



The Fire of the Holy Spirit

"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16)

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The Grace and Work of the Holy Spirit



The Day God Went Crazy

by Carlos Mantica

It is said that a peasant from the northern mountains of Nicaragua once went down to the seashore for the first time in his life, and wanted to see the ocean. When he came to the beach he stayed there in ecstasy, watching the immensity of the ocean, and for several hours he did not utter a word. All he did was to contemplate, in deep meditation. Then he stood up, took an empty bottle in his hands, went into the sea, and filled it with water. When he was asked what he wanted the water for, he replied: “In my town they don’t know the sea. I’m taking this bottle to them so they can know what it is like.”

That’s how I feel now. I have been asked to talk to you about grace, and trying to enclose all the majesty, the immensity and the beauty of grace in one talk is just as absurd as attempting to put the ocean inside a bottle.

The study of the theology of grace takes three years. At the end of that period one realizes that the mistake of great theologians was also that they attempted to bottle grace into words, definitions and concepts that reflect nothing of its glory. In order to understand what the sea is, you have to plunge into it. And then we can understand perfectly how delightful it is, and at the same time stand in awe at its immensity and its power.

Revelation of God's grace

The holy writers of the Old Testament never attempted to define grace. In order to explain it, they resorted to the words that God himself used when he revealed himself to Moses as the God of grace:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful (*rahamim*) and gracious (*hen*), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emet*), keeping steadfast love (*hesed*) for thousands... (Exodus 34:6).

In God, grace is at once mercy that pities over misery (*hen*), loving steadfastness towards his own (*hesed*), unyielding solidness in his commitments (*emet*), wholehearted adherence of the whole being to those he loves (*rahamim*), inexhaustible justice (*tsedeq*) that is able to bestow on all his creatures the fulness of their rights, and to fill all their aspirations.

What God reveals to Moses is his own character, what God is. God is love. God is *hesed*. God is faithful. God is kindness and mercy. God is loyalty. God is grace!

With the same words they express that which they had experienced as God's grace. And what they have experienced is that God, in a free, gratuitous way, out of sheer love, had chosen Israel and had made a covenant with them. They were to be his people and he would be their God. They are clear that this love of God for Israel and this choice had nothing to do with what Israel is, with what Israel has done, or with what Israel has or deserves. They are clear that this is pure grace of God, his free gift.

The Lord says in Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers.

Then Paul says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In order to express the sovereign and gratuitous character of that love, the Old Testament authors use the Hebrew word *hanan*. What *hanan* conveys is the idea of an immense kindness and favor from someone who is far superior to us, who is far above us and who does not have the least obligation to show such kindness. This is the free relationship between omnipotence and impotence, between sin and forgiveness.

God's covenant love

Later on they come closer to the concept of grace with a key word that contains a new element and that adds something very important to what we are trying to explain. This word is *hesed*, which expresses that that kindness and love are constant, faithful, loyal, steadfast, unbreakable.

The word *hesed* has some affinity to the concepts of mercy and forgiveness, but the new and most important feature is that this *hesed* of God is eternal, constant and irrevocable. There is nothing that can change it, and it will never end.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands;

your walls are continually before me (Isaiah 49:15-16).

I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness (*tsedeq*) and in justice (*mishpat*), in steadfast love (*hesed*) and in mercy (*rahamim*). I will betroth you to me in faithfulness (*emunah*), and you will know the LORD (Hosea 2:19-20).

The steadfast love which God offers Israel is the love that stands even when Israel is unfaithful and breaks the Covenant. God will always remain faithful and will not change his mind.

In Hosea 3:1 the Lord says to Hosea: “Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the LORD loves the people of Israel.” God has given them a law out of love, but when that law is not obeyed, God’s faithful and unchanging love is the cause of his forgiving the sinners. God moves the sinner to repentance and corrects him, but makes him righteous once again. That is, he restores his relationship of love with him.

In order to understand this notion that God “makes him righteous,” let us remember that in Hebrew mentality righteousness or being righteous does not indicate an inner virtue, but a situation or legal status before God. Being righteous or just is being in a right relationship to God, being at peace with him:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God (Romans 5:1).

You can now see how hard it is to express all these things in a modern language. This *hesed* is not an isolated action, something that God does at one time and then forgets, but a way of loving that establishes a relationship, a covenant.

In this Covenant God expresses the way he wants to relate to his people, and at the same time the way he wants the members of his people to relate to each other. What God reveals to them and commands them is that they should relate to each other in the same way that God relates to them, with that same *hesed*. Hence the New Commandment, which both comprises and surpasses all the others, is that we should love each other as he has loved us.

As a result of his choice and as an expression of his Covenant, God promises to establish with Israel a type of relationship such that his power will always be available to Israel:

Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the word of the LORD (Exodus 34:10).

God’s omnipotence was available to his people at all times. And it continues to be so: “He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do” (John 14:12).

Grace is also God’s indwelling in his people – God’s presence, theophany. God dwells among his people. He leads them, he guides them, he protects them, he forms them, he sanctifies them. Later he will be Emmanuel, “God with us”, and at the end of time, “He will dwell with them... and God himself will be with them” (Rev. 21:3).

This indwelling of God in us is not like having a relative or a mother-in-law living in your house. It is an indwelling that will gradually purify us, form us and transform us into God himself, giving us his own way of thinking, of

desiring and of acting.

The Israelites understood it so. In the deuterio-canonical book of Wisdom we discover that wisdom is nothing else but God himself communicating with the creatures. Through wisdom, God gives creatures a reflection of his beauty and his truth, of the internal cohesiveness that holds everything together.

This wisdom which is God himself enlightens our understanding and leads us on the right path. In the future, the Holy Spirit will reveal all things to us. And this is so because everything that the Old Testament narrates is only a foreshadow of what is to come.

All is grace

Grace is that, and many things more. St. Paul comes to the point of saying that “All is grace.” Not because grace is many different things, but because it is like a light that, being one, breaks itself up into multiple colors.

In fact, St. John is the first to use the word “light” when he wants to speak about grace, and tells us that Christ, the Word, “is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:3-5).

Like light, grace cannot co-exist with darkness, but overcomes it by dissipating the darkness of sin. Like light, grace is communicated when it gives itself, and yet we cannot say that we possess light; we could rather say that the light possesses us and surrounds us, and enlightens us, and helps us to see ourselves as we actually are (the Holy Spirit “will convince... concerning sin and righteousness and judgment,” John 16:8) and shows us the path to follow.

Light is a fountain of joy, of security and peace, and shows us the reality of things (without it, confusion reigns). Walking in the light is living in truth, but it is also walking and living in the Kingdom of Grace, and not under the dominion of the law.

But, above all, light makes us similar to itself, to a certain extent. It is John who tells us that one day we will be like Christ, because we will see him face to face. Light does not change us into light, but enlightens us and gives us some of its own features. God has not yet made us gods, because we can only see him as it were through a veil, but he has made us divine. Grace divinizes us.

As I said at the beginning, the sacred writers needed to use many different words and comparisons in order to explain all of these things. When the Seventy translated the Old Testament into Greek (the version thus known as the “Septuagint”, i.e. translated by “seventy”), they found a word which was later used in the New Testament – the Greek word *charis*, which is the one we now translate as ‘grace’.

This word occurs 150 times in the New Testament, more than 100 of which are in the letters of Paul. It does not occur in Mark or in Matthew, who are the first evangelists. In Luke it occurs 8 times, and 3 in John, although, as we said earlier, John prefers to explain this with the notions of light and life. It was Paul and the Pauline writers who gave the word *charis* the meaning it now has.

Finally, the notion of grace is also applied to our response to such favors. This is evident in languages like Spanish, where the word for ‘thanks’ is *gracias*, but in English it can also be seen in words like grateful. Thus, the notions of ‘gratitude’ and ‘gratefulness’ include the concept of ‘grace’. When we say, “Thank you”, or “I’m grateful,” we

actually mean, “I have received many graces from you, and therefore I express gratitude.” The grace of the Lord also calls us to gratefulness and thanksgiving.

I think we can perceive that *charis* also has to do with ‘charity’. God’s grace cannot be separated from his love. One could almost say that the grace which God reveals to Moses as his way of being is also a revelation of his way of loving. Grace is a manifestation of his love, with certain characteristics that show us God’s way of being. And God is love.

Charisms

We can also discover that another derivative of *charis* is *charismata*, that is, the charisms or spiritual gifts. In fact, all charismatic gifts are, like grace itself, free gifts which we cannot deserve, but that God gives us in a gratuitous way (and ‘gratuitous’ and ‘gratis’ are also derivatives of ‘grace’). We know that, in fact, charisms are not something that God gives, but that they are God the Holy Spirit at work within us and revealing himself through us.

Grace is like that: God himself dwelling within us and working in us. It was St. Paul who gave the word *charis* a much wider sense, which includes everything that we have said hitherto about grace.

And now please allow me the folly of summing up all that I have said in a single phrase I heard, from Thomas Merton, which I think will make all of this the simplest.

If grace is God at work, then who is God’s dynamis? Who is he who from the beginning was hovering over the waters, the one we know as the Power of God, the strong wind separating the waters of the Red Sea, and the strong wind of Pentecost, the one who generated Jesus in Mary’s womb and then raised him from the dead?

If grace is God manifesting himself to us such as he is, who is he through whom God manifests himself to us? Who is he who through us manifests God’s power? Who is he who reveals God’s mind to us, and who shapes inside us, from one degree of glory to another, the image and the character of God?

If grace is God himself speaking to the sinner and calling all of us to conversion, who is he who will convince us of sin and of judgment, and through whom we have heard and understood God’s voice? Who is he who will teach us all things? Who is he to whom Jesus was referring when he told the Samaritan woman, “If you knew the gift of God”, God’s endowment, the fountain that springs forth unto eternal life, so that you will thirst no more? Who, but the “sweet Guest of the soul”?

The phrase I listened to in a recording of Thomas Merton was the following: “Habitual grace is God inhabiting us, and actual grace is the Spirit of God acting in us.”

The idea is not Merton’s. It is found already in St. Cyril of Alexandria, who noted how the Spirit of God works in us, sanctifies us, joins us to himself and makes us partakers of divine nature. We are his temple. He dwells in us and makes us similar to himself, and transforms us into gods by giving himself to us. But above all, it is found in St. Augustine, who often uses the word ‘grace’ to designate the Holy Spirit, such as in his Sermon 144. Other times, instead, he designates as grace the effect created by the indwelling of the Spirit of God in us.

New Testament understanding of grace

Since he dwells in us, he makes us pleasing or agreeable in God’s eyes. Now ‘agreeable’ is also a word that derives from ‘grace’. We have found grace in God’s eyes, like Mary, the one who was full of grace, *gratia plena*. God put his eyes in the smallness of his handmaiden, and that is why all nations of the earth would call her ‘Blessed,’ that is,

‘pleasing’ to God. All of us are blessed.

Now I want to ask you to pay close attention, because we are going to take a big leap from the Old to the New Testament.

If the Israelites experienced the grace from God above all in the fact that God chose them as his own people, and in the covenant he established with them, which included on the one hand the Law and on the other the protection of God’s power which brought them freedom from slavery, Paul and the early Christians experienced the grace of God, above all, as the “gift” or “benefit” that God bestows on men, of attaining salvation.

“By grace you have been saved,” says Paul (Ephesians 2:5). For them, the supreme grace is the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ.

God had manifested himself to the Israelites and had established a covenant with his people. He set them free from slavery by using all his power, he granted them forgiveness, and he gave them a law so that they would relate to each other the same way he was relating to them.

The Israelites lived under the law, and were unable to obey it. God then told them that he would give them a law, not written on stone, but on their hearts.

And it was then that God went crazy.

Christ Jesus... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being born in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:2-6).

The God of grace and kindness, rich in mercy, but who does not leave the guilty unpunished, then laid the sins of his people on the head of his Son. The scapegoat became the Lamb of God, the victim of propitiation for the sins of his people, who died for us once for all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth... He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people...” (Isaiah 53:7-9)

What happened afterwards is imagined in a very ancient anonymous homily for Holy Saturday. Christ goes down to sheol and, coming near Adam, says to him:

I am your God, who for you and for all those who are to be born of you have become your son. And

now I tell you that I have the power to proclaim to all who are in chains, 'Come out!', and to those who are in darkness, 'Be enlightened!', and to those who sleep, 'Arise!' To you I command: 'Wake up, you who sleep, because I did not create you for you to remain captive in the abyss. Rise from the dead, because I am the life of the dead. Rise, you work of my hands; rise, you who are my image, created in my likeness. Rise, let us go out of here, because I in you and you in me make up one indivisible person. For you I, your God, have become your son. For you I, your Lord, have put on your condition of a servant. For you I, who am above the heavens, have come to earth and have descended into abyss. For you I have become man, similar to a paralytic that has his bed among the dead. For you, who were expelled from the garden, I have been delivered to the Jews at a garden, and in a garden I have been crucified.

Behold the spits on my face, that I have withstood in order to give back to you your first breath of life. Look at the bruises on my cheeks, which I have undergone in order to reshape your deformed image in accordance with my image. Watch the marks of the lash on my back, which I have accepted in order to lessen the weight of your sins, which had been placed on your back. Look at the nails that have fastened me strongly to the tree, for I have accepted them for you, who maliciously stretched your hand towards the forbidden tree. I slept on the cross and a spear pierced my side, for you who in Paradise slept and gave origin to Eve from your side. My side has cured the sorrow of yours. My sleep brings you out of the sleep of the abyss. My spear removed that sword that was threatening you in Paradise.

