

THE LEGACY OF THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

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Today I am going to try to look at the legacy of the charismatic movement as it affects the reformed Christian churches in the UK. There will be some reference to the wider legacy to the wider evangelical and non-evangelical churches. But that is not my main concern. Neither am I going to look in detail at the legacy in respect of its effect or non-effect on moral, spiritual, political and cultural developments in our nation, interesting subject though that would be. The verses we read a moment ago summarise my view – I am not expecting grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles. There is not time to justify that view at length here but I speak as one who is a cessationist and convinced of the need for reverent worship. Rather we are going to home in, as best we can, on matters nearer to us. What has been the effect of the charismatic movement on us, on people like us, on churches like ours? We might think some of these effects are self-evident and indeed many are. We shall look at some of them in a moment. But, in addition, has the charismatic movement shaped our thinking and the thinking of believers like us in more subtle ways? Has it exposed weaknesses, insecurities or fears in us? Has it affected our views on worship and the conduct of public meetings? So we might include in our review of the legacy of the charismatic movement the question as to whether it has been a window into our own souls and from which we can learn and grow.

Some considerations

Let me say, this examination has been no easy enterprise. There have been few short-cuts I have been able to employ. There is no definitive text or conference that has dealt with this issue per se. There are various scattered references. Andrew Walker's book 'Restoring the Kingdom', sympathetic in its treatment of restorationism, has some helpful material but does not in detail look at the effect or recruiting potential of the charismatic movement amongst the reformed churches. There are of course books that look at the history of the Charismatic Movement or test against Scripture the claims for apostles today, prophets today, tongues-speaking, demon possession and healing ministries. There are also excellent treatments on the subject of worship. Again I say that as a cessationist and as one unsympathetic to the musical output of the charismatic movement. Articles have appeared, for example, in 'The Sword and Trowel' which have looked at aspects of the issue. But there has been no specific treatment, as far as I am aware, of the impact of the charismatic movement on the reformed churches in the UK.

This absence is in itself interesting. It may actually show us there are 'no-go areas' where unacknowledged codes of 'political correctness' are operating. Perhaps the subject is too divisive to consider. This is only too understandable if an expressed view on the charismatic movement, one way or the other, is going to spark controversy within one's own church or family. Sometimes people will

keep their counsel to themselves in case it drives away the young people or the old people from their churches. Or they will avoid it in case it introduces tensions amongst ministers. So people are not always quick to declare their stand or rush into print because of the fall-out that may occur.

We also have to recognise the task is made more difficult by the fact that the charismatic movement is by no means a uniform phenomenon. It never was. Different people in our Reformed churches have been affected by different parts of it. And what the charismatic movement was forty years ago is not necessarily what it is now. As it undergoes changes and blends with other movements such as the seeker-sensitive or the emerging church movement, it is in the process of generating a new set of legacies for future generations. The more eclectic mix that constitutes the new church movement knocks on our door to pose fresh challenges and asks new questions of us. So the brush strokes used here will have, of necessity, to be broad ones. By the same token, neither is it always easy to define who the reformed people are upon whom we are attempting to discern the charismatic legacy. In this respect we will have to demarcate them as being those who are willing to uphold the doctrines of grace. So there is a fair measure of generalisation which will not do full justice to all parties concerned.

If I should declare something of my own interest in the subject, I was once out there in the charismatic world. I was among the company of those who would call themselves 'reformed-charismatic'. I was encouraged to read Lloyd-Jones on 'Romans'. As for many of us, it was not without a struggle that I conceded the force of the biblical case for Calvinism. Eventually I was compelled to admit that the worship of the God of glory revealed in Scripture was not compatible with what I was witnessing in the charismatic churches, all the more so when the 'Toronto Blessing' came to town. So having renounced my charismatic views I knew I wanted to be where the doctrines of grace were preached and honoured. Likewise I also found the case for cessationism strong and have found no reason to revise that view in the last fifteen years. But, speaking personally, moving to the Reformed churches has not been without its puzzling moments for me. I have had the feeling that as I was coming off the street one way through an imaginary revolving door, while others were simultaneously going the other way out on to the street. Or as an asylum-seeker looking to escape a land being ruined by the anarchic forces of unbiblical doctrine and practice, I was not too sure how many in my chosen host country actually shared my views of the land I had left behind. So it has been an interesting journey and my own reflections are still developing.

