

DARE WE TRUST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

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On the Feast of Saint Mark, April 25, 1969, kneeling in front of the pulpit in the Church of the Good Shepherd, Kanawha City Charleston, West Virginia, I became peculiarly aware of the Holy Spirit. Prior to that morning He was more of an “it” than a “He” but when the American Baptist minister whom God sent that morning prayed for me, the Holy Spirit became real without my expecting Him.

I was preparing for a ministry I had never before performed – an exorcism! They did not teach us how to do that in seminary. Six months earlier the suggestion that I would perform such would have been the most remote thing in my mind. Several months earlier while attending the College of Preachers at the Washington D.C. Episcopal Cathedral my former seminary classmate witnessed to me about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I had been told that another classmate had some kind of Pentecostal experience and spoke in tongues and was now Vicar of a church in Alaska. My reaction was that is a good place for him to be; cool down! Now I am listening to my roommate at the College tell about his praying in tongues. I invited him to conduct a healing mission at Good Shepherd and it was greater than any revival could have been, both for the membership of Good Shepherd and the Christian community of Charleston. Within days after the mission ended a parishioner phoned asking if I would talk with a friend who had come to town and had a problem. I met with her and listened to her story about strange things happening in her apartment and apparitions appearing in the night in her bedroom. She left Los Angeles where she lived thinking these weird things were due to a man whom she was seeing, only to discover that she had not escaped these occurrences; they came with her.

I phoned my classmate for guidance. He told me what to do and how to do it, and when this Baptist minister came to talk with me that morning, I wanted to get rid of him so I could study the instructions I had been given. I thought if I ask him to pray for me he would leave. He prayed for me and then took a seat in the church while I ministered to the young lady.

All I can say is that after his praying for me I felt plugged into a source of Power I had never before experienced. The evening before I knelt at the same spot and asked God for help. I felt myself very powerless to do the kind of ministry expected of me. The ministry that morning went well. The young lady was helped and it was the start of a new life for me.

I am the kind of person who doesn't take things part way. I am either totally for something or totally against. When David duPlessis (Mr. Pentecost) assured me at a later time that I had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, I was totally immersed in the “charismatic movement” and everyone knew it. I had several inquiries about moving to a new church and in my response I gave them my testimony that terminated the invitation. They were not looking for a charismatic Priest. Perhaps they had heard

negative things about us. When a church member would complain about the book display in the narthex, or our Monday night Prayer and Praise service, I would give the church member my testimony which sometimes ended with their receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, or no more complaining to me less they get more testimony. My study of the Acts of the Apostles convinced me that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit was expected of all Christians. The reports of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the Acts made clear that believers were to be empowered with the Holy Spirit. If it was good for them, it was good for us, and I was far from being a closet charismatic.

I don't remember how I got an invitation to a Holy Spirit conference in Bermuda, but June and I went to that conference where we met John Sherrill. Mr. Sherrill was Senior Editor of *Guidepost*, and had authored a book about his own experience entitled "*They Speak With Other Tongues*". God created a wonderful friendship with John, and I asked if he would come to Good Shepherd and conduct a weekend mission on the Holy Spirit. He said he would if the Vestry invited him. It was wisdom on the part of Mr. Sherrill, because if there were any repercussions I would not be blamed if the Vestry issued the invitation.

I acquired copies of "*Cross And The Switchblade*" and "*They Speak With Other Tongues*" which he had authored, along with copies of "*Guidepost*" which they were already familiar. The Vestry was excited that such an important and famous man would be willing to come to their church and immediately issued the invitation. The first weekend of December 5, 6, and 7, 1969, John Sherrill came to Charleston.

On Friday night he spoke for one hour to a church full of eager listeners. His teaching was about the nine traditional "gifts" of the Holy Spirit recorded in First Corinthians 12: 8-10. Out of his wealth of knowledge as an author and editor, he explained each gift with illustrations easy for the people to understand, and realize that these manifestations presented by Saint Paul were valid for today.