Rise up, let us leave this place. The enemy took you out of Paradise. I am placing you, not in Paradise, but on the heavenly throne. I forbade you to eat of the tree of life, which was only an image of the actual tree. I am the true tree, I who am the life and who am united to you.

I placed a cherub to watch over you faithfully. I now grant that the cherub, acknowledging your dignity, may serve you. The throne of cherubim is ready. The porters are attentive and prepared, the nuptial room is built, the food is ready. The eternal tabernacles and dwellings have been embellished; the treasures of all gods have been open, and the Kingdom of Heaven is prepared from all eternity.

In this, my brothers and sisters, we have known the grace of the Lord: in that he loved us first, and has given us his own Son so that whoever believes in him might have eternal life.

Throughout the centuries, various authors develop new explanations of grace, and each of them stresses one of its aspects, though none of them comes to the point of explaining it completely, because it continues to be impossible to express in words the whole greatness of God's love. It took God, not centuries, but thousands of years, to manifest it and to reveal it, not with words but with the manifestation of himself, of his relentless love, of his eternal faithfulness, of his tenderness, of his infinite favors, with the liberation of his people and the redemption of the whole human race. The perfect expression of this crazy love was his incarnation in time, and the delivery of his Son for our salvation. All is grace!

The great gift of God was, at the beginning, God himself that became manifest to Israel as *I Am*, and who committed himself to his chosen people through a covenant in which he involved his whole power in order to set them free from slavery. He wanted to convey to them his way of acting, giving them a law that would teach them to act as he does: with an infinite, gratuitous and unbreakable love, and to relate to each other in the same way.

God established the New Covenant

Since the old covenant was not enough, at a given moment God went crazy and established a new covenant. This

time he would not write the law on tables of stone, but in our very hearts.

This time, God's gift was his own Son, whom he gave over to death for us. He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. In him the fulness of God's power was manifested, and he set us free from the bondage of the devil, of sin and of death.

He showed us how we were to relate to each other, not as a written word but by loving us to the extreme, and commanding us to love in the same way he loved us.

And this Son, the night before his death, knowing that it was not part of our nature to love as God had loved us, just as it was not part of the Israelites' nature to obey the law of Moses, he promised us his own Spirit, the Gift of God that was announced to the Samaritan woman: the love of God that has been poured on our hearts. He is the one who writes the law on our hearts, giving us the same way of being of God, and God's way of loving.

In the Spirit of God becomes manifest not only the power of God, but this power is communicated and imparted, in order to do the same things as he did and even greater, in order to carry the Good News to the last corners of the earth with the signs that accompany preaching, and in order to be able to obey the law and to overcome the devil.

The Spirit sent on Pentecost

Having been sent on the day of Pentecost in order to call together the New Israel from among all the peoples of the earth, he now joins us to Christ in order to form with him one Body, whose head is Christ.

He who promised to stay with us to the end of the age now inhabits our hearts through the Holy Spirit, in union with the Father. We have now become children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, living temples of his Spirit and heirs of heaven, in order to sanctify us, which amounts to divinizing us, because God alone is Holy.

The gift is now complete. It is complete and gratuitous. All is grace. God has given himself over to us, and dwells wholly in us. He works in us and through us. There is nothing we can do to deserve this. But the merits of Christ have been credited to us.

Today we are pleasing in God's eyes. We are blessed. We are called to create a new world together with the Father, with the Word for whom all things were created, and with the Holy Spirit who is now once again hovering over the whole creation in order to renew the face of the earth. We have been called to carry on the redeeming work of Christ, as the mystical body of Christ which is an extension of Christ in history. We have been called to start and to expand the Kingdom of God on earth. We have been called to bring all things to unity under Christ. We have been given a mission of gods. In order to carry this out, we bear God himself within us. One day we shall see him face to face and shall be like unto him.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them." (Revelation 21:3).

They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:4).

Amen!

See related articles by Chale Mantica > [What is the Kingdom of God?](#)

This article is adapted from the book, *From Egghood to Birdhood (hatch or rot as a Christian)*, (c) copyright 2001 Carlos Mantica. Used with permission.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Ciudad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



The “Breath” of God and Gifts of the Spirit

The Spirit of God works in us so that we can be a people after God’s own heart

by Steve Clark

The “Breath” of God

We tend to think of the Spirit as being immaterial (a true statement) and therefore weaker, less substantial (a false one). Psalm 33:6-9 makes it clear that something spiritual is something powerful, something “charged with” the Spirit, who is the power of God:

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.*

Let all the earth fear the LORD, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.

The word Spirit is a translation of a Hebrew (and Greek) word that sometimes is translated “breath,” as in the

above psalm, and at other times, “wind.” The Holy Spirit, then, is “the breath of his [God’s] mouth.”

There is an image behind the use of *word* and *spirit* as synonyms in this psalm. We can only speak a word when we breathe out. To speak, we breathe and form our breath into a sound of a certain sort. A word then comes into existence. The breath (spirit) gives the force or energy for the word to be spoken and heard. If you project your voice or shout, you realize this more quickly, because doing so takes more breath.

The word of God creates heaven and earth. Speaking of “the heavens ... and all their host ...” as well as “the earth ... and all the inhabitants of the world,” the psalm says, “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.” In other words, by speaking a command, God created everything. His command contained the understanding of what he wanted to happen, which came from his wisdom or reason. His breath or spirit contained the force or power that brought it into existence. The Spirit with which he breathes his word is creative power itself.

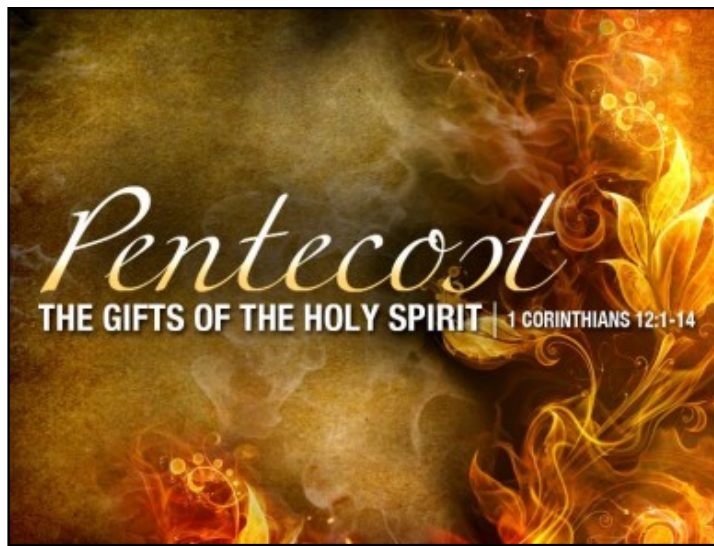
Although seemingly insubstantial, wind can be very powerful. We can see something of this by considering a hurricane or tornado, both very strong winds. I was once staying with my mother when she lived close to Miami on Biscayne Boulevard. One evening a tornado decided to go north on Biscayne Boulevard. It touched down at three points and then headed out to sea. The next morning I went to one of the spots where it had landed and was impressed with how little it left of what once was a substantial building. The Scripture tells us that this is the kind of power that the “breath of God” has.

On the other hand, wind can have constructive effects. It can blow on a windmill and produce electricity or power a water pump. It can fill sails and move a boat across a great ocean. To get such results, we need the ability to receive the wind and apply its power to something useful.

Sometimes we use the phrase “charged with the Spirit.” Behind this is the image of an electrical wire. We can plug a cord into an appliance and nothing will happen. When, however, the other end of the cord is plugged into a socket, the cord is charged with electricity and brings electrical power into the appliance to enable it to function. Something charged with the Spirit is spiritually powerful and capable of getting spiritual results.

Spirit, then, is something forceful or powerful. The Holy Spirit, the holy breath of God or wind from God, brings with him God’s power. He enables what he enters into to operate with spiritual or divine power. That is why Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” and why Peter said in Acts 10:38, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

The Holy Spirit, however, is not naked power or brute force. He brings power accompanied by and formed by wisdom, because he is the power of God. As a consequence, he not only seeks to make our action more powerful, he also seeks to direct our action so that we know better what to do and how to do it. When the apostles wanted to choose what are sometimes described as the first deacons (servants), Peter said to the community, “Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom [or full of the Spirit of wisdom, the wisdom-bringing Spirit], whom we may appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3). They were to look for men to whom the Holy Spirit had given wisdom, spiritually wise men. It is the combination of wisdom and power that forms human action and makes it effective and not chaotic or destructive, like that of an enraged man out of control. When we receive the Holy Spirit, then, he enters into us with wisdom and power, to equip us and work through us so that we can serve the kingdom of God in a more effective way.



Gifts are the result of the Holy Spirit working in us

Scripture speaks about gifts and graces that come from God, to use the traditional English translations. The two words seem to be rough synonyms, although some teachers distinguish between them. They are used to speak about what God does inside of us when he takes us into relationship with himself and fills us with his Spirit. They are called gifts or graces (favors), because they are not something we can earn or acquire by our own efforts, like the skill attested by a medical degree, but are the result of the Holy Spirit working in us “as he wills.”

On the other hand, gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are not like modern birthday gifts but are more like birthday gifts used to be. I remember that when I was a child, I received toys or something similar from most people, but I could always count on my aunt, who was a somewhat old-fashioned person, to provide me with some clothing or something else “useful.” My parents seemed happier with her gift than I was.

God’s gifts, at least for the most part, are not given to us to enjoy or use for whatever we want. I once visited a park that had belonged to a duke in England. They showed us where “the lion” had been kept, a place surrounded by a strong fence. Some tribal chief in Africa had apparently sent the duke a lion as a gift. The gift, however, had a mind of its own, so there were only a very limited number of things the duke could do with him. God’s gifts are more like having a lion than having a gift certificate — they have “a mind of their own,” so to speak. We can only make use of them if we cooperate with the way they function.

The word gifts can also be misleading in another way. When we think of a gift, we think of something we can take and carry off and still make use of when the giver is gone. But the gifts of the Spirit, especially the charismatic gifts or spiritual gifts, do not function apart from the giver himself. They are ways to receive the action of the Spirit working in and through us to accomplish some purpose that we can only serve.

Manifestations of the Spirit

On the other hand, a gift of the Spirit is not exactly the same thing as a particular action of the Spirit or a working of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discussed “spiritual things”(a phrase the RSV translates as “spiritual gifts”) like the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, which he described as “manifestations of the Spirit” (verse 7). He discussed them in order to put them into a context that would allow the Corinthians to understand how to respond to them well.

In verses 4-6 he began to speak directly of these gifts: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;

and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.” Paul here uses three terms: gifts, services, and workings. The last word is difficult to translate but is sometimes rendered “operation” or “inspiration.” It is used to describe the fact that God at times works through us (operates through us) to get something to happen.

These three words all refer to the same set of things, but they have three somewhat different meanings. When people are “healers,” God works through them to heal, and so the healing that occurs is a work of God. At the same time, by praying for people, healers are performing a service. But also they have been given a gift that enables them to receive the workings of God that allow them to perform their service.

Having a “gift” can be distinguished from experiencing or cooperating with a “working,” as being a prophet or having the gift to be a prophet can be distinguished from giving a prophecy. The working is God’s action, God’s doing something through us. The gift is God’s having enabled us to receive his working on a regular basis. God seems willing to work through a great variety of people to heal at different times. But if we speak of someone as having the gift of healing, we mean more than that. We mean that that person can somehow tap into the working of God in a regular way and so can get more regular results than someone who just prays over another person and sees a healing.

We can, then, see the gifts and graces of the Spirit as equipping us or “programming” us, making us “spiritual receptors.” To use an analogy, the internet can send music. But if we do not have an application or program on our computer that is capable of receiving what is sent, we will never hear that music. When the Holy Spirit gives us gifts, he does something like program us—that is, change us spiritually inside—so that we can receive what he does, his “workings,” in an ongoing way.



The Gift of the Spirit Himself

The first kind of gift that we receive is one that we have already discussed, the gift of the Spirit himself. This is the chief gift we are given. When we have received the gift of the Spirit, we have God himself abiding in us, giving us life and working in and through us.

As we have seen, the gift of the Spirit brings us new life, and as a result of that life, the fruits of the Spirit should grow. To be sure, life needs feeding and this fruit comes through exercise or practice. Some people who have received the Spirit or been baptized in the Spirit do not seem to have received much spiritual life or to have become very spiritualized. Nonetheless, spiritual life and the fruit of the Spirit become possible, in principle, through the gift of the Spirit.

The life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit in us makes it possible for us to be effective. If we were not alive, we could not do anything. Therefore, without the spiritual life the Holy Spirit gives, we cannot do anything or have any effect as Christians. However, considering the gift of new life in the Spirit and the way he works to enable us to develop greater likeness to God in our character does not cover all his gifts. He also gives us gifts that equip us to be effective in serving him or in acting to advance his kingdom, and those are the focus of this chapter. Here we do not need to do any more than call to mind the basic gift of the Spirit so that we can see the overview.



