

TEARS – GIFT OF THE SPIRIT ?

PART I – Introduction

1. Why write about 'Tears' ?

a) Pastoral need

I write about tears because many Christian individuals find that their spiritual growth is accompanied by various sorts of weeping that they have not known before. Not only may they feel embarrassed, but guilty as well if their experience seems to differ from the Christians around them. Most have not heard of any **Gift of Tears**. This article explains the type of spirituality in which the gift most often comes and which alone makes sense of it. It guides the reader to a right assessment of it within the wider picture of the Spirit's gifts and their usage.

b) Why 'Gift of the Spirit' Question Mark?

The title **Tears – a Gift of the Spirit?** has a question mark, because most experiences of tears have no direct relationship to the Holy Spirit. Sitting on a drawing pin or peeling an onion are obvious examples!

2. Tears in General

a) What they are

Our eyes have their own windscreen-wash system which is always active. Our regular blinking distributes the liquid and keeps our eyes clean and moist. The liquid usually drains away. We call such liquid **tears** only when it *overflows* - either because our drainage channels are blocked and/or we are producing too much for them to cope with.

Laurence Olivier regretted that when on stage he was never able to *produce* tears when needed. (Obviously some adults find difficult what children find so easy!) Before we see in more detail what produces tears, let's look briefly at –

b) Jesus' Tears

The shortest, and therefore famous, Bible-verse is **Jesus wept** (John 11:35, KJV). The word used (as we shall see later) is not one of wailing, crying or sobbing or even weeping, but simply of falling tears.

The context makes clear what caused Jesus' tears –

When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews...also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

[John 11:33-36. In all these articles I use the Anglicized Edition of the New R.S.V. translation. Its rendering that Jesus **began to weep** is parallel to the Contemporary English Version but no others.]

Jesus' tears arose from deep emotion both at the death of his friend Lazarus, the grief, weeping and unbelief of those around, and perhaps also the strain of the situation which was likely to hasten his death.

c) Their Causes

There are two main causes of increased tear-production: emotional and physical. Both are radically different chemically from our ordinary eye lubricant. They flush-out minerals and hormones related to stress and depression. Tears can plummet stress levels.

Emotional reasons

- **Increased emotions** like love, enthusiasm and eagerness increase the tear-fluid. It may not overflow. We speak then of *eyes-sparkling*.
- **Strong emotion** can cause us at first to appear *tearful*, and then to overflow and *shed tears*. We associate tears mainly with negative things like sorrow and bereavement, frustration, self-pity, and anger. But positive emotions like gratitude or extreme happiness, can also produce tears. We can 'laugh till we cry'!
- **Variety of triggers.** The fact that some films are 'weepies' illustrates that even emotions raised by make-believe can produce tears. It is even possible to experience tears of laughter by joining a laughing crowd – even if you missed the joke!

Physical reasons for tears. Irritant vapours or getting something in one's eye cause a tear-reflex to wash it away. Pain can cause tears. Tear gland activity is influenced by physical health/illness. A vitamin deficiency, for instance, can make one person much more 'weepy' than another. It does not thereby make that person more Spirit-gifted!

d) Tears – the new Prozac!

Times are changing. Tears are increasingly recognized to be good for you. They provide release when you cannot put complex emotions into words, as Gwyneth Paltrow found when accepting her Oscar! Crying helps us more quickly to restore our equilibrium after an upset.

In America tears are now regarded as the new Prozac! A recent book on them has taken the country by storm. The author claims that on average men are already crying once every three weeks – a statistic that I find quite astonishing

[*Crying: The Natural & Cultural History* by T.Lutz, W.W.Norton, reviewed by L.Hoe in *Sunday Times Style*, June 17,2001.]

PART II - The Spiritual Context of the Gift of Tears

1. The Holy Spirit's Outpouring

a) All Christian streams – all nations

- From roughly the mid-1960's, following the 'God is Dead' era, the world experienced a spontaneous international outpouring of God's Holy Spirit across all denominations and Christian groupings.

[It had actually begun at the turn of the century. For historical accounts see e.g. *Streams of Renewal* by Peter Hocken, Paternoster, '86. *Charismatic Renewal & the Churches*, Kilian McDonnell, Seabury NY, '76., *The Charismatic Renewal in the Church of England*, C.I.O., '81.]

