

EUCCHARISMA

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ISSUE 1

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EUCHARISMA

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EDITORIAL

THE STATE OF CHARISMATIC THEOLOGY

T. M. Suffield & Jonathan Black

Charismatics and Pentecostals have a reputation for being anti-intellectual. Although we'd love to say this was a myth, the reason it's so often repeated is that it, unfortunately, does have some grounding in reality. We Pentecostals and Charismatics aren't well known for being thinkers.

But we think that's a problem. In many parts of the charismatic and Pentecostal world, it's common for pastors to be largely untrained. Sometimes that's off-set by careful and rigorous self-study; sometimes it's not. Too often in our churches we shrug our shoulders at difficult questions. Too often (to borrow an expression from Rick M. Nañez) we can end up with 'full gospel, fractured minds.'¹

Yet the sad result is 'thin' discipleship for many in our churches. Or, perhaps more accurately, a discipleship of the affections but not the intellect. The Lord loves our minds too and wants to conform them to his likeness. In order to grow churches where heads are better disciplined, alongside hearts—holding onto our vital love of the Spirit's presence and our emphasis on the affections—we need to disciple the minds of those who teach us. We need to encourage one another to think hard and think carefully as an act of worship in the presence of God.

This is where *Eucharisma* comes in. We hope this journal will serve the church. Our contributors are a mixture of academics, church leaders, and church members, who share the vision that a 'thinking charismatic' is not a paradox. We write primarily for pastors and church leaders, hoping to resource the church.

The idea, cooked up on a summer's walk in the Malvern hills, initially came when Tim had written an article on the state of the British charismatic church's mind and had nowhere to publish it.² Jonathan, in turn, fleshed out what the reality could look like. Our hope in the pages of *Eucharisma* is to resource the church, but we are also aware that the opportunity to write, and have your writing read, is one of the ways that thinkers develop. That's how some of the great thinkers of early Pentecostalism honed their powers of thought. Donald Gee, one of the most influential voices around the world of that first generation, began by writing an essay every morning in the back room of his little church in Leith, outside Edinburgh. From those essays written for his eyes only, he went on to write in Pentecostal magazines, before writing the books and editing the journals which had such an impact on Pentecostal (and later, Charismatic) thought (whether we remember his name or not!). Gee's careful thought, developed through

¹ Rick M. Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds? A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

² T. M. Suffield, 'It's Time to Build Counter-Institutions', *Mere Orthodoxy*, 03/08/22.
<https://mereorthodoxy.com/its-time-to-build-counter-institutions>.

writing, won him the nickname ‘the apostle of balance’. But it also helped raise up thoughtful and balanced disciples in churches not only across the United Kingdom, but the world.

The time has come for a new outlet for a new generation of Charismatic and Pentecostal thinkers. Today, we need publications like *Eucharisma* to help develop the thinkers and teachers who will help us all grow. For too long, we have had to outsource too much of our thinking and writing to the wider evangelical world.

These articles represent a wide range of divergent viewpoints, from across the Pentecostal and charismatic worlds within the UK. And that’s an important aspect of our vision for *Eucharisma*. The Charismatic and Pentecostal world in the UK is much wider and more varied than probably any of us realise. Very often we don’t really know much about other parts of the movement and have few opportunities to hear voices from beyond our own networks. We want *Eucharisma* to be a bridge between these different spheres. In this issue, you’ll find contributions from writers who are part of the Pentecostal churches, the charismatic renewal in the historic denominations, and the new churches or apostolic networks.

You will also sense disagreement among our contributors. We suspect that none of the contributors will be in 100% agreement with every article in the issue; the editors certainly aren’t. That’s a feature, rather than a bug. Disagreement is how our thinking grows. It makes us think very carefully about what we’re reading and how we’d respond. And we’d invite you to contribute to that: if you would like to take a different stance to one of these articles and can sign our forms of unity, please consider submitting a reply for a future issue. It’s in the faith which we share—the faith set out in our forms of unity—that our unity is found, not in our agreement on every opinion. We commend these articles to you in that vein.



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HOW TO BE A THEOLOGIAN

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

This is the text of St. Gregory's First Theological Oration (Oration XXVII), lightly modernised by T. M. Suffield from the original translation of A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 vols. in 2 series. 1886–1889.

I

I am to speak to people who pride themselves on their eloquence; so, to begin with a text of Scripture, “Behold, I am against you, O proud one,” not only in your system of teaching, but also in your hearing and your tone of mind.

For there are certain people who have not only their ears and their tongues, but even, as I now see, their hands too, itching for our arguments. They delight in profane babblings, and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called, and strifes about words, which tend to no profit; for so Paul, the Preacher and Establisher of the “Word without delay,” the disciple and teacher of the Fishermen, calls all that is excessive or superfluous in discourse.

But as to those to whom we refer, would that they, whose tongues are so versatile and clever in applying themselves to noble and approved language, would likewise pay some attention to their actions. For then, perhaps, in a little while they would become less verbal-tricksters, and less absurd and strange acrobats of words, if I may use a ridiculous expression about a ridiculous subject.

II

But since they neglect every path of righteousness, and look only to this one point, namely, which of the propositions submitted to them they shall bind or loose. They are like those persons who in the theatres perform wrestling matches in public, but not that kind of wrestling in which the victory is won according to the rules of the sport, but a kind to deceive the eyes of those who are ignorant in such matters, and to catch applause.

They insist that every marketplace must buzz with their talking; and every dinner party be worried to death with silly talk and boredom; and every festival be made unfestive and full of dejection, and every occasion of mourning be consoled by a greater calamity—their questions—and all the women's apartments accustomed to simplicity be thrown into confusion and be robbed of its flower of modesty by the torrent of their words.

This is the situation: the evil is intolerable and not to be borne. Our Great Mystery is in danger of being made a thing of little moment. Well then, let these spies bear with us, moved as we are with fatherly compassion, and as holy Jeremiah says, torn in our hearts; let them bear with us so

far as not to give a savage reception to our discourse upon this subject; and let them, if indeed they can, restrain their tongues for a short while and lend us their ears.

However that may be, you shall at any rate suffer no loss. For either we shall have spoken in the ears of them that will hear, and our words will bear some fruit, namely an advantage to you (since the Sower sows the Word upon every kind of mind; and the good and fertile bears fruit), or else you will depart despising this discourse of ours as you have despised others, and having drawn from it further material for gainsaying and railing at us, upon which to feast yourselves yet more.

And you must not be surprised if I speak a language which is strange to you and contrary to your custom; you who profess to know everything and to teach everything in a too hasty and generous manner... I wouldn't offend you by calling you ignorant and rash.

III

Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to discuss theology. Not to everyone, the subject is not so cheap and low. I will add, it is not right to discuss before every audience, nor at all times, nor on all points; but on certain occasions, and before certain persons, and within certain limits.

Not to all people, because it is permitted only to those who have been tested, and are passed masters in study, and who have been previously purified in soul and body, or at the very least are *being* purified. For the impure to touch the pure is, we may safely say, not safe, just as it is unsafe to fix weak eyes upon the sun's rays.

On what occasion is such talk permitted? It is when we are free from all external defilement or disturbance, and when that which rules within us is not confused with vexatious or erring images. Otherwise we are like people mixing up good writing with a scrawl, or filth with the sweet smells of perfume.

It is necessary to be truly at leisure to know God; and when we can get a convenient moment, to discern the straight road of the things divine. And who can discuss theology? They to whom the subject is of real concern, and not they who make it a matter of pleasant gossip, like any other thing. We cannot speak of God like the races, or the theatre, or a concert, or a dinner, or sex. To such people, idle jests and pretty contradictions about these subjects are a part of their amusement.

IV

Next, on what subjects and to what extent may we engage in theology? On matters within our reach, and to such an extent as the mental power and grasp of our audience may extend. We must go no further. Otherwise as very loud sounds injure the hearing, or excess of food the body, or, if you will, as excessive burdens beyond the strength injure those who bear them, or excessive rains injure the earth; so these too, being pressed down and weighted down by the stiffness, if I may use the expression, of the arguments should suffer loss even in respect of the strength they originally possessed.

V

Now, I am not saying that it is not needful to remember God at all times! I must not be misunderstood, or I shall be having these nimble and quick people down upon me again. We

ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath; and if the expression is allowed, we ought to do nothing else.

I am one of those who entirely approve that Word which bids us meditate day and night, and tell at evening and morning and noon, and praise the Lord at every time! To use Moses' words, whether a man lies down, or rises up, or walks by the way, or whatever else he might be doing—and by this recollection we are to be moulded to purity.

It is not the continual remembrance of God that I would hinder, but only the talking about God; nor even that as in itself wrong, but only when unseasonable; nor all teaching, but only want of moderation. Overeating of even honey, though it be of honey, causes vomiting. As Solomon says and I think, there is a time for everything. That which is good ceases to be good if it be not done in a good way; just as a flower is quite out of season in winter, and just as a man's clothing does not become a woman, nor a woman's a man; and as geometry is out of place in mourning, or tears at a drinking party!

Shall we in this instance alone disregard the proper time, in a matter in which most of all due season should be respected? Surely not, my friends and brothers. I will still call you brothers, though you do not behave like brothers. Let us not think so nor, like hot tempered and hard mouthed horses, throwing off our rider Reason, and casting away Reverence, that keeps us within due limits, run far away from the turning point. Instead, let us do theology within our proper bounds, and not be carried away into Egypt, nor be swept down into Assyria.

Let us not sing the Lord's song in a strange land, by which I mean before any kind of audience, strangers or family, hostile or friendly, kindly or the opposite, who watch what we do with an overly great care, and would like the spark of what is wrong in us to become a flame, and secretly kindle and fan it and raise it to heaven with their breath and make it higher than the Babylonian flame which burnt up every thing around it. Since their strength lies not in their own dogmas, they hunt for it in our weak points. Therefore they apply themselves to our—shall I say “misfortunes” or “failings”?—like flies to wounds. Let us at least be no longer ignorant of ourselves, or pay too little attention to the due order in these matters. If it is impossible to put an end to the existing hostility, let us at least agree upon this: that we will utter Mysteries under our breath, and holy things in a holy manner, and we will not cast to ears profane that which may not be uttered, nor give evidence that we possess less gravity than those who worship demons, and serve shameful fables and deeds; for they would sooner give their blood to the uninitiated than certain words.

Let us recognise that as in dress and diet and laughter and demeanour there is a certain decorum, so there is also in speech and silence; since among so many titles and powers of God, we pay the highest honour to The Word. Let even our disputings then be kept within bounds.

VI

Why should a man who is a hostile listener to such words be allowed to hear about the “generation” of God, or his “creation,” or how God was “produced out of things which had no being,” or of section and analysis and division? Why do we make our accusers judges? Why do we put swords into the hands of our enemies? How do you think, and in what mood, will the arguments about such subjects be received by one who approves of adulteries and the corruption of children? Or one who worships their sins and cannot conceive of anything higher than the body? Until recently they set up gods for themselves and gods who were noted for the vilest deeds. Will they not first hear you from a material standpoint, shamefully and ignorantly, and in

the sense to which they have been accustomed? Will he not make your Theology a defence for his own gods and sins?

If we ourselves wantonly misuse these words, it will be a long time before we will persuade them to accept our teaching. If they are in their own persons inventors of evil things, how should they refrain from grasping at such things when offered to them? Such results come to us from civil war. Such results follow to those who fight for the Word beyond what the Word approves. They are behaving like mad people, who set their own house on fire, or tear their own children, or disavow their own parents, taking them for strangers.

VII

But when we have put away from the conversation those who are strangers to it, and sent the great legion on its way to the abyss into the herd of swine, the next thing is to look to ourselves, and polish our inner theologian to beauty like a statue.

The first point to be considered is—what is this great competition of speech and endless talking? What is this new disease, this insatiability? Why have we tied our hands and armed our tongues? We do not praise either hospitality, or brotherly love, or conjugal affection, or virginity; nor do we admire liberality to the poor, or the chanting of Psalms, or nightlong vigils, or tears.

We do not keep under the body by fasting, or go forth to God by prayer; nor do we subject the worse to the better—I mean the dust to the spirit—as they would do who form a just judgment of our composite nature. We do not make our life a preparation for death; nor do we make ourselves masters of our sins, mindful of our heavenly nobility; nor tame our anger when it swells and rages, nor our pride that brings us to a fall, nor unreasonable grief, nor unchastened pleasure, nor gaudy laughter, nor undisciplined eyes, nor insatiable ears, nor excessive talk, nor absurd thoughts, nor any of the opportunities which the Enemy gets against us from within ourselves; bringing upon us the death that comes through the windows, as Holy Scripture says; that is, through the senses.

No, we do the very opposite! We have given liberty to the sins of others, as kings give releases from service in honour of a victory, only on condition that they agree with us, and make their assault upon God more boldly, or more impiously. We give them an evil reward for a thing which is not good, license of tongue for their impiety.

VIII

And yet, O chatty Dialectician, I will ask you one small question. Answer me, as the Lord said to Job, Who through whirlwind and cloud gave Divine admonitions. Are there many mansions in God's house, as you have heard, or only one?

Of course you will admit that there are many, and not only one.

Now, are they all to be filled, or only some, and others not; so that some will be left empty, and will have been prepared to no purpose?

Of course all will be filled, for nothing can be in vain which has been done by God.

And can you tell me what you will consider this mansion to be? Is it the rest and glory which is in store for the Blessed, or something else?

No, not anything else.

Since we agree on this point, let us examine another. Is there anything that procures these mansions, as I think there is; or is there nothing?

Certainly there is

What is it?

Is it not that there are various modes of life, and various vocations, one leading one way, another another way, according to the proportion of faith, and these we call Ways?

Must we, then, travel all, or some of them?

Yes, the same individual along them all, if that is possible. If not, along as many as may be; or else along some of them. And even if this may not be, it would still be a great thing, at least as it appears to me, to travel excellently along even one.

You are right in your conception. What then when you hear there is but one way, and that a narrow one, does the word seem to you to mean?

That there is but one on account of its excellence. For it is but one, even though it can be split into many parts. It is narrow because of its difficulties, and because it is trodden by few in comparison with the multitude of the enemies, and of those who travel along the road of wickedness.

So I think too. Well, then, my good friend, since this is so, why do you, as though condemning our doctrine for a certain poverty, rush headlong down that one which leads through what you call arguments and speculations, but I call frivolities and quackeries? Let Paul reprove you with those bitter reproaches, in which, after his list of the Gifts of Grace, he says, Are all Apostles? Are all Prophets? Etc.

IX

Let us grant that you are lofty, even beyond the lofty, even above the clouds. Let us grant that you are in fact a spectator of things invisible and a hearer of things unspeakable; if you have ascended after Elijah, and after Moses have been deemed worthy of the vision of God, and after Paul have been taken up into heaven. Why do you mould the rest of your friends into Saints in a day, and ordain them theologians, and as if you breathed instruction into them, and make them into many councils of ignorant intellectuals? Why do you entangle those who are weaker in your spider's web, if it were something great and wise? Why do you stir up wasps' nests against the Faith? Why do you suddenly spring a flood of dialectics upon us, like giants from the old fables? Why have you collected all that is frivolous and unmanly among men, like a rabble, into one torrent, and having made them more effeminate by flattery, fashioned a new workshop, cleverly making a harvest for yourself out of their lack of understanding?

Do you deny that this is so, and are the other matters of no account to thee? Must your tongue rule at any cost, and can you not restrain the labour pains of your speech? You may find many other honourable subjects for discussion, try to turn this disease of yours to some advantage. Attack the silence of Pythagoras, and the Orphic beans, and the novel brag about "The Master said." Attack the ideas of Plato, and the transmigrations and courses of our souls, and the reminiscences, and the unlovely loves of the soul for lovely bodies. Attack the atheism of Epicurus, and his atoms, and his ideal of Pleasure; or Aristotle's petty Providence, and his artificial system, and his discourses about the mortality of the soul, and the humanitarianism of his doctrine. Attack the superciliousness of the Stoics, or the greed and vulgarity of the Cynic.

Attack the “Void and Full” (what nonsense), and all the details about the gods and the sacrifices and the idols and demons, whether benevolent or malignant, and all the tricks that people play with divination, evoking of gods, or of souls, and the power of the stars. And if these things seem to you unworthy of discussion as petty and already often refuted, and you wilt keep to your line, and seek the satisfaction of your ambition in it; then here too I will provide you with broad paths. Speculate about the world or worlds; about matter; about the Soul; about natures endowed with reason, good or bad; about the Resurrection, about Judgment, about reward, or the Sufferings of Christ. For in these subjects to hit the mark is not useless, and to miss it is not dangerous. But with God we shall have knowledge in this life only to a small degree; but a little later, it may be, more perfectly, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever.

Amen.



St Gregory of Nazianzus. 329-390. Archbishop of Constantinople. Along with St Basil the Great and St Gregory of Nyssa he is known as one of the Cappadocian Fathers.

THE GREAT DIVORCE

CHARISMATIC GIFTS AND CHARISMATIC WORSHIP?

Aaron Stead & Tim Blaber

The first song recorded in the English language was the result of an illiterate and tuneless cowherder prophetically dreaming, or so recounts the Venerable Bede.¹ Caedmon's hymn was penned in the latter half of the seventh century. It is arguable that the tradition of music in the English tongue flows from the charismatic experience of an unassuming cattle-hand.

From the very start of English song there has been an intermingling of the spiritual and the musical. Yet as with all relationships, the course of true love never did run smooth. As we examine this relationship today, one begins to wonder whether there has been something of a subtle and quiet divorce of charismatic practice from 'charismatic' worship.

Engage in a thought experiment for a moment. Imagine one Sunday the doors of your church were bolted shut. So, you dispersed the faithful amongst the other local churches. Some attended the high Anglican church, others visited the Catholic church, a few the Methodists, some a Baptist chapel, one or two to the Vineyard, and so on and so forth. Then in the ensuing weeks you asked each member about their experiences; and specifically, whether the church they attended was 'charismatic'. What would their answers be?

The answers in and of themselves, are of little interest. What is intriguing is on what basis the answers would be given. Now, some may have witnessed a tongue being interpreted or a clear prophetic word. But let us assume none of your dispersed congregation did clearly witness any of the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 11:8-11 (words of knowledge or wisdom, healing, prophecy, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues). On what basis would their answers be predicated?

After all, it is possible for a church to have a continuationist theology of spiritual gifts and not witness a prophetic word on any given Sunday. Especially as churches grow, there is often a winnowing of those with access to the microphone as the pastoral risks of a wayward contribution heighten. There are large significant churches in the UK, who are publicly charismatic and propagate charismatic theology widely; yet their primary gatherings have limited to no room, for ordinary members of the church to offer up a spontaneous charismatic contribution. There may be time for people to inwardly meet with the Holy Spirit during a "response time", the opportunity to receive prayer, or discussion of the Spirit's work. Yet the

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English*, Book V Chapter XXIV.

avenues for ordinary members to serve the church through charismatic gifts at the primary church gathering is minimal.

Fundamentally, the point is this: it is possible for a church to publicly hold strongly to a charismatic position of spiritual gifts; whilst simultaneously witnessing little to no expression of that position on any given Sunday.

So, to return to the thought experiment, whilst not having witnessed any charismatic gifts on display, your dispersed church members would likely still have strong views on whether the church they attended was 'charismatic.' So, on what basis would your congregants arrive at their assessment? In all likelihood it will be based upon the music played. After all, to many, the idea of organ accompanied charismatic worship may seem oxymoronic. Whereas a soft rock band replete with guitars, drums, keys and synthesiser, seems far more befitting a church with a charismatic theological position.

So why is it that in the English-speaking West a certain musical style seems near synonymous with being 'charismatic'? Why is musical preference a proxy for spiritual gifts? Especially since a word of knowledge is not a song of knowledge and a miraculous healing is not wrought through musical therapy but by the moving of the hand of God.

A Beautiful Union: Singing Prophetically

Admittedly, there is a relationship between song and the exercise of the charismatic gifts. Such a marriage is long established, not just in the days of Caedmon, but within the biblical canon itself.

The early church instinctively understood the existence of this relationship between song and the work of the spirit. Paul, addressing the church in Ephesus associates being 'filled with the spirit' with 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord' (Eph. 5.18-19). Or, again, Paul when discussing the disorderly exercise of spiritual gifts in Corinth (1 Cor. 14.26) remarks on the abundance of tongues, interpretations, and revelations; intriguingly he places such contributions alongside hymns.

This intermingling of song and the prophetic is also present in the Old Testament.

In David's court, he organises his musicians and sets apart the sons of 'Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals' (1 Chr. 25). Here the link is even more acute as the instruments themselves play an integral part of the prophetic process. Heman, specifically, is referred to as the 'King's seer.' These three, and those in their charge were 'trained in singing to the Lord'" and were musically 'skilful.'

Many have attempted to dissect this relationship between what David's musicians are doing and the spiritual realm. Often these interpretations serve to divorce these men's musical endeavours from any prophetic significance.

Matthew Henry for instance,² deemed these men to be doing nothing more than singing and that the biblical author is using prophesying as a synonym for singing or playing. Yet this does a disservice to the chronicler's divinely inspired choice of words. If the author sought to say 'singing,' he easily could have; but he didn't.

² Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Corinthians 25.1.

Others have noted that these three men have Psalms ascribed to their pen. If we are to equate prophecy with authoring scripture then these men were prophets. This justifies the Chronicler's word choice. But if this were the case, then why is Heman elevated to the status of the 'King's seer' whilst only penning a single psalm compared to Asaph's eleven or Jeduthan's three?

Clearly there is something in what they are doing which is of a spiritual nature and this is observed by those who witnessed them; otherwise it would not be deemed prophetic by David or the Chronicler. Yet what they are doing does not seem to be prophetic in the same sense as the utterances of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and their ilk. After all, 1 Chronicles 25.2 states 'Asaph, who prophesied under the direction of the king [David].' This would go against the flow of more prominent Old Testament prophetic utterances, that originate from God speaking at his own discretion rather than at man's direction.

Therefore, it seems that the Chronicler here is equating the singing of songs, something a man can direct, with prophetic utterance. Yet, these songs were in some way prophetic or else Heman would not have received his designation as the king's seer, nor would the Chronicler continually couch their activities in prophetic rather than musical language.

This sort of ambiguity is present elsewhere as we find in 1 Samuel 10.5 a procession of prophets prophesying accompanied by 'harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre.' As Saul joins them in song, he too begins to prophesy.

There is clearly, in certain circumstances, a link between prophetic ministry and musical endeavours. Which whilst oblique, on further contemplation it is profoundly unsurprising. Prophecy is primarily concerned with the revelation of God: his nature, his plans, and his purposes. True Spirit-led Christo-centric sung worship is an awed, exuberant, and joyful response to the revelation we have received. In fact, when the words sung succinctly extol the Divine nature, it can be as if what is sung exceeds mere response and becomes in and of itself a revelatory declaration of God to those gathered.

Such musical responses are the pattern of the biblical canon. Song, or at least poetic verse, accompanies and reflects back revelation of the divine. For example: Mary's Magnificat, Moses' song of deliverance, Deborah's song, Hannah's song, Habakkuk's song, and many others. Therefore, it would only be fitting that God's revelation should be frequently accompanied by or stir a fresh musical reply. And that these sung declarations would in some way interact with the revelation of God.

A Reinvigorated Marriage? Music in the British New Church

Something of this union between the charismatic and sung worship was reemphasised in Britain through the birth of the New Church Movement in the sixties, seventies, and eighties. This movement sought the renewal or revitalisation of the church through the rediscovery of spiritual gifts, miraculous signs, and 'true' worship.

These new churches were often formed outside of traditional denominational structures in the belief that the new wine that the Spirit was pouring out needed to be poured into new wineskins. This movement spawned networks of churches such as Newfrontiers, Ichthus, Salt and Light, and Pioneer. Typically, these groups began as single house churches, that grew into multiple house churches, and then into a network of building-owning churches as they outgrew the homes of their members.

Their emphasis was often on the Holy Spirit and the charismatic gifts: gifts whose expression was largely absent in the wider mainline British church. Coupled to this was a genuine desire to worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ (John 4.24) that gravitated away from rote liturgical forms of scripted prayer, dispassionately sung hymns, and recitation of creedal statements. Instead, a more spontaneous form of worship emerged that sought to focus on grace and engage both the emotional and the rational faculties of the worshipper.

Part of this re-evaluation of worship practices was initially shaped by the house church origins of these new entities. This limited the ability to engage in ornate organ or choral music. Accordingly, songs were often limited to simple piano accompaniment or a solitary acoustic guitar. Melody became of vital importance due to the need for the assembled voices to carry the tune rather than musical instruments.

The precise form of each house church’s service would have been different. But in a number of house churches an individual would begin singing a pertinent song, with other members joining in. This was aided by many of the early house church attendees being established Christians with a shared corpus of hymns they inherited from their time in the historic denominations.

This led to a far more spontaneous and freer environment in which songs were often interspersed with charismatic contributions. Especially as there was no strict liturgical structure that needed to be adhered to. Whilst the two elements of song and spiritual gifts were both present, they were not confused or conflated. After all, initially at least, a large proportion of songs sung were hymns common to the Baptist, Anglican, and Brethren origins of the church members. To be ‘charismatic’ was to believe in and engage with the spiritual gifts. Charismatic worship, if such a term existed then, was sung worship where spiritual gifts were on display during the meeting.

In response to this wave of spiritual experiences, a new breed of songwriters began to appear. For example, Graham Kendrick came from the Ichthus movement, as Nathan Fellingham and Stuart Townend emerged from Newfrontiers. They would teach their new songs within their local churches and their songs would spread to other new churches experiencing similar charismatic phenomena. These songs gave new avenues to voice and declare the nature, grace, and favour of God; in response to the fresh experience of the Spirit within the New Church.

Yet these new songs often reflected the simple roots of the churches that spawned them. Simple melodies and accompaniment; a renewed emphasis on scripture and especially the Psalms; all coupled with an attentiveness to the theological content of the songs. These songs often focused on grace, love, salvation, and the holiness and grandeur of God.

This simplicity and spontaneity stood in contrast with what preceded it. In much the same way that the proactive use of spiritual gifts stood in stark contrast to the underutilisation of such gifts in previous generations.

A Subtle Divorce? The New Church today

Yet we may find a less rosy marriage if we were to observe the descendant congregations of the New Church movement; both those within the formal groupings initially spawned and those outside such structures who share similar ecclesiological, evangelical, and charismatic convictions.

