The Manifestations of the Spirit in Church History

I. HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

A. Much of the material in this document was taken from Wesley Campbell's book *Welcoming a Visitation of the Holy Spirit* and Jerry Steingard's article *Preparing for Revival.* To obtain Jerry's complete article you can email him at *steingard@sympatico.ca.*

B. There is a historical precedent for the manifestations of the Spirit. Throughout church history unusual manifestations caused by the Spirit's presence have been documented in virtually every part of the Body of Christ. Christians from every tradition have written extensively about manifestations for centuries. There are thousands of testimonies that substantiate this as fact.

C. The same manifestations occurring in the lives of many today have occurred often throughout history. Accounts of manifestations are reported from most revivals in history. The sheer weigh of material is overwhelming and many books could be written just summarizing the material.

II. THE CORPORATE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

A. The French Huguenots: physical manifestations occurred with the old and young as many fell down under the power of God and experienced what seemed like involuntary contortions.

B. The First Awakening in America (1730-80): prominent revival leaders in England and America were John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. They experienced many of the same manifestations that are taking place today.

C. ***John Wesley*** (1703-91), the founder of the Methodist movement, was the most well-known revival preacher of his time. He reported that "people dropped on every side as thunderstruck as they fell to the ground, others with convulsions exceeding all description and many reported seeing visions. Some shook like a cloth in the wind, others roared and screamed or fell down with involuntary laughter." Wesley's journal from Jan. 1, 1739: "About sixty of our brethren until three in the morning, the power of God came mightily on us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground." John Wesley prayed, "Lord send us revival without its defects but if this is not possible, send revival, defects and all."

D. ***George Whitefield*** (1714-1770) preached nearly 20,000 times to perhaps ten million hearers. He witnessed the same manifestations as Wesley. Whitefield's journal inserts are similar to those described by Wesley and Edwards.

1. Whitefield wrote of many falling to the ground, trembling exceedingly with strong convulsions. People fell down, cried out, trembled with convulsive twitchings. Sinners dropped down, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convulsed, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress or in raptures of joy! The noise was like a roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings as agitated by a storm. Seized with convulsive jerking all over.

2. George Whitefield worked with Wesley in England. When people started to fall in Wesley's meetings, Whitefield protested it in a letter to Wesley writing, "I cannot think it right in you to give so much encouragement to these convulsions which people have been thrown into in your ministry." Ironically enough, when Whitefield came to confront Wesley in person he found himself reprimanded by reality, for when Whitefield preached the next day, "four persons sunk down close to him, almost in the same moment. One of them lay without sense or motion. A second trembled exceedingly. The third had strong convulsions all over his body, but made no noise, unless by groans. The fourth, equally convulsed, called upon God, with strong cries and tears. From this time," Wesley writes, "I trust we shall all suffer God to carry on His own work in the way that pleases Him."

   From that time, Whitefield's preaching was commonly accompanied by people falling.

E. ***Jonathan Edwards*** (1703–1758), the great leader of the First Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s in New England, is considered to be one of America's greatest theologians. He became the chief spokesperson for the revival, trying to bridge the difficult chasm of emotional excess and freedom of the Spirit as evidenced with manifestations. He provided a comprehensive biblical evaluation of revival and its manifestations in his book *A Narrative of Surprising Conversations and the Great Awakening.*

   1. Edwards wrote, "Many young people appeared to be overcome with the greatness of divine things and many others at the same time were overcome with distress about their sinful state so that the whole room was full of nothing but outcries, faintings and such like and many were overpowered and continued there for some hours. Some have been so overcome with a sense of the dying love of Christ as to weaken the body. It was a very frequent thing to see an house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions and such like, both with distress, and also with joy" (*The Great Awakening* p. 547).