- It was not a 'movement' in the usual sense for it had neither leader nor organisation to promote it. Groups and individuals independently began to experience God afresh in similar ways. The results were and *are* remarkable. (The 'outpouring' is still going on; one major denomination has eighty *million* members who would testify to being personally touched by it.)
- Many think it the greatest Spirit-outpouring since Pentecost. Such numbers over several decades make it easy for historians to summarise its characteristic results in people's lives. These results are **directly related to the Gift of Tears** because they describe the situation in which the Gift of Tears is most likely to be given and experienced.

b) Typical Results of the Spirit's Outpouring

The main results of the world-wide Spirit-outpouring I would sum-up in the phrase - **'From Christian Fog to Christian Focus'**

A personal experience of the Holy Spirit would be, and is, most likely to produce growth along some of the following lines -

- A personal encounter with Jesus
- A greater awareness of God as Father, and the desire to praise him
- A clearer awareness of God 'speaking' and a transformation in prayer
- A personal empowering of the Holy Spirit, bringing greater victory over sin
- An experience of God which makes the persons of the Trinity meaningful
- A new, or much greater, love of Scripture, and a thirst for spiritual knowledge
- A heart-felt desire for Christian unity and pain at our disunity
- A new, or greater desire to share the Gospel with others
- A growth in the social implications and outworkings of the Gospel

The experience of tears is closely related to these things. The gift of tears cannot be understood outside of the wider work of the Holy Spirit today. I will continue, therefore, to describe that work.

c) Outpouring - Fringe or Central ?

My list (above) shows how right the late Cardinal Suenens was in claiming that the Holy Spirit's work in this world-wide outpouring was certainly 'extreme', but it was *'extreme CENTRE !'* What some initially feared as *abnormal* was, when viewed as a whole, found to be a work of God to restore his Church to **normality!**

God is a God of surprises! The churches were generally unprepared for it! Although there were leaders who were praying - *Lord, renew your wonders as of a new Pentecost.*

[The Prayer of Pope John XXIII, and his successor, for the Second Vatican Council 1962–65. I have used this prayer in two of my Hymns, e.g. Hymn to the Spirit.]

- Every denomination had to come-to-terms with this new work of the Holy Spirit. There was a tendency for the new wine to burst the old wineskins, so local organisations inevitably sprang up to integrate the new life into old structures, to teach and to guide. In Britain, Michael Harper founded the Fountain Trust in 1964, and its magazine *Renewal* as an important tool for this.

I wrote the original article *Tears – Gift of the Spirit* for the magazine in 1980 after I had travelled for four years as the Fountain Trust's Associate Director.

2. Understanding the Riches

a) "Pentecostal"?

- The mainstream churches taught about the Holy Spirit, but some were suspicious of any sort of religious 'experience'. Although the Prayer Book prayed for Christians to **daily increase in the Holy Spirit more and more** this could, in practice, be dampened by leaders 'reassuring' young Christians: 'Don't expect anything to happen!'
- There was no such inconsistency and reticence in the Pentecostalist churches. Christians, therefore, who had personally experienced the Holy Spirit in a new way, but whose own denomination was unable to explain it or guide them, tended to listen to the many teachers influenced by the Pentecostalists. As far as I know 'The Gift of Tears' never particularly featured in the Pentecostalist tradition, although Michael Harper told me that he recalled David Wilkerson (of *The Cross & the Switchblade* fame) in the 1960's addressing ministers in London solely on the 'Gift of Tears'. He invited them afterwards to be prayed-over to receive the gift – which they did.
- Because of the emphasis and witness of the Pentecostalists to the experience of the Holy Spirit, their terminology and expectations were very influential. A person's special experience of the Holy Spirit was widely labelled *Baptism in the Spirit*, and with that went the strong Pentecostalist convictions that i) it was an experience separate from conversion and ii) it was authenticated by 'speaking-in-tongues'.

[If you want to see an outline of how the N.T. describes experiences of the Holy Spirit, see Appendix A.]

The New Testament's very varied language about Spirit-experience (*receiving him*, being *filled by him*, being *baptized* [by Jesus] *with him*, having him *come upon* you, *fall upon* you, or *anoint* you) underlines the *diversity* of the Holy Spirit's actions.

- Many lives *were* transformed by a pattern of experience that did tally with the Pentecostalist expectation of Baptism in the Spirit with speaking in tongues. But as time

passed, experience showed that the Spirit worked in more diverse ways. Christians, it was found, could grow into the *fullness* and *anointing* of the Holy Spirit without one momentous experience and/or without speaking in tongues. They could, for instance, receive the *gift of tears*.