The preponderance of songs sung in these churches were once born from the experiences of local churches interacting with the Holy Spirit. Yet today, new songs introduced into churches are typically the products of Elevation Worship, Bethel, or Hillsong. Written in a context far away in foreign climes, rather than reflective of any local or regional experience of God. The songs of these groups are not intrinsically problematic, but rather the over-reliance on such a limited collection of songwriting-houses robs the local church of a local expression of what God is doing in its midst.

That is not to say that all songs sung should be written within a geographical catchment area. But rather that an over-reliance on any single source can have the potential to inhibit the ability of a congregation to give a musical reply to the revelation of God in a particular congregation. This is comparable to the experience of early members of the New Church movement, who perhaps felt unable to reply to God's revelation whilst being limited to the hymnody of their forebears. Put most simply, the spiritual journey of a church in Redding, California, as expressed in their latest album, is unlikely to be identical to the journey of a church in Reading, Berkshire.

Some of the reasons for the popularity of the main progenitors of contemporary 'charismatic' worship music is their high production values, intricate musical elements, and ability to follow wider trends in popular music. Again, this is not intrinsically an issue. Yet, there is a temptation to try and imitate or mimic such songs. For example, singing songs in the key the song was produced in rather than one that aids the congregation or the worship band in singing them. Or opting for songs based on their musicality over and above their lyrical content. Serious attention can be diverted from how best to worship God and towards ensuring that the drum roll or guitar riff sounds emblematic of the version streamed online. When this occurs, we venture into the dangerous territory of Christian karaoke, rather than a heart-felt worshipful response to the nature and works of the divine.

Again, we should stress that this is not a criticism of the output of the large song-writing houses, but rather of how their music can be over-relied upon and misapplied within a church service.

Yet these issues can have a dampening effect on worship as it loses its numinosity, the awed sense of the divine presence. Times of sung worship can be impressive musically, especially if aided by lights and a large sound system. But they risk losing the "true" worship element initially sought by the pioneers of the New Church movement. Worship ceases to be about a reply to the revelation of God, including his revelation through spiritual gifts. This can hollow out sung worship, where it has reverted back into the rote recitation of songs, so chastised by the founders of the New Church movements.

Worse still, this import dependence can lead to a negative feedback loop. Attempts to re-invigorate worship revolve around importing and mastering the latest song, in the hopes that this new song will reignite passionate worship, even though the last new song failed to do so. So, worship becomes even limper, as not only are congregants singing songs which fail to resonate, but songs that they do not know.

The issue is that the music has become divorced from the spiritual life of the congregation. The songs sung have ceased to be a heartfelt response to the revelation, both biblical and charismatic, of the divine. That is not because the songs are bad, but instead because our priorities have shifted. Musical mastery is prioritised over the reflection of God's glory.

However, due to the songs originating from charismatic churches, and their lyrical content referencing a God who acts today and a Spirit that engages, such music becomes a passable

expression for being ‘charismatic.’ After all, it is predominantly theologically charismatic churches that sing them.

Yet to be charismatic is more than to sing a particular set of songs. It is to engage willingly with the living God. It is to be sensitive to the Spirit’s voice. Worship is a heartfelt response to the revelation of God. To separate worship from this, is to hollow it out. It is to settle for Christian karaoke.

Charismatic worship, if such a term is valid, is not defined by the songs that are sung; but by how the congregation engages with and responds to the very real Spirit of God. To settle for anything less than that, is a divorce in all but name.



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ANGLIAN DISTINCTIVES

IN THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Brogan Hume

Anglican and Charismatic: The Problem

The Anglican definition of a church is set out in the 39 Articles which stipulate that ‘the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.’¹ To be called a church, therefore, the congregation must receive the gospel of Christ in both Word and Sacrament (baptism and the Eucharist). These are the two constitutive elements, without which a group of believers in Christ are not part of the visible church; although this makes no comment on their participation in the invisible church.

The charismatic movement, with its roots in conservative Evangelicalism and Pentecostal movements, has a natural and deeply ingrained conviction of the centrality of the scriptures. Indeed, empirical research shows that charismaticism ‘moves those *within* Anglo-Catholic traditions away from liberalism and towards biblical conservatism’.² As is explored further below, British Anglican charismatics have a natural “lean” towards the scriptures.³ However the same cannot be said of the second constitutive factor: the sacraments.

There has, to date, been little or no engagement with what should be the most pressing question for a charismatic church that gathers around word and sacrament: what is the Spirit doing within us, and within the bread and the wine, when we celebrate communion? Indeed, as I noted in my MA Thesis on this topic, of the forty Grove booklets published within their Renewal Series, there is no title that considers the role of the Eucharist or Holy Baptism. As such, the question must be asked: which should take priority, our charismaticism, or our Anglicanism? I argue in this essay that our charismaticism *is* an expression of our Anglicanism, and that we need a *both-and* model of ministry. I then explore what it means to be most *charismatic* and *Anglican* in regards to the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the sacraments.

¹ “Article 19” Church of England, *Thirty Nine Articles of Religion*, 1662 (<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion#XIX>)

² Andrew Village, ‘Biblical Conservatism and Psychological Type’, *Journal of Empirical Theology* 29, no. 2 (2016): 137–59, 151

³ I distinguish here between Anglicanism and (British) Anglicanism. The Church of England (along with a number of other Anglican movements based in England - for example Anglican Mission in England, and Anglican Convocation Europe) is part of the wider Anglican Communion, but my comments here relate strictly to the Church of England, rather than the global Anglican communion or the various other Anglican movements which an article with wider scope would benefit from considering.

First, however, I shall outline a brief history of charismatics in the Church of England to explore why the theological roots of the movement reside within the concern for the preaching of the scriptures, rather than the celebration of the sacraments.

The Roots of The Anglican Charismatic Movement

The most cursory glance at the Church of England shows that the charismatic evangelical movement is flourishing in a manner that would have been almost unthinkable thirty five years ago. In the summer of 1989 a group of 3,500 people from predominantly Anglican churches gathered for a week of bible teaching and worship under the leadership of David Pytches.⁴ Pytches, along with his wife Mary, were initially missionaries sent from St Ebbe's Oxford with the South American Missionary Society to Valparaíso, Chile.⁵ It was through South American Pentecostalism that Mary Pytches—and later David—began to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit which the conservative Evangelicalism of St Ebbe's taught had ceased at the death of the apostles. He was subsequently consecrated as Bishop, first of Valparaíso, and later appointed Bishop over the whole Diocese of Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. He returned to England in 1977 to take up a post as Vicar of St Andrew's, Chorleywood.

The Pytches' experience of the Holy Spirit in South America had a profound effect on the congregation of St Andrews, especially through the ministry of Vineyard church leader John Wimber. At Pentecost of 1981 his visit resulted in a type of 'holy chaos' and 'impromptu anointings'. Wimber was also warmly welcomed by St Michael le Belfrey in York, under the ministry of David Watson.⁶ The quiet conservatism that predominated Anglican Evangelicalism had been irreparably shattered. Through his ministry of signs and wonders, Wimber demonstrated to Anglican Evangelicals that the text on the page of scripture was not only a record of a past visitation, but an invitation to experience the visitation of the Holy Spirit in the present age. James Stevenson's retrospective on Wimber's ministry reasons that his warm reception amongst Anglican Evangelicals was due to Wimber's consistent and unwavering reliance on the scriptures.⁷

Significantly, through his 'signs and wonders' ministry, Wimber was able to also make a direct connection between contemporary experience and the New Testament experience, and so, to a large degree, resolve the evangelical dilemma of reconciling the biblical account with modern understanding.⁸

While this teaching was initially disseminated through gatherings of church leaders and the sharing of cassette tapes, the conviction gradually arose that each individual Christian, not only their church leader, should be invited to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹ In the summer of 1989 that vision was realised, and the New Wine Festival has been a gathering point for many

⁴ 'The story of New Wine so far,' New Wine, accessed Feb 27, 2024, <https://stories.new-wine.org/the-story-of-new-wine-so-far-7fc362304f8e>

⁵ Andrew Atherstone, 'Obituary: The Rt Revd David Pytches', *Church Times*, Dec 8, 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/8-december/gazette/obituaries/obituary-the-rt-revd-david-pytches>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ James Henry Stevenson, "'Worship in the Spirit': A Sociological Analysis and Theological Appraisal of Charismatic Worship in the Church of England." (PhD, London, Kings College, London, 1999), <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2931935/DX210766.pdf>, 45

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ New Wine, 'The story of New Wine so far'

Anglican Charismatics ever since. Not only did the New Wine movement receive richly from the Vineyard and Pentecostal movements, but so did a number of others, including Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB). HTB has an equally storied history, however that is beyond the scope of this essay. The contemporary picture is our present concern. 35 years later, nearly every large Anglican church designated by the national church with a mandate to resource others (a 'Resource Church') is linked with either the HTB or New Wine networks¹⁰. Even those who are outside of the HTB or New Wine Networks—or outside of evangelicalism as a whole—recognise that 'Much of the most exciting Anglican missional practice theology is now done by Evangelicals' (Penduck), that 'Charismatic Christianity has become a dominant force in Evangelical Christianity' (Scotland), and that 'evangelicals are in the vanguard of social action.'¹¹

In short, if a new Anglican church is planted near you it is, in all likelihood, led by a minister who fully affirms the continuation of the charismata and has some experience in their practice. It will be, in all likelihood, part of a network which has been shaped in both theology and practice by the charismatic tradition. Its services will, in all likelihood, look and feel far more like the Vineyard church down the road than either the Roman Catholic or FIEC church up the road. It is from this tradition that much of the missionary drive and momentum of contemporary Anglicanism arrives and charismatic Evangelical bishops are significantly more numerous than their conservative evangelical counterparts, with Justin Welby—the present Archbishop of Canterbury—having come through the HTB network.

Yet for all this, there is a deep problem at the heart of British Anglican charismatic evangelicalism. It has, quite simply, grown beyond its capacity to understand the roots of its own identity.

Charismatic, or Anglican?

There has been a long-standing concern, in which I share, that the identity problem within British Anglicanism is revealed in how we structure our services. Rather than integrate charismatic elements into an Anglican liturgical structure the tendency has often been—conversely—to impose Anglican elements into a charismatic 'liturgical' structure often seen in a Pentecostal or Vineyard church.¹² This charismatic structure is one of sung worship, followed by a message—expository or otherwise—from the bible, followed by ministry time—in which members of the church pray for one another in response to the talk or prophetic words that have been shared.¹³ For the Anglican charismatic, there may also be communion added into this structure, perhaps under the banner of *ministry time*, but it is nonetheless an Anglican element transposed into a charismatic setting. There are ways in which this can be used powerfully by God for healing (emotional, spiritual, or physical) in the individual. In such times

¹⁰ This was confirmed to me in private correspondence by Revd. Professor Christian Selvaratnam.

¹¹ Joshua Penduck, 'The Week Evangelicals Began to Take Over the Church of England', *Open Evangelical*, March 6, 2017, <https://openevangelical.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/the-week-evangelicals-began-to-take-over-the-church-of-england/>. Nigel Scotland, 'From the "not yet" to the "Now and the Not yet": Charismatic Kingdom Theology 1960-2010', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): 272–90, 273; Malcolm Brown, 'Anglican Social Theology: Today and Tomorrow', in *Theology Reforming Society: Revisiting Anglican Social Theology*, ed. Stephen Spencer (London: SCM Press, 2017), 126

¹² Mark J. Cartledge, 'Liturgical Order and Charismatic Freedom: A Reflection on the Development of Anglican Practices', *Liturgy* 33, no. 3 (3 July 2018): 12–19, 14

¹³ *Ibid*, 14

The reception of Holy Communion is often regarded as a therapeutic moment in the life of the Christian...the communion rail is the place where prayer for healing is offered, often by lay teams trained to listen for words of knowledge and to pray as they feel led by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

Without disregarding the tangible and significant ways this has been used by God for the purposes of building up and strengthening his church, it is nonetheless a narrowing in our understanding of the Eucharist; the benefits and purposes of which are non-exhaustively listed in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), the foundation stone of Anglican Liturgy, as:

- i. The 'remembrance of his meritorious Cross and Passion'
- ii. The means by which are 'made partakers of the kingdom of heaven'
- iii. A way in which we 'render most humble and hearty thanks to Almighty God our heavenly Father'
- iv. 'our spiritual food and sustenance'
- v. A meal of such power that it is a 'comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily', but is 'so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily'¹⁵

Yet this narrower understanding of communion can quite easily find its place within the traditional understandings of communion. Indeed, for Cranmer, who authored the BCP), Communion had a richly experiential aspect. In his defence of the Anglican doctrine of the Eucharist he writes:

Our Saviour Jesus Christ...came into this world from the high throne of his Father, to declare unto miserable sinners good news; **to heal them that were sick...to give light to them that were in darkness and in the shadow of death...**And to perform the same, he made a sacrifice and oblation of his own body upon the cross...And to commend this his sacrifice unto all his faithful people, and to confirm their faith...he ordained...**the celebration of his holy supper, wherein he doth not cease to give himself with all his benefits.**¹⁶

The charismatic *experience* of communion therefore indispensably has a place within the Anglican tradition; however the profound power of communion is derived not merely from an experiential affirmation but rather from a rich theological hinterland of wider tradition in which the transformative individual encounter is situated.

The same can be seen in corporate prayer. Thomas Smal, writing in the then leading publication of British charismaticism *Theological Renewal*, noted that:

Corporate charismatic worship, which is our present concern, has often neglected the hard work of intercession...Charismatics tend to concentrate on

¹⁴ Ibid, 17

¹⁵ 'Warning for the Celebration of Holy Communion', in The Order for the Administration of The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

¹⁶ Thomas Cranmer, 'The True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Christ', in *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. G. E. Duffield and J. I. Packer, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 2 (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964), p. 55. Emphasis mine.

the exercise of the ministry of healing...standing, as it were, at God's side and exercising the power...We may contrast with that the kind of prayer for healing that takes a much more lonely stance, identifying less with God who can meet the need than with the person whose need it is.¹⁷

In this matter we have shifted from the Anglican understanding of *corporate intercession* to a charismatic understanding of *prayer ministry*. This is not wholly bad, and is an important corrective to bring into line with the manner of prayer demonstrated on a number of occasions by the early church.¹⁸ However there are also moments more akin to the type of corporate intercession described by Smail, and commanded by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-2.¹⁹ Thus, for the early church, and for many Christians today, corporate intercession and prayer ministry are not only mutually compatible but equally practised. Yet some charismatic Anglican churches and parachurch organisations demonstrably fail to follow this biblical model of ministry.

In regards to both corporate prayer and the celebration of Communion, therefore, we must seek a *both-and* model of Anglican ministry. We must do the former, without neglecting the latter. We must be both charismatic *and* Anglican. The rest of this essay, therefore, shall turn to ask *how* we have a *both-and* model in regards to communion. For this task, we must situate our exploration of Anglicanism within the text of the Book of Common Prayer, which is the founding liturgical document of our worship.

Locating charismatic experience within Holy Communion

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer makes an often overlooked contribution to Anglican Eucharistic theology in the rubrics—the instructions to the minister—for The Communion of the Sick. These stipulate that if someone cannot receive the sacrament for good reason, yet is repentant, trusts in the cross, and joyfully thanks God for the same:

he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.²⁰

Cranmer explains:

They [the Roman church] say, that good men eat the body of Christ and drink his blood only at the time when they receive the sacrament: we say, that they eat, drink and feed on Christ continually, so long as they be members of his body.²¹

That is to say, for Cranmer, (lowercase-c) communing with God does not require (capital-C) Communion. Christ is present with his people where two or three are gathered, not only where there is a priest and an altar. We encounter God in the sacraments not through bodily presence, in a manner akin to Roman Catholic transubstantiation, but rather through the power of the

¹⁷ Thomas Allan Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 74

¹⁸ For example, Acts 3:6-8; 9:32-5; 14:8-19

¹⁹ For example, Acts 4:24-30.

²⁰ 'Communion of the Sick', *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

²¹ Cranmer, 'True and Catholic', 125

Holy Spirit who works in our hearts through faith.²² Furthermore this is not just an intellectual assent to an objective theological proposition, but rather a subjective encounter in which a ‘man feeleth himself how he feedeth on Christ.’²³

To be charismatic and Anglican is to affirm *both* that we commune with God through the Eucharist *and* that our communion is not limited to this meal. Our sung worship and prayer ministry are a type of communing which is typified by, and finds its steadfast expression in, the Eucharist. This lays the foundation for what it means to be charismatic in the Anglican tradition.

If we account for Cranmer’s understanding that the benefits of the Eucharist can be received by a spiritual communing, it is possible to conceptualise the unmediated encounter with the Spirit as a subset of the mediated encounter with God which is normatively enjoyed in Communion. As such, to be a charismatic Anglican is to fully affirm the formularies, including the Anglican word and sacrament definition of church in the articles. However it is also to take our understanding of the sacraments beyond the two dominical sacraments (baptism and the Eucharist), and draw on the BCP liturgy for the communion for the sick, to expand that which we consider sacramental. This is not to suggest that we are adding dominical sacraments, for by their nature these two are distinct by their visible instituted by Christ in the gospels. Rather, as charismatic Anglicans we recognise that the charismatic gifts fall within the category of visible signs of an invisible reality. Frank Macchia, a Pentecostal theologian, has already demonstrated the potential of understanding charismatic gifts as in some sense sacramental.²⁴

This reconceptualisation of where charismatic gifts and worship sit within our ecclesial life also provides fresh impetus for us to reevaluate the role of the Eucharist. If our moments of communing with God without Holy Communion are punctuated by miracles and signs of the eschatological kingdom, then we should expect much more of those times in which we commune with God through the Eucharist. We might say that when we charismaticise our sacramental understanding, we sacramentalise our charismatic practice. This is not to erode the primacy and potency of the dominical sacraments, but rather to appreciate that they are ‘sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace’ which serve as a consistent place of encounter in a theological worldview which emphasises the immanent presence of God.

Charismatic and Anglican: A (Partial) Solution

This essay has articulated part of a solution to the problem identified in the introduction. Namely, that the Anglican definition of a church is not a word and *Spirit* community, but rather a word and *sacrament* community. Notably, traditions outside of Anglicanism have been far more willing to wrestle with the role of the sacraments in the life of the church, and have produced far more thorough and creative proposals. Chris E.W. Green has demonstrated the profound belief in God’s power in the Eucharist found in early Pentecostal worship.²⁵ Simon Chan has considered the tension between tradition and the ‘novel work of the Spirit’, yet he concludes that

²² Ibid, 185.

²³ Ibid.195.

²⁴ Frank D. Macchia, ‘Tongues as a Sign: Towards a Sacramental Understanding of Pentecostal Experience’, *Pneuma* 15, no. 1 (1 January 1993): 61–76, 61.

²⁵ Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 129

the Eucharist should be the ‘organizing centre’ for Pentecostal worship.²⁶ Jonathan Black has critiqued the assumed memorialism of the Pentecostal tradition, and demonstrated how Pentecostal theological anthropology requires us to concede that the finite is capable of hosting the infinite, as every Spirit-filled believer can attest.²⁷

For all the theological resources of Anglican liturgy, the same quality and quantity of reflection has been sadly lacking. Yet a distinctive Anglican contribution expounded above is to locate the work of the Holy Spirit *within* a rich, historic sacramental framework. Furthermore, when we are able to do so, we have a developed explanation for a profound divine encounter through the sacraments. These are not merely memorials (contra Zwingli) by which the Holy Spirit works; rather, in the words of the Thirty Nine Articles, they are tokens which have the power to make effective in the life of the believer the gospel act which they signify. The Anglican sacramental framework allows for an instrumentality of the elements to accomplish God’s work in God’s church: including—but not limited to—the healing, restoration, and comfort of his people.

Each Anglican minister, every time they take up a new post, has to give assent to the statement that the Church is called to proclaim the apostolic faith afresh in every generation, and that the church ‘Led by the Holy Spirit...has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.’²⁸ Equally, British Anglicanism is indebted to the charismatic movements, most especially the Vineyard movement and ministry of John Wimber. However if we are to be authentically Anglican in the contemporary landscape we must be willing and able to articulate how these two legacies intertwine and inform each other. They are not opposed, but an inability to demonstrate their coherence only serves to create the impression that they are. For the sake of proclaiming the apostolic faith afresh in our time, we must begin to speak of them as one well of life from which we draw living water.



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²⁶ Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, repr, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 22-23.

²⁷ Jonathan Black, ‘On the Possibility of Presence: Overcoming Mere Memorialism in British Pentecostal Eucharistic Theology’, *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 40, no. 2 (2 July 2020): 120–31, 122-123

²⁸ ‘Declaration of Assent’, Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/declaration-assent>

APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP AND THE SPECTRE OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

SUSPICIONS OF PIONEER AUTHORITY AS HINDRANCES TO PIONEER MISSION

Aaron Edwards

Introduction: Pioneer Apostles

The recovery of apostolic leadership is one of the most important, and controversial, marks of the charismatic restoration/renewal movement of the mid-late twentieth century. Whilst the recovery of the gift of tongues and prophecy might be most commonly associated with the movement, often it was the notion that God calls ‘apostles’ today which sparked significant criticism on the basis of the propensity to authoritarian abuse.

Such apostles are called to offer the kind of prophetically pioneering and authoritative leadership which—whilst not claiming the same authority as New Testament apostles—seeks to mirror their practice to enable the planting of churches, the laying and maintaining of doctrinal foundations, and a spur to the cross-pollinating nature of itinerant kingdom mission.¹

Apostolic leadership is a wonderful and mysterious thing. As good Protestants, we may not believe in ‘apostolic succession’ the way Roman Catholics do, yet there is *some* correlation to what the Catholic doctrine seeks to capture, including the laying on of hands (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6). Apostles cannot be self-made or self-appointed. Yet neither can they be merely ‘trained’ for their role.

Apostleship is a unique, pneumatological calling that often emerges organically through practice and experience. It is often confirmed prophetically, as the gift is recognised by the wider ekklesia in and through the apostle’s ministry. It is this pneumatological role that is so easily lost in an age of secularised management theory and even secular approaches to more horizontally collaborative and ‘democratic’ forms of leadership.²

In this article I will use ‘apostle’ in a deliberately broad sense to denote the calling of a pioneer foundation-laying missionary. Even those who do not call themselves ‘apostles’ may still, in fact, *be* apostles (gifted ‘apostolically’), sent in order to establish a new frontier of necessary ecclesial mission.³

¹ See David Devenish, *Fathering Leaders, Motivating Mission: Restoring the Role of the Apostle in Today’s Church* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2011).

² The point is not to separate the apostolic charism from the wider body nor from the importance of collaborative activity, but to avoid the increasingly secular approaches to these which (by nature) cannot imagine the role of the Spirit in leadership practices or frameworks.

³ For a nuanced and varied account of the role of the apostle in the contemporary church and its potential incorporation with other forms of ecclesiastical governance in traditions beyond charismatic networks, see Benjamin

This does not mean every person who sets up a new charity, church plant, or mission agency is automatically ‘an apostle’, but there are those whose calling leads to a wider impact upon the Church at large which usually results in some or all of the following resulting from the direct exercise of their gifting:

- necessary challenge to the existing ecclesial or missional establishment
- ‘front line’ vision for kingdom mission beyond a singular locale
- the planting, founding or supporting of new church congregations

Given that pioneering is essential to the apostolic charism, the apostle must be gifted with the authority to lead in ways that are likely to be misunderstood by those who cannot see what they see. The hinterland between such visionary authority and those expected to follow what they do not yet see, at least not with the same clarity, is the cause of much controversy, misunderstanding, even abuse. How do we know we can trust such an authority? To whom are they accountable, and how?

My focus in this article is to address what I see as a key stumbling block to effective apostolic (or pioneer) leadership in the coming generation due to the developing spectre of spiritual abuse suspicion.⁴ Having introduced the function of apostolic ministry in a broad sense, I will then discuss 6 interrelated areas of focus which flow from this problem: 1. The disconnect between apostolic authority and spiritual abuse suspicion; 2. The necessity of the individual charism of an apostolic leader; 3. The way such leaders often respond to accusations against them, and what this may or may not reveal; 4. The role of conflict, courage, and pioneer decision-making which the individual charism brings, often inhibited by the fallout from abusive leadership elsewhere; 5. The subsequent effects of a loss of pioneer decision-making upon ongoing missional movement; 6. The need to keep such leaders accountable within genuine relationships (contrasted with bureaucratic forms of accountability often deemed essential in response to authority abuse, but which inevitably inhibit the exercise of pioneer leadership longer term.

Newfrontiers and Masculine Authority

There is an occasional illustrative focus throughout on the Reformed charismatic movement, Newfrontiers. This is not merely because it is the family of churches with which I am most personally familiar, but also because it has perhaps the greatest longevity of such movements within the UK Church. On the one hand, it has more clearly stood the test of time in ways other movements have not.⁵ In another sense, precisely *because* Newfrontiers has stood the relative test of time, its former emphases, practices, and alliances are now subject to the retrospective critiques which have become germane to our age amid the spectre of ‘spiritual abuse.’

This is not only because Newfrontiers has always held to a strong view of apostolic authority, but has seen several recent examples of leaders who, in one way or another, have been deposed

G. McNair Scott, *Apostles Today: Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates: A Historical and Theological Appraisal* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014).

⁴ Arguably, this risks opening a controversial can of worms which cannot be adequately reflected on during the scope of this article. Whilst it may be deemed wiser to leave the can closed, I believe one of the reasons it is seen as so controversial relates to the highly emotive implications of these themes within progressive, individualistic, self-expressive, therapeutic societies such as characterise the modern west.

⁵ One reason for this may be that Newfrontiers came to be seen as ‘the acceptable face of Restoration’, a reputation Virgo himself did not see as an entirely good thing! See Terry Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths: Restoring the Church to Christ’s Original Intention: One Man’s Journey* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2006), 235.

of their positions of authority.⁶ They have also been cited in recent years as having platformed, and been significantly influenced *by*, prominent leaders accused of spiritual abuse, such as Mike Pilavachi, and Mark Driscoll. All of this poses a particular challenge in how they respond to such critiques without losing their pioneering identity.⁷

Given the inescapably observable connection between pioneer apostolic leadership and traits which pertain to masculine authority (however broadly defined), while it will be impossible to explore the details in the scope of this article, it is not irrelevant that swathes of Newfrontiers churches in the western world have begun introducing regular women preachers and mixed-gender leadership teams in numerous contexts.⁸ This poses unique challenges to maintaining the pioneering emphasis that characterised its emergence and growth.

