy Spirit. Many errors are made by our assumptions. Hence I raise the question to my brothers: - Bishops, Priests and Deacons. How relevant in our lives is that personal relationship where Jesus baptized us with the Holy Spirit and power? And if we ask ourselves as those in Holy Orders that questions, what then do we ask regarding the members of our congregations? Archbishop Bates prepares new members of the Cathedral of the Intercessor by putting them through the Alpha course which when fully taught concludes with the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He conducts a monthly Prayer and Praise service in the Cathedral and encourages the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our Patriarch is setting an example for the rest of us. Just as Jesus said to the first Apostles that they were to receive Power through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 5,8) so believers today need both the realization of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through a Pentecostal encounter.

As Missions Consultant to the Patriarch I get email referrals from men in Africa and South America who are interested in the ICCEC. We have experienced unique growth in the African and Brazilian churches while stagnated or losing members in the American Church. I sensed the conviction of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of this year that He is encouraging us to remember the first love that brought growth and excitement to the Charismatic Episcopal Church; that we have entered a decade of renewal. Archbishop Bates said, "I came into the CHARISMATIC Episcopal Church because we were openly charismatic and not ashamed of being charismatic." That is the testimony of many of us.

Without neglecting the Evangelical and Catholic (Liturgical and Sacramental) Streams, we must re-examine ourselves and enjoy our first love. I believe the Holy Spirit will bring into our Communion those to whom we can minister, and who will be empowered to minister to others.

Over the past few weeks the list of recipients of these postings has grown to 122 email accounts. I first sent to the Bishops of our Communion and some of the priests. I included a few men from other denominations whom I count as my brothers and friends in the Lord. I have had response from some of you telling me that you have passed on my articles to others. I have no idea how many now read these postings. Early in the posting I received the following email from Bishop Charles Sekelwa of Tanzania: "Greetings from

Mwanza in the name of our Lord Jesus. This short note seeks to appreciate and applaud your commitment to the noble work you are doing in the form of instructions or teachings on the operations and giftings of the Holy Spirit. I believe we are all blessed especially those who closely follow them (The teachings). It is an undeniable fact that nothing greater can be accomplished in the Kingdom of God in our respective ministries without the manifestations of the works of the Holy Spirit. Christians (The laity and the clergy) in our entire Diocese have just completed ten days of fasting prayers last Sunday. It was so glorious as the Holy Spirit was at work during the days of prayers. We used some of your teachings to help our people, especially the new converts so that they know the works of our Holy Comforter. Thank you Brother. Keep it up and God bless."

In several of our African dioceses there has grown a desire from the clergy to study about the manifestations of the Holy Spirit due to their Bishops copying my articles to their clergy. Several days ago I received the following from Bishop Hannington Bahemuka of Uganda: "Dear Bishop Weeks. Thank you again for this article and those you have sent before. They have been a wonderful tool for my clergy. I cannot put a price tag on the value of these articles. Since you started sending them, I began sharing them with my clergy and my Archdeacons suggested that all the clergy should begin assembling every Friday and study the insights in them. Their testimony is that we are now re-digging the gold mines of spiritual wealth and namely the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Body of Christ. They say they are no longer the same since they started reading these articles. They are now empowered in their ministry. We will incorporate them in our training program. We thank you".

I am humbled by these emails from Bishop Sekelwa and Bishop Bahemuka. One of our American priests wrote saying he is considering a home study of the gifts. Bishop Michael Davidson gave an "AMEN" to Bishop Bahemuka's email, and has offered to develop a study syllabus on the articles that can be incorporated into the Certificate Program, and made available for churches to use with their membership. I am blessed! More is coming emphasizing the Roman gifts as well as the others at the end of First Corinthians Twelve. Pray for the Holy Spirit to revive our Communion, and bless the good works now being done by the Patriarch's Council, and that the various Houses of Bishops will continue to "fill the void" that was prophesied concerning our church twenty years ago.