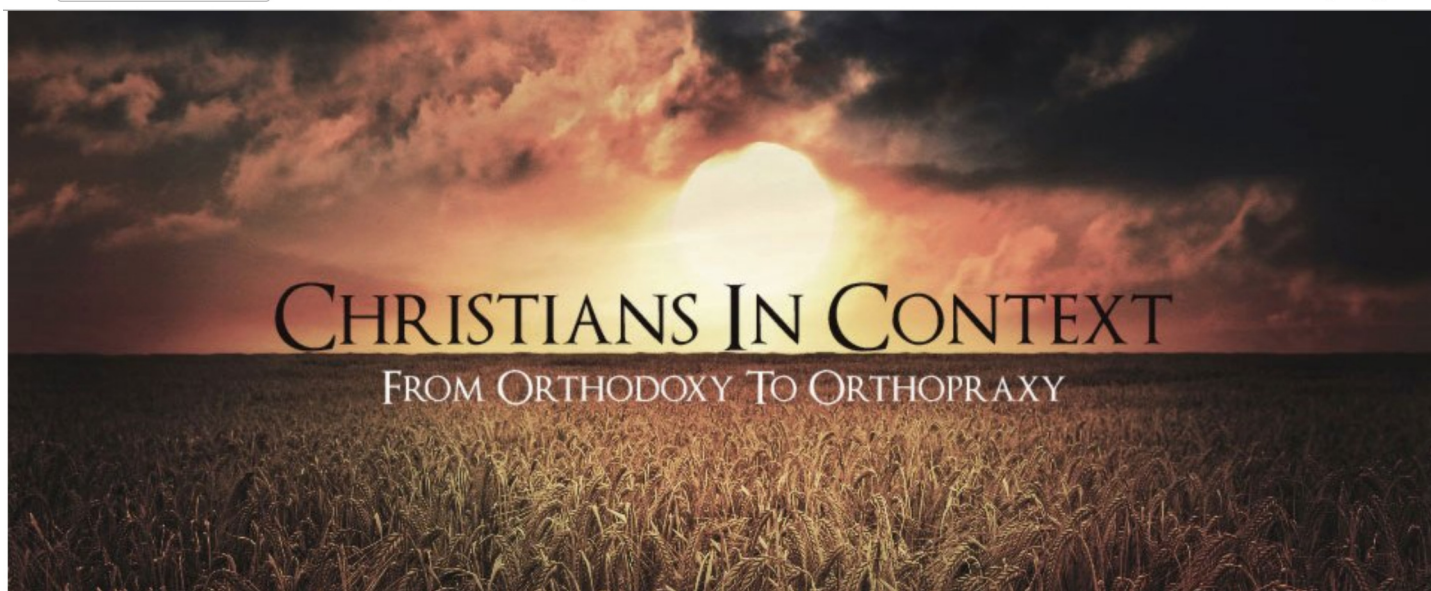


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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2010

Evaluating the Charismatic Movement in its 50th Year

Posted by Andrew Faris

My Father is an insider in the charismatic movement. He originally became a Christian in the [Jesus movement](#) and has pastored Vineyard churches for over 20 years. This experience on top of his general intelligence and godliness combine to make him a credible voice for his last two blog posts, "[What Now, Charismatics?](#)" and, more to the point of this post, "[Charismatic Boons and Busts](#)", where he evaluates, as the title suggests, the good and the bad of the charismatic movement.

By way of summary, he offers the following mirrored commendations and critiques:

1. **Boon:** More focus, both theological and practical, on the person and work of the Holy Spirit; **Bust:** A lot of bad theology of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Boon:** An outburst in compassion ministry; **Bust:** Personality cults.
3. **Boon:** An increase in "lay ministry"; **Bust:** The "Prophetic Movement", where certain people are always prophesying/projecting "the next big thing".
4. **Boon:** Worship music; **Bust:** Worship music.

I am quite in agreement with these points, but I thought it may be worth offering a few others. I do not have my Dad's charismatic credentials, but I was raised in the Vineyard and still consider myself a charismatic, so know that this all comes from one who is generally in agreement with the basic premises of the movement.

Boon: Emphasis on the place of emotions and experience in the life of a Christian.

Christianity is more than mental assent to a series of beliefs. We believe that the central glory of salvation is that Christians can actually *know* God in Christ. Charismatic churches work this assumed truth into their meetings more fluidly and regularly than any other churches I have been to without exception. This experience includes emotional overflow, which charismatics are glad for. And why shouldn't they be? If God is really with us- if we can *really* know Him- then shouldn't we expect that we will feel our responses deeply?

I wonder, by the way, if this explains the recent convergence of charismatics and Reformed types (e.g. Piper, Mahaney, Storms). The theological approach to Christian living popularized most recently and widely by Piper in *Desiring God* (wherein Christians glorify God *by enjoying Him*) really does go hand in hand with the charismatic emphasis on experiencing God. It has been a fruitful combination for at least this Reformed charismatic.

Bust: The steadfast refusal to validate the importance of the life of the mind in Christian living.