Gifts and Graces for All

Some gifts of the Spirit seem to be for everyone, the kind of spiritual equipment that comes with being a Christian. The prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-5 has been traditionally understood to be a description of such gifts:

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist,
and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.*

This is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, delivered toward the end of the eighth century B.C. The royal house of Judah, the house of David, here referred to by mentioning Jesse, the father of David, is like a large tree that has been cut down. Only the stump remains. But a new shoot or branch will grow out of it. That shoot will be the Messiah, that is, an anointed king. In other words, at a time when it will look as if there are no kings left, a new king will arise.

According to the prophecy, this promised Messiah will have the Holy Spirit rest on him—that is, come into him in an abiding way in order to equip him to be an effective king. The same thing, in other words, will happen to this descendant of David that was described in 1 Samuel 16:13 as happening to David himself: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”

In other words, David was anointed by Samuel to be the king, and then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in a powerful way to equip him to be king. The Spirit needed to remain with him and work through him in an ongoing way, because he was to be king for over forty years, all day long and all year long. David did not receive a particular working (inspiration) or help when he was anointed but a spiritual equipping that lasted “from that day forward.”

According to the prophecy, the Holy Spirit would provide different kinds of spiritual equipment for this king and, as we shall see, for us. There are some different interpretations of the set of words that describe this equipment, but the following is a helpful one:

Wisdom and understanding

These correspond to what we might call mental formation, the mental formation that allows us to know basic truths like the nature of God, the creation of the world, and basic morality—that is, what is right and wrong. A king who has these gifts should be able to understand what he is about in the light of an overall grasp of the world and its relationship to God, of human life and how it can arrive at what God created it to be. The Spirit of God works in us to teach us, to so form our minds that we can understand foundational truths in a spiritualized way.

Counsel and might

These are equipment for action. Counsel is good judgment about what to do as different situations present themselves to us. Might is the strength to do what we need to do, especially the ability to handle difficulties or obstacles that might turn us away from doing what we judge is the right thing to do. The Spirit of God works in us to make us effective servants (agents) of his.

Knowledge and fear of the Lord

These concern our relationship with God. Knowledge in this context probably refers to the personal experiential knowledge of God and what he wants of us. It is “knowing him and not just knowing about him.” Fear of the Lord is obedience to him. The Spirit of God works in us so that we can be in a good relationship with God.

His delight is the fear of the Lord:

His delight is the fear of the Lord seems to be a concluding summary statement. A godly king should be someone who delights to do what God wants, whose inner orientation is to do what God wants in everything. David was described as a “man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), not meaning that God had affection for him but that David wanted what God wanted. The Spirit of God works in us so that we can be a people after God’s own heart.

Irenaeus, a second-century father, described the Spirit in his book *Against the Heretics* (III, 17) as “the Holy Spirit, who descended upon the Lord, *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of the fear of the Lord*, and to whom he in turn gave to the Church, sending the Paraclete from heaven unto all the earth.” Irenaeus saw the seven “gifts” as seven

ways in which the Holy Spirit himself operates in us. The prophecy in Isaiah 11, then, was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord to equip him to save us and to bring the kingdom of God to the human race (see also Luke 4:16-21). But it was also poured out on him for us, so that when we are baptized and baptized with the Holy Spirit, we too are equipped as he was.

God, then, gives certain gifts to all of us. He allows us to participate in the gifts that Christ, the Messiah, was given so that he could advance the kingdom of God in the face of spiritual opposition. We all therefore have been equipped with gifts that allow us to receive and grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding, so we can understand basic truths about reality and morality; counsel and might, so we can act more effectively; and knowledge and fear of the Lord, so we can be in a good relationship with the Lord. We can be a people whose delight is in the fear of the Lord, so that we live as his servants, to advance his will and his kingdom. If we have confidence that God has done these things in us, we will be able to advance his kingdom more effectively.

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



The Fire of the Holy Spirit

from the writings and sermons of Spirit-filled preachers - ancient and new

Made New by Spiritual Fire and Water

by Didymus of Alexandria (313 – 398 AD)

Speaking quite literally, and also in harmony with the words of water and the Spirit, John the Baptist says of Christ: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*. Since we are only vessels of clay, we must first be cleansed in water and then hardened by spiritual fire – for God is a consuming fire. We need the Holy Spirit to perfect and renew us, for spiritual fire can cleanse us, and spiritual water can recast us as in a furnace and make us into new men and women.

[see longer version of the homily, [The Holy Spirit Perfects and Renews Us](#)]

The Fire of the Holy Spirit

by Theodore of Heraclia (d. 355 AD)

The souls of the saints, in order to receive the mystery of revelation, are said to be baptized purely “in fire.” This is because the Spirit first came down upon the disciples in tongues of fire, by which they were baptized and their souls made perfect (Acts 2:3). Or because, in the age to come, all will be baptized with fire, for “everyone will be salted with fire” (Mark 9:49), so that “the fire may test everyone’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Fire is appointed for the material element, which in itself is neither wicked nor evil but powerful and able to purify from evil. For the power of fire is deemed to be beneficial and strong, destructive of evil things and preservative of what is better. This is why fire is associated with wisdom by the prophets. For this reason also, when God is called “a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29), this is to be understood as a term and symbol not for evil but for power. As fire is the strongest of the elements and conquers everything else, in the same way God is all-powerful and almighty, able to conquer, to create, to

make, to nourish, to multiply, to save, possessing authority over both body and soul. Just as fire outperforms all the elements, so too all gods, powers and rulers are no match for the Almighty.

Fire has a twofold potency. On the one hand, it is suitable for the formation and ripening of fruits and for the birth and sustenance of animals. The sun is the primary image of this power. On the other hand, fire is fit for destroying and consuming, as is the case with earthly fire. When God therefore is called a “consuming fire,” able to destroy, he is being called a mighty and irresistible power. To God nothing is impossible. Concerning such a power the Savior also says, “I came to cast fire upon the earth” (Luke 12:49). This is a power that purifies the saints, causes material things to disappear and, we might say, educates. Fire induces fear. Its light spreads outward.

Turned Upside Down by the Holy Spirit

by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household

At Pentecost... the apostles did not want to make a name for themselves but for God. They were no longer discussing among themselves who the greatest was. They were turned upside down by the Holy Spirit, dazzled by the glory of God. Everyone understood them because they did not speak about themselves but about “God’s great deeds.” The apostles experienced the Copernican revolution: They became “decentralized” from themselves and were “recentralized” on God. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to perform this Copernican revolution in us too. Let’s make him our center and proclaim his great deeds. Only then can we say that the revolution has happened!

...Our evangelization should be Pentecostal: It should cause heartstrings to vibrate. In the place where the towers of Babel were first erected and people wanted to make a name for themselves, those towers are demolished and every one’s name is forgotten. Let us, therefore, lift up the name that is above all names and proclaim Paul’s words, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (see Romans 10:9).

[see longer version of the homily, [*Pentecost: The Way to Conversion and Unity*](#)]

A Completely New Kind of Life

by Cyril of Alexandria (378 – 444 AD)

It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell. He so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life... Does this not show that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives?

With the Spirit within them it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely other-worldly in outlook, and for cowards to become men and women of great courage. There can be no doubt that this is what happened to the disciples... The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ, facing the violence of their persecutors unafraid. Very true, then, was our Savior’s saying that it was to their advantage for him to return to heaven: his return was the time appointed for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

[see longer version of the homily, [The All-powerful Spirit Changes Us](#)]

The Spirit Restores Paradise to Us

by Basil the Great (330 – 379 AD)

The Spirit restores paradise to us and the way to heaven and adoption as children of God; he instills confidence that we may call God truly Father and grants us the grace of Christ to be children of the light and to enjoy eternal glory. In a word, he bestows the fullness of blessings in this world and the next; for we may contemplate now in the mirror of faith the promised things we shall someday enjoy. If this is the foretaste, what must the reality be? If these are the first fruits, what must be the harvest?

[from the treatise *On the Holy Spirit*]

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

by John Wesley (1703 – 1791 AD)

The Spirit directly witnesses to our spirit, that we are children of God. That Jesus Christ has loved us and given his life for us. That our sins are forgiven and forgotten. Faith becomes personal - I, even I, am reconciled to God.

The testimony of the Spirit of God must come before the testimony of our own spirit. This is evident by the fact that: We must be holy of heart, and holy in life before we can be conscious that we are so; before we can have the testimony of our spirit, that we are inwardly and outwardly holy. But we must love God, before we can be holy at all. Love of God is the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God until we know he loves us. "We love him, because he first loved us." And we cannot know his pardoning love to us, until his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Consequently, the witness of the Holy Spirit precedes are inward consciousness of it and the testimony of our spirit concerning it.

[see longer version of the sermon, [The Witness of the Holy Spirit](#)]

The Indwelling Spirit

by John Henry Newman (1801 – 1890 AD)

The Spirit comes to us as Christ came, by a real and personal visitation... Such is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, whether in Jew or Greek, bond or free. He himself perchance in his mysterious nature, is the Eternal Love whereby the Father and the Son have dwelt in each other, as ancient writers have believed; and what he is in heaven, that he is abundantly on earth.

He lives in the Christian's heart, as the never-failing fount of charity, which is the very sweetness of the living waters. For where he is, "there is liberty" from the tyranny of sin, from the dread, which the natural man feels, of an offended, unreconciled Creator. Doubt, gloom, impatience have been expelled; joy in the Gospel has taken their place, the hope of heaven and the harmony of a pure heart, the triumph of self-mastery, sober thoughts, and a contented mind.

[see longer version of the homily, [The Indwelling Spirit](#)]

The Glory of the Holy Spirit

by Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 AD)

When love has entirely cast out fear, and fear has been transformed into love, then the unity brought us by our savior will be fully realized, for all men will be united with one another through their union with the one supreme Good. They will possess the perfection ascribed to the dove, according to our interpretation of the text: One alone is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only child of her mother, her chosen one. (Song of Songs)

Then, when [Christ's] human nature had been glorified by the Spirit, the glory of the Spirit was passed on to all his kin, beginning with his disciples. This is why he said: *The glory you gave to me, I have given to them, so that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, I want them to be perfectly one.*

[see longer version of the homily, [The Glory of the Holy Spirit](#)]

The Renewing Work of the Holy Spirit

by Steve Clark, author of *Charismatic Spirituality*

The renewing work of the Holy Spirit is an ongoing part of the life of the pilgrim people of God. In every age, the Holy Spirit begins movements of renewal. Sometimes he does so through the ordinary forms of church life, sometimes through special interventions that may lead to new forms of Christian living.

We live in a special time of renewal...a time in which we cannot simply rely on the accomplishments or forms of life of the past. Rather we must live the unchanging life of Christ and his church in new ways. These have to be both more effective for our age and more faithful to what was entrusted to the church in the beginning.

As throughout the ages the Holy Spirit has been active among the Christian people to bring about renewal, groups of Christians have come together to respond. Many Christians have come together to perform some special services or foster spiritual growth with no further bond among themselves than that necessary for achieving particular goals... When the Holy Spirit renews his people, he often leads groups of Christians to join themselves to one another to live more fully the life together of the Christian people. Such a coming together is not intended as an alternative to the life of the church. Rather, it is a renewed living out of what the life of the church should be and so signifies the communion and unity of the church of Christ.

[see longer version, [A Work of the Spirit - New Forms of Christian Life in Community](#)]

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



First disciples gathered in prayer on the Day of Pentecost
(Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2)

Come, Holy Spirit

a selection of prayers and invocations to the Spirit of God

Intercession for the Feast of Pentecost

prayer from the Taizé Community

O living God, come and make our souls temples of thy Spirit.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

Baptize thy whole Church with fire, that the divisions soon may cease, and that it may stand before the world as a pillar and buttress of thy truth.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

Grant us all the fruits of thy Holy Spirit: brotherly love, joy, peace, patience, goodwill and faithfulness.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

May the Holy Spirit speak by the voice of thy servants, here and everywhere, as they preach thy word.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

Send thy Holy Spirit, the comforter, to all who face adversity, or who are the victims of men's wickedness.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

Preserve all nations and their leaders from hatred and war, and build up a true community among nations, through the power of thy Spirit.

Sanctify us, O Lord!

Holy Spirit, Lord and source of life, giver of the seven gifts,

Sanctify us, O Comforter.

Spirit of wisdom and understanding, Spirit of counsel and strength,

Sanctify us, O Comforter.

Spirit of knowledge and devotion, Spirit of obedience to the Lord.

Sanctify us, O Comforter.

Come, Holy Spirit

prayer for Liturgy of the Hours - Terce, by Ambrose of Milan (339-397 AD)

Come, Holy Spirit, who ever One
Are with the Father and the Son,
It is the hour, our souls possess
With your full flood of holiness.
Let flesh, and heart, and lips and mind,
Sound forth our witness to humankind;
And love light up our mortal frame,
Till others catch the living flame.
Grant this, O Father, ever One
With Christ, your sole begotten Son
And Holy Spirit we adore,
Reigning and blest forevermore. Amen.

Fire of the Spirit

by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Fire of the Spirit, life of the lives of creatures,
spiral of sanctity, bond of all natures,
glow of charity, lights of clarity,
taste of sweetness to sinners--
be with us and hear us.

Composer of all things,
light of all the risen,
key of salvation,
release from the dark prison,
hope of all unions, scope of chastities,
joy in the glory, strong honor--
be with us and hear us.