- Some, like many Roman Catholics, happily called themselves 'Pentecostal' i.e. relating to the New Testament account of Pentecost.
- Those on the denominational spectrum who were nearer to the Pentecostalist churches tended not to call themselves 'Pentecostal' as it might imply a total acceptance of the Pentecostalist Churches' formulas and outlook.
- In addition, every Christian tradition has a recognized place for the Holy Spirit. The only hymn in the Book of Common Prayer is addressed to the Spirit, and every hymnbook contains similar prayers. Why import the terminology of the Pentecostalist churches when such prayers were answered?

[The term '*Neo-Pentecostal*' was used and promoted (*Neo-* coming from the Greek word for 'new/young'). It was accurate but never really caught on. See the important 1970 Report *The Work of the Holy Spirit* produced by the United Presbyterian Church of America.]

b) The Giving of Gifts/Charisms & "Charismatic" ?

- Non-Christians nowadays call Hitler 'charismatic'!! But before the word became fashionable it was the Christians within this world-wide moving of the Spirit who first really used it. They were experiencing unfamiliar '*spiritual gifts*' and so borrowed the New Testament word for 'gift', '*charism*', an undeserved gift of grace.

[An example of the New Testament use of '*charism*' as God's endowment upon believers is I Corinthians 12:4 - **Now there are varieties of gifts** ('charismaton' Gk. Plural) **but the same Spirit.**

See also Romans 12:6, I Corinthians 1:7; 12:9,28,30 & 31, I Timothy 4:14, II Timothy 1:6, I Peter 4:10.]

I deal with *charisms* in the N.T. in the article on **TONGUES**. I will simply mention here that a) *the* gift above all else is eternal life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23) and b) point you to the lists in Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:12, and I Corinthians 12:8-10. The last is quoted in full shortly.

- The term '*Charismatic*' could, however, suggest that *spiritual gifts*, including the gift of tears, were the *essence* of the Spirit's work, rather than items which spring from the great transformation of the believer's relationships with God, scripture, church and society. Such gifts are *not of the essence* of renewal. (They might be likened to the Bridegroom's gifts to his beloved at their wedding. They may be lovely *signs* of a new relationship, but are most emphatically not the marriage itself.)

- The natural tendency of some to focus too much on the gifts rather than the deeper *renewing* work of the Spirit added to the unease about using the term 'charismatic'.
- Even if the term 'charismatic' is not used, it reminds us that the Holy Spirit **gives** to us undeservedly. Gifts are given to help encourage us, deepen our prayer and worship and strengthen our witness.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not rewards for our goodness, nor badges marking our maturity, nor are they favours which we have merited. If you have ten such gifts you are not thereby a *better* person than one with none. If you have the gift of *service* that does not make you inferior to or more mature than someone with, say the gift of *miracles*. There can be no prestige or pride in testifying to any that one has received, therefore, only gratitude.

[I Peter 4:10-11, I Corinthians 12:10.]

St. Paul went to enormous efforts as a writer to convey that -

- **what is given is the choice of the Spirit not the receiver** and
- **the Spirit's gifts are immensely varied.**

Thus in I Corinthians 12:4-11 we read

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,
and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,
to another faith by the same Spirit,
to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
to another the working of miracles,
to another prophecy,
to another the discernment of spirits,
to another various kinds of tongues,
to another the interpretation of tongues.
All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who
allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.*

Later in the same chapter Paul asks a series of questions to hammer home to his readers the fact that the Spirit does **not treat everyone in the same way**. He asks rhetorically

*...Are all prophets?
Are all teachers?
Do all work miracles?
Do all possess gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues?
Do all interpret?*

The answer Paul is trying to evoke from his hearers/readers is: 'No! of course not!' [1. Corinthians 12:29-30]

The Holy Spirit's charisms/gifts mentioned in the New Testament come mainly in Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11 and I Peter 4:10-11a. The lists, single or in combination, are widely regarded as samples only, **they are not meant to list everything.**

Hence there are gifts that occur in Christian experience which are not mentioned.

c) "Renewal" ?

If the term '**Pentecostal**' was not universally used because of an over-identification with the Pentecostalist churches, and '**charismatic**' was not always used because of an over-identification with the Holy Spirit's 'gifts', it was the term '**Renewal**' that seemed to be the most useful and the least misleading.

