

Charles F. Schmitt - a brief introduction

Geir Lie holds a Master of Christian Religion from the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology in Oslo.



Schmitt (1937-)¹ was born and grew up in Brooklyn. He had a ‘born again’ experience in 1950, was water baptized a year later in an independent Pentecostal church his aunt attended and was ‘Spirit filled’ in 1952 (subsequent to having read a Keswick-inspired book on *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*).

He had been ‘saved’ through the work of the Fellowship Deaconry which was carried out by German Deaconess Sisters in New Jersey, and since several of his mentors had attended Prairie Bible Institute in Canada, Schmitt also decided to attend in 1955. Here he was introduced to and greatly influenced by the publications of Watchman Nee. About at the same time he began to gather with a Plymouth Brethren group which met outside of campus.

One year later (1956) Schmitt became aware of an assembly in Jamaica, New York, where Stephen Kaung, a former co-laborer of Watchman Nee, ministered. Later, he was introduced to Herb Fader, who actually proofread the translation of the Nee manuscripts which Kaung had brought with him to the U.S. from China.

From Prairie Bible Institute, Schmitt went to Bethany Fellowship in Minneapolis in 1958. Here he was exposed to charismatic phenomena such as tongues, interpretation and prophecy. He was receptive and soon received his own ‘Pentecost’.²

Schmitt then went to Roseau, Minnesota with a small group of young Christians where they all were further introduced to charismatic faith and practices. As they were ‘released’ from this independent charismatic church in Roseau, Schmitt decided – together with

¹ This article is based on a conversation with Schmitt, dated July 7, 2000.

² Schmitt obviously distinguishes between his Spirit-filled experience in 1952 and his Pentecost-experience six years later.

Morris Watson from Grand Rapids, to meet on a regular basis with a small group of believers in that city. The Fellowship of Believers in Grand Rapids was founded in 1962 as an expression of the restoration of New Testament church life such as Schmitt had seen portrayed in Nee's ecclesiological writings. The Grand Rapids fellowship grew to 180 believers (children included). In addition Schmitt ministered among many small groups scattered throughout a number of states (Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and Missouri). These groups, taken together, contained thousands of believers, Schmitt claims.

Although it was primarily the Nee writings which influenced Schmitt's ecclesiology, he developed further contact with Christians of yet other persuasions, including some Latter Rain/Manifest Sonship contacts, such as Bill Britton, Sam Fife, John Robert Stevens (initiator of The Walk) and Stevens' father. He also met Gene Edwards, Lance Lambert, Bob Ewing (son of Glenn Ewing),³ and DeVern Fromke, in addition to Stephen Kaung. Schmitt also knew several of the British Restorationist leaders. While living in Grand Rapids, he had invited Gerald Coates to preach. He later visited the UK where he met John Noble and Maurice Smith, among others.

In 1979, Schmitt (with his family) moved to Wheaton, Maryland to be a part of a fellowship led by Larry Tomczak and C.J. Mahaney: Gathering of Believers. After two years, a painful separation took place between these men. Schmitt, in the process, became convinced that they had become exclusive and sectarian. In time, he found that this concern would equally apply to himself and to many fellowships he had previously ministered in. He recalls reading Witness Lee's book, *The All-inclusive Christ*, and suddenly realizing that although Lee's words in the book were *inclusive*, the author's followers nonetheless displayed an *exclusive* attitude towards others who were not connected with their local churches. This had also been true of

³ Glenn Ewing has unfortunately never been the object of scholarly research. In a letter to this author, dated May 7, 1997, Charles V. Simpson writes: "[Glenn Ewing] is a little known patriarch...represent[ing] the earliest combination that I know of reformed theology, charismatic truth, the five-fold ministry, and spirit, soul, and body teaching."

himself and many he labored with. (In 1998 Schmitt was reconciled to most of the leaders from the Gathering of Believers fellowship; among these were Larry Tomczak, Jim Golden, Che Ahn, and others.) Interestingly, Tomczak has since also severed his ties with Mahaney and the Gathering of Believers movement (which has gone through various name changes, first People of Destiny, and later Sovereign Grace Ministries). The division between Tomczak and Mahaney, although not referred to explicitly in his book *What do you believe about how people get saved?* (1998), which seeks to counter the Calvinistic view of the way to salvation, nonetheless is hinted at.

After the division with the Gathering of Believers in 1981, several key local pastors in the Washington D.C. area gathered around Schmitt and his wife (Dorothy). As close friends, they encouraged the couple to begin to build a local church. In the fall of 1983 a small group came together in the Schmitt's family home to pray. However, they quickly outgrew their location and moved to a local Seventh Day Adventist fellowship hall. By 1984 they had grown to over 100 believers and relocated to E. Brooke Lee Middle School in Wheaton, Maryland. In early 1989, the church purchased property at 16819 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Springs, Maryland where they relocated. More than 3,500 believers now consider Immanuel's Church their home church.

Immanuel's Church is an interdenominational 'Spirit-filled' church with ever-increasing relational connections to a wide spectrum of evangelical-charismatic-revival churches and ministries. One of the current thrusts in Immanuel's is home cell groups. The church also has a Bible school and college, and undergirds a growing network of so-called 'apostolic' missions. Immanuel's currently supports scores of missionary families worldwide.