

THE “NEO-CHARISMATIC” CHURCHES AND NETWORKS OF THE LAST THIRTY-FIVE YEARS

Friday April 8, 2005

An Evaluation: Sociological and Theological

This month I want to reflect on the phenomenon that I have presented during my last two visits: this massive growth in new charismatic churches and networks, especially since 1980. It is important to examine what has been happening and to ask questions about it:

- What is most clearly the work of the Holy Spirit?
- What is a clothing of the perennial Gospel in modern forms?
- Where are they sensing more clearly the needs of contemporary society?
- What is an adaptation (surrender) of the Gospel to modern demands?
- Where are old patterns they criticize reappearing in a new form?
- What are their strengths and their weaknesses?

This reflection needs to be more than just doctrinal or theological. For many of the characteristics of the new churches represent a taking on of contemporary patterns (organisation, leadership, training, buildings, music), so these factors also introduce an anthropological or sociological element. I have already remarked that often the first people to study this phenomenon seriously are social scientists (e.g. anthropologists and sociologists). This is because they are always on the look-out for interesting new patterns developing in the contemporary world.

For a Christian, I think the first question has to be: what is most clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. Here I believe we have to

begin by saying that this is a Christian phenomenon. There is a strong element of the Holy Spirit involved in this current, because it arose initially from baptism in the Spirit with spiritual gifts; because it seeks to be biblical and to be Christocentric (it rejects post-biblical revelation); and because it has a strong missionary concern. The emphasis on praise, on evangelism, on church planting, on intercession: these are hallmarks of the Holy Spirit (which does not mean that everything done under these banners is 100% Holy Spirit).

In the Pentecostal movement, there was a greater element of biblical rediscovery (Pentecost), and a smaller element of contemporaneity. With the new charismatics, in what is new and distinctive, it seems to be the other way round: a bigger element of contemporaneity and a smaller element of biblical rediscovery.

This contemporary character is seen in models of organisation, leadership, training, buildings, music in the service of the Gospel and methods of effective evangelism. So here comes also the sharpest critique: that they have exalted contemporary forms and relevance to the detriment of the fullness of biblical revelation.

Let us look more closely at this modernity and then move into a more biblical and theological assessment/reflection:

1. Organisation

The new churches are much more like new business enterprises than traditional church structures. First in their independence: starting a new enterprise (church, ministry) unrelated to existing church traditions and structures. This is quite a new mentality, stemming from the world of capitalist free enterprise.

This has advantages: it means there is a freedom to develop the new church or ministry according to the founder's vision, without interference from unsympathetic denominational

authorities. It also privileges success and growth: those new groupings that are still around after 30 years are those that succeeded, but there were others that did not succeed, about which we do not hear so much. Another application of the saying: History is written by the winners.

While the new networks inevitably develop their own structures, they seek to subordinate them to their vision and mission. These new structures are generally flexible, being adapted to changing needs and situations. This flexibility is a major asset, but it is easier in the first generation of a new movement than in the third and fourth.

The new churches do not have the geographical limitations imposed by traditional church structures. They are not limited by the parochial and diocesan structures of the Catholics, the Lutherans and the Anglicans; and they are not limited by the national structures of virtually all the Protestant denominations. So we find the new networks expanding across national borders. The new networks are much better adapted to the era of **globalisation**.

It has disadvantages: as with the world of capitalist free enterprise, it produces **competition**; first, the focus on evangelism can lead to many newcomers being transfers from other churches rather than converted unbelievers; secondly, the belief-system of the new grouping will be the beliefs of the founder – which while they contain important Christian convictions – will be less than the fullness of divine revelation. The successful new groups tend to major on elements neglected in historic Christianity (or at least in recent times): e.g. healing, deliverance, signs and wonders. They can start by reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of Evangelical Christianity, but they can reflect the weaknesses more strongly (e.g. a weakness in theology). Their rediscoveries may not be successfully integrated with those truths/doctrines that are part of biblical revelation and which have always been preached.

