

Mark Cartledge: Encountering the Spirit – the Charismatic tradition

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An excellent overview of the charismatic movement, including a comprehensive account of its history from the OT onwards.

Introduction

The central motif of the charismatic tradition is the 'encounter with the Spirit' both corporately within the worshipping life of the Church and individually through personal devotion and ongoing work and witness in the world.

1. Charismatic Spirituality

Ways in which the HS is located theologically within the different traditions vary enormously. Some forms of spirituality exclude spontaneous workings of the HS. Charismatic spirituality however regards the work of the Spirit to be free and spontaneous as well as, to some extent, patterned and predictable.

Foremost historical theologian of Pentecostal movements in C20th is Walter Hollenweger. He describes the oral and African roots of US Pentecostalism. Others have argued that in the UK the Wesleyan holiness heritage is as significant.

Outline of early history – Parham, Seymour. In UK, Alexander Boddy in Sunderland 1908-14 (published a magazine entitled *Confidence*). Pentecostal denominations emerged in US, and in UK Assemblies of God, Elim and Apostolic Church (Wales). Dennis Bennett in ECUSA, Michael Harper and the Fountain Trust (magazine called *Renewal*, journal called *Theological Renewal* 1975-83, ed Smail). John Wimber and Vineyard.

'Waves' of renewal:

1. classical Pentecostal denominations
2. mainline renewalists
3. new independent churches – 'charismatic' Christianity

Common features – emphasis that at the heart of Christianity there is and should be an encounter with the HS, which is free, spontaneous, dynamic, transformative and ongoing.

Charismatic spirituality can be described in terms of a process of search-encounter-transformation. Different traditions see this encounter as taking place in different ways (sacrament, sermon, worship).

Encounter with God is the common ground of spirituality and theology – spirituality is the encounter, theology the attempt to understand and speak of it.

Charismatic spirituality can also be described in terms of a framework, containing narrative, symbol.

Speaking in tongues is the 'cathedral of the poor' – a language not tied to privilege, power and status, demonstrating the power of God in the weakness of humanity.

2. The Charismatic Tradition in Church History

Charismatic spirituality has been evident throughout the history of the Church. (Sources [Stanley Burgess, *The Holy Spirit*, 3 vols 1984,93,97](#), and [David Allen, *The Unfailing Stream – a charismatic church history in outline*, 1994](#)).

1st – 2nd century

Luke, Acts, Corinthians; continuity with OT eg Joel 2-Acts 2.

Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch refer to prophetic gifts; also Didache and Hermas.

Justin Martyr, Irenaeus mention charismatic gifts. Hippolytus and Tertullian refer to healing, exorcism, revelation.

3rd century

Montanists emphasised prophecy, visions, encounters with angels. Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Origen, Athanasius describe healings, exorcisms, prophecies, signs and wonders. Cyprian links charismatic gifts with the office of bishop, and thus consolidates the subordination of gifts to offices within the Church.

4th century

Eusebius refers to a man named Quadratus known for prophetic gifts. Cyril of Jerusalem affirms the continued manifestation of wisdom, prophecy, exorcism, biblical interpretation; and also links baptism with the reception of the Spirit. John Chrysostom refers to the holiness the Spirit gives to believers, forming character rather than giving charismata; he is the first major fig to deny the continuing existence of signs and wonders in the church. John Cassian talks about the Spirit providing virtues to be obtained and gifts received.

In the E, Basil of Caesarea sees the Spirit as the sanctifier of creation, each person being given a gift. Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes the importance of the sacraments as a means of grace and transformation, but also refers to the gifts of the Spirit. Gregory of Nazianzen talks about the Spirit in worship, as assisting us in prayer. Hilary of Poitiers urges believers to use the charismata. Ambrose sees the Spirit operative in the reading of scripture.

5th century onwards

Augustine – Spirit assists in prayer, forgives, bestows love. Tongues no longer in the church; but miracles do still occur, eg healing.

