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## Charismatic Renewal – The search for a theology

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### Introduction

Book written from papers at a weekend seminar at the CSLewis Centre.

*For our part, the whole experience has provided solid and encouraging evidence that the charismatic renewal is at last entering a much more reflective phase, in which people are not simply content to worship with swaying bodies and closed eyes, but are becoming more ready — not before time — to take stock of how things have developed, what theology is implicit in charismatic attitudes, practices and priorities, and how it squares with the biblical gospel and its teaching about the Holy Spirit and his work. This is a welcome sign that the movement is becoming confident enough to be self-critical.*

Desire to see the charismatic movement live up to the purposes that God has for it and escape from the dead ends into which it has been in danger of being trapped.

### Part I : Experiencing the renewal – 3 testimonies

#### 1. Tom Smail : A renewal recalled

Renewal in the HS – something that started at a certain point but has never finished; it does not belong to the past but continues to mould and shape him.

1 Cor 12.3 – HS is at work in the lives of all those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Acts 2.21 contains the recipe for all Christian renewal – ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ – not in response to complex techniques but by turning from our own efforts to do God’s work for him and throwing ourselves on his mercy and his promises to do for and in us by his Spirit what we cannot do by ourselves for him.

What was I to do? The answer is the clue to all authentic Christian renewal: ‘seek God himself’. *The heart of personal renewal is not in thinking about God, talking about God or undertaking and organizing worthy enterprises in the service of the kingdom of God; it is in opening yourself up to God. It means turning from all the things that you have been doing for him, to ask him to do what only he can do, and breathe his life and energy into you. It was not a coming to faith, but rather a personal entering into the good of what I had always believed.*

John 16.15 – taking what is mine and making it known to you

2 Cor 3.18 – changing us into Christ’s likeness from one degree of glory to another.

What did it look like?

1. a renewal in his relationship to God
2. a new closeness with other people – people can ‘smell’ the love of God
3. a taste of victory in the moral struggle with himself – encountering in a new way the Spirit of prayer, of love, of victory
4. charismatic gifts

Note – although Pentecost is personal, it is never individual.

#### 2. Nigel Wright : A pilgrimage in renewal

Everything about the church cried out to be transformed, and that basic perception has remained as the seed-bed for spiritual renewal.

Renewal – he was attracted by the vital spiritual life and repelled by the language in which it was packaged.

Renewal seemed to be a personal experience with no obvious implications for the corporate life of the church. But there was also a conviction that the church needed to be renewed and restored, that the new wine of spiritual experience demanded also the new wineskins of reformed structures.

‘There is a short step between knowing what it is to tremble when the Spirit comes and thinking that if we tremble the Spirit is bound to come’, 29.

‘It appears to me that a feature of the aftermath of renewal is a deep hunger for understanding, and that this is a mark of its authenticity. The criticism that charismatic renewal is more concerned with romanticism than enlightenment has been only partly true.’ Aim has been to redress a balance, the over-intellectualizing of the faith and the neglect of the heart and emotions; it has led to a greater wholeness and completeness.

'It does appear to me that charismatic renewal is merging again with the primary traditions of the Church's life and becoming less and entity in itself and more a seasoning and a dimension in the totality of the Church's life.' – we have found the Spirit, and are now becoming Trinitarian.

*Having spent much of my life concerned for the renewal of the Church, it has become increasingly clear to me that the renewing of the Church and the transformation of God's world are parallel and related themes, 31. If the renewal of the Church is a priority, it is so because the Church has a mission to fulfil and is involved with God in his work of redemption and transformation.*

The charismatic movement has begun to reflect on itself; good – but we need a naivety beyond the reflection, which is the acknowledgment that we still need God and his Spirit.

### 3. Andrew Walker : notes from a wayward son

Fascinating journey from the Pentecostal to the charismatic to the Orthodox. From Orthodoxy he learned that God the Holy Spirit is a person not a power.

Wesley insisted on 4 fundamental quadrilaterals of faith, reason, scripture and experience.