2. Leadership

This is generally a strong point of the new churches. The men who emerge as leaders are those with the ability to lead (though they may have character defects that work against a Christian pattern of leadership). Providing leadership is rightly seen as key to impact and growth.

The flexibility of new groupings can be seen in the stories of their founders, particularly in the widespread pattern of the founder being the pastor of a growing church, attracting others to his leadership, the formation of a network, and then the founder handing over the original church to another pastor and becoming full-time leader of the network. See story of Terry Virgo, founder of New Frontiers International, told in his book *No Well-Worn Path*.

It is under Leadership that comes the issue of Eph. 4: 11 ministries, in general a hallmark of the new charismatic churches. The new churches regard their patterns as more biblical as well as more effective (they would say effective because biblical). In fact, the effectiveness factor plays a huge role: the reasons for having networks with entrepreneurial oversight are much connected with the visions and ambitions of founding pastors, who seek a biblical basis for their systems. Because the new churches are not theologically sophisticated, the books arguing for apostles today are not of the kind that would impress many biblical scholars and theologians. But this is a debate that needs to take place. It is clear that what is claimed to be apostolic ministry is closely linked to: pastoral oversight of pastors (Episcopal ministry without assigned territories?) to church planting and expansion, and to encouragement of the other ministries (prophet, teacher, etc). The recognition of prophets seems to be more problematic. One major figure acclaimed by many as a prophet is now under discipline for grave moral failings.

However in some parts of the world a major criticism of new church leaders is of lack of accountability. One article cites the problem of “immature, authoritarian and power-hungry leaders”¹.

3. Membership Participation

The new charismatic churches are highly participatory (links with age of democracy). The comments of Peter Zimmerling², a charismatic Lutheran scholar from Germany: The rediscovery of the charismatic dimension of the Gemeinde made clear a serious weakness (Defizit) in the Reformation Churches. In theory they taught the priesthood of all believers, but in practice they had not overcome the pastor-dominated character of parish life. (p. 128). The charismatic churches have done this through the encouragement of the spiritual gifts (charisms) in all the church members. Zimmerling remarks that the original plurality of charisms was first practised in 18th century Pietism in the Brudergemeinde in Herrnhut (p. 129).

Zimmerling emphasizes the gift character of all charisms (p. 124). He is critical of programmes preparing people for charisms. He sees the great variety of charisms as linked to the great variety of ways in which people can receive charisms (p. 125). He emphasizes the need to ground the working of the supernatural in the created order. Otherwise (his criticism of Pentecostals and New Charismatics) the result is inevitably a highlighting of the more extraordinary. The need for very visible supernatural manifestations then produces manipulation to bring this about.

Charisms have an ecclesial Zielhorizont, spectacular charisms must be entzaubert, charisms have a identity-building potential, so that their integration into the whole personality is necessary,

¹ John Corrie in “Latin America and Western Europe: Mission Perspectives” in *Transformation* 21/4 (Oct. 2004), p. 263.

² Peter Zimmerling, *Die charismatischen Bewegungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

that a theory and practice concerning the awakening of charisms is needed, and that charisms have a social-ethical orientation. “Sie gehören systematisch-theologisch in den Bereich der Heiligung, sind der Frage nach der Erlösung also nachgeordnet; sie stehen unter eschatologischem Vorbehalt (proviso) und werden darum mit der Neuschöpfung aufhören (they will end with the new creation).”. It is necessary to understand the charisms in a Trinitarian framework instead of one that is only pneumatological (Spirit-centred). “The threefold Charismenursprung in 1 Cor. 12: 4 ff. implies a pneumatological, christological and creations-theology foundation for the multiplicity of the charisms.” (p. 187).

The new church emphasis on Eph. 4: 11 ministries as well as 1 Cor. 12 spiritual gifts can sometimes produce a tension, as Eph. 4: 11 are leadership ministries, whereas the spiritual gifts of 1 Cor. are for all. So it is a test of the maturity of the leadership whether they really encourage the exercise of the gifts among the whole congregation.

