

Q&A: What do you think about charismatic visions [like Unity's Vision]

waffleater asks: *what do you think about charismatic visions like this one <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVyMPqvnw5k> do you believe in these gifts or not*

Thanks for the question Waffleater:

I'll embed the video you link for ease of access:

It's interesting. I haven't heard of Unity before. Your question is a general one – what do I think about charismatic visions *like this one* and do I believe in these gifts or not.

Let me answer generally, therefore. I do believe that God gifts his church with visions and revelations at times. Some examples in Scripture of such “extra-biblical revelation” include Agabus’ foreknowledge of a famine (Acts 11) as well as through a prophetic symbolic act regarding Paul’s likely imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21). Paul himself had dreams that directed his movements (the famous “Man from Macedonia” in Acts 16). None of this is surprising in that the fulfillment of Joel (“Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams”) is applied to the church in and through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

I know a number of people who have had similar experiences in their own ministry and mission work. I myself have had times of overwhelming conviction in certain circumstances. Surely this form of revelation/understanding/awareness/knowledge, whatever you would like to call it, can be a genuine and credible part of the Christian walk.

A key characteristic, however, is that revelations of this

type are always SERVANTS of God's clear and authoritative Revelation of himself through the Scriptures and its revelation of Jesus. If you like, the benefit of these forms of (little-r) revelation is that they help apply the (big-R) Revelation to a particular time and place. So the people of God can respond to the famine, Paul can be directed to Macedonia, and so forth.

I am ready to accept the revelations people experience from their walk with God – but they will always be tested by Scripture, and should always be a means of applying or grasping further the authoritative Truth of God.

Having said all that – let me consider Unity's vision. It is interesting in that it is a broad statement with very little specifics. It draws on biblical imagery from Revelation 13 and Matthew 25. It does very little, however, to help us apply those Scriptures. In many ways my conclusion would be "Why do we need this vision at all? Reading Revelation 13 and Matthew 25 directly would be a lot more powerful."

But, bring on revival in Australia. I can admire that sentiment.

Q&A: Apparently the rapture is going to happen on July 24th 2012! [What] do you think...?

Anonymous asks: *<http://www.themysteryunlocked.com/> take a look at this book apparently the rapture is going to happen on july*

24th 2012! do you think his arguments are weak for his justification

Wow, less than a month away! Bring it on. Maranatha!

But, what do I think of the author's arguments? He is Mark Alexander who describes the foundation of his authorship and the book thus (his emphasis):

*This servant of God, has no background of being through a Seminary School/College, has no large Ministry and confesses that he is insignificant and unworthy of such a Great Revelation in more than many ways and that would be the challenge of God to the readers, so that in the end of it, only He the Great God would get all the Glory who is only worthy of all Glory. **All the Scripture verses and knowledge and wisdom in this Book, has come, purely in and through the Holy Spirit's revelation and guidance to this untaught servant, (an agent and go between) to bring this Hidden Mystery to God's People in God's time, in these Last Days and as many as have been appointed to eternal life will believe.***

So, unless I'm willing to accept that Mark Alexander is an authoritative purveyor of a previously unknown Revelation from God, the book would be quite useless. The humility is false, he is claiming a power that is rightfully Christ's alone.

Any argument based on this premise will be weak. I have no inclination to investigate further ☐

Q&A: Does [the Anglican]

church believe that faith alone is needed to go to heaven?

Tony asks: *You are an Anglican right-does your church believe that faith alone is needed to go to heaven*

Hi Tony,

The short answer is “yes.”

Within orthodox Anglican theological circles there is variance as to what “faith alone” means (along the spectrum of the efficacy of our faith, or the faithfulness of Christ), and what “go to heaven” means (along the spectrum from ethereal eternal life to the Kingdom of God on earth). And of course there are a number of Anglicans who have moved away from orthodoxy.

But the short answer is “yes.”

The Anglican formularies helpfully expound the definitive Anglican view. The Thirty-Nine Articles speak to your question. I have included some of the relevant articles below.

Thanks,

W.

Article X

Of Free-Will

The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to

God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

Article XI

Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

Article XII

Of Good Works

Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

Review: Finding Home

My response to reading an autobiography is a binary condition – the book is either tedious or don't-want-to-put-it-down fascinating. It is the latter condition that results from a read of *Finding Home*, the autobiography of the Gen-Xer Tasmanian Christian Environmentalist Activist, Erik Peacock.



