
Reviewed by Henry H. Knight III

There have been a number of excellent historical and theological works written by charismatics from within the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed traditions. William DeArteaga’s *Quenching the Spirit* is the first substantive work written from an independent or “new” charismatic perspective. As such, it warrants careful reading and a serious response. It makes both historical and constructive theological arguments.

The historical argument, which is the central theme of the book, concerns the recurring phenomenon of “Pharisaism.” DeArteaga defines the Pharisee as “a deeply religious person who, among other things, staunchly asserts and defends the status quo with regard to tradition, order and consensus orthodoxy” (16). “Consensus orthodoxy” refers to the commonly held theological interpretations of religious people in a particular age.

Pharisaism exaggerates the truths of consensus orthodoxy in order to oppose any new work of the Holy Spirit. Like the opposite extreme, Gnosticism, the Pharisee is biblically defined as a heretic; but contrary to our usual way of thinking, Pharisaism is “heretical in spite of its theological correctness” (17).

The fundamental error of Pharisaism is their intellectualizing of faith. Instead of understanding faith as “trust in God and expectancy in His provision,” the Pharisees in Jesus’ day “evaluated religious questions and spiritual phenomenon on the basis of authoritative opinion rather than spiritual discernment” (19). Thus, they would question the authority by which Jesus or the Apostles acted rather than examining the fruit of their activity. DeArteaga calls this “judging by origins.”

In contrast, both Jesus and Paul insisted that these matters be evaluated not by their origins but by their fruit. This evaluative standard was the only means identified to test and discern whether a particular phenomenon is truly of God. However, DeArteaga notes, “the fruit criterion should only be used to test those things within the possibility of scriptural validity. Things plainly contrary to Scripture cannot be tested by their fruits” (22).

DeArteaga’s argument thus far is persuasive. But it should be noted that the use of scriptural validity to negate the “fruit criterion” is precisely the point for Pharisaism: The fruit is irrelevant because the persons or movements violate the “consensus orthodoxy” and its interpretation of Scripture. As a result, no new movement of the Spirit can defend itself by appealing to fruit alone; exegetical and theological
resources are necessary to challenge "consensus" interpretations of Scripture. DeArteaga himself offers such a defense of the independent charismatics in the latter portion of the book.

Having described Pharisaism, DeArteaga offers three historical case studies which show how it has functioned to "quench the Spirit." The first in the Great Awakening in eighteenth-century North America, which is described as a "messy" revival: it is a genuine work of God, but it is marked by extremism. While the fruit of the Awakening was apparent in changed lives and the evangelization of tens of thousands of unchurched Americans, the revival was accompanied with self-righteousness, divisiveness and a lack of wisdom. A Pharisaic reaction, led by Charles Chauncy, saw the Awakening as an enthusiastic deviation from sound doctrine and good order, eventually putting an end to the revival by turning the clergy against it. DeArteaga sees obvious parallels between the Great Awakening and the contemporary Charismatic Movement.

One advantage the Great Awakening had over today's charismatics was Jonathan Edwards as its most distinguished advocate. Defending the revival against rationalist critics such as Chauncy, Edwards at the same time distinguished the genuine work of God in the Awakening against the extremists. Edwards insisted the true test of revival was not emotionalistic behaviors but "the ultimate spiritual fruit" (43). In taking this approach, I would add, Edwards parallels John Wesley's defense of the Evangelical Awakening in England.

With the Great Awakening as his paradigm, DeArteaga offers two other historical studies. The first shows the development of the doctrine of cessationism, which excessive and superstitious claims for the miraculous on the part of Roman Catholicism led to Protestant denials that miracles and gifts of the Spirit are for today. The teaching of Calvin in this regard becomes hardened in Protestant scholasticism, Scottish commonsense realism, and most radically in John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism (all of which are essential elements in twentieth-century fundamentalism). This tracing of the historical origin of cessationism is a major contribution of the book.

The second describes the evangelical faith-cure movement of the nineteenth century, focusing on Charles Cullis and A. J. Gordon. Again, the movement was a "messy" revival, marred by extremists such as John Alexander Dowie; a Pharisaic reaction by Methodist James Buckley insured the healing movement would be considered heretical and banished from mainline churches.

In his historical argument, DeArteaga makes the provocative claim that the defenders of rational orthodoxy tend to fall into the heresy of Pharisaism when faced with a genuine work of God. Put differently, he is describing the perennial conflict between pietism and scholasticism, in which each side sees the other's excesses as typical and dangerous,