



## Have we limited the Holy Spirit?

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

*This issue basically amounts to – have we in the Orthodox Church truly responded to the challenge our Lord Jesus Christ put to Nicodemus who met with Him by night?*

“Verily, verily I say unto you, unless a man is born (anōthen) from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). But Nicodemus completely missed the supernatural dimension in which Jesus was speaking. He replied: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus came back with a clarification that you and I and Church members need to remember: “Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (v.5). Jesus makes perfectly clear to us who desire to inherit His eternal promises: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v.6).

A priceless testimony in this regard is what we find in the anointed writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian who lived at the turn of the first millennium. As no other Church Father does before or after his time, he makes the Holy Spirit Baptism a “must” for the average Orthodox believer: “Our salvation lies not in the Baptism of water only, but in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit”. (Moral Chapters 5:461).

### Run! As Many As Are Unsealed!

St. Symeon remains uncompromising on the Holy Spirit as an indispensable element in the Orthodox walk with Christ: “Unless a man is

baptized in the Holy Spirit, he becomes neither a son of God nor co-heir with Christ” (Catechesis 33: 125).

“Run! As many of you as are unsealed, as many as are unmarked. Make haste to be stamped with the seal of the Spirit!” (Catechesis 2: 133). “How can such persons who have never been baptized in the Holy Spirit understand the transformation of those already baptized in the Spirit?” (Catechesis 24: 112).

St. Symeon the New Theologian lived in an age when he experienced the ravages of desolation in the Orthodox Church. It was a generation that lived in an atmosphere of dead religion. Dead routine was the common religious activity they knew and lived. It is for this reason St. Symeon was misunderstood, maligned and persecuted. They were so convicted in the Holy Spirit, the monks under his monastic care intended to rush him and commit physical violence against him. In his own words, he gives this account: “They began to instantly bark like dogs... I say again, they bark at him like mad dogs and they rush him, if possible to devour him” (Moral Chapters 9: 356).

The situation has not changed much since a thousand years ago when St. Symeon the New Theologian emerged as a dynamic prophetic figure in the firmament of the Church. **He shook the status quo**

of the Church of Byzantium, and ended up rejected and persecuted by the religious powers that be.

We have inherited the inspiring classical iconography and fabulous priceless mosaics of Byzantium, but lives are not changed. Is it any wonder I was spiritually dead from my infancy up to my ordained years to the priesthood (1953). I was the most miserable of all men. Space does not permit me to elaborate here on the nightmare I suffered. It was on a divinely appointed day in Lent of 1972 that I received in the privacy of my own home the awesome life-changing “Unction from the Holy One” (John 2:20). It was my day of deliverance and emancipation! It was bestowed upon me, not by any human intermediary, but by Jesus Himself, as He did in the Upper Room with His apostles and disciples. This was the true Unction I needed. “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you. But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and is even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.” (John 2:27).

I do not propose to fall into the sin of speaking with self-righteousness and assessing judgmentally. However, the fact that I have served my Church without a salary for several decades might give me the moral right to point out the above. Then what about my personal sacrifices in refusing enticing opportunities for the promotion in the ranks of the clergy. Only to mention the late Archbishop Iakovos’ plan to ordain me as the first U.S.-born bishop. His confidential letter remains in my files for anyone to verify this. I have been dying a daily death in the cause of Orthodox awakening for the past fifty years.

I have written exhaustively through the years in all my books and articles the spiritual principles that relate to the financial and Church attendance anxieties. It is not my intention here to rewrite any of my books. Please go back and refresh your memory, dear reader, if your concern is genuine. All my warnings of earlier years are now proving themselves authentic in the face of our current Church crisis. The root of any situation in the Church should be traced back to whether or not we are maximizing the potential of the Church pulpit. Is it touching and transforming the hearts and character of our Church people?

