

As With Gladness Men of Old

William Dix (1837–1898)

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious God, may we
evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
to that lowly cradle-bed,
there to bend the knee before
Him whom heav'n and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek Thy mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
at that cradle rude and bare;
so may we with holy joy,
pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our heav'nly King.

Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way;
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed lives at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In that heav'nly country bright
need they no created light;
Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown,
Thou its Sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our King.



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In the Nick of Time

Erecting the Right Fences in the Right Places, Part Nine: Continuationism As a Secondary Doctrine

Kevin T. Bauder

The book *Finding the Right Hills to Die On* is Gavin Ortlund's theory of doctrinal triage. According to his theory, primary doctrines are essential to the gospel and to Christian fellowship. Secondary doctrines are not essential to the gospel, but they are necessary to some levels of Christian fellowship. Differences over tertiary doctrines should not inhibit Christian fellowship.

Ortlund illustrates his category of second-rank doctrines by applying it to three specific controversies. His second controversy is the one over the continuation of what he labels "spiritual gifts." He does not address spiritual gifts in general, however, but specifically miraculous and revelatory gifts.

At the outset, Ortlund identifies himself as a continuationist "in both practice and conviction" (108). He also tries to limit his discussion to Reformed attitudes toward continuationism. Given the widespread influence of charismatics across the contemporary theological spectrum (including not only gospel-believing groups like Reformed or Wesleyan evangelicals but also ecumenical liberals, Romanists, and even Mormons), he has defined his discussion too narrowly. Since gospel deniers regularly practice charismatic gifts, supposed appearances of those gifts cannot possibly be taken as self-authenticating evidence for God's activity or approval.

Admittedly, a *comparatively* mild version of continuationism is voiced within certain evangelical circles. It is represented by figures such as Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and Sam Storms. I assume that Ortlund holds this version of the theory. These figures and their followers, however, represent only a small fraction of charismatic continuationism. Adherents to the prosperity gospel far outnumber them (especially worldwide), as do devotees of the New Apostolic Reformation. The Grudem-Piper-Storms (and Ortlund?) version of continuationism barely amounts to a pebble in the mountain range of these larger movements.

The prosperity gospel is not the biblical gospel. It is a gospel of a different kind, and it falls under the anathema of Galatians 1:6–8. Furthermore, anyone claiming to be an apostle today is necessarily a false apostle (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8), and Paul denounced false apostles as ministers of Satan

(2 Cor 11:13–15). In other words, at least some of the time continuationism is a first-level, fundamental error. I acknowledge no Christian commonality with (for example) a Benny Hinn or a Kenneth Copeland. If Ortlund thinks that he can, then worse and worse.

If, on the other hand, Ortlund is willing to acknowledge how serious the errors of a Hinn or a Copeland are, then he needs to bring considerably more nuance into his discussion of Reformed continuationism. But he does not. He rests his argument fundamentally upon the fact that he can find Reformed progenitors who acknowledged some element of continuation for miraculous or perhaps even revelatory gifts. He relies especially heavily upon figures of the Reformation and the Puritan movement.

The problem with this appeal is that both the Reformation and the Puritans came prior to the defining point for the doctrine of miraculous gifts. One can find loose expressions of Christology among orthodox Christians before Nicea. One can find loose expressions of soteriology by evangelical Christians before the Reformation. But what Arius was to Christology, and what Johann Tetzel was to soteriology, early Pentecostalism was to miraculous gifts. It was Pentecostalism (and its forebears Edward Irving and John Dowie) that forced the issue on miraculous and revelatory gifts. These influences brought Christian thought to a defining point over these doctrines. We presently find ourselves standing at much the point that Athanasius stood with respect to Arius or that Luther stood with respect to Leo X. We cessationists are no more deterred than Athanasius was when he was informed that the whole world was against him.

I am not suggesting that continuationism is always a fundamental error, but beyond question it sometimes is. Even when it is not, the implications of charismatic theology reach far beyond a simple misunderstanding about the role of the Holy Spirit. For example, older Pentecostals and charismatics grounded their doctrine of present-day divine healing in the atonement, seriously distorting the biblical doctrine of the atonement and badly misreading Scripture. Third-wave charismatics presently ground their doctrine of healing in an over-inaugurated understanding of the kingdom leading to “power encounters.” (Incidentally, most cessationists affirm that God is able to heal miraculously; what they deny is that He has given the gifts of healing to individuals to exercise with the kind of discretion that Christians witnessed during the apostolic age.)

Similarly, the doctrine of revelation must be taken seriously. In the Old Testament, a prophet was to be tested partly by his ability to produce miraculous signs that were unmistakable and verifiable. A single false prophecy earned him the death penalty (Deut 18:18–22). Grudem has tried to soften this understanding of prophecy for the New Testament, but two responses must be noted. First, even most Third-wave charismatics disagree with him, insisting that church prophecy today is just as authoritative as Scripture for

those to whom it is delivered (see, for example, the Fuller Seminary doctoral dissertation on this topic by Stephen Oldham). Furthermore, *contra* Grudem, 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21 do not show New Testament prophecy being sifted and weighed, 1 Corinthians 14:30–31 does not show prophecy being ignored, Acts 21:4 does not show prophecy being disobeyed—indeed, it does not relate a prophecy at all—and Acts 21:10–11 does not show prophecy being mistaken.

It is impossible in a short space to review every argument, but it should be clear that the charismatic error does not just involve misinterpreting a verse or two. In all its forms it represents a gigantic shift that rearranges much of the biblical system of faith and practice. It also relocates the methodological basis of evangelical theology from *sola scriptura* to *ambo scriptura et experientia*.

Ortlund wants to place continuationism in between the second-level and third-level on the scale of doctrinal importance. I insist that various charismatic errors are often first-level, fundamental errors, and they are never less than upper-second-level (using his taxonomy). I do not deny that some level of Christian fellowship remains possible with the more balanced Pentecostals and charismatics, but I do believe that whatever levels of fellowship are possible will be those that require a bare minimum degree of doctrinal agreement.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