Gregory the Great records miracles including healing, raising the dead, exorcisms, prophecy, deliverance from danger. He talks of the gifts of the Spirit from Isaiah 11.2. He wrote *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

Bede observes how spiritual gifts operate in the 7th Celtic church (life of Cuthbert).

Symeon the e New Theologian proposes a Spirit baptism, after water baptism, based on Acts 8.14-17 – but doesn't expect tongues to come with this experience.

Middle Ages

Cathars advocated consolamentum – baptism with fire and the HS with the imposition of hands.

Bernard of Clairvaux – miracles and exorcisms. Hildegard – regarded as prophet, talked about gifts of HS from Isaiah 11. Richard of St Victor – gifts include the 1 Cor 12 lot. Joachim – we live in the 3rd age, that of the Spirit. Bonaventure wrote extensively on the spiritual life, describes spiritual gifts from Isaiah 11 and regards the church as born on the day of Pentecost; describes St Francis as having intense spiritual experiences, drunkenness in the Spirit, revelations, powerful preaching, prophecy, miracles.

Aquinas saw the Spirit as the bond of love within the Trinity; mentions 7 gifts of Spirit from Is 11, discusses fruits of the Spirit and charismatic gifts.

C14 Gregory Palamas said God can be known not in his essence but in his energies, through which the HS works; he recognises the charismatic gifts of 1 Cor. Nicholas Cabasilas sees the mysteries of baptism, chrismation and eucharist as to do with the work of the HS.

Reformation

Hugely significant; yet the role of the Spirit was defined in very different ways.

Luther said the Spirit works through the Word of God and baptism/Lord's Supper. Zwingli through the Spirit helps interpret the Bible. Calvin sees the Spirit as the Spirit of life, ordering the Cosmos; we depend on him to sustain us and give us faith. The charismatic gifts are partial, spoilt by the fall. Muntzer talks about an inner baptism of the Spirit (Jn 7.38). Ignatius wrote about his mystical experiences.

Post-Reformation and the Holiness movement

Thomas Munster speaks of the inner word of the Spirit, dreams, visions, baptism in the Spirit, sung tongues.

Quakers, Moravians, First Great Awakening movements all report spiritual phenomena such as healings, prophecy, tongues. Wesley regarded healings, revelations, prophecies as rare; his contribution was belief in a post-conversion experience of grace. Seraphim of Sarov (Russia) wrote about reception of the Spirit and healing.

19th century

Numerous accounts of charismatic phenomena around the world. Edward Irving in London. USA holiness denominations.

3. Praise and worship

Charismatics take their inspiration with regard to worship from the Bible.

King David. Solomon – cp 2 Chron 5.13, 7.1 – the presence of the Lord in a cloud meant the priests could not perform their service as the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

Luke 1 Mary's Magnificat, Zechariah's prophetic song. Luke 2 Simeon's Nun Dimitris. Revelation.

The characteristics of contemporary charismatic worship... Praise, participation, ministry. The goal is perhaps intimacy with God. Charismatic songs include praise, love/commitment, intercession, ministry, awe/glory.

4. Inspired speech

OT has lots of examples of God communicating with people. Gen 2.16 is the first – Adam; right through to Revelation. In early Genesis, God addresses characters directly – Adam/Eve 2,3; Cain,4; Noah 6-9; Abram, 12+. In the rest of Genesis he appears in dreams and visions – eg Jacob at Bethel ff; Joseph. Exodus has theophanies to Moses, burning bush ch3; dialogues thereafter. There are prophecies, Balaam's donkey Numbers 22; prophetic schools 1 Sam 10, Elijah, Elisha 2 Kings; and recognised prophets including Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan (2 Sam 2), Ahijah (1 Kings 14). Micaiah (1 Kings 22). Major and minor prophetic books. In the NT there is a clear continuity of prophetic activity – angels speak in Lk 1 (John B) and Mt 1 (to Joseph). Jesus is the prophet par excellence – Lk 4, announcing the day of the Lord; Jn 1 he is the very Word of God himself. This prophetic gift is bestowed on the disciples, fulfilling Moses' wish that all God's people would be prophets (Numbers 11; Joel 2). Acts – Philip 8.26; Saul 9.3-6; Ananias 9.10-16; Peter 10.9-16. Paul, 13.1-2, 16.9. Divine leading is seen as normal, and discussed in 1 Corinthians 14. Revelation.