To ‘pioneer’ requires breaking new ground and building foundations in contexts of direct and sustained conflict and opposition, often requiring a forthright initiative-taking that willingly risks opposition for the sake of the principle or mission at stake. Caveats and exceptions aside, such pioneering tends to necessitate the kind of combative posture germane to masculine men, to persevere despite opposition, and to take risks that may inhibit collaborative social relationships.⁹

It is not surprising, then, that in the founding years of Newfrontiers, Terry Virgo saw the recovery of masculinity as bound up within the very project of ecclesial restoration, encouraging the Church to move from a posture of doubtful irrelevance to faith-filled assurance. Of one early charismatic meeting he attended, Virgo commented approvingly: ‘there was a shout in the camp, and a manly vitality about the atmosphere.’¹⁰ It is a sign of the incredulity towards ostensibly masculine leadership in our times today, that one’s first thought upon hearing this today is more likely to be: ‘But what about *womanly* vitality?’¹¹

⁶ Examples in the public domain include PJ Smyth and Stephen Van Rhyn. However, these also indicate an ever-increasing number of examples of leadership ‘transitions’ with leaders who could be characterised as exuding or advocating for an overtly ‘masculine’ approach to leadership. Irrespective of the genuine problems for which such leaders may be culpable within such cases, it appears such leaders are now far more likely to be held in suspicion within the present cultural moment.

⁷ Indeed, the names of most of the now-devolved Newfrontiers apostolic spheres – ‘Advance’, ‘New Ground’, ‘Regions Beyond’, ‘Relational Mission’ – still connote this now-threatened pioneering identity.

⁸ See, for example, Andrew Wilson’s stance. <https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/teaching-with-a-little-t-and-a-big-t>. Oddly (but not insignificantly), the feminist activist Natalie Collins attended Wilson’s 2018 ThinkTheology conference, and subtitled her review of the conference: ‘When Newfrontiers became accidentally feminist’. She noted: ‘I can say with confidence that Andrew Wilson’s complementarity is a repackaged version of 1980s romantic feminism, which is different enough from 2018 modern feminism to lull delegates into believing they are maintaining their complementarian convictions.’ Natalie Collins, ‘The Future of Complementarity: When Newfrontiers Became Accidentally Feminist’, *The Christian Post* (July 2018). <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/the-future-of-complementarity-when-newfrontiers-became-accidentally-feministexecute1/130003.htm>

⁹ To speak in such terms inevitably invites the question of evidencing such traits, which is not possible here. For a nuanced study of observable male/female differences in general, see Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 369-448. For a more recent and pointed discussion of ‘masculine’ traits in relation to oppositional leadership, see Zachary M. Garris, *Masculine Christianity* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion Publishing, 2021), 41-44.

¹⁰ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 68.

¹¹ As Dave Murrow argued, accentuating masculine virtue redresses an existing imbalance: ‘The feminine spirit is a wonderful thing. A healthy church has to have it. But most churches today are out of balance, brimming with the feminine spirit while short on the masculine spirit... When the masculine spirit shows up in church, Christians and non-Christians roundly condemn it. People who speak the truth too boldly are stifled because they might hurt someone’s feelings. Leaders who make bold moves are accused of being power hungry... [T]he answer is not the

It is also clear that masculine vitality was something to be not simply admired but cultivated. Virgo himself saw raising men from apathy to action as key:

I was determined to overcome their passivity and bring more men through and felt God had spoken to me from the illustration of eagles pushing their young out of the nest in order to teach them to fly.¹²

Again, one cannot help but wonder what questions such sentiments might raise within our abuse-alert ecclesial culture today: ‘What if such men did not want to be “brought through”? What if they did not want to be “pushed out of the nest”? What if they just saw themselves as different and less traditionally “masculine”? What if they did not believe “God has spoken to Terry”? And who made Terry the divinely authorised “super-eagle” who gets to push men around and make them different to who they currently are?’¹³ This intensity of awareness for Foucauldian power dynamics is common in an age ever more anxious about the permissible uses of masculine authority in particular.¹⁴

Coupled with the aforementioned incursions into formerly male-only leadership teams, and the de-masculinisation of leadership expectations with the introduction of women to such positions, however subtly introduced, such cynicism drastically inhibits the exercise of masculine authority in ways that directly impair the exercise of the apostolic charism.¹⁵

To challenge such cynicism in our contemporary ecclesial climate is not to support the harbouring of genuine power abuse; it is simply to challenge that which would prevent further abuses by denying the virtuous growth of the genuinely faithful leader, called to lead with the kind of decisive and courageous authority that might even befit the description: ‘manly vitality.’

1. Authoritative Leaders and Spiritual Abuse

Whilst Peter calls leaders to speak ‘as those uttering oracles of God’ (1Pet. 4:11), he also cautions against prideful, domineering leadership (1Pet. 5:3-5). Arguing for the importance of masculine authority does not preclude challenging the wolves amidst the sheep (cf. Acts 20:29-30). Whilst such overt dangers remain, a more subtle danger arises when the fear of authority abuse itself inhibits authoritative (male) leaders from leading like authoritative (male) leaders precisely *for* the sake of the sheep. This includes the need to guard against the kind of doctrinal infection that might cause longer term pastoral sickness, akin to what Joe Rigney has recently called ‘emotional sabotage’, downstream from what Edwin Friedman called the ‘leadership-toxic climate’ of

triumph of the masculine spirit over the feminine. A church must have both. A shortage of one or the other leads to abuse.’ David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 25-26.

¹² Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 64.

¹³ Whilst these may be hypothetical speculative questions, anybody familiar with the common pattern in how such discussions tend to occur will recognise a culture of suspicion apparently foreign to the New Testament Church in relation to honouring leaders. ‘Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour...Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.’ (1Tim. 5:17-19); ‘Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.’ (Heb. 13:17). It is precisely on account of the honour *due* to leaders that ‘those who persist in sin’ must be publicly rebuked ‘so that the rest may stand in fear.’ (1Tim. 5:21).

¹⁴ See Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 64-106.

¹⁵ Arguably, the culture of cynical anxiety could also be interpreted as ‘abusive’ *to* leaders who feel called to ‘lead with zeal’ (Rom. 12:8) and to speak ‘as those uttering oracles of God’ (1Pet. 4:11). To do so in our contemporary postmodern climate is unlikely to avoid the charge of domineering.

modern society, where those most anxious end up substantially shaping vision and practice at the expense of the clear and decisive exercise of authority.¹⁶

One way this can happen is in and through the highly emotive climate in which a leader seeking to show ‘nerve’ may be seen—to those who disagree—as perpetrating ‘spiritual abuse’. This is a relatively recent concept, and one which Evangelical Alliance UK has even recognised as ‘a seriously problematic term partly because of its own inherent ambiguity.’¹⁷ Marcus Honeysett, in his insightful book, *Powerful Leaders?* rightly exhibits caution about using the term ‘spiritual abuse’ because it may conflate a range of perceived behaviours, from relatively innocuous to extremely serious, under one umbrella.¹⁸

However, Honeysett does point to a kind of definition as ‘patterns of emotional or psychological control through coerced behaviours over a period of time in a religious context.’¹⁹ Such patterns include ‘religious justifications or defences for behaviour, (mis)use of religious texts, doctrines being used as tools for control, claims to divine inspiration, or misuse of God’s name and/or Word in the perpetration or justification of mistreatment.’²⁰

Nobody genuinely seeking Biblical foundations for leadership could condone such things, of course; but the issue is made more complex by the ambiguity of subjective offence. To one so inclined, a directly exhortative sermon on a challenging Biblical text could easily be read as the ‘(mis)use of religious texts...as tools for control’. Similarly, a prophetic insight shared in a team meeting (like Paul’s in Acts 16:9-10, leading to a significant change of plan), could easily be read as ‘claims to divine inspiration.’

Misinterpretation of leaders’ actions or motives is not a modern problem. Yet the difference now is the climate of communication in which these misinterpretations may occur, coupled with the societal accentuation of psycho-therapeutic approaches to personal, communal, and spiritual problems.²¹ It is now more possible than ever to find concerns with more forthright patterns of behaviour, decision-making, or speech, and to communicate these grievances widely.

Whilst elements of this development should certainly be welcomed as giving formerly silenced victims a voice, adverse effects include the possibility of unjust charges or an uncharitable lens assumed against leaders due to emotive and subjective interpretations of ambiguous events. More germane to our purposes here, such a climate also impacts what a leader (or institution) may instinctively *avoid* doing in future, including what they may be more likely to de-emphasise for fear of reproach.

¹⁶ Joe Rigney, *Leadership and Emotional Sabotage: Resisting the Anxiety that will Wreck Your Family, Destroy Your Church, and Ruin the World* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2024); Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in an Age of the Quick Fix*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 2017).

¹⁷ *Reviewing the Discourse of ‘Spiritual Abuse’: Logical Problems & Unintended Consequences* (Evangelical Alliance, 2018), 1. ‘Such persistent application of [the term, ‘Spiritual Abuse’] risks becoming a “self-fulfilling prophecy”: whether intentionally or not, it will lend weight to the arguments of those who take its cumulative general usage as evidence of the need distinctively to criminalise it, and thus potentially to criminalise whole religious communities with whose theology they happen to disagree.’ *Spiritual Abuse*, 18.

¹⁸ Marcus Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?: When Church Leadership Goes Wrong and How to Prevent It* (London: IVP, 2022), 157-159.

¹⁹ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 157.

²⁰ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 157.

²¹ For an influential analysis of this in a parenting context (thus influential upon future generations of leaders), see Abigail Shrier, *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren’t Growing Up* (London: Swift Press, 2024).

Spiritual abuse is simultaneously difficult to define and easy to apply to the exercise of courageous or forthright authority. Because of the proliferation of (usually male) leaders whose ministries have collapsed on account of allegations of bullying or generally authoritarian behaviour, it is often assumed that the problem is with the Church's faulty expectations for such leaders. Michael Kruger's *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Role of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (2022) exemplifies this view:

We want leaders who are powerful, decisive, inspiring, dynamic, and get things done... We would rather have a leader who will beat up our enemies than one who will tenderly care for the sheep. It's not that different from the person who decides to buy a pit bull as a family pet. It may be cool to have a tough dog, and it may protect you from burglars. But eventually it may maul a member of your own family.²²

The problem is not Kruger's critique of abusive behaviour, but the assumptions made of particular leaders, or the *desire* for particular kinds of leader. One of the most problematic elements here is that the behaviour assumed to be problematic is not only difficult to define but is often interpreted in and through an already-suspicious lens:

Whatever the hard numbers are for spiritual abuse, there is good reason to think that most instances still go unreported. After all, spiritual abuse does not involve demonstrable physical acts like other forms of abuse, making it difficult to define... Even the victims know it is tough to prove. That fact, along with the inevitable retaliation they might expect from the bully pastor, makes most people prefer silence over speaking up.²³

All this assumes that those reporting are indeed victims and that the pastor is indeed a 'bully'. There is little that differentiates this from the old maxim: 'there's no smoke without fire'.

It is clear that, although pioneer leaders may be relatively more likely to veer towards authoritarian behaviour, there is legitimate confusion over what precisely constitutes 'spiritual abuse' in practice. As such, assumptions are easily made which problematise the very possibility of a leader with specific, God-anointed authority. For charismatics who believe in the 'gift' of pioneer apostles called to lead with distinct authority, such assumptions risk undoing the purpose of the gift itself.

2. The Necessity of Individual Charism

The role of the Spirit is bound up in the way a leader makes decisions in boldness beyond their natural capabilities.²⁴ Yet much of the received wisdom on leadership in our time tends to denigrate even the very idea of a gifted (we might say, 'charismatised') leader with an individual calling to the kind of pioneer leadership which necessarily draws people to follow him, and is

²² Michael J. Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), xiv-xv.

²³ Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 5. In contrast, Honeysett shows far more awareness of the dangers of cynicism undermining genuine uses of authority. See *Powerful Leaders?*, 20-23.

²⁴ We see this especially among the judges and prophets of the Old Testament in the sense of the Spirit coming 'upon' a leader for a particular purpose, but we see a similar connection in relation to the role of the Spirit for apostolic ministry too.

proactive about doing so (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). This is precisely where the aforementioned assumptions over motives come into play.

Diane Langberg pointed to problems not only in the leader but in the expectations of congregations who instinctively seek such leaders as self-reflective heroic idols:

When a leader's powerful presence coincides with a growing church, a global influence, an influential media presence, and a steady inflow of money, their followers believe that the leader is the one who has made it all happen. It follows that any attack on or criticism of that leader will not be believed or must be denied. A threat to the leader is a threat to all.²⁵

But again, is 'charisma' or 'powerful presence' thereby something that should be avoided? Not if we wish to see the 'apostolic' gift flourish.

The Church runs the risk of becoming inherently suspicious of 'charisma' itself, not only in its colloquial meaning (a persuasive or charming personality) but the pneumatological work within the individual leader which necessarily draws people towards them in order to draw them to follow Christ with greater faith, hope, and love.

Paul was confident enough in his Spirit-led anointing to call the Philippians to imitate him: 'Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.' (Phil. 3:17).²⁶ He also warns of 'enemies of the cross' who are self-seeking, whose 'god is their belly' (3:19). Even to call out the counterfeits takes clear, confident, and decisive authority.

We are now far more likely to see notions of calling and charism as mere portals for exploitation by the charlatans whose ambition exceeds their character. Mark Sayers conflates this not merely with the leaders who fall, but with the very idea of 'ambitious' leadership itself:

Our understanding of leadership is markedly shaped by the myth of the hero, the idea that through sheer effort and determination we can reshape reality. The myth of the hero tells us that dynamic, charismatic, and glorious individuals can heal cultures through their personal guile, skill, and glory.²⁷

This is, of course, a caricature. Believing in the extraordinary gift of apostolic leadership need not necessitate a belief that such leaders can 'heal cultures through their personal guile, skill, and glory.' Nor is gravitation to the heroic a superimposed 'myth.' Scripture contains numerous litanies of heroes (cf. Heb. 11), whose heroic faith is intended to inspire, challenge, and encourage.

Apostles are not self-proclaimed 'heroes' but they are called to walk in faith-exuding authority. David Devenish, who quite literally 'wrote the book' on apostleship within Newfrontiers, also recognised the danger of the self-titled 'apostle' as artificially creating an elevated status symbol.²⁸

Even if leaders do not accept the office or title of 'apostle', they may well be functioning in a role whereby their own charism becomes a reputable 'brand'. There is no more obvious example of

²⁵ Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos 2020), 128.

²⁶ See also "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1).

²⁷ Mark Sayers, *Facing Leviathan: Leadership, Influence, and Creating in a Cultural Storm* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 103.

²⁸ Devenish, *Fathering Leaders, Motivating Mission*, 6-11.

this in recent years than Mark Driscoll, who had a not-insignificant relationship with Newfrontiers.²⁹ After speaking at Newfrontiers' annual leadership conference in 2008, Virgo spoke of him in direct relation to his individual charisma:

Well, he came and he's gone – but we certainly knew he was here! Mark Driscoll packs a punch. What did I especially appreciate about him? His straightforwardness. Nothing hidden and no hiding, so, like the Apostle Paul, his forthrightness commended himself to our consciences. Because of his transparency it's not difficult to feel that you know him personally... He loves the truth and he loves Jesus and wants to make him known... His radical priorities and decision-making are deeply rooted in a passion to confront our contemporaries with gospel truth.³⁰

Virgo's appreciation for Driscoll's forthrightness might echo what Sayers and Langberg see as a problem: the expectation of a 'certain' kind of leader. But gifted individuals have always been important within apostolic networks. Indeed, in his autobiography, Virgo regularly comments upon such leaders glowingly *as* gifted men worthy of emulation: 'For the first time I was encountering Gerald Coates'; 'the "London brothers"...included other stars such as John Noble...'; 'C. J. Mahaney...is one of the most impressive men of God it has been my privilege to know...The whole movement is filled with the fruits of his outstanding example.'³¹

Reformed evangelicalism often plays down the role of the individual, perhaps from good motive to avoid pride, undue adulation, or tyranny; yet this is not without the danger of false humility and dishonourable cynicism too. For Virgo, the attraction of gifted men lay precisely in their charisma for galvanising others to a greater kingdom vision beyond themselves, as we see in his description of prominent apostolic leader, David Mansell where a 'captivated' Virgo describes: 'My heart was pumping with excitement. I loved this man's message and I increasingly loved the man.'³²

There is no inherent contradiction in seeking the glory of God and his kingdom in and through the honour of one of God's gifted servants. Individual leaders matter not only as repositories of the gift, but as *people* themselves.

Similarly, Virgo's reflection on meeting 'The Magnificent Seven' (a group of noteworthy apostolic leaders whose number eventually grew to include Virgo himself), is also insightful. He clearly appreciated their masculine directness in contrast to established evangelical leaders:

At first I was shocked at the forthrightness of their conversation when confronting one another, though to be honest I also admired their edge as a genuine strength...I had never seen encounters that were quite so raw and lacking in the normal niceties of Christian debate which so often seemed to fudge issues.³³

²⁹ For a brief summary of Newfrontiers' relationship to Driscoll, see Phil Whittall's post. <https://thesimplepastor.co.uk/newfrontiers-mark-driscoll/>

³⁰ 'Mark Driscoll at Together on a Mission' (July 2008). <https://www.terryvirgo.org/blog/mark-driscoll-at-together-on-a-mission/>

³¹ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 69.

³² Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 66.

³³ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 81.

Virgo also noted the idea of ‘balance’ as a kind of idol within the Reformed theological world of the time. ‘At LBC in those days “caution” was the key theme. “Balance” (what J.I. Packer calls “that dreadful self-conscious word”) was to be our God.’³⁴ In contrast, Virgo was influenced by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, whom he described as ‘no narrow-minded, safe, evangelical but a man with a big God who was to be sought for all his many blessings.’³⁵ It seems that Virgo’s appreciation for faith-filled confidence in other leaders was inextricable from the kind of leadership he felt was essential in order to bring reform. This was not an abdication of the need for a genuinely balanced approach, but rather a recognition that true Biblical balance might be found not in Aristotelian moderation but in the mutual angularity of different kinds of personality.

The lack of ‘normal niceties’ among the apostolic pioneers Virgo saw can be seen as a feature of such men who hold their convictions with appropriate seriousness and focus that they display Paul’s own apostolic desire ‘to speak, not to please man, but to please God’ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:4). It is such single-minded focus that often frames a more robust response to critics.

3. Authority, Opposition, and Response

One recurrent critique of authoritarian abuse is seen in how an authoritative leader may respond to opposition and criticism, especially in their citation of Biblical examples mirroring their own ministry. Much has been said in evangelical circles about *not* seeking to emulate such leaders, such as Matt Chandler’s well-known exhortation: ‘you’re not David!’³⁶ While ‘narcigesis’ is certainly a danger, restorationist apostles regularly applied the lives of Biblical heroes not only to the experience of leaders but also to congregations and movements.

Nehemiah and the Wall

One of the most pertinent parallels for apostolic leaders is Nehemiah, particularly due to the rebuilding of foundations (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10) and opposing enemies to that rebuilding work (cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-5, 20-21). Nehemiah refuses to even speak with Sanballat et al, identifying them as harmful conspirators: “I am doing a great work...Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” (Neh. 6:3). He also refuses to acknowledge any truth in their accusations that he had conceited motives for rebuilding the wall: “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” (Neh. 6:8). A significant critique of Mark Driscoll made in the influential *Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* podcast (2021) was the perceived misuse of Nehemiah 6 to avoid valid critiques of his vision and practice.³⁷

In a more recent sermon series on Nehemiah, Driscoll said: ‘Don’t meet with your enemies, but do meet with your God...’³⁸ The sermon also reveals a different side to Driscoll’s story, seeming to show why he refused to respond to the podcast’s request for comment, in tandem with Nehemiah’s responses to Sanballat. A *Gospel Coalition* article directly questioned this kind of interpretation:

³⁴ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 57. See also Aaron Edwards, ‘Preacher as Balanced Extremist: Biblical Dialectics and Sermonic Certainty’, *The Expository Times* 126:9 (June 2015), 425-35.

³⁵ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 57.

³⁶ Matt Chandler, ‘The Bible Is Not About Us’. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHm-rj_VmmE&t=6s

³⁷ See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>.

³⁸ Mark Driscoll, ‘Nehemiah #6 – What is the best way to deal with cruel enemies?’ (22nd Oct 2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XXPZgHOGG0&list=PLAYWRCyUBQanW3AmO4N5sz2fxc4Xj5m0l&index=8>

Is Nehemiah really a good model to follow? Or are Driscoll and others using his example to wrongly justify violent and intimidating ways of leading God's people?...When we read Nehemiah as a model for leadership, we easily end up confirming our own biases. It's not the way to go.³⁹

Whilst it would certainly be problematic to apply Nehemiah to justify violence or intimidation, clearly it is not inherently inapplicable to cases of opposition to pioneer leaders. Indeed, the irony is that such a critique overlooks the bias of the potentially cowardly and avoidant leader, who might find 'Nehemiah as a model for leadership' problematic precisely because of *their own* biases.

In his 1987 book, *Men of Destiny*, written during a key time in the emerging reputation of Newfrontiers as a movement, Terry Virgo himself highlighted Nehemiah 6:8 in the same way Driscoll would many years later:

We must emulate him. We cannot be taken up with chasing these mysterious allegations or trying to unravel where they all start. Just as Nehemiah did not seem to become preoccupied with it or thrown off course, neither must we...[H]e was not arrogant. He had a sense of destiny. He had no intention of running away or being diverted.⁴⁰

Virgo also recounts the rumours spreading around himself and Newfrontiers at the time, including accusations that Virgo himself was angling to be a new 'pope' who sought to take over churches.⁴¹ 'The rumours were...both powerful and painful. I experienced old friends avoiding me...And, to make matters worse, no one ever spoke to me direct or asked me questions that would have provided opportunity to answer and show how wrong the stories were.'⁴²

Again one wonders whether the present climate might have caused even greater reputational damage for Virgo, given the increased platform for public expression for such critics. This shows again not only the validity of an apostolic leader's identification with figures like Nehemiah, but the likelihood of personal accusations regarding self-serving motives arising when they seek to exercise pioneer leadership.

Paul and the Corinthians

Notably, the Apostle Paul had cause to respond to accusations of what today might be termed 'spiritual abuse.' Paul's response to such allegations is, arguably, the entire point of the second epistle to the Corinthians. It is clear he and his team have been accused of 'commending themselves', a phrase referenced numerous times throughout the letter, often ironically (2 Cor. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12; 10:18; 12:11). Paul is clearly wrestling with the dynamics of authority and honour in the context of his own dishonour, with he and his team treated as 'imposters' (6:8) under the suspicion that Paul was 'crafty' and deceitful, seeking to 'take advantage' of them, both spiritually and financially (12:16).

What is intriguing in light of our present context of equivalent situations is that Paul not only defends himself against these charges by citing his authority, but he turns the source of these

³⁹ Timothy Escott, 'Leading Like Nehemiah: Can We Read Nehemiah Like Driscoll Did?' (Aug 2021).

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/leading-like-nehemiah-can-we-read-nehemiah-like-driscoll-did/>

⁴⁰ Terry Virgo, *Men of Destiny* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1987), 153.

⁴¹ Virgo, *Men of Destiny*, 146-47.

⁴² Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 86.

charges into a pastoral opportunity to challenge his accusers and highlight the problem of those deceived by them. When a Christian leader does something similar today, they tend to be immediately re-accused of ‘victim-shaming’ on the basis that—irrespective of whether any allegations are true—a pattern of narratives of subjective hurt are often deemed sufficient colloquial evidence to indict a leader’s conduct or general vision.⁴³

To use another contemporary pejorative phrase, Paul ‘doubles down’ on his authority, stating the full spectrum of his postures, practices, and sufferings, how they spoke ‘by truthful speech, and the power of God’ (6:7). He challenges the Corinthians’ own foolishness in listening to the *actual* imposters, the ‘false apostles’ (11:13) who spread slander about them, ‘disguising themselves as apostles of Christ’ and as ‘servants of righteousness’ (11:13-15). Paul could easily be accused of deflecting or a lack of humility. He refuses to back down or acquiesce with even a hint of his accusers’ charges, saying: ‘what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.’ (11:12).

Paul ‘doubles down’ in this way not to condemn the Corinthians, nor merely to clear his name for his own sake, but for the Corinthians’ sake, out of his overflowing love for them (7:2-4). It is for this reason that he can say: ‘I am acting with great boldness toward you’ (7:4). This is in stark contrast to the kind of enforced timidity (and perhaps faux humility) which often characterises the responses of public leaders to such charges today, perhaps more eager to bring quick resolution to the difficulties than to challenge the culture or false teaching by which such attitudes have been nurtured.

It is not inappropriate for pioneer leaders to continue exercising their leadership gift in the face of the kind of motive-targeted opposition they are promised will occur *if* they are doing their job properly (cf. Matt. 5:11). Clearly this does not give licence to blanket silencing of all critics. But unless we are willing to call Nehemiah and Paul inherently arrogant, we must allow not only the possibility but the necessity of pioneer leaders to strongly oppose their opponents if they can indeed point to the goodness of their motives and the good fruit of their labours.

A leader is not inherently arrogant or unbiblical for believing in the vision, principles, and methods for which they advocate, even where such methods may have adverse effects. This cannot be used to assume every opponent is typified as a Sanballat, but neither is it necessary to say that a leader who responds as Paul did to the Corinthians—or as Virgo did to many of his many critics—inevitably follows an identifiably ‘problematic’ pattern.

Pioneer leaders cannot flourish unless, on some level, there is a degree of trust that they are indeed ‘gifted’ (pneumatologically) to intuit some decisions that need to be made,⁴⁴ and thus, to be prepared to oppose (rather than placate) those who seek to undermine that Spirit-led mission too.

⁴³ See Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 5.

⁴⁴ PJ Smyth, a Newfrontiers apostolic leader who stepped down from ministry in controversial (albeit not ‘abusive’) circumstances in 2021, had published a widely commended book on eldership only the previous year, where he argued not only for symbiotic team dynamics to restrain potentially abusive leadership, but also of the importance of the team learning to trust the ‘intuition’ of the primary leader. PJ Smyth, *Elders: Developing Elders and Revitalizing Teams* (Redhill: Advance, 2020), 120-21.

