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Don Matzat

The Charismatic Movement

History and Introduction:

Defining the Charismatic Movement today is not as easy as it was twenty-five years ago. It is no longer a movement with a singular agenda. Twenty-five years ago, a Charismatic was one who claimed to have experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, believed in the exercise of the 1 Corinthians 12 supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, participated in hand-clapping and arm-raising "free" worship, and, as opposed to Pentecostals, remained within his or her denominational structure.

But much has changed.

- There is no longer an influential, clearly-defined Charismatic leadership. Most of the former leaders have died (David DuPlessis, Dennis Bennett, Don Basham), been in prison (Jim Bakker), disgraced by moral failure (Jimmy Swaggert, Larry Lea), guilty of false teaching (Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Charles Simpson, Ralph Martin), caught up in other pursuits (Pat Robertson), retired (Oral Roberts), or simply no longer on the scene. Benny Hinn is probably the most influential leader today which speaks volumes about the quality of the movement.

- The Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship which was the primary means of disseminating the Charismatic experience disintegrated over financial controversy after the death of Demos Shakarian.

- Evangelicals or "charisgelicals" such as John Wimber and C. Peter Wagner have been thrown into the mix. While they believe in the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, they deny the "second experience."

- Most Charismatics today are members of Charismatic churches. The movement has simply become another denomination with local congregations (New Life Christian Fellowships, Vineyard Fellowships, Christian Centers).

- The major Charismatic emphasis today is upon revival within its own ranks. These revivals such as "Holy Laughter," the Toronto Blessings, and the Pensacola Revival promote strange experiences (falling over, shaking, acting drunk, barking and growling).

Any Lutheran pastor today who chooses to affiliate with the Charismatic Movement should have his theological head examined. The closest most come is attending a Promise Keepers' gathering. Pastors today who come home all excited from a PK gathering remind me of pastors in the 70's who attended a Lutheran Charismatic Conference for the first time.

There are four primary issues raised by the Charismatic Movement:

I. The "Sola Scriptura" Issue:

The Formula of Concord states, that Scripture is "the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged." This standard is not a "Charismatic standard." Popular extra-biblical experiences are readily taught and promoted. This includes "slain in the Spirit," binding demons, delivering Christians from demons, mystical visualization as in "Inner Healing", "Holy Laughter", the Toronto Blessing, and the Pensacola Revival. One wonders what will be next. Assembly of God member Larry Thomas suggests that temple prostitutes are very possible.

II. The "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" Issue:

Charismatics and Pentecostals teach a "second experience" called "the baptism in the Holy Spirit" which allegedly empowers Christians for service and ushers them into the supernatural dimension in which the gifts of the Spirit function.

Second-experience theology developed in the Methodist revival in England and characterized the Second Great Awakening in America. Charles Finney taught a baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace producing sanctification. In 1900 at Charles Parham's Bible College in Topeka and at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" was associated with the Pentecost event. This marked the beginnings of Pentecostalism. In 1962, Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett received this "baptism in the Holy Spirit" with speaking in tongues. This began the Charismatic Movement.

In the early 80's evangelicals such as John Wimber and C. Peter Wagner (charismatics) taught the experience of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit but rejected the "second experience" theology. Yet, their experience of the alleged gifts of the Spirit was and is widely accepted by Charismatics. This produces confusion. It seems that Charismatics are very willing to set aside their theology in order to embrace those who can perform spiritual tricks. For this reason, you find little written today on the "second experience" which, in the 60's and 70's, was the central Charismatic focus.

There is no such experience as the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" ever promised in Scripture. In fact, the phrase "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is never used in Scripture. The phrase is always in the verb form "Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit" and is always used in conjunction with the alternative phrase "John baptizes in water." The Gospel writers were simply stating that Jesus was superior to John the Baptist. They were not offering or promising some specific experience. There is no mention of any "second experience" in the didactic portions of Scripture. In the sections of Acts, often cited as evidence by Charismatics (2,8,10,19), the verbs "filled," "received," "came upon" are used, never "baptized."

III. The Epistemological Issue:

A primary theological concern is: What is the basis for knowledge? The answer is, we "know and believe" what the Bible clearly declares and promises. The Charismatic basis for knowledge is the combination of experience and the authority of Charismatic leaders. Basing what you know upon what you experience and what others tell you will potentially call into question the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Can Charismatics know that they are actually speaking in tongues? If Scripture is the singular source of knowledge, the answer is NO. While the Bible says that Peter, Paul, the Apostles, Cornelius, the Ephesians spoke in tongues, it does not promise that anyone today would speak in tongues. In fact, is the "speaking in tongues" practiced by charismatics today the same experience taught in 1 Corinthians 14? Some doubt it. It is obvious from 1 Corinthians that the tongues are Corinth were known languages. Perhaps the issue was simply what language should be spoken in the public worship. The Bible does not define the nature of speaking in tongues. Charismatics believe they are speaking in tongues because of their experience and because other Charismatics have told them that what they are doing is speaking in tongues.