On Saturday morning the young people were separated from the adults and studied the chapter about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in "*Cross And The Switchblade*". The adults gathered in the parish hall. We were about forty souls listening to Mr. Sherrill talk more about the Person of the Holy Spirit. Throughout his speaking he frequently used the phrase "Spirit led" and Dave Barry, one of the vestrymen, asked what did he mean by that phrase. Mr. Sherrill explained that there are times when in a worship setting no human is in charge and the congregation allows the Holy Spirit to lead. It was sort of like what we understood the early Quakers practiced, and people would respond to whatever motivation they felt the Spirit was directing. Dave wanted to "try it".

Immediately I was on my feet, objecting. "You don't know what you are asking for", I said. In fact I didn't know what was being asked, but I knew it would be different from anything we had ever experienced. "If anything goes wrong, I am the one the Bishop will hold responsible". There was beginning to be a stir among the listeners and Dave said, "As a Vestryman, I will be responsible."

The parish hall is at one end of the building; the sanctuary at the far distant end. We started the long walk pass the ladies parlor, class rooms, offices, rest rooms, and finally through the French doors opening into the Sanctuary. When I opened those doors the Presence of the Lord was so strong I sat down in a pew and held on because I knew if I did not I would be in the floor. The Holy Spirit had preceded us and was waiting to bless us. The young people left their classroom and joined us. People scattered throughout the sanctuary, some sitting, others kneeling. After a few minutes of quietness someone began a spiritual chorus and we all joined in. Our older daughter Gail went to the altar rail to pray and Elizabeth Hutton, one of the young people, knelt with her and she received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Our church organist who had resisted much of what I had started doing suddenly burst out, "Oh, Jesus, You are so wonderful" and Jesus became real in her life. Some weeks later at a Monday night prayer meeting in our Rectory she asked for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. We prayed with her and sought the manifestation of tongues but nothing happened. She left the Rectory and driving home suddenly realized she was praying with words she did not know. Upon arriving at home she phoned to tell me what had happened.

Remember Dave Barry who offered to accept responsibility for any strange repercussions that might happen in the "Spirit led" event? Within twenty minutes he literally ran from the sanctuary and out of the building. He did return that evening and asked me, "what happened?"

Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead puts considerable pressure on the Pastor who is hired by his congregation to lead. The Holy Spirit may change the agenda or interrupt the normal pattern of worship. It is important for the Pastor to have several trusted men who can affirm whether or not something done by an individual is under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Some people think they must do something or say something whether being directed or not by the Holy Spirit. Some people are very uncomfortable with silence. When Archbishop Craig Bates, Patriarch of the International Communion of The Charismatic Episcopal Church, was meeting in a theatre in the heart of Hempstead, NY, there were times when the Holy Spirit would tell him to put a hold on the liturgy and pray for people. I was present one of those Sundays when he stopped the liturgy and announced that he was to pray for specific needs the Spirit had revealed to him. For the next half hour he was anointing with holy oil and praying for members of the congregation as they came forward. When all had been prayed for, he resumed the liturgy. His people understood. But such would make some congregations very uncomfortable.

I was ministering in an Episcopal Church in California and in the course of my message, I shared about the Saturday, December 6, 1969 event at Good Shepherd. Some of the people responded just as did those at Good Shepherd that morning, and wanted to "experiment" with a Spirit led time of worship. The Rector approved, and I stopped my teaching and we went into the Church proper. But after a few minutes of silence, the Rector said, "let us sing Alleluia", and that was the end of the Holy Spirit leading. The Rector took charge, announcing something else to do when we finished that song. It was a dud.

Pentecost followed Easter. Easter is the celebration of Jesus resurrection and in His rising to new life our believing in Him as Savior gives us renewed life now and in eternity. He was returning to the Father and He promised to give the Holy Spirit to His followers who not only would represent Him in their midst, but the Spirit would empower believers for ministry, and equip us to be the only Jesus some people will ever witness. Evangelical churches emphasize the need for people to believe in Jesus as Savior and accept Him as Savior and Lord, giving Him place in their lives. But charismatic churches stress there is another dimension to the salvation experience.

