Open to the Spirit: Covenant Dialogue with Charismatic Movements

José González, Lead Pastor
Northbrook Covenant Church, Northbrook, Illinois

Throughout its history, the Evangelical Covenant Church has interacted with various Christian movements that place significant focus on the operation of the ongoing gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially those which might be considered the more visible or miraculous gifts, such as tongues, healing, and prophecy. In this article, I survey the extent and substance of the Evangelical Covenant Church's response to charismatic movements.[1] Generally speaking, the Covenant's Pietist roots, and its identification as a renewal movement, have encouraged a measured assessment that seeks common ground with charismatics with regard to theology and practice. Rather than an outright critique or denial of charismatic experiences, one finds in Covenant engagement an affirmation of the ongoing nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by a call to remain biblical in teaching and practice, and to keep Christ

[1] Though admittedly an over-simplification, for the purposes of this article I will use the term "charismatic" to refer to the kind of Christian faith that places a significant focus on the Holy Spirit's operation, particularly what might be considered the more visible or miraculous gifts in the life of a Christian. It is also worth noting that while such movements have occurred around the world, Covenant dialogue has generally interacted with the movements that originated in the United States. See Alan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) for a helpful treatment of the history and theology of these movements. Note Anderson's treatment of the complexities involved in defining terms in his introduction (Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 1-6) and his chapters exploring the different histories by continent and region throughout the work. Anderson however prefers "Pentecostal" as the more general term.

central. Covenant publications, resolutions, and consultations that have engaged with charismatic movements reveal a consistent commitment to the Covenant affirmation of the Christian's continual dependence on the Holy Spirit, while also challenging the church to seek and receive whatever gifts or methods God might offer to empower its mission.

I begin with a brief overview of the three historical "waves" of the larger Charismatic movements (Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neo-charismatic or "Third Wave") and Covenant responses to each. This provides a framework for then exploring more fully the substance of those responses, integrated around four themes: a call to be biblical, a call to be Christ-centered, a renewed sense of Spirit-dependence and Spirit-heritage, and a challenge to be open to the Spirit's work.

Charismatic "Waves" and Covenant Response: An Overview

While the terms "Pentecostal" and "charismatic" are often used interchangeably, they more accurately designate distinct movements. Most Pentecostal denominations that formed within the United States find their roots in the turn of the twentieth century, when, in 1906, William Seymour began pastoring a small African American Holiness church in Los Angeles. Seymour led the church into revival, and when the movement outgrew its location, it relocated to a storage building at 312 Azusa Street. The "Azusa Street Revival" soon became multicultural and was marked by manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and collapsing under the power of the Spirit (i.e., being "slain in the Spirit").[2] The movement quickly gained national and international attention and influence. While many churches trace their roots to this movement, the denominations that have the most direct descendance include the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Foursquare Church.[3] As such, the designation "Pentecostal" most precisely refers to churches identified with this historical phase of the movement.

The Holiness movement, out of which the Pentecostal movement emerged, has roots in Lutheran Pietism through the Moravian revival's impact on John Wesley. Shared emphases include the importance of the Spirit's work and the emphasis on emotion in the Christian experience.[4] Regardless of how practices and theologies may differ or align today, one may identify Covenanters and Pentecostals as cousins in this regard,

[2] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 41–42.
[3] Ibid., 52.
[4] Ibid., 25–26.

since both traditions have common roots in Pietist revivalism. This may contribute to understanding why, historically, Covenant pastors and scholars have not generally refuted the manifestations of the Spirit that charismatic Christians claim, and at times have even stated their own openness to, or belief in, such manifestations. At the same time, Covenant ministers insist upon a biblical and Christ-centered foundation for teaching and practice.

The movement commonly known as the "Charismatic movement" is usually identified with the process of charismatic ministries entering mainline denominations in the 1960s.[5] This represents a culmination of many events spanning several decades and involved ministers and laypeople of different traditions who were exposed to charismatic ministries.[6] Various ministers of older denominations in the 1940s and 1950s had received "Spirit baptism" or a "second blessing," that is, a post-conversion experience wherein one is overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit's power.[7] The most public encounter was that of Episcopal rector Dennis Bennet, also in Los Angeles. Bennet experienced Spirit baptism along with a colleague and several church members in November 1959. He made the event public in an April 1960 sermon at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, leading to a controversy that resulted in his resignation. When Bennet's story was reported by *Time* and *Newsweek*, a sympathetic bishop in the state of Washington appointed Bennet to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle. Bennet shared his experience with this struggling parish, and the congregation grew rapidly. It reached two thousand in weekly attendance at its height and became a destination for those seeking Spirit baptism.[8]

Bennet's published testimony became a bestseller, and his ministry led many Christians from various denominations to join the burgeoning Charismatic movement, including Methodists, Reformed, Baptists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians.[9] During the 1960s, the movement spread

[5] Ibid., 157.