Prayer of St. Augustine (354-430 AD)

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

Prayer for the Indwelling of the Spirit

by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

Holy Spirit, powerful Consoler,
sacred Bond of the Father and the Son,
Hope of the afflicted,
descend into my heart and establish in it your loving dominion.
Enkindle in my tepid soul the fire of your Love
so that I may be wholly subject to you.
We believe that when you dwell in us,
you also prepare a dwelling for the Father and the Son.
Deign, therefore, to come to me, Consoler of abandoned souls,
and Protector of the needy.
Help the afflicted, strengthen the weak, and support the wavering.
Come and purify me.
Let no evil desire take possession of me.
You love the humble and resist the proud.
Come to me, glory of the living, and hope of the dying.
Lead me by your grace that I may always be pleasing to you. Amen.

Come Creator Spirit

hymn attributed to Rabanus Maurus in the 9th century
(Pope John Paul II said this prayer every day)

Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest,
and in our souls take up Thy rest;
come with Thy grace and heavenly aid
to fill the hearts which Thou hast made.
O comforter, to Thee we cry,
O heavenly gift of God Most High,
O fount of life and fire of love,
and sweet anointing from above.

Thou in Thy sevenfold gifts are known;
Thou, finger of God's hand we own;
Thou, promise of the Father, Thou
Who dost the tongue with power imbue.

Kindle our sense from above,

and make our hearts o'erflow with love;
with patience firm and virtue high
the weakness of our flesh supply.

Far from us drive the foe we dread,
and grant us Thy peace instead;
so shall we not, with Thee for guide,
turn from the path of life aside.

Oh, may Thy grace on us bestow
the Father and the Son to know;
and Thee, through endless times confessed,
of both the eternal Spirit blest.

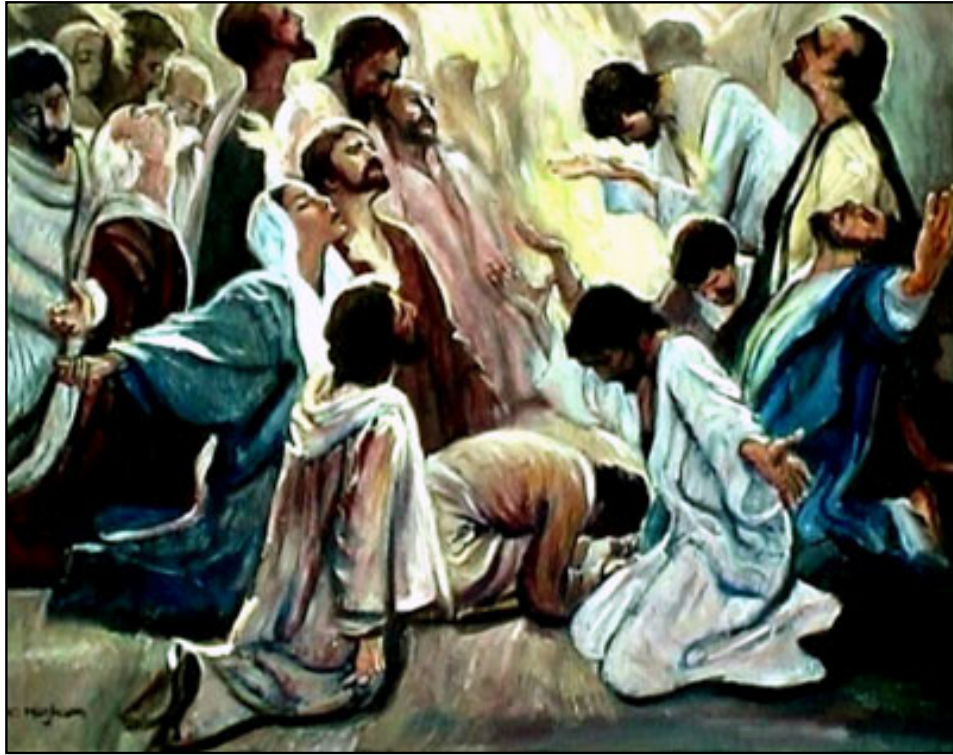
Now to the Father and the Son,
Who rose from death, be glory given,
with Thou, O Holy Comforter,
henceforth by all in earth and heaven. Amen.

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

prayer 34,G from the [Armenian Prayer Book of St. Gregory of Narek](#) (951 –1003 AD)

We always praise along with the Son and Father, the Holy Spirit,
which is of the same essence,
mighty, true, perfect, and hoily,
wo from nothing brought into existence everything that exists,
who acts through itself and shares rule with the other two,
in the same indestructible, boundless kingdom,
who is the first cause, the awesome Word of his selfhood.
And the same exalted Holy Spirit,
good ruler, who dispenses the gifts of the Father,
in praise of the name and the glory the only begotten Son,
who acted through the Laws and inspired the Prophets,
with the encouragement of your co-equal Son commissioned your apostles.

In the form of a dove you appeared at the River Jordan,
for the greater glory of the one who had come,
shone forth in the writings of the evangelists,
created genius, strengthened the wise,
filled the teachers, blessed the kingdom,
assisted kings, appointed the guardians,
issued the decrees of salvation, granted talents, prepared atonement,
cleansed those baptized into Christ's death that you might dwell in them
a sacrament performed jointly by the Father and Son with the Holy Spirit,
who is God, honored as Lord, in all ways in all things.



Day of Pentecost, painting by Chris Highham

Anticipating God's Purposes

by Bob Tedesco

In times of confusion or rapid change, it seems common to search for purpose. *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, tapped into this strong current of underlying questioning and searching. Modern trends of gender-confusion, icon-bashing, and the pervasive challenge of authority have not led to more clarity, but to more confusion. One of the enemy's strongest strategies is to convince us that no one knows the truth. When I have eliminated all outside authorities and teachers, I am now my own expert. "I" must then have all the answers; and if I do not, I will get plenty of help from my ancient dark friend.

After more than 35 years of teaching, I have found the recent class of young adults to be mostly likely to take a posture of, "Who says so?" Yet at the same time a searching and questioning is in place. There is a recognized vulnerability that is the result of this new individualism. We can be like hungry children who are too "picky" to eat.

By "anticipating purpose" I mean to address something more than what is *my* purpose. In one grandiose sweep I would like to suggest that we try to anticipate and explore God's purposes, his intentions, and his patterns. As we understand his purposes, we can explore with increasing success, our own purposes. This would be a grand undertaking beyond the realm of human minds, so I'll limit myself to just a few examples.

The Work of Christ

The life and work of Christ is a grand topic that has been covered by many books (and Gospels). His roles of

teacher, healer, and deliverer have all been addressed. Each role has generated specific books such as, *The Teaching of Christ*, by Donald Wuerl.

He came to save us from the enemy; he came to save us from ourselves; he came to save us *for* the kingdom of heaven, for all time. To list all of the features of the work of Christ is beyond this chapter. But, I think there is a great value in looking at the question, “What was Jesus concerned about in his last free moments on earth?” The answer is unity.

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” John 17:20-21

The Work of the Spirit

Assuming Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be on the same page, we can now anticipate one main purpose of the Holy Spirit: **unity**. Steve Clark in his article, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Community” says it simply, “Central to the work of the Holy Spirit is unity.”

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” Ephesians 1:9-10

Interestingly, unity is a gift of the Spirit, and, as with all the gifts, human beings are entrusted with it, having a responsibility to preserve it and use it well.

“Always seek to keep the unity which the Spirit gives.” Ephesians 4:3 (New American Bible)

In 1 Corinthians 12, gifts are listed with a certain descriptive caution: “As it is, there are many parts but one body” (verse 20). Again in 1 Corinthians 14:12 “Try above everything else to make greater use of those (gifts) which help to build up the church.” (Today’s English Version) This whole section in 1 Corinthians 12-14 seems to be calling forth giftedness, but giftedness that is: 1) expressed together in groups; 2) exercised properly and in good order; and 3) upbuilds the one body.

These markers, these features of the last prayer of Christ and these descriptions of the gifted body by Paul allow us to predict, to anticipate to some extent, what Pentecost would be like. More importantly, it allows us to anticipate what future experiences of Pentecost (significant moves of the Spirit) would be like.

So here is a layman’s first attempt at anticipating the purposes of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost will have unity as its purpose; Pentecost will be marked by unusual giftedness; Pentecost will have community as its result; Pentecost will create circumstances and experiences which will necessitate responsible and capable pastoral care.

The Seven-Step Pattern of the Holy Spirit’s Work

If the last section was not adventurous enough, I will now try to identify a seven step pattern using the scriptural accounts that we have. This is not from some great theological authority. I have seven steps because in the Bible seven is considered a perfect number. You might study the same texts and come up with six or eleven. These are elements that I see in the verses. I am using them to explain and/or anticipate the purpose that the Lord has given us in community.

1. **Obedience**

Acts 1:4 says he commanded them to wait in Jerusalem. In one verse we have two things that modern people hate: commands and waiting. Not many people “wait on the Lord” anymore, but I think waiting or anticipating is one key. Waiting *together* is another (Acts 2:1). Also worth noting, obedience prepares us for power.

2. **Worship**

We know that some prayer was taking place; tradition supports that (Acts 1:24).

3. **Pentecostal Power**

Scripture says that there was a great noise like a violent wind. It was loud enough to gather a crowd.

4. **Charisms or Gifts**

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues...” Acts 2:4

5. **Interior Change** (zeal, courage, etc.)

Acts 2:14 Peter stood up with the eleven...

Acts 2:13 Some were mocking (not safe).

Acts 2:36 Peter accused (courage).

Acts 2:40 Peter warned and pleaded (zeal).

6. **Evangelism**

“About 3000 were added...” Acts 2:41

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:19-20

7. **Community**

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Acts 2:42

“...breaking bread in their homes” Acts 2:46

Thus the first Christian community was the result of this first Pentecost. They did not disperse until later when persecution began: wherever they went, they then formed new communities.

Why Community?

Heaven is a grouping (see Revelation). It is almost always de-scribed in groups together (“with one voice”) in unity, the work of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament community was that ear-ly, first, Christian example of the kingdom of God on earth. Subsequent eruptions of the Spirit would produce similar results. Works of God draw his people together; they worship and they courageously evangelize with power. That’s just the way it is.

Reverse Implications of Anticipation: What is a Christian Community?

Ah, the joys of complicated titles. I once saw a hammer described as a Positional Adjustment Impact System! Apparently, this allows you to charge the government a higher purchase price! I think the reverse implications that

we might observe can help us to describe at least a sketch of Christian community.

- **Obedience:** A community obeys together and can be directed by the Lord as a body.
- **Worship:** A community worships the Lord together.
- **Pentecostal power:** A community experiences an empowering when it worships the Lord and listens to him.
- **Charismatic gifting:** Gifts flow from the worship of the Lord, and not just for one or a few anointed individuals.
- **Interior change:** There is an interior impact on the body of believers; postures and attitudes change when it worships together.
- **Evangelism:** The gospel is spread with zeal.
- **Community:** New life is welcomed and fostered; a way of life results. Christianity is something to do together, not just as isolated individuals. We are devoted to teaching, praying and spending time together. Family-like relationships grow. Pentecost results in community and it also defines it.

Acts 2:42 “Devoted to”

For the sake of this discussion, I would like to consider “devoted to” as a *power* statement. People can humanly be devoted to a set of things; but when they *suddenly* become devoted to a set of things, something mysterious, something powerful has happened.

Teaching

Of the Christian groups that I am familiar with, those who are baptized in the Spirit seem to have a remarkable devotion to teaching and to the study of Scripture. I see this as a result of the Pentecostal experience. There is (for most) nothing flashy or attractive about teaching, yet we see a devotion to, an empowerment in the area of teaching (both giving and receiving). There seems to be an unusual understanding, appreciation and benefit from teaching.

Breaking of Bread

For most there is also a new understanding of, benefiting from, and appreciation for the Eucharist/Lord’s Supper. This is often accompanied by a deeper appreciation of church ties and commitments.

Prayers

There is a remarkable new devotion to prayer, especially corporate prayers (initially) and eventually, individual prayer. Corporate prayer can be remarkably powerful and have been a great witness leading to repentance and conversion for many souls.

Fellowship

They were devoted to fellowship. They appreciated being to-gether; they benefited from it.

See related article by Bob Tedesco > [Empowered to Live in Community](#)

[This article is excerpted from [Essays on Christian Community](#), (c) copyright 2010 Bob Tedesco. The book can be purchased at [Tabor House](#).]



Empowered to Live in Community

by Bob Tedesco

One of the first recorded results of Pentecost was the new church, the new community. Pentecost is seen as the birthday of the church, and the church is, at the beginning, a *community*. I use that word because of the way it is described in Acts: its “hallmarks” are community-like and it is not simply a worshipping congregation.

Some “hallmarks” of the early church:

1. It was different. It would be called “the Way” by outsiders. Outsiders would comment, “See how they love one another.” They shared. (Acts 2:44-45)
2. Their contact and times together were frequent. “...day after day they met together as a group...” (Acts 2:44 Today’s English Version)
3. It had a family look to it. They called each other brothers and sisters.
4. A rarely used word (*agape*) would be needed to describe their love of the brethren.
5. A strong word (*koinonia*) would be needed to describe their relationships.
6. They shared meals together.
7. Their families were centered in the family of God.

The Number One Grace of Pentecost

I believe that this early community was the #1 grace of Pentecost...this is your sign, this is your wonder, and this is your miracle: people loving one another in Christ and centering their lives in Him, in a common way of life.