   2. "It was common to see outcries, faintings, convulsions with distress and joy. Some were so affected that their bodies were overcome, so they stayed all night in the church. There were some instances of persons lying in a sort of trance, remaining for perhaps a whole twenty-four hours motionless, and with their senses locked up; but in the meantime under strong imagination, as though they went to heaven, and had there a vision of glorious and delightful objects" (*The Great Awakening* p. 550). Their joyful surprise has caused their hearts as it were to leap, so that they have been ready to break forth into laughter, tears often at the same time issuing like a flood, and intermingling a loud weeping. Sometimes they have not been able to forbear crying out with a loud voice, expressing their great admiration" (*Narrative* pp. 37-38).

F. ***Francis Asbury***, appointed by Wesley in 1771 as a missionary to the colonies, was a disciplined man who insisted on meetings being conducted in a proper fashion, yet his meetings were characterized by shouting, falling, crying, and the "jerks."

G. ***The Cane Ridge revival*** meetings in Kentucky in early 1800s were led mostly by Presbyterian preachers. It was reported that people shook and lips quivered as many fell to the ground with shrieks and shouts. Peter Cartwright was a prominent revivalist in Cane Ridge. He wrote of the manifestations of the "jerks" that seized saints and sinners with a convulsive jerking all over, which they could not by any possibility avoid, and the more they resisted the more they jerked.

H. The following was the report of an atheist "free thinker" named James B. Finley, who attended the Cane Ridge, Kentucky revival in 1801: "The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm... Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting vociferously. While witnessing these scenes, a peculiarly-strange sensation, such as I had never felt before, came over me. My heart beat tumultuously, my knees trembled, my lip quivered, and I felt as though I must fall to the ground. A strange supernatural power seemed to pervade the entire mass of mind there collected. At one time I saw at least 500, swept down in a moment as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens. I fled for the woods and wished I had stayed at home."

I. ***Charles Finney*** (1792-1875) is considered by many to be America's most powerful revivalist. He is often credited as being the instrument to bring 500,000 conversions from 1825 to 1875.

1. Finney witnessed the same manifestations as we are witnessing today. He reported spasmodic laugher; it was impossible to keep people from laughing, phenomena of speechlessness for hours, fainting spells. Finney described people falling under the power of God's presence in his meetings. The congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction. I was obliged to stop preaching.

2. At the schoolhouse near Antwerp, New York, Finney described the phenomena of people falling under the power of God's presence: "An awful solemnity seemed to settle upon the people; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction and cry for mercy. If I had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them down as fast as they fell. I was obliged to stop preaching."

J. ***George Fox*** (1624-1691) was founder of the Friends, commonly known as the Quakers. The Quakers got their nickname from many cases of people who physically quaked in their meets whenever the Holy Spirit moved with heightened spiritual activity. Fox had tremendous influence for righteousness during his generation, leading thousands to Jesus.

K. ***Frank Bartleman*** was a leader in the Azusa Street revival in 1906. The accounts of the Azusa Street revival describe many shaking, speechlessness, motionlessness, being enraptured, drunk in the Spirit, laughter, visions, tongues, prophecy, and the like.

L. There have been many moves of God in the USA in the last 100 years since the Azusa Street revival in 1906 that have been used by God. For example:
John Alexander Dowie healing revival (1890s); ***Azusa Street revival*** (Los Angeles in 1906); ***John G. Lake*** healing revival (1910-30); ***Aimee Semple McPherson*** healing revival (1920s); Voice of Healing revival with ***Oral Roberts***, William Branham, Kenneth Hagin, TL Osborne, etc. (1940s-50s); and the Welsh Revival of 1904 in Great Britain.

M. The ***Charismatic Renewal*** with the Catholics and mainline Protestant denominations (1967); ***Jesus Movement*** Chuck Smith/Lonnie Frisbee (1970s); ***Vineyard healing revival*** with John Wimber (1980s); international renewal ministries like ***Rodney Howard-Browne*** reaching Pentecostals (1993) and ***Toronto*** with John Arnott reaching mainline denominations (1994) in conjunction with the ***HTB*** renewal in UK; ***Pasadena*** renewal center with Lou Engle and Che Ahn; the ***Pensacola*** revival with Steve Kilpatrick and Steve Hill (1995); the renewal in ***Smithton*** and Kansas City with Steve Gray (1995); healing revival in Redding with ***Bill Johnson*** (2000).