[6] Ibid., 158–61.

[7] There is disagreement regarding the nature of and appropriate label for such an encounter. See for example Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism,* 29, and his identification of the three main views and labels interacting with the Holiness roots of American Pentecostalism.

[8] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 162.

[9] For his published testimony, see Dennis J. Bennet, *Nine O'clock in the Morning* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International Fellowship, 1970).

throughout the United States and Canada.[10] In 1967, it made its mark on the Roman Catholic Church, primarily through two theology professors from Duquesne University: Ralph Keifer and William Storey. When Keifer and Storey read *The Cross and the Switchblade* and *They Speak with Other Tongues*—two of the most influential publications in expanding the charismatic movement—they received Spirit baptism and passed it on to students at a retreat.[11] The movement then spread rapidly throughout the Roman Catholic Church.[12]

The "Third Wave" refers to the third primary phase of the broader Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in largely nondenominational settings, which arose out of the Church Growth Movement of the 1970s and 1980s.[13] It was so named by C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary. In particular, Wagner identified the movement with John Wimber, who came to lead the Association of Vineyard Churches in 1982 and who, with Wagner, taught the course "Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth" at Fuller from 1982 to 1986.[14] This Third Wave moved away from the idea of a "second blessing," and instead applied the label "Spirit baptism" to events occurring at conversion itself. Also, it emphasized the use of charismatic gifts in evangelism and viewed them as a natural part of daily Christian life.[15]

Covenant leaders and theologians entered into dialogue with all three of these historical "waves." C. V. Bowman, president of the Covenant from 1927 to 1933, addressed the issue of speaking in tongues in response to the Pentecostal revival and, more specifically, the "Latter Rain" movement. This movement taught "evidentiary tongues," a view affirming that the gifts of tongues would be manifest in all who were baptized.[16] While Bowman affirmed the gift, he refuted the notion that it is necessary to

[10] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism,* 162.

[11] David R. Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: Random House, 1963); John L. Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

[12] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 165.

[13] Charles H. Kraft, "'The Third Wave' and the Covenant Church," *Narthex* 5.1 (1985): 3. Available at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/npu_narthex/id/1464/rec/8; Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism,* 66-67.

[14] Ibid., 67; Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, *A History of the Vineyard* (Cape Town: Vineyard International, 1999), 110, 124.

[15] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 67.

[16] C. V. Bowman, "Speaking in Tongues," trans. Vernon B. Westerburg, *Covenant Quarterly* 53 (1995): 49. Bowman writes sometime between 1910 and 1920. The movement is distinct from the post WWII movement with the same name.

evidence faith, or that its manifestation is somehow indicative of deeper or more genuine spirituality.[17]

The charismatic renewal of the 1960s elicited a fairly prompt response from the Covenant denomination. Even before the renewal made its most notable break into the Roman Catholic Church, the 1963 Covenant Annual Meeting passed a resolution on spiritual gifts, recognizing "the commendable renewal of interest in the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of God, in many historic denominations … accompanied by reported instances of speaking in tongues, divine healings, and other phenomena."[18] In 1968, the *Covenant Companion* ran a series of four articles on the work of the Holy Spirit written by North Park Theological Seminary faculty. Biblical studies faculty members Frederick Holmgren and Henry Gustafson Jr. addressed the themes of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, respectively.[19] Professor of theology Donald Frisk discussed the Holy Spirit and the Church.[20] Pastoral theologian Wesley Nelson concluded the series with a discussion of the Holy Spirit as the "Holy Innovator."[21] While the articles do not reference the Charismatic movement explicitly, Frisk alludes to it with his suggestion that the Holy Spirit "seems to be calling his church to new and often strange forms of ministry in our day."[22]

Larger Protestant denominations were already issuing official reports on the charismatic renewal occurring in the 1970s, by the time the Covenant held its first consultation in 1970, focused on the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work. A second consultation, on "Spiritual Gifts and Covenant Polity," followed in 1976. In fact, the 1978 Covenant Midwinter Conference was devoted to the subject of the Holy Spirit.[23] The *Narthex* issue of September 1982 also offered a discussion on the gifts of the Spirit.[24]

[17] Bowman, "Speaking in Tongues,"49.