The legacy of division and diminution

As we examine the legacy, let us attempt some generalisations. At risk of stating the obvious, we can safely say that reaction to the charismatic movement over forty years among reformed churches and Christians has been varied. This is a clue to the first legacy to identify – namely division. Broadly speaking, we can

group these reactions on a spectrum. At the one end is 'complete acceptance' of the charismatic movement. This then shades into 'cautious welcome'. Next reaction on our spectrum we might identify is 'ambivalence'. Then, beginning to move to the other end of the spectrum, we come to 'mildly critical'. Moving to more decidedly adverse responses, there is what I am calling 'unfocussed antipathy' before finally, at the other end of the spectrum we arrive at 'principled opposition'. There is another group, the confused. I want to deal with them separately later. They do not quite fit on the spectrum for reasons which in a sense are obvious but which I will spell out in a moment.

So some Calvinists have been accepting of the charismatic movement and its general practices and claims. Men like Terry Virgo, a leader in New Frontiers, quickly received the baptism in the Spirit in the 1960's and embraced wholesale most expressions of charismatic life. For others the process of becoming charismatic was slower and more painful. I can think of a pastor who forty years ago would have identified strongly with the position I hold. But, eventually, he succumbed to the claims of the charismatic movement. He loved Spurgeon, read John Owen, had listened with great appreciation to Dr Lloyd-Jones and is now, in ripe old age, one of the most aggressive champions of the phenomena associated with the 'Toronto Blessing'. There are people in the charismatic churches, especially from the 1960's and 1970's, who were drawn from the fraternal and churches where Calvinism was believed to be sound doctrine, men like Peter Lewis and the late Henry Tyler.

Still to this day there are established people who decide to add to their Calvinism a wholesale acceptance of the charismatic gifts and 'apostles and prophets today'. Their defection can be quite spectacular and surprising. Or we can think of young people, perhaps away at College, or who have moved for work related or marriage related reasons, who then have drifted into a charismatic position. Or they may have more emphatically rejected the cessationist teachings they had received at home or in the churches that nurtured them. The hurts and tensions caused by this process over the years have been many. Probably some older ministers are still left wondering what the numerical strength of the churches would have been had there not have been an aggressive, proselytizing charismatic church that set up shop down the road from them. So, dwelling on these who have completely accepted the charismatic movement over the years, we can identify one obvious legacy bequeathed to us. Humanly-speaking our churches are smaller than maybe they would otherwise have been. Diminution has been one of the legacies of the charismatic movement over the years. There have been enough of the 'complete acceptance' reactions to ensure that happened.

From other Calvinists there has been a cautious or qualified welcome to the charismatic movement. This may best characterise the early position of Dr Lloyd-Jones. There were some sympathetic reports that came back to Westminster Chapel via Philip Hughes of the happenings under the ministry of

Dennis Bennett in the United States. This sympathy began to drain away when more evidence came back to the UK. But people like David Watson and Terry Virgo would reckon that Dr Lloyd-Jones gave them a guarded 'OK' when they related to him the experiences they had had. A 'cautious welcome' is still a common response among those who would be called 'open evangelicals', some of whom would be explicitly reformed or at least in some senses keen expositors of the Bible. While unhappy with the excesses that surface, they would not deny the place or value of tongues-speaking even if they would not do it themselves. This shades into the ambivalence category where even if the people themselves do not speak in tongues or prophecy, they are very comfortable with the idea that others should do so if they find it helpful. For the ambivalent there is felt to be no need to issue a warning or oppose what is happening. Many of these would also identify in part with the 'mildly critical' school. Here the 'cautious welcome' or 'ambivalence' is replaced by mild criticism but not outright rejection. These middle groups can merge together. Sometimes it is not clear into which category they fit. They may appear to move around categories. This would characterise some, perhaps most, of the Anglican evangelicals, 'Reform' and perhaps the 'Proclamation Trust' as well, although with the exception of Dick Lucas. Our definitions as to who is 'reformed' would get a bit stretched here and so quite a few in these three categories we would call 'evangelical' without going further by saying they were 'reformed'. Many younger people, exposed to charismatic teachings at University, have embraced these middle-ground positions. Again, churches like ours may be numerically weaker because these groups regard people like me as negative and avoid us. We shall see later on that this group is where some of the innovations of the charismatic movement have found a home amongst the Reformed churches.

In others the charismatic movement has produced 'unfocussed opposition'. They just do not like what they are seeing and hearing. They hate the noise, the music, the breaking down of order, the perceived emotionalism. They would not mount a principled objection, for example, by holding cessationist convictions. They would not believe that there is an adequately clear biblical case against the charismatic movement. But they don't like what they see and hear in the charismatic movement. They may also feel aggrieved that churches, including their own, have suffered defections to the charismatic movement. Of course these groups are not watertight and some from this group may over time be softened into ambivalence when they see, for instance, the power of the charismatic movement to get young people into churches. Some indeed can end up giving a cautious welcome and there are instances of older ministers apologising for earlier opposition and who now allow for tongues-speaking, prophesying and new forms of worship.