III. DR. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES' COMMENTS ON MANIFESTATIONS

A. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899– 1981) is considered by many to be one of the most influential voices in the Church in the Western world in the 20th century. For nearly 30 years he ministered at Westminster Chapel in London, one of the most well-known churches in the world at the time. He was one of the main evangelical champions, powerfully resisting the tide of liberal theology.

B. Lloyd-Jones pointed out that it comes nearer to being the rule in revival that manifestations occur, such as people groaning in agony of soul and feeling the power of the Spirit to such an extent that they faint and fall to the ground with physical convulsions. And sometimes people seem to fall into a state of unconsciousness, into a kind of trance, and many remain like that for hours. He wrote that "these phenomena are not essential to revival yet it is true to say that, on the whole, they do tend to be present when there is a revival."

C. Lloyd-Jones taught: "Why should the Devil suddenly start dong this kind of thing in a period of spiritual dryness? The very result of revival completely excludes the possibility of this being the action of the Devil. If this is the work of the Devil, well then the Devil is an unutterable fool. He is dividing his own kingdom; he is increasing the kingdom of God. There is nothing so ridiculous as this suggestion that this is the work of the Devil" (Lloyd-Jones 1987, pp141-2).

D. Lloyd-Jones points out: "Always in a revival there is what some call divine disorder. Some are groaning and agonising under conviction, others praising God for the great salvation. And all this leads to crowded and prolonged meetings. Time seems to be forgotten. A meeting may not end until daybreak the next morning with nobody aware of the passing of the hours."

IV. CONTROVERSY

A. Jonathan Edwards said, "a work of God without stumbling blocks is never to be expected" (*Works* 2:273). He exhorted people to not oppose the Spirit of God in the revival but by and large his warnings went unheeded. By 1742 a majority of the New England clergy concluded that the Great Awakening was merely an epidemic of emotionalism. Rev. Charles Chauncey of Boston became the articulate champion against the revival. He effectively articulated the doubts, fears and criticisms of the revival. His books became best sellers.

B. It's worth noting the fruit at the end of the lives of these two prominent figures—Edwards and Chauncey. Edwards is regarded as one of America's greatest theologians and most effective revivalists. Chauncey became one of the founding theologians of Unitarianism, which discarded the Trinity and advocated universalism, that all would be saved regardless of whether they had a relationship with Jesus. Chauncey is no longer considered a hero who saved the people from emotionalism. He is now seen as a religious bureaucrat who defended the status quo without comprehending the reality of the Spirit and the glorious revival occurring in his generation.

C. We don't like it when meetings get messy and unpredictable. It is embarrassing and offensive to most of us. If we find a revival that is not spoken against, we had better look again to ensure that it is a revival. No one would pretend to claim that every revival burns with a smokeless flame (Arthur Wallis).

D. Wherever Jesus or Paul went there was confrontation. Riots and controversy occurred. Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, and Edwards were extremely controversial characters in their day. Many revivalists were kicked out of their denominations! But once the dust settled, centuries later they have come to be highly revered and seen as fighters for orthodox Christianity.

E. We are wise to take the advice of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "We must be careful in these matters."

F. What do we know of the Spirit falling on people? What do we know about these great manifestations of the Holy Spirit? We need to be very careful lest we be found fighting against God, lest we be guilty of quenching the Spirit of God.

V. THREE THINGS IN EVERY MOVE OF GOD: GOD'S POWER, DEMONIC, THE FLESH

A. ***God's power:*** miracles that bring people to salvation and healing (Mt. 10:8; Mk. 16:15).

B. ***Demonic activity:*** Satan came among them. Wherever we find God at work, the devil won't be far behind. In Acts 16:16-34 we see a girl with the spirit of divination. Paul rebuked the demons (Acts 16:18).