My fascination was not simply due to the fact that I know Erik personally: a bit more than simply a mere acquaintance, a friend of a friend and occasional conversationist. I know some of those he talks about. I remember many of the environmental and political issues he refers to. Sometimes it was a surprise (“that was him doing that?!?”) and other times it was nostalgic. He writes

...I found myself lounging on the back of a flatbed truck full of woodchips with a smelly hippy doing blocks of the Hobart CBD. We both had suits on and life sized pictures of then Prime Minister John Howard and aspiring prime minister Kim Beasley which we held in front of our faces and then pretended to snog. The point was that both the government and the opposition were ‘in bed’ together when it came to forest issues. (Page 197)

I recall a time when walking the streets of Hobart I glimpsed an acquaintance from YWAM and Uni sitting in the back of a ute. I remember this event.

In a shallow and mild sense, then, Erik's story and my own overlap by simple accidents of space and time. The insight into his story, however, has caused me to realise that there is also something of a deeper affinity. I also am a child migrant from England. I also had parents attempting their own version of *The Good Life* in rural Tasmania. I also learned to

draw spirituality together with experiences of the land and the wilderness (although nowhere near as adventurously as Erik) and to appreciate the maverick revolutionary nuances of grassroots-focussed greenly-tinged politics. I wasn't home-schooled but, being TV-less for much of my childhood, I dwelt in the lands of books and brains rather than the latest trends and the common narrative of Saturday morning cartoons.

My journey is my journey of course. Erik reveals his own with a fair degree of openness and vulnerability, as well as sensitivity to some of the living, breathing characters that share the narrative with him. The book is constructed as a series of "stories", largely chronological, each one a piece in the mosaic. Once the story progresses past the foundational experiences of his childhood and adolescence there are some clear themes: his environmental activism, his journey of faith, and a broad-spectrum awareness of culture and cultural interaction.

The first of these – environmental activism – is the guise in which I best know Erik. The activism of his youth, including blockades and demonstrations, speaks to the true sense of *activist*; an activist is one who gets into action, who doesn't just sit and whinge but *does* something. His activism is self-generated adventure to be sure, but like any good adventure the reader is caught up in amusement and outrage, empathy and thoughtful reflection.

It is easy, however, to combat engagement with the activist story with cynicism. Erik doesn't always help his case (if this is indeed his intent) as the philosophical grounds for his environmentalism are mostly wrapped inside his own personal responses to a particular event, or they remain hidden inside some stark statistics and presentation of facts. The rights and wrongs of his position are assumed, not argued for. The point where he does engage however, is where his environmentalist meets his faith. He decries the lack of Christian engagement with environmental issues and is scathing

of the use of the “dominion covenant” to justify a purely utilitarian view of the environment which gives no innate value to forests and the like.

Erik the Christian is someone who rests much on spiritual experiences. These experiences are both positive – he references YWAM meetings and other places where the presence of the Holy Spirit are tangible – and negative – aspects of spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry are recounted. And so we encounter the enigmatic figure of an ardent environmentalist merged with a zealous evangelist who is willing to speak of sin and demonic oppression.

He fully admits, however, that his conservatism has waned. I empathise with much of his reflections on the state of society and the church. I have also walked the path of depression as he has and have found refuge in elements of contemplation that are foreign to the fervent pentecostalism of my earlier Christian life. I wonder, though, whether in some areas his conservatism has increased – he is less and less a pacifist, his rejection of multiculturalism as a practical reality seems to strengthen in its resolve as the journey continues. Erik Peacock remains a delightful enigma.

Here, in book form, is what might be called a “coffee conversation in black and white.” This is the sort of stuff – everything from views on home education and politics to military procurement strategies – that naturally flow when wannabe-polymaths share a beverage. You don’t always agree, but iron sharpens iron, good thoughts are thought, and strengthening happens. I am hoping, in my case, that my reading of this book may preempt such a conversation.

For the more general reader, this book can be taken as something of an insight into a generation. Here is the turmoil of the post-boomers, we who are the receivers of idealism and cynicism in equal parts. We who seek to grasp some of the things of eternity in the face of selfishly purist utility and

vacuous political correctness. Here we have angst, passion, depth, frustration, primality and formality shaken up and pressed down. Like it or not, the Erik Peacock's of this world exemplify the current and imminent thought-shapers and leadership of the world. God help us all!