Then there is principled objection. This has been perhaps best articulated by reformed Christians who have convinced cessationist positions and feel warranted by Scripture to deny the spiritual legitimacy of the charismatic movement. We can think of Peter Masters in this category and a host of pastors

and Christians who over the years have held to the biblical case for cessationism and have not been swayed by the apparent numerical success of the charismatic movement.

So the very existence of this broad spectrum tells us that the charismatic movement has had a divisive effect on the reformed witness. So diminution and divisions are two readily identifiable features. For those who are totally accepting of charismatic distinctives or who cautiously accept some of them, people who oppose it are wrong – indeed may be blaspheming the Spirit. For those with a principled objection, a similar argument in essence may be made – namely that involvement in the movement is wrong and spiritually ruinous. For those in the middle somewhere the advice is that we should all just calm down, not divide over secondary issues and learn to love one another. But then such people are in return, and with some justice, accused of ‘fence-sitting’. So people who may agree on the five points of Calvinism have found themselves poles apart on the charismatic issue. The ease or otherwise of communication, fellowship and common endeavour can hinge on this issue. On a superficial level it can make the flow of conversation suddenly stutter if we discover we are holding different viewpoints. More seriously we may feel unable to work with others who would call themselves Calvinistic but who would believe, for example, that the Christian can be demonised or believe that gospel preaching should follow forty minutes of loud emotion-inducing music.

So one legacy, which is inevitable, is that there is division. It is seen in the different conferences, fraternals, blog-sites and groupings set up to cater for those of different persuasions. Indeed the division can be stated more strongly than being ‘inevitable’ and can be called ‘necessary’. In fact I would go further to suggest that the division often reveals different convictions stirring in people’s breasts which, if the charismatic movement had not brought them out into the broad daylight, would eventually have come out in different ways. So although in danger of seeming to extract the clichéd positives out of the negatives, as one who holds to the sovereignty of God, I can still see the hand of God in the charismatic movement but more as a means for revealing our hearts and refining our convictions than by being a heaven-sent spiritual blessing.

The legacy of confusion, fear and insecurity

Finally, as I mentioned a moment ago, there is a group who do not quite fit in on the spectrum. These are the confused. These are people who simply do not know where they should be on the spectrum. They would dearly wish to be on the spectrum but they do not know where on it they should be. They cannot completely accept the charismatic movement, do not know whether to welcome some of it, feel they should not be ambivalent about it, know they need more than unfocussed opposition against it but yet cannot quite embrace cessationism. I would suggest there have been quite a few in this category, especially in the

early days of the charismatic movement but such people are still with us to this day.

Here it is perhaps necessary to make special mention of the influence of Dr Lloyd-Jones. Many, especially in the earlier days, had their views shaped less perhaps by the charismatic movement directly and more by the Doctor's view of the charismatic movement. One can be forgiven at times for feeling that the legacy of the charismatic movement to the reformed churches and the legacy of the Doctor blur together at certain points. In the Doctor's own lifetime, people's attitudes to the charismatic movement were influenced by the Doctor's views. Perhaps there are quite a few who still do take their cue from him twenty-eight years after his death. But his views were by no means always easy to put into practice by those seeking to discern whether some happening was a work of the Spirit or not. Seeking to avoid dead orthodoxy and insisting on the possibility of an immediate and unpredictable work of the Holy Spirit, he opened up a grey area of phenomena that might or might not be the work of the Holy Spirit. The Doctor might be sure he could tell the difference between the true and the false. Those who followed after him were not blessed with such confidence.

The task of implementing the Doctor's teaching on a case-by-case basis when confronted by some spiritual phenomenon was not made easier by the fact that his views on the charismatic movement appeared to change through time. Iain Murray's biography notes how in 1963 the Doctor's was open to some of the early claims of baptism in the Spirit from men like Michael Harper, David Watson and John Collins¹. But this was replaced by the 1970's with concern about the ecumenical drift of the movement and its concomitant denigrating of doctrine. It is understandable then, given his influence, how many in the reformed churches could have been left with a legacy of confusion, hesitancy and uncertainty when trying to respond to the charismatic movement. So John Brencher, in his analysis of the Doctor's relationship to Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, could write,

*People who had long looked to Lloyd-Jones for guidance and leadership, and who had responded to his clear-cut views on other matters, were now not so sure of what they heard. True, his preaching was no less emphatic and, as usual, he gave no quarter to those who opposed him, but there was an underlying ambivalence. Both sides of the charismatic divide claimed his support and in a sense they were both right; he had a foot in both camps.*²

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It is arguable then that he left people without chart and compass to navigate their own way unaided through the choppy seas of spiritual phenomena. Fearing lest by being sceptical they should crash into the Scylla of dead orthodoxy, but not wishing to crash into the Charybdis of doctrine-free emotionalism, they ended up becoming becalmed in the Sea of confusion, uncertainty and insecurity.