[18] *Covenant Yearbook 1963*, 242.

[19] Fredrick Holmgren, "The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," *Covenant Companion*, April 19, 1968, 8–9; Henry A. Gustafson Jr., "The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the New Testament," *Covenant Companion*, May 3, 1968, 12–13.

[20] Donald C. Frisk, "The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Church," *Covenant Companion*, May 17, 1968, 10–11.

[21] Wesley W. Nelson, "The Holy Spirit: The Holy Innovator," *Covenant Companion*, May 31, 1968, 4–5.

[22] Frisk, "The Holy Spirit," 11

[23] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 164; Robert K. Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Covenant Today," *Covenant Quarterly* 44 (1987): 49–50.

[24] *Narthex* 2.2 (1982). The full issue is accessible through the *Narthex* digital collection of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/npu_narthex/id/1201/rec/1.

Philip J. Anderson, Covenant historian and journal editor, introduced the issue by summarizing two decades of Covenant engagement with the Charismatic movement.[25] The central article of the issue was written by Lars Sandstrom, pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Florissant, Missouri, and was entitled "The Gifts of the Spirit: Optional Features or Standard Equipment?"[26] The issue featured responses by Randall D. Roth, Theodore D. Nordlund, Craig A. Nordstrom, Thomas F. Sharkey, Jane K. Koonce, Phillip J. Ladd, and R. Dan Simmons.

The May 1985 issue of *Narthex* addressed the impact of the Third Wave within the Covenant.[27] In the leading article, Charles H. Kraft, then professor of anthropology and intercultural communication at Fuller and member of the Pasadena Covenant Church, recounted his interaction with Wimber and Wagner's "Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth" course and the subsequent formation of healing ministries at Pasadena Covenant Church.[28] Responses to Kraft's article were written by Klyne Snodgrass, William L. Peterson Jr., Richard W. Carlson, Young Ho Chun, Gwynn Lewis, and John S. Bray.

In 1986, the Covenant held a consultation on "The Covenant and the Charismatic Movement," the proceedings of which were published in the *Covenant Quarterly.*[29] An introduction by Robert K. Johnston, then dean of North Park Theological Seminary, provides a helpful summary of much of the Covenant's responses to charismatic movements.[30] Johnston stated that the movement served as a catalyst for discussing renewal in the Covenant Church.[31]

Overall, Covenant dialogue with these three movements provides formational insights for any ministry, and is worth considering by Christians who identify as Covenant, charismatic, or both.

[25] Philip J. Anderson, "Comment," *Narthex* 2.2 (1982): 52–57.

[25] Erasmus of Rotterdam, Paraphrase on Matthew, vol. 45 of *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. and annot. Dean Simpson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 83.

[26] Lars Sandstrom, "The Gifts of the Spirit: Optional Features or Standard Equipment?" *Narthex* 2.2 (1982): 58–72.

[27] *Narthex* 5.1 (1985). The full issue is accessible through the *Narthex* digital collection of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/npu_narthex/id/1464/rec/8.

[28] Kraft, "'The Third Wave' and the Covenant Church," 5–15.

[29] See the second issue of volume 44 of the *Covenant Quarterly*, from 1987.

[30] Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Covenant Today," 49.

[31] Ibid., 50.