4. Pioneer Courage, Trust, and Conflict

It is common to critique the decision-making of pioneer leaders on the grounds that they might say or do things which produce negative effects among those who see them uncharitably. As Andrew Wilson rightly observes: ‘We don’t have to choose between men of jelly and men of steel. It’s possible to shepherd with courage and compassion, humility and bravery, clarity and charity.’⁴⁵ And yet, much like Virgo’s observation of the pursuit of perpetual ‘balance’, this might create a flawed expectation.

Pioneer leaders such as Martin Luther, John Wesley, and William Booth all seemed to have what could be called an ‘edge’. This was not faith or courage at the expense of love or gentleness, but merely an angularity of character, meaning they might not display all conceivable leadership virtues simultaneously. Obvious New Testament examples include Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple or Paul causing a riot at Ephesus, in which good virtues like the avoidance of quarrels, peaceability, striving for unity, or gentleness, may not be overtly evident to all observers within all individual moments.

The expectation that pioneer leaders *should* show the same kind of gentleness and tolerance, for example, to all people at all times is neither realistic nor advisable.⁴⁶ It is such misconceptions that result in the peculiar angularity of some pioneer leaders being easily misunderstood by those less sympathetic to their priorities.

When you see how the prophets and apostles acted in individual moments, they do not always show a balanced model of gentle-yet-firm action in every instance. Such balance ought to be present, rather, across the entire breadth of their life and ministry, as attested by the overseer qualifications (Tit. 3; 1 Tim. 2-3), which tend towards character traits best observed close-up and over the longer haul (hence why recent converts should not be overseers, cf. 1 Tim. 3:6).

Wilson’s ‘solution’ for keeping leaders from becoming overbearing also seems inescapably bureaucratic:

Institutionally, churches can make feedback and accountability as easy as possible through a combination of church surveys, staff appraisals, clear job descriptions, anonymous staff-culture surveys, a competent and empowered board, and rigorous HR processes.⁴⁷

This may well be seen as ‘good practice’ but this simply doesn’t seem to be the case for how pioneer leaders have been kept accountable throughout most of church history. Arguably, this more likely creates ‘company men’ who do the sensible things and rarely take prophetic risks of which the establishment might disapprove.

The scene between Paul and Agabus in Acts 21, for example, is remarkably unbureaucratic: a dramatic prophetic word is delivered which Paul simultaneously agrees with and yet ignores the accompanying counsel and goes to Jerusalem anyway, since he ‘would not be persuaded’ (Acts 21:10-14). This is one of many examples where Paul could be labelled ‘arrogant’ for apparently acting beyond the democratic wisdom of his accountability. In contrast, at the riot at Ephesus,

⁴⁵ Andrew Wilson, ‘Courageous Pastors or Overbearing Leaders: How Do We Tell the Difference?’ *The Gospel Coalition* (Feb 2024). <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/courageous-pastors/>.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Paul’s response to Elymas (Acts 13:10-11).

⁴⁷ Wilson, ‘Courageous or Overbearing’.

we hear: ‘But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him.’ (Acts 19:30). There is evidently a Spirit-led give-and-take between Paul and his companions, but certainly not a ‘formal’ accountability structure.

On some level, apostles need to be trusted to make decisions that will—by the very definition of the fact that they are pioneer apostles—go against the perceived wisdom of much of the accountability structure that we may put in place to constrain them. Indeed, perhaps the most easily misunderstood behaviour of a pioneer leader is their propensity to eschew bureaucratic constraints when such structures threaten to undermine or derail what they see as a Spirit-led direction.

Honeysett, for example, highlights the danger of leaders ‘overrid[ing] the formal structure of authority, governance and accountability’ so that such mechanisms are replaced by ‘coercive control.’⁴⁸ This, again, invites an inevitably cynical motive (‘coercive control’) for what may be a fairly ‘normal’ aversion of the pioneer to bureaucratic constraint.

There would be no *Salvation Army* if William Booth had not effectively taken charge of the London Mission’s annual conference, changing the name to the ‘war council’, appointing himself as the ‘general’ of a new ‘army’, giving him ‘the freedom to act without the restraint of the conference.’⁴⁹ At this moment Booth famously said: “‘if you can’t trust me it is of no use for us to attempt to work together. Confidence in God and in me are absolutely indispensable both now and ever afterwards.’”⁵⁰

How else would we see such events today other than ‘coercive control’? They seem to fit what Honeysett calls ‘the first, biggest, and easiest step into abuse’: ‘when leaders use their informal power to try to increase their formal power, or otherwise to evade or avoid legitimate constraints upon them.’⁵¹ Again, we might imagine the contemporary responses to Booth’s actions: “‘What about those important formal processes? What about due democratic diligence? Who does this Booth think he is?’”

“‘He’s a Spirit-led apostolic leader’”, should be the reply. Because only an apostolic leader would do such a thing. Indeed, whilst manipulative abusers might also seek to take over existing structures for self-serving ends, such acts of pioneer authority remain essential to flourishing missional advance.⁵² Indeed, just eight years after Booth’s executive ‘intervention’, the mission grew from 50 stations to 1,006, from 88 evangelists to 2,260, plus expansion into 12 other countries.⁵³

Fast-track growth is often noted as one of the ways abusive leadership is excused, of course. This was one of the major critiques of Mark Driscoll’s situation at Mars Hill. But like Booth, Driscoll did have a propensity to take the kind of action that would inevitably cause conflict along the

⁴⁸ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 79.

⁴⁹ See John Larsson, *1929: A Crisis that Shaped the Salvation Army's Future* (London: Salvation Army, 2009), 13-14.

⁵⁰ Larsson, *1929*, 14.

⁵¹ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 57.

⁵² None of this is even to say that Booth did not introduce problematic processes in the Salvation Army *via* such executive leadership. He almost certainly did. But this does not negate the necessity of Booth’s apostolic heart in launching the Army as the mission-shaped institution it ultimately became. This is why the apostolic gift is needed not just once, but ongoingly (including as an eventual challenge *to* the methods of the founding apostle, of course).

⁵³ Larsson, *1929*, 23.

way.⁵⁴ This is often seen as exclusively problematic. Yet more charitably it could be seen as a necessary trait of pioneer leadership. As Roxburgh and Romanuk noted:

Missional leaders can model ways of engaging conflict to bring about change. They must be ready to create conflict that helps people think differently, name conflict, and facilitate its resolution. They will live with conflict and still sleep at night.⁵⁵

The critical angle to this might be that leaders like Driscoll ‘create conflict’ in order to achieve their own aims at the expense of others. It ultimately depends whether the conflict is justifiable according to the mission, or genuinely megalomaniacal to the detriment of it.⁵⁶

Such conflict-creation is simply what happens when new terrain is explored or conquered. Similarly, it was said of the pioneer of the Great Awakening, George Whitefield: ‘It was not... Whitefield’s style that provoked the Church’s reaction to him. It was Whitefield’s disregard of the ecclesiastical, theological, and political preoccupations of the age.’⁵⁷ The pioneer cannot regard the establishment with too friendly a disposition, lest their own calling to bring reform *to* it become compromised.

It is impossible to take such an attitude and *not* encounter intense opposition from those who cannot see the same problems, or who do not believe the pioneer’s alternative approach is necessary or legitimate. But the pioneer will fail to fulfil his calling if he cannot bring the appropriate level of challenge to the establishment whilst also forging an alternative path forward.

5. Pioneer Leadership and Permanent Movement

One of the reasons a culture of spiritual abuse suspicion is so important is that the loss or denigration of pioneer apostolic leadership is genuinely crucial to the advance of Church mission in each generation.

Missional movements tend to diminish from fear of the implications of risk-taking. Notably, in the book published just before his ‘fall’, Driscoll spoke about this very problem, where an institutional movement becomes ‘afraid of losing what it has achieved’ with ‘constant pressure upon senior leaders to stop at a moderate level of success and cease pushing forward for new victories.’⁵⁸ He even makes a distinctly pneumatological claim regarding the anointing of the Spirit for movements which forsake their ‘apostolic’ mission:

⁵⁴ Driscoll’s infamous conception of the necessary ‘pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus’ is a mutated extension of this logic which ultimately led to the failure of the mission (or, the crashing of the bus). See Cosper, *Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*, episode 7. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/mars-hill-mark-driscoll-podcast-state-of-emergency.html>

⁵⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 135.

⁵⁶ What is often overlooked is that the ‘mission’ is not merely the numerical advance but the structural integrity of what is built. This was Paul’s concern, that the mission builds firm foundations (1 Cor. 3:10), and that the people – the ultimate ‘goal’ of the mission – bear good fruit (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

⁵⁷ William Gibson, ‘Whitefield and the Church of England’, *George Whitefield: Life, Context, Legacy* (London: OUP, 2016), 63.

⁵⁸ Mark Driscoll, *A Call to Resurgence: Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2013), 283-84.

Once the mission of an organization becomes the preservation of the institution, the original mission stops, and the Holy Spirit stops showing up in power... The remnant that is left behind exists solely to tell the story—not to keep writing it.⁵⁹

It is a common joke within British Methodism that the Methodist Conference (the annual governance meeting) exists to ensure there will never again be another John Wesley. Indeed, the only way Methodism could likely birth ‘another Wesley’ would be for such a person to pioneer something of which Methodism could not approve. This, after all, is precisely what Wesley and Whitefield did in ‘leaving’ the Church of England, and what William Booth did by leaving Methodism.

Steve Addison, in *Pioneering Movements*, highlights the necessity of the unbureaucratized ‘fringe’ of the Church in the advance of kingdom mission: ‘Unrecognised groups of ordinary people with little or no status in the church have started at least half of the mission movements in the history of the church.’⁶⁰ This presents something of a paradox to some conceptions of ‘apostolic’ authority too. If those exercising an apostolic gift become more like ‘sitting bishops’ who no longer exercise their authority on the missional front lines, this will catalyse new apostolic leaders to initiate reform and renewal.⁶¹

Hirsch and Catchim echo this sense in their concept of ‘permanent revolution’:

The routinization of charisma, the process of institutionalization, reification, and a host of other factors all conspire to work against such durability. Entropy and dissipation are part of the physical and social fabric of reality, yet the very nature of the church’s mission calls for continuous movement.⁶²

Where some traditions might resent this apparently perpetual need for change, this is not a gravitation to perpetual reinterpretation (as with progressivism) but rather perpetual dependence upon the work of the Spirit who birthed those traditions. Hence, when Paul says ‘follow the pattern of sound words’ and to ‘guard the good deposit’ he calls him to do this ‘by the Holy Spirit, who dwells within you’ (2 Tim. 1:13-14), regarding Timothy’s spiritual anointing (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6).

Paul also calls Timothy to raise up ‘faithful men’ capable of themselves leading other ‘faithful men’ to follow after them (2 Tim. 2:2), opening a pathway to future generations whose emphases may well differ from their predecessors whilst being called to ‘follow the pattern of sound words.’

This pattern of raising up and releasing new leaders is evidently an important way the Spirit operates in the multifarious frontiers of kingdom mission across different generations and

⁵⁹ Driscoll, *Resurgence*, 284-85.

⁶⁰ Steve Addison, *Pioneering Movements: Leadership that Multiplies Disciples and Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 69.

⁶¹ This also provides a way to marry the Biblical heart behind challenging abusive authority in relation to the silencing of suffering voices. Sometimes it is those who see things differently to the established leadership dynamics who may be the harbingers of the next movement of missional advance. This is by no means automatic, of course. Movements such as the Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions sought to galvanise a pioneering spirit away from the established centre, but failed to produce long term missional fruit, arguably because they remained fixated upon their disenfranchisement from the establishment, without a genuine apostolic vision and practice.

⁶² Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 176.

contexts. Furthermore, the ‘continuous movement’ Hirsch and Catchim advocate cannot be centred upon a mere constitutional pioneering ‘policy’. An apostolic leader really *is* necessary:

We suggest that the concept of perpetual advance and renewal is directly linked to the presence and activity of the apostolic ministry; they are the permanent revolutionaries who maintain the permanent revolution. As long as Wesley was alive, the movement continued to grow... The loss of the apostolic influence opens the door to encroaching decline.⁶³

There is a notable application here to the Mark Driscoll saga. Many saw the subsequent collapse of Mars Hill as symptomatic of Driscoll’s inappropriate level of control. Some of this is undoubtedly true, particularly because Driscoll did *not* function in a consistently apostolic manner. At Mars Hill he did not train, send, and release new leaders and congregations but rather expanded his own sphere of influence without raising up new leaders who might pioneer beyond him.⁶⁴

However, it is also inevitable that if a leader’s charisma is not adequately succeeded, inevitably a movement will not ‘move’ as it once did. This is evident from the trajectories of most of the fruitful pioneering movements in evangelical history. Whilst the Salvation Army and Methodism continue on, playing a role in the ecclesial body, they are no longer on the missional ‘front line’ which made them necessary in the first place, when the gift of charismatic apostolicity was present.

6. Accountability and Relationality

A climate of spiritual abuse suspicion tends to encourage bureaucratic rather than relational cultures to guarantee accountability of pioneer leaders, despite potentially eroding *functional* trust in apostolic authority as a result.

Virgo, whilst extolling the virtue of the individually gifted apostle and the need to press forward despite sharp criticisms, was not thereby oblivious to the dangers of genuinely unaccountable or abusive leadership.⁶⁵ One reason his legacy endured contra that of so many of his restorationist apostolic peers: a strong combination of pioneer faith and relational accountability.

Strong emphases upon relationality within movements, however, may now be interpreted suspiciously. As Honeysett argues: ‘the relational is less transparent and so needs to be governed and overseen by formal accountability if we are to have confidence that it is being exercised appropriately.’⁶⁶ There is a perception here that formal bureaucratic structures are less likely to be abused. However, this is not necessarily true. Abusers often know how to hide within or manipulate bureaucratic structures, and sometimes the structures themselves become abusive.

There is also the inevitable dehumanisation, however subtle, in such systems which can lead to officious forms of abuse, as C.S. Lewis said, perpetrated by ‘quiet men with white collars and cut

⁶³ Hirsch, *Permanent Revolution*, 176.

⁶⁴ This reveals a marked difference between Mars Hill and Newfrontiers. Speaking at the 2008 Newfrontiers leadership conference, Driscoll exhorted the movement to find a successor to Virgo. They heeded this but disagreed with his particular application, choosing instead to release each apostolic leader to form their own movement, allowing the pioneering cycle to continue (‘in theory’, at least), even if it meant ‘Newfrontiers’ (Virgo’s ‘sphere’) gradually disappeared.

⁶⁵ See Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 180-82.

⁶⁶ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 56-57.

fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices.⁶⁷ As I have argued elsewhere, there is a kind of ‘violence’ to the bureaucratic that is especially problematic precisely because of what it purports to oppose.⁶⁸ Such critiques of bureaucracy *per se* must be borne in mind when seeking to oppose potential relational weaknesses.

Honeysett rightly notes that ‘it is hard to ascertain the effects of relational influence, trust or popularity built up between individuals, even for those involved, or to evaluate the possible power discrepancies that can arise’.⁶⁹ But such relational bonds of trust remain essential to how apostolic teams function, mirroring the apostolic brotherhood of Paul and his team. As Virgo himself said:

The whole atmosphere of the New Testament church is not one of an institution but of a family... [Paul’s] apostolic relationship, often expressed through such men as Timothy, Epaphras, Epaphroditus and others, was crucial to their growth and success.⁷⁰

In contrast, Kruger demonstrates the suspicious lens through which such relationships may be viewed as manipulable: ‘Narcissists are remarkably good at forming alliances, building a network of supporters, and laying the groundwork for a future alienation of perceived enemies.’⁷¹ No doubt this is true of abusive leaders. But is forming alliances and connecting closely with loyal supporters not what all leaders seek to do, including to oppose disruptive enemies of the apostolic vision in unison?

Loyalty can be abused, but it is also a natural and desirable consequence of relational team-building. Any good vision should be subject to valid and accountable critique, but as noted earlier, a fruitful vision will also attract ‘enemies’ who need to be opposed *as a team* too. It is now easier than ever for such enemies to cast themselves as victims due to the many documented examples of abusive leaders seeing genuine victims as enemies. As ever, the challenge is determining the extent to which such opponents seek to enlighten the darkness in faith or to endarken the light in doubt.

Speaking of the leader’s response to accountable challenge, Kruger says: ‘We need to stop thinking like lawyers – ready to litigate and rebut each and every attack – and instead be willing to hear the truth if it is spoken in our midst.’⁷² One assumes this analogy also applies to ‘prosecution lawyers’ as well as ‘defence lawyers’. If the accused leader is called to cease being ‘defensive’, what about the increasingly litigious processes by which such leaders are often challenged?

Virgo speaks of such challenges in light of the Israelite army’s obedience to Gideon in separating the camp:

He did not invite a vote about it. There is no record that he asked the soldiers which groups they would like to be in... A leader does not want to

⁶⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 2.

⁶⁸ See Aaron P. Edwards, ‘The Violence of Bureaucracy and the Gospel of Peace: A Theological Response to an Academic Problem’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 12 (2018), 195-217.

⁶⁹ Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders?*, 57.

⁷⁰ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*, 232.

⁷¹ Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 13.

⁷² Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 18.

have to explain his every decision or for ever have to coax his people to embrace the vision that God has shown him. Gideon said, “Watch me and what I do, then do likewise.” This is one of the hallmarks of anointed leadership.⁷³

Truly ‘anointed leadership’, of course, must be correctable, not merely trusted and honoured. The question is not *whether* to hold anointed leaders accountable, but *how*. Those most animated to *stop* potential authoritarians will be less likely to direct their considerable energies to ensure prophetic and pioneering risk-taking continues to lead mission.

Accountability must be exercised Biblically, in genuine community, according to consistent and comprehensive application of Biblical principles and examples, rather than an infiltrated version of such principles led by secular postmodern anxieties over power relations. If there are attestable and consistent patterns of unrepentant sin, not a mere pattern of offence causation, then the Biblical processes for challenging such leaders should be followed.⁷⁴

Charismatic leaders exercising some form of ‘apostolic’ authority may always be prone to authoritarian abuse. However, exclusively bureaucratic or suspicious approaches to authority will inevitably stifle the very gift of pioneer apostolic leaders to herald the advance of the kingdom in fresh and incisive ways.

In a time where ‘loyalty’ to a leader is seen with increasing suspicion (not least of one calling himself a spiritual ‘father’), familial relationality will be difficult to recover if we are so afraid of safeguarding concerns that we fail to safeguard the familial bonds necessary for ongoing fruitful apostolic mission. If some churches appear content to continue without such pioneer apostolic mission, this does not mean they have faithfully ‘guarded’ all they are called to guard (cf. 2 Tim. 1:14). It may indicate a settling for something less than the frontier mission to which the Church has been called.



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⁷³ Virgo, *Men of Destiny*, 111.

⁷⁴ What should not be forgotten in this is the role of the Spirit in confrontation and reconciliation: ‘Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ (Gal. 6:1-2). The leader remains a brother in sin, who – though he himself may not have exercised gentleness in addressing others’ sin – should still be shown requisite gentleness by his addressors.

HOLISTIC, COMMUNAL, DIVERSE AND HUMBLE

A VISION FOR CHARISMATIC, DECOLONIAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Helen Collins

Ubiquitous in the literature is the assertion that Pentecostal/charismatic Christians¹ have a history of anti-intellectualism, and that they have not prioritised theological education in their missions and ministry.² Historically, Charismatics have tended to see academic study as somehow in opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit, a form of ‘dead intellectualism’³ which undermines their conviction that authority to minister comes from the Holy Spirit and not from qualifications.⁴ Study is thought to be a ‘waste of time, energy, and money,’⁵ because it is not seen as relevant to people’s lives of faith.

However, despite this scepticism towards the academy, there are an abundance of charismatic training programmes—from church-based prophecy schools, to ministry internships, to discipleship courses—which have flourished since the beginning of the Movement.⁶ Such training has often been characterised as practical and informal,⁷ teaching people what to believe, and how to encounter God, rather than how to explain or interrogate their ideas.⁸ Therefore, charismatics cannot be characterised as ‘anti-training,’ but they have often been ‘anti-academy.’

In this article, I will examine how this charismatic ambivalence towards the academy is now being voiced more widely, by Christians from a range of traditions and denominations, through

¹ For a discussion of how I am using these terms, see the Introduction of my recent publication Helen Collins, *Charismatic Christianity: Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023).

² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 243; Simo Frestadius, ‘Pentecostal Theological Education: Mapping the Historical Landscape and Reflecting on a Theological Future’, *PentecoStudies* 20, no. 1 (2021): 58; Rick M. Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds? A Call to Use God’s Gift of the Intellect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

³ Cephas N. Omenyo, ‘African Pentecostalism and Theological Education’, in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives - Regional Surveys - Ecumenical Trends*, ed. Dietrich Werner et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 744.

⁴ Leke Ogunewu, ‘Charismatic Movements and Theological Education: Past, Present and Future’, *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* XIII, no. 2 (2008): 66.

⁵ Josfin Raj, ‘“Production of Knowledge” as a Vocation of Pentecostal Theologians at the Postmodern Turn: Nurturing Research Culture Among Pentecostal Theological Educators in India’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 65.

⁶ Dietrich Werner et al., eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives - Regional Surveys - Ecumenical Trends* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010); Gary Blair McGee, *Miracles, Missions and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

⁷ Ian S. Markham, ‘Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century’, *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (2010): 157.

⁸ Paul W. Lewis, ‘Explorations in Pentecostal Theological Education’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 162; Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

the lens of a decolonial critique.⁹ I will argue that charismatic Christianity is well-placed to share insights with these works of decolonising theological education, due to four areas of shared concern: holistic engagement, communal participation, diverse contributions, and humble dependency. I will conclude by arguing that despite these areas of mutual interest, there are three areas where charismatics need to receive the insights of others: rigorous analysis, ecumenical accountability, and public dialogue.

Sharing Insights: A Charismatic, Decolonial Theological Education

Academic theological education is in crisis. Across the West, colleges, seminaries, and Higher Education providers are feeling the effects of the sharp decrease in church attendance, and are experiencing a correlated decline in student recruitment alongside a terrific escalation in the costs and compliance required to deliver their accredited programmes.¹⁰ Amid these crises, and perhaps also because of them, there are growing calls for the academy to recognise and address its damaging colonial legacy.¹¹ These decolonisation critiques highlight how Western theological education, informed by Enlightenment paradigms, has continued to privilege and centre rationalist, objective, abstract ways of knowing as the uniquely superior form of knowledge construction for all people and places. Western theological education is charged with exporting these methods around the world in ways which marginalise, ridicule, and destroy the knowledge paradigms of different cultures and contexts. The recent Eerdmans series, *Theological Education Between the Times*, invites a range of authors to reflect on their experiences of Western theological education and to reimagine what a decolonised theological education of the future needs to look like for a multicultural and global church.

Many of the themes raised in the Eerdmans series have strong resonances with charismatic Christians' experiences of being alienated from the academy. For charismatics, Western theological education has deliberately eclipsed the experiential and supernatural dimensions so central to their faith.¹² The cherished rationalism, objectivity, and criticality of the Western academy seem diametrically opposed to a charismatic approach to theological knowledge which is experiential, confessional, and missional.¹³ As such, there are clear resonances between a

⁹ 'Decolonisation as a term 'is associated with the historical process of political independence of former colonies... (but it is) a normative idea, a political and economic ideal, or an epistemic project, demonstrating the unsettled nature of its use.' David Boucher and Ayesha Omar, eds., *Decolonisation: Revolution and Evolution* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2023), Introduction.

¹⁰ Pertinent analyses of these trends can be found in Amos Yong, *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education After Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Daniel O. Aleshire, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021); Ted Smith, *The End of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023).

¹¹ For excellent analyses of these themes, see Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020); Keri Day, *Notes of a Native Daughter: Testifying in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021); Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Atando Cabos: Latinx Contributions to Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021); Vee J. D-Davidson, 'Non-Western Students in Majority World Asian Settings: Understanding and Overcoming Barriers Inherent in Cross-Cultural Teaching and Learning', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 7–20; Eve Parker, *Trust in Theological Education: Deconstructing 'Trustworthiness' for a Pedagogy of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 2022).

¹² Allan Anderson, 'The "Fury and Wonder"?: Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality in Theological Education', *Pneuma* 23, no. 2 (2001): 296; Mark J. Cartledge, 'Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy', *Pneuma* 30 (2008): 83–107.

¹³ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "'Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment" In Search of a Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education', *Pneuma* 34 (2012): 245–61; Amos Yong, 'The Spirit, Vocation, and the Life of the Mind: A Pentecostal Testimony', in *Pentecostals in the Academy: Testimonies of Call*, ed. Steven M. Fettke and Robby Waddell (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012).

decolonial and a charismatic critique, which global majority Pentecostal scholars have identified.¹⁴ I want to add to these contributions by explicitly collating areas of overlap to offer a decolonial critique of theological education which is substantiated by a charismatic theology.¹⁵ I will show how charismatic Christianity has rich insights to offer to the theological academy, and I suggest that such insights may indeed help theological education to respond better to its present crisis, and hopefully rediscover its telos to serve the global church.

1. Holistic Engagement

Both a charismatic and a decolonised vision for theological education highlight how humans are more than just ‘walking heads,’ and as such, they argue that we need an embodied, affective education and not just a rational, cerebral approach. Charismatics understand their faith in terms of orthopraxy (right practice), orthodoxy (right belief), and orthopathy (right feeling),¹⁶ and they therefore need a theological education which reflects the ways in which these mutually inform and enrich one another.¹⁷ Yong describes this as a ‘head-heart-hands’ approach to education,¹⁸ where no dimension of what it means to be human is prioritised at the expense of the others. Smith describes Pentecostals not as ‘anti-rational’ but as ‘anti-rationalist’ because they resist the elevation of reason over against all other ways of knowing.¹⁹ Thus, charismatic requires a curriculum and pedagogy which seeks to train students in reason, but also in intuition, affection, relationality, habituation, imagination, and wisdom in order that people might not just know about God, but know God in ‘dynamic, experiential, relational’ ways.²⁰

Likewise, from a non-Charismatic perspective, literature on decolonising theological education calls for a similar renewed focus on bodies as sites of knowledge which tell stories and carry understanding.²¹ For example, the way a person of colour learns to orientate their body within a white-majority space carries and communicates a history of racism and exclusion which is known through lived experience more than it is learnt through explanation. A decolonised perspective also advocates that holistic theological education needs to help us learn to love the other in the way that God does, to desire and delight in their ‘otherness,’ to grow our Eros so that we receive the other as gift, without seeking to turn them into versions of ourselves.²² Such a perspective celebrates narratives, poetry, family, art, and anecdotes as ways of knowing and living out this

¹⁴ Daniel Topf, ‘Pentecostal Theological Education in the Majority World: A Century of Overcoming Obstacles and Gaining New Ground’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 81–96; Raj, “‘Production of Knowledge’ as a Vocation of Pentecostal Theologians at the Postmodern Turn: Nurturing Research Culture Among Pentecostal Theological Educators in India”; Omenyo, ‘African Pentecostalism and Theological Education’.

