

# Four Movements

*P*astors today find themselves being drawn in a variety of directions. There are numerous movements and ideologies hankering for attention. Being a pastor today in a confessional denomination is not easy. The questions are many: Should I embrace the Church Growth Movement? Should I send my men to Promise Keepers? Should I incorporate contemporary music into my worship service? Should I adopt some of the methods of psychology? Should I be more seeker-sensitive and give people what they want?

The problem is further com-pounded by the fact that pastors who have embraced these various movements readily proselitize for the movements. Church Growth pastors promote the Church Growth Movement. Charismatics want to make more Charismatics. Promise-keeping pastors are sold on the movement. They want their fellow-pastors to experience what they have experienced.

Of course, many voices are raised on the other side of the fence, warning of the dangers, distortions and bad theology. So the pastor asks, "To whom should I listen? Whose advice should I follow?"

Allow me to offer to you some advice. *Do your own homework!*

Every movement and emphasis in the church today is rooted in a movement and theology that emerged in the past. Nothing comes from nothing. Only as we understand the movements of the past can we properly discern their offspring. In addition, we can predict that the theological distortions of the "parents" will be seen in their "offspring."

I will briefly share with you some some of the tenets of four movements that have emerged in American Christianity. I will also include some additional sources for further research.

## 1. Evangelical Revivalism

One cannot understand decision theology, holiness teaching, Pentecostalism, or, for that matter, the Promise Keepers without understanding Revivalism.

Revivalism emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century in what has been called the Second Great Awakening. Under the leadership of Charles Grandison Finney, an eastern lawyer with no theological training, "new measures" were developed to produce on-going revival. Finney taught that conversion was an act of the human will. The unbeliever had to be educated, motivated, and moved by emotions to choose to live a holy life.

Finney was a heretic who rejected the doctrine of original sin, the vicarious atonement, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer.

### *Resources:*

Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994).

Michael Horton, *Made in America*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991)

## 2. Neo-Evangelicalism

Out of reaction to Fundamen-talism, the new Evangelicals emerged in the 40's. Neo-Evangelicalism sought to reach the culture with the Gospel. The *National Association of Evangelicals* was formed in 1940. *Christianity Today* became the evangelical answer to *The Christian Century*. Fuller Theo-logical Seminary trained the new evangelical pastor. *Time* magazine declared 1976 as the "Year of the Evangelicals."

Over the past twenty years it has become clear that Evan-gelicalism, rather than influencing the culture, has widely embraced the culture and does theology with a view to the culture. Thus, we have the Church Growth Movement, "seeker sensitivity," contemporary Christian worship and music, Christian publishing, radio and television, the Religious Right, the psychology of self-esteem, Willow Creek etc. In Richard Niebuhr's paradigm, it is "culture over Christ."

Many of the theologians of neo-evangelicalism have minimized the truth of human sin, blood-bought redemption, and the doctrine of eternal punishment since these concepts are not appealing to the culture.

### *Resources:*

David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1992)

Michael Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994)

*Modern Reformation* magazine

## 3. Latter Rain Movement

Emerging in 1948 in North Battleford, Saskatchewan among the Sharon Brethren Pentecostals, the Latter Rain Movement has widely influenced both Charis-matics and Evangelicals. In fact, Charismatic theology including the definition of the *charismata*, the use of speaking and singing in tongues, the practice

of laying on hands for the “baptism in the Spirit,” the idea that Christians can be demon-possessed is Latter Rain teaching.

The “signs and wonders ministry” of the Jesus-only heretic and occultist William Branham was the primary influence behind the Latter Rain Movement.

Built on the notion that there will be a great end-time restoration called the Latter Rain (Pentecost being the “early rain”), the movement promoted the restoration of all the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and New Testament authority exercised through modern apostles and prophets. C. Peter Wagner is one of the present leaders of this movement.

The Latter Rain Movement was condemned by the Pentecostal Assemblies of God as heresy in 1959. The teachings were kept alive through Demos Shakarian and the *Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowships* and resurfaced in the 1960’s as the Charismatic Movement. The Vineyard Fellowships, the “Toronto Blessing,” and the Pensacola Revival are all Latter Rain influenced, even though the leaders will not admit it since the LRM was heretical.

Latter Rain teachers promoted the restoration of “Davidic Tabernacle Worship.” Services began with the emotional, repeated singing of praise choruses whereby the assembly came into the presence of God (or brought God into the assembly). This has become the format of typical Charismatic gatherings and has even influenced some “Lutheran” contemporary worship services.

**Resources:**

Michael G. Moriarity, *The New Charismatics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992)

Bob Liichow: [www.discernment.org](http://www.discernment.org) – a great website to study Charismatic distortions.

#### **4. Postmodernism**

Postmodernist thinkers reject the role of reason and the validity of absolute truth claims. In so doing, they have become champions of the irrational. They refute themselves. They fill books with propositions against proposition-alism. With many words they promote the deconstruction of words. They cut their own throats!

Postmodernist theologians suggest a Biblical hermeneutic that rejects the objective truth of Scripture. It is only truth from the perspective of the reader who filters the Biblical content through his own thought process. Of course, if you apply the same hermeneutic to the theologians who promote it, you have no reason to buy nor read their books. After all, they are only presenting their perspectives. Who cares?

The ecclesiastical promoters of the postmodern philosophy seek a “kinder and gentler” relativism, producing the distorted notion that we should speak truth without refuting error, or “do dogmatics without polemics.” Truth is only “our truth.” The fact is, if there is no error worth refuting, there is no truth worth promoting.

I agree. Postmodern thinkers do reject reason. They demonstrate it by what they write.

**Resources:**

Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994.)

David McCallum, *The Death of Truth*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996)

Henry Knight, *A Future for Truth*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997)

James W. Voelz, *What Does this Mean?* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995)

#### **Conclusion:**

I wasted fifteen years in the Charismatic Movement because I jumped in without doing research. Don’t make the same mistake!

Don Matzat