Putting it another way, we know the story of the 'ugly duckling', his feathers all stubby and brown. What did those proud and small-minded ducks do to the

stranger in their midst. I will quote as exactly as I can. 'Quack, quack, get out; quack, quack, get out; quack, quack, get out of town.' Except, of course, the ducks were the bad guys and the ugly duckling was the good guy. He it was who grew into a beautiful swan and humbled all the dull-witted, bad-natured unkind ducks. How wrong they got it. So the fear has lurked under the surface that to oppose the charismatic movement would be to overlook the soon-to-be beautiful swan in their midst. A negative reaction would risk jeopardising future involvement in any future revival and bring God's displeasure down on us. The stakes of course are only raised higher when would-be doubters fear being guilty of blaspheming the Spirit should they reject what is happening.

All this perhaps struck at a distinctive Achilles heel amongst reformed people in the 1960's and 1970's and perhaps still works today. Reformed people, like many others, were longing for revival and real spiritual experience. Back in the 1960's, all around, meetings were springing up. People involved in the charismatic movement were making claims for the spiritual benefit they had received. Faced with claims from charismatics about being on fire for the Lord, having a greater love for the Bible, a revitalised prayer life and a care for souls, it had seemed churlish and down-right sour-grapes to quibble about the means by which these apparent results were being extracted. Where after all was our zeal and warmth? Where was the power in our ministries? To raise doctrinal objections against a movement of vital spiritual energy, the very need of the hour, caused some to bite their tongues. Feeling like the friend offering to take a speck out of the eye of another friend, we feared the retort 'so where is your spiritual power?' which would render these objections foolish and embarrassing. Some were compelled to sample these new methods to see if they had any merits. For some the result was a journey into the charismatic movement from which they have never returned. But for others the result was confusion where the desire for spiritual experience was hamstrung by the unbiblical teachings and practices which the charismatic movement presented them with. Unable to embrace it, yet unable to reject it, confusion and a fair dose of fear has been the legacy left with many.

This legacy can be seen in different respects. Some in the reformed churches to this day are still unable to account for what is happening in the charismatic movement. Years on they are still reluctant to comment lest they call it wrong. They have looked on, rather bemused, when the Toronto Blessing came to town. They could not work it all out. If they could not speak for it they dared not speak against it. So there is a further period of anxious inquiry in which old fears can come back to haunt them. It would be true to say there are various things that feed into this fear and keep it in tact. One of these is ignorance. Many simply do not know what is happening in the charismatic movement and take all the enthusiastic testimonies and miraculous happenings too much at face value. It is not helped by the fact that many in the charismatic movement do not welcome questions being asked, especially if they are put by people who are not already enthusiastic supporters. Polite inquiry can be rebuffed with an airy dismissal that

the searcher for answers needs to evaluate with his spirit and not with his mind. But that said, the actual practices of the charismatic movement can be very poorly understood. So confusion, fear and insecurity are able to flourish untreated simply because the unbiblical nature of the movement's methods are not known. Why, if people only knew how much that takes place relies upon switching the mind off and allowing oneself to lose self-control. If they only knew how much is induced by a need to conform to leaders' expectations. More Reformed people would have been able to shift from confusion into a stronger position if they had been clear about how these experiences were induced.

It has also exposed a fear to actually apply the Bible to the evidence that was before our eyes. Did the Bible really leave room for such emotionally-induced experiences? Did it really advise the leaving off of the mind? Was it really indifferent to the increasingly pronounced doctrinal indifferentism that the movement was displaying? This unwillingness to apply Scripture has suggested at the very least a want of conviction in the cessationist position. But it may go further. It has found us happy to be evangelicals by profession but not so happy to be evangelicals in actual practice. It found some at least unable or unwilling to use the Bible when confronted by something that needed assessing. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture sometimes suffered damage if not de facto rejection as room was found for the new and the bizarre. It was not that Scripture lacked examples and teaching about false zeal or false prophecy. It warns against being impressed by claims and sets doctrinal tests which were often failed by those who were promoting these happenings. But there was an unwillingness or lack of confidence on the part of some reformed people to apply these biblical cases to the data that was put in front of us.

So besides division and diminution, another legacy, whether recognised or not, has been confusion, fear and insecurity. It has challenged convictions and left some, I fear, holed beneath the surface, unable to make up their minds. How much spiritual energy and effort has been lost to the wider cause as these dear friends have fretted about the charismatic movement we may never know. To how many they in turn bequeathed their fears and insecurities, we again may never know either. But the calculation must run into many man and woman hours, another legacy of diminution or loss attributable in some senses to the charismatic movement.