Many Christians were already familiar with the term in the New Testament. In Titus 3:4ff. we read:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

[The same noun is used by Paul in Romans 12:2 –

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,...

The same word is used in its verb form in e.g. II Corinthians 4:16.

...we do not lose heart...our inner nature is being renewed day by day.]

Because of other 'renewals' in the churches, e.g. liturgical renewal, the term 'charismatic renewal' is sometimes used. It is a bit of a mouthful. One journalist thought that Michael Harper was a leader of 'cosmetic revival'!

In my four years' travelling as one of many leaders in this 'Renewal', (1977-1980) I inevitably had the honour of folk sharing their lives with me. I am not claiming that they were typical of *all*, but they certainly represented those who felt uncertain and were looking for guidance. Two things struck me most of all.

- **The strong influence of the Pentecostalists' teaching of a fairly uniform experience, and**
- **The deep distress and guilt felt by those to whom the Spirit had given other experiences.**

Many were so anxious about a gift(s) that they had *not* received that they had missed seeing and using the one(s) they *had* been given!

So, many of them were deeply troubled that they did not speak in tongues, and were astonished and *immensely helped* when I shared that of the Holy Spirit's gifts I had not, so far, received the gift of tongues.

I also shared that I had always stammered and that I could hardly speak my own surname for my first two decades. I quipped that I was still overwhelmingly grateful for the *charism* – given at Ordination – a genuine 'gift of tongue' that enabled me to speak **English!**

One of my spiritual mentors, a renowned Benedictine monk, had taught me that there were three rules for the Christian life:

- Don't fuss
- Love God
- Don't fuss

I learned the second one by the age of nine when I heard my call to the Priesthood and said 'Yes'. The other two I am still learning! Openness to the Holy Spirit was of paramount importance to me, while at the same time I hoped to avoid getting into a fuss because his actions didn't tally with the expectations of those around me.

One thing I did know, as St. Paul concluded in the passage I quoted at length earlier - ***the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.***

3. Tears outpoured

a) My own

I find it easy to share about my own gift of tears, because as I have stressed, such gifts are nothing whatever to be proud of. They are *not* signs of maturity, nor rewards for goodness. Having certain ones does not indicate any seniority, having other ones does not imply inferiority. It is ***the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.***

- I had, for many years, found that I wept gently, but with no real emotion or sobbing or facial contortion, whenever a Christian gathering moved together into real praise of God, or whenever there was teaching or singing that drew us nearer to the Cross of Christ.
For decades I've simply been unable to sing '*When I survey the wondrous cross*'. It is as if my eyes take over from my voice! The tears flow when my voice cannot.
As a public speaker it was not a gift I would recommend! At a personal level it was a nuisance. (I did not find it embarrassing, though, since my years of stammering as a Christian had taught me to believe that anyone who felt impelled to ridicule me because I was a stammerer was displaying as much weakness as I was – but of a different sort!)
- Tears appeared to have no purpose in a public speaker other than to hinder him/her in the job. But whatever it seemed at a practical level, I know for certain that at a spiritual level it was *mightily* used by God.

It was in a decade when there was widespread stress on *power*: power-evangelism, power-healing and power-leadership. My tears seemed to have provided an antidote. It displayed my own vulnerability and was used, I think, to lead people to realise that there can be no Pentecost other than through the Cross of Christ.

- It was as if there was growing separation of Pentecost from the Cross, and that God wanted some leaders to be seen to express the necessity of vulnerability, and that I was one of those so privileged. Like St. Paul I experienced a paradoxical ministry where God's power somehow came through weakness. (Perhaps it still does, as I have had M.E. for the last fifteen years and am writing this largely because I am unable to minister in public.)

b) The Tears of Others

When the first version of this article was published in *Renewal* in 1980 it broke new ground. The response was phenomenal, because up to that time the leaders in the renewal had said nothing about it, and there was no easily available teaching on it. I sought the advice of some of the more senior leaders about breaking the silence and they too felt that the time was right.

The following exchange was typical of my experience:

Me: '**...perhaps you have the gift of tears.**'

Enquirer: '**Gift of Tears!** I've never heard of such a thing. But if it exists, I've most certainly got it!'

PART III - Tears in Scripture

1. Tears in the Life of Jesus and in the N.T.

a) In Jesus' background

Scripture gives us many examples of tears and weeping. There is not space to comment on any more than a few of the 200 instances. Suffice it to mention here just a few instances of it in the Scriptures that Jesus knew.