¹⁵ Yong, *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education After Pentecost* is one of the few texts which explicitly brings these together, but using the language of ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘flattened world’.

¹⁶ Stephen J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT, 2010).

¹⁷ Temesgen Kahsay, ‘Theological Education in the Majority World: A Pentecostal Perspective on The Role of the Holy Spirit in Theological Education’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 101; Lewis, ‘Explorations in Pentecostal Theological Education’, 168.

¹⁸ Amos Yong, ‘Theological Education between the West and the “Rest”: A Reverse “Reverse Missionary” and Pentecostal Perspective’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 31.

¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 53.

²⁰ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 35.

²¹ Parker, *Trust in Theological Education: Deconstructing ‘Trustworthiness’ for a Pedagogy of Liberation*, chapter 2; Luke A. Powery, “‘Do This in Remembrance of Me’”: Black Bodies and the Future of Theological Education’, *Theology Today* 76, no. 4 (2019): 336–47.

²² Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, chapter 5.

love,²³ and it embraces the imagination to explore how knowledge might set hearts on fire.²⁴ A decolonial theological education recognises that formation needs to be holistic, and a charismatic theological anthropology substantiates this. It offers a theological rationale for holistic theological education: to equip the church to encounter the Spirit in embodied, affective, and cognitive ways.²⁵

2. Communal Participation

A charismatic and a decolonised approach to theological education embraces not only the holistic but also the communal and relational dimensions of our humanity. For charismatics, theological education must take place in community because it is orientated to ministry, which is all about being with and for other people. An education for ministry requires a spiritual, ethical, and relational formation which can only happen in a community.²⁶ Charismatics recognise that what we know of God, we know together as the body of Christ joined by the Spirit. It is this church context within which individual encounters with God find shape, language and purpose, and so knowledge is socially and ecclesially produced.²⁷ Such knowledge is held within and disseminated for the strengthening of the church, which is the primary motivation for all study.²⁸ For charismatics, theological knowledge is also necessarily missional, always orientated to the transformation of an ‘ever-expanding audience’²⁹ as other people come to hear and receive the gospel. Therefore, theological study must always be done with and for others, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

In a related way, the decolonising perspectives focus on the importance of education in and through networks and communities. Liu Wong recognises the importance of family, friends, and neighbours in the theological formation process, and describes ways that her college seeks to include communities, churches, and neighbourhoods in the students’ education.³⁰ Sun describes her Chinese-American diaspora college, and the ways that multilingual instruction enables students to learn in ways which do not separate them from the communities to whom they are called to minister.³¹ Jennings emphasises the importance of building together, where diverse people have space to bring their contributions, recognising that we all have only fragments of knowledge. People then co-labour to join their fragments together and create something new and inclusive.³² Decolonial theological education must allow participation in ways which build and sustain community, and thus promote inclusion. A charismatic ecclesiology can offer a robust, theological rationale for this work of communal participation, especially through the gifts of the Spirit and the body of Christ metaphor. A decolonised and charismatic theological

²³ Maria Liu Wong, *On Becoming Wise Together: Learning and Leading in the City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023).

²⁴ Mark D. Jordan, *Transforming Fire: Imagining Christian Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

²⁵ I discuss these themes further in Collins, *Charismatic Christianity: Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit*, Chapter 3.

²⁶ Lewis, ‘Explorations in Pentecostal Theological Education’, 171.

²⁷ Raj, “‘Production of Knowledge’ as a Vocation of Pentecostal Theologians at the Postmodern Turn: Nurturing Research Culture Among Pentecostal Theological Educators in India”, 71.

²⁸ Daniel Chiquete, ‘Pentecostalism, Ecumenism and Theological Education in Latin American Perspective’, in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives - Regional Surveys - Ecumenical Trends*, ed. Dietrich Werner et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 738.

²⁹ Yong, ‘Theological Education between the West and the “Rest”: A Reverse “Reverse Missionary” and Pentecostal Perspective’, 26.

³⁰ Wong, *On Becoming Wise Together: Learning and Leading in the City*.

³¹ Chloe Sun, *Attempting Great Things for God: Theological Education in Diaspora* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

³² Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*.

education would encourage and equip people with a broad spectrum of spiritual gifts for the building up of the whole body.

3. Diverse Contributions

Building upon the previous points, charismatic and decolonial theological education which is holistic and communal must also celebrate the *diverse* contributions of all peoples, and not just continue to centre White, Euro-American perspectives. Early global Pentecostals had few books or scholars of their own to learn from, and so much of their thinking was imported from the West. This importation came mostly through missionaries who brought their ideas, their books and their money and inserted them into other cultures without recognising the dissonance and damage this created.³³ Yong highlights how the many tongues of Pentecostal is the theological rationale and impetus for a pedagogy which embraces many voices and does not prioritise one global perspective over another.³⁴ God delighted to pour the Spirit upon the church, creating a cacophony of sounds from all tribes and nations, each declaring the wonders of God in their own languages. As such, the Spirit embraces and accentuates diversity and difference for the glory of God. Likewise, it is the vision of the Spirit poured out on all flesh in Acts 2.17-18 which means that knowledge of God is for *all* people: men and women, young and old, slave and free. The Spirit is for all without exception and therefore knowledge of God is accessible to and witnessed within each individual life baptised in the Spirit. This means that there must be a democratisation of study for charismatics, so that all people, regardless of background or status, can access theological education. Moreover, because of their personal encounters with the Spirit, each person must also be able to contribute to the content and shape of that education, and not just be the recipients of others' ideas.³⁵

Within much of the literature on decolonising theological education, there is a recognition of the ways in which Western forms of education have excluded global majority participants. D-Davidson catalogues the various ways that Asian theology students are disadvantaged when Western concepts of time, communication, power, identity, relations, and achievements are all baked-in to the content and form of the theological curriculum.³⁶ Naidoo demonstrates how so much of the formation in a college happens within the 'hidden curriculum' of the educational culture and ethos, where often, ethnicism, racism and sexism roam unchecked.³⁷ Powery also catalogues the ways in which Western theological education has wounded and excluded black bodies and denied them participation in theological construction.³⁸ In these ways, decolonial critiques highlight the injustice of the present systems of exclusion, and advocate for a more diverse, inclusive theological education where the different contributions can be heard and received. Decolonial theological education must enable the contributions of all people as a matter of justice. Charismatic theological education builds on this important contribution to

³³ Topf, 'Pentecostal Theological Education in the Majority World: A Century of Overcoming Obstacles and Gaining New Ground'; Omenyo, 'African Pentecostalism and Theological Education'.

³⁴ Yong, 'Theological Education between the West and the "Rest": A Reverse "Reverse Missionary" and Pentecostal Perspective'.

³⁵ Wonsuk Ma, 'Theological Education in Pentecostal Churches: Theological Education in Pentecostal Churches in Asia', in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives - Regional Surveys - Ecumenical Trends*, ed. Dietrich Werner et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 733.

³⁶ D-Davidson, 'Non-Western Students in Majority World Asian Settings: Understanding and Overcoming Barriers Inherent in Cross-Cultural Teaching and Learning'.

³⁷ Marilyn Naidoo, 'Exploring Integrative Ministerial Education in African Theological Institutions', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 2 (2021): 223-33.

³⁸ Powery, "'Do This in Remembrance of Me": Black Bodies and the Future of Theological Education'.

show that precisely because the Spirit is poured out on all flesh without partiality, all people are included, not just because it is fair and right, but because God delights in and loves diversity.

4. Humble Dependency

The above summaries of a decolonised theological education highlight that future approaches need to be much humbler and more tentative than they have been in the past. If theological education is to be communal and diverse, it will invariably involve wrestling with dissonant perspectives and ideas. Teachers and students will require humility in sharing what they know, and dependency on one another as they seek to bring their fragments together. Jennings rejects traditional theological education because its goal is colonial: to form ‘a white, self-sufficient man, his self-sufficiency defined by possession, control and mastery.’³⁹ A decolonised theological education must reject all attempts to master knowledge, skills, people, or places and instead embrace humility and mutual dependency. This requires a curriculum which teaches humility and dependency in holistic, integrated ways: intellectually, affectively, and habitually.⁴⁰

For charismatics, this humble dependency relates to our mutuality and reciprocity with our fellow brothers and sisters, but it also flows from the fact that all our knowledge of God comes to us as an encounter with the Spirit. The Spirit is our primary teacher, leading us into all truth (John 16.13) in experiential ways, and tangibly empowering us for teaching and learning. Kahsay argues that classrooms need to be spaces where the presence of the Spirit is a reality rather than just an idea,⁴¹ where the teacher is recognised first as a Spirit-filled witness and only secondarily as an expert in a particular area of academic study.⁴² Charismatic learning environments are where we approach not just others with humility and a sense of mutual dependency, but where we affirm God as the one on whom we all depend for theological insight. Charismatics invite this God, in Christ, to be an active, discernible participant in the classroom, giving gifts of revelation, insight and wisdom, as the Spirit wills. A charismatic perspective can therefore further strengthen and enliven the rationale for a decolonised theological education which embodies humble dependence.

Receiving Insights: Theological Education for Charismatics

So far, I have argued that charismatic Christianity has much in common with decolonial approaches to theological education, and that it can provide a robust theological rationale for a future decolonised education which is holistic, communal, diverse, and humble. However, in the spirit of humility, community and diversity so far outlined, charismatics also need to recognise that they have things to learn from others about theological education, as well as having things to give. To conclude this article, I will apply the four themes so far discussed to areas where I suggest charismatics have more learning to do: rigorous analysis, ecumenical accountability, and public dialogue.

³⁹ Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, 6.

⁴⁰ Jonathan D. Worthington and Everett L. Worthington Jr., ‘Spiritual Formation by Training Leaders in Their Indigenous Cultures: The Importance of Cultural Humility and Virtue Theory’, *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 12, no. 1 (2018): 112–34.

⁴¹ Kahsay, ‘Theological Education in the Majority World: A Pentecostal Perspective on The Role of the Holy Spirit in Theological Education’, 101.

⁴² Kahsay, 100.

1. Rigorous Analysis

A theological education informed by holistic engagement means charismatics should not elevate rational ways of thinking, but neither should they denigrate them. The life of the mind is just as important for a rounded faith as is right feeling and right action. Charismatics need to be more comfortable allowing their cherished beliefs to be analysed and interrogated, to ensure they truly are leading us into truth.⁴³ As Yong reminds us: ‘unless we Pentecostals develop and model the possibility of a Spirit-filled life of the mind, our children will not be inspired to earnestly seek after the life of the Spirit.’⁴⁴ He highlights Luke 10:27 where Jesus affirms the lawyer’s answer that loving God involves all of our heart, soul, strength *and* mind. Charismatics would do well to encourage, affirm, and pursue theological education at all levels, such that they can develop practices of rigorous analysis, not for the tearing apart of their beliefs, but so that they might be rightly weighed and tested.⁴⁵ To do so is to exercise the gift of discernment given to the church through the Spirit.

2. Ecumenical Accountability

A theological education informed by communal participation does not mean engaging only with other charismatics or Pentecostals, but it is about recognising that we are part of the global body of Christ through the Spirit, and thus we have things to learn from other denominations. Chan argues for the need for charismatics to have better traditioning processes, where ‘tradition’ is just another name for the Spirit’s ongoing work in the history of the church.⁴⁶ Therefore, we need to give careful attention to what God has done throughout history, and what God is presently doing within other denominations. This careful study will help charismatics to broaden and deepen their love for the God who transcends all human institutions and structures. Ogunewu laments the ways in which theological colleges in Nigeria, and no doubt in the UK, are often run by people with limited training and without external scrutiny, and thus they become theologically impoverished and isolated.⁴⁷ Charismatics would do well to celebrate the ways in which they can learn from and be accountable to their brothers and sisters in other denominations. To do so is to embody the Holy Spirit’s ministry of reconciliation, participating with the Spirit in the work of bringing unity to Christ’s body.⁴⁸

3. Public Dialogue

A theological education informed by diverse contributions does not mean only engaging with other Christians in our pursuit of knowing and loving God. It also means being willing to dialogue with other faith perspectives, with other academic disciplines, and with non-believers. This is both so that we might learn from others, and also be better equipped to share the gospel in ways which connect beyond the church. Raj argues that theological educators should also be activists, participating in public debate and being willing to engage beyond the boundaries of the

⁴³ Cartledge, ‘Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor’s Agenda for Church and Academy’, 88.

⁴⁴ Yong, ‘The Spirit, Vocation, and the Life of the Mind: A Pentecostal Testimony’.

⁴⁵ Karkkainen, ‘“Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment” In Search of a Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education’, 253.

⁴⁶ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 35.

⁴⁷ Ogunewu, ‘Charismatic Movements and Theological Education: Past, Present and Future’, 75.

⁴⁸ Raymond Pfister, ‘An Urgent Plea for a Real Ecumenism of the Spirit: Revisiting Evangelicalism and Ecumenism within Pentecostal-Charismatic Theological Education’, *Evangel* 26, no. 1 (2008): 21–27.

church for the sake of the gospel.⁴⁹ Charismatics would do well to cultivate relationships and opportunities where these conversations can happen. We can recognise our humble dependency on others by getting involved in situations and conversations of public concern, such as the environmental crisis, racial justice, disability rights, technological usage, and corporate responsibility. To do so is to embrace our solidarity with our fellow creatures as part of God's loved, broken, redeemed world. To participate in public dialogue is to witness to the Spirit's ongoing work of renewing the whole creation as we await Christ's return.

Conclusion

My prayer is that contemporary charismatics might boldly embrace a renewed, theological education in ways which further encourage and facilitate the work of decolonising academic study. That in doing so, they might help to set a new agenda and shape the future of education, even leading the way for other Christian denominations. My hope is that together, the global church might better bear witness to the kingdom of God through a theological education which is diverse, communal, holistic and humble. I desire that through these endeavours, charismatics might be more rigorously analytical in their thinking, more ecumenically accountable in their practices, and more fervent in publicly dialoguing across divides, all to the glory of God.



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⁴⁹ Raj, "Production of Knowledge" as a Vocation of Pentecostal Theologians at the Postmodern Turn: Nurturing Research Culture Among Pentecostal Theological Educators in India', 74.

THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

AS PREACHED BY AFRICAN NEO-PENTECOSTAL PASTORAL LEADERS IN THE BRITISH CONTEXT

Eben Adu

Pentecostalism is experiencing phenomenal growth, especially in the global South, but the global North is also experiencing exponential growth and influence, particularly within the African-led neo-Pentecostal tradition. The neo-Pentecostals are ‘founder-led independent churches that share phenomenological similarities with North America's new paradigm churches.’¹ The neo-Pentecostals, besides their ‘general Pentecostal orientation, also preach a gospel of success, positives and prosperity, with a very international orientation.’² Among this group is a growing number of Christians from Africa, particularly those from Ghana and Nigeria, who are championing a brand of Christianity in Britain with much emphasis on experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in their meetings and lives.³

These churches primarily worship in English but sustain a cultural and ecclesiastical identity from their country of origin, though with a strong North American influence. There are several distinctive ‘cultural and theological markers for Black churches in the African Diaspora,’ of which the African-led Pentecostal community in Britain is part.⁴ However, their beliefs and practices have been impacted to some extent by their African cultural and theological backgrounds and that of North American neo-Pentecostal pastoral leadership praxis.⁵ Even though there are several influences from North American Pentecostal pastoral leadership on their African counterparts, such as the style of worship (primarily black American gospel music), leadership structure, and preaching styles, this article considers the impact of North American neo-Pentecostal pastoral leadership on the African-led counterparts in British society in the light of prosperity theology.

I will also consider the varying ways pastoral leaders approach the teaching of prosperity. Some are extreme on this subject, but there are also those who are much more balanced in their theology, as well as those who repudiate the teaching of prosperity altogether. Current denunciations of the prosperity teaching by Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar have caught public attention. Such denunciations from such influential figures have not gone down well with many

¹ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Anointing Through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana,’ *Studies in World Christianity*, 11, 1 (2005), 9-28.

² Ibid., 9; R Burgess, *Nigerian Pentecostalism and Civic Engagement: Mission in the Midst of Poverty and Violence*. http://www.tcn.org/articles/RB58_Burgess.pdf. Date of access: 30 December 2023.

³ Babatunde Adedibu, *The Urban Explosion of Black Majority Churches: Their Origin, Growth, Distinctives and Contribution to British Christianity*. Potchefstroom: NWU. (Thesis-Ph.D.), 293.

⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁵ Paul Gifford, ‘Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,’ *Christian Century*, (2007) 124(14): 20-24; cf. Babatunde Adedibu, 2010. 55.

leading figures within the neo-Pentecostal movement globally. Besides, COVID-19 has challenged many who firmly held to prosperity teaching without giving much room for suffering. This has led to sober reflection by many.

I will, therefore, take a much more nuanced view of prosperity and posit that its teaching by pastoral leaders from the African neo-Pentecostal tradition in the British context has some influence from their North-American counterparts. It also has an element of the African traditional view of prosperity and is part and parcel of the theology of most African neo-Pentecostal pastoral leaders. Of course, some are gradually moving away from an extreme form of prosperity that does not embrace the concept of suffering.

For this article I have drawn on part of my PhD thesis,⁶ informal conversations with pastoral leaders within the African neo-Pentecostal tradition in the UK context (particularly in London), interactions with literary sources, and my observations via varied sources, including social media, of how the concept of prosperity has been delineated by its proponents globally.

Who are Neo-Pentecostals?

In this article I am particularly concerned with neo-Pentecostals.⁷ Neo-Pentecostals are 'founded [often established by a charismatic leader], independent churches that share phenomenological similarities with North America's new paradigm churches.' Besides their 'general Pentecostal orientation,' they 'preach a gospel of success, positives, and prosperity, with a very international orientation.'⁸ In other words, most neo-Pentecostal churches or denominations are led by a charismatic leader, often male, who emphasises the works of the Holy Spirit with prosperity or success-motivated teachings. So, churches led by many North American independent Pentecostals fall under this category. Diaspora churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) fall under neo-Pentecostalism with an African twist to it (even though RCCG started as a non-charismatic denomination, it has evolved over the years under the leadership of Enoch Adeboye). Ruach City Church, London, is a typical example of a neo-Pentecostal church. However, as indicated earlier, they do not all subscribe to the same theological views. Some African diaspora neo-Pentecostals are not heavily prosperity-orientated as they have moved away from such teaching. Thus, we have varied expressions within neo-Pentecostalism.

An Overview of the Prosperity Gospel

As a student of Global Pentecostalism, I know the challenges and difficulties inherent in the teachings of prosperity. I am also mindful of the overgeneralisation made towards Pentecostals as proponents of the prosperity gospel; not all Pentecostals teach the concept of prosperity.

I want to state that I do not affirm the blatant misapplication of Scripture to achieve preconceived teaching on prosperity. I do not subscribe to the teaching of prosperity, which says God wants *all* Christians to be wealthy and not experience 'suffering' (the extreme form of prosperity teaching). However, the Bible is not against God blessing Christian individuals with

⁶ E Adu, *Pastoral Leadership among African-led Pentecostal Churches in the Context of British Society*, (PhD thesis, North-West University, 2015).

⁷ Ibid. Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?' 2009, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/november/main.html>. Accessed 10/01/2024.

⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005, 'Anointing through the screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana,' *Studies in World Christianity*, 11(1), 9-28.

financial substance for kingdom purposes. The Bible is replete with individuals God blessed in wealth for His purposes. For example, Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27.57-61); Joseph (Barnabas) who sold land and distributed the proceeds (Acts 4.33-37); and (1 Timothy 6.17) encouraged the rich in this world to not put their trust in it, but in God 'who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon are examples of 'prosperous' individuals.

Biblically, there is nothing wrong with some Christians being blessed financially as long as it does not distract them from serving God. The Bible is not against Christians doing well in their chosen fields of endeavour and honouring God. But it discourages us from trusting money and lusting after it (Matthew 6.19-34; 1 Timothy 6.10-20).

What is the Prosperity Gospel?

The concept of prosperity is understood and practised differently by differing strands of Pentecostalism and enjoys broader support than one might imagine.⁹ The 'prosperity gospel,' also known as the 'prosperity message,' 'Faith and Word movement,' 'health and wealth,' 'Name it and Claim it,' or even 'Blab it and grab it,' is strongly associated with global neo-Pentecostalism.¹⁰ The prosperity gospel proponents argue that "Just as God by His faith spoke the universe into existence, so also Christians can speak things into existence or conceive of things in their mind and speak them into reality."¹¹ This theology is firmly rooted in the teaching of E. W. Kenyon, arguably the first advocate of the prosperity gospel.¹² The common assertion by teachers of the prosperity gospel is that God wants his people (believers) to be prosperous financially, materially, and in every area of their lives.

The Lausanne Theology Working Group defines prosperity gospel as "The teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the "sowing of seeds" through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings."¹³ Hellstern sees the prosperity or faith teaching as the notion that a Christian 'should and can live in perpetual divine health and material abundance and that one should learn to exercise his or her faith to appropriate those blessings.'¹⁴ Paul Gifford on his view of the prosperity gospel comments that the 'theme of success' runs through the presentation of prosperity gospel which sees God meeting 'all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in Christ's victory over sin,

⁹ E B Adu, In *African Voices : Towards African British Theologies*, Israel Olinjana (ed.), Pp227-247; see Debra J Munford, "Prosperity Gospel and African American Prophetic Preaching," *Review and Expositor*, 109 (2012), 365-385; Glyn Williams, *The Prosperity Gospel's Effect in Missions: An African Perspective*, 2017; Hermen, Kroesbergen. *The Prosperity Gospel: A Way to Reclaim Dignity*, In Hermen Kroesbergen *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, 74-84

¹⁰ Larry Eskride, 'Prosperity Gospel is Surprising Mainstream, 2013,' see David, Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 6,11.

¹¹ Allan Anderson. *The Pentecostal Gospel, Religion and Culture in African Perspective*.

<https://www.slideshare.net/ipermaster/allan-anderson-the-pentecostal-gospel-religion-and-culture>; see Ken L Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (October-December 1986), 339-352

¹² OluGbenga Olagunju, 'Health and Wealth Gospel in the Context of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria,' *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, XIV (2009), 149-150.

¹³ The Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34,2 (2010), 99.

¹⁴ M. Hellstern, "The Me Gospel: An Examination of the Historical Roots of the Prosperity Emphasis within Current Charismatic Theology," *Fides et Historia* 21,3 (1989),78.

sickness, and poverty-blessings which can be obtained by a confession of faith.¹⁵ Gifford adds that the prosperity teaching is associated with the concepts of ‘seed faith’ or the biblical image of ‘sowing and reaping.’¹⁶

Most proponents of the prosperity message do not only see spiritual salvation as the end of God's redemptive plan for believers but also that God wants believers to prosper spiritually, physically, emotionally, and materially. Its extreme form states that *all* Christians are to be rich materially and do well in life; one could call it a gospel of materialism. To experience this well-being, one could ‘sow,’ giving money to an anointed man or woman of God, a Christian organisation or church, or make positive confessions. Some do not teach their adherents the need to develop a hard work ethic to prosper but only encourage their followers to give ‘special offerings.’ Some teach their followers the importance of hard work alongside giving to prosper. The prosperity teaching has strong links to North American neo-Pentecostal preachers like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, John Avanzini, Mike Murdoch, Creflo Dollar, etc. It has found fertile ground in majority world contexts like Asia, Africa, Latin America, and wherever you see this tradition of Pentecostalism. Thus, you will discover a variety of diaspora Pentecostal churches, be it African, Asian, or Latin American, espousing this teaching.

Why has prosperity teaching flourished and spread globally, particularly in developing countries and their diaspora?

First, Pentecostalism started as an anti-intellectual movement in terms of theological education. Hence, some early pioneers read the Scriptures the way they saw fit.¹⁷ In other words, biblical texts were applied to their immediate contexts without much hermeneutical and exegetical consideration for the reader to grasp the nuances of the text. This has led to what is known as proof-texting—in other words, applying the scriptures out of context. Others argue that due to the unique Pentecostal reception of the biblical text, often described as ‘pneumatic exegesis,’¹⁸ Pentecostals exegete the text in a Spirit-empowered way. In other words, what the Holy Spirit says to the reader of the text is especially important. So, the typical traditional evangelical hermeneutical approach, the historical-critical method of looking at a biblical text, may not be used in biblical exegesis by most African neo-Pentecostal pastoral leaders (unless trained theologically). This has led to the use of biblical texts in the authorised version, like ‘Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth’ (3 John 2 KJV), as one of the Biblical passages in prosperity teaching without much consideration to what this particular text means in context.

Another text often used to justify prosperity teaching is Galatians 3.13-14, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.’ This text, particularly the ‘blessing of Abraham,’ is taught to mean material prosperity because

¹⁵ Paul Gifford, “Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” *The Christian Century*, 124 (2007), 20-24.

¹⁶ Ibid.20

¹⁷ Wolfgang Vondey, Jan 2023, 'Pentecostal Theology', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al.

<https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/PentecostalTheology#:~:text=With%20the%20waning%20of%20traditional,o n%20an%20experiential%20encounter%20with> Accessed 10 November 2023.

¹⁸ Ervin, H.M., “Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal option,” in Sandidge, J.L. *Roman Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue (1971-1982): study in developing ecumenism*, (1987), 100-121.

Abraham was blessed with cattle, sheep, servants, etc. However, in its context the text is about God's salvific plan for humankind. The 'blessing of Abraham' is the blessing of salvation, not necessarily wealth.

Secondly, prosperity theology has flourished globally, particularly in developing countries and their diaspora, because of poverty and lack of basic amenities. Most diaspora first-generation neo-Pentecostal Christians come from such places and have brought a prosperity orientation to the UK and the West. The preaching of prosperity gives people in these contexts and the diaspora some level of hope, knowing that accepting Christ as one's saviour is not a licence to be condemned to poverty but an opportunity to do well in life.