Themes in Covenant Engagement

A Call to Be Biblical. Covenant responses to charismatic Christians and charismatic ministries overwhelmingly foreground the call to be biblical. This represents the primary grounds for almost all of the critique one finds in the dialogue. This does not imply that in these discussions, charismatic Christians are accused of being in error in experience or analysis. Rather, Covenant responses emphasize the need to root teaching and the interpretation of experience in Scripture, in order to prevent error in teaching and practice. In this regard, Bowman's early response to the Latter Rain movement is characteristic of much of the Covenant dialogue with charismatic ministries. Bowman opens his article affirming that no one familiar with biblical truths would question that speaking in tongues occurs today. At the same time, he cautions that not all such manifestations are of the Spirit—nor are twentieth century manifestations unique, citing instances as far back as the fourteenth century. Also, Bowman notes how seldom the gift of tongues is mentioned in Scripture, taking Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 to place the gift last in rank. He also calls it the least necessary and the least useful.[32] At the same time, he critiques the Latter Rain movement's expectation that everyone "baptized in the Spirit today … speaks in tongues." To the contrary, he insists that the apostle Paul's words demonstrate that "not every Christian will possess the gift of speaking in tongues," nor should the lack of the gift trouble the Christian.[33]

The four-article *Covenant Companion* series on the Holy Spirit from 1968 offers a helpful example of the Covenant emphasis on the need for a biblical foundation in teaching and interpreting the work of the Holy Spirit. Together, these articles provide an exegetical and theological introduction to the work and person of the Holy Spirit. This was particularly helpful as a framework for processing the phenomenon of the Spirit's gifts finding fresh expression in the Charismatic movement of that period. For example, in his treatment on the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, Gustafson identifies the Spirit's gifts as a means of equipping the church, intended to promote unity and to be used for the good of the whole body. In doing so, Gustafson names preaching, teaching, healing, administration, and interpretation of tongues as examples of the

[32] Bowman, "Speaking in Tongues," 48, 50.
[33] Ibid., 49-50.

diversity of the Spirit's gifts.[34]

The conversation within the 1982 and 1985 issues of *Narthex* also emphasizes the need for a biblical foundation in understanding the Spirit's work. In his response to Sandstrom's article on spiritual gifts, Sharkey, then assistant pastor of North Park Covenant Church, stated that a firm grounding in Scripture was one of the greatest needs of the charismatic movement.[35] Snodgrass, professor of biblical literature at North Park Theological Seminary, echoes a similar sentiment in his response to Kraft's article on the impact of the Third Wave within the Covenant. Snodgrass is critical primarily of what he sees as "little in [Kraft's] explanation that is particularly biblical or, for that matter, Christian."[36] Snodgrass raises concerns regarding language that does not derive from Scripture, and asks what is specifically Christian within the Third Wave, as distinct from similar phenomena espoused by non-Christian movements.[37] Despite these critiques, Snodgrass affirms some of the by-products of the movement as desirable for Covenant churches, including the expectation of God's working and re-vitalized worship.

A Call to Be Christ-Centered. The reminder to maintain focus on Christ stems naturally from the call to be biblical. This does not discount the work of the Spirit, but rather recognizes the object of that work and seeks to avoid glorifying the gifts over the God who gives them. Referencing John 7:39 and 20:22, Gustafson, for example, notes that the Spirit's work presents the truth as it is in Christ and so follows the ministry of Christ. He states that the Spirit "necessarily fulfills a secondary and subsequent position in relation to Jesus."[38]

In their response to Sandstrom's *Narthex* article, Roth and Nordlund (then pastors of West Hills Covenant Church in Portland, Oregon) advocate for the proper use of all God's gifts, which they offer as an antidote to potential abuse. Roth and Nordlund identify "proper use" as "always in the context of love, for the purpose of upbuilding the body of Christ, and continuing his life and ministry in the world."[39] Sharkey affirms Sandstrom's article for pointing out the scriptural basis for Spirit baptism,

[34] Gustafson Jr., "The Holy Spirit," 13.

[35] Thomas F. Sharkey, "Response," *Narthex* 2.2 (1982): 85.

[36] Klyne Snodgrass, "Response," *Narthex* 5.1 (1985): 16.

[37] It is worth noting that, while Snodgrass's concerns are valid, Kraft's article reads more like a descriptive account rather than a fully developed theological argument.

[38] Gustafson Jr., "The Holy Spirit," 13.