4. Worship

A strength in worship is that most new charismatic churches begin their gatherings with a substantial period of **praise**. This again is highly participatory – with body as well as with voice. No special items by highly-trained choirs. These churches often give more teaching on praise than other Christians, with attention to the formation of music ministers. Music leading has become a real ministry, and among leading network musicians a full-time ministry (Doerksen, Ruiz, Kendrick, Redman, Richards). As a result, there is an understanding of leading the congregation towards an intimacy with the Lord. There is also a great creativity in the composition of new songs.

An Anglican scholar, Martyn Percy³, has made a detailed study of the teaching and music of John Wimber and the Vineyard

³ *Words, Wonders and Power* (London: SPCK, 1996).

churches. Percy makes an important point that the music and words of the songs play an essential role in Vineyard life, shaping the minds and hearts of the members. Percy makes a comparison between the hymns of Wesley and the songs of Wimber: the hymns of Wesley are didactic (forming the understanding as well as uplifting the heart); the songs of Wimber are existential and therapeutic: “For Wesley .. there is a stress on the sin of mankind, and the need for salvation; on Christ’s atonement, and the power of the cross; on the need for holiness, discipline and order. [Wimber] the stress is quite different. Songs focus on the power and love of God; the Christian is not so much sinful, as unfulfilled, and in need of healing; the cross of Christ is almost absent, replaced by an emphasis on the majesty and closeness of God.” (p. 64).

Percy speaks of the “passivity” in Vineyard songs, “a passivity that does not include sufferance, abstinence, or pain”. “Tears, fears, pain and misery are resolved in the songs, provided the worshipper has surrendered to the love and power of God. Significantly, the source of such malaises (personal responsibility, Satan, or whatever), is seldom mentioned. ... Reflecting Wimber’s belief that the Church simply needs to receive power, the worshipper is portrayed as a passive victim of emotional, physical or spiritual affliction. The solution to the problem is equally passive: to receive and reside in a counterbalancing flow of power and love.” (p. 65).

“Externally, the community appears structureless, united only in spirit. Internally, however, the community of feeling is the community of the fulfilled. And this fulfilment arises out of the community’s self-reflection of their closeness to God, and his closeness to them.” (p. 68). “the worship songs of Wimber seem to reduce significant knowledge of God to testimony about transformed emotional states, and stress how the individual believer has been affected.” (pp. 68 – 9).

Zimmerling provides both positive and negative comments on new church worship (not limited to Vineyard):

4.3.1. “Eine liturgische Befreiungsbewegung” – Stärken charismatischer Gottesdienstkultur (pp. 230 – 1).

- a) Der Gottesdienst als Ort für das spontane Wirken des Geistes (pp. 231 – 2).
- b) Partizipatorische Ausrichtung des Gottesdienstes (pp. 232 – 3).
- c) Ökumenische Offenheit des Gottesdienstes (pp. 233 – 4).
- d) Betonung von Lob und Anbetung Gottes (pp. 234 – 7).

All four are seen first as positive. Expectation of God doing great things today as well as in the past (importance of element of memorial) (p. 232). “The program of a totally praise-centred praxis represents an important step towards overcoming the intellectualising of Evangelical [Lutheran] worship.” (p. 234).

4.3.2. Verbleibende Anfragen an die charismatische Gottesdienstkultur.

„Ich habe den Eindruck, dass charismatische Bewegungen die Beziehung des Geisteswirkens zum Wirken der beiden anderen trinitarischen Personen nicht inklusiv, sondern exklusiv verstehen.“ (p. 237). For Zimmerling, the traditional liturgies [he is thinking especially of Lutheran and Reformed worship] emphasized the Father and the Son, but neglected the Spirit. This was done through Word and Sacrament. Now he sees the charismatic worship culture as strong on the Spirit, but weak on Father and Son, as Word and Sacrament are neglected. He sees three dangers in this Charismatic Worship Culture: (1) a failure to appreciate the traditional liturgies; (b) an ever-increasing monotony due to its unreality; (c) an opposition between worship happenings and everyday life (p. 238). “The scepticism towards traditional liturgical forms in most charismatic groups is in danger of failing to recognize that the working of the Spirit always has an incarnational orientation: the over-emphasis of spontaneous working of the Spirit in charismatic worship leads to an under-emphasis of the – once and for all achieved – redemption in Jesus Christ.” (p. 239).

