

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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RECONSTRUCTIONIST RENEWAL AND CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

by Gary North

Power from below, whether feared or courted, is very much a part of modern man's faith. That power can reside in inanimate nature, as in the stars, and hence the revival of interest in astrology. It can reside in magic and witchcraft, or in other related practices, but, in any case, it is *power from below*. The result of such a faith can only lead, as it already has, to a greater faith in raw and primitive violence as against reason. We can only expect, until this faith is shattered, a steady intensification of violence, crime, and revolution. *Power from below* means that normal sexuality is regarded as sterile and inhibited, and violence, rape, and perversion are thus regarded as raw and true power in the sexual realm. It also means a greater stress on mindless religion, as witness the so-called charismatic movement, an emphasis on mindless experience as power. The charismatic who learns to babble insanely in what is no tongue at all has no answer therein to moral and intellectual problems, but he "witnesses" eloquently to others of the feeling of "power in the Spirit," power which is in essence a cultivation of what is mindless and subterranean.

R. J. Rushdoony¹

Most charismatics are premillennial dispensationalists. Why charismatics have, until quite recently, clung so tightly to Dallas Seminary's view of biblical law and eschatology has long been a mystery to me. Why does a person adopt almost without alteration the theological system of people who think he is heretical or worse? But for over half a century, millions of Pentecostals have done exactly that. This has recently begun to change. More and more charismatics are now dropping dispensationalism and adopting Christian Reconstruction.

A new book is scheduled for publication soon by a Dallas Seminary professor who criticizes Christian Reconstruction for its close alliance with the charismatic movement. He recognizes that this is "a new thing," to coin a phrase. Understandably, this a real concern to the premillennial dispensationalists at Dallas Seminary. They despise the charismatic movement, and in the past have expelled charismatic students. They also despise Reformed theology—at least those who aren't closet Calvinists do. To see the two theological streams now flowing together frightens them. It should.

The fact that charismatics are abandoning the Scofield Reference Bible seems consistent. Or does it? Are these charismatics jumping out of the dispensational frying pan into the Reconstructionist fire? Are they adopting a theol-

ogy of another group of people who also think that they are heretical or worse? Is Mr. Rushdoony's view of the charismatic movement really representative of the Christian Reconstruction movement? Not any longer. Anyway, not entirely. Not in Tyler.

I am no longer on speaking terms with my father-in-law, so I do not know if he still analyzes the charismatic movement in terms of its supposed links to the underlying theology of witchcraft and sexual perversion. He no longer says so publicly, in any case. If you are a charismatic, you might consider asking him what he now believes (P.O. Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251). He may have changed his views since 1974. It would be most interesting to discover **why** he has changed his views, if he has. (He does speak at charismatic conferences, as I do, so this may be evidence of a major shift in his theology. Then again, it may just be prudence in action: don't make your paying host angry.)

I know I have changed my view. I reprinted Mr. Rushdoony's essay as an appendix to my 1976 book, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft*. I was always nervous about this very section. I was not convinced that he was correct about charismatics. On the other hand, I was not convinced that he was incorrect. So I did what I believed was the prudent thing: I did not unilaterally revise his essay. But when it came time for me to reprint the book in an updated form, *Unholy Spirits* (Dominion Press, 1986), I dropped this appendix. Nevertheless, it will eventually come out that I reprinted it in 1976. I think it is time to clarify matters before this happens. My changed view has to do with shifting theologies on both sides.

Shifting Theologies

The charismatic movement is now in the process of breaking up. This is because Rushdoony's original assessment was not completely off the mark. There was for many decades an antinomian streak in Pentecostalism. Pentecostals got it straight out of Scofield. Without biblical law as a guide, what is the basis of living the Christian life? I can think of three answers: feelings, man-made rules and regulations (legalism), and power. Pentecostals fell prey to all three.

By adopting an antinomian theology, Pentecostals placed themselves at the mercy of satanic forces—power from below. (So, for that matter, do non-Pentecostal dispensationalists.) This has been going on within the church for 1900 years. But Pentecostals had seen certain signs and wonders that seemed to confirm their theology, something that normal dispensationalists lack. This is why Dallas Seminary tosses out Pentecostal students. They want antinomianism without power, signs, and wonders. They are satisfied with cultural defeat without all the trimmings.

1. Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. 1 (Winter, 1974), p. 9.

Some Pentecostals weren't satisfied. They had seen God at work. (They also had seen Satan masquerading as God, for Satan would rather perform signs and wonders in a local church or tent service than provide cultural influence for members of that church.) They recognized that God moves in history to heal the sick and dying. Always in the back of any Pentecostal's mind is this nagging question: "If God can heal a sick person, why can't He heal a sick society?" That is not a question that dispensationalists ask themselves very often. (Amillennialists don't either.)