Q&A: How many websites does the Aussie church need [...having...] replaced genuine inspiration?

Anonymous asks: *How many websites does the Aussie church need to keep everyone happy with the latest technology that has more-or-less replaced genuine inspiration?*

Thanks for the question. It's one of those ones where I have to decipher what the premise of it is! Let me respond to a false dichotomy between web-presence and "genuine inspiration." Yes, surely there are many many tacky web site out there. Yes, surely there are many churches that invest more in their uber flashy professional-grade web presence than they do with real ministry. But this is no new thing. In the past all churches had an entry in the white pages just like every church should now have a web page somewhere that at least communicates phone number, time and place. But some also had ads in the yellow pages. Most had ads in the Saturday paper. Some had large billboards and flashy neon. Some even put ads on buses and took out radio and TV ads. There is nothing new under the sun.

So its a false dichotomy – having a website doesn't mean

giving up on “genuine inspiration.” Neither does making sermons available and engaging with the church community through social media. These are tools for communication and our job is communication.

The real problem, which is also not new under the sun, is when the tools of communication (be they Gutenberg-pressed tracts to Jack Chick cartoons to animated vegetables) overwhelm the reality of what is actually being communicated.

All churches are called to faith, to trust God to enable their purpose and mission. That faith is often costly and difficult. When churches refuse to count the cost or face the difficult they often end up faking it. The sovereign presence of the Spirit is replaced with a light show. The reverence and transcendence of the glory of God is replaced with controlled, dry, performance. Genuine communication is replaced with glitzy websites. We grow by tickling ears, and, yes, by keeping everybody happy.

In the end, then, the problem is not the number of websites, the problem is an authenticity of faith. I’d rather be counting that than the number of superfluous URLs.

Q&A: Should all the Billy Graham era stalwarts now be euthinased (sic)?

Anonymous asks: *Should all the Billy Graham era stalwarts now be euthinased (sic)?*

The answer to your frivolous question is a resounding “no” of

course. The legacy of Billy Graham is clearly a nett positive for the world and for the church. He called a generation to faith and hope. Yes, sure, his gospel presentation was repetitious and slightly over-simplistic.

Yes, he had an (over?-)emphasis on individual salvation more than kingdom emphasis on society. But so what? Many were rescued not just from <whatever definition of eternal punishment you prefer> but also from a spiritual passivity and an entirely self-serving life. Those stalwarts have been leaders in their own right and the blessing has multiplied into subsequent generations.

Those stalwarts are now, by and large, reaching retirement age. They should be honoured, their wisdom should be heard, and the up and coming generation of leaders should spend lots of time with them as they wrestle with the complexity of our own era.

Review: Trinitarian Self and Salvation

Can there be be such a thing as a novel and new work in the area of theology? I suspect not, but there are places where our current thought, practice and doctrine so intertwine with both modern ecclesiastical intellect *and* the real world, that the exploration perforce covers old ground in new ways and towards new ends. Scott Harrower's *Trinitarian Self and Salvation* is one of these explorations.



This deeply theological book, a published doctoral thesis, is,

in Harrower's own terms, an "Evangelical Engagement with *Rahner's Rule*." This is a theologically technical landscape to journey through and so it bears some explanation. It relates to our understanding of how the immanent Trinity (God as God is for all eternity) and the economic Trinity (God as God is revealed and acting in history) can be understood together. Harrower himself gives excellent background.

This axiom, RR, is defined as follows in Karl Rahner's classic work The Trinity: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity." (Page 1)

Evangelicals with a high view of Scripture tend to choose either of two approaches to RR... There is firstly the "strict realist reading" (SRR) of RR, secondly, a "loose realist reading" (LRR) of RR. (Page 3)

Quoting Olson, "interpreters of Rahner's Rule have tended to divide into two camps: those who believe in a strong identity of immanent and economic Trinity and those who would qualify that identity by positing a prior actuality of the immanent Trinity." (Page 6)

In other words, to borrow from Giles from Harrower's footnote on page 7, the SRR of RR connotes an *identification* between the economic and the immanent Trinity, and the LRR of RR connotes simply a *correlation* between the economic and immanent Trinity.

Harrower's focus is to assess the strength of the SRR of RR by means of an exegetical study of Luke-Acts. He does not focus on the *practical* implications of either the SRR or the LRR but they are there in the background.