To support this conclusion, I ask you to consider this: in 1 Corinthians 12-19, the various gifts are discussed and we have the “more excellent” way of love described in chapter 13. Various gifts are ranked and compared; prophesy is given a high place. These giftings or gifted persons are compared to being parts of a body: less noble parts, more beautiful parts, etc.

But, this whole discussion of “parts” *presupposes the body* and it insists that we upbuild the body with our gifts.

Therefore, the number one grace or result of Pentecost is the body. All of the gifts and roles are in support of and for the upbuilding of the body. Gifts such as healing or prophecy should never be “stand alone” phenomena, but are a part of and an expression of the body. To wander the countryside prophesying misses the main intent of Pentecost: the body itself.



Koinonia: Spiritually Bonded Community

Many years ago, the great Christian teacher, Bob Mumford, tackled the topic of “koinonia”. After five or six tapes with a number of quotes from Greek scholars, he still seemed at a loss to define the word “koinonia”, which weakly translates as “fellowship” in Acts 2:42. There seems to be a spiritual bond that happens among those who are baptized in the Spirit. It seems mysterious and beyond our understanding...a bond of unity. We often notice a certain inner celebration when we are together. It can be noticed at retreats, summer camp, and Lord’s Day celebrations. Children “catch” it at retreats, and we do ourselves and our children a disservice to miss these yearly events. It seems that the more the event is focused on the Lord, the more noticeable is the inner celebration and bonding.

This inner magnetism or grace can even have a regional or international expression as we gather with other members of the Sword of the Spirit at the summer conference or international leaders’ events. Our children experience that bond at regional youth events, and, in a very real way, they understand our “vision and call” more by this experience of koinonia.

As a personal example, I have two friends, Jim and Connie, who live over 30 miles from me. We are in the [People of God Community](#) together, but we are from different locations, somewhat different geography, different families, different parishes, different social circles, and have different hobbies. Yet, when we are together something inside of me resonates, celebrates, and rejoices with them. My covenant with them acknowledges what is already there: a spiritual bonding in the Spirit: koinonia.

Our Response

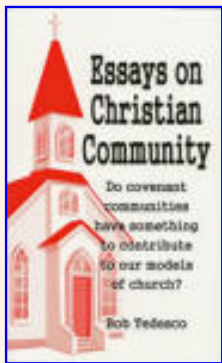
Over the years, I think, it has been a mistake of the charismatic renewal to overly focus on the gifts and to miss this koinonia unity. It is a magnetism, yet it can be ignored if we walk away. The attraction can be broken or weakened by inattention. I believe the writer of Hebrews 10:25 warned about this when he said, “... not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some.”

We should nourish, stir to life, and protect the unity (Ephesians 4:3). We should *anticipate the purposes* of the Holy Spirit and we should adjust our decisions accordingly. (See Joseph's responses in Matthew 1:19&24, 2:14, and 2:19-23.)

We are first and foremost empowered to live in a local, worshiping, and directable people who will love God and one another in a common way of life. By doing so, we both anticipate and participate in the purposes of the Holy Spirit.

See previous article by Bob Tedesco > [Anticipating Purpose](#)

[This article is excerpted from [Essays on Christian Community](#), (c) copyright 2010 Bob Tedesco. The book can be purchased at [Tabor House](#).]



[Essays on Christian Community:](#)

Do covenant communities have something to contribute to our models of church?

written by Bob Tedesco,
published by [Tabor House](#), Lansing,
Michigan, 2010, 157 pages.



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 40 years.

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email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



The Holy Spirit and a New Society

By Jerry Munk

Before He returned to heaven, Jesus Christ made a promise to His followers. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This promise was fulfilled shortly after his ascension:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting...and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

The lives of Christ’s disciples were transformed when they received the Holy Spirit. God gave them a new life and formed them into a new society. God’s people became a visible and united family of believers. They lived a common life: a life devoted to Jesus Christ. Because of their love for one another, the first Christians were able to convince others of the reality of the new life they had found in Jesus Christ.

All who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

Contemporary society

We have seen many societal changes in recent decades. Unfortunately, much of this change is in opposition to the way of life the Bible teaches Christians to live. Crime, dishonesty, abortion, broken marriages, drug abuse, the

breakdown of neighborhoods, sexual promiscuity, and materialism have increased at an alarming rate. There is no way to measure the emotional, psychological, and spiritual damage that is being done. Many people lack purpose and have few lasting, supportive relationships – they especially lack relationships that will help them love Jesus Christ and live fully for him.

Our modern society has placed tremendous pressure on the churches. Fewer and fewer Christians are able to stand firmly in the face of these challenges. Many simply adopt the values of the secular society in which they live. Vision for and experience of a full Christian life lived in the context of a tangible, loving community of God's people have, for the most part, been lost by today's Christians.

Building Christian community

The Lord is actively working among Christians to restore among them the life He came to give. He is looking for men and women to be His disciples, to proclaim His Gospel, and to build His kingdom. Through the Holy Spirit, men and women can have a personal experience of God. They can receive power to dedicate themselves to Him and to live a life that glorifies Him. Only through the Holy Spirit can Christians respond fully to the commandment of Jesus Christ: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). One result of this renewing work of the Holy Spirit is the building of Christian community.

You are God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people (1 Peter 2:9-10).

What is Christian community?

Christian community is created when people who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ agree to live for him and serve him together. In Christian community, God's people share their whole lives with one another in an environment of love and mutual support: a new society – a new family – in which men, women, and children live for Jesus Christ and experience the abundant life that he came to give. People in community share their talents, their resources, and their day-to-day lives. They make a stable, long-term commitment (a commitment that is often life-long) to love and serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. They agree to work together in the mission God has given them to do. Single people, couples, and families find in Christian community an environment that helps them to grow in Jesus Christ and to live faithfully for him.

What Christian relationships ought to be

The Bible contains many instructions about how Christians ought to relate to one another. By looking at passages that contain the phrase "one another" we can begin to see what "normal" Christianity was intended to be.

- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Speak the truth in love to one another (Ephesians 4:15).
- Teach one another (Colossians 3:16).
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32).
- Admonish one another (Romans 15:14).
- Comfort and edify (build up) one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13).
- Stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).
- Confess your trespasses to and pray for one another (James 5:16).
- Be hospitable with one another (1 Peter 4:9).
- Minister to one another the spiritual gifts you have received (1 Peter 4:10).

While these instructions are given to all Christians, very few Christians today have a tangible experience of this kind of personal, committed, and Christ-centered relationships. By living in community, members of The Sword of the Spirit are not trying to do something extraordinary, they are simply trying to live “normal Christianity:” a Biblical way of life.



Jerry Munk is a member of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church and a coordinator in the [Work of Christ Community](#), Lansing, Michigan, USA. He and his wife Jan have three grown children, all actively participating in the community.

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email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



A Work of the Spirit – New Forms of Christian Life in Community

By Steve Clark

The church, the body of Christ, has Christ and his Spirit dwelling within. It has every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Yet it is in need of renewal. It is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified. It is continually pursuing the path of penance and renewal (Lumen Gentium 9). Recognizing the predestined call and nature of the glorious church of God (Ephesians 5:27) should not lead to a failure to recognize the actual state of the people of God and their need...

The Holy Spirit begins movements of renewal

The renewing work of the Holy Spirit is an ongoing part of the life of the pilgrim people of God. In every age, the Holy Spirit begins movements of renewal. Sometimes he does so through the ordinary forms of church life, sometimes through special interventions that may lead to new forms of Christian living.

We live in a special time of renewal... a time in which we cannot simply rely on the accomplishments or forms of life of the past. Rather we must live the unchanging life of Christ and his church in new ways. These have to be both more effective for our age and more faithful to what was entrusted to the

church in the beginning.

As throughout the ages the Holy Spirit has been active among the Christian people to bring about renewal, groups of Christians have come together to respond. Many Christians have come together to perform some special services or foster spiritual growth with no further bond among themselves than that necessary for achieving particular goals.

Renewed living as brothers and sisters in the Lord

But the human race is naturally social, and it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ in the people of God (see 1 Peter 2:5-10), and into one body (see 1 Corinthians 12:12, Acts 18). Therefore the very nature of the Christian people is to be brothers and sisters in the Lord, one in the Spirit in the bonds of peace and mutual love (Ephesians. 4:3). Consequently, when the Holy Spirit renews his people, he often leads groups of Christians to join themselves to one another to live more fully the life together of the Christian people. Such a coming together is not intended as an alternative to the life of the church. Rather, it is a renewed living out of what the life of the church should be and so signifies the communion and unity of the church of Christ.

In our day, desire for such coming together is felt with greater strength because of the loss of natural community in society and in [many parishes and congregations]...

Covenant communities

In recent years the Lord has brought into existence new forms of Christian life that are called covenant communities. They are covenantal because they are based on the voluntary commitment of members to one another in a serious way that is not necessarily lifelong and does not necessarily partake of the nature of a vow. The commitment is in the form of a personal covenant of brothers and sisters one to another that supplements and strengthens the relationship that comes from being baptized members of the church. They are communities because they share together their spiritual and material goods as a way of expressing their relationship as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The relationship together of the members of covenant communities is personal and family-like, with a concern that extends to the whole of their lives...

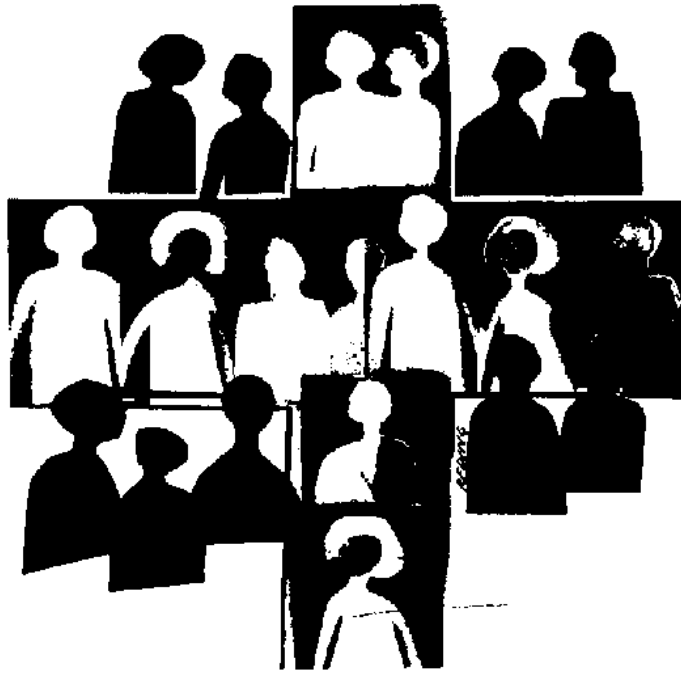
There are many types of covenant communities. Some are primarily together for mutual support in Christian life and service, while others are missionary bodies, established to be available to the work of the Lord for particular services. Some are together for the renewal of the parochial or diocesan life of the church, while others engage primarily in an evangelistic or social apostolate in the wider society. Some are together to live a special spirituality, while others have no other spirituality than the common one of the church. All these communities are at one in their desire to live together as brothers and sisters their Christian way of life.

[Steve Clark is past president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#) and founder of [The Servants of the Word](#). This article is adapted from *Covenant Community and Church*, Chapter One, (c) 1992 Steve Clark, Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA]

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Our Beginnings in Covenant Community - A Worldwide Work of God

By Bruce Yocum

Over the past several years in the Sword of the Spirit, we have presented a conference on “Our Call and Mission.” Its title is not accidental, for any God-given mission begins with a call from God. The initiative is always with God, and he takes that initiative by addressing his word to particular people at particular times and places.

The spirit of my reflections echoes what is repeated every year at the Jewish Passover meal, as the Jews recount the history of their life as a people who are called by God. At one point in the ceremony the leader says, “Let no one say ‘God called them (in the sense of those others).’ For if you belong to this people, it is because God called you.” A prophetic word given 40 years ago, perhaps even before some of us were born, is part of the living heritage of the Sword of the Spirit. It is as much a call to you personally as it was to those who first heard it.

Seeking the Lord for his direction

In 1969, when I was at university in Ann Arbor, Michigan, about 30 of us prayed regularly together. We had not become a community at that point, just a loosely-knit group of Christians, mostly university students, who had been baptised in the Holy Spirit and were trying to take our faith seriously. We would meet each Monday evening in the large living room of a rented house to pray and seek the Lord.

During a meeting early in the summer of 1969, the Lord began to speak to us about repentance, about clearing away the obstacles to God’s work, obstacles which we had created through our

unacknowledged and unrepented sin. In prophecy after prophecy during that meeting, we heard of the areas that needed to change, and the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of many of us to see what he was seeing. Mostly the sins were not big, but things that occupied a place in our life that God wanted for himself – our career plans, our cherished possessions, our immoderate interest in food, and so forth. This “prophetic examination of conscience” lasted several weeks and created in many of us a sense of anticipation: what was God preparing us for? He seemed to be addressing us as a group even as he was addressing us as individuals. He seemed to be “doing something with us.”

A year of discovering "covenant love and community"

Midway through that summer we found our attention drawn to many passages in Scripture about covenant. That was the beginning of a year of discovery, as we learned about the covenant love and faithfulness between God and his people and between brothers and sisters who are part of the same people. So the Lord’s call to covenant community had begun – with a corporate call to repentance.

