

Does Pentecostalism Have Reformed Roots?

An analysis of the argument of W.W. Menzies

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The article considers Menzies' appeal to reformed roots of Pentecostalism in a lecture given at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. After examining his use of the concept of "roots", difficulties are pointed out regarding Menzies' appropriation of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. It is argued that these appeals overlook central features of Calvin's and Edward's theology that mark a clear distinction to the Pentecostal movement.

On March 16, 2006 William W. Menzies gave a lecture at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, titled 'The Reformed Roots of Pentecostalism'.¹ In this lecture he defends the view that Pentecostalism is not only an extension of the Wesleyan Holiness movement. In his opinion, this would be an oversimplification. The influence of Keswick would have been a non-Wesleyan influence. According to father Menzies, the Pentecostal movement owes much to the Reformed tradition. For that reason he speaks about reformed 'roots' in the title of his lecture.

In the analysis of Menzies' thesis, it is first of all important to understand his use of the word 'root.' Does Menzies mean that the reformed tradition is the authentic root of Pentecostalism? If that is the point he makes, Pentecostalism is not really new in history. In essence, Pentecostalism would be reformed.

Looking into Menzies' use of the word 'roots' we do not perceive this historical understanding of the concept of root. Menzies speaks too definitely about the birth of the Pentecostal movement to intend that Pentecostalism is the natural outgrowth of the Reformation. He agrees that the Pentecostal movement did not have its origin in, but alongside the reformed tradition.

THEOLOGICAL ROOTS

In using the root-concept Menzies means the theological foundation of the Pentecostal movement in the reformed tradition. He argues that the reformed theologians had ‘an important influence in the shaping of values that later were incorporated readily into the fabric of the modern Pentecostal movement.’ In using this meaning of ‘root’, Menzies wants to say that the Pentecostal movement owes much to the reformed tradition. Defined somewhat more pointedly: the Pentecostal movement depends theologically on the reformed tradition (cf. Menzies 1975:81-98; see Waldvogel 1977).

To prove that the Pentecostal movement has reformed roots, Menzies uses the following method: After proving historically that the Wesleyan movement cannot be the exclusive root of Pentecostalism, he mentions other theological sources of Pentecostalism, such as Fundamentalism, Keswick and reformed theology. This last source he deals with most extensively. First the similarity in the theology of justification and sanctification is underlined. In addition he refers to the theological work of the Presbyterian charismatic J. Rodman Williams (1988; 1990). Next he deals with some more or less representative reformed theologians. Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Kuyper and most extensively John Calvin are treated. These reformed theologians’ names alternate with the names of Irving and Finney. Before his conclusion he deals with the problem of cessationism. After this subject he comes to his conclusion:

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate that the modern Pentecostal movement owes much to the Reformed tradition (...) We Pentecostals owe an enormous debt to our forbears of the Reformed faith.

REFORMED THEOLOGY IS ONE OF THE ROOTS

So far Menzies’ proof of the reformed roots of Pentecostalism. I would like to evaluate this appeal to the reformed tradition. My evaluation is very limited. We can enter into the question whether Keswick is a non-Wesleyan influence or not, and other historical influences.² However, we pass this question and concentrate on Menzies’ basic thesis that the Reformation belongs to the

roots of Pentecostalism. First, I ask what really has been proved by Menzies. Secondly, I deal with his appeal to the reformed tradition, especially his appeal to John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards.

First, I do not think that Menzies has really proven that the reformed tradition is the source of Pentecostalism. In the title of his subject he speaks about ‘the’ reformed roots. According to his lecture there have been more influences on the Pentecostal Movement than the influence of reformed theology alone. He has not proven or made reasonable that the influence of the reformed tradition has been decisive. Theoretically it is possible that one of the other influences has been more important. It is even possible that not-mentioned influences have been more important to the Pentecostal movement. It is, therefore, impossible to speak so strongly about ‘the’ reformed roots. The title of this subject does not necessarily follow Menzies’ argumentation in the lecture. The lecture has only argued that the Reformation is one of the many roots of the Pentecostal movement. In accordance with Menzies’ lecture it is better to change the title of his subject into ‘Reformed Roots of Pentecostalism’.