- Grief is an obvious source of tears, e.g. King David for Absalom, Rachel for her children [II Samuel 18:33, Jeremiah 31:15.]
- Of more interest are tears which accompanied prayer to God.
Hannah *prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly.* [I Samuel 1:10.]
Hezekiah when facing death prayed with tears. God prompted Isaiah to tell him:
*"I have heard your prayer,
I have seen your tears;
I will heal you;
on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord.
I will add fifteen years to your life."*
[II Kings 20:5 repeated in Isaiah 38:5.]

The Hymn Book of the Jews, the Psalms, featured tears regularly. Sometimes literally at other times in picture language.

[Literally in. 6:6, 39:12, 56:8, 116:8, and picture-language in 42:3, 80:5, and 126:5]

- The Psalmist links prayer and tears –
*Hear my prayer, O Lord,
and give ear to my cry;
do not hold your peace at my tears.*
[39:12]
- The pain of seeing others turn away from God may cause weeping. So the Psalmist makes the lovely contrast –
*Make your face to shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes,
My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept.*
[Psalm 119:136]
- Tears found their place in the life and teaching of the Prophets. Jeremiah wept over the people of Judah –
*O that my head were a spring of water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people.*
[Jeremiah 9:1, see also 13:17 & 14:17.]

- But it was the prophets who could also envisage the end of all tears, and God acting like a parent:

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces...

b) In the Life of Jesus

In the N.T. while there are a number of references to weeping which must include tears, there are, in the life of Jesus only three references to **tears** as such.

The first is the noun *tears* that occurs twice, and the second the verb-version of the same word, which we might translate **shed-tears**.

- **The Woman who anointed Jesus**(Luke.7:38,44)
She stood behind him [Jesus] at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Jesus later explained the situation to his host –
"...she has bathed my feet with her tears...her sins, were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love."

The New R.S.V.'s translation (above) is *has bathed*. This probably reflects the American basis of the New RSV. Many English speakers would regard *bathe* as too excessive a word to translate the Greek *brecho* which is used of rain. A better translation is to use the verb **to wet** as the New International Version does.

(Some readers might wonder why I have not included the tears of the father of the lad Jesus delivered and healed in Mark 9. For details see BIBLE button)

- **? The epileptic-demoniac's Father** (Mark 9:24)
Not included here, see below:
[The King James' Version (1611) has in the story of the father and the epileptic-demoniac: the father *said with tears "I believe, help my unbelief"* (Mark 9:24) This reference to tears was dropped in the 1881 Revised Version and by every translation since because there is not sufficient support for it in the most important *Greek* manuscripts. (Only Knox, in 1945, translating the *Latin* N.T retained it.)]
- **Jesus in Gethsemane** (Hebrews 5:7-8a)
Outside of the Gospels there is a second reference to Jesus' **tears**. The writer of Hebrews, referring mainly to Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, wrote:
*In the days of his flesh,
Jesus offered up prayers and supplications,
with loud cries and tears,
to the one who was able to save him from death,
and he was heard because of his reverent submission.
Although he was a Son,*

he learned obedience through what he suffered;...

[Hebrews 5:7-8a The Gospels do not record tears *as such* in their accounts. See Mark 14:32-42, Matthew 26:36-46, Luke 22:40-46.]

- **Jesus before raising Lazarus (John 11:33-36)**

This has the verb-form of **tears**. [This passage has already been mentioned in passing in Part I, section 4.]

When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews...also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

Charles Spurgeon, in *The Power of Christ's Tears* has sermons on each of the Jesus' tears-passages and nine other closely related topics. [Compiled by L. Wubbels, and published by Emerald Books, Washington, '96.] Under the heading 'Jesus Is Our Instructor In Weeping' he writes – 'Observe why Jesus wept and learn a lesson from it. He wept because *this was His method of prayer of this occasion.*'

It may be no coincidence that in the first passage Jesus notes that the woman's tears were part of her demonstration of great **love**, and that in this one the Jews explain that Jesus' tears also were due to his great **love**.

A.P.Sym wrote of this: *He who with Divine authority was about to call the dead to life, yet had the human weakness to shed tears.*

[See - 'Tears', p.706 in Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*. T.& T Clarke, 1908.]

c) Tears in the N.T.

The other N.T. references simply to **tears** as such rather than weeping, include Paul's own descriptions to the Ephesian elders of ***"serving the Lord with all humility and with tears enduring the trials that came to me..."*** and ***"...that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears."***

[Acts 20:19 & 20:31]

Paul reminded the Corinthians:

I wrote to you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

[II Corinthians 2:4.]