Are they really speaking in tongues?

Our church's position is: You cannot know for sure! My opinion: I don't believe so. While many stories are told, I know of no situation in which a charismatic tongue was identified as a known foreign language.

IV. The Credibility Issue:

All supernatural occurrences in the New Testament such as speaking in tongues, casting out demons, falling over dead were spontaneous events. The Charismatic manifestations of the alleged supernatural are primarily learned phenomena. People are taught to speak in tongues, programmed to fall over backwards, and counseled into believing that they are demonized.

Take, for example, the typical Charismatic teaching on speaking in tongues. The scenario goes something like this:

1. Acts 2:4: "**They** began to speak..." You, not the Holy Spirit, speaks in tongues.
2. 1 Corinthians 14:32: "The spirit of the prophets **is in the control** of the prophets." You initiate the new language. You prime the pump and initiate the flow. You may begin "in the flesh," but end up "in the Spirit."
3. The first temptation you will receive is that you made it all up yourself. This is not true. Why? "If you ask for bread, you will not get a stone." You asked Jesus and he gave it to you. (Is this temptation or reality check?)

The tongues experiences in the Book of Acts were spontaneous events. The Apostles on Pentecost did not receive prior teaching on tongue-speaking. Peter did not instruct Cornelius to begin to speak in tongues while he was preaching. Paul did not give the Ephesians information on priming the "tongues-pump." Charismatics respond by saying that while you think you are making it up, it is really the Holy Spirit within you providing the utterance. Is this feasible?

Charismatics make many claims as to what the Lord is doing and going to do. The problem is, the Lord never seems to do it! According to Scripture, we must never speak in the name of the Lord if we are not certain that what we are saying is the Word of the Lord.

As a participant in the Charismatic Movement for fifteen years, in spite of all the rhetoric, I never saw a person healed of an obvious ailment. Charismatic ministries are no more "supernatural" than are non-Charismatic ministries. Every Charismatic does have one or two "pet healing stories" which they tell over and over again. Many of the healing stories, such as Benny Hinn's claim to have emptied the beds in a Sault Ste. Marie hospital, are fraudulent.

Psychologists have demonstrated that people will engage in all kinds of strange behavior because of suggestions from an authority figure.

Conclusion:

Twenty years ago, most LCMS congregations had some Charismatics within their ranks. That is certainly not the case today. The traditional Lutheran Charismatic Renewal is, in my opinion, a dead issue. When I left the movement in '86, RIM (Renewal in Missouri) was just beginning. The leadership of RIM is the same today as it was ten years ago. In other words, there are no new, young, energetic Charismatic promoters. The Promise Keepers' Movement, with its "charisgelical" leadership, and contemporary Christian music are the vehicles used today to introduce Lutherans to Charismatic "life."

While I renounced my involvement in the Charismatic Movement, I did not renounce the Holy Spirit. I redefined my spiritual awakening in 1971 as the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit which is a clear biblical, Lutheran doctrine. I believe that many Charismatics have had legitimate spiritual awakenings. Seeking the Holy Spirit and studying the Word of God will produce dynamic results. A common experience among Charismatics is that the Bible becomes a new and living book. This is enlightenment and is, I believe, the key to spiritual renewal.

Charismatics need to recognize that theological definitions are very important. How you define an experience will determine your expectations. If a person believes that he has been baptized in the Holy Spirit and ushered into the supernatural dimension his desire will be to see supernatural things in order to validate his experience. Charismatics today are open to almost anything that appears supernatural even if it involves, as in the case of Paul Yonggi

Cho's "Fourth Dimension" teaching, occult phenomena. I have come to the conclusion that the charismatic movement has visited the Christian Church with a major delusion and deception.

If I define a spiritual awakening as enlightenment, I will be directed to the Word of God, not to the pursuit of alleged miracles.

In the 70's and 80's, the Charismatic Movement invaded our congregations and stole many of our people who now attend Charismatic Churches. I believe the time has come to turn the tables. We have seen, as a result of *Issues, Etc.*, numerous people leave the Charismatic Movement and join churches who offer solid theology. Our strength and appeal is not our ability to do contemporary music nor to provide an emotional experience but to teach that solid theology.

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