

## Articles and Sermons :: Impressions from Strange Fire by Anton Bosch

### Impressions from Strange Fire by Anton Bosch - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2013/10/25 19:56

Here are the impressions I have gained from John MacArthur's strange Fire Conference. Please note this is not an exhaustive critique of which, I am sure, many will be appearing on the internet for and against. I simply want to convey the broad strokes as I saw it.

I attended all of the first day (Wednesday October 16) and the Q&A session on the third and last day. In addition, I have read parts of the book by the same title and read summations of the other sessions as published by MacArthur's people: <http://thecripplegate.com/>.

The facilities and organization were extremely professional. All the way from the white table cloths on the tables in the parking lot at which 5,000 people dined in style, to the sessions starting on the exact second. One could not help being impressed with such a huge crowd singing the great hymns of the faith, especially when accompanied by a string orchestra and powerful organ. The only sour note for me was when on the Wednesday evening a 50 something couple in front of me decided that it was time for foreplay (literally) during the meeting. So much for the moral high ground!

The sessions were being simulcast in many different languages and the book Strange Fire was simultaneously being launched on several continents and in several languages.

The sense of professionalism flowed through to the ministry, which obviously sorely lacked any form of straying from the very carefully prepared and orchestrated scripts. I guess some people like the professional approach, but I prefer to feel that the preacher is actually trying to communicate with me rather than reading his script for the sake of the cameras.

The first (middle and last) word went to John MacArthur. "You are the chosen" was the first words out of his mouth. Everyone laughed, but I cringed, feeling that the joke had a real barb to it. This was more than an ice-breaker, this was the message of the conference: Unless you are Reformed and elect you are in error and not saved!

It became clear to me that the issues were not so much cessationism vs. Pentecostalism (or Continuationism, as they prefer to call it), but Reformed Cessationism vs. the rest. Non-Calvinist Evangelicalism does not seem to exist as far as the speakers were concerned you are either Calvinist and Cessationist or nothing.

MacArthur draws no distinction between classical Pentecostals and Charismatics. Neither does he believe that there can be any such thing as a moderate or conservative Pentecostal. He likes to bandy about the statistic that 90% of Pentecostals are into Word of Faith and Prosperity. My personal experience in the USA and in Africa contradicts this exaggeration and suggests that 90% are NOT into Word of Faith. His number may be true of Nigeria but that's as far as that statistic goes.

According to the speakers Continuationists are not saved, and are worse than Mormons in their error, growth and threat to true Christianity. All charismatic gifts are demonic (including most of what was happening in the church of Corinth). It was the consensus of the speakers that no movement in the history of the church has done more damage to the Gospel than Continuationism. MacArthur promotes a caricature of Pentecostals of which Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), Benny Hinn and Paul and Jan Crouch are typical, rather than the exception. He makes a point of emphasizing that there is absolutely no difference between someone like Hinn and moderate Pentecostals.

Part of this caricature is that Pentecostals have made no contribution, ever, to the spread of the gospel, the promotion of Biblical truth or the glory of God. To protest about the thousands that have been saved through the missionary activity of Pentecostals the world over is pointless since such converts are (by their definition) not saved. In contrast to the half Billion (their statistic) Continuationists who have been saved out of darkness, MacArthurism has done almost nothing to reach the lost. Their sect is almost exclusively populated with sheep, and entire congregations, stolen from other churches.

He further emphasizes that the only stream of truth runs from Augustine through Luther and Calvin to RC Sproul (and others of the same ilk). Clearly evangelicals that held to the truth before the Reformers came on the scene and the thread that runs through the small groups that held to truth throughout the ages are also mistaken. I am lead to conclude that the Lord's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church did not apply to the period between the

Church Fathers and the Reformation, unless that stream flows through the church of Rome?

MacArthur did not exposit Scripture but simply ranted.

RC Sproul

Sproul spoke by means of video (probably pre-recorded). The first part of his analysis was good as he traced the thread of the promise of the Spirit through the Prophets to the day of Pentecost. He then dealt with four of the five recorded occasions that the Spirit came on people in the book of Acts.

His thesis was simple but short on logic and truth. According to Sproul there were four main groups of people in the book of Acts: The Jews, the God Fearers, the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Somehow this relates to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. His logic here was too convoluted for my simple brain. What I do know however, is that there were only two main groups – Jews and Gentiles and that everyone else fell into those groups. The very vision of the sheet of unclean and clean animals in Acts 10 declare Cornelius and his people as “unclean” – Gentiles. Acts 11:1 specifically calls them “Gentiles”. They are not, by any stretch of the imagination, a separate group. Neither are the Samaritans or the God Fearers representative of any future group of people. Throughout Paul’s epistles there are only two groups – Jews and Gentiles.