### **Renewal Stirrings in the Church**

Emperor Justinian very skillfully justified the direct interventions with impressive theological reasoning. The Emperors introduced permanent church practices and traditions that, to this day, we reverently refer to as “holy tradition.” Bishops were always in the palace area confirming the holiness of imperial edicts directed at the Church. St. Pachomius, a prominent Abbot, was saved from a side exit by a few faithful monks from a local Council of Lykopolis, Egypt. The ruling Church did not look with favor on those individuals involved in spiritual revival activities.

Monasticism could be viewed as the first acceptable expression of organized spiritual rejuvenation in the Orthodox Church. Certain desert luminaries in Egypt such as St. Pachomius, is a significant figure, as well as St. Anthony and his disciple St. Macarius, who contributed in making monasticism acceptable and legitimate in the eyes of the institutional Church. The life of St. Anthony written by St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria around 360 A.D. served as a notable factor in this regard. St. Basil later, just to mention another Church

Father is conspicuous in extoling the divine destiny of Monasticism.

However, the time came when Monasticism itself needed to become spiritually rejuvenated, just as much as the Church out of which it originated and aimed to rejuvenate.

All of creation, inanimate, as well as animate creation is stamped or sealed with the “*image and likeness*” of the Creator. It occurred obviously when the “*Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*” (Genesis 1:2). But even prior to this point the Spirit was engaged in its creative activity, imparting its nature in its very creation of matter. This is known as the entifying (ontopoesis) of matter ex nihilo, out of nothingness. The following days of creation, (as given to us in scripture) are stages of the unfolding of the Spirit’s act of creating ex nihilo.

But now behold “*the mystery which hath been his from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints*” (Col. 1:26). In spite of how preeminent the third person of the Trinity appears to be, it is actually the second person Who has preeminence in the creation of the world. “*All things were created through Him and for Him*” (Col. 1:16). The Son or Logos of God infused the Spirit into the created world, while the Spirit remains self-effacing. His function in the Trinity is to glorify and highly exalt the Logos, notwithstanding the Nicene Creed’s profession that the Spirit is “*worshipped and glorified*” with the other two persons. Hence the equality of the persons of the Trinitarian God remains secured. With the fall of Adam a divine intervention in the process of creation influenced the normal course of God’s original scheme of things. We direct this influence in the divine pronouncement: “*Cursed is the ground for thy sake in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life*” (Genesis 17).

What often is referred to as the Adamic curse we can connect with the “*travaileth in pain*” that the Apostle Paul speaks of in Romans 8:22. As I noted above, created nature is not to be taken as totally inanimate. But, as in a mystery, it breathes and sighs. Like the believer, it groans longing for ultimate redemption. Paul states, “*Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Rom.8:23). Christ “*having been a curse for us*” (Gal. 3:13), he reassures us. We are permitted to anticipate the restoration of the whole man. Short of the resurrection of the body, our redemption remains without being consummated. It is in the victory and glory of Christ’s Resurrection that, even what we usually regard as the inanimate cosmos, shares in that victory, transfiguration and glorious metamorphosis of man. It marks a restoration of the entire universe “*wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (Peter 3:13)!

If “*we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*”, then it is only normal for me, who at my advanced age of nearly 90 searches the mysteries of God, to “*groan and travail in pain until now*” (Rom. 8:22). Under the affliction of this constant pain, I yet sense a profound impulse to dare utter God’s deepest mysteries and events which are predicted to take place in His master plan. Among these is the “*Mystery of Iniquity*” and “*It already worketh*” since the apostolic times (2 Thess. 2:7). To think how far the “*mystery of iniquity*” has evolved and spread is mind boggling after 2000 years. That Satan would gain that much success is shocking to any of us in the Church. Yet, we have been blind to this grim situation and how it can coexist with the reality of the Body of Christ, otherwise called the Bride of Christ.

## **THE ORTHODOX EVANGELIST**

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**We have lost sight of the fact that the prophecy of Joel was only partially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. In the terminal age it will be fulfilled completely. Cosmic signs, as predicted by Joel, did not appear on the day of Pentecost.**

But at the time of the “Latter Rain,” *“I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come”* (Joel 2:30).