Then, in the late 1970's, a handful of Pentecostal-charismatics discovered Christian Reconstruction. They finally got the answer they had been waiting for: God **can** heal a sick society. Better yet: God **will** heal a sick world through a great movement of the Holy Spirit. These men dropped dispensationalism, and adopted a world-and-life view that is consistent with the victories that charismatics have seen first-hand.

Meanwhile, within the "Tyler" branch of the Reconstructionist movement, there came a new emphasis on liturgy, especially the power of the sacraments, and especially weekly communion. This emphasis on communion soon led to the split between "Tyler" and "Vallecito," for Mr. Rushdoony adamantly refuses to take communion—weekly, monthly, or annually. The Tyler church also adopted formal healing services as a part of public worship. The elders went to sick people and anointed them with oil. (The first step, it must never be forgotten, is the sick person's confession of sin. **Ethics is primary, not the details of liturgy.**) My wife was healed miraculously of a life-long affliction as a result of one such visit. So were others in the church.

This did not lead to tongues-speaking, but it did lead to a new willingness to accept the fact that no one ecclesiastical organization has all the answers.

The Holy Kiss

Let me give the example that sticks in my mind. The New Testament never says that a church must pass a collection plate each week, but almost every church does. It does not say that marriages and funerals should be conducted in church, but almost every church conducts them. (The Puritans didn't, by the way.) The New Testament does not say that there must be tongues-speaking in church, but Pentecostal churches define themselves by this form of liturgy. What the New Testament clearly and repeatedly **does** say is that we should greet each other with a holy kiss. Paul **commanded** this again and again (Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26). Peter also commanded it (I Pet. 5:14).

Now, let's be honest. When was the last time you personally obeyed the New Testament in this regard? When was the last time you heard a sermon on it? No, it's "turn to your neighbor and shake hands with him." Greet each other with a holy handshake!

The fact is, churches are liturgically diverse. They do not agree on what is supposed to be done in a worship service, apart from a sermon, a few hymns or psalms, and passing the collection plate. They do agree about one thing that is **not** to be done: greet each other with a holy kiss. In short, everyone ignores the obvious. This is traditional. It is convenient. It is also wrong.

Once we recognize how liturgically diverse we are, and once we admit that no denomination honors what is clearly taught by Paul and Peter, we can begin to dispense with the existing radical separatism between conflicting traditions. Obviously, any Pentecostal who declares that he has received a revelation from God that is equal to (and therefore in practice supersedes) the Bible has become heretical. But most Pentecostals admit this, at least officially. So the debate is over practice, not theology. And this is another reason why the charismatics are splitting apart. Those who hold to the older pietistic antinomian mysticism are at war with those who have abandoned Scofield and have adopted biblical law. It is a fight at least analogous to the split within the Presbyterian camp between those who hold to traditional antinomian pietism (sometimes even affirming Scofieldism) and those who affirm biblical law.

The Heart of the Matter

The heart of the matter is ethics. It is the great debate over the question: "How shall we then live?" All the brouhaha about prophecy charts is a smoke screen. The real issue is obedience to God in every area of life, and the connected issue, "By what standard?"

Closer connections between the "Tyler" branch of Christian Reconstructionism and the charismatic movement have developed over the last five or six years because of the underlying agreement over the answer to the question: "By what standard?" The agreed-upon standard is **the whole Bible**. Both sides recognize that this underlying agreement is more important than prophecy charts, tongues, mode of baptism, and similar debating points. The issue is ultimately this one: Whose law-order is sovereign in history, Christ's or Satan's? This also raises the question of whose kingdom is sovereign in history. Over the answer to that question, charismatics are now battling. So are Presbyterians and other Reformed groups.

This growing alliance between charismatics and Reconstructionists has disturbed Reformed Presbyterians almost as much as it has disturbed premillennial dispensationalists. It has led to accusations of heresy against both groups from all sides: pietistic Pentecostalism, pietistic Scofieldism, and pietistic Presbyterianism. The critics worry about the fact that the Pentecostalism's infantry is at last being armed with Reconstructionism's field artillery. They **should** be worried. This represents one of the most fundamental realignments in U.S. Protestant church history.

Conclusion

The charismatics, contrary to Rushdoony's 1974 evaluation, are no longer (if they ever were) mindless people who have substituted experience for reason. Many have substituted theonomy for antinomianism. It is the hope of the "Tyler" branch of Reconstructionism that they will also substitute weekly communion for quarterly, child communion for no child communion, and infant baptism for profession-of-faith baptism. We want them to see that every professing head of household is under the judicial terms of God's covenant, and therefore family members under his jurisdiction are also under these judicial terms, whether professing Christians or not. Now, if we could just persuade the Reformed churches of this, too!

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