Due to the African worldview of prosperity, prosperity theology has attracted many new followers, particularly in Africa and the diaspora. It has tapped into the 'African notion of prosperity, which should be described in terms of the African worldview and traditional religions, and its appeal to the deep longings of every human heart for peace, health, happiness, wealth, and prosperity.'¹⁹

For those in the diaspora, whether from Africa, Asia, or Latin America, a message of prosperity gives many the impetus to work hard and flourish. Prosperity may mean buying a house, owning a decent car, having a lovely family, and remitting family members back home—particularly among Africans—due to economic hardships. The prosperity message encourages adherents to climb the economic ladder and afford some things they could not.

The Impact of North American Prosperity Theology on African Pastoral Leaders

There are different views concerning the source of the prosperity gospel taught in Africa and its diaspora, particularly in Britain. Some theologians argue that African Traditional religious ideals and North American neo-Pentecostalism influence the prosperity gospel within African Pentecostalism.²⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu does not believe that, 'contemporary African Pentecostalism is a North American import.' He postulates that, 'The argument that Africa's new Christianity is a clone of North American Christian fundamentalism ignores the internal dynamics of transformative religious encounters around which the testimonies of African Christians revolve.'²¹ However, he admits that the prosperity gospel pursues 'North American levels of materialism.'²² Others see the 'prosperity gospel' as an American influence on African Pentecostalism in 'both theology and organisational structure and practice.'²³ Ruggles writes, 'Our Western prosperity gospel, exported and preached in many Pentecostal African churches, has found fertile soil in the hearts and empty wallets of these impoverished people.'²⁴ However,

¹⁹ Nel, M., *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020). <https://www.perlego.com/book/1707199/>

²⁰ Kwabena, Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Encountering Jesus in African Christianity: A Ghanaian evangelical/pentecostal thought on faith, experience, and hope in Christ,' *HTS*, 62, 2 (2006a):364.

²¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Did Jesus Really Wear Designer Robes?' <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/november/index.html?start=2> Accessed: 15 December 2023

²² Ibid.,

²³ Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2008), p.13; see also Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp.216.

²⁴ Brad Ruggles, 'Exporting the Prosperity Gospel to Africa?'

Kalu points out that the relationship between an African Pentecostal pastor and their 'Western patron' has been eclectic and 'dependency mutual.'²⁵ There is the suggestion that Western proponents of prosperity theology often need their African counterparts to enhance their international status and enrich their financial resources.²⁶

Ojo (1996:106), writing from the Nigerian context, states, 'Nigeria, the prosperity and success narratives were locally developed as a response to the socio-economic changes of the 1880s.'²⁷ This view is contrary to those who see a North American influence.²⁸ Gerloff suggests that,

American-style evangelical and prosperity religion with an emphasis on deliverance from evil forces have influenced churches in West Africa [in the diaspora as well] and have placed the traditional understanding of the cosmic struggle in the realm of Christian beliefs.²⁹

Burgess points out that 'though the prosperity ideas resonated with traditional piety and satisfied local religious demands, they were expressed in standard American.'³⁰ The influence of North American Pentecostal leaders on African Pentecostal leaders both in Africa and the diaspora is often acknowledged, as Gifford referring to Ayedepo, one of the leading African Pentecostal figures who champions the prosperity message, with churches in Africa, North America, and Europe including Britain, claims, 'The Lord has told him that Hagin's "baton has been passed" to him and that [he] received Copeland's anointing by sleeping in a bed once slept in by Copeland.'³¹ Adeboye, the General Overseer of Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal denomination with branches all over the world, including Britain, was a regular participant in Hagin's annual conventions beginning in 1979, some years before he re-structured the RCCG.³² Gifford claims he once heard in Ghana the Nigerian Matthew Ashimolowo, the Senior Pastor of the largest African-led Pentecostal church in Western Europe with its headquarters now in Chatham, Kent, tell a congregation that if they had ever heard a sermon on sowing, it had probably originated from Mike Murdock.³³

<http://www.bradruggles.com/2010/08/04/exporting-the-prosperity-gospel-to-africa/> Accessed: 20 December 2023.

²⁵ Kalu, Ogbu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

²⁶ Roswith Gerloff, *The African Christian Diaspora in Europe: Religious and Cultural Aspects*. (Paper for the IAMS Assembly in Malaysia, 2004). P.18

http://www.missionstudies.org/archive/conference/1papers/fp/Roswith_Gerloff_New_Full_paper.pdf Date of access: 20 January 2014.

²⁷ Matthews Ojo, "Charismatic Movements in Africa," in *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s*, Christopher Fyfe and Andrew F. Walls, eds. (University of Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 1996), 106.

²⁸ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst and Co., 1998), 368; Roswith Gerloff, *The African Christian Diaspora in Europe: Religious and Cultural Aspects*. (Paper for the IAMS Assembly in Malaysia, 2004). P.18.

²⁹ Roswith Gerloff, *The African Christian Diaspora in Europe: Religious and Cultural Aspects*. (Paper for the IAMS Assembly in Malaysia, 2004). P.18

http://www.missionstudies.org/archive/conference/1papers/fp/Roswith_Gerloff_New_Full_paper.pdf

³⁰ Richard Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution. The Civil War Revival and its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)* (Carlisle: Regnum/Paternoster, 2008a), 235-6.

³¹ Paul Gifford, "Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa," *Christian Century*, 124(14) (2007), 24; cf. Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2008), 154.

³² *Ibid.*, 24

³³ *Ibid.*, 24

These claims attest to the fact that the prosperity gospel preached by African pastoral leaders in Africa and Britain is influenced to an extent by North American neo-Pentecostal pastoral figures, even though it is expressed differently contextually.

Criticisms Levelled Against the Prosperity Gospel

One major criticism levelled against prosperity preachers is the lavish lifestyles they live.³⁴ The major proponents of the prosperity gospel in North America and certain parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America own private jets, plush homes, flashy cars, spend holidays at luxurious places, and mouth-watering salaries.³⁵ However, most pastors within the neo-Pentecostal tradition, whether in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the diaspora, do not live luxuriously as the few proponents do. For instance, Pentecostal diaspora pastors I know work hard at night jobs as security men while having other day jobs to maintain their homes and keep their churches afloat. Prosperity is relative. What an African or a diaspora neo-Pentecostal might call ‘prosperity’ can be considered basic in the eyes of a Westerner. Having a car (often secondhand), regular work and a family is deemed prosperity within an African context and, to some extent, those in diaspora communities—of course, some are financially wealthy but are in the minority compared to the general demographic—but this might be basic for most people in the West. Thus, the criticism of living a lavish lifestyle must be addressed appropriately.

Others have criticised the prosperity gospel preaching as benefiting only the preachers, not experienced and shared by all, especially the congregants.³⁶ Israel Olofinjana posits that prosperity should be seen from the view of shared blessings. That is, God’s blessings in terms of finances should not be enjoyed by individuals at the expense of others. The need to share one’s blessings with others is a communal form of prosperity (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37).³⁷ He observes, “The hermeneutic lens through which Scripture is read and reinterpreted will be the community, and this will be valid as it resonates with the culture of the Israelites in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. This paradigm also resonates with African and Caribbean solidarity concepts, where the community comes first before individuals.”³⁸

³⁴ Lovemore Togarasei, “African Gospreneurship: Assessing the Possible Contribution of the Gospel of Prosperity to Entrepreneurship in Light of Jesus’s Teaching on Earthly Possessions,” in *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, ed. Hermen Kroesbergen (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014), 110-125; see Victor Chilenje, “The Challenges of the Prosperity Gospel for Reformed/ Presbyterian Churches in the Twenty-First Century” in *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, ed. Hermen Kroesbergen (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014), pp.3-18.

³⁵ E B Adu, “The Impact of North American neo-Pentecostal Pastoral Leadership on their African Counterparts in British Society in the Light of Prosperity Theology Gospel,” in *African Voices : Towards African British Theologies*, Israel Olofinjana (ed.), (Carlise, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2017), 227-247; see Debra J Munford, “Prosperity Gospel and African American Prophetic Preaching,” *Review and Expositor*, 109 (2012), 365-385; Glyn Williams, *The Prosperity Gospel’s Effect in Missions: An African Perspective*, 2017; Hermen, Kroesbergen. *The Prosperity Gospel: A Way to Reclaim Dignity*, In Hermen Kroesbergen *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, 74-84

³⁶ Mwita Akiri, *The Prosperity Gospel: It’s Concise Theology, Challenges, and Opportunities*, A Presentation at Gafcon Jerusalem Congress, 2018 <https://www.gafcon.org/resources/the-prosperity-gospel-its-concise-theology-challenges-and-opportunities>. Accessed 01/02/2024

³⁷ Israel Olofinjana, *Towards A Prosperity Gospel of Liberation*. <https://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2012/02/20/towards-a-prosperity-gospel-of-liberation/> Accessed 10 November 2023.

³⁸ Ibid.

Another criticism raised against preachers of prosperity is taking biblical passages out of context and propounding the teaching of wealth.³⁹ As highlighted earlier, this comes from reading the text in a spirit-inspired way, which some Pentecostal preachers call ‘revelation.’ Thus, gaining insight into a text by divine revelation gives deeper meaning to a biblical text through the agency of the Holy Spirit, sometimes leading to an allegorical reading of the Bible.

The prosperity gospel has had its fair share of criticism for being light on suffering but heavy on Christians’ prospering. This criticism has its place because most proponents of the message of prosperity do not emphasise the pain, suffering, and challenges Christians face. Some will argue that looking at the contexts—also including diaspora neo-Pentecostals—of recipients of the prosperity gospel, a context of pain and suffering communities, such a gospel comes to lift them out of poverty and misery. Those in the West—particularly indigenous communities—blessed with many social amenities and structures, may not fully understand the contexts in which such messages flourish. The prosperity message also makes sense to most neo-Pentecostals in the British context and the West because of the challenges they face. It is a context of pain, inequality, and suffering; hence, a message of hope and the ability to progress in life encourages and motivates the adherents. Togarasei calls it ‘Gosprenurship.’⁴⁰ It is a message of empowerment that looks at every aspect of one's life. Proponents of the prosperity message are of the view that Jesus Christ taught, preached, healed the sick, and fed the hungry (Matt 4.23-24; 10.35). A prosperity message is seen as a holistic message that seeks to address the people's spiritual, social, physical, and existential needs. However, the Bible is clear on the sufferings of Christians (Psalm 34.19; Isaiah 43.2; John 16.33; Rom 5.3-4; 2 Cor 1.3-4; Gal 6.2; James 1.12; 1 Pet 4.12-13), and any preaching or teaching devoid of that falls short of the whole gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ- a balanced presentation of the gospel must be encouraged.

Some neo-Pentecostal pastoral leaders worldwide are moving away from this heavy triumphalist message and embracing a much-balanced gospel teaching. Besides, COVID-19 has come to expose such one-sided teaching of prosperity devoid of suffering and eschatological significance, as it has proven to be a ‘theologically challenging endeavour.’⁴¹

Current State of the Prosperity Gospel Preaching

The teaching of prosperity by most neo-Pentecostal preachers has come under much criticism from those within the tradition. A couple of leading proponents of the prosperity gospel, Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar have recently denounced some practices of prosperity teaching. Benny Hinn criticised and denounced the practice of ‘seed sowing’ and felt it was unbiblical.⁴² Also recently, Creflo Dollar has questioned the idea of believers paying tithes to receive God’s

³⁹ Ervin, H.M., “Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal option,” in Sandidge, J.L. *Roman Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue (1971-1982): study in developing ecumenism*, (1987), 100-121. See also Nel, M., *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020). <https://www.perlego.com/book/1707199>

⁴⁰ Lovemore Togarasei. ‘African Gosprenurship: Assessing the Possible Contributing of the Gospel of Prosperity to Entrepreneurship in Light of Jesus’s Teaching on Earthly Possessions,’ In, *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African Reformed Perspective*, Herman Kroesbergen (ed.) pp110-125

⁴¹ K Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Pentecostalism and Coronavirus,’ *Spiritus* (6.1, 2021), 157–74.

⁴² Leonardo, Blair, Benny Hinn renounces prosperity gospel, say Holy Ghost is just fed up with it. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/benny-hinn-renounces-prosperity-gospel-says-holy-ghost-is-just-fed-up-with-it.html>. Accessed 10th March 2024; see also Steven Kozar, Benny Hinn: Pretending to Change His False ‘Seed Offering’ Sales Pitch. <https://www.themessedupchurch.com/blog/benny-hinn-pretending-to-change-his-false-seed-offering-sales-pitch>. Date of Access: 10/03/2024

blessing. He believed it was unbiblical; therefore, his congregants should do away with his tapes, books, and videos on the teaching.⁴³ These renunciations have not been uncriticised by other prosperity theology proponents who disagree with Creflo Dollar and Benny Hinn.⁴⁴ Observing the responses of some leading figures within the neo-Pentecostal movement on social media and conferences, I would say most of them are not in tune with the positions of Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar. Most preachers within the neo-Pentecostal tradition, particularly the ‘Word of Faith’ preachers, view such renunciations as unhealthy and unbiblical. They believe there is a place for such teachings and practices.

Apart from some influential figures within the neo-Pentecostal movement renouncing some of the teachings and practices underpinning prosperity teaching, by my association with some church leaders within the movement in the British context, I have seen a shift towards much more balanced teaching on prosperity or what others see as the blessings of God. Some African neo-Pentecostal pastoral leaders are beginning to question the one-sided triumphalistic teaching of prosperity and embracing a much more biblical position which looks at prosperity holistically.

COVID-19 has also made some proponents of the prosperity theology evaluate their teaching as faithful believers lost their lives and others lost their family members.⁴⁵ Some have criticised the prosperity gospel in the face of COVID-19.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The teaching of prosperity is part and parcel of the neo-Pentecostal movement. The degree to which prosperity is preached depends on who you encounter based on their theology and interpretation of the Bible. Even though the designation ‘Prosperity Gospel’ is a pejorative expression to characterise adherents of neo-Pentecostalism, most proponents of the teaching are comfortable with the term ‘Prosperity.’

Even though the prosperity gospel preached among African-led Pentecostal pastoral leaders in British society is contextualised within the African milieu to make sense to their adherents, it is influenced by their North American counterparts. I deduced from my informal conversations with some pastors from the African neo-Pentecostal tradition in the British context and literary sources that the prosperity gospel is part and parcel of the neo-Pentecostal phenomenon and, hence, cannot be ignored, especially in places where poverty and deprivation are prevalent.

Prosperity is preached to an extent by a number of African-led Pentecostal pastoral leaders in the British context to empower their members who might struggle to find work, start a new

⁴³ See Vanguard, American preacher Creflo Dollar confesses he misled congregants, saying tithing is not biblical <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/07/american-preacher-creflo-dollar-confesses-he-misled-congregants-says-tithing-not-biblical/#:~:text=July%204%2C%202022-,American%20preacher%2C%20Creflo%20Dollar%20confesses%20he%20misled%20congregants%2C%20says%20tithing,he%20made%20on%20the%20topic.>

⁴⁴ Timothy Murungi, Pastors Disagree with Creflo Dollar’s teaching of giving tithing not a must. https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/news/pastors-disagree-with-creflo-dollars-teaching-NV_138751#google_vignette

⁴⁵ Eben Adu, Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the Diaspora Church: A Brief Look at African Pentecostal Diaspora Churches in London. Unpublished article written for London City Mission in February 2020. See also <https://www.facebook.com/eben.adu/posts/pfbid023sKidQB4B28hDZwYoXbiYXPjqSF11moqsm5KMnM5sCewZxvtFbUMsmcVD3pLF9pCl>

⁴⁶ Conrad Mbewe, How Does COVID-19 Expose the Lie of the Prosperity Gospel? <https://www.9marks.org/article/how-does-covid-19-expose-the-lie-of-the-prosperity-gospel/> Date of Access: 02/02/2024

business, have immigration issues, or live in poverty. Thus, preaching prosperity helps alleviate such existential problems. However, it must not be taught as an end in itself. Empowering one's congregants to overcome existential challenges is necessary, but it is not the ultimate goal of the Christian. The Christian's ultimate goal is to know Christ and become like him in his death (1 Cor. 2.1-2; John 17.3; Matt. 22.37; Phil. 3.7-14).

Also, since COVID-19, some Christian leaders and Christians have come to consider what is more important in life. In my interactions with some Christian leaders and Christians within the African neo-Pentecostal tradition, I get the impression that there is a realisation that Christianity is not all about acquiring wealth and status in life but about being much more like Christ in all you do (Rom. 8.29; 1 Cor. 11.1; Eph. 5.1-2; Phil. 2.5-11; 1 John 2.6; 1 Pet 2.19-23; 4.1-2). The loss of many lives, including Christians, has caused many to wonder what is the essence of clamouring for worldly goods, knowing that one could lose them at any time.

I contend that since the concept of prosperity teaching is part and parcel of neo-Pentecostalism, there must be ways to evaluate the teachings from a thoroughly biblical and theological perspective and thus propound a teaching that is sound and consistent with Scripture. Any teaching on prosperity inconsistent with Scripture, no matter how attractive, should be ignored. For example, the prosperity teaching that is light on suffering and promises a problem-free Christian life should be discounted. I believe suffering is part of the Christian life and could manifest in different forms or situations depending on God's sovereign will. Hence, any preaching that does not delineate suffering in the Christian's life is not preaching the whole will of God (Acts 20.25-27; 2 Cor. 6.3-13, 12:1-10; 2 Tim. 1.12, 3.12).



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WHAT UNITES US

CHARISMATIC THEOLOGY AND INTIMACY WITH GOD

Jacob Taylor

It is a warm May morning and in a little community centre in the heart of the city, about thirty adults and children have gathered together. Their chairs are laid out in a small semi-circle, huddled around a little projector, table, and chair. Someone stands up and shares something with the group that God has been teaching them this week. Having been edified by their sister, the group rise and begin to sing. As they wind through the song and it seems to draw to a close, someone shouts out a thanksgiving prayer, followed by the chorus of another song. And so, they sing together, pray together, and share with one another how God has been working. A capella, led by the Holy Spirit, the group worship God together. Eventually communion is distributed amongst them, sharing one single loaf bought from Sainsbury's that morning, all drinking out of the same cup. It is intimate as if shared among a tight-knit family. At the end, the group disperses to their homes for lunch, full of the joy that comes from intimacy with God and fellowship with one another.

A few months later, in another city, in a different country, another group gathers, this time in a cinema. The largest room in the cinema is packed full, as people flock to take their cushioned cinema seats. It's hot outside but inside the air conditioning is working miracles. Although the overhead lights are dimmed, the auditorium is lit up by the intricate lighting rigging and on the immense cinema screens creative visuals displaying the lyrics of the song that the contemporary worship band on the stage are leading the congregation in singing. After the sermon, preaching the gospel and applying it to the modern, city context that the congregation finds itself in, communion is also distributed in little cups, with little pieces of bread. As one broad family, the congregation partake of the elements, before the band lead the congregation again in sung worship to give glory to God through music and praise. In the end they disperse, each to separate corners of the city, full of the joy that comes from intimacy with God.

Both of these are experiences I have had in a little charismatic church in my university city and in an inner-city Pentecostal church in Germany where I was for part of my year abroad. Both churches were thoroughly "Spirit-filled". Both fervently pursued God. Both wholeheartedly desired fellowship. Yet they were very different from one another.

Up and down the United Kingdom, there are thousands of Christians who identify with the labels "Pentecostal" or "charismatic". There are even numerous Pentecostal and charismatic denominations like Elim, Vineyard, and Newfrontiers, as well as countless smaller networks and

independent congregations. Is there really enough common ground for these groups to unite around? What unites the churches of hundreds in large halls with the house church of a handful?

Together we are one people pursuing intimacy with God.

Looking through Scripture, Church history, and continuationist theologies, I hope to demonstrate that intimacy is not only at the heart of Christian theology and history but also that our movements are best placed to lead us into intimacy with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit.

Intimacy with God in Scripture

Intimacy with the divine has always been a core difference between Christianity and other faiths. Whereas others are beset with a legalistic list of rules and regulations like Islam, Christians are invited to come into close relationship with love Himself. Where faiths like Buddhism stress the need for individual enlightenment attained through thorough meditation, Christians are invited into a relationship with the one Being, who knows their innermost thoughts and feelings - and who nonetheless loves them so intensely that He would die for them.

Scripture tells us we are invited into intimacy with God. We are brought into an intimate relationship through being part of His Bride and as members of His Body.

Throughout Scripture, marriage is a picture of the relationship God has with His people. Both the Edenic marriage at the beginning of Genesis and the wedding of the Lamb in Revelation drive home this point:

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

(Revelation 19:7)

But Paul explains this further in Ephesians 5. As the people of God, Paul applies the marriage theme to the Church. As the bride, the Church is to submit to her husband, our Lord. Through this submission, the bride is sanctified, renewed by baptism and reformed by the preaching of the Word, “*so that [Christ] might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:27). And, as husbands become one flesh with their brides, Christ becomes one with His Bride. As husbands and wives enjoy intimacy, so does Christ enjoy intimacy with His Church as His bride. As the whole corporate bride experiences greater intimacy, so too do the individual parts of that body. Therefore, as individuals we enjoy increasing intimacy with Christ as a result of our participation in the bridehood of the Church. As we become one flesh with Christ, the Church both already is and is becoming His Body, of which He is the Head.

It is in this intimate union with Christ that the Church finds herself. As Paul describes in Ephesians 1:22-23, “*And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*” The fullness of Christ, the fullness of God is amongst His people, through His Holy Spirit. There is no part of the body that is deficient in its portion of Christ. The profundity of this is awe-inspiring. Even the newest convert is a member

of the fullness of all of Christ. The oldest, most stalwart sojourner has never ceased to be a partaker of the fullness of all of Christ.

This is the absurd beauty of the Gospel: intimate union with the fullness of God. God is not distant or detached. He is intimate and loving. God is not far-off or uncaring. He is close and caring. Through union with Christ, the truest intimacy with the divine is possible, to which no other faith can lay claim. Indeed, no other faith is bold enough to make that claim. But in the Scriptures we see the Early Church embracing this intimacy and union fully and staking their unity on it. As Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “*For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Unity among the brethren, regardless of our backgrounds, is only possible through our ultimate union with Christ.

Intimacy with God Through History

Within modern Evangelicalism there can be a deep aversion to the intimacy inherent to the Gospel; few are the days on which a Twitter account is not decrying some alleged effeminacy in Contemporary Christianity. But as we look through Church history, we see a different story.

The whole life of a good Christian is an holy desire. Now what you long for, you do not yet see: howbeit by longing, you are made capable, so that when that has come which you may see, you shall be filled.

St Augustine¹

St Augustine recognised that a key quality of a Christian was their desire for Christ. For Augustine, our desire for Christ prepares us for His Second Coming, when we will know Him fully, the veil torn away, the dissipated shadows revealing the beatific vision, the beautiful vision of our perfect Saviour. Augustine suggests that desire and intimacy in this life prepare us for the perfect reality of this upon His return, just as one would stretch a wineskin or sack in order to fit more inside of it. Augustine goes on to state: “*so God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious.*”² Waiting for Christ’s Second Coming is a preparatory grace from God, that as our desire increases, our capacity increases, so we are able to receive Christ. Perhaps here is sanctification hinted at, that as we are sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ, so are we prepared to receive him.

But he also hints at a cycle of increased desire leading to increased capacity for receiving Christ, leading to increased longing. This cycle is the life of the Christian, that as we long for intimacy with Christ and as we grow in intimacy with Christ, our capacity for intimacy both now and in the New Heaven and New Earth grows, leading us to desire intimacy with Christ in this life all the greater still.

In his prayers St Anselm longed for intimacy with his Saviour, desiring to know his Saviour deeper and with ever greater love.

¹ Saint Augustine, *Homily 4 in the Homilies on the First Letter of John*, 6.

² Ibid

Teach me to seek you,
And as I seek you, show yourself to me,
For I cannot seek you unless you show me how,
And I will never find you
Unless you show yourself to me.
Let me seek you by desiring you,
And desire you by seeking you,
Let me find you by loving you,
And love you in finding you.

St Anselm³

This is one of the major themes of Anselm's prayers, that as he sought Christ, he begged Christ to show himself to him. But more than this, for Anselm the act of seeking Christ would awaken even greater love and desire for him, that in this perpetual cycle of seeking, loving, desiring, and finding his Saviour, Anselm would lose himself in his Saviour.

Elsewhere he prays: "*I thirst for you, I hunger for you, I desire you, I sigh for you, I covet you.*"⁴ Every one of Anselm's senses are straining towards Christ, reaching out with every fibre of his body, his mind, and his soul, to grasp his Saviour, to taste his Saviour, to be in intimate relationship with his Saviour. Anselm understood that union with Christ was both completely intimate and intimately complete. There was no part of Anselm that would be spared from the union with Christ and no part of Anselm that did not wish for union with Christ with its utmost being. Anselm was completely given over to intimately loving his Saviour.

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Westminster Shorter Catechism⁵

The Puritans are often caricatured as dour, sour-faced intellectuals, who hated Christmas and any other way ordinary people have fun. While they did sometimes seem to go overboard with their restrictions on the Christian life, if we read them we will find some of the sweetest spiritual marrow as well as some of the most exuberant, God-glorifying passages, we could read. The Puritans wrote just as fondly about their first love as previous generations had. Through his *Body of Divinity*, which expounds the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Thomas Watson becomes consumed with passion for his Saviour:

³ Saint Anselm, *Prayer to Christ in Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, Translated by Sr Benedicta Ward, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 243.

⁴ Saint Anselm, *Prayer to Christ in Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, Sr Benedicta Ward trans, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 94.

⁵ Question 1 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

Now Christ has pulled off his veil, and showed his smiling face; now he has led a believer into the banqueting-house and given him of the spiced wine of his love to drink; he has put in his finger at the hole of the door; he has touched the heart, and made it leap for joy. Oh how sweet is it thus to enjoy God! The godly have, in ordinances, had such divine raptures of joy, and soul transfigurations that they have been carried above the world, and have despised all things here below.