Borrowers, imitators and befrienders

Perhaps the most evident legacy today has been the willingness of reformed people to borrow from or imitate certain aspects of the charismatic movement. Those in the middle region of our spectrum who have not rejected the movement outright have at times displayed a pragmatism in adopting elements of the charismatic package. Whatever the discernible flaws that could be seen, however regrettable the teachings, the excesses and that odd personalities, these people have felt there was still something to learn. This has been

especially so in the area of music. The tongues-speaking, the prophecies, the healing ministries by and large have not migrated from the charismatic movement into reformed churches. But the worship ethos of the charismatic movement most certainly has. With the music have come, I would argue, other legacies which have had an impact on preaching, views on separation from the world and co-operation among evangelicals of all kinds and species, though time will not permit me to develop this theme more.

Part of the motor driving the charismatic movement has been a desire to emphasise more the immanence of God. He is to be known and felt. He is near to His people. We are to engage with Him with our whole being, including our bodies. So the nature of the music was designed to evoke feelings and responses, couched in terms which could be understood in the contemporary context. The words were more subjective expressing our feelings. They emphasised feelings of excitement and set this to musical genres that could be found in the world of popular music. Words and music that were expressive of love in the contemporary scene could now be transferred and used to give vent to the desire for relationship with God. Experiences that used to be interpreted as baptism in the Spirit were now available through the immersing of self in the music of desire, with hands aloft, eyes shut and with the body moving to the accentuated rhythms of the music. The music has evolved over the forty years to reflect changes in the secular sphere and as particular emphases such as supposed experiences of revival phenomena have swept through the churches. At other time, especially in the 1970's, when grand hopes of kingdom advance were nurtured, these upbeat estimates found their way into the songs of the charismatic movement. But always the basic worship experience remained the same. There were to be feelings induced – whether ecstatic or of the excited, dancing banner-waving kind. The music and the words were to prompt a response from the emotional system of the worshipper. So much so, in fact, that music albums, worship leading, musical choreography and gatherings are judged by their effectiveness in making us feel something.

The reformed churches have not imported everything musical. They omitted the more expressly charismatic songs, namely songs explicitly about the Holy Spirit or the gifts of the Spirit. Likewise some of the restorationist output and more overtly triumphalistic music has not travelled across the divide. Care has also been taken to turn back shallow, sentimental and overly subjective songs at the border. But other songs have been accorded citizenship status and are now passing into the worship repertoires of reformed churches. Where it is felt there is worthy doctrinal content and orthodox evangelical truth, the songs have been deemed of sufficient merit to overlook who has written them or what the accompanying music sounds like. The informal ad hoc nature of this process has been codified in the last ten years by the inclusion of many modern songs in hymn books like 'Praise' at the end of the 1990's and the 'New Christian Hymns' a few years ago.

The result is that many reformed or perhaps hitherto more conservative evangelical churches now have a style of worship which is very different to what they had ten or certainly twenty years ago. As well as incorporating the new hymns and songs, efforts are often made to reproduce the sound that these songs are meant to strike. Much of the new music is ill suited to the organ or piano solo. It needs more rhythmic accompaniment and more musical input to assist the worshipper in what are now more complex tunes. To cater for this, drums have now appeared. The worship band is more frequently to be found occupying a place up front. Special ministries are being developed to lead in worship. A service may now have a mixture of traditional hymns and the more contemporary items. The proportion of hymns sung may vary but the process has meant that they have had to be demoted to accommodate opportunities for singing the new songs. The overhead projector begins to replace the hand-held hymn book. The hands may not be raised or clapped. People may not be dancing but staying rooted to the spot. Eyes may be open and there is no 'singing in the spirit'. But there is an effort to carry over something of the emotional experience from the charismatic movement into the worship of reformed churches.

Here is an example that we can briefly consider. I had a look at the web-site of Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge. It was for many years the place where Roy Clements exercise his very influential ministry prior to his personal and very sad demise. We return to his impact in a moment as his cautious acceptance/ambivalence to the charismatic movement has perhaps had an influence on younger people, some of whom are now embarking upon their first or second pastorates. Let us just take a quick snap shot of today's Eden Baptist Church. There is plenty to encourage us in the emphasis on preaching. Likewise the web-site has some very helpful things on it. But then there is the worship. We are told at the two services to expect the following,

In our times of praise we aim at a biblical mixture of awe at God's greatness and joy at his goodness and grace. There is plenty of variety in music: traditional hymns are sung alongside modern songs. In most services accompaniment is provided by a piano and a lively band of musicians, with the organ joining in for the hymns.

The organ is no help for the modern songs for the reasons already given. The lively band makes the new music come alive and reproduces the authentic sound more accurately. Remember, people are likely to have albums with these songs on or have heard them in large gatherings. An organ attempting to recapture the feeling and mood would sound frankly lame. It needs the band. Here is something more of what to expect.