Further references include II Timothy 1:4 - **recalling your tears**. This probably refers to the last time that Paul and Timothy parted, or, as some think, to the departure from Ephesus where **there was much weeping** Acts.20:37. There is also a reference to Esau whom God would not free from his tears because he had no chance to repent. Hebrews 12:17.

The Book of Revelation twice proclaims the great promise ***God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*** [7:17 & 21:4.]

2. Weeping in the Life of Jesus and in the N.T.

In addition to the times (above) when Jesus shed **tears**, there is in the N.T. one other reference to Jesus *weeping*. Greek, like English has a range of words from shedding tears to crying (aloud), to making lament through to wailing.

- *As he came near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!"*

This is the usual word [Luke 19:41. Greek *klaio*, used over 20 times in the N.T. Compare Isaiah's prophecy over Jerusalem 22:4] and denotes a loud expression of grief.

Peter wept in shame after denying his master.

Jesus found Mary of Magdala weeping at the sepulchre thinking that her dead Lord's body had been removed.

Weeping features regularly with mourners, e.g the disciples at the death of Jesus; families and friends of Jairus's daughter and Dorcas.

[Peter – Mark 14:72, Matthew 26:75, Luke 22:62.

Mary – John 20:11.

Disciples – Mark 16:10.

Jairus's daughter – Mark 5:38-39.

Dorcas' friends – Acts 9:39.]

Matthew's account of Jesus' teachings has four times when *weeping and gnashing of teeth* might be expected in the after-life. [8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30.]

Part IV – Christian Understanding of the Gift of Tears

1. Christian Insights into the Gift.

Tears feature throughout Christian history and in the West appear in the writings of St. Augustine, Julian of Norwich, St. Francis and others. But it is from the Christians of the East that the richest experience and teaching comes.

In my own case, and in the experience of many others, the gift is rarely linked to any emotional change, the tears just come – with no feeling of weeping or crying. The occasions of their coming are specially the times when God is particularly present by his Spirit. They come in times both of receiving and giving ministry; in times of prayer; in times of worship.

I recall being prayed over by leaders of the renewal movement on the stage of a packed Central Hall Westminster, when they commissioned me for work with the Fountain Trust. The tears just *flowed!* They had done so also two years earlier in the same place (at the 1975 Westminster Conference) when I experienced the pain of some 2,000 Christians together, united in the Spirit, but unable (because of denominational disciplines) all to communicate together. It was a warm summer, and I was in short-sleeves. It was noted at the time that my shirt was actually *drenched* with tears. I was certainly not the only one. Later I read this and quoted it because it made sense of my experience -

The gift of tears .. is associated not with human passions, but with the experience of God. Even their physiological aspect manifests this fact. They flow without strain or effort, without violent sobbing or the contortions of the face muscles.

[This appeared in my article in 1980, but no source was given, and I do not now know who wrote it]

In her widely-read book *Poustinia* Hueck Doherty makes the same point and says that when the Holy Spirit opens to you the panorama of the world and its pain, it will be tears rather than tongues that will be given.

In *The Orthodox Way* (a fine introductory book), Bishop Kallistos Ware writes –

- *When it is genuinely spiritual, “speaking with tongues” seems to represent an act of “letting go” – the crucial moment in the breaking down of our self-trust, and its willingness to allow God to act within us. In the Orthodox tradition this act of “letting-go” more often takes the form of the gift of tears.*

The Eastern Christians have many names to describe and relate to this gift –

- the way of tears
- the prayer of tears
- the gift of tears
- holy sadness
- tears which illuminate

- weeping without ceasing, etc.

So central to the spiritual life do they regard the gift that it is frequently called ‘**the second baptism**’. Fr. Maloney SJ, in *Inward Stillness*, records the teaching that this term is used because the waters of baptism only dealt with past sin, while the waters of our tears often relate to God’s washing away of our *present* sin.

Symeon, the New Theologian, (a.d. 949-1022) whose writings have spoken so clearly to those touched by the Holy Spirit's out-pouring of this century shared the belief of his contemporaries about the gift of tears marking this ‘second baptism.’

- His term for the 'gift of tears' was *the baptism in the Holy Spirit*.
- It would be surprising if the gift of tears did not feature frequently in a world-wide movement that tends to describe its distinctive experience *the baptism in the Holy Spirit* !