Sense of being caught up in a work of God

One of the most striking things about being part of the community in the early days in Ann Arbor was the strong conviction that we had been caught up in a great action of God. We saw the evidence everywhere we looked: men and women were hearing God’s word and were being changed by it. God speaking and was bringing about what he had spoken. And before our very eyes this work of God grew with astounding speed.

Those who had attended a tiny prayer meeting in Ann Arbor in December 1967 (there were perhaps 15 people present) heard a remarkable prophecy.

You will reap a harvest you did not sow. You will sow, and in years to come will see the harvest. The work you have seen begun here will spread....I will bring many to you... and I will baptize them in my Holy Spirit. I will raise up spiritual sons and daughters for my work. A shining cross of my body will be raised up among you...I will send people to you from all across the nation to receive a message they will take back [with them]....

Within a few short years this prophecy was fulfilled, as hundreds of people came every year to visit the community, not only from across the nation, but from around the world. Less than eight years after that prophecy was given, the community had to maintain guesthouses to care for the 1500 people who were coming each year to visit the community and see what God was doing there.

Life together in the power of the Holy Spirit

Just as had been prophesied, many came to Ann Arbor and caught a vision for Christian community lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, returned to their homes to pursue that vision themselves. In those very early years, the seeds were being planted which later produced a harvest of Christian community life around the world.

[Bruce Yocum is President of [Christ the King Association](#) and a member of the International Executive Council of [The Sword of the Spirit](#).]

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early Lamb of God prayer meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand 1979

Things of a Man, and of a Dog, and of Almighty God

a reflection on the beginnings of the Lamb of God community in New Zealand

by Roger Foley

This past month, May 9th, was the thirty-fifth Anniversary of the founding of the [Lamb of God community](#) in Christchurch, New Zealand. The photographs from our founding year and following, tell their own story of a people called and responding into a work of God, and slowly building a way of life which today is perceived more and more as counter-cultural.

How did it start? On that day in 1979 I was walking our dog, Mandy, and the time was early afternoon. As I crossed a road I was suddenly struck with an over-whelming sense of the presence of God. Without regard for where I was or for road traffic, I recall sinking to my knees and then audibly hearing the words 'Now is the time to build this community' and that was all.

God bless Mandy - she just stayed with me, and sat in the middle of the road with her leash on! This word [*Rhema*] came following four years of searching and endeavours to build some form of stronger Christian relationships within a prayer group. Following this 'event' on May 9, 1979, the establishing of the Christian Community Lamb of God moved ahead rather quickly. It was God's timing.



The first exploratory Prayer Meeting was held on July 8, 1979, and we still have four of the 'founding twelve' significantly involved and active in the Branch, being John and Monica and ourselves, Roger and Veronica.



We thank God for Christian Community. But let me add that if you are looking for a 'quick buzz or high, or a quick fix' to the challenges of life - do not join a community. Christian Community is a 'WAY of LIFE', it is a journey with a people seeking a common life. There is no perfection this side of Heaven. But if you invest yourself with this people then you will find a valid way of living this life journey with and in God, and you will walk with faithful people who will be for and with you. This is indeed a treasure not to be missed.

We are with our brothers and sisters in the Lamb of God - and the wider Sword of the Spirit network of communities - in and on this journey.

Postscript: We recently shared a Lord's Day Celebration in Christchurch to mark the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Lamb of God. It was a memorable and joyful evening. As well as sharing from our early years we had several young children stand to share what is significant in their memories of community life. The children witnessed to two joys in our life, being those many lamington makes [yes - hard work but also where much relationship building and fun was had] and the annual 'Community Camp' with the water slides, mud pools and holding onto a sledge at speed down a bumpy hillside.

See related article on Lamb of God > [Land of Awesome Beauty - Land That Can Take Your Life](#)

Roger Foley is the senior coordinator of the [Lamb of God Community](#). He and his wife Veronica live in Christchurch, New Zealand.

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"Doing It Together"

Pharos Leuven – a University Christian Student Community on the Move

by Daniel "SPOK" Spokoinyi

This past university semester was really filled with a lot of zeal and initiative, ownership and love among the members of the [Pharos](#) university student community here in Leuven, Belgium. 'Doing it together' was our motto this past school term, and it worked well.



After the ceremony for Rembert and Gerlindes' wedding we gathered together for a Lord's Day celebration and meal

The semester kicked off with the Kairos Weekend in London, which brought student mission workers together

Reflection on Holy Spirit Weekend

by **Corneel Vander Plaetse**
Medical Student

The Pharos weekend in Bonheiden had promised to be nothing less than amazing (like every Pharos event, according to Spok) so I figured I would join in and see what it was all about.

The theme of the weekend was the Holy Spirit and we had great talks by Luc Vanraes and Tony Laureys, as well as a prayer evening. I arrived without any big expectations, but as the weekend progressed I realised what an awesome experience it is to spend a few days together learning more about and sharing in the Holy Spirit.



Perhaps even more importantly, I was able to take a step back from my otherwise busy life in Leuven and just be away from it all - taking time to actually listen to God and see what he has in store for us. Those moments, where you can truly feel that the Holy Spirit is working around you, are really so special. I remember feeling a deep, inner peace that weekend. How big do our doubts and worries really look when you compare them to His power?

Throughout the weekend we had opportunities to share our experiences and thoughts with others and since we were such a diverse group, coming from all sorts of backgrounds

from various university outreaches in Europe. And we also joined in the wedding celebration of Rembert and Gerlinde, two members of Pharos. Both events gave us a real boost at the beginning of the semester.

Many students who attended the Kairos European Weekend, made decisions to step out in faith, with courage, and boldness to allow God to work through them in mission.

The first 5 weeks of term we ran our WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) course, a series on the basic message of the Gospel: 'Who is God?', 'Who is Jesus?', 'Why did he die?' and 'How can we follow him?'

What made the course so special? We had absolutely fantastic speakers with a wide range of backgrounds: a seminarian (S. Bosch), a professor (J.F. Collet), a consultant (J. Geleyn), teachers (K. Vandenberghe & M. Baumers) and some business people participating in our weekend as well (L. Vanraes & T. Laureys). They brought a wide range of experiences and insights, and a very unified message about our Christian faith and mission as disciples of Christ. We sensed that students were ready to take further step in serving and growing as community of students.



Pharos BBQ event May 2014

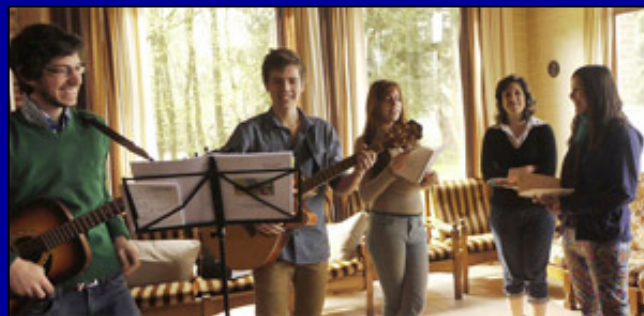
Our common meals and the other activities (prayer & social times, men's & women's events) made each evening unique and rich. Overall, I think we really grew together as a group, gained some new insights and were able to build a stronger foundation to open our hearts even more to the Lord.

For example, Pharos sponsored an open evening discussion

and denominations, that was really interesting to me. The works of the Holy Spirit are really diverse as we learned from Luc and Tony and then through group discussions.



We also had a chance to talk on a one-to-one basis during the Emmaus walks which was a good chance for us all to share some more personal thoughts, beliefs, doubts and so on.



And of course we had heaps of fun being in such a beautiful place next to a castle and just spending time together. I'm especially thankful for the sisters at Bonheiden for having us and of course the Pharos team and everyone who participated - it was a more-than-amazing experience to grow together with you all in Christ!



on 'Buddhism & Christianity.' We invited a professor and a priest from the University of Leuven to address the topic. We had some fruitful discussion about how to dialogue between religions, while building on our own Christian foundation as followers of Christ, or as Fr. Peter calls us the 'Jesus Boys.'

We have had some great social times and fun together as well. But I think the greatest blessing in Pharos has been our unity together as an ecumenical group. I mean, can you be anymore heterogeneous as a group with students coming from more than 10 different cultures and languages, Christians from all kinds of church backgrounds, including Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical and Baptist, home church and some non-churchgoers and non-Christians mixed in as well? But even with all this diversity, the Lord Jesus is what truly unites in Pharos.

During our Pharos weekend retreat, we were all filled with the same Spirit. I believe that Holy Spirit is truly helping us to welcome the resurrected Christ into our midst and continue growing together as a group. And I am convinced that the Lord has much more for us in the future as well. Praise the Lord. I love Pharos and I love that we are all different, but still one in Christ. Amen!

Daniel Spokoynyi is Mission Leader for [Pharos](#) and a Master student in Work and Organisational Psychology at the University of Leuven, Belgium

Also see > [What Pharos has done for me](#), by Maarten Baumers and Georgie Burrows

If you would to see more of what Pharos has done this year, check out our [slideshow](#).

Pharos is also looking for people to study abroad in Leuven and join us for our mission. Here is a [video](#) telling you more about it > [Study Abroad and Serve](#)

Mission of Pharos Leuven

Pharos is an ecumenical international Christian student community in Leuven, Belgium.

Our mission is to expose students to the Christian faith and help them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and share the good news of the Gospel with others. We actively seek to further our knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith through Christian teaching, Bible study, and group discussion. Through these different ways, formation leads to a strengthening and revival of our faith.

Pharos is a community of students who support a shared series of values and ideals. We want to be brothers and sisters whose relationships are characterised by service, love and respect. We invite other students into this community life.

We believe that God has given us a mission which goes beyond ourselves. We believe He has called us to be a Christian witness to other people. We actively want to spread the gospel through talking to students on campus about our faith and inviting them to our events.

Pharos contributes to the work of Christian unity by forming a student community across the different Christian churches and denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Anglican, Orthodox,...). In our formation and evangelism we focus on what all Christians have in common, which is expressed in the Nicene Creed.

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What Pharos has done for me

by Maarten Baumers

I left the university student life a couple of years ago when I graduated from the University of Leuven, but it was more difficult for me to let go of [Pharos](#). So when I was asked to share my testimony at my last ‘official’ Pharos event, I didn’t hesitate for a moment. It was an ideal way for me to look back at what Pharos has meant for me in my life.

I cannot compare myself at all with the guy I was four years ago, before I got to know Pharos. Back then, I was an unbelieving, “searching” boy. Yes, I had an interest in Bible stories and in spirituality, but that was about it.

In Pharos, I discovered that God is a loving God, who wants to establish a personal relationship with every one of us. He wasn’t the distant, indefinable person anymore, but he became a friend and a Father for me. Instead of getting to know something about Him, my life changed when I got to know Him personally.

The most important thing Pharos instilled in me was community life. As a Christian, you are never alone. In Pharos, university students from all over the world, all

No "co-incidences" but "God-incidences"

by **Georgie Burrows**

Erasmus Exchange Student - Masters in Christian Theology

What I like about the Pharos community is that, although we are from different traditions, denominations and cultures, we have two things in common: our Christian faith and our youth. These two things immediately offer an unspoken bond between fellow students, ensuring that prayer is at the heart of our relationships.



This was most evident on the Pharos retreat in Bonheiden in March, where a small group of thirteen gathered together to share in community our time, our thoughts, our prayers and our talents and helped to build friendships even more. Here, in a safe environment, we were encouraged to share our faith and get to know one another on a deeper level. It was a time to be with God, others and yourself.

The weekend was beautiful and definitely filled with love. The Holy Spirit works through each of us, and when we gather for prayer, this is especially illuminated.

completely different, come together to form one whole. And they do that because they have one thing in common: the desire to know God better.

Being able to share with like-minded people about personal struggles and blessings is a tremendous encouragement. And being able to ask for counsel and spiritual advice from Christians who are a bit farther along in life, is even more encouraging.

And in Pharos there is another great blessing - the opportunity to live with other Christians in a household. What began as an excuse to leave my parents' house for a while, has become a true growing process. In living with other Christian men I have been challenged, encouraged, corrected, sharpened, confronted, but most importantly, blessed.

I have learned so much through Pharos, but the most central thing I learned was this: believing is not just a part of your life. Through receiving practical Christian teaching and living in Christian community, I have discovered bit by bit what believing in Christ really means. If you really want to live and grow as a Christian in the power of the Holy Spirit, He begins to work in you and to take over your whole life, every aspect, even the things you would rather not give up.

I have learned that being a Christian is not a hobby, it is a way of life.

Saying goodbye to Pharos luckily doesn't mean that I will say goodbye to that way of living. Every ending is a new beginning. The challenge that follows for me is to never forget to keep the Gospel in front of me and to find new places where I can grow and experience life in Christ. With God's help and the support of Christian believers around me, I am sure I'll be able to do it, because 'giving up' is an idea that doesn't exist with God.

Maarten Baumers studied Biology at KU Leuven

Also see > "[Doing It Together - Pharos Student Community](#)" by Daniel Spokoinyi



It is amazing when we leave our situation at home, our own Christian communities (for me the Cursillo community) and come to a different country and God helps us meet another community, as God is everywhere working through his people. It really makes you realise how as Christians we are part of a bigger family wherever we are on our journey.