The inclusion of Giles as a contemporary Evangelical theologian who "employs the LRR" (Page 7) brings to bear the

sphere of subordinationism within the Trinity and the correlative theology of subordinationism in terms of gender roles. It may be over-simplifying but we can take the LRR to be a generally egalitarian view of God and the effects of salvation history, and the SRR to be, generally, a complementarian view that reads the subordination of Christ back into the very being of the Godhead and then extends its applicability to many, if not all, areas of life.

Harrower's method is simple enough. He unpacks the concepts, puts clarifying bounds on his terms, and then gives some detailed background on Rahner himself so that we can be clear about what is at stake. Rahner held to an SRR and it was here in this background information that my own interest began was piqued. I found myself reading of thoughts and phrases that I myself had employed to speak of the Trinity (e.g. "[a theology] which only allows for the Son to become incarnate", Page 34; "The Christology is thus a descending Christology in which Christ has his identity from God the Father's expression of himself towards the world in the Logos as his symbol.", Page 43). Was I SRR or LRR? I had reached the end of my previous thinking and now precision was expected of me!

The conclusion is made clear from the beginning – Harrower's mission is to demonstrate the flaws of an SRR or RR. Should I be seeking to line up beside him or give a retort to each point made? The best theological journeys are the ones where you are not quite sure where you will end up.

Before his exegetical thrust the background includes some strictly theological reflections on the flaws of the SRR. Harrower has enumerated these from Page 46 under informative headings. I had a number of "I hadn't thought of that" moments in this section. Consider these gems that struck me in particular:

- The strong identification of the economic with the immanent implies an essential necessity for God to be

incarnate and therefore an essential reliance on creation/redemption in the very *being* of God. Can God still be God without creating and saving by this view? "...in Rahner's theology God is dependent on the world for the fruition of his selfhood." (Page 48)

- "Rahner's axiom detracts from the incarnation because it asserts that God the Son's relations with the other person of the Trinity in history must be exactly as they are for God the Son within God's immanent self... Thus, the extent of the condescension of God in the incarnation, and salvation history as the context for the incarnation may have a reduced place in Rahner's theology." (Page 53). "Thus Rahner does not sufficiently deal with the two "states of Christ": his humiliation and glorification." (Page 54)

This last point is key – the emphasis of the SRR elevates the fullness (or at least the precision) of the *revelation* of God in the incarnation – but this is at the expense of the *condescension* of God in the incarnation. The tension is clear, in Christ God brought all of himself, and at the same time emptied himself so that he might be, for us, the Son of Man, Messiah and Saviour. The SRR implies a complete (cost-free?) continuation of Trinitarian relationship before and after the incarnation. The LRR affirms that "the incarnation involved a change in the way in which God relates to himself as Trinity after God the Son took on human flesh." (Page 59).

Harrower picks up this point a number of times throughout and it enables him to approach his exegesis of Luke-Acts through the Christological lens of the "messianic role" in which in the light of "his anticipated eschatological work and revelation, Jesus' work in the economy of salvation is an incomplete revelation of who he is." (Page 73). Harrower does not pursue it, but it would be an interesting exercise to thoroughly correlate the RR considerations with the hermeneutical perspective of the likes of N. T. Wright. The

starting point might be this:

Jesus relates to the Father and the Spirit in a specific messianic manner which is a newly-structured relationality. To hold the contrary opinion, namely that the trinitarian relations in the economy of salvation are the unrestrained self-expression of God's immanent taxis, is to lose sight of Jesus' vocation as Messiah and its significance for Christian theology. (Page 79)

This understanding sets up Harrower's basic exegetical argument: Take an element of the messianic shape of Christ's ministry, apply the SRR to apply that shape to the essence of God, demonstrate the absurdity, inconsistency, or undesirability of that shape. The last two chapters exercises this argument by considering both Father-Son and Son-Holy Spirit relationships.

At the end of the journey that is this book I was left with varied thoughts. I was variously impressed, frustrated, intrigued, and challenged along the way. I am aware that because of its interaction with the subordinationism debate this is likely to be a book of some controversy, particularly in the Australian scene. As I was with Giles, I am sympathetic to Harrower's stance.

What I most desire having read this book is further engagement. I want to read a rebuttal. I will seek to find an opportunity to share a coffee and a discussion with the author. One thing is sure, Harrower's presence in the Australian and international theological academy is a welcome one and a worthy example of the next generation of Christian thought leaders.