2. Five Areas of the Spirit's work closely related to Tears

The actual ‘gift of tears’ is received mostly within the context of the Holy Spirit's renewing movement (that I have detailed above). There are **five** facets of the renewal in which weeping and the 'Gift of Tears' may be appropriate. Do not expect there to be a very clear demarcation line between human weeping and the Spirit's gift of tears. Charisms are gifts given to us as individuals, and it is through our own individuality that they operate. So whatever happens is inevitably a mix of the human *and* the divine. Discerning the divine inspiration for tears is hardly necessary. Unlike, say, the Gift of Prophecy, we are not claiming any authority because of our tears, nor is the Church guided by them or us because of them.

a) Worship

The Holy Spirit’s work in many of us is to move our beliefs about God into a heart-experience of him, and to enable us to respond more totally. Emotion (not *emotionalism*) is finding its rightful place as a part of our total loving response to God’s love for us in Christ. In this setting, tears may be experienced, whether of penitence, thanksgiving or adoration.

b) Wilderness

As the Holy Spirit drove Jesus after his baptism out into the wilderness, so usually, it is so with us. (See my article **WILDERNESS – the Christian Experience**.) In this place of preparation for ministry, we experience the removal or the destruction of our idols, and the things on which we wrongly depend; we may experience temptation; we may undergo the changing of our priorities. ‘*Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me*’, is an authentic prayer to the Spirit, and when that prayer begins to be answered, then weeping and tears may not be far away.

c) Healing

Some conditions, spiritual, or mental, actually make it impossible for a person to weep. In that case new tears speak not of breakdown and bondage, but of a healing, release and liberation. One good reason to be more familiar with tears is so that our ability not to be upset by them will move forward the healing of others (and, of course, ourselves).

Some of us have mental hurts and wounds buried below the surface like splinters. For our healing they must come out. The warmth of the Spirit sometimes brings ugly facts of our past life to the surface, to heal us by a sort of surgery. Then there may be real pain and considerable hurt that have to be endured before we can be free.

d) **Growth**

In many of our Christian traditions we have inherited the purely human requirement to radiate victory and joy and assurance. They should indeed radiate from us, but when they do not, some Christians are forced to wear a false smile in order to be loved and accepted by our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. Sadly Christians may pretend most when together and least when away from one another! Sooner or later, the Holy Spirit will face us with ourselves as we really are. God can only meet us where we *are*, and it is often a long and painful journey, and the way may well be the way of tears.

e) **Pain**

As the Holy Spirit renews our minds and makes us more aware of reality, so bad things, as well as good, will touch us more deeply. If we grow in our recognition of God and his work, our increased vision will mean that we will see the devil and all his works as well. Human sin in general, as well as our own, will be more real, and spiritually, we will at times join our Lord in weeping over the Jerusalems of today as we learn of them through the media or feel the burden and sorrow of the joyless society around us.

It is in this context of the renewal, and in particular of weeping in worship and in the wilderness-experience, weeping in our healing, in our growth and in our pain that the Holy Spirit's gift of tears can begin to be understood.

When the Psalmist sings-

***May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy***

[126:5, NIV, see also Psalm 30:5

**Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.]**

It may be valid to read it not merely that God *replaces* joy by tears, but that tears may well be, for some, a *path* to joy.

PART V – A Final Note

...or rather, Letter.

What follows is an excerpt from a letter I once wrote to a person who asked me about the Gift of Tears. It expressed what remains to be said, so I have simply quoted it just as written.

...Thank God for it,[your gift of tears] but realize that such a gift is unlikely to be a permanent adornment. As you grow, you change, your situation changes and what God is calling you to be and calling you to do is likely to change also. Watch out for new gifts as the Spirit deems necessary and don't cling to old ones like sports trophies!

The outworking of your gift will not be identical to anyone else, for God has made you unique and treats you accordingly. Don't feel guilty by comparing what God is doing with you with what he is doing to someone else. That's hardly relevant! Don't focus on the gift. Watch out that you do not indulge in it. Never boast about it, but promptly witness to it if the Spirit leads you to do so, for your sharing is likely to bring great reassurance to others and will free them from false guilt that the expectations of other Christians may have forced upon them.