[39] Randall D. Roth and Theodore V. Nordlund, "Response," *Narthex* 2.2 (1982): 79.

and for the acceptance of the Spirit's gifts in the church. He concludes his response by stating that it is imperative that in all things we listen to "the message of the revealed Christ: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.'"[40]

In his introduction to the proceedings of the 1986 Covenant consultation on "The Covenant and the Charismatic Movement," Johnston, then dean of North Park Theological Seminary, notes that one of the four questions for the final discussion of the 1986 consultation was, "What ought to characterize our posture with respect to the special gifts (e.g., healing, exorcism) so that our common life can be enhanced?" Among the observations recorded is the statement that "we need to build our church around Christ alone," rather than the demonstration or lack of a particular gift.[41] Similarly, the 1963 resolution had resolved that the Spirit's gifts be exercised in love for edifying and unifying the body of Christ rather than as a badge of spiritual attainment.[42] Peterson, then pastor of Vision of Hope Evangelical Covenant Church, Eagan, Minnesota, concludes his contribution to the 1986 Consultation with an anonymous quote that states, "We should seek to imitate no one but Christ, but neither should we refuse anything that Christ offers."[43] Paul Larsen, then president of the Covenant, states directly that the Covenant has not been centered on signs and wonders but on Jesus Christ. He further notes that waiting in Christ-centeredness will fill our sails with the Spirit.[44]

A Renewed Sense of Spirit Dependence and Spirit Heritage. Engaging with charismatic movements has led Covenanters to recognize and recall the Spirit's work within the Covenant throughout its history. This has led most naturally to a renewed recognition of the denomination's dependence on the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps most directly seen in the 1963 Annual Meeting resolution's reaffirming the Covenant's continuing dependence on the "illuminating, regenerating, and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit," in all labors, while also recognizing the Spirit's prerogative to divide such gifts according to the Spirit's will.[45] It is also explicitly

[40] Ibid., 88.

[41] Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," 51–52.

[42] *Covenant Yearbook 1963*, 242.

[43] Carleton D. Peterson, "The Charismatic Movement in Covenant Churches, 1986," *Covenant Quarterly* 44 (1987): 60.

[44] Paul E. Larsen, "Signs, Wonders, and Covenant Theology," *Covenant Quarterly* 44 (1987): 99, 101.

[45] *Covenant Yearbook 1963,* 242.

mentioned in Nelson's *Covenant Companion* article on the Holy Spirit as the Holy Innovator. In that article, Nelson ties the denomination's future to its dependence on the Holy Spirit, recognizing that it would have been dead long ago without the Spirit's life-giving work.[46]

Part of the Covenant's recognition of Spirit-dependence has taken the form of recalling the Spirit's work throughout the denomination's history. In his response to Sandstrom's article on spiritual gifts, Nordstrom, a systematic theology student from Evanston Covenant Church, highlights his perception of great similarities between Covenanters and charismatics, especially the emphasis of life over doctrine in response to impersonal scholasticism.[47] Johnston recognizes the Covenant's roots as a renewal movement in Sweden and its openness to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit from the beginning. He ties this reality to the language of the reaffirmed Spirit-dependence in the 1963 resolution and its caution for the Spirit's gifts to be exercised in love to edify the church.[48]

In his contribution to the 1986 consultation, Peterson, then pastor of First Covenant Church in St. Paul, states his experience in reading that Pentecostal churches grow primarily because of an emphasis that God seeks us out, and that the Holy Spirit acts powerfully through ordinary Christians. He recognizes that these characteristics sound like strains of the Pietist movement in Sweden.[49] In his engagement with the work of Wimber of the Vineyard, Larsen cites the Covenant's Pietist heritage, recognizing it as a protest against western Christianity's over-rationalistic orientation. This is an orientation that he argues Wimber rightly critiques. He also recognizes power as being the essence of Pietistic proclamation, as he notes that "miracles, signs and wonders, and victories of Satan have been, are, and shall be a part of the life and faith of the Evangelical Covenant Church."[50]

A Challenge to Be Open to the Spirit's Work. In addition to a renewed sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit, Covenant authors have raised the question of continued openness to the Holy Spirit's work. An openness to the Spirit's work is a significant challenge presented in Nelson's 1968 *Covenant Companion* article on the Holy Spirit as Holy

[46] Nelson, "The Holy Spirit," 5.
[47] Craig A. Nordstrom, "Response," *Narthex* 2.2 (1982): 81.
[48] Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," 49.
[49] William Peterson Jr., "The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Ministry of Healing: Reclaiming the Ministry of Healing Today," *Covenant Quarterly* 44 (1987): 74.
[50] Larsen, "Signs, Wonders," 99.