Services usually involve quite a lot of singing, of both traditional hymns and more modern songs. The words are provided in books on the back of the seats in front of you or on an overhead projector screen above the platform.

We are told the first part of the service will last about forty-five minutes. This includes prayers and Bible readings but we are to expect a fair proportion of that time to be taken up with singing. The sermon will also be of similar duration. But we can well imagine other churches where the sermon time will be squeezed.

Furthermore, on the first page you come to, there is an advertisement for a Stuart Townend concert at Eden Baptist as part of his 'Creation Sings' tour. It is happening on Monday October 19th. He will be there with his band for 'An evening of worship'. Described as one of the UK's leading songwriters, you may well be familiar with Stuart Townend's background as belonging amongst the New Frontiers churches. These have a very charismatic agenda and are part of the restorationist fraternity where apostles and prophets are to provide the direction and overall leadership. A donation of £10 is suggested for those who want to attend to cover the cost. We know from other events that Stuart Townend has participated in that you may need some protection for your ears. It is also highly likely that hands will be raised and eyes will be closed and spiritual ecstasies may be on offer. It is probably no accident that for pastoral oversight, Eden Baptist has turned to a man who was previously in a position of responsibility at Cornerstone in Nottingham where reformed-charismatic Peter Lewis is the minister. Not that they perhaps speak in tongues or that you might expect to hear a prophecy. But the music of the charismatic movement is well and truly in place.

Stuart Townend is just one of the new breed of song-writers and worship leaders to have entered the mainstream including the reformed branch of the church. Others have also received a similar accolade. We might mention Graham Kendrick from the Ichthus branch of the charismatic movement, now a veritable elder statesman of contemporary worship. Then there is Dave Fellingham, also from New Frontiers. In the last ten years Matt Redman from among the Soul Survivor group of churches has rocketed to prominence. Their songs and their sounds have found their way into the revisions of hymn books and into the worship of reformed churches. The FIEC grouping of churches have employed the Stuart Townend band at their event in Cheltenham last year. In different churches with a reformed heritage and understanding, this legacy of music can be found the length and breadth of the country. What then has been happening and why? There is much that could be said and so I will have to keep myself to a few observations.

Under pressure

The pressures to imitate, borrow and in some measure befriend the charismatic movement are considerable in the reformed churches. The pressures have only increased as our churches have struggled to grow. There is probably a widespread disappointment that so few have come to hear sound preaching and expositional teaching, or to engage in reverent worship. Ministers have sought to maintain an evangelistic ministry and a work among the young but have

struggled with a declining church membership and an ageing church membership. Visitors to the church and prospective members may appreciate the preaching but find the formal services off-putting. They have perhaps come from churches like Eden Baptist. Some might be exiting the charismatic movement because of its excesses but might still desire the worship of the churches they are leaving behind. Young people are more likely to arrive with a taste for this kind of music. They hear it at college. They hear it when they visit friend's churches. They feel more at home with the contemporary sound and we can sense their disappointment, even if they do not voice it, that there is no drum kit, no band and no Stuart Townend available. So to hold on to these young people, the pressure is on the minister and elders to make an accommodation to these things. It can all be very pragmatic. The minister may not like the new songs and be highly suspicious of the new song writers and what they stand for but feel powerless to resist. Various considerations can chip away at previously held convictions. After all, as Rick Warren, boldly asserts, the music is just a matter of taste, isn't it. Older ministers set in their ways shouldn't get in the way of a little progress – or so the argument would go.

Or, faced with ageing congregations as just described, it might be felt that this is the way to attract young people into our churches in the first place. Arguments against using these offerings from the charismatic movement are liable to collapse when confronted with these pressures. In fact, it can feel as stark a choice as 'modernise or die' and there is no absence of platform speakers who have reinforced that message. Demoralised, church ministers have permitted cherished convictions to be disposed of in order to secure the imagined future survival of the church.

The nagging doubt that the reformed church is committing suicide on this issue is only compounded by the fact that many of the reformed-charismatic teachers are bright, powerful, positive and able communicators. They have big churches. They have success. They have a happy story to tell us. The reformed church in the UK does not have many big growing churches filled with energetic young people. It does not have many reports of vigorous church planting to turn to. The charismatic movement does. Even if we cut away the more overtly worldly sectors of the charismatic movement, as represented, for example, by Gerald Coates, and confined ourselves just to those charismatics who boast reformed credentials, they still have story of growth to tell us. New Frontiers has churches all over the world. Faced with these vibrant, confident and successful exponents of new worship, many who in past times would have been unhappy with the innovations represented by new worship, have wilted. The sheer size of the reformed-charismatic constituency is a force to be reckoned with and it is not going to disappear tomorrow.