Thomas Watson⁶

For the Puritans, intimacy with Christ was to be found in two places - the Word of God and the ordinances. As Paul says in Romans 10:15, “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of God*”, and so as Christians listen to the right preaching of the Word of God, they are filled with faith, both in the first instance but also as a continuing means of grace. Preaching lights the fire of faith; it reveals to us our first and truest love. The Word of God is a wellspring of intimacy as we know God more and discover Him and His attributes through the pages of our Bibles.

But the emphasis for Watson, at least in this passage, seems to be on the “ordinances,” the waters of baptism and the elements of bread and wine found in Communion. It is in those ordinances we are elevated into heavenly realms, as John Calvin also noted⁷, and the communicants are carried above the world into the embrace of Christ. Now is perhaps not the best place to write deeply on sacramentology, but I would encourage you to read writers like Andrew Wilson and Jonathan Black,⁸ as well as others (some baptists have also begun a *resourcement* on this too)⁹ who exhort us to have a higher view of the Lord’s Supper than we may have previously had.

Jonathan Edwards was arguably one of the last Puritans. He lived through the time of revival commonly called the “First Great Awakening”, in which God’s Spirit moved through North America and Great Britain, bringing many people to faith. Through this time, it was necessary to test the fruit of the revival. Writing on the revival, Edwards wrote about how Christians can discern the marks of the Spirit of God, one of which was a deeper and deepening love of God.

⁶ Watson, Thomas, *A Body of Divinity*, (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 15.

⁷ Calvin, John, “Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments; between the Ministers of the Church of Zurich and John Calvin, Minister of the Church of Geneva”, in Calvin, John, *Tracts: Containing Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith, Volume Second*, Henry Beveridge trans (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849 [1554]), 240.

⁸ Especially Wilson, Andrew, *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharistic Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), and Black, *The Lord’s Supper: Our Promised Place of Intimacy and Transformation with Jesus*, (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2023).

⁹ E.g. Haykin, Michael, *Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition*, (Bellingham: Lexham, 2022) and Barcellos, Richard, *The Lord’s Supper As a Means of Grace*, (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2013).

The spirit that excites these motives, and makes the attributes of God as revealed in the gospel, and manifested in Christ delightful objects of contemplation; and makes the soul to long after God and Christ - after their presence and communion, acquaintance with them, and conformity to them - and to live so as to please and honour them... there is the evidence of the influence of a true and divine spirit.

Jonathan Edwards¹⁰

Edwards suggests to us that evidence of the Spirit of God is an increase in love for God; so that Christians long for the presence, communion, acquaintance, and conformity with and to God. Therefore, we should assume that the Christian experience should be one of increasing love for God, increasing communion with God, and increasing conformity to God. These themselves, as the Spirit grows in us, become wellsprings for even greater intimacy with God.

Christianity is the faith of increasing intimacy with God, which itself fuels greater love and desire for intimacy with God. It has always been a faith fuelled by this love and desire, as shown throughout history; in fact, faith and the indwelling of the Spirit are evidenced by this!

Charismatic and Pentecostal Theology Best Positions Us for Intimacy

Pentecostals and charismatics have always emphasised the centrality of worship and prayer in all of this. By actively pursuing the Holy Spirit and receiving His gifts, we can experience greater intimacy with our gift-giving Father.

We have always argued that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the Church in order to build her up. Prophecy, tongues, and healing all build up the Church by edifying and encouraging her. As the Body of Christ is built up, the Bride of Christ is prepared for her bridegroom. This has always been the primary purpose of all the spiritual gifts.¹¹ When believers are edified, the Church is edified but when the Church is built up, so are individual believers. Therefore, as we use the gifts to build up the Church, individuals are also deepened in their intimacy with God through the use of those gifts. If someone speaks a prophetic utterance or word of knowledge, my love for God is deepened if it applies to me, because I am reproved or encouraged in my specific situation. Even if it does not apply to me, I can marvel at the power of God to speak into the specific circumstances of my brothers and sisters. These gifts mean I can have greater trust in Him.

The gift of tongues deepens our intimacy with God as the believer prays to God through a personal, spiritual language. While others may not derive meaning from that which is spoken in tongues, tongues are always inherently meaningful.¹² Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 about praying in tongues, commenting that his spirit prays but his mind is unfruitful. So even the speaker of the tongues themselves might not know in their mind what is being spoken but their spirit, their innermost part, speaks, falls further in love and is fed. In praying in tongues, the spirit is edified and in speaking in tongues, we recognise the great mystery of our faith, of the

¹⁰ Edwards, Jonathan, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 116-117.

¹¹ Storms, Sam, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 26.

¹² Storms, Sam, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 214.

unseen nature of the new covenant.¹³ Therefore, tongues deepen our intimacy with Christ because our Spirit is edified, learning to trust and increasingly love the great God with whom we are speaking.

Divine healing is not a mark solely of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, but it is certainly a key focus of our movements. Here we have great demonstrations of the power of God over the natural world, in His ability to miraculously overcome cancers, broken bones, and illnesses. Not only is it a great comfort to those who have been healed, but it further gives glory to God for his magnificent power over all Creation. Our intimacy and dependency on Him deepens as we marvel at His love and power.

God speaks through words of knowledge, in which someone speaks a revelatory insight or instruction into someone's life, which has come from God. This is one of the ways that God continues to speak into the life of His people. Through words of knowledge, people are encouraged, convicted, and edified as God speaks directly into their lives. They are a sweet foretaste of heaven, of the deep knowing of and being known by our Father.

An Exhortation

The pursuit of intimacy with God unites Pentecostals and charismatics. This pursuit should be the bedrock of unity upon which *Eucharisma* seeks to build. As we go forwards we should not seek to replace our worship and praise with our books, words, and writing and in our writing we should seek truly deep intimacy with our Father. We should never stop praising. Even as we seek to write and think deeply about theology, we must never stop worshipping the Lord. In fact, our writing and our thinking must necessarily pour out of our praise. Therefore, we must drink deeply not only in our gatherings on the Lord's Day but also throughout the week, as we worship amongst our small groups and families. In our acts of praise, we will find greater intimacy with Christ and our writing and thinking saturated in the love of Christ.

Imagine another scene. A handful of students gather in a front room. Fresh cups of tea and squash have been made and people have caught up with one another. As one person leads on the guitar, their voices begin to rise in exaltation of their King. Some lift up holy hands, others lift up prayers of thanksgiving and praise. As the Holy Spirit leads them, they share words of encouragement with each other. We came from different churches. I was from the church with the little semicircle of chairs, others from the charismatic Anglican Church at the foot of the university hill, and others were from another independent charismatic church on the other side of the city. Yet we all came with the singular purpose to intimately pursue God.

This has always been an emphasis of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements. Through worship, we grow in intimacy and in growing through intimacy we grow in unity in the body. Across denominations, across doctrinal specificities, the Spirit brings unity through our intimacy with the Father. This is a picture of the New Heavens and New Earth.



Jacob Taylor is a member of Cornerstone Church Newcastle and loves his wife, Sarah, and their beautiful daughter, Tabitha. Sometimes he preaches and sometimes he worships with his bass guitar.

¹³ Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1073.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL IN MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS

AMBIGUITY, UNITY, AND POTENTIAL

Christopher Landau

On Maundy Thursday, in many Anglican cathedrals, clergy and lay ministers from across a diocese gather for a 'Chrism Eucharist' – where holy oils are blessed and distributed for use in the year ahead, and ministerial vows are renewed. At Lichfield, on 28th March 2024, the Bishop (Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave) welcomed worshippers with these words:

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
As in this most holy season we celebrate the Paschal Mystery
Of our Lord's saving death and resurrection,
We gather in joy to celebrate the gifts of his Holy Spirit;
To bless for anointing the oils of baptism, chrism, and healing;
And to renew our commitment to the ministries we exercise
Among the whole people of God.

Lichfield is perhaps one of the least well-known early sites of Christian worship in Britain. The first church is thought to have been built in 659; St Chad became the first bishop of Lichfield in 669. The following thousand years included plenty of challenges, including the near destruction of the cathedral during the civil war. Today's building is heavily influenced by Sir George Gilbert Scott's Victorian restoration; it was into the building's nave that bishops, canons, archdeacons and other clergy processed on Maundy Thursday in 2024.

In quoting the bishop's opening words at this year's service—the only corporate gathering of clergy from across the diocese in the year—I wish to underline the way in which insights rediscovered by charismatic renewal since the 1960s have become embedded in what would otherwise be perceived as highly traditional Anglican liturgy. The blessing of oils, particularly for healing, speaks of a continuing faith in a God who moves and acts among his people, including in miraculous ways. For me, of particular interest was the bishop's phrase, 'we gather in joy to celebrate the gifts of his Holy Spirit'. Now this didn't mean the service included speaking in tongues or the active practice of spiritual gifts; but nor are these words empty of meaning. For me, they represent what I wish to call the *implicit* charismatic theology which is present in many Anglican contexts, waiting (in my view) to be fully unlocked.

There were other aspects of the service which reflect the ambiguous presence of charismatic renewal within an ordered, largely traditional, liturgical Anglican setting. While most of the music within the service was, as would ordinarily be expected in a cathedral, led from the organ and at times by a solo male cantor, there was also a three-piece worship band leading some contemporary sung worship – using musicians from the diocesan renewal group. As the gospel procession moved into the centre of the nave, the congregation sang 'O Praise the Name of the Lord our God' (Hillsong, 2015). Among the several hundred worshippers, a generous handful of

hands were raised in worship at this point. For some, this will simply have been a spontaneous act of devotion; for others, perhaps, a more deliberately political signal of charismatic enthusiasm in the context of formalised liturgical worship. Note that the freedom to be expressive was there – and was even more evident during the celebration of Holy Communion, which included the singing of ‘Way Maker, Miracle Worker’:

You are here, moving in our midst
I worship you, I worship you...
You are here, touching every heart
I worship you, I worship you...¹

“Well, that was lovely” said the retired lay minister sitting next to me as the singing of *Way Maker* drew to an end. Her comment seemed to reflect a sense of pleasant surprise that this song, with its unabashed celebration of God’s presence and power, should have been sung in the context of cathedral worship. But this is a perfect illustration of the ambiguity which fascinates me concerning the place of the Spirit in traditional Anglican worship. Often, Anglicans are content to sing quite emphatically charismatic hymns or songs that are unabashed about the presence and power of God – but questions hang in the air about how willing those same worshippers are actually to see that God move in their midst.

Anglicans learn to live with such ambiguities. After the service, a queue of ministers waited at the east end of the cathedral to receive the newly consecrated holy oils. An accompanying leaflet noted, ‘Oil as a symbol reminds us of God’s boundless generosity towards us, and of his never-ending love of us. When we use it to anoint people in the Church, it is more than merely a symbol or reminder. It becomes one of the channels by which God’s power comes into the world, by which he blesses us with his Holy Spirit... by the means of the Holy Oils, he pours his healing and life-giving Spirit into the Church and upon her members.’

Another expression of ambiguity is worth noting in relation to this particular location within the cathedral. The oils were given out next to the new Shrine of St Chad – itself a somewhat ambiguous innovation in the cathedral’s recent history. The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion, which continue to form part of the ‘inheritance of faith’ which Anglican clergy seek to uphold at ordination, are clear in their rejection of the significance of relics. Article 22 states, ‘The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.’ But this did not prevent an historic occasion in late 2022, when a relic of St Chad was brought from Birmingham’s Roman Catholic cathedral, and installed in the new shrine. Using language of episcopal diplomacy and understatement, at a special service the Bishop of Lichfield said:

The language of relics does not come naturally to many Anglicans, and veneration of them does not usually form part of our spiritual practice; but we do use the language and practice of memory and remembering... it is right that a part of Chad’s mortal remains should be brought back here to the place where they once were laid. It is good that today we join together not only as Anglicans and Roman Catholics but as brothers and sisters of other churches too. We all have much to learn from one another, and I have been learning much recently from the Moravian tradition in particular.²

¹ ‘Way Maker’ by Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu, © 2016 Integrity Music.

² <https://www.lichfield-cathedral.org/news/news/post/582-the-reinstatement-of-the-shrine-of-st-chad>

I found it fascinating that here the bishop not only spoke of Catholic-Anglican relationships, but also cited the Moravians. Was this a nod towards wider currents of renewal within the church? The Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley, also spoke of the relic as an impetus towards unity:

Under our shared patronage of St Chad, the bonds of faith and affection that exist between our two dioceses and their respective cathedrals are deepened and set on a new trajectory... The veneration of relics has been a cause of division in our shared history - but today is a moment that draws us together as we seek to reflect on St Chad's life... May this relic be a symbol of our friendship and the unity in faith in Christ which we already enjoy – and may it always foster the fullness of unity for which Jesus prayed: that we might all be one.

This appeal to unity is worth noting. Even in the context of an admission about the ambiguity of Anglicans honouring relics, two historically divided churches found a way to express a deep sense of common mission and purpose.

And I wish now to turn to another Anglican cathedral, and another landmark event— which brought together an even wider range of denominational representatives, with undoubted significance in the history of charismatic renewal's impact on mainline denominational churches: the Fountain Trust's "Fellowship of the Holy Spirit" conference at Guildford Cathedral, in July 1971. It is not hyperbolic to identify this conference as a key moment in charismatic renewal in the UK, particularly in relation to unity between churches and the impact of renewal on mainline denominations.

The conference was the brainchild of Michael Harper, an Anglican clergyman who had begun the ministry of the Fountain Trust in the 1960s, seeking to foster charismatic renewal, particularly through inviting American speakers to share their experiences 'across the pond'. Harper had left his curacy at All Souls Langham Place in London when it became clear that his charismatic enthusiasm was not to the taste of its then vicar, John Stott. In a biographical account of his life and ministry, Harper's widow Jeanne wrote: "The vision of Guildford was closely related to Michael's Baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1962: to bring the churches together so the Body of Christ could be no longer fragmented but whole, each part being in fellowship with the others, despite differences, doctrinal and cultural. Structural unity was not part of the package, for differences are to be accepted, as long as the basic essentials of the Truth were not forfeited."³

The conference gathered what was, and remains, an astonishingly diverse group of Christian leaders. Jeanne Harper writes, 'Guildford was unique in that through it God broke through the tightly held denominational allegiances for the first time, especially those of the Catholic and Protestant churches. ... It was declared that despite doctrinal disagreements, the conference would demonstrate a unity made possible by the experience of the Holy Spirit.'⁴ She also notes that it was because of the Conference that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal began its work in the UK.

³ Jeanne Harper, *Visited by God: The Story of Michael Harper's 48 year-long Ministry* (Cambridge: Aquila Books, 2013), p.24.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.25.

The *Church Times* reported at the time, “The spirit of renewal which is stirring the Church in ways at the same time old and new swept over a congregation of fourteen hundred people in Guildford Cathedral last week as, with arms upraised, they sang in the spirit, sang in tongues. It was, after all, the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.... Whatever anyone says, joy and spontaneity is the mark of the charismatic movement, so why should anyone be surprised when a Roman Catholic - Kevin Ranaghan - describing the stages of Catholic charismatic renewal as experienced in the United States, should liken the first stage to wildfire - “ a foretaste of heaven, a kind of foretaste of the pleasure of the Supper of the Lamb!”⁵

The ministry of the Fountain Trust was characterised by a unity in the Spirit which risks being forgotten in today’s fragmented church. Indeed when the Trust ceased its work in 1980, a number of denominationally-specific organisations sprang into life, of which Anglican Renewal Ministries was one (which changed its name to ReSource in 2004, adopting a more intentionally ecumenical character; I am its current director).⁶

But one initiative of Michael Harper’s, nurturing unity, endures to this day: an annual gathering of leaders from across charismatic and Pentecostal movements, currently led jointly by Charles Whitehead (now retired from key roles within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal) and Hugh Osgood (a former Free Churches Moderator and President of Churches Together in England).⁷ The gathering is remarkable in its holding together of a deep openness to the ministry of the Spirit with an unusual breadth of attendees, spanning both charismatic and Pentecostal churches and networks. It is through this gathering that I have connected with those leading equivalent organisations to ReSource in Catholic, Baptist, United Reformed and Methodist contexts.⁸ In the final section of this article, I wish to reflect on four common themes that impact each ministry: tensions in relating to an historic denomination; varied denominational approaches to formal recognition of charismatic renewal; challenges prompted by divisive issues within the church, notably sexuality; and questions around church tradition and worship style.

The common link for each of our organisations is that we have some kind of structural recognition as a vehicle for charismatic renewal in the denomination to which we are attached, though the terms of that recognition vary substantially. In my own Anglican context, for example, the separate ministries of New Wine and Holy Trinity Brompton (especially through the latter’s church planting work, the Revitalise Trust) are both also hugely significant, and both work with the Church of England in many and varied ways, but neither has the particular structural history of Anglican Renewal Ministries which has been inherited by ReSource. Our relationship to the Church of England is formalised as an arms-length mission partner, but largely our bonds are relational. For Catholics, by contrast, there is a clear structure within which the work of renewal now functions. The current Pope has formalised its place within official structures, commending spiritual renewal to the whole church. In an address to an international gathering of key leaders of the charismatic renewal gathered at the Vatican in 2019, he named three key priorities for the work:

“- to share baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church. It is the grace you have received. Share it! Don’t keep it to yourselves!

⁵ *Church Times* 23 July 1971, p.14

⁶ <https://www.resourcingrenewal.org/>

⁷ <https://leadersgathering.co.uk/>.

⁸ CHARIS England and Wales <https://www.charisuk.com/>; Fresh Streams <https://freshstreams.net/>; Group for Evangelism and Renewal within the United Reformed Church <https://www.gear.org.uk/>; Methodist Evangelicals Together <https://www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/>.

- to serve the unity of the body of Christ, the Church, the community of believers in Jesus Christ. This is very important, for the Holy Spirit creates unity in the Church, but also diversity. The personality of the Holy Spirit is interesting: with the charisms he creates the greatest diversity, but then he harmonizes the charisms in unity. Saint Basil says that “the Holy Spirit is harmony”; he creates harmony: harmony in the Spirit and harmony among us.
- and to serve the poor and those in greatest need, physical or spiritual. This does not mean, as some might think, that suddenly the Renewal has become communist. No, it has become evangelical, for this is in the Gospel.”⁹

Those of us working in non-Catholic contexts may be tempted to spot patches of greener grass at the Vatican, in the sense that renewal (and specifically, baptism in the Holy Spirit) is commended to the whole church; though it is also clear that structural recognition alone does not mean every local bishop seeks to match the Pope’s enthusiasm. Indeed for some organisations, an arms-length or independent relationship to a denomination provides exactly the kind of freedom in the Spirit that charismatics customarily seek; Fresh Streams offers an example of a clearly defined and cherished relationship within the Baptist Union, but also a freedom and flexibility in independent ministry.

The question of how charismatic organisations navigate areas of controversy within their respective denominations is a shared challenge across different contexts. Methodist Evangelicals Together is itself an organisation that brings different strands of Methodism and renewal together, and became the key group opposing the Methodist Church’s liberalising moves on same-sex marriage, raising deep questions about how the group’s ministry may in future be received across the breadth of the denomination. Within the United Reformed Church, GEAR as a renewal movement is clearly also evangelical in its sympathies; whereas ReSource, and Anglican Renewal Ministries before it, has always sought to explore the reality of renewal across the breadth of church tradition. For every renewal organisation, there is a key strategic challenge in navigating how to encourage the renewal of the whole church, while some sections of denominations turn away from traditional understandings of holiness.

A final area of challenge shared across denominations concerns perceptions of renewal being synonymous with contemporary sung worship and other liturgical innovations (or the abandonment of liturgy), even when proponents of renewal may wish to commend a broader musical or worshipping diet than critics expect. 2024’s Holy Week has offered a case study in these tensions arising from an official Church of England social media post on X, inviting people to church. A traditional church interior is visible, with a worship band standing at the front of the building (obscuring any altar or table). The congregation includes those with arms aloft or hands visibly held in prayer; the screens show that ‘O Happy Day’ is being sung – a key point of subsequent criticism, in that some felt a ‘Holy Week’ post should not have included an Easter Day song.

⁹ ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the International Conference of Leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service – CHARIS’, Paul VI Audience Hall, Saturday, 8 June 2019: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190608_charis.html.



This Holy Week, we're inviting you to church. 🕯️

With many services and events happening in your area, find one that's right for you at [AChurchNearYou.com/lentandeaster](https://www.churchofengland.org.uk/ChurchNearYou).

#WatchAndPray



... At the time of writing, the post has attracted almost five hundred thousand views, and hundreds of comments. Responding to the many criticisms, one Anglican priest wrote, “If it’s news to you that charismatic worship exists in the Church of England - welcome. We celebrate it as we celebrate all the traditions of the church.” A lay person responded, “What on earth is that nonsense! Where are the candles, the prayer books, the organs, the choir and the pews. Honestly, what a disgrace!”. Then the journalist and author Louise Perry joined in: “Lots of criticism of this from traditionalists, I might once have agreed. But I tried this style of worship and found I loved it. And a large, youthful congregation seems to love it too. HTB¹⁰ plant churches are flourishing.” In response to her, the Anglican priest and podcaster Daniel French disclosed the church depicted in the post: “Yes for the Anglican Twitter grizzly voices it’s actually the Plymouth HTB resource church and St Mellitus [sic] Theological College. The college does “high mass” as well as praise style.”¹¹

It is a storm in a teacup that is, nonetheless, revealing—in the way it highlights the continuing tensions which surround the reception and adoption of charismatic renewal within mainline contexts. All the denominations I have mentioned are experiencing numerical decline overall, but are also denominations where charismatic congregations and initiatives often resist or even dramatically buck such trends. Each denomination has to navigate a recognition that the renewal is not currently surging and breaking new ground in the way it did in Guildford in 1971; but its influence and accessibility has reached a level (such as in Lichfield Cathedral in 2024) which is pregnant with opportunity, and in need of further future cherishing and growth. In some quarters, there are questions about whether renewal has become so mainstream that it has become spiritually domesticated, having lost its earlier zeal. The ambiguities are many, as are the challenges of seeking renewal within established denominational frameworks; but each organisation committed to such a ministry has examples of the sovereign Lord at work, even in unlikely or testing circumstances.

Writing autobiographically before the Guildford conference had taken place, Michael Harper noted, ‘God never forsakes his people. He does not view them as ‘Anglicans’, ‘Baptists’, ‘Presbyterians’ or ‘Pentecostals’, but as members of Christ’s Body. The Holy Spirit has no

¹⁰ Holy Trinity Brompton church in London.

¹¹ St Mellitus College was founded by Holy Trinity Brompton, and now has several centres across England, training around one in four Anglican ordinands. It champions ‘generous orthodoxy’ and seeks to train clergy across a breadth of church traditions.

respect for denominational frontiers. There are no boundaries to His activity, and no passports or visas are needed. But wherever His people meet, whatever larger body they belong to, He is with them.¹² He contrasts ‘the agonisingly slow death of institutional Christianity’ with ‘the new life that is surging into local churches, when they are more fully open to the Holy Spirit’s influence. The local church is still the area where the Holy Spirit can be most active, and this will always be so.’¹³ For those who may sometimes be tempted to focus on the decline and challenges—perhaps even the terminal decay—of established denominations, Michael Harper’s words offer a prophetic hope about God’s continuing action through the life of the local church. Come, Holy Spirit.



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¹² Michael Harper, *None Can Guess* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), p.144.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.145.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN BRITAIN

INTERCULTURAL PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Britain has been a home to many spiritual renewals and awakenings over the years.¹ From these shores, some of these awakenings have been a blessing to different parts of the world as missionaries have travelled to different parts of the globe to serve. Whilst some aspects of this mission history are contentious because of the context of enslavement and colonialisation, nevertheless, there have been fruits from those missionary endeavours that now mean Britain is at the receiving end of missionaries from those former mission fields.

How is this reverse mission, particularly the emergence of what we know in the UK as Black Majority Churches (BMC) contributing to spiritual awakenings? One of the things that I believe God is doing today in Britain is the development of an intercultural missionary movement as a result of the blessings and gifts that Majority World Christians are to the UK church and society at large. In this article, I will reflect on this by firstly exploring the history of Pentecostalism in Britain, drawing attention to its intercultural origins and nature. This will be followed by considering the development of Black Pentecostal churches in Britain as an example and lastly reflect on the ongoing intercultural conversations that are developing in Britain and what God might be doing through these discussions. My positionality is that I am a Baptist minister rooted in African Pentecostalism and came to the UK as a missionary. I therefore consider my identity as a 'Bapticostal' navigating and embracing Charismatic, Pentecostal and historic church contexts and practices. I have had the privilege of leading three different multicultural churches which included a charismatic church and currently serve with the Evangelical Alliance UK leading an intercultural network called One People Commission.

Origins of the Pentecostal Movement in Britain

The year 1906 is very significant in modern Pentecostal history, as it was the year that the Pentecostal revival of Azusa Street in Los Angeles started, led by William J. Seymour. Some scholars and commentators see this event as the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement, while others will argue that it was in 1900/1901 at Topeka, Kansas with Charles Parham that modern Pentecostalism originated.² A further debate associated with the history of Pentecostalism is whether Charles Parham (1873 –1929) or William J. Seymour (1870 –1922) is the founder of the movement. Those who prefer Parham do so on the basis that he formulated the Pentecostal theology of speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Some of the excerpts for this piece were taken from Israel Olofinjana, *Historical development of Black Pentecostal churches in Britain: A case study of the Apostolic Pastoral Congress*, ANVIL 37:3, November 2021.

² Alan Anderson and Walter Hollenweger, eds., *Pentecostals After a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 41– 42.

However, others prefer Seymour on the understanding that the Pentecostal missionary movement and ecumenical vision which transcends race started with Seymour's movement in Azusa Street in 1906.

It is an historical error to assume that modern Pentecostalism originated in the United States with the events of 1906. The Azusa Street revival is very significant in the history of modern Pentecostalism partly because it later gave birth to Classic Pentecostal churches such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC); the Church of God Cleveland, TN; Apostolic Faith Church; the Pentecostal Holiness Church; the Assemblies of God; the Foursquare Gospel Church, and many more.³ However, there were other streams of Pentecostals that emerged separately in other parts of the world, such as the Jamaican Revival of 1860–1861; the Mukti Mission in India from 1905–1907; the Korean renewal movement from 1903 (Pyongyang 1907); and African Initiated Churches (AICs) at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴ However, the origins of Pentecostalism in Britain are closely linked to the event in Azusa Street.