In Saint John chapter 20, verse 23 Jesus appears to the Apostles on Resurrection evening and breathed on them and said, “receive the Holy Spirit”. Most commentators refer to this event as their regeneration or “born again” experience. Sacramental churches believe that in water baptism the candidate receives the Holy Spirit for regeneration. Before His Ascension Saint Luke records in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus told these same men they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The cousin of Jesus, John the Baptizer, had said in Saint John, chapter 1 verse 33 that Jesus would baptize believers in the Holy Spirit. Jesus had two functions. First as the Lamb of God He would provide the remedy for sin that He did in His death upon the Cross. Second, He would restore that spiritual dimension man enjoyed with God before the fall, and on the Day of Pentecost He poured out the Third Person of the Trinity on one hundred and twenty gathered in the Upper Room. Subsequently throughout the book of the Acts are accounts where this “baptism” was repeated and expected. Jesus gives the Spirit to help believers live out the salvation He had provided. We are not alone, nor left to our own strength to live the Christian life.

When we are reluctant to trust the Holy Spirit, He will find others who are willing. History reveals such a pattern. In the mid 1800s the Holy Spirit moved in the Russian Orthodox Church and people began experiencing the Power of the Holy Spirit and the Corinthian gifts. These charismatics were persecuted and many of them fled to Armenia, leaving a void in Russia that subsequently was filled by the Bolshevick Revolution and eventually, Marxism. A prophecy was given to charismatics in Armenia to flee a forthcoming persecution and they went to Los Angeles where on Azusa Street in 1906 people were heard praying in tongues as the Holy Spirit empowered them. Again the mainline churches rejected this as unorthodox and God raised up the Pentecostal denomination with its various communions. They were left to themselves, to do whatever they wanted to do, but these Pentecostal ways were not to be part of the major denominations. A Holy Spirit move took place in other parts of the world including a mighty outpouring in Africa in the 1930s.

In the early 1960s reports drifted into the media that students at Notre Dame were speaking in tongues. Students do all kinds of crazy things and they were partially ignored, although they were the beginning of the Roman Catholic Pentecostal move. On April 3, 1960 Father Dennis Bennett, a respected Episcopal priest, Rector of a wealthy Van Nuys, California church announced that he had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. He was quickly fired and moved to Ballard, Washington where the Bishop gave him a church the Bishop was planning to close. It was the

beginning of the Charismatic Movement in the Episcopal Church that also spilled over to other denominations and a revitalization of the Full Gospel Business Men Fellowship.

During the subsequent years the charismatic dimension has been like a roller coaster. There have been little pockets of charismatic life. Over and over the Spirit moved and men take charge, quenching Him and He goes seeking some one who will trust Him. Mainline denominations gave token acceptance to charismatics. Many found no welcome signs at churches, and the vibrant worship experienced in a charismatic service was hard to find. According to statistics quoted in Julia Duin's book "*Quitting Church*" many stopped going to church altogether.

In 1993 the Charismatic Episcopal Church was officially birthed. What is not well known by many is this communion was raised up out of the anti-abortion movement. The first members of the Charismatic Episcopal Church were beaten by Los Angeles police, and jailed for protest demonstrations in front of abortion mills. They believed all life was sacred and the Holy Spirit gave them no rest from allowing potential life to be destroyed. The original founder and first bishop was Austin Randolph Adler who spent many days in jail for protesting abortion, during which time God revealed to him aspects of the historic Faith which the Holy Spirit wished restored to the Church in our day.

History gives us a warning. If those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and tasted the gifts of the Spirit fail to be the people of God whom He has empowered, He will abandon us and find others who will be faithful to His calling. This may be the interpretation of Hebrews chapter six, verses four through six. Denying what we have been given, failing to use what He has imparted, He will take from us what had been entrusted, and find someone who will trust Him.