Something of this process of rapprochement and befriending can be found in the United States. By all accounts there is a resurgent Reformed movement in America. Young people, often émigrés from the shallow church-growth/purpose-

driven wing of the church, flock to events which marry reformed teaching with charismatic worship. Collin Hansen's book 'Young, restless, reformed', which came out last year, tracks the influence of men like John Piper, CJ Mahaney, and Mark Driscoll who would espouse some of the distinctives of the charismatic position but would assert their commitment to teaching about the sovereignty of God. These men are found in co-operation with other more conservatively minded men like John MacArthur, RC Sproul, Al Mohler and Mark Deever. They speak at each other's meetings and events. Now the message to the wider evangelical world is that it is not worth fighting a war on the gifts of the Spirit or the nature of worship. In other words, there is more that unites than divides. In such an environment of peace-making led by prominent men, it can seem churlish and small-minded to insist on the dangers of the charismatic movement. So there has been a new accommodation. The concession by the more conservative men has been that belief in prophecy and ecstatic worship is not incompatible with the pursuit of reformed convictions about the person and majesty of God. Hansen, reflecting on John MacArthur's embrace of charismatics like CJ Mahaney, explains it thus,

From MacArthur's perspective, desperate times call for desperate measures. They can agree to disagree about tongues and prophecy because other items on which they agree - such as reformed soteriology, complementary gender roles, and church discipline - demand more urgent attention.³

If Hansen is right, it is not only people with small churches who are feeling the heat. If John MacArthur is feeling desperate, what hope for the rest of us? In fact Peter Masters has already noted a sea-change with John MacArthur and observed a readiness in his church to have music without words defended as a medium of worship. But returning to the point that Hansen was exploring, it is an interesting aside he makes when looking at the experience of charismatic pastor CJ Mahaney. Rejected by many in the charismatic movement because of his espousal of Calvinism, Hansen reported,

Calvinism remains a tough sell in charismatic communities that prioritize concerns other than doctrine. Mahaney and like-minded theologians such as Wayne Grudem and Sam Storms have had much more success at coaxing Calvinists away from their traditional cessationism. These Calvinists profess to be "charismatics wearing seat belts," to borrow Mark Driscoll's phrase.⁴

The names are familiar to us in the UK. Their books are here and their influence is known. We must imagine that they are having the same effect in the UK as in the US, persuading people away from cessationism. Claiming love for Jonathan Edwards, CH Spurgeon and reformed doctrine in general, they disarm objections and overcome hostility. I might add that sheer force of character and the size of their churches would make this 'softening up' more effective still. Collin Hansen goes on to offer the following thoughts,

*Considering domestic and international trends, it's likely that Reformed evangelicals will become more charismatic if Calvinism continues to spread. Cessationism among American evangelicals has waned outside Reformed circles just as it has within. Certainly around the globe, Christians tend to assume that the New Testament miracles continue today.*⁵

As goes America, so goes the UK. In fact we can see it already. Cessationist convictions in the UK are being buried or at least being seriously modified through encounters with Reformed-charismatic people. The process of moving people along the spectrum towards ambivalence or cautious welcome, especially in the area of music, has been hastened by the prominence and visibility of teachers that promote harmony and who advocate a rapprochement with the charismatic movement. We mentioned Roy Clements a moment ago. We must mention him again. He has influenced many people into adopting a more agnostic position towards the charismatic movement. Although having the ability to demolish the biblical credentials of charismatic phenomena, he acted more to secure a co-operative attitude. His analysis of the Toronto Blessing could find little good to say about what he was seeing. Yet he refused to work against it. In 1996 he was to be found speaking at the Evangelical Alliance National Assembly advocating a working together of reformed and charismatic. This befriending aimed to harness the energy of the visionaries and young people that the charismatic movement seemed to have in abundance while weaning it off its excesses. He argued the reformed churches needed the power and life to be found in the charismatic churches while they in turn needed the solid bible teaching that the reformed church could offer.

One imagines he might have been offering himself as a figure who could facilitate this process. We will never know as he abandoned the ministry a little afterwards. But his theme of rapprochement has struck a chord. Many sections of the evangelical world that would identify with the appellation 'reformed' are not to be found opposing the charismatic movement. Nobody is likely to take up the cudgels against new worship in the pages of 'Evangelicals Now!' for example. Neither are some of the leading evangelical Bible colleges likely to offer a trenchant critique of the charismatic movement. Jonathan Stephen of WEST has previously stated that he is not seeking to perpetuate a separation from charismatic people. He was looking for a rapprochement and stood ready to facilitate the befriending process.