The Welsh Revival, led by Evan Roberts in 1904, was the catalyst for the Pentecostal Movement in Britain as it sowed the seeds and laid the foundation for the emergence of Classic Pentecostal churches in Britain, such as the Elim Pentecostal Church, The Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God Great Britain. The Welsh revival also inspired what later followed at the Azusa Street revival, as Frank Bartleman, the official historian of the Los Angeles revival, corresponded with Evan Roberts inquiring about the principles of revival and also asked Roberts to pray for revival in California.⁵ However, it was the influence of the Azusa Street revival on T. B. Barratt from Norway, Cecil Polhill, Alexander A. Boddy, and others like them that led to the start of Pentecostalism in Britain. Boddy and Polhill were the founders of the first Pentecostal missionary movement in Britain known as the Pentecostal Missionary Union.

Alexander Boddy (1854–1930), an Anglican priest at All Saints in Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, is considered the father of British Pentecostalism because his church was a meeting point where different people came to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit beginning in 1907.⁶ One of the people who was baptised in the Spirit through Boddy's ministry was Smith Wigglesworth (1859–1947), a true pioneer of the faith.⁷ Another person who was baptised in the Spirit at one of the revival meetings in Sunderland was Rev. Kwame Brem-Wilson, a Ghanaian businessman and schoolmaster.⁸

Brem-Wilson was born in Dixcove, Ghana in 1855 and came to Britain in 1901. In 1906, Brem-Wilson started a church known as 'God's House' in Peckham, South East London. He developed relationships with the founders of the Apostolic Church, D. P. Williams and W. J.

³ Some of these churches started before 1906 but the events of the revival shaped their theology, ecclesiology and mission.

⁴ Some of the AICs developed as a result of praying for healing during the influenza that took place after the First World War and as a reaction against the Colonial Christianity that the Mission Churches introduced into Africa. See Roswith Gerloff, "Churches of the Spirit: The Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement and Africa's Contribution to Renewal of Christianity," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, eds. A. Adogame, R. Gerloff and K. Hock (London, Continuum, 2008), 209.

⁵ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street: The Roots of Modern Day Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ, Logos International, 1980), 13–15 and Robert Liardon, *God's General* (California, Roberts Liardon Publishing, 1998), 89–93.

⁶ Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Australia, Paternoster Press, 1986), 145.

⁷ Lester Sumrall, *Pioneers of Faith* (Sumrall Publishing, 1995), 171.

⁸ Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours* (London, Wisdom Summit, 2012), 26.

Williams. These inter-ethnic relationships were very rare at that time when it was generally not socially acceptable among white Christians to associate with black people. It reveals the Pentecostal significance of breaking down church traditions and racial barriers. In addition, it also demonstrates the ecumenical inclinations of early Pentecostals in Britain. This early relationship is quite significant and foreshadows some of the more recent Anglican-Pentecostal relationships that have emerged; for example, that between Jesus House led by Pastor Agu Irukwu and Holy Trinity Brompton formerly led by Nicky Gumble; the Anglican-Pentecostal Theological consultations; the instalment of Bishop Tedroy Powell of the Church of God of Prophecy as the third Pentecostal President of Churches Together in England (CTE); and the partnership that exists between the Church of England and the Apostolic Pastoral Congress (APC), a black-led Pentecostal network. These intercultural church unity are crucial for our current context.

But what might God be doing now? Before looking at what God is up to in Britain, I want to briefly examine the history of Black Pentecostal churches in Britain as a way to understand why an intercultural missionary move of God is significant. This history reveals the trauma that African and Caribbean communities have to endure in the pain of racism. The history of African churches that follow after whilst different also reveals the otherness they also experienced.

Caribbean Pentecostal Churches

The 1940s and 1950s saw an influx of Caribbean families into the UK due to the invitation of the British government to come and help rebuild the country after the devastation of the Second World War. Many people from the Caribbean responded to this call but to their surprise and dismay, they were rejected by society and the church. This period is usually referred to as the Windrush generation, as the ship SS Empire Windrush brought 493 people from the Caribbean on 22 June 1948 to Tilbury, London. The year 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of this migratory experience. The majority of the people from the Caribbean saw and regarded themselves as British citizens, being part of the Commonwealth, and therefore expected to be treated as such. Instead, they were faced with posters saying, 'No Irish, No Blacks and No Dogs.' They soon realised that the idea of a commonwealth was an illusion; the wealth was not common and they were second-class citizens. Walter Hollenweger, in an introduction to a seminal book on the black church in Britain written by Roswith Gerloff, comments that, 'Christians in Britain prayed for many years for revival, and when it came they did not recognise it because it was black.'⁹ This rejection, coupled with other factors, such as loyalty to church denominations and the formality of British Christianity, led to the formation of Caribbean Pentecostal and Holiness Churches. The first Caribbean Pentecostal church founded in the UK was the Calvary Church of God in Christ, which started in London in 1948. The church became affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, USA in 1952, and they now have 21 congregations in the UK.¹⁰ Others soon followed, such as the New Testament Church of God (1953); the Church of God of Prophecy (1953); the Wesleyan Holiness Church (1958); and the New Testament Assembly (1961), now with about 18 congregations in Britain.¹¹

Since the 1990s, a new generation of Caribbean Pentecostal churches have emerged in Britain. These churches have a wider appeal to Caribbean British Christians who are second- and third-

⁹ Roswith Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theology*, vol. 1, (Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

¹⁰ <https://cogic.org.uk/2020/04/01/about/> accessed 08/03/24.

¹¹ <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/religion-in-london/resource-guides/black-majority-church.htm>.

generation descendants of the original immigrants. Many of the leaders are second- or third-generation Caribbean British Christians as well. These churches are Pentecostal and as such have dynamic worship and worship teams; they make use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have creative preaching styles. These churches are very proactive in terms of community and social engagement, providing services such as food banks, debt counselling, soup kitchens, prison ministries and many more. Examples of these churches are Ruach City Church Ministries, led by Bishop John Francis (1994); Christian Life City (1996) led by Bishop Wayne Malcolm; Micah Christian Ministries (1998) led by Pastor Denis Wade; The Tabernacle Church (formerly called The Bible Way Church of the Lord Jesus Christ Apostolic) led by Pastor Michael W. White; Greater Faith Ministries led by Bishop Lennox Hamilton, and a host of other churches.¹²

African Pentecostal Churches

The independence of sub-Saharan African countries from 1957 onwards led to increasing numbers of African diplomats, students and tourists coming to Britain. When they discovered, like the Caribbeans before them, that they were rejected by the British churches and society at large, this led to the founding of African Instituted Churches (AICs) in London. The first of these churches to be planted was the Church of the Lord (Aladura), planted in 1964 by the late Apostle Oluwole Adejobi in South London. This church has its headquarters in Nigeria. Others soon followed, such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1965; the Celestial Church of Christ in 1967; and Aladura International Church in 1970. Others include Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Mount Bethel founded by Apostle Ayo Omideyi in 1974; Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) of Great Britain in 1976; and Born Again Christ Healing Church founded by Bishop Fidelia Onyuku-Opukiri in 1979. All these churches were led from their headquarters in Nigeria. The first of the Ghanaian churches to arrive in England was the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) in London in 1980.¹³

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of African Newer Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs) from West Africa. For example, one of the former largest churches in Western Europe is Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) founded in 1992 by Matthew Ashimolowo (a Nigerian). Another of the fastest-growing churches in the UK is The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which was started in Nigeria in 1952 by the prophet Josiah Akindayomi. This church began in the UK in 1988-89 through the efforts of David Okunade and Ade Okerende and they now have more than 850 churches in the UK. They also have churches in Germany, Norway, Spain, Holland, Italy, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Portugal, Luxemburg and the Czech Republic. The current General Overseer is Pastor Enoch Adeboye, and the UK National Overseer is Pastor Leke Sanusi, Senior Pastor of Victory House in south London. Victory House is known as a house of prayer due to their love of prayer and hosting several prayer conferences and gatherings. RCCG UK also organises a Christian Festival called 'Festival of Life' at the Docklands Excel Centre which, before the pandemic, attracted around 40,000 people.

¹² Israel Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Mission: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (Milton Keynes, Author House), 41.

¹³ Olofinjana, *Reverse in Mission*, 37.

What is God currently doing in the UK?

Having explored the painful history of black Pentecostalism in the UK, how is God moving to bring about an intercultural healing process? The global pandemic and the death of George Floyd in the United States have opened up opportunities for conversation on the issues of race and how we can create inclusive communities to mitigate exclusion. There is a renewed interest in developing what could be described as intercultural churches. Before the death of George Floyd, it is fair to say that we were all working towards creating multicultural churches that had great representation but the power dynamics still resided in one community therefore leading to the assimilation or absorption of other nationalities and cultures into the dominant culture or ethnicity. For the purposes of this article, my own definition of multicultural churches are churches that have different nationalities, cultures, generations, ethnicities and classes represented, co-existing, and working most of the time towards a British way of doing church. In essence, representation, tolerance, co-existence and assimilation to a British way of doing church are the essential ingredients in these types of churches. But since the pandemic and the death of George Floyd, I believe the spirit of God ruptured something and opened our eyes to the possibility of intentionally creating a 'new humanity church' that affirms the humanity of all in a way that allows for a journey and process of integration as opposed to assimilation. So, what is an intercultural church?

Intercultural churches are churches that have embraced God's vision and gift of ethnic and cultural diversity therefore intentionally creating spaces and contexts where different cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, generations and classes integrate mutually and meaningfully to create something new for the sake of God's kingdom purposes. The key elements here are intentionality, integration, mutual inconvenience to use Michael Jagessar's¹⁴ description of intercultural engagement and God's kingdom.

Not everyone has caught this prophetic vision yet of an intercultural ecclesiology, but what I am seeing is God's Spirit moving and raising catalysts in different denominations, networks and streams all over the country and using them to pioneer and lead the way on this. This is beginning to happen within the Elim Pentecostal church with some key leaders pioneering conversations on how to create inclusive communities but also developing what could be described as templates of an intercultural church. Similar conversations are happening within the Newfrontiers churches.

For example, one of the initiatives I am involved in is the Intercultural Church Conversation (ICC). is an idea to promote the approach of intercultural churches as a significant way of doing church in the UK in a season when there is division and polarisation in both church and society. The idea is to promote this through online conversations and conferences. The vision strategy is to ground this conversation in Biblical conviction, empower confidence in practice and enable connection through networking that brings all the practitioners together. Partner organisations are: Evangelical Alliance, Intercultural Churches UK, Salt and Light Ministries, Capstone Community Church (an independent charismatic church), British East and South-East Asia Christian Collective (BESEA.CC) and London City Mission. This initiative is being well received and God is using it to break down racial and cultural barriers in different parts of Britain. We are seeing people from Black Pentecostal churches, South Korean churches, Chinese churches,

¹⁴ Jagessar, Michael, *Ethnicity: The Inclusive Church Resource*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2015).

South Asian churches, Latin American churches and white British churches engaging in these conversations. I believe that through these conversations God's healing process is also taking place for those who might have experienced racial injustices and trauma. But I also believe that these conversations are still in their initial stages and where the Spirit might want to be leading us, if we can be reconciled with each other in the church and demonstrate an intercultural ecclesiology, this could shape our public witnessing ushering in a national renewal. In essence, our intercultural unity is crucial to a spiritual awakening in the nation.

Concluding Reflections

This article has looked briefly at the history of the Pentecostal movement in Britain as a way to illustrate intercultural relationships that existed at the start of the movement. Whilst these intercultural dynamics were not sustained as we see in the developments of later black Pentecostal churches, we see that after the pandemic and the death of George Floyd, a new opportunity to pursue an inclusive church that affirms the humanity of all nations is emerging. This intercultural approach to church is very different from a multicultural approach to church which has its goal as assimilation. In an intercultural approach to church the goal is to journey towards something new similar to the church Paul describes in Ephesians 2. This can be adequately described as the 'new humanity church' which is reconfigured on the notion that we are all created in the image of God and therefore all equal, and all deserving of respect and dignity. This new humanity church¹⁵ is I believe a start of something that could be a catalyst for a spiritual awakening in Britain. This is because when we are reconciled with each other and experience healing, God can use that process to birth something new in the nation. We are still in the early stages of this in Britain, but there are signs pointing in the right trajectories therefore inspiring hope!



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¹⁵ Milne, Bruce, *Dynamic Diversity: The New Humanity Church for Today and Tomorrow*, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006)

REVIEW OF CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

BY HELEN COLLINS

Andrew Larkin

For those who think the Charismatic Movement lacks theological underpinnings, Helen Collins' book, *Charismatic Christianity*, is a work which fills that void. Collins is Vice Principal and Tutor in Practical Theology at Trinity College, Bristol, and her previous books include, *Reordering Theological Reflection: Starting with Scripture* and *Mary the Worshipping Mother*.

Collins' book is an attempt to introduce charismatic theology through the gifts of the Spirit, focusing particularly on the Pentecost narrative of Acts 2 and the teaching on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Hence Collins writes, 'I think it is precisely the Pentecost narrative, interpreted using a charismata/spiritual gift hermeneutic, that sets the precedent for my project, which is both contextual and transcultural.'¹ In order to do this, she focuses on seven emphases, using a threefold structure to describe each, followed by discussion around one of the gifts and how this works in practice. She then explores a doctrine that relates to this area—again, using a threefold structure to bring out themes that, on first blush, might seem contradictory. The dangers around each emphasis are examined, alongside a different gift which can help curb excesses and bring balance, followed by a fruit of the Spirit cultivated by the emphasis and gifts practised. Needless to say, this is a teaching tool to 'aid analysis'², given the 'interconnectedness of the emphases, doctrines and gifts.'³ A helpful appendix can be found at the back with a table containing the Chapter Overview.

The book has four aims. The first is 'to give you a language and a framework to better understand and confidently speak about your tradition.'⁴ Whilst Systematic Theologies, like J. Rodman Williams' *Renewal Theology*, have been written from a distinctively charismatic perspective, this book is doing something different. In Collins' own words, 'What makes this project a contribution, I hope, is my demonstration of the relationship of these familiar doctrines with the charisms and charismatic practices. This means that the outcome is both discernibly Christian and authentically charismatic.'⁵ Rather than a book on doctrine that happens to be written by a charismatic, therefore, the blending of doctrine and practice gives the work a particular steer.

¹ Helen Collins, *Charismatic Christianity: Introducing Its Theology through the Gifts of the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023),9

² P.188

³ P.188

⁴ P.2

⁵ P.188

The second aim is ‘to show the distinctive contribution that charismatic theology can make to Pentecostal scholarship’⁶ recognising that there is a difference between Pentecostal and Charismatic theology, even though these are interconnected. Collins notes that people often do not see the charismatic movement as adding anything distinct to Pentecostal perspectives and that, generally speaking, Pentecostal writers have tended to have more respect in the academic world, given much charismatic literature is written at the popular level. That said, I was surprised not to see works by writers such as Jack Deere, Derek Mophew⁷ and Henry Lederle⁸ referenced, which show exceptions to the generalisation.

The third aim of the book is to provide ‘advocacy for charismatic spirituality as a theologically coherent contributor to global theological discussions,’⁹ whilst the fourth is to ‘highlight how and where the charismatic tradition needs renewal of its beliefs and practices [claiming the movement has] the resources necessary for its own self-correction.’¹⁰ Given the times we live in, this is an important feature.

There is much I liked about the book. There has been a need for this type of book—the other that comes to mind is Lederle’s book, although that is more a reflection and evaluation of key doctrines within both the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement—and Collins has more than achieved the first aim through the distinct contribution she aimed for. For any looking for a responsible discussion on the gifts of the Spirit and the interplay between these, the emphases of the charismatic movement and doctrines, this is the book to read. Collins is conversant with the literature on the subject and so the book helps the reader to understand different understandings around certain gifts, e.g., glossolalia. As such, Collins has, ‘mostly summarised and synthesised what others have already said’¹¹ which tends to prioritise breadth over depth, as she acknowledges,¹² but that is the right call for what this book is aiming to achieve.

I appreciated the discussion of different gifts, particularly around prophecy and glossolalia. I found much which was wise and pastorally helpful. One example would be the chapter on *Expectancy* which focuses on the gift of prophecy. Noting that such an emphasis can come with the dangers of straying into heresy and an unhealthy prioritising of new things—something charismatics and, for that matter, our wider culture in general can be guilty of—Collins shows how teaching can frame expectancy in a helpful way which does not run asunder into those errors. The book is littered with helpful nuggets, one of them pertaining to this area, where Collins writes, ‘expectancy must be accompanied by the fruit of patience if it is to be from the Spirit of Jesus Christ...It is counterintuitive that we should grow more patient the longer we wait for God’s expected work of renewal. The reason for this is that as we wait expectantly, prophesying and teaching, we come to know better the relationality and sovereignty of God as

⁶ P.3

⁷ For instance, Deere’s books, *Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit*, (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993) or *Surprised by the Power of God*, (Eastbourne: Kingway, 1996) and Mophew’s *Breakthrough: Discovering the Kingdom*, (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, republished 1998). Although such books were written for a more popular level audience, they are both academics.

⁸ *Theology with Spirit: The Future of the Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements in the Twenty-first Century*, (Tulsa: Word & Spirit Press, 2010).

⁹ P.4

¹⁰ P.5

¹¹ P.187

¹² P.187

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹³ Such sentences show the interplay around emphasis, doctrine and gifts that makes this book rich.

There are many other examples I could give but I will only mention two. One is around the insight of Brian Brock and Bernd Wannewetsch that the gift of faith can act vicariously and so act as an encouragement to others and thus see faith increase in them. I have seen this to be true but had not connected the dots to the gift of faith in this way. Another concerns the commonly held idea, arguably going back to David Hume, that the supernatural involves breaking natural laws. Collins notes that the day of Pentecost saw the coming of the Spirit as being ‘accompanied by dramatic signs, but they are “natural” signs, entirely continuous with and authentic to the “natural” creation, and that mediate God to us.’¹⁴ A few pages later, Collins summarises Amos Yong who shows the ‘natural’ vs ‘supernatural’ or miraculous breaking ‘immutable laws’ leads to an inconsistent theology, which owes more to Enlightenment scepticism than biblical definition. On the flip-side, however, I feel Collin’s definition of a miracle as a ‘sign or wonder that reveals God in the world in a particularly intense way’¹⁵ is too broad and open to much subjectivity.

There will be some areas people would want further discussion on such as the sacraments; the issue of women in leadership and how that pertains to debates around complementarianism and egalitarianism; and different stripes of charismatic theology and practice such as the emergence of ‘Reformed Charismatics.’ Given the focus of the book, however, which, to my mind, is almost a ‘mere’ Charismatic Christianity, I can understand why such subjects are best left for future works.

I was surprised 1 John 4 was not examined when Collins discussed the discernment of spirits, and would have appreciated more comment on certain areas. For instance, Paul Cain is mentioned as an example of some wrong practices and excess in prophecy. This has been well-documented but my question would be, how do character flaws and mishandling of gifts interplay with the genuineness of much of Cain’s prophetic ministry? How do we go about the work of chewing the meat and spitting out the bones? Several people I know with a prophetic gift can sometimes be astonishingly accurate one day; vague and humdrum another; and other times just a bit weird or unstable. Why is that? How do we explain or handle that?¹⁶

I think those charismatics looking for “solid ground” upon which their theology works itself out in practice will be well served by this book. When considering the four aims at the start of the book and returned to at the end, I would suggest Collins has very much succeeded. As such, this is also a very helpful “way in” for those who want to understand more about charismatic theology, gifts of the Spirit and how these things can work in practice. Those in church leadership will be helped, both in terms of biblical and theological exploration of gifts but also the practice of how these work in sync.

It feels fitting to conclude with a note from Collin’s conclusion. The book begins with a testimony and ends with one, in the finest of charismatic traditions. The end testimony talks about how, on becoming a mother, previous charismatic practices did not sustain her faith as

¹³ P.40

¹⁴ P.47

¹⁵ P.61

¹⁶ A starter for ten on such questions would be this article by John Piper at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-some-spiritual-gifts-attract-unstable-people>

they had previously. Fourteen years, three children and a PhD later, Collins has been able to reconnect with charismatic practices, but in a broader way, with new practices from “old” traditions and more life experience. Collins writes, “I have become *more* charismatic through the embrace of these new practices and insights, while not leaving my old ways behind.”¹⁷ I think this is a neat way of summarising the book and the current moment for much of charismatic theology and practice: an embracing of the newness of the old, bringing out old treasures which feel new, and increasing in maturity.



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¹⁷ P.201

REVIEW OF A DISTINCT TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTIC

HARLYN GRAYDON PURDY

David Mitchell

With this book, Purdy enters the 20 year or more long debate on whether it is justified to speak of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic.

While in a review I would ordinarily survey the book and engage what I think are its main strengths and weaknesses, this volume has demanded a different approach. Purdy argues on New Testament grounds for a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutical model; the whole book rises or falls on the strength of that argument. While I have approached this book with curiosity and openness, I was puzzled by his NT examples and on scrutinizing them found them insufficient. Thus, I will briefly comment on the book as a whole, but because it depends largely on its NT foundations, I will examine the crux of those arguments in more detail before offering final remarks.

The book is divided into six chapters with two appendices, one being a syllabus for an undergraduate course with this book as a primary text. The author is writing from within an African Pentecostal context and is concerned to provide a corrective to excessively subjective interpretation of Scripture which he sees in global Pentecostalism, not least where he lives. This is a noble goal. His discussion of early Pentecostal interpretation, with the latter rain motif and a Lukan lens informing it, is helpful (chapter 2). His later discussion of the place of modern interpretive concepts is a balanced effort to integrate tools such as narrative criticism and reader-response into a hermeneutical framework that honors the text (chapter 5).

Purdy is arguing for a hermeneutic involving an interplay of Scripture, Spirit, gifted leader, and community (e.g. chapter 6). He builds this primarily on an examination of apostolic leaders' use of OT texts in Acts 2 and Acts 15 (61), with further support briefly drawn from three other NT texts (chapter 2).

For all its potential, the book unfortunately does not deliver. This is because the author misreads and misuses the main texts he selects as the foundation for his hermeneutical model. This is a strong assertion, and I regret having to make it. Space does not permit a thorough discussion, but I will indicate key difficulties in the author's use of Acts 2 and 15.

Regarding Acts 2 (63-66), Purdy states that Peter's use of Joel in Acts 2 provides 'helpful insight into how the contemporary Pentecostal hermeneut should operate.' (65). He discusses differences between Peter's rendering and 'the inspired words of Joel'. He notes that parts of the language and order of Joel 2:28-32 are changed. He concludes that 'Scripture's use of Scripture in Luke's recounting of Peter's sermon portrays the interpreter (Peter) as involved in manipulating the text and the creation of meaning' (66).

However, he's reached this conclusion without bringing the reader through a logical thought process. He's not told us whether he's comparing Peter's (or Luke's) citation of Joel with LXX or with MT. He's not discussed whether the changes in the text in fact reflect a change of meaning or whether, as Keener evaluates, Luke changes it to illuminate its meaning.¹ He asserts without providing evidence that Peter 'was creatively engaged in the creation of new meaning. This provides a biblical foundation for a twenty-first century Pentecostal hermeneutic whereby the Spirit and reader are actively engaged with the text in the creation of meaning.' (66). The argument is unconvincing.

Turning to Acts 15 (67-72) as the second plank of support for his hermeneutical model, the author's language is opaque and his argument is based on a misreading of the text.

He discusses what James does in quoting from Amos 9:11-12, arguing that James has given 'new meaning to this ancient text,' by unexpectedly taking an OT prophecy about 'a remnant of people (Israelites) [who] would seek God,' and applying it to Gentiles rather than to Jews (68). Purdy says James is 'creating meaning.' However, James does not take a text about Israel and make it about Gentiles; James does not claim to be creating meaning. Rather, in citing Amos, he claims that 'the words of the prophets are in agreement with this' (15:15), that is, with Peter's testimony of Gentiles receiving the Spirit. The citation of Amos in Acts 15:15-18 has a particular emphasis on Gentiles, and they are the ones in the text who seek God: 'that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name.' Purdy's assertion that James makes a text about Jews to be about Gentiles is plainly incorrect.

It is hard to know how Purdy made this mistake. If he had quoted the passage from Acts 15, the language of the citation itself would have laid the error bare; but he does not. It appears he has not properly read it. It seems he has fixed on James' use of *laos* before the Amos citation ('Simon has described how God first intervened to choose a people (*laos*) for his name from the Gentiles,' v14), and its common reference to the Jewish people. Apparently, Purdy thinks the Greek rendering of Amos 9:11-12 speaks of Jews who 'would seek God' (68), and that it uses the term *laos* in referring to them, and that James creatively re-interprets an instance of *laos* in the Amos citation to refer to Gentiles. However, the first two of these assumptions are incorrect, and thus also the third. In the process of making this error, the author also misrepresents a source on whom he bases his misunderstanding of *laos*.² In summary, Acts 15 does not have James creatively reinterpreting an OT text about Jews into one about Gentiles, providing us with a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutical model.

The problem is not simply that Purdy has misread or misinterpreted the text. The problem is that he is seeking to build on this text a basis for a particular hermeneutic that involves 'creation of meaning' (66). This is a significant departure from traditional biblical hermeneutics and needs a high threshold of evidence. The example from Acts 2 is thin and unconvincing. The example from Acts 15 misreads the text under study and is unhelpful to the author's case. The hermeneutical model the book promotes lacks the exegetical foundation it claims. Whether there may be something to the model the author proposes remains to be seen, but it cannot be supported using the exegetical materials he provides.

¹ Keener, Craig, *Acts*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 1:875.

² Kisau, Paul Mumo, 'Acts of The Apostles,' In Adeyemo, Tokunboh (Ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*, (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 1353.

A contributing problem is the lack of exegetical work done. The writer makes virtually no use of and seems essentially unaware of the literature on Acts 2, Joel 2, Acts 15 or Amos 9. He completes the bulk of his exegesis of the Joel 2 citation in one long paragraph; the Amos 9 citation gets an even shorter paragraph of exegetical treatment. This lack of rigor seems odd as the premise of the entire book rests on the author's reading of Acts 2 and Acts 15. His interaction with supporting NT texts is briefer still and open to similar critique as above.

I appreciate the intention of the author, and there is some useful material along the way. One big takeaway for me is that in any effort to build a hermeneutic that is defended by Scripture itself, I'd better make doubly sure I'm reading the text well, engaging with the literature on the text, anticipating objections, and engaging it in depth. Perhaps these thoughts may be useful should the author consider a revised edition in future.



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