C. ***Flesh exaggeration:*** exhibits itself so as to be seen as special or spiritual.

VI. DISCERNING WHETHER SOMETHING IS OF GOD, THE DEVIL, OR THE FLESH

A. Test all things by the Word. If the evangelist tells us one thing, and the Bible tells us something else, the Bible is right! If we cannot find a teaching in the Bible, we must refuse it.

Test all things; hold fast what is good. (1 Thes. 5:21)

B. The primary principles are: is it biblical and does it edify the majority? In the early days, even a little manifestation of the Spirit edifies the majority because it signals a change of the season.

[1]Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts…..[12]Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel…[26]Let all things be done for edification. (1 Cor. 14:1, 12, 26)

C. We do not care how extreme the manifestations are as long as they are not outside biblical parameters, and are not fake or exaggerated. Test all things by the Word.

[21]Test all things; hold fast what is good. (1 Thes. 5:21)

D. What is the fruit of the teaching or the action? Does it bring glory to Jesus? Does it bring attention to self? Are people brought to Jesus and righteousness? John the Baptist, Elijah and Ezekiel did strange things. God uses the unusual. They all had really good fruit in their lives.

[20]Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Mt. 7:20)

E. If we aim for love and humility we will always win. People who live for love and humility are stable and difficult to offend because they do not have false expectations in their serving.

F. Challenge #1: being zealous and discerning. We must be zealous for the Holy Spirit's activity (not just open to it) as we seek to excel in love and discern the things that are excellent in the midst of things less than excellent.

[12]Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. (1 Cor. 14:12)

[9]I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, [10]that you may approve the things that are excellent… (Phil. 1:9-10)

G. Our first challenge is to discern between what is good and evil. After that we are to discern between what is good and best (or excellent). We can be both zealous to receive from the Spirit and discerning of what is excellent. We honor anointed vessels without abdicating our responsibility to receive only what is biblical.

[15]The sons of Zadok…[23]shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. (Ezek. 44:15, 23)

[18]Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Mal. 3:18)

H. God uses weak vessels of clay so that no one glories or boasts in man. The weaknesses in character, doctrine, and ministry style of the vessels that the Spirit chooses are not automatically resolved when the power of God operates through them. Some wrongly assume that the Spirit only moves through people who are right in all they do or say.

[27]God has chosen the weak things…[29] that no flesh should glory in His presence…[31]that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." (1 Cor. 1:27-31)

I. We must see God's favor and honor His activity while graciously discerning that which is not excellent. We are not mandated to point out what lacks excellence in each vessel.

[8]Have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. 4:8)

J. There are two ways in which we can quench the Spirit: First, by allowing fleshly elements to dominate. Second, by hindering the activity that the Spirit wants to release.

[19]Do not quench the Spirit. [20]Do not despise prophecies. [21]Test all things; hold fast what is good. [22]Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thes. 5:19-22)

K. Challenge #2: defining the weightier and lesser issues. We must distinguish and define the weightier and lesser issues in a move of God so that we swallow or tolerate the lesser "gnat-issues" while straining or refusing the larger "camel-issues." Because the Pharisees did not do this they ended up straining out gnats and swallowing camels. We are to graciously bear with the lack of excellence in the "lesser issues" of doctrine and ministry style without being compelled to imitate leaders in our quest to receive "their anointing."

[23]You pay tithe of mint and anise…and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy. [24]Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Mt. 23:23-24)

L. Challenge #3: being childlike in faith, not childish in discernment

[3]Unless you…become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. [4]Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom (Mt. 18:3-4)

1. Humility of childlikeness: trusting God as a risk-taker without fear of losing our status.

2. Humility of childlikeness: learning with a teachable spirit

   [18]Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (1 Cor. 3:18)

3. Humility of childlikeness: Hungry and satisfied with being with Father. We are not to be childish in perspective nor in conducting ourselves without the restraints of love. Children are focused on themselves and their needs; they draw attention to themselves.

   [20]Do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature...[39]Desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. [40]Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Cor. 14:20, 39-40)