

Responding With 'Holy Fire'

I've known Dr. R.T. Kendall since he was pastor of Westminster Chapel in London from 1977 to 2002. Situated just yards from Buckingham Palace, this historic church has been led by great pastors such as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. That an American from Kentucky would pastor this church for 25 years was amazing.

Equally remarkable was Kendall's bold preaching on the Holy Spirit amid a mainline evangelical church culture. Given his staunch Calvinist background, some may think Kendall an unlikely candidate to defend the work of the Holy Spirit against the attacks of cessationists. Yet when Dr. John MacArthur's *Strange Fire* book and conference caused a stir last fall, Kendall once again spoke out with boldness.

What MacArthur said isn't new: that the gifts of the Spirit ended with the death of the apostles and that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including charismatics' worship style, are "strange fire." Yet when MacArthur characterized the entire Pentecostal-charismatic movement and all its elements as works of the devil, it couldn't help but sound like blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to me.

Last month I wrote about how Dr. Mark Rutland and Dr. Michael Brown created their own stir online with their wise and thoughtful responses to MacArthur. But the real answer, I believe, comes out this month in an important new book by Kendall called *Holy Fire*. Full disclosure: Not only did I publish this book, but I also persuaded Kendall to write it because I knew MacArthur needed a response from someone who was his academic and intellectual equal (or, in my opinion, superior).

Kendall is the one to take apart MacArthur's arguments and point out that he's taken the hypothetical teaching of cessationism and turned it into dogma. Kendall told me he's

read every one of MacArthur's major books and actually agrees with parts of his arguments, including that there are extremes in the Pentecostal movement that need addressing. But in a letter to MacArthur asking for a public debate, Kendall points out the fundamental flaw of the preacher's argument: "If your book purports the danger of offending the Holy Spirit with counterfeit worship, I fear you are in greater danger of offending the Holy Spirit by attributing His work to Satan. Does this not worry you? You are risking an awful lot by counting on cessationism to be totally true."

Holy Fire is more than just an answer to MacArthur and cessationism. It's for anyone who wants a better understanding of how the Holy Spirit works today. That's because Kendall writes from personal experience. He testifies how his wife, Louise, was healed of a serious chronic sickness when she was prayed for by revivalist Rodney Howard-Browne. And Kendall describes, as he has in other books, how he was baptized in the Holy Spirit as a student at Trevecca Nazarene College in the 1950s while driving in his car alone.

Kendall understands a key principle of our faith: that Christianity is more than religious creed and that the Holy Spirit's work and outpouring are more than dogma. People such as MacArthur are comfortable with dogma; they aren't comfortable with the experience of the power of God when it hits a believer's life.

Advance copies of the book drew endorsements from 33 Christian leaders, ranging from John Arnott of the Toronto Blessing to John Hagee of Christians United for Israel to David Neff, former editor in chief of *Christianity Today*.

But the most effusive praise came in the foreword by globally respected pastor Jack Hayford, who wrote, "I am of the opinion this is a landmark book. By making that designation I am saying I believe *Holy Fire* will, with time, become noted as more than simply a good, useful and helpful book (which it

certainly is). ... It will find enduring use for a generation or more ... helping bring people to a sure destination. ... This book is designed to teach, to feed the hungry and to satisfy the weary, nurturing hope and faith while balancing truth and love."

Debate on the Holy Spirit has been around a long time and will continue for many years. In *Holy Fire*, Kendall sets the record straight about His role in the lives of individual believers and in the life of the church pertaining to miracles, blessings and spiritual gifts.

But Kendall also emphasizes that while healing and prophecy all have their proper place, you must rightly divide the Scriptures if you seek to represent the Spirit's work in your life. That's the right kind of fire for any believer.

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