“Alle Gottesdienste sind geprägt von einer emotional erhöhten Stimmungslage.“ (p. 241). „We, especially in the Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, have fashioned a world that wishes

away the reality and inserts a dogma that believes everything is OK, everything must be in control, everything is manageable! Thus, the sermons and the songs become the mode of support for our desire of a ‘well-wished’ world.” (citing an American author, pp. 242 – 3). Zimmerling cites Graham Kendrick: “In the adoration of Jesus Christ the false gods of contemporary society should be challenged and their areas of power be threatened. Kendrick mentions for today’s western society the examples of the god of superabundance, the god of personal happiness, the god of anxiety, the god of unjust social systems (p. 244). “Charismatic worship culture should not lead to an isolation of the Spirit’s working in divine worship from his working in everyday life.” (p. 245).

5. Pastoral Ministry

Evaluation of Charismatic Pastoral practice: Positives: Makes Christian proprium central; centrality of faith, recognition of God, Lordship of Jesus and gifts of Spirit. Possible role of evil spirits. Rediscovery for Protestants of forgotten elements, like laying on of hands. Opened up new areas of reality in pastoral care, including the importance of intuition (p. 297), feminine strength. Negatives: Forgetting the hidden aspect of God’s blessing through the cross, blessing in name of Jesus not in the power of the Spirit. We are saved by Jesus’ sufferings and death, not by his miracles. Need to keep salvation paramount. “Gefahr zu einem unpersönlich wirksamen Ritus zu werden“ (pp. 294 – 5). Danger of individualism: „Die Wirkungen von Gottes Segen transzendieren das Schicksal des einzelnen Menschen. ... Ziel von Gottes Segenshandeln ist die endgültige Erneuerung der Schöpfung.“ (p. 295). Danger of loss of focus on justification. Focus on power of Holy Spirit in danger of losing Christocentric and cross-centred focus and trinitarian framework (loss re-Father and creation: loss re Jesus and Cross). Over-emphasis on supernatural and sensational, exalting intuition over intelligence (p. 298).

Faith Movement/Emphasis: Link between Positive Thinking and Visualisation (Agnes Sanford one of first exponents). Major teacher today is Cho through his teaching on *The Fourth Dimension*⁴. “First, to use your faith you must be able to envision a clear-cut objective.” (p. 9). “Secondly, if you have a vivid picture, you should have a burning desire for those objectives.” (p. 23). “Thirdly, you must have the substance, or assurance.” (p. 24); “you must wait upon the Lord until you get the assurance.” (p. 26). “Fourth, you should show evidence of your faith.” (p. 28). “Claim and speak the word of assurance, for your word actually goes out and creates.” (p. 31).

Cho presents the widespread Faith teaching that distinguishes between *logos* and *rhema*. In his teaching *logos* is the general word (Cho says the world was created by the *logos* of God) and *rhema* is the particular word of God (“faith specifically comes by hearing the *rhema*.” p. 91). Cho ends up defining *rhema*: “*rhema* is a specific word to a specific person in a specific situation.” (p. 91). In fact, this is biblically untenable: where Paul uses *rhema* in Romans 10 (one of the passages cited by Faith teachers), he is not referring to specific words to individuals, but to the gospel being preached. “the word of faith we are proclaiming” (Rom. 10: 8) is part of Paul’s teaching on justification by faith, and comes immediately before: “if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.” (Rom. 10: 9). The same applies to the context of Rom. 10: 17: “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ”. *Rhemata* is used of the Gospel in Acts 5: 20: “tell the people the whole message of this life”. *Logos* is not just the general word (it is used much more frequently in the NT than *rhema*): the most striking disproof is

⁴ Cho’s first 4 chapters in *The Fourth Dimension*: 1. Incubation: A Law of Faith; 2. The Fourth Dimension; 3. The Creative Power of the Spoken Word; 4. Rhema.

in 1 Cor. 12: 8, where the spiritual gifts of “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” are both *logos*⁵.