I recognise the "God-incidences" in my life, and coming to know the Pharos community through a series of events and people was definitely one of these incidences and it has helped me to make a smoother transition into a new country. I look forward to the remainder of my time here in Leuven with Pharos and the continual part it will play in the flourishing of my faith journey. Thank you and God bless.

Pharos is an ecumenical international Christian student community in Leuven, Belgium.

Person to Person: A practical approach to effective evangelism



Prayer Makes a Difference

by Jim Berlucchi

A few years ago I asked an older Christian woman about the success of her backyard garden. “How do you get that kind of harvest?” I asked admiringly as I stood beside tall stalks of corn and top-heavy tomato plants. “Well,” she said, and her face broke into a broad smile, “when I sow each seed in the spring, I say, ‘I plant you in the name of Jesus!’ My neighbors are always jealous, but they don’t believe in this sowing and praying business!”

As certainly as the power of prayer seemed to multiply that natural harvest, sowing and praying are mandatory for a spiritual harvest.

A friend of mine, former head football coach for a major university, had great success in a previous assignment as defensive coordinator for the University of Michigan Wolverines. He orchestrated a defense that refused to yield a touchdown in twenty-two consecutive quarters. As impressive as his football success, his evangelistic catches are equally remarkable. When I once inquired about the secret of his spiritual reaping, he replied, “Someone once told me that a person can’t come to Christ unless another Christian is praying for him. I believed that and have kept a list of people for whom I pray everyday.”

I asked him how many people were on his list. “Well, I pray for quite a few,” he said as he pulled out a typewritten sheet enclosed in plastic. “The hardest thing is remembering the names of all their children.” My mouth fell open as I glanced at the list, dumbfounded. “You must have three hundred names on that list!” I stammered. “I used to,” he replied. “Now it’s about five hundred.” For most people it is advisable to pray for ten individuals on a regular basis. Obviously, this man had a gift for more.

People who are serious about reaching others with the love of God in Christ are always serious about prayer too.



A former college professor who has won many people to Christ once told me of an experience he had while lecturing one day. In the middle of his presentation to a large class, the Holy Spirit suddenly called his attention to a student near the front. The professor realized that the Lord was particularly interested in drawing this young man to himself.

“I began to pray for him. I told the Lord that he needed to bring that young man more directly onto my path. Soon afterward, guess who showed up at my office, handed me a slip, and said, ‘You’ve just been appointed my faculty advisor’?” Within a short time, the professor was offering more than academic advice, and the student made a huge change of life, turned from his sin, and became a fervent Christian. This change initiated by the Holy Spirit, was wrought by the teacher – sowing and praying.

God will respond in unexpected ways as we pray for others. Through our prayer, God can begin to stir up a deeper desire for his life in the hearts of those for whom we are praying. He will alter circumstances, provoke hidden needs, and even reveal himself to someone quite independent of a human agent. A while ago I received the following account from a woman who prayed for her family.

When I visited my family over Thanksgiving vacation, I became very concerned about people’s personal lives. While I was asking the Lord to help them, I sensed him saying, “You know, Meg, I could just step in and patch things up in these people’s lives, but in a few months they would be in other situations they couldn’t handle because they don’t know me or turn to me. Pray, instead, for their salvation. Then I can give them what they need to deal with anything.”

I replied by saying, “Lord, I’ve known these people all my life and they’re not going to change. They’re not the religious type.” As soon as I said this, I realized my presumption and repented for my lack of faith. I asked God for faith to believe my family would change, and I began claiming their salvation and praising God for changing their lives. During the next three work days, I used my lunch breaks to pray for my family rather than for eating lunch.

About a week later my sister called and told me that the funniest thing had happened. That week

she had had the same dream on two successive nights. She dreamt she died, but when she met God, she knew she wasn't right with him and wouldn't be able to stay with him. As a result of the dreams, she worked through some problems relating to her husband and both of them began attending church again regularly.

A month later, my father, who hadn't set foot inside a church for fourteen years, was piloting an airplane on a short, solo flight. The engine quit in mid-air, and the plane crashed. Though the plane was completely destroyed, my dad opened the cockpit door and stepped out without a mark on him. You can imagine how this affected him. Though he isn't one to talk about his beliefs, he went back to church the next Sunday and has attended nearly every Sunday since for the last two years. His personal life has straightened a good deal, and even though the problems haven't completely vanished, he is now in a position to receive help from the Lord.

This woman's prayer was effective for several reasons. First, she was motivated by genuine love. Her intercession for her family resulted from her concern for them. Second, she was not only mindful of her family's dilemmas but sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Rather than praying according to her own assessment of the situation, she was able to be directed by God to pray according to his purposes. This is critical. We can become so focused on our own concerns for others than our petitions may be off center. The Holy Spirit wants to shape and inspire our prayer according to God's will for the person or situation. As we pray according to the mind of God, his power is released in the lives of others.

During certain times and seasons, God wants to mobilize our prayer in special ways. For instance, Meg was inspired to focus her intercession with considerable intensity for a short period of time. In particular, she did some fasting and prayed at length for three days. Quite dramatically, God answered her prayers almost as soon as they were spoken.

Concerted or intense intercession, inspired either by a sense of spiritual urgency or by natural circumstances, is one way to pray for others. Though we will not always experience the kind of quick and dramatic results that Meg did, we can be assured of God's reliability and responsiveness. It is not difficult to imagine the good pleasure that the Heavenly Father experiences at the earnest and fervent petitions of his people. Stronger, more intense spiritual assaults are needed in our warfare against Satan himself. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

We cannot underestimate the importance of prayer. Our persistent prayer is a potent spiritual force opposing the work of Satan and opening the door for others to respond to God. Our prayer not only does people good, but it fosters our love for them and helps us align our own perspective with that of our heavenly Father.

A while ago I was annoyed and impatient with a man I was trying to help. I had invited Brian to a regular Christian meeting and maintained a good deal of personal contact with him. For some reason, in the midst of what had seemed like good spiritual progress, he stopped coming to the meetings and refused to return my phone calls to his office. My annoyance grew into a subtle resentment at what seemed like a calculated retreat on his part. Even so, I stepped up my phone calling, but without result.

In this midst of this exasperation, I sensed the Holy Spirit trying to set my thinking right. As I paused to listen to his counsel, the prescription was clear: "Quit calling. Start praying." With an embarrassed reluctance I began to pray for Brian daily, and at some length. As I prayed, I recognized and repented of my impatience. Instead of being resentful, I began to be more compassionate and relaxed about the situation. My own human

perspective diminished, and God's perspective began to take hold.

During this time, I told the Lord I would take no action other than prayer, unless and until he directed me to do otherwise. About six weeks later, I felt directed to call Brian. Once again he was unavailable, so I left a message. The next morning, he called back, explaining his absence and expressing his desire to resume contact. Since then, he has made steady progress with the Lord. For my part, I am trying to pray more and interfere less!

This experience taught me a lesson about the importance of praying for those we are trying to serve. Prayer can be hard work. It will not always seem inspired. Just as we experience dry times in praise and worship, so, too, intercession will often seem difficult and unfulfilling. Only by the grace of God, the exercise of wisdom, and the help of others can we be faithful in praying for others. A few practical tips can help us be faithful to intercession.



Set Aside a Time and Place

As in any natural activities, practical planning and implementation is much more likely to produce success than irregularity and spontaneity. While we should be open to inspiration, a careful plan for intercession is wise. The plan could vary greatly depending on our circumstances, natural disposition, and God's design. Some people intercede for fifteen minutes at a time, three times a week. One homemaker I know has designated certain areas of her home and certain regular tasks for intercession. For instance, whenever she folds laundry, she prays for her sister and brother-in-law. When cleaning her son's bedroom, she consistently prays for another person. Some people intercede for others while they jog. (I am afraid I don't have that gift.) Others pray while commuting to or from work. Whatever your personal inclination, it helps to establish a regular time and place for prayer.

Methods of prayer can vary greatly as well. One person might recite a fixed prayer of petition or pray for a set amount of time per individual. Some people maintain a prayer list of individuals for whom they regularly pray. Others might pray the same psalm or a prayer from the New Testament (see Ephesians 3:14-19). We should not be inflexible in our method, but open to the Spirit.

Establish Reasonable Goals

We should be familiar enough with our prayer capacity that we don't overtax our spiritual muscles. It is better to apply steady spiritual pressure against the enemy for a few people than barely to scratch the surface for scores of individuals. The one who is faithful in a little will be given more.



Join with Others

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20). This remarkable promise can most certainly be applied to intercession. Two or three is not so awesome a number that it cannot be met with ease. However, it is spiritually significant enough to command an incredible commitment from God himself.

Praying with others is not only more effective on a spiritual level, it is also helpful on a natural level. Encouragement, inspiration, and accountability help us to remain faithful in prayer. On one occasion I agreed with twelve other men on a seven-day prayer contract. We agreed to pray for thirty minutes daily for a particular non-Christian man. On more than one occasion I finished my prayer just before midnight, but I was faithful each day because of the commitment I had made to the others. Moreover, I was inspired to know that six hours of intercession were offered daily by the group. I might add that the man we prayed for has taken noticeable steps toward the kingdom of God.

Pray with Patience

Patient prayer is potent prayer. Augustine’s mother, Monica, is known for her unyielding persistence in prayer for her worldly son. She prayed with tears for many years for Augustine, though she saw no evidence of his conversion. Eventually her persistence was rewarded, and her prayers were of immense benefit to the whole Christian people.

We can be strongly tempted to give up when we don’t see quick results. In the spiritual realm, instant results are rare, and we are well-advised to prepare for the long haul, remembering that we are moved by faith and not by sight. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Furthermore, God approves of this kind of faith. “For by it the men of old received divine approval” (Hebrews 11:2).

I would venture a guess that maintaining this kind of faith over a long period of time is one of the greatest tests that faces us in evangelism. This is especially true the closer the relationships. Praying for family members, for instance, can challenge our faith to the limit. May we never forget that our Lord is great, powerful, and able to do all things. “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of men that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Nm 23:19)

If we prepare ourselves for a long fight that will require hardy and enduring faith, we will be better equipped to meet and prevail over the inevitable storms of spiritual resistance. The cost is high but the prize is great.

Imagine the joy of one day viewing even one soul who has been vindicated in the sight of God largely as the result of your prevailing and patient prayer.

Pray for Laborers

Jesus' perception of the harvest of souls for the kingdom of God seems to indicate that the biggest problem involves the lack of harvesters. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'" (Matthew 9:36-38).

Moved by compassion for the lost sheep of his generation, Jesus assessed the situation as a labor crisis – a severe shortage of harvesters. He thus instructed his disciples specifically to pray for laborers. Our situation today remains the same. The Lord of the harvest has explicitly exhorted us to pray for laborers. For many years, Christians have obediently made this their own petition. We should also make this our prayer.

Through the years I have hoped to win many close friends and family to the Lord. However, God has made it clear that in certain cases I am not to be his chosen instrument. Instead, my part is to pray that God will send someone else to represent his case. This awareness relieved me of a misleading sense of responsibility to preach and reminded me of my God-given responsibility to pray. This prayer for harvesters is one we should all pray frequently.

[This article is adapted from the book, *Person to Person: How to be effective in evangelism*, © 1984 by Jim Berlucchi, and published by Servants Books, Ann Arbor.]

Person to Person: How to Be Effective in Evangelism by Jim Berlucchi

- > [Part 1: True "No Limit" Message](#)
- > [Part 2: Everyday Evangelism](#)
- > [Part 3: Be Open - Be Natural](#)
- > [Part 4: Building Bridges](#)
- > [Part 5: Authentic Evangelism](#)
- > [Part 6: Portrait of the Christian Ambassador](#)
- > [Part 7: Prayer Makes a Difference](#)



Jim Berlucchi is the Executive Director at [Spitzer Center for Ethical Leadership](#). He formerly served as the Executive Director of Legatus, an international association of Catholic CEOs. He is the work/life columnist for [Faith Magazine](#), and a published composer and recording artist. Sample [audio clips](#) of his music are available [online](#). He served for many years as a community leader in The Word of God and The Sword of the Spirit. He and his wife Judy reside in Dexter, Michigan, USA. They are the grateful parents of eight children and enjoy a steadily increasing number of grandchildren.



An Invitation to Joyful Witness of the Gospel

by Beth Melchor

During a recent Bible study on the Book of Revelations, a question was posed: “If there’s a letter addressed to your Christian community today, what would the letter say?” I’d imagine it might be Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), because it is what I think many of us need to hear today.

Below are some excerpts from *The Joy of the Gospel* that will hopefully draw readers to read this wonderful exhortation written by someone whom God has given to the wider church “for such a time as this.” Pope Francis truly speaks from the heart as a pastor who loves his flock.

The exhortation opens with a moving invitation: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’.”

Pope Francis then opens our eyes to the world we live in by aptly describing today’s society and the dangers it poses.

“The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of His love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.”

He challenges us to live the Gospel at its very core, as if cheering us on at a pep rally with the following chants:

- No to an economy of exclusion and inequality
- No to the new idolatry of money
- No to a financial system which rules rather than serves
- No to inequality which spawns violence
- No to selfishness and spiritual sloth
- No to a sterile pessimism
- No to spiritual worldliness
- No to warring among ourselves
- Yes to the challenge of a missionary spirituality
- Yes to the new relationships brought by Christ

Ending with the loud cry: “Challenges exist to be overcome!”