Innovator. Nelson concludes, in part, by encouraging his readers not to set limits on the Spirit's ability to lead to new areas of fruitfulness.[51]

Openness to the Spirit's work is also a central question in the dialogue of the September 1982 issue of *Narthex*. For instance, in response to Sandstrom's article, Sharkey states that what is necessary in the face of renewal is the courage "to examine the Scriptures in the confidence of the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to see if there is a possibility that we may have missed something or that our own faith can be enriched."[52] Roth and Nordlund also identify the need to be in control as an issue with openness to "all the Spirit's gifts."[53] They recognize that some gifts are seemingly more controllable and less threatening, but they also affirm from Scripture that healing should be prayed for (Acts 4:30), prophecy earnestly desired (1 Cor 14:1), and the gift of tongues commended to all (1 Cor 14:5). In his response to Kraft, Snodgrass further affirms that the Church has a healing ministry that has too often gone neglected.[54] Peterson's response to the same article echoes this sentiment, as he notes that too often evangelical churches have neglected the healing ministry of Jesus. Peterson's paper for the 1986 consultation was written on reclaiming such ministries of healing.[55]

The material compiled in the *Quarterly* from the 1986 consultation reflects a great desire for openness to the Spirit's work. Johnston's introduction to the material recalls a September 24, 1970, letter from denominational leaders and North Park Theological Seminary faculty to the ministerium suggesting a deeply felt need for renewal of the church by the Spirit.[56] Johnston also recalls a November 8, 1976, presidential newsletter from Milton B. Engebretson, who states that it seems the Covenant should accept a more embracing posture on the issue of the Holy Spirit's presence and ministry within the whole church of Jesus Christ.[57] After recounting an episode of demonic exorcism and deliverance, Margaret Swenson, at that time a missionary to Colombia, poses the question of what we want for the Covenant. She continues with a

[51] Nelson, "The Holy Spirit," 5.
[52] Sharkey, "Response," Narthex 2.2 (1982): 86.
[53] Roth and Nordlund, "Response," 76, emphasis original.
[54] Snodgrass, "Response," 18.
[55] Peterson Jr., "Response," 19; And generally, see Peterson Jr., "The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Ministry of Healing."
[56] Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," 49.
[57] Ibid., 49–50.

challenge not only to be a people who believe in miracles, but also, to be "a people that do what needs to be done to see miracles happen."[58]

One of the few indicators of a closed-off posture to charismatic ministries within the Covenant denomination can be found in Peterson's overview for the 1986 Consultation. After recognizing the spiritual fruit born from these ministries—including a wider range of worship practices, increased frequency of the Lord's Supper, and wider use of healing services—Peterson also relays anonymous impressions of the perceptions of denominational leadership. Several respondents reveal their perceptions that some denominational leaders were not as open to charismatic leaders or ministries as they would have preferred, likely out of caution for the difficulty such ministry might cause.[59] Regardless, these sentiments are expressed in the context of a desire for greater openness to the Spirit's work.

Concluding Considerations for Ministry

Engaging the Covenant's historical dialogue with charismatic movements calls to mind characteristics of the denomination that continue to stand as healthy foundations for teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work, and for encouraging Christians to learn about the Spirit's gifts and about putting them into practice. Johnston saw the caution of the 1963 resolution as an example of a gentle, biblical, and pastoral admonition, which has allowed the Covenant to benefit from renewal movements without being trapped in dogmatism or excess.[60] Similar sentiments could be extended to much of the Covenant's responses to charismatic movements. The centrality of the word of God, the focus on Christ, recognition of the denomination's Spirit-dependence and the Spirit's work throughout the denomination's history provide healthy foundations for ongoing ministry practice. They are conducive to helpful assessments of experience and practice; they also protect from abuse with regard to the Spirit's gifts. Such a foundation is particularly useful in charismatic environments, where clergy and laity alike are comfortable with the more visible or miraculous gifts. Indeed, many charismatic pastors share the aforementioned concerns of Covenant ministers.

[58] Margaret Swenson, "Consultation on the Covenant and the Holy Spirit," *Covenant Quarterly* 44 (1987): 69.

[59] Peterson, "The Charismatic Movement," 58–59.

[60] Johnston, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," 49.