Does this undermine the whole of Cho’s faith teaching? No. All faith has an element of the divine: it is gift; it is the gift of God to take hold of the things of God. The problem is naiveté, not realising the element of ego, the depth of our need for purification. The assumption that what I want to pray for as a zealous pastor is simply 100% Holy Spirit.

Is visualisation problematic in itself? No, insofar as it brings into our minds the purposes of God for his creation. As power technique, it is highly problematic! A major danger: of reducing faith to a means of obtaining health, success and prosperity. Highly problematic that sicknesses and setbacks cannot be integrated into Christian faith. (Zimmerling, p. 265).

Inner healing. Zimmerling gives several positive fruits; but then questions: “Theologisch fragwürdig ist die Verkoppelung von innerer Heilung und Sündenvergebung, die sich bei manchen ihrer Vertreter ... beobachten lässt.” (p. 276). The certainty of the forgiveness of sins must not be made dependent on the experience of inner (seelisch) healing. Theologically, inner healing belongs to the sphere of sanctification. (276). They only fully come together in the *eschaton*.

Inner healing focuses attention on the relationship between spirit, soul and body. Need to give proper place to order of **creation**, and thus of scientific knowledge, but without denying the role and Lordship of the Holy Spirit. Need to learn wisdom and methods, without reducing to technology. Role of ministers of healing as servants, not as controllers who know everything.

6. Deliverance Ministry

⁵ See 1 Cor. 2: 13: “we speak of these things in words (*logois*) not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.”

“Die mit der Aufklärung erfolgte Entdämonisierung der Welt wurde in falscher Weise weitergeführt, indem das vorherrschende Wissenschaftsverständnis der Moderne nur noch die sichtbare - wägbare und messbare – Welt als existent betrachtete.“ (p. 281). „Die Westlichen Grosskirchen haben erst in jüngster Zeit angefangen, sich mit der veränderten geistigen Stimmungslage auseinander zu setzen. Bis vor wenigen Jahren meinten sie noch, Theologie und Glaube mit einem rationalistischen Weltbild in Einklang bringen zu können.“ (p. 281).

This is a distinguishing feature of new church ministry in many places, especially in Africa and Latin America. Zimmerling accepts 3 points from Thurneysen: (1) danger of over-emphasising the demonic; (2) of forgetting that exorcism stands under eschatological proviso; (3) of neglecting the societal context of burdens and bondages (p. 301).

Along with deliverance ministry often goes a practice of “spiritual warfare” as taught by C. Peter Wagner. Wagner’s steps: (1) choose a specific territory; (2) arrive at a unity among the spiritual warriors („Die Einheit unter den Pastoren einer Stadt ist eine unersetzliche Grundlage für die geistliche Kampfführung.“ (p. 354)⁶; (3) a common purpose among the congregations of the city/region; (4) the spiritual preparation of the intercessors (sanctification and obedience); (5) spiritual mapping of the area; (6) particular intercessors with prophetic gifts uncover the spiritual battle. As part of (6) it is presumed that each city has a particular task/calling, that one must discern between Satanic strongholds and “territorial spirits”⁷, that this warfare requires reconciliation between peoples with identificational repentance from the representatives of cities and nations. Theologically, SW has produced a “Dämonologie in

⁶ This is because the “Pastoren die geistlichen Torwächter einer Stadt sind“.

⁷ Territorial spirits are: “personal verstandene Dämonen, die mittels der ‘Festungen’ herrschen“ (p. 355).

kosmischen Größenordnungen” that presents itself as a “regelrechtes Welterklärungsmodell” (p. 358)⁸.

