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## Power in Action

**T**he greatest event in history was the coming of Jesus Christ into the world to live and to die for mankind. The next greatest event was the going forth of the Church to embody the life of Christ and to spread the knowledge of His salvation throughout the earth.

It was not an easy task which the Church faced when she came down from that upper room. To carry on the work of a man who was

known to have died—to have died as criminals die—and more than that, to persuade others that this man had risen again from the dead and that He was the Son of God and Saviour: this mission was, in the nature of it, doomed to failure from the start. Who would credit such a fantastic story? Who would put faith in one whom society had condemned and crucified? Left to herself the Church must have perished as a thousand abortive sects had done before her, and have left nothing for a future generation to remember.

That the Church did not so perish was due entirely to the miraculous element within her. That element was supplied by the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to empower her for her task. For the Church was not an organization merely, not a movement, but a walking incarnation of spiritual energy. And she accomplished within a few brief years such prodigies of moral conquest as to leave us wholly without an explanation—apart from God.

In short, the Church began in power, moved in power, and moved just as long as she had power. When she no longer had power she dug

in for safety and sought to conserve her gains. But her blessings were like the manna: when they tried to keep it overnight it bred worms and stank. So we have had monasticism, scholasticism, institutionalism; and they have all been indicative of the same thing: absence of spiritual power. In Church history every return to New Testament power has marked a new advance somewhere, a fresh proclamation of the gospel, an upsurge of missionary zeal; and every diminution of power has seen the rise of some new mechanism for conservation and defense.

If this analysis is reasonably correct, then we are today in a state of very low spiritual energy: for it cannot be denied that the modern Church has dug in up to her ears and is struggling desperately to defend the little ground she holds. She lacks the spiritual insight to know that her best defense is an offense, and she is too languid to put the knowledge into effect if she had it.

If we are to advance we must have power. Paganism is slowly closing in on the Church, and her only response is an occasional "drive"

for one thing or another—usually money—or a noisy but timid campaign to improve the morals of the movies. Such activities amount to little more than a slight twitching of the muscles of a drowsy giant too sleepy to care. These efforts sometimes reach the headlines, but they accomplish little that is lasting, and are soon forgotten. The Church must have power; she must become formidable, a moral force to be reckoned with, if she would regain her lost position of spiritual ascendancy and make her message the revolutionizing, conquering thing it once was.

Since “power” is a word of many uses and misuses, let me explain what I mean by it. First, I mean spiritual energy of sufficient voltage to produce great saints once again. That breed of mild, harmless Christian grown in our generation is but a poor sample of what the grace of God can do when it operates in power in a human heart. The emotionless act of “accepting the Lord” practiced among us bears little resemblance to the whirlwind conversions of the past. We need the power that transforms, that fills the soul with a sweet in-

toxication, that will make a former persecutor to be “beside himself” with the love of Christ. We have today theological saints who can (and must) be proved to be saints by an appeal to the Greek original. We need saints whose lives proclaim their sainthood, and who need not run to the concordance for authentication.

Secondly, I mean a spiritual unction that will give a heavenly unction to our worship, that will make our meeting places sweet with the divine Presence. In such a holy place showy sermons and streamlined personalities will be all out of order, a very grief to the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis will fall where it belongs, upon the Lord Himself and His message to mankind.

Then, I mean that heavenly quality which marks the Church as a divine thing. The greatest proof of our weakness these days is that there is no longer anything terrible or mysterious about us. The Church has been explained, the surest evidence of her fall. We now have little that cannot be accounted for by psychology and statistics. In that early Church they met together on Solomon’s porch, and

so great was the sense of God's presence that "no man durst join himself to them." The world saw fire in that bush and stood back in fear; but no one is afraid of ashes. Today they dare come as close as they please. They even slap the professed bride of Christ on the back and get coarsely familiar. If we ever again impress unsaved men with a wholesome fear of the supernatural we must have once more the dignity of the Holy Spirit; we must know again that awe-inspiring mystery which comes upon men and churches when they are full of the power of God.

Again, I mean that effective energy which God has, both in biblical and in post-biblical times, released into the Church and into the circumstances surrounding her, which made her fruitful in labor and invincible before her foes. Miracles? Yes, when and where they were necessary. Answers to prayer? Special providences? All of these and more. It is all summed up in the words of the evangelist Mark: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the words with signs following."

The whole book of Acts and the noblest chapters of Church history since New Testament times are but an extension of that verse.

Such words as those in the second chapter of Hebrews stand as a rebuke to the unbelieving Christians of our day: "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." A cold Church is forced to "interpret" such language. She cannot enter into it, so she explains it away. Not a little juggling is required, and not a few statements for which there is no scriptural authority, but anything will do to save face and justify our half-dead condition. Such defensive exegesis is but a refuge for unbelieving orthodoxy, a hiding place for a Church too weak to stand.

No one with a knowledge of the facts can deny the need for supernatural aid in the work of world evangelization. We are so hopelessly outclassed by the world's superior strength that for us it means either God's help or sure defeat. The Christian who goes out without faith in "wonders" will return without fruit.



No one dare be so rash as to seek to do impossible things unless he has first been empowered by the God of the impossible. "The power of the Lord was there" is our guarantee of victory.

Lastly, by *power* I mean that divine afflatus which moves the heart and persuades the hearer to repent and believe in Christ. It is not eloquence; it is not logic; it is not argument. It is not any of these things, though it may accompany any or all of them. It is more penetrating than thought, more disconcerting than conscience, more convincing than reason. It is the subtle *wonder* that follows anointed preaching a mysterious operation of spirit on spirit. Such power must be present in some degree before anyone can be saved. It is the ultimate enabling without which the most earnest seeker must fall short of true saving faith.

Everything else being equal, we shall have as much success in Christian work as we have power, no more and no less. Lack of fruit over a period argues lack of power as certainly as the sparks fly upward. Outward circumstances

may hinder for a time, but nothing can long stand against the naked power of God. As well try to fight the jagged lightning as to oppose this power when it is released upon men. Then it will either save or destroy; it will give life or bring death. "Ye shall receive power" is God's promise and God's provision. The rest waits on us.