Pentecost, Acts 2 (Jews had begun to associate Pentecost with the giving of the law).

In the charismatic movement there are examples of people receiving messages from God via words, pictures, visions, dreams. Bruce Yocum suggests that we receive a clear understanding of a prophetic message, but have to find ourselves the words to express it.

Categories of inspired speech – tongues; prophecy (a spontaneous speech act specific to the occasion on which it is received); words of wisdom (classic Pentecostals see this as information about the future; others as an understanding of the purposes of God, or ability to interpret scripture); words of knowledge (of specific application); discernment of spirits. Prayer is central to charismatic spirituality, as are testimonies.

Divine inspiration is not something new, and can be traced throughout the biblical narrative; it has been claimed throughout church history. Most leaders emphasize the need for discernment.

5. The Sanctified Life

The concept of holiness runs through the scriptures..

Wesley taught that we are gradually sanctified following our justification by faith; we become more and more like Christ. In the US Methodist camp meetings were emotional. The National Holiness Association was set up to promote the teaching of holiness, using 'holiness codes' – eg banning coca cola, gum, rings, bracelets, neckties, fairs, mixed bathing, cinema, make-up. In the UK the Keswick Convention maintained holiness ideas. all this led to a set of expectations regarding obligation and prohibitions.

Some in the Catholic tradition have criticised the movement for introspection at the expense of the struggle for justice.

William Kay finds a strong legacy of the holiness tradition in the UK amongst Pentecostal ministers.

Key concepts: recognition of the significance of sin; understanding of a relationship between holiness and anointing.

6. Empowered kingdom witness

The OT prophetic literature anticipates the day when God will establish his reign of justice and peace; cp especially Isaiah 61 and Lk 4. Anointing with the Spirit is a key component, and the ministry of empowered witness through sings and wonders runs through Acts. These can be linked to earlier manifestations in the OT, eg Exodus 7, Josh 10, Judges 6, 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 2,4,5. The charismatic tradition expects this to continue. Its challenge is to integrate these phenomena within Western contexts. Hollenweger suggests one way would be to begin with a theology of creation, which is also alive with the Spirit of God, and integrate natural and supernatural categories.

The charismatic tradition regards witness to the presence of Christ by his Spirit as one of the most significant aspects of the Christian life. This is manifested eg by Wimber in 'power evangelism' and in the catholic tradition through social programmes. Increasingly there is a recognition that the gospel is holistic, that spirituality connects to the whole of life and should be expressed socially in concrete and practical ways. 'Prayer ministry' – ie healing. Wimber referred to it as 'doing the stuff'.

7. The Community of Interpreters

Pentecostals place the text of scripture within the horizon of the contemporary church. The inspiration of the Bible by the Spirit is not simply codified within the words on a page, but made to live experientially because of the same Spirit who lives within the hearts of believers. It is therefore the focal point of God's continued revelation today. Mark Stibbe points out how the NT preachers and authors use the Hebrew scriptures to explain what God is doing among them now – they find passages which illuminate their experience, on the lines of 'this-is-that'. Eg Peter explains the events of Acts 2 by saying this is what was spoken by Joel.

Conclusion

Strengths of the charismatic tradition:

1. the ability to express the importance of experience
2. openness to the empowering of *all* of God's people
3. the doctrine of the HS has been allowed to attend the theological ball

Weaknesses:

1. charismatics can err on the side of expecting too much now; the kingdom is not yet, as well as now
2. the category of creation/nature can be lost in a worldview that sees reality in dichotomous terms
3. sometimes theological reflection is lacking, resulting in odd ideas and personality cults.

Ends with beautiful invocation of HS from Symeon the New Theologian, p 137.