## Part II : Thinking about the renewal – 3 theological contributions

### 4. Tom Smail : The Cross and the Spirit – towards a theology of renewal

James Packer once described the charismatic renewal as a movement looking for a theology. One of the best is Yves Congar, 'I believe in the HS', 3 vols of French Catholic reflection. In the mid 70s, if you mentioned theology in a charismatic gathering, they all looked as if they thought they didn't need that any more, now they'd been renewed in the Spirit. It was 1991 before the CofE reported on it. Perhaps charismatic renewal has to do with experience of God rather than thinking about God. But *if you have a tiger in your tank, but no map for the journey, I am certainly not coming with you, for fear that we might end in the ditch!* Charismatics need to learn that theology has a spiritual dimension. An encounter with God in the spirit is meant to engage our thoughts as well as our emotions, our minds as well as our hearts. 'Many thoughtful charismatics are now recognizing that there are grave dangers in allowing themselves to be affected and influenced by an unexamined theology whose credentials they have never carefully scrutinized and which they are therefore not in a position to criticize or correct.' We have interpreted the work of the HS in terms of a Reformation theological tradition, modified by Methodist holiness teaching and classical Pentecostalism. We need to distinguish between the wonderful works of God among his people and the theological traditions by which we try to interpret them. The genuineness and efficacy of the Spirit's work by no means guarantees the adequacy of the theology by which we try to grasp its meaning.

Pentecostal theology tends not to recognise the intimate relationship between the renewing and empowering work of the Spirit and the centre of the gospel in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus; and this is what lies at the root of many of its aberrations. We need to understand the relation between cross and Spirit in a different way from the way the Pentecostal theology that has shaped the renewal understands it. *The Spirit comes from the cross.*

#### 2 models of renewal:

1. **Pentecostal model** : the Spirit comes from Pentecost; to enter into Pentecost is to pass beyond the cross into a new supernatural world in which centre stage is held not by the incarnate Christ but by the Spirit and the dramatic manifestations of his triumphant power. The saving activity of Jesus on the cross and the Pentecostal activity of the HS tend to be segregated into different compartments, with the cross relating to what Jesus did for us long ago, and the Spirit being about what is being done here and now. This is why much renewal preaching centres on experience, rather than on expositions of scripture. To put it simply, the cross is located in the pardon department where our Christian life begins; and the Spirit is located in the power department, where the second stage of our Christian life takes place. The result: the gospel of the cross is O level Christianity, and charismatic experience is A level Christianity.
2. **Paschal model** : we find this as we turn from Luke to John and Paul. John links cross and Spirit; and in Jn 19.30 Jesus 'hands over the spirit' on the cross – not just his spirit, but the Spirit of Calvary, the same spirit by which he has just defeated the powers of evil. The Spirit doesn't wait for Pentecost. See also John 19.34-35, the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side; and in this gospel water has always been the symbol of the Spirit – so to say that water flows from the wounded side of the crucified Jesus is to say that the Spirit comes from the cross. And see John 20.19-23, where Jesus breathes his Spirit upon the disciples. In this gospel, the way of the cross and the way of the Spirit are one and the same. There are not 2 circles, one with cross and one with Spirit at their centres, but only one, with the crucified

and risen Lord at the centre. Paul shows the same awareness: 1 Cor 1.22-25 Jews want signs, Greeks want wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

Cautions about using 'power' language. We can give the impression that we think that God deals with evil by unleashing against it a violent onslaught of superior supernatural force, by which it is immediately crushed and subdued. But Jesus did not attack evil from the outside by smashing it with the laser beams of supernatural force; he took it on himself and let it do its worst. He did it not by exercising power and force, but by renouncing them. His power is the power of Calvary love. It is by that love, nothing more and nothing less, that God delivers, remakes, heals, frees and saves.

*What heals is not esoteric techniques, or even special supernatural endowment as such; what heals is Calvary love. The charismatic renewal strays furthest from its own best insights and becomes most nearly gnostic in its seemingly endless search for the effective technique, the method, the panacea that will release the power of God deal with all the ills of his people. The sesame key to wholeness is not speaking in tongues, or the healing of the memories, thanking God for everything or asking him for anything; it is not having your demons cast out, still less being slain in the Spirit or reliving your traumatic birth experience, or any other of the fashions that have followed one another in quite fast succession over the past twenty-five years. All these can at best offer subsidiary assistance to some people in some situations but the ultimate key to the wholeness that God purposes for his people and his world is far more central to the gospel than any of these; it is Calvary love.*

*Where there is little healing and renewal among us, it is not chiefly because we have not entered into the appropriate spiritual experiences or been open to the needed charismatic gifts; rather, it is because we have been lacking in this quality of love. What we need to seek from the Spirit, much more than any of the gifts that charismatics have valued so highly, is, as Paul puts it in Romans 5.5, that God should pour out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us'. God's healing and renewing power is not something other than or apart from that love; that love itself is the most powerful thing on earth and in heaven.*

And so we reach a theology of suffering, and begin to see that God's purpose is not always to take us out of what is threatening to hurt or destroy us, but to take us through it – the route that Jesus took.