THE APPEAL TO JOHN CALVIN

Secondly, an important appeal of Menzies is to the reformed theology of John Calvin. This is understandable, because Calvin is a representative theologian and a kind of father of reformed tradition. Menzies sees an openness to charismatic gifts in Calvin’s theology.³ Indeed the reformer made positive remarks about the gifts of tongues, prophecy and miracles.⁴ In spite of the extremes of the radical Anabaptists, Calvin called these gifts an ornament for the Gospel.⁵ In his opinion, it was a deficiency to be without these gifts.⁶

These positive remarks of John Calvin were qualified. The Geneva-reformer relativised the gifts by a sharp distinguishing between the outward and inner gifts of the Spirit.⁷ The real and eternal gifts in the theology of Calvin are regeneration and communion with Christ. Calvin did not deny the life on earth, but in relation to the heavenly and spiritual he held the earthly life in contempt.

If I understand Calvin correctly, he saw the charismatic gifts not as eternal gifts, but as earthly blessings. Godless people can have certain external gifts of the Spirit.⁸ Calvin saw the possibility for

Satan to work these gifts. He denied that the gifts have to do with the inner spiritual level. Calvin did not see the gifts as a token of personal spirituality, but as a token of the history of salvation. These gifts were a once-only testification of the new gospel (Sweetman 1979).

This principle is very strict for Calvin in relation to revelation. As the highest prophet Christ fulfilled all revelations.⁹ Speaking about new revelation concerning the doctrines of the Gospel is blasphemous.¹⁰ Scripture is the definite revelation of God (Van 't Spijker 1986:194-195). The only way in which Calvin wants to speak about prophets is as interpreters of the Word of God.¹¹ There is also a certain openness for foretelling the future.

Menzies' appeal to Calvin is direct and unproblematic. The suggestion is that there is a common theological framework between the reformed tradition and the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostal Christians believe in Father, Son and Spirit. They speak about the Father and the Creation. They agree with the soteriological doctrines about the Son and our redemption. They stress the work of the Spirit and the necessity of spiritual experience. They are loyal to the Scriptures and interpret them as literal as possible. Within this greater theological framework, Pentecostals differ only in some minor subjects concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They accept the greater pneumatological structures in theology, but they only add the charismatic gifts as something 'extra' to the classic reformed position. In this way Menzies minimizes the theological consequences of the charismatic insights.

I wonder if this appeal to Calvin is possible. Considering Calvin's views on the gifts of the Spirit it is also possible to give another interpretation and application of his theology. It is understandable that Calvin's insights are also used to criticise Pentecostal theology. This use of Calvin has also to do with the complete structure of his theology.

The theology of Calvin has essentially a soteriological structure. Calvin places the work of the Spirit in a Christological framework. The Son poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The work of the Spirit is to glorify Christ in the hearts of sinners. The Spirit is the Spirit of faith. He brings us to Christ and unites us to Him. He teaches us the unmeasurable riches in Christ. He is not a Spirit of addition, but He is the Spirit of application. The Spirit does not add anything to the salvation in Jesus Christ, but He brings us in the reality of the Saviour and His salvation.

This explains the experimental character of Calvin's theology. The reality of regeneration, sorrow for our sins and joy in God are preached. Calvin called his Institutes not a 'summa

theologiae' but a 'summa pietatis'. But the spiritual experience is never an end in itself. Experience is always experience of the reality of the Word, of Christ, of the triune God. For this reason Calvin's theology is not compatible with an independent interest in the Spirit and his gifts. In short, the view that gifts are essential for Christian life and available for every Christian and for every time does not fit with the broader structures of Calvin's theology.

THE APPEAL TO JONATHAN EDWARDS

Menzies refers to Jonathan Edwards as a Pre-Pentecostal theologian. I wonder if this is possible. As early as 1738 Edwards wrote about the gifts of the Spirit (Edwards 1989:149-173; 351-365; cf. Gerstner 1991:161-179). He dealt with the question whether an outpouring of the Spirit would imply the presence of gifts. Edwards' answer was negative. The revival-theologian gave different reasons for that.

Edwards distinguished gifts and grace. He compared the gifts of the Spirit with clothes. Men can have nice clothes without living in the fear of the Lord. For him the gifts were not a proof of a high spiritual life. In this way the pastor of Northampton rejected the charismatic position. He relativised the gifts much more in stating that the devil can work these gifts as well. In this aspect he agreed with Calvin.