Zimmerling’s critique: This concept of SW was unknown before 1950. Early Eastern monasticism: “Indem der Kampf mit den Dämonen um die Gedanken der Mönche geführt wird, bleibt er unmittelbar mit deren persönlichem geistlichen Leben verbunden.” (p. 373). On St Benedict: Opposite of modern SW: (1) Benedict refuses to speak to the devil, no dialogue. (2) Benedict’s life is a threat to the devil and so the devil becomes aggressive, but with SW it is the other way round. (3) Benedict’s battle is the result of Evangelization, not prior to it. (pp. 374 – 5). For Luther, “die ganze Weltgeschichte einen Kampf des Bösen gegen Gott darstellt.“ (p. 376). Die Mittel (of the faithful) in diesem Kampf sind Glaube, Gebet und Verkündigung des Evangeliums“ (p. 376). Blumhardt „sich auf von Fasten begleitete Bittgebete beschränkte.“ (p. 376).

Zimmerling addresses the following issues: (1) the battle language. (Comparison with Joshua, OT battles, offensive strategy, etc). In NT, it is God in Christ who has destroyed the work of Satan cf 1 John 3: 8. “Als Ziel des Evangeliums wird der Kampf Jesu gegen den Satan genannt, anstatt bei der Versöhnung des Menschen mit Gott einzusetzen. Folglich steht im Zentrum der Evangelisation nicht die Predigt von der Versöhnung, sondern die geistliche Kampfführung.“ (p. 381). This turns upside down the relationship and use of military imagery between OT and NT. (2) the understanding of power. Too much ‘already’ at expense of ‘not yet’. In Eph. 6, the weapons are defensive weapons, not offensive. “Der Kampf mit Satan und Dämonen kann nur von Jesus Christus selbst offensiv geführt werden” (p. 383). SW in practice separates itself from the Gospel (p. 384). (3) Placing of Experience before Teaching. Wagner’s pragmatism. Allegorical tendencies in exegesis: “die Einnahme Kanaans durch die Israeliten lediglich als Vorbild für die Einnahme von okkult verseuchten Gebieten in Rahmen der

⁸ In this cosmic demonology, Eph. 6, Daniel 10 and Revelation 17 play a key role.

geistlichen Kampfführung gedeutet word.“ (p. 385). Prophetic insights serve as legitimation (p. 386). “die Anweisung, dunkle Schriftstellen von hellen her auszulegen, wird missachtet” (p. 386), the literal sense is neglected for the sake of an allegorical (prophetically interpreted). (4) A Ritualisation of the Gospel. “Der Geist wird nicht mehr vom Glaubensgeschehen, also vom Verhältnis des Menschen zu Gott her definiert, sondern vom Kampfgeschehen zwischen guten und bösen Mächten.“ (p. 387).

Percy is also critical of Wimber’s encouragement of deliverance ministry: “Though sin and personal responsibility play their part in his [Wimber’s] theology, they receive nothing like the emphasis that demons, powers and principalities receive.” (p. 94).

There is more to be said for “spiritual mapping” than Zimmerling allows. The Vatican document on *Memory and Reconciliation* recognizes that the sins of past generations still affect the present through memories, personal and corporate. Identifying the root-causes of past conflicts whose consequences still persist is an important step in dealing with conflict. But in MR the purpose is the purification of memories: eliminating the lies and distortions that are transmitted in our folk-histories. I can also see that where there has been corporate sin of peoples in abandonment to lies and violence, there has been an opening to evil spirits. But the repudiation and exorcism of evil spirits is both a prelude and a follow-up to renunciation of the sin. Is there a corporate parallel to people being cursed? Yes. Here Wagner is on to something, but his lack of theology is a big handicap. He assumes that every city has its “territorial spirits”: I would suggest that “spiritual mapping” is needed, but has to be more scientific, and less controlled by “prophetic imagination”. I.e. when there is hard evidence that a place/region was characterised by worship of/consecration to Satan, then there needs to be an exorcism/deliverance. Prophetic words can open up a door for research, but by themselves without corroboration can be dangerously subjective.