## **5. Nigel Wright : The theology and methodology of signs and wonders**

Wagner identifies 3 'waves' of the HS:

- o Emergence of Pentecostalism, 1<sup>st</sup> decade C20th
- o Charismatic movement, 60s
- o Wimber and Vineyard, 80s.

Although the charismatic movement often talked the language of power, it wasn't till Wimber that it was much in evidence. Another new feature was the desire to 'equip the saints' – in contrast to the inclination in other charismatic leaders to be the centre of attention, ministering powerfully in the anointing of the Spirit as the gifted among the ungifted. And finally, there was a shift away from Pentecostal theological categories, so that the phrase 'baptism in the Spirit' was replaced by the more flexible notion of 'anointing'.

Wimber however comes a bit too close to dualism; the idea of the natural realm gets left out, and the created realm is an extensive part of reality in which most sickness is located. Sickness shouldn't be identified with Satan, it's often part of the natural order which itself needs healing.

## **6. Andrew Walker : The devil you think you know – demonology and the charismatic movement**

For Christians to disbelieve in demons leads to the sort of monism where God is held responsible for all the suffering and evil in the world as well as all the good. If God were truly the author of evil as well as order, he would not be a God of love.

He is concerned about what passes under the heading of 'spiritual warfare'.

### 1. The paranoid universe

*A belief in the devil and demonic powers does not in itself entail paranoia, either in the strict medical sense or as a social neurosis. In the third-century writings of St Anthony of Egypt, for example, we see ample evidence of a belief in demons, but hardly a blind terror of them. Indeed, stemming from St Anthony, and becoming normative in the Christian East throughout the Middle Ages, a sound psychology of the spiritual life developed that distinguished between God's acts, the devil's ploys, and the normal processes of the natural world. The fallen and natural world included the human will neither yet demonized nor yet redeemed. The fathers'*

*insistence that we must discern fallen but natural forces from intrinsically evil ones is one of the great bequests of the patristic era to Christianity.*

A Christian world-view that is divided into the tripartite arenas of the divine, the natural, and the demonic is unlikely to fall prey to a paranoia which dissects the world into 'us' and 'them'. Charismatic theologies which do are in danger of adopting a paranoid world view.

Demonism is a reality, but rare. Cp Exeter report on exorcism, 1972.

Paranoia doesn't come from Pentecostalism; its origins probably lie in the 40s-50s Latter Day Rain movement – Branham, Oral Roers, Kathryn Kuhlman. AA Allen made the most extreme claims for demons of this and that; and died an alcoholic. The Hammonds ('Pigs in the Parlour') talked about the spirit of nervousness and the demon of heart attack. Don Basham and Derek Prince pioneered a belief in the prevalence of witchcraft in our societies, with talk of strong men and demonic powers controlling churches, cities, and whole nations. In NZ Bill Subritzky had an enormous impact on exorcisms all over the world. Walker thinks that their views helped create a paranoid universe. At first charismatics saw demons only in the world; then in unrenewed churches; then into renewed Christians: everyone needs deliverance... Don Basham taught that feminism is under the influence of the spirit of Jezebel, which dominates; and women dominate. When Pentecostal women disagree with male leaders, they are under the spirit of Jezebel...

The problem is that paranoid beliefs breed a basic insecurity which is always looking for the men and women of power to who us the way to protect ourselves from danger.

## 2. The devil, devils and the Bible

Interesting facts: the OT says little about the devil. The NT says a lot more. Neither has the fascination with possession and exorcism that we find in the paranoid universe. The word 'devil' means destroyer (NT); the OT has Satan, or adversary. The clear precedent for deliverance is in the ministry of Jesus – but the NT tells us little about demons, perhaps to discourage our curiosity.

