

Streams of Living Water
The Charismatic Stream
September 22, 2019

Texts: Psalm 150:1-6, John 14:15-17, 25-26, Romans 8:9-11, and Joel 2:25-29

According to Richard Foster in *Streams of Living Water*, The Charismatic Tradition emphasizes “a life immersed in, empowered by, and under the direction of the Spirit of God.” We need this emphasis because “through it we are empowered by God to do his work and to evidence his life upon the earth” (132). Foster asserts that the Holiness Tradition and the Charismatic Tradition are closely related, in that both emphasize the importance of spiritual power and spiritual growth. “These two traditions should work hand-in-glove and should fuel each other,” (p. 103).

In one sense, there are no genuine “non—Charismatic” Christians. That is, all Christians receive the Spirit as part of becoming a Christian. In his book, *Quench Not the Spirit*, Myron Augsburger wrote: “That a person has received the Holy Ghost is no guarantee that he is at a given time **filled** with the Spirit. The **baptism** with the Spirit is a crisis experience when He is given to the believer, while the **filling** of the Spirit is the continual experience of His possessing the believer. There is one **baptism** with the Spirit, but many **fillings**” (p. 17).

Some claim that the contemporary Pentecostal movement is the closest modern equivalent to the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century. In his book, *Winds of the Spirit*, sociologist and pastor Conrad Kanagy tells the story of several “Pentecostal” Mennonite denominations on foreign soil which were planted by the Lancaster Mennonite Conference. The growth of these groups has far outstripped the mother church; the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia alone is more than twice the size of Mennonite Church USA. The basis of this growth, Kanagy claims, is their eager embrace of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the church.

These overseas churches eagerly embrace a threefold function of the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit as Foster has identified them: “gifts of leadership, such as apostleship, evangelism, and preaching/teaching; ecstatic gifts, such as tongues, discernment of spirits, and prophecy; and gifts that build community life, such as wisdom, faith, and helps” (126).

At its best, the Charismatic Tradition offers gifting and empowerment for witness and service, helping to develop the joy and fruit of the Spirit. It invites the power and presence of the Holy Spirit into our worship services and our daily lives. However, when misdirected or distorted, the tradition may focus on gifts or other “signs” of the Spirit at the expense of the fruit of the Spirit, and/or misuse the power of the Spirit for personal gain.

Questions to ponder:

1. Tell about the significance of the Holy Spirit in your own life.
2. What has been your personal experience with groups who claim to flow in the Charismatic or Pentecostal stream of Christian faith?
3. In your own words, tell about the single greatest strength and the most significant weakness of the Charismatic stream as you have witnessed/experienced it?