Pope Francis is purposive throughout his exhortation, even in showing how to evangelize “person to person” or how a homily is to be prepared. He acknowledges challenges and limitations to our missionary call. But most of all, he calls all believers to “embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by joy.”

One can go on and on, but rather than tasting tiny morsels, feast on the banquet itself. I pray you have time to read and reflect on the Joy of the Gospel. I close with a final excerpt on joy.

"There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved."

Quotes from *The Joy of the Gospel*

For quick reading, here are other quotes from the document. These quotes are in no way meant to represent the overall tone, meaning or intent of the Apostolic Exhortation. The full document is nuanced and full of thought-provoking messages which should be read in full.

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking His mercy.

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice.

All revealed truths derive from the same Divine Source and are to be believed with the same faith, yet some of them are more important for giving direct expression to the heart of the Gospel. In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.

Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or

lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!”



Beth Melchor has been a member of the [Joy of the Lord](#) community in the Philippines for the past 39 years. She serves as a senior woman leader in the community and represents the Asia region on the International Women's Coordinating Committee (IWCC). She also serves as the Vice-President of the [Bethany Association](#).

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The Battlefield in your Mind

by Tom Caballes

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12:2

What goes on in our minds is something even the greatest scientists, with all the technological advancements, cannot explain. In our minds are past emotions, our memories of both good times and bad, pleasure and hurts, and so on. But the mind is also where we form and choose our values, principles, and priorities in life. Anything can come to our minds and we need to process them – either accept them or reject them. Like in the cartoons, we have two voices within us – the good [represented by an angel] and the bad [represented by the devil]. How do we know which side is saying which? We are bombarded with moral choices we face daily, and sometimes we make mistakes in our choices and sometimes we choose the right decision. There is a spiritual warfare always happening 24/7 between our ears.

So how do we win in the battlefield in our minds?

1. We need to grow in knowing the mind of God. The first way is to read the Bible daily and live out the teachings that it says. We need to know the ways of Jesus, the mind of Jesus, and the character of Jesus. What would Jesus do in that situation?
2. We need to be careful what thoughts captivate us – are they righteous and wholesome, or unholy and self-seeking? If they are in the secondary group, we need to decide to keep the ‘garbage out.’
3. We need to look at the media that we let our minds be influenced with. Are they coming from people who desire to love and serve God, or not? That is why it is good to read and learn from the lives of saints and their teachings.

4. Aside from the media, people greatly influence us. Without thinking, we absorb the values and the character of those who we hang around with. Are those closest to us want to love God? Would Jesus be happy with my friends' choice of words?
5. Many of us believe in lies, and these lies prevent us from drawing close to God and living in peace. We need someone who we can share our life with who can mentor us and help us identify and uproot those lies from our lives.
6. Lastly, choose to forgive rather than to keep the hurts and grudges inside. Choosing to behurt and re-live those hurts makes us live in the past. We need to let go, surrender those grudges and let God deal with them, so we can move on in peace in our lives.

Other Scripture References

- *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...* [2 Corinthians 10:5]
- *...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* [Philippians 4:8]
- Other references: Proverbs 3:7; Proverbs 13:20; Matthew 22:37; Romans 8:6-7; Romans 12:19-21.

For Personal Reflection and Group Sharing:

1. Am I careful with what captivates my mind?
2. Who is winning in the daily battle in my mind? Am I growing in the wisdom and knowledge of God every day?



Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the [Lamb of God](#), a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads [Kairos New Zealand](#), an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.

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email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



The Cowardice of Christian Niceness

by Sam Williamson

Many years ago, a young man was transferred to my department. During his first annual review, he asked me why his raises had been consistently lower than the company average. I said,

“Well, you’re kind of a jerk.”

And he was. If a colleague asked a question about our software, he’d sigh, look at his watch, and then bark, “Don’t you know that by now!” If a client inquired how the software worked, he’d huff, “Didn’t I explain that just last month?”

But he was smart. He dissected software bugs with scalpel-like sharpness. His technical keenness took the edge off his social rudeness. But just barely. His low annual raises reflected the mixed feelings his previous boss had toward him.

When I told him he was “kind of a jerk,” he seemed stunned and simply squeaked, “Really?” Then he read several books on human relationships, and he began to change. Something really seemed different.

Different enough, that he got a huge raise the following year. He then asked his former boss (a Christian) why the boss hadn’t been honest and direct. The boss admitted, “I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.” My new employee retorted,

“Damn it! Your cowardly Christian niceness cost me thousands of dollars. Thanks for nothing.”

(Hey, he was a recovering jerk; I never said he was cured.)

Christian cowardice

You see, most of us Christians are cowards. I mean nail-biting, knee-knocking, lily-livered, chicken-hearted, spineless, yeller, scaredy cats. If we were angels, we'd be Rubens' chubby cherubs. If we were spirits, we'd be Casper the friendly ghost.

Nowhere in scripture will you find the command: "Go ye into all the world and be nice."

Christian niceness is neither Christian nor nice, just like Grape Nuts is neither grape nor nuts. Jesus was direct. He showed no hint of vague, spineless, "I don't want to hurt your feelings," niceness. To the woman caught in adultery, he said she had sinned. Black and white. Clear. Unambiguous.

Jesus also spoke with grace. He said to the same woman, "Neither do I condemn you."

Grace and Truth

Jesus spoke no namby-pamby niceness. Iron sharpens iron; slugs simply ooze mucus. To be a friend of Jesus means he deals with our reality—no sentimental niceness. But he deals with our reality. He sharpens us until we become finely-honed swords ourselves.

But Jesus was full of truth and grace (John 1:14); filled with both, not a compromise of both (like Christian niceness). He was 100% truth at the same time he was 100% grace.

What do most people want?

Everyone you meet deeply desires real friendships with real people. We are unsatisfied by sanctuaries populated with mannequins wearing plastic smiles. We want real heart-connected friendships, not artificial acquaintances. But it means we have to be real.

What does it mean to be real? At least these four elements:

- Awareness. We are aware of our current emotions—neither controlled by them nor suppressing them—simply aware of them. Are we sad, angry, or fearful?
- Consciousness. We are conscious of our thoughts and beliefs. Do we think our employee is rude, timid, or immature? Let's be conscious of this belief.
- Unpresumptuous. Despite our brilliant, perhaps genius-like, discernment, we are occasionally wrong. Let's take our own beliefs with a grain of salt, and let's recognize our emotional response may be built on a false presumption.
- Honest. Let's express our beliefs—and if appropriate our emotional reaction—precisely and without ambiguity. Let's be clear, and real, and honest.

It means we express a kind of authenticity with grace. My former employee's boss could have said, "I'm really a little nervous to say this, I don't want to hurt your feelings ... but it seems to me you are often rude with clients and colleagues. Your career would

advance quicker if you weren't. But perhaps I'm missing something."

Both would have gained a friend. And the employee would have made lots of money! (Alas, you probably noted my earlier, "You're a jerk" line, revealed my own inner-jerk.)

It takes inner strength, a true kind of courage, to be real

If anything, Christians should be the most "real" of all people. We should have the courage to let people see beyond external niceness to our inner-jerk. We'll have friends who see us to the bottom and loves us to the top. How do we get this boldness?

The greatest offense ever given to anyone in history was given by Jesus. His death says that we are so messed up—we have been such jerks—that a little advice at our annual review cannot fix it.

His death is offensive. If we don't feel that offense—really feel it—we miss the heart of the gospel. If we don't gulp in astonishment and say, "Really, me?," we miss the cure.

The cure for our cowardice is this: he swallowed agonizing death because of the great joy he had in giving us life. He so deeply wanted a true relationship with us, he became ultimately vulnerable and real, vulnerable to death, and ultimately real to new life.

If we really know this, we can quit hiding behind the fig leaves of cowardly niceness. And if Christians became real, it would be a far better world.

And wouldn't that be ... nice?

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish [Antioch](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men's retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. He is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.



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email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com



Pillar of Fire, print by Jeanne Kun

The Pillar of Fire

**"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire to give them light"
- Exodus 13:21**

reflection on Exodus 13:21 by Don Schwager

God called his people out of Egypt on a long journey to an unknown future and to a strange land promised to them. God led his people by the roundabout way of the wilderness to the Red Sea. This route was the way chosen by God, not by Moses or the people. While the alternate route was quite a bit shorter, it was also occupied by the Egyptians. They would have had to fight the Egyptians if they had taken that route. God spared them from battles they were not yet prepared to fight.

The guiding light of God's presence

The wilderness was vast and desolate, and largely uninhabitable. Without a good guide, they would have easily perished. God manifested his presence among his people in a special way in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. He guided them through the wilderness by means of this pillar of cloud and fire. His continuous presence enabled them to persevere on their journey to the very end - until they reached the

promised land. It was their greatest consolation while they wandered as aliens and sojourners in an uncharted and strange land (Numbers 14:14).

The wilderness was the place of preparation and testing for the people of Israel. When Israel had encamped between the wilderness and the Red Sea, Pharaoh sent his special hand-picked forces to bring the Hebrews back to Egypt. This would be their first test in the wilderness, as they waited on God. Had they charted their own course apart from God, they would have perished.



Before the Lord Jesus began his public ministry, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days of preparation. There he encountered testing and spiritual warfare with his arch-enemy Satan, whom Scripture calls the father of lies and deceiver. Throughout this time of testing Jesus proved his readiness to obey and to trust his Father.

The Holy Spirit is our Pillar of Fire

The Lord leads us into the wilderness by his Holy Spirit (we are not yet home with the Lord in heaven). We, likewise are aliens on a pilgrim journey to the promised land of the kingdom of heaven. God guides us on our journey through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who is our "pillar of cloud" and "pillar of fire" to guide, protect, and show us the way (John 14:16-17,26; 1 Corinthians 10:1-3).

Do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? And are you ready to cooperate with his transforming work in you? Ask the Father to fill you with his Holy Spirit so you can recognize his presence and follow his direction. The Holy Spirit never fails those who trust in his guiding hand. The Spirit will bring the healing fire of his purifying love and mercy to burn away all that would try weigh us down or hold us back from doing the Lord's will. The Spirit is ready to train and equip us for a life of fruitful service and mission. Yield to his grace and help and allow the Spirit to transform you.

"Lord Jesus Christ, your word is my lamp and your Holy Spirit my light. Help me to always walk in your presence and to obey you fully. Give me courage and perseverance to never wander from the course you have set for my life."

Also see > [The Exodus Trilogy](#): A theophany of God's saving presence with his people in the wilderness

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The Pillar of Cloud

poem by John Henry Newman
written at sea, June 16, 1833

LEAD, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
 Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
 Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
 Shouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path, but now
 Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

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Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Verse by Edith Stein

Who are you, sweet light, that fills me
And illumines the darkness of my heart?
You lead me like a mother's hand,
And should you let go of me,
I would not know how to take another step.
You are the space
That embraces my being and buries it in yourself.
Away from you it sinks into the abyss
Of nothingness, from which you raised it to the light.
You, nearer to me than I to myself
And more interior than my most interior
And still impalpable and intangible
And beyond any name:
Holy Spirit eternal love!

Are you not the sweet manna
That from the Son's heart
Overflows into my heart,
The food of angels and the blessed?
He who raised himself from death to life,
He has also awakened me to new life

From the sleep of death.
And he gives me new life from day to day,
And at some time his fullness is to stream through me,
Life of your life indeed, you yourself:
Holy Spirit eternal life!

Are you the ray
That flashes down from the eternal Judge's throne
And breaks into the night of the soul
That had never known itself?
Mercifully relentlessly
It penetrates hidden folds.
Alarmed at seeing itself,
The self makes space for holy fear,
The beginning of that wisdom
That comes from on high
And anchors us firmly in the heights,
Your action,
That creates us anew:
Holy Spirit ray that penetrates everything!

Are you the spirit's fullness and the power
By which the Lamb releases the seal
Of God's eternal decree?
Driven by you
The messengers of judgment ride through the world
And separate with a sharp sword
The kingdom of light from the kingdom of night.
Then heaven becomes new and new the earth,
And all finds its proper place
Through your breath:
Holy Spirit victorious power!

Are you the master who builds the eternal cathedral,
Which towers from the earth through the heavens?
Animated by you, the columns are raised high
And stand immovably firm.
Marked with the eternal name of God,
They stretch up to the light,
Bearing the dome,
Which crowns the holy cathedral,
Your work that encircles the world:
Holy Spirit God's molding hand!

Are you the one who created the unclouded mirror
Next to the Almighty's throne,
Like a crystal sea,
In which Divinity lovingly looks at itself?

You bend over the fairest work of your creation,
And radiantly your own gaze
Is illumined in return.
And of all creatures the pure beauty
Is joined in one in the dear form
Of the Virgin, your immaculate bride:
Holy Spirit Creator of all!

Are you the sweet song of love
And of holy awe
That eternally resounds around the triune throne,
That weds in itself the clear chimes of each and every being?
The harmony,
That joins together the members to the Head,
In which each one
Finds the mysterious meaning of his being blessed
And joyously surges forth,
Freely dissolved in your surging:
Holy Spirit eternal jubilation!

[poem from *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, © 1992 ICS Publications. Used with permission.]

Related Article > [*Blessed by the Cross: The Heroic Life of Edith Stein in Nazi Germany*](#),
A biographical reflection by Jeanne Kun

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