The paranoid universe literalises parable and metaphor – eg the strong man in Mt 12.29.

## 3. Recharacterising the devil and Christian spiritual warfare

Much charismatic understanding of the demonic rests on the assumption that the devil is a person. But maybe evil has no real being of its own, for God created only what was good. Lucifer wanted to be the creator, cast himself off from God's love and drifts towards non-personhood, with the only end of nothingness, the non-being which is outside the personal life of God.

## Part III : Questions for the renewal – 3 current issues

### 7. Tom Smail : In Spirit and in Truth – reflections on charismatic worship

Because charismatic renewal is about our relationship to God, the renewal of worship is one of its primary concerns. We have seen a new release of praise; singing in the Spirit; new worship songs. For those involved in the renewed worship in its early days, it was like entering into the worship described in Revelation.

BUT all is not well.

- We can end up with a worship style which is all about Easter and Pentecost, and does not take into account that they can be reached only by way of the cross. It was done, first of all, not in us but for us – by Jesus on the cross.
- We can fail to find a central place for confession and the repentance that frees us. Every great renewal begins when the HS convicts people of their sins and leads them to repentance (Jn 16.8-11)
- We can subordinate intercession to praise. Intercession always has something of Calvary about it.

### 8. Nigel Wright : The rise of the prophetic

Wimber pays tribute to Paul Cain. Cain's ministry shows that because he is gifted in the word of knowledge, it does not mean he is accurate when he ventures into wider prophetic utterances. Such a prophetic ministry may be exercised in a variety of ways, and it is not the mode of delivery which determines what is prophetic and what not, but the degree to which effective application is made to our lives and to the contemporary world. Because some insight is received without prior reflection, and with a heightening of the spiritual senses, does not mean that its content is anymore prophetic than something which may be the product of careful thought and analysis. It is the matter which counts, not the form. 120. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Martin Luther King both sought to apply the word of God to the contemporary church and society, with much thought and application but also with intuitive instinct

for what is right and appropriate. They operated in a very different manner from Paul Cain, but are unlikely to be exceeded in impact.

*But the contemporary church has a decision to make and it involves careful theological, pastoral and political reflection. What kind of prophetic ministry are we currently most in need of? While quite acknowledging that the gifts represented by Cain are valuable. I have no hesitation in asserting that those illustrated by Lloyd-Jones and Luther King are what we most of all need. This is not to elevate these figures unduly since they too had their faults and partial perceptions, but to identify what they brought to the mission of Christ.*

*A prophetic ministry which springs out of the exposition of the Scriptures is less likely to become volatile and ensnared in mystical subjectivism. A prophetic ministry which addresses the issues of an unjust world is less likely to become in-house entertainment for the saints. For the contemporary charismatic, there is the need to be willing to make and stand by responsible theological judgements concerning what is good for the mission of Christ, rather than to feel that because pronouncements are made in an authoritative and subjective fashion they must carry more weight. Discernment is as much to do with careful thought and theological analysis as with inspired guesses and sudden intuitions.*

### **9. Andrew Walker : Miracles, strange phenomena, and holiness**

'many traditional Christians .. feel uncomfortable at the thought that the Jesus of the NT might have the temerity to step out of the pages of the Bible and start working miracles in their front-room or the chancel of their local church'.

Because miracles are crowd-pullers, charismatic Christianity can degenerate into a circus... there is power, sex and money in Pentecostalism, as well as grace.

Danger – sometimes it seems that what is important to people is *that* God spoke, not *what* he said!

## **Part IV : Further questions**

### **10. TS, AW, NW : 'Revelation knowledge' and knowledge of revelation – the faith movement and the question of heresy.**

The faith movement – ie health and wealth. They think it is hermeneutically unacceptable, ethically dubious and probably heretical. Faith movement theology is tricky to evaluate, because it is mostly spoken not written, and it's not even clear who is in the faith movement, because it has influenced widely. Many teachers and speakers buy into bits of it – Benny Hinn, Moris Cerullo.

One of the most worrying views is that faith is a principle or force rather than a gracious unmerited gift of God. Manipulating faith is gnostic, not Christian. Confessing your healing isn't a technique for getting it.

The ransom theory of the atonement, the descent into hell and the deification of believers are all marginal Christian traditions, which are adopted as key planks of faith theology.

### **11. Toronto – a discussion.**

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