I, myself became a beneficiary of this end time outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He reveals to me that the Chrismation is not only a sacrament (a term barrowed from the Roman Church) *sacramentum*. The original Greek term *mysterion* is undoubtedly preferable, because it conveys a reality and experience that cannot be structured. It does not simply release grace, as the Roman Church would apply to all the *“Seven Sacraments.”* It releases the third person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit by reason of the Father’s grace (unmerited favor).

To begin with, we Orthodox do not have a theology of grace – ours is a theology of the Holy Spirit (involving the immediate personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit). It should be made obvious from these considerations that something like the Holy Spirit baptism being bestowed upon the believer at the hour of the *“Latter Rain”* is easier to accept when the supernatural reality of being *“born from above”* (*anathen*) is viewed truly as a mystery, instead of some theological proposition. **It is obvious when we remember that *“born from above”* is what John speaks of repeatedly in his epistles as *“born of God”* (John 5:1,4,18). It initiates us into the realm of mystery, the inscrutable, the ineffable.**

It is significant that even the psalmist prophetically alludes to this apocalyptic phenomenon of the end time outpouring of the Holy Spirit: *“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth”* (Psalm 72:6).

Remember again how our Lord

Jesus Christ compares the bestowal of the Holy Spirit with the blowing of the wind in his dialog with Nicodemus: *“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or where it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit”* (John 3:8).

An ordinary Church member would very likely consider the principle disruptive of order and discipline. They would oppose it with the words of St. Paul: *“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace”* (1 Cor. 14:33). But their overreaction would simply doom the Church to dead forms, that is, religious legalism. They would justify and idealize that as *“law and order”*. Hasn’t St. Paul cautioned us against the *“letter of the Law that kills”* the soul, that is, separates it from the Spirit eternally!



God created man and woman in the Garden of Eden to allow for exercising their right in making free choices. But they disobeyed God’s one restriction. Like them, when we surrender to Christ the New Adam, we receive the freedom that comes with the Holy Spirit, but with the accountability that our obedience to the Lord remains perfect. *“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (2 Cor. 3:17).

We come face-to-face here with a divine paradox that accountability comes with the one alternative of accepting the divine endowment of freedom that allows for the risk of the sin of disobedience. If man were to have been created by God to do His

bidding like a robotic machine by remote control, it would be the other alternative which no one instinctively would prefer. The fall of Lucifer and the host of angelic powers He pulled down is the scriptural illustration of this point.

Faith remains the key to receiving the Holy Spirit Baptism. As the adult believer becomes immersed three times in the Baptismal font, he should expect the Holy Spirit Baptism normally to follow. Listen carefully – by simply exercising expectant faith based on the promise of Christ: *“He who believes in Me, as the scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38). And *“The water that I shall give him will be a well of water springing up into eternal life”* (4:14).

The *“Latter Rain”* is not some kind of hidden and obscure move of the Holy Spirit in this terminal generation. We have already seen it appear in the mainline Churches as the *“Charismatic Movement”*. Once kept out of these Churches with passion, those ultimately, baptized in the Spirit became welcomed to be members of these mainline Churches. It is remarkable how widespread on radio and television we find dramatic signs of masses of believers receiving the Holy Spirit Baptism. We behold in front of our eyes supernatural signs and wonders of thousands of people who receive miraculous healings.

Nothing on the day of Pentecost can be singled out as resembling such earth-shattering events that we see rocking the world around us. But at home in our Orthodox Churches we seem to live aloof and distant from this awesome prophetic and apocalyptic explosion. We rest satisfied in the comfort of our traditional cubby holes and sacramental culture. We are contented with our familiar routine surroundings and religious activities.

### **A Paradox in the Early Church**

Satan was not on vacation break, when the Church was founded on the day of Pentecost. St. Paul said it all,

when he declared soon after his conversion experience on the Damascus Way: *“The Mystery of Iniquity doth already work”* (2 Thess. 2:7).

