

Book Review

The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology

S. David Moore,

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The Shepherding Movement was a controversial and influential movement within Pentecostal/Charismatic circles during the 1970s and 1980s. In his book, *The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology*, S. David Moore attempts to bring to the reader an accurate, fair, and “complete history. It is not, however, an exhaustive history” (vii). Moore has a keen interest in this subject because he was a part of the movement, leaving it, as he says, because of “what I believed were its problems, and therefore I imagined I would write a more critical document” (vii). However, what he provides is a thorough introductory history to a movement that is a prominent feature of Pentecostal/Charismatic history, one that offers insight into today’s *sitz im leben*, or situational context.

The Shepherding Movement is part of Moore’s doctoral dissertation at Regent University and was academically researched. Whenever possible, Moore draws his content from primary sources such as books authored by key leaders of the movement. He consulted *New Wine* magazine, which was the *de facto* official organ of the Shepherding Movement, the repository of many articles from leaders such as Bob Mumford, Ern Baxter, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, Don Basham and

John Poole. To extend his database of original research, and thereby his credibility, Moore also conducted seventy-three interviews with principal leaders, such as Mumford, Simpson and many others who both supported and opposed the movement. His evaluations of this movement, then, are based upon his own experiences, research and the continuing influences from remnants of a bygone era.

Moore’s primary purpose is to provide an accurate representation of an historical movement. Indeed, the book is informative for those who are interested in Pentecostal/Charismatic history. However, the perspectives represented lean slightly toward a Charismatic ideology. Nevertheless, the reader can gain a thorough knowledge of the people, places and dates that are significant to the history of the Shepherding Movement. Included are the perspectives of the five key leaders mentioned above, with the exception of Poole who left the movement early in its progression. These five men were known as the Fort Lauderdale Five, because their ministries were based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for a time.

Moore explains the development of the Shepherding Movement from its inception, through its historical peak and to its final

demise as an influential movement. He notes, “This work does not center on a theological analysis of the movement’s teachings, [but] it does present the movement’s distinctive doctrines as the movement defined them, seeking to show the reasons for and influences upon its development” (5).

The history of the Shepherding Movement, as Moore presents it, is loaded with controversy. Unfortunately, one criticism of the text is the lack of detail behind the controversy, as Moore chooses to leave much unexplained. The reader is left with many questions about the entirety of the story. Moore recounts the entire fifteen-year history and beyond in only 199 pages. While it seems the whole story is presented, the informed reader may be left feeling unfulfilled by gaping historical holes due to lack of sufficient detail behind the sequence of events presented. If the reader does not have previous connection with the story, the entire controversy, as it is presented, can seem somewhat puzzling.

Perhaps the largest gap in Moore’s coverage is explained by Moore himself when he notes he found so many of the “movement’s most vocal critics, including Pat Robertson (who is the founder of Regent where Moore submitted this dissertation), Ralph Mahoney and Ralph Wilkerson, unwilling to be interviewed (9, footnote 36). The accounts of these men would provide an invaluable side to an otherwise incomplete story. Rather than speaking for themselves, the prominent opponents to the Fort Lauderdale-based movement (i.e., Robertson, Shakarian, and Eldon Purvis) can be heard only through the filtered lenses of what Mumford and Simpson could or would recall of their opponents’ opinions.

Another limitation is the lack of full

development of the stories of persons affected by critical accusations. For example, the connection between the Fort Lauderdale leaders and abuses cited by Robertson during an event dubbed the “Curtis Hotel Shootout” are never fully developed. Further, Moore portrays Mumford, Simpson and the other leaders as being sorry for any abuses that might have taken place within their movement, but those abuses are unspecified. It does seem, however, that the movement’s leaders were personally removed from the alleged abuses with which their critics charged them, but this is not resolved in the text.

Moving from the personal to the practical, theological issues highlighted in the script are presented in the most general terms. The topics of male leadership in the home, worship, trans-local authority, the principle issue of discipleship and the overarching issue of Charismatic ecclesiology are all offered in somewhat of an introductory manner.

A definite strength of the *Shepherding Movement* is Moore’s emphasis on the historical context of the movement. Classical Pentecostal adherents might be tempted to view the Shepherding Movement from the perspective of denominational structures that have been functioning for generations, with emphases on institutional hierarchies, spiritual growth, discipline and accountability. The Charismatic Movement, however, did not have this structured discipline, and the mainline denominations were not accustomed to handling outbreaks of the gifts of the Spirit.

An accurate understanding of the denominational and theological framework, then, is important for a more precise understanding of the movement’s overall development and progression. As Moore so

aptly points out, American culture at large and, by extension, the Charismatic Movement, both independently and within the mainline denominations, were strongly individual focused. Mumford, Simpson, Prince, Basham and, later, Baxter saw this and joined together to emphasize the areas of discipline and spiritual growth. Unfortunately, these teachings were easily abused by those lower in the network of their ministry, casting a shadow on their work in ministry.

pastors serving in that tradition.

Moore's narrative provides an interesting starting point for further study of the history of the Shepherding Movement and the Charismatic Movement at large. Moore has provided painstaking research and an accurate portrayal of the historical data surrounding the rise and fall of Church Growth Ministries and the Shepherding Movement. The seriousness of this research is indicated by the thoroughness of the bibliography provided (205), which is rich with citations of primary documents written by the Fort Lauderdale Five, their friends and their opponents.

In summary, David Moore's *The Shepherding Movement* is a timely work and a source for reflection on the short history of an ecclesiastical movement, showing the pitfalls, successes and lessons to be learned from it. As much as possible, Moore has tried to offer an unbiased presentation of events, although he occasionally suggests conclusive opinions without clear support for his rationale. The text is clear and to the point, providing a concise presentation of information. The book is not laden with burdensome or obscure theological language that would hinder the reader's full comprehension of its contents, thus *The Shepherding Movement* could easily be recommended reading for students of Pentecostal/Charismatic church history and