The Charismatic movement and the Reformed tradition

I. John Hesselink

Abstract

At first it might appear that the Reformed tradition and the approach and theology of the charismatic movement were basically different, if not antithetical, entities. For of all the Protestant tradition, the Reformed has been noted for its emphasis on doctrine and theology as such. The charismatic movement, on the other hand, places great emphasis on experience. The Reformed churches are noted for their theologians, not their “saints” or evangelists. We glory in our confessions and catechisms, solid theology and pure doctrine. Charismatic and Pentecostal groups, on the other hand, boast of healings and ecstatic experiences. Reformed Christians tend to be cerebral, cool, and analytical. Charismatics promote enthusiasm, “letting go,” and warm feelings.
Protestant bodies—Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Reformed, Anabaptist, Quaker, and others—were themselves debates over the essence of Christianity. Taken together, they made it increasingly difficult for any one to claim a monopoly on the custodianship of that essence, try as they might. Thus, some have spoken of that movement as a reunion of churches, an idea that carries an implication that they had once been "one," and a further hint that one included an essence on which people agreed. Reunion, then, would mean a stripping away of accretions, a reducing of the number of arguments, and a refocusing on essentials. There is nothing Orthodox about the charismatic movement. It is incompatible with Orthodoxy, in that it justifies itself only by perverting the message of the Fathers, suggesting that the Church of Christ needs renewal, and indulging in the theological imagery of Pentecostal cultism. With such things, one cannot be too bold in his language of condemnation and reprobation. As for those caught in the web of the charismatic movement, under no circumstances are we justified if we condemn them.