Glenn Clark’s Camps Furthest Out: The Schoolhouse of the Charismatic Renewal

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In the 1960s, thousands of Spirit-filled Christians met at summer camps where they prayed for each other in small groups and heard lectures by leaders of the new Charismatic Renewal on such issues as healing, inner healing, and deliverance. Among the speakers at the camps were such notable figures as Agnes Sanford, Derek Prince, and (by the end of the 1960s) Fr. Francis MacNutt. Activities known as “creatives” encouraged the campers to participate in spontaneous drama skits, psalm writing, rhythmic exercises, drawing, and music. All these creatives involved the invited presence of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of these camps was to learn to be more effective Christians and at the same time gain a sampling of what it would be like to live in the Kingdom of God.

These camps were known as “CFOs” or Camps Furthest Out. Some camps, such as the one held at Kanuga, North Carolina, drew thousands of participants at a time. However, because of the CFO’s early ties to New Thought, the histories of the Charismatic Renewal have ignored the significant role of the CFO in the early stages of the Renewal. In fact, Dave

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1 The research for this article was done principally in the mid 1980s as I was preparing a manuscript on Agnes Sanford and the development of inner healing (yet to be published). Mrs. Sanford wrote about Glenn Clark and the CFO approvingly in her own autobiography, Sealed Orders (Plainfield: Logos, 1972). This sparked my interest and I attended several CFO camps during the 1980s, and made special efforts to talk to the “old timers” who remembered the camps in the earlier days. The Rev. Tommy Tyson, Methodist charismatic evangelist and frequent CFO speaker, was especially kind in sharing his CFO memories. During 1986-88 my wife and I served on the (Georgia) Golden Isles CFO “council ring,” the local governing group. A brief, early version of this paper was published as “Glenn Clark and the CFO,” Sharing (Nov./Dec., 1992): 13-19.

2 An exception is the excellent article, “Charismatic Movement,” by Peter D. Hocken in The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). It is interesting that neither Glenn Clark and his CFO nor Agnes Sanford are given separate articles in the Dictionary. Accounts of the role of the CFO are found among the “witness” and autobiographical writings of the early charismatic leadership. See, for example, Harold Bredesen, Yes, Lord (Plainfield: Logos, 1972), 127.
Hunt and other critics of the Charismatic Renewal have simply labeled the CFO and its founder, Glenn Clark, as parts of the cultic “seduction” of the Charismatic Renewal.3

In my earlier work, *Quenching the Spirit*, I argued that such characterizations are destructive simplifications. Critics such as Hunt do not take into account the unfortunate situation within nineteenth-century “orthodox” Christianity in which any form of healing prayer was labeled as cultic and heretical. The consensus orthodoxy of the era stressed the doctrine of cessationism, which also declared the gifts of the Spirit to be unavailable in the current age. This theology combined with a largely unrecognized dependence on philosophical realism that came into both Catholicism and Protestantism from the late Middle Ages. As a result, the consensus orthodoxy of the era left no room for the role of a believer’s faith to move in healing prayer or in the gifts of the Spirit.4

The Rise of Faith-Idealism

An overview of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows a pattern in which the Holy Spirit moved the Church away from its cessationism-realism-based theology. At the same time, the Spirit inspired different groups and individuals toward theologies that reincorporated the gifts of the Spirit, and allowed for a more active understanding of the role of mind, acting through faith in Christ, to activate the miraculous powers of the Kingdom of God. This was a move to theologies based on moderate idealism, that is, that mind, with faith, can influence matter, as in healing and the miraculous, and away from theological systems based on radical realism in which the Christian merely petitions that God act.5 A characteristic of faith-idealism is that physical evidence is of less immediate concern than the witness of the Word of God.

The shift from cessationist realism to faith idealism was a process that began in the middle of the nineteenth century and has yet to be completed. The first example of faith-idealism as a conscious theology was in the writings and ministry of Phebe Palmer, the famous Holiness evangelist who developed her “altar” theology that spread the gospel of Wesleyan

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