But the rapprochement has not quite materialized along the lines that Clements in his address to the EA mentioned a moment ago. Rather than coming to the reformed people for help in understanding their Bibles, the charismatics have sometime been courted, not for their knowledge of spiritual experience but for, guess what, their Bible knowledge. Organisations like UCCF, the FIEC, and New Word Alive are asking men like Terry Virgo, much to his surprise, to come and teach them. Having previously felt he had been accorded pariah status by them,

he now finds them beating a path to his door, eager for instruction. Again we can see that this process of rapprochement and befriending has only been hastened by the apparent failure of the reformed and conservative churches, at a time of national moral decline, to achieve great spiritual breakthroughs. Co-operation with reformed-charismatics is now on the agenda and conference platforms are throwing up some interesting combinations of people. The numerical strength and durability of some wings of the reformed-charismatic movement has caused much soul-searching for more conservative people at a time when spiritually those reformed churches are at low ebb. As people move along the spectrum it is making cessationism appear a marginal and negative doctrine more akin to a belief in a flat earth. At the same time this greater openness to the charismatic movement has led to a re-scripting of the meaning and nature of worship in many places. Looking at a flagship FIEC church plant on the south coast, the photographs made it look indistinguishable from the New Frontiers church down the road. The same fate may await many other churches yet as the charismatic legacy in worship continues to make its presence felt.

But those who are eager for rapprochement have reason enough to pause for thought. No fan of the health and safety culture myself but if these men are to be known now as 'charismatics with seat belts', my advice is that they keep their seat belts firmly on. Their charismatic partners have a penchant for reckless driving. I say that having observed over the years some of the directions that men like Terry Virgo and C.J Mahaney have been willing to take. Last year, with Todd Bentley riding high with the Lakeland Revival, Terry Virgo, though hesitant about Bentley's angels, was edging towards embracing the movement. He and C.J Mahaney were involved in the promulgation of the 'Toronto Blessing' back in the mid 1990's. Read the recent reports from the New Frontiers summer meetings and you will know they are heavily into prophecy and so-called manifestations of the Spirit. They are still enjoying the legacy of the 'Toronto Blessing' and have an undiminished appetite for triumphalistic prophecies of revival 'just round the corner'. I do not mean my judgement to be too unkind or harsh but their Calvinism has not brought them much discernment. As we team up with John Piper, we do well to wonder where this is going to take us. The ecumenical 'Promise Keepers' and the 'Toronto Blessing' slipped under his radar some years back. His acceptance of Mark Driscoll to speak at his conference on the use of bad language created quite a stir a year or so ago. Hearing John Piper justify employing Driscoll was a deeply embarrassing interview to listen to. Sam Storms' best-seller 'One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God' is dedicated to Mike Bickle, the pastor to the Kansas City Prophets whose occultic prophetic practices shook the charismatic world in 1990. These dear conservative friends who have been persuaded to be 'charismatics with seat belts' may well end up resembling those crash dummies which you see in slow-motion testing the crash-worthiness of different cars. I do not envy them the experience.

But changing the worship ethos does threaten to alter others things with it. I do not have the evidence to hand but some anecdotal evidence does reach my ears from time to time. The lighter mood means that the sermon may be under pressure to follow suit. More jokes, more personal stories, less challenge has followed. The language that is used owes less to the Bible and more to popular culture. Likewise the reading of Scripture has suffered and may have been significantly curtailed. And the prayers. Again there has been a discernible 'dumbing down' of the prayers. The majesty of God is lost in the dash to be on intimate terms with the Lord. Not all of this can be laid at the door of the charismatic movement. The spirit of the age is like invisible ether that can seep in through any number of cracks and from any number of sources. But the process of envying the charismatic movement its numbers has helped weaken convictions about the transcendent glory of God and how He is to be addressed.

The future

The charismatic movement continues to ask questions of Reformed Christians. I have only outlined something of the legacy for the reformed churches. The process of bequeathing is an ongoing process but I do not think of it happily. I do see thornbushes and thistles and query whether true grapes and figs are really being selectively harvested from it. It may rewrite for us the nature of spiritual experience beginning with the fundamental doctrine of worship. If we let that pass through our hands we actually let much of true reformed doctrine and heritage pass with it. There is something to contend for. The place of the mind, the need to see the sources of spiritual experience – these are vital issues. Belief in the five points of Calvinism does not make everything OK. Desperation must not drive us but rather a desire for the glory of God. If we must stay small, then so we must. If we must tent-make I order to be pastors, then that is the way forward. But kindly thoughts and the tug on our hearts to move along the spectrum or even to become amongst the ranks of the confused should not be an option. I believe in the sovereignty of God. The continuing challenge of the charismatic movement is an opportunity to hone our discernment, to hunger for true spiritual experience and to search our own hearts and convictions. It may mean we have to suffer for the faith. But I believe there is much that is precious that is at stake and that is ultimately bound up with the glory of God.

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