

# Renewal

by Warren L. Hoffman

The Brethren in Christ have a long history of openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. We desire to be receptive to what God is saying to the church today. In both our historical roots and current aspirations, we have a rich context for renewal.

The Brethren in Christ Church emphasizes the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live the holy life. We affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in our doctrinal statement. We encourage individuals and churches to seek God for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We approach the Christian life with the expectation of a vital, life-changing relationship with the living God.

We accept the Bible as the final authority for faith and practice. We recognize that the Holy Spirit continues to work in the church today in teaching us how to understand, interpret, and apply the Scriptures. As we open the Scriptures together, we believe the Holy Spirit helps us discern God's truth and will. Always, our aim is to remain faithful to the Word of God.

With such biblical convictions and historical precedents, it is not surprising that the Brethren in Christ are attracted to contemporary expressions of spiritual renewal and careful to distinguish between essential and extraneous elements. The desire for renewal is woven into our understanding of the Christian life. Yet, we want to be certain that we experience an authentic move of the Holy Spirit. We recognize our need for one another so that together we can discern the strengths and weaknesses of various movements and phenomena in our day.

We are familiar with practices that have become identified with various renewal movements. For example, the "holiness" movement has been known by altar calls, shouting, and upraised hands. The "Pentecostal" movement has been associated with speaking in tongues and interpretation in public assemblies. The "charismatic" movement has been marked by praise choruses, ministry gifts, and hands raised in worship. The "Third Wave" movement has been characterized by expressive worship, corporate prayer, and teaching about spiritual warfare. Other renewal movements have been noted for emphasizing prophetic words and being slain in the Spirit.

The Brethren in Christ strive to stay attuned to the moving of the Holy Spirit and remain faithful to the Word of God by measuring contemporary renewal movements by biblical marks such as:

## Repentance

Throughout the Bible the call to-and the response of-repentance has preceded fresh outpourings of God's Spirit. From the days of the Old Testament prophets to Peter's sermon at Pentecost, times of renewal have been marked by constant truth-when God's people humble themselves, confess their sin and need, and turn to God for deliverance and guidance, God responds with revival and blessing (2 Chronicles 7:14).

## The Fullness of the Holy Spirit

When God's people long and pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, God gives this

gracious gift. Jesus taught, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). When we surrender to the sovereign rule of Jesus through the indwelling presence of his Spirit, the wind of renewal blows upon the church.

### Obedience

A renewed commitment to obedience to Christ is inseparably linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul demonstrates this link by using phrases such as "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) and "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (1 Colossians 3:16) interchangeably. He teaches that people filled with the Spirit are distinguished by traits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23).

### Community

In His interaction with humankind, God has clearly demonstrated His interest in creating community. His call to Abraham was a call to bring forth a nation. (Genesis. 12:3). He instituted the church to be "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." (1 Peter 2:9). Community, therefore, is a vital dimension of any renewal which is rooted in God".

### Witness and Service

The church experiences fresh manifestations of God's grace as it extends itself for witness and service in the world. A.W. Tozer observed, "God works as his people live daringly. He ceases when they no longer need His aid." "I As the church stretches beyond its human capacities in obedience, to the Great Commission to make disciples, and as it seeks to be a redemptive influence in the world with acts of love and compassion, it receives from the Holy Spirit the direction and empowerment to fulfill its calling.

The Brethren in Christ affirm the following guidelines which can assist us in ascertaining what is an authentic movement of the Holy Spirit.

- We affirm Brethren in Christ doctrine concerning the work of the Holy Spirit both personally and corporately.
- We celebrate and foster Christian community as the context for our common participation in the gift of the Holy Spirit given in response to our faith and commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (1 Corinthians 12:7, 24-26; Ephesians 4:3).
- We encourage all individuals and churches to seek God for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- We affirm vital public worship services and recognize that people experience God in various ways and worship in various styles.
- We anticipate that the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) will be evident in renewal (Galatians 5:22-26).
- We understand that gifts of the Spirit are given to strengthen and enlarge the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are to be governed by love and used for the common good of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- We recognize that the Bible affirms a variety of spiritual gifts and experiences.
- We acknowledge that we need each other so that together we can discern the strengths and weaknesses of various movements and phenomena in our day.
- We affirm the role of bishops and pastors to clearly instruct people in biblical teachings, such as heart purity and holiness of life, so that people can distinguish between essential and peripheral elements in renewal.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit exalts Christ for the glory of God (John 16:12-14; 1 Corinthians 12:1-3; Ephesians 4:11-16).

I A.W. Tozer, Paths to Power

This material has been condensed and adapted from the report of a Task Force on Renewal at the 1996 General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church.