7. Church Planting

Zimmerling's critique: "steckt hinter diesem Argument (von Wagner) ... weniger der neutestamentlich begründete Missions – und Evangelisationsgedanke als vielmehr eine neuzeitliche, amerikanisch geprägte Wachstumsideologie, für die es keine ‚Grenzen des Wachstums‘ gibt." (p. 321). The essential difference between Wagner and NT lies in the conviction that "das Gemeindegewachstum durch eine Methode wie die Gründung neuer Gemeinden geplant werden könne." (p. 322). „lassen die Konzepte keine Berücksichtigung des ‚inneren‘ Wachstums erkennen.“ (p. 322). Behind this teaching lies a „triumphalistic Geistverständnis“ (p. 322). A high %age of members in church plants come from "transfer growth". Wagner emphasises the importance of prayer accompanying the process, and of leadership qualities. "durch eine bestimmte Methode der Weg zur Gemeindegewandgründung so festgelegt wird, dass eine echte Korrektur durch das spontane Wirken des Geistes gar nicht möglich ist." (p. 324). Wagner's teaching gives hardly any role to the unity of the Church (pp. 324 – 5). It neglects the Vielfalt of Gemeindeformen in the NT church (p. 325).

Zimmerling raises 3 theological issues: (1) charisma and institution; (2) The inculturation of the Gospel in changed situations in society; (3) the holding together of Unity and Pluriformity. Under (1) he asks „ob hier nicht Gottes Geist als traditionsloses Erneuerungsprinzip missverstanden wird“ (p. 329). For (3) he advocates a model for "einer konziliar und dialogisch orientierten Pluralität" (p. 334).

8. Theology

The critique common to Zimmerling and to Percy is really a lack of theological grounding, the triumph of pragmatism over principle. In the end, the theological lacks show up most in the lack of understanding of the incarnation (also as work of the Trinity), the lack of Christology, and a coherent understanding of salvation.

Salvation

Richard Shaull, studying the newest groupings in Latin America, esp the IURD, charts the traditional view and the new paradigm for salvation:

Traditional

Prob: "Human beings have fallen from the state of goodness in which they and the world were created. They are now victims of original sin, guilty before God and under God's judgment. In this context, evil is internalized.

Soln: God's free gift of forgiveness and justification of the sinner, made Available through the expiatory Work of Christ on the cross.

Human Faith as the acceptance of God's Resp: forgiveness and grace. Those persons who receive this unmerited gift offer their lives to God as an expression of their gratitude.

New Paradigm

Human beings are poor, impotent and condemned to insignificance. They are engaged in a desperate struggle for survival in a world falling apart around them. They and their world are largely 'possessed', dominated by supernatural demonic forces who are agents of chaos and destruction. They experience evil primarily as something outside themselves that threatens them and their world.

An experience of the presence and power of the resurrected Christ and of the Holy Spirit as the source of life and hope, the power to make it through each new day, and the guarantee of victory over demonic forces. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's saving work is manifest as an immediate response to suffering, pain, and brokenness, which makes possible a journey toward the fullness of life as health, material well-being and happiness.

Faith that dares to start a new interaction with God and take possession of what has been lost. It means appropriation of the power made available by God now in Order to take responsibility for one's life, live in community with others, and join in the struggle against demonic

forces fully confident of the coming of the millennium.⁹

“the movement of the believer from one realm of reality into another: not primarily from sin to forgiveness, but rather from empty to full, from destroyed to prosperous, from humiliated to respected, from depressed to happy, from anguish to peace, and from loneliness to life in the community of the church.”¹⁰

There is a huge challenge here – from the new Pents like IURD and new Chars like Faith chs – to our inherited ideas of salvation. We have had far too dichotomised a view: that has marginalized the body and this world. [Israel – earthly; Church – heavenly].

Weakness in Christology

“Christ the King, enthroned in glory with the reigning Father is emphasized, at the expense of Christ in his risen humanity, who has known weakness.” (p. 79). “The power that is .. portrayed is usually that of supernatural brute force, rather than the ambiguous power of Calvary.” (p. 79). “Those songs of Wimber that deal with ‘spiritual warfare’ are strongly success-oriented, showing little awareness of our inherent frailty and limitations, and still less that such weakness can itself be an agent for the grace of God.” (p. 80). “What of sin? The concept is almost entirely absent in Wimber’s songs, and when it does surface, it is usually only as a defeated power rather than a serious or persistent problem.” (p. 80). “The notion of the cross as a place where God bears the full reality of evil is absent.” (p. 80). “The Spirit is either like a lover bearing gifts or a brute supernatural force: but both are unrelated to Christ as a role-model of power.” (p. 80). Re the Church: “what we again find missing is a sense that authentic *koinonia* involves pain and hardship. Where pain or division is referred to, it is firmly in the context of ‘spiritual

⁹ Shaull in Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 144 – 146.