Sproul’s thesis then is that the Spirit was given to these four groups in turn (Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19) to show that every one is included because these four groups represent all the possible kinds of people to whom the gospel would be preached.

I must grant that at this point Sproul went against the classical cessationist view that the receiving of the Spirit was (note : not is), in Acts, a separate experience from salvation.

So the first problem with his theory is that the four groups are not representative. The second problem is that he glibly ignores the 5th event which is Paul in Acts 9:17. It is just plain faulty logic to have five examples and then to base a theory on the four that fit your idea and then ignore the one that contradicts your theory. (Pentecostals have long been guilty of the same error when trying to prove tongues as the initial evidence, based on three out of five of these same events plus deductions based on the other two).

Just as Sproul jumps from circumcision to infant baptism without any logical or Scriptural link between them, he then jumps from these examples to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a “second blessing”, in any shape or form, and that we receive the Spirit at salvation. Please listen to the recordings and you will see he does not even attempt to build a bridge between these two divergent ideas – he simply makes a wild assumption.

Sproul is one of MacArthur’s heroes and is held up as an example of someone who believes in Sola Scriptura, but he has based his entire Pneumatology on an assumption and disregards the plain teaching of the Scriptures. This would be bad enough, but it is worse since these are exactly the people who claim to be fastidious about interpreting the scriptures and blame everyone else for loose theology and flawed logic.

One of the accusations the speakers kept leveling at classical Pentecostals is that they “opened the door” for the excesses of Charisma. But if Pentecostals open the door, then Sproul and his Reformed friends provided a theological foundation for the Prosperity and Dominionists heresies with their Post-millennialism, Amillennialism and replacement theology. So the speakers can rant and rile against Dominionism and Prosperity as much as they like (and they should), but it is simply the logical extension of their own theology. (Note: MacArthur is Pre-Millennial yet he finds in Sproul a champion for truth)

Joni Eareckson

Eareckson gave a well delivered and touching testimony of how God did not heal her quadriplegia even though she had prayed for healing many times and even attended a Kathryn Kuhlman meeting in the hope of being healed. The bottom line was that she came to understand that healing is not physical but spiritual.

I believe she was carefully chosen to illustrate one of the fundamentals of the cessationist position that there is no such thing as physical healings for the post-apostolic church. (MacArthur touches on this in 1 ½ pages in his book – p245.)

My friend, who attended with me, did not think that she was making a universal point but rather just giving her own testimony, but I am a lot more skeptical and believe that each participant in the conference was carefully chosen to make a very specific contribution.

Steve Lawson

Lawson never opened the Scriptures once, but preached from the gospel according to Calvin. His whole presentation was as a presentation of what Calvin had to say about the miraculous (so-called by the Roman church) and the Pentecostal phenomena as displayed by some Anabaptist and Libertine groups.

He opened by extolling the glories of Lord Calvin. I had never heard so much unreserved praise and glory heaped on one man as I heard in this session. Not even the Charismatics with their personality cults go as far as Lawson did. Interesting how you perpetuate the very thing you so despise in others!

One of the evidences he quoted as proof of Calvin's greatness is the fact that he wrote his institutes when he was only 27 years old and two years after he was "saved" / out of Catholicism. I am sorry, but to me that is no commendation but rather a serious flaw. It is not possible for a 27 year old, being saved for 2 years to reverse the effects of 27 years of indoctrination by Rome. Rather than this being a recommendation for Calvin, it simply underscores the weaknesses of his theology which ultimately perpetuates many of the errors of Rome. Yet this is the man they all but worship and whose word is the final authority on all matters of doctrine! I assume the ESV Bible does not contain verses that warn about laying hands suddenly on people and appointing novices to positions of leadership?

In Lawson's presentation he frequently stole quotes from Calvin which were aimed at the false miracles and signs of Rome which Lawson then applied to the "Pentecostals" of his day. This is just not being honest. Worse, one of the points MacArthur likes to make is that Pentecostalism is a new thing going back to Azusa Street (early 1900's). Yet Lawson contradicts MacArthur by saying there were Pentecostal phenomena before, and during, the Reformation.