In my experience, the best, most serious Bible teachers and thinkers have not been charismatics. By contrast, charismatics seem to wrap up experience of God so much in emotions that intellectual response is generally considered "less spiritual". It is as if folks are saying, "Why bother with all your heady theology when I can feel God here and now?" The result has been much of the bad worship songs, bad preaching, and shallow practice that many consider synonymous with charismaticism. There are exceptions, of course (e.g. Wayne Grudem and Gordon Fee), but in my experience, most charismatics would rather sing "[In the Secret](#)" than "[Before the Throne of God Above](#)". And the lay people themselves are normally not to blame: it is the leaders who have not trained their churches to be thoughtful who are at fault.

I am glad for the indications that this tide is turning. The Vineyard, for example, has created "[The Society of Vineyard Scholars](#)", which held its inaugural theological conference this year. Also, the aforementioned convergence of charismaticism with Reformed theology will hopefully have positive effects on all of this. In any case, this is one of the largest oversights in

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- ▶ [2011](#) (47)
- ▼ [2010](#) (165)
 - ▶ [December 2010](#) (6)
 - ▶ [November 2010](#) (10)
 - ▶ [October 2010](#) (6)
 - ▶ [September 2010](#) (6)
 - ▶ [August 2010](#) (10)
 - ▶ [July 2010](#) (12)
 - ▶ [June 2010](#) (14)
 - ▶ [May 2010](#) (13)
 - ▶ [April 2010](#) (22)
 - ▶ [March 2010](#) (24)
 - ▼ [February 2010](#) (12)
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Boon: The recovery of the priesthood of all believers.

OK, I'm cheating here because my Dad already mentioned something quite like this. But I really am convinced that nothing can do more to get everyday Christians ministering than emphasizing that spiritual gifts are for everyone. Most evangelical worship services have basically two people doing the talking/leading: the pastor who is preaching and the worship pastor. This communicates week in and week out that these are the only ones who really minister. But they are not. When my old Vineyard church allowed space every week for any believer in the congregation to prophesy, read Scripture, give words of knowledge, pray for others, or ask for prayer, it was clear that every Christian could and should minister. I love this about the charismatic movement.

Bust: Charismatic excess and bad theology of spiritual gifts.

Nothing has done more to turn people off from charismaticism than **the excess of charismatics**. The steadfast refusal of charismatics to heed the clear teachings of 1 Cor. 12 & 14 consistently flabbergasts me. Why- I beg you, charismatic leaders, why- why do you allow people to speak in tongues publicly without interpreting? Why will you not weigh prophecy against the Bible more rigorously? Why do you push people down when you want to pray for them to heal them? Charismatic gatherings have so much that is patently unbiblical (**even if it really is the Holy Spirit who is at work!**) that I cannot blame many for their skepticism.

Right in line with this is the influx of garbage teaching about the nature and practice of spiritual gifts themselves. The "spiritual gifts test" in all its ugly forms is the clearest example of this, but it goes beyond that. CiC has posted plenty on this issue in the past (go [here](#) and follow the links), so I'll leave it at that. Charismatics are not the only ones to blame, but of course, they have propagated it with the most vigor.

I should close by reiterating that I love the Vineyard movement in particular (I am a charismatic, yes, but I am no Pentecostal). I am glad to see when it flourishes, and I pray that it only will more. And for those who are not cessationists but who are also not charismatics, **may I ask why not?** If the "charismatic" gifts are still for the church today, who are you not quenching the Spirit when you do not pursue them intently?

Update: My Dad added another "boons and busts" post with four more. [Check it out.](#)



4 COMMENTS...:



rick said...

hmmm ... been in the AVC since '87 (I missed the very beginning) and never thought we were charismatic ... I only used that term with anti-charismatics to help them more quickly understand what they didn't like about me.

February 22, 2010 2:38 PM



Andrew Faris said...

Rick,

What do you consider yourself then? Any theological term you prefer? Third Wave, perhaps? Whatever you do want to call it, the Vineyard is certainly where most of my experience has been and where most of this post was aimed at.

For that matter, I should say that there probably are some anti/non-charismatic readers of this blog, so the broader term may be the most helpful

Discuss.

▶ January 2010 (30)

▶ 2009 (327)

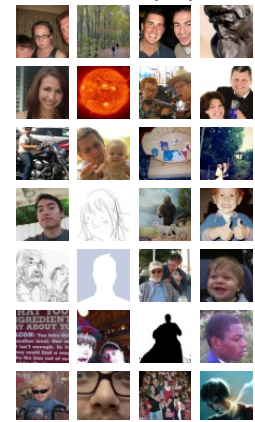
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THEOLOGICAL WORD OF THE DAY

Andrew

February 22, 2010 2:53 PM

Steve Hayes said...

I'm busy right now writing a history of the charismatic movement in southern Africa (see [Charismatic Renewal: Khanya](#)) so I found your post very helpful -- it couldn't have been better timed.

February 22, 2010 5:45 PM

Barb said...

THX Andrew, good post, insightful! The gulf between Charismatics and spirit-filled, word obeying people should be filled with Vineyard folk, who embrace the Holy Spirit's power and move, teach the authority of the scripture and obedience to it's practices, and empower doing the stuff laity as it's front line for cultural change.

February 25, 2010 1:12 PM

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