¹⁰ Shaull, *op. cit.*, citing Corten, p. 146.

warfare', where the Church is treated as an object of Satan's focus, in order to limit the power of God." (p. 81).

"Throughout Wimber's works, Jesus is constantly presented as a powerful personality who can take hold of and transform the inner life of others." (p. 84). "his summaries of the life of Jesus usually focus on his works, and how they can be repeated today: there is far too little stress on aspects of Christ's life that (apparently) cannot be imitated, not least the atonement." (p. 86).

"Although sin and personal responsibility play their part in his [Wimber's] theology, they receive nothing like the emphasis that demons, powers and principalities receive." (p. 94).

"Wimber, in common with other church growth thinkers, sees the Church as little more than a mechanism or agent (with a stress on efficiency), as it attempts to do the work of God. ... Wimber's rhetoric is often packed with mechanistic words like 'tools', 'effective', 'priority', 'mobilize' and 'control'." (p. 110). "The stress on holiness as an emerging trend within the Vineyard need not surprise us. Many revival movements find a move towards bodily and spiritual purity unavoidable. ... The reasons for this are manifold, but are connected at a deep level to the community's need to preserve the purity of their power." (p. 114). "The Church is to be a power-body, an agent, like Jesus, who enacts God's power. Entry or initiation into the Church is via an experiential power encounter, and continuation in the Christian life is being affirmed in the body by more signs and wonders." (p. 114).

"However, the stress on the acts of Christ, including his death, hide a deep weakness in Wimber's theology. He completely ignores any attempt to deal with the incarnation. For Wimber, the virgin birth is only significant because it is a miracle, and because it 'proves' Jesus' divinity. But mention of Christ's 'self-emptying' (*kenosis*), and the significance of his adoption of weakness (cf. Phil. 2. 1 – 11) is not to be found." (p. 128).

Percy sees 3 reasons for this failure: 1. “an acknowledgment of God’s conscious identification with weakness in Jesus threatens the recovery of a full omnipotence.” (p. 128). 2. “the incarnation confers a status on humanity and reality that does not sit easily with Wimber’s dualism, particularly in the realm of healing.” (p. 128). 3. “Christ’s willingness to suffer, and ultimately to succumb to torture and death, is essentially passed over. Wimber’s interest lies in what the death of Christ achieves, and who it affects. The actual fact of the death itself is, however, a problem for him, since it is quite plain that Christ either lost his power here, or chose not to use it. . . . The cross is not Christ voluntarily resigning his powers, and willingly suffering as a sign of his solidarity with the most broken of humanity. It is instead a kind of trick, an ‘ambush’ that commits Satan to a path that ultimately results in victory for God.” (p. 129).

Conclusion

In my view, these detailed criticisms are largely justified, but an overall negative response is not. Here Zimmerling is more positive than Percy; Percy tends to regard the more negative as the deeper reality and to explain everything from that (e.g. Wimber’s turning to holiness to preserve power), which can be psychological reductionism. But I would add – what Percy does not add – that the Holy Spirit can be strongly at work through limited and defective instruments. People can also be better than their articulated theologies. There are key insights in all these currents, picking up on elements neglected by mainstream Christianity – and now even by mainstream Pentecostalism. The lack of a sound theological method does not prevent the Holy Spirit acting, but it has a marked effect on the long-term fruit. For the theological weaknesses are not just theoretical weaknesses, but indicate existential gaps and distortions that undermine the life that the Spirit has truly brought. Overlooking Jesus as suffering servant is not just a theological weakness, but produces a distortion in ministerial ways of relating.