According to the revival-theologian the spiritual gifts belong to the childish period of the church (Edwards 1989:149-150). The Holy Spirit gave these gifts because the revelation of God in scripture was not yet finished. Edwards connected the charismatic gifts closely with the apostles. With the end of the apostolic time, also the time of special gifts ended. This means that Jonathan Edwards was a strict cessationist (Van Vlastuin 2001:89-91).

Menzies mentions the problem of cessationism. But he does not really deal with it. His implicit suggestion looks in this way: The reformed theologians accept the gifts of the Spirit. They err that the gifts are only for a time. When stating that there is an 'overwhelming evidence that the gifts of the Spirit never did cease entirely', Menzies corrects the reformed position and appeals to this theology to maintain the Pentecostal position. This way of proving is not careful.

Dealing with reformed theology in this way gives the impression that we can take away the element of cessation out of the reformed theology while the same theological framework remains. This is not true. Because Edwards rejected the charismatic gifts for this time and values them in another way, it is not possible to appeal to Jonathan Edwards for the Pentecostal movement. Edwards even warned against the use of the charismatic gifts of tongues, prophecies and miracles. This is not only a difference to Edwards' theological conviction, but his theology is an antithesis against the charismatic-pentecostal way of thinking. There may be many agreements between this theologian and Pentecostal theologians, but these agreements cannot justify an appeal to Edwards for the most characteristic mark of the Pentecostal movement.

CONCLUSION

We come to an evaluation of Menzies' lecture on the reformed roots of Pentecostalism. According to his own arguments it is better to leave out the word 'the' and to speak about reformed roots of Pentecostalism. Penetrating deeper into his appeal to the reformed tradition we perceive problems. Menzies did not go into the problematic character of this appeal. If we go into the direct utterances of two representative reformed theologians we discover that a direct appeal is impossible. If we go into the systematic structure of Calvin's theology, we find out a Christ-centred theology without an independent interest in pneumatological gifts. I think it is problematic to claim this theology as a source for a more charismatic theology. Going into the structure of Edwards' theological framework the strict cessational position should make us very careful in calling Edwards a Pre-Pentecostal theologian.

I do not deny influence of the reformed tradition on the Pentecostal movement. But the lecture of Menzies did not convince me of that influence. Menzies failed to make clear what sort of influence he meant and he did not explain in what way the reformed tradition influenced the Pentecostal movement. Until this work is done, there are arguments from within the reformed tradition to maintain not only a difference, but even a contrast between the classic reformed tradition and the modern Pentecostal movement.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ W.W. Menzies, ‘The Reformed Roots of Pentecostalism’, lecture at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on March 16, 2006.
- ² B.B. Warfield in his works on perfectionism places Keswick in the Wesley/Holiness tradition: “From Wesley to Keswick may superficially seem a somewhat far cry. There is, no doubt, room between these limits for many distinguishable varieties of teaching. They are all bound together, however, by common fundamental conceptions of very dubious character” (Warfield 1932:557-558).
- ³ As J. Rodham Williams, who has a chapter ‘The Charismatic Movement and Reformed Theology’ in his *A Theological Pilgrimage*, <http://home.regent.edu/rodmwil/>.
- ⁴ CO II,383, 404-405, 660; CO IL,531-532 (*Institutes* II.xvi.16, III.ii.9, III.xx.33; comm. 1 Cor. 14:32). For a complete evaluation of Calvin, see Van Vlastuin (2006).
- ⁵ CO XLVIII,251 (comm. Acts 10:46).
- ⁶ CO IL,531 (comm. 1 Cor. 14:32).
- ⁷ CO XLVII,182-183 (comm. John 7:38-39).
- ⁸ CO II,405 (*Institutes* III.ii.9).
- ⁹ CO VI.21; IL.362 (Catechism of Geneva question 39; comm. Rom. 12:6).
- ¹⁰ CO XLVII361-362 (comm. John 16:13); see Krusche (1957:213-215).
- ¹¹ CO IL.239, 506-507, 519 (comm. Rom. 12:6-7, 1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Cor. 14:6).

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