At the same time, the dialogue also challenges Covenant churches today to grow in their understanding of the Holy Spirit, generally, and of the Spirit's gifts more specifically, and to grow in their openness to whatever the Spirit would do. It is one thing to be reminded of one's dependence on the Holy Spirit; it is another to self-reflect and consider whether one's life, church, or ministry is missing out on the Spirit's activity in some capacity. To appropriate the language of Sandstrom's article, it is worth asking the tough question of whether we treat some of the Spirit's gifts or activity as "optional equipment."[61] If we find such activity in Scripture but not in our church, are we depending on the Spirit as we should? Within this dialogue, the apostle Paul's treatment of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12-14 has rightly been employed to assure Christians that they are no less spiritual for lack of any gifts, particularly those that may be emphasized in charismatic communities.[62] For example, if one does not speak in tongues, prophesy, or heal, that is not an indication, in and of itself, that one is negligent or less spiritual than someone who does, for the Spirit distributes "just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Cor 12:11). Paul asks rhetorically whether all work miracles, have gifts of healing, or speak in tongues (12:29-30); the answer he expects, as indicated by the passage's context and language, is no, not everyone does.

But Paul's questions can equally lead us to consider the opposite: does no one work miracles, have gifts of healing, or speak in tongues? If no one does, why not? Does no one have these gifts, or have we not made space for them? Are there gifts we should seek that we have not? Before we conclude that God is not operating in these ways in a given context or season (which one could assert while simultaneously affirming that God does operate in these capacities in principle), we might consider Paul's exhortation to strive for "the greater gifts" (12:31) and his encouragement to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, "especially that you may prophesy" (14:1).[63] If certain gifts feel unfamiliar or absent in

[61] Sandstrom, "The Gifts of the Spirit," 58.

[62] See especially Bowman, "Speaking in Tongues," 47–50; Sandstrom, "The Gifts of the Spirit," 66, 68, 78.

[63] While the consideration for seeking gifts is important, there can be complexity and disagreements on the specific definitions of the gifts Paul refers to, and sometimes there is recognition of overlap for some terminology. For helpful treatment of the specific gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, see Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 591-99, and also Craig Keener, *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 114-127.

our context, or make us uncomfortable, then affirming the centrality of the Word of God should lead us to honestly ask why, and to consider if some gifts should be sought. If they are present, it is worth asking if they are a focus unto themselves, or if they are properly employed in Christ's service with a practice that is biblically rooted. The Christlike love that Bowman recognizes in Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13 should encourage Christians to consider these questions and strive for the greater gifts, always with the motivation of sharing the love of Christ.[64] It is also worth considering Swenson's challenge of whether we are doing what needs to be done to see miracles happen.[65] The importance of a posture of openness to the Spirit extends beyond the scope of an individual's gifts. We may also consider whether we are responding to God's "innovations," as Nelson describes the new work God may seek to do.[66]

At the 2019 Midwinter Conference, President John Wenrich called Covenanters to recognize the Holy Spirit as the "blazing center" for our mission. This call came with an invitation for Covenant churches and pastors to commit to a renewed focus and conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.[67] Furthermore, at the 2020 Midwinter Conference, Make and Deepen Disciples introduced the Blazing Center resource suite, making available several resources intended to help renew the affirmation of conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit in our lives and churches.[68] Such an emphasis and such resources may help Covenanters grow in openness to the work and person of the Holy Spirit. Nelson has helped us understand what such openness may look like:

> Think of [our churches] all waiting on God, all forgetting any "good old days" when things seemed better, and remembering only that the Spirit is free to move in directions we have never seen before, all prayerfully engaging in new experiments, all seeking the mind of the Spirit to lead them to new innovations, all asking the Spirit to renew them for service in their own communities! There is no limit to what the Spirit may innovate under such circumstances.[69]

[64] Bowman, "Speaking in Tongues," 50.

[65] Swenson, "Consultation on the Covenant and the Holy Spirit," 69.

[66] Nelson, "The Holy Spirit," 5.

[67] "2019 Midwinter, President's Update," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0SB5x59iFc&t=1252s, accessed February 12, 2021.

[68] https://covchurch.org/blazingcenter/blazing-center/

[69] Nelson, "The Holy Spirit," 5.

In the end, Covenanters should be encouraged to consider how our conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit ought to manifest itself in our lives and in our churches, and whether we really are open to all the Spirit would like to give us. As we strive to live our lives in conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, we may find ourselves all the more empowered to carry out God's mission—however the Spirit chooses.