Satan was at work from the beginning setting forth his master plan to thwart the redeeming economy of Christ. It is strange that St. Augustine admitted his ignorance of St. Paul’s statement concerning the *“Mystery of Iniquity”*. He states in his City of God (Book XX): *“I frankly confess I do not know what he means”*. Our own Orthodox Church reflects his influence.

**I find it almost shocking that even during the early apostolic period we find opposition to the oversight of churches exercised by the apostles themselves.** To take one glaring example, the pastoral leadership of the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and with whom He tendered an intimate bonding was unbelievably challenged in one of the churches in the Ephesus area. We read: *“I wrote unto the Church but Diotrophes who loveth to have the preeminence among them receiveth us not... (3 Jn. 9-10)... not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbideth them that would, and casteth them out of the Church”*.

It is horrifying then to move on to the Apostle Jude, “Brother of James”. Our churches in our present age are *“holy, not having spot or wrinkle”*, compared to the state of the churches he portrays in his own day that sounds like the predicted *“Harlot Church”*.

*“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth and example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (v. 7)... these are raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness forever (v. 13).*

But we must hear especially from the Apostle Peter who speaks vividly about the threat to the holiness of the Church in his day: *“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of*

*you; whose judgement now of a long time lingers not”* (Peter 2:18).

The Apostle Peter continues in several of the following verses presenting the picture of desolation of the Church in his own day. *“They count it pleasure to riot in the day-time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deception while they feast with you. Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling, unstable souls; a heart they have exercised with covetous practices, cursed children”* (2 Peter 2:13f).

How significant it is that the Apostle Peter asserts his apostolic authority as no other Apostle in the following verses: *“that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the prophets, and of the commandment of us the Apostles of the Lord and Savior”* (2 Peter 3:2).

*“For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God, and if it first begins with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”* A needed apostolic warning for the believers both of his day and of our own day!

The coexistence of the Bride of Christ and the Great Whore Church on and off appears visible and unmistakable. At certain periods of Church history it seems as if there are two churches functioning side by side – the visible institutional Church and the less visible smaller Remnant Church, consisting of men and woman who have had a face-to-face, life-changing experience of Christ, easily identifiable as *“born of God”* (used frequently by the Apostle John), (1 John 3:9, 4:7, 8, 5:1).

### **The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

*“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ”* (1 Cor. 12:12). A body cannot conceivably exist without members. There are many members that comprise a human body: hands, feet, eyes, ears, etc. So in like manner the Body of Christ which is the Church

consists – not of one member – but of many members and manifesting diverse gifts and functions. *“For the body is not one member, but many”*.

The Charismata do not come with intellectual application. They are not attained as a result of academic effort. They are not acquired in the natural. They are not natural innate gifts. Charismata are supernaturally endowed by God upon the believer. The gift of wisdom, for example, does not come by getting a college degree. It is a supernatural endowment received directly from God. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him”* (James 1:6).

There are signs on the horizon that many Orthodox believers are already receiving of the new outpouring of the heavenly Spirit. As I continue to come into contact with them, I can sense how much their heart is inflamed with a burning love for Jesus. Many of them are being filled with the Holy Spirit. **Those touched by the Spirit become better Orthodox and relate more meaningfully to the sacramental life of the Church.**

It is wonderful to see how many people in the church are hungry for Christ and how they thirst for a greater measure of the Holy Spirit. A rediscovery of the charismatic life of the church will help to make the church what the Lord intended her to be: a living Body with each member a recipient of a gift of the Holy Spirit. But before the Spirit can be released, the cradle members need to be re-evangelized. They must be told about His mighty acts for man’s deliverance from eternal condemnation. It takes little imagination to foresee the wonderful result that will surely follow the new outpouring of the *“Holy Spirit upon all flesh.”* the dramatic transformation of the lives of countless men and woman in the Church.