It is likely that life will have for you deeper pain, not less, as you see and feel things increasingly more from God's view. That is a special calling, and is, I think, linked to our sharing in some way the sufferings of Our Lord. Very often, in situations where God is felt to be present, the tears will have no emotional upheaval behind them, nor will they be accompanied by sobbing. The gift of tears is not the gift of sobbing one's heart out! Spiritual sensitivity is two-sided. Sin, your own and others' will pain you more; beauty and goodness will move you more. Both the wonder and goodness of God, and the horror and enormity of evil, will perhaps seem too big for you to cope with. In practical terms you may have to take steps (unnecessary to many other Christians) to reduce the seeing the deluge of evil that comes into your life via newspapers and T.V.

If you have the Gift of Tears, as I think you may, do not feel that every tearful overflow is spiritual! Don't encourage tears. Beware of getting over-tired. If you are ministering in public you may have actually to move your thoughts deliberately away from God(!) in order to cope better. (Rare advice from a Christian minister!!) Don't feel guilty about this. If you have a job to do – do it, the best you can. If tears get in the way, take practical steps to keep them in check. (If I am giving a talk, I have to go through it aloud half a dozen times or more to get the tears out of me first, if I'm to have any chance of getting through it smoothly in public!) I'm reminded of Joseph in Gen.43:30 [Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into his private room and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself said...Genesis 43:30]. Not quite the same thing as the Gift of Tears, but a good example nevertheless!

If, in spite of all you do, you experience tears in public ministry, don't let it bother you. Just let them fall and keep going. I can assure you it will not distress people. They will move people, and when that happens it may be a means by which they can respond more wholly – not just their minds – to God's ministry to them.

Tears is, I think, a very 'spiritual' gift, and so it is important (as with all spiritual things) not to let the devil divert you into being over-spiritual! The over-spiritual are a pain to God and man! Keep the balance of your life right. Keep the secular going strongly and move as the light of Jesus within it. Keep your spiritual life 'earthed' – and a sense of humour is near-essential.

Whatever gift(s) you have, never rest on past abilities, expect to grow, and earnestly desire day by day any new good thing that the Lord has for you.

Select Bibliography

- Doherty, H. *Poustinia*, 3rd. edit. Madonna House Publications, 2000.
Lutz, T. *The Natural & Cultural History of Tears*, W.W.Norton, 2001.
Maloney, G.A., SJ, *Inward Stillness*, Dimension, New Jersey.
Orthodox Spirituality – SPCK, '79.
Spurgeon, C.H. *The Power of Christ's Tears*, YWAM Publishing, '96.
'Tears', *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, I.V.P., '98.
'Tears', *Hastings' Dictionary of the Gospels*, T.& T. Clarke, '08.
Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Way*, Mowbrays, '79.

Author's Thanks

My thanks to the many who shared with me whose names I cannot disclose, and to those whose advice and guidance I sought before writing this original article, and whom I am glad to name: especially Michael Harper, Stephen Parsons and Bishop Kallistos Ware.

Appendix A

For experiencing the Holy Spirit the New Testament mainly uses: **receive, baptize with, fill, come upon, fall on, and anoint.**

Here is an outline. (Space prevents it being complete.)

1. **Receiving** is the most common term.

e.g. John 20:22 Jesus **breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."** (see also John 7:39, Acts 1:8, 2:38, 8:15,17,19, 10:47, 19:2, Romans 8:15, I Corinthians 2:12, II Corinthians 11:4, Galatians 3:2, 3:14, I John 2:27.)

The use of **receive** reflects the fact that God **gives** the Spirit (e.g. Luke 11:13, Acts 5:32).

2. **Filling** is used by Luke no less than ten times in Acts, e.g. 2:4 - **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability** (See also Acts 4:8, 4:31, 6:3, 6:5, 9:17), and four times in his Gospel referring to John, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Jesus (Luke 1:15, 41,67, 4:1).

The use of **fill** reflects the fact that God **pours out** the Spirit (e.g. Acts. 2:17, quoting Joel 2:28).

3. **Baptism with** the Holy Spirit is used by John the Baptist in his description of Jesus' work (Mark 1:8, Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, John 1:33), and most importantly by the Risen Christ **"...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now"**(Acts 1:5). These words were quoted by Simon Peter to the Jerusalem Church leaders (Acts. 11:16), but note that Peter happily used the **falling upon** terminology in his previous sentence.)

4. **Coming upon** us is sometimes used e.g. Acts 8:16 & 19:6.

5. **Falling upon** us is also used, e.g. Acts 10:44. 11:15.

6. **Anointing** is used to describe the Spirit coming to Christ. (Acts. 10:38)