(Somewhere into Lawson's presentation, my friend who is more tolerant of divergent views than I, had had enough and left.)

One of his three points in conclusion really disturbed me. He said: "The Bible joins together the Spirit and the Word in the tightest bond." Several other speakers said the same thing "that the Spirit only works in, and through, the Word and you cannot separate the Spirit from the Word. To me it sounds dangerously close to redefining the Trinity as Father, Son and Word.

While taking side swipes at Pentecostals and Charismatics, Lawson's presentation was not primarily aimed at them. Rather, he had in his sights, certain Reformed Charismatics such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem. He concluded the session by saying that a "Charismatic Calvinist" is a "oxymoron" (sic) just as a "Baptist Theologian" is a contradiction in terms.

Conrad Mbewe

Conrad Mbewe is a Reformed Baptist pastor from Lusaka, Zambia and referred to by some as "the Spurgeon of Africa". A few months ago he published an excellent article on his blog entitled "Why is the Charismatic Movement Thriving in Africa" (<http://www.conradmbewe.com/search/label/Charismatic%20excesses>). He made some really good points in this article and, as a result, was asked, at the last minute, to speak along those lines at the conference. (By the way his article is worth reading as it explains very accurately, how well Charismania synchronizes with African traditional religion.)

It was good to hear a fellow African speak in an accent and style I could understand and relate to. But he had changed his message!

On his blog he drew a clear distinction between Pentecostals and Charismatics: "In this blog post, I do not refer to the old conservative form of Pentecostalism once represented by the Assemblies of God churches. I have in mind the current extreme form that is mushrooming literally under every shrub and tree in Africa."

In his address he still saw Pentecostals and Charismatics as different and separate "a distinction that MacArthur and his friends do not make. But Mbewe had recently changed his tune and now blames Pentecostals for "opening the d

oorâ€ for the Charismatics. Obviously a message he had picked up from MacArthur and was now echoing. I was very saddened to see him become a puppet of the very Americans he so despises because of what they have done to African Christianity.

Mbewe emphasized a point that almost every other speaker also made: that Classical Pentecostals are to blame for the Charismatic movement and that â€œweâ€ opened the door for it. But that is a total lie.

The Charismatics did not come out of the Pentecostals at all. They had nothing to do with each other. There may have been isolated individuals that had attended Pentecostal meetings but the majority of these people were in mainline churches. They independently, from one another, and from Pentecostals (they despised Pentecostals) began to seek Godâ€™s face and were filled with the Spirit â€ some as individuals and some as small groups within mainline churches. I have always believed that it was a sovereign work of God and that it was genuine but it went wrong. Very few of these people ended in Pentecostal churches. They began to meet informally and as ministers were kicked out of their churches, mainly over adult baptism, they began to form churches. These churches came under the wrong influences and ended in the chaos we have today.

Now hereâ€™s the thing; they came out of all the traditional churches, including Reformed churches. So if the Charismatic chaos came out of anything and if anyone â€œopened the doorâ€, the traditional churches (including the Reformed ones) opened that door because of their deadness! Had those churches been preaching Spirit and life there would never have been a need. Irrespective of how you cut it, this had nothing to do with Pentecostals.

Pentecostals did not corrupt the Charismatics but the Charismatics corrupted many Pentecostals.

## Division

MacArthur agrees that this conference is divisive and he is proud of that since he says that truth divides â€ the same excuse many others have used to sanctify their rude and unChristlike behavior. But once again, MacArthur is guilty of the very thing he blames on Pentecostalism. The speakers frequently referred to Pentecostals dividing the church into the haves (the Spirit) and the have-nots and that they had created a two-class system of Christians. This conference has done the same except the two groups are the Calvinists and the rest. The difference is that Pentecostals never (that I know of) said that those who were not filled with the Spirit are not saved, but MacArthur and his friends are saying that that Pentecostals are not saved and that the only repository of truth is in Calvinism.

We have always felt that there is a certain elitism and superiority to being Calvinist. We no longer have to â€œfeelâ€ that way, they are claiming it outright â€ Calvinists have the truth the rest are in darkness.

The battle lines have been drawn, it is no longer Evangelicals and Moderate Pentecostals against Charismania, but it is Calvinism against the rest with Baptists and other Evangelicals only slightly better than Pentecostals. One of the sad side-effects of this will be that many Pentecostals will now feel they have to defend the indefensible and will form alliances with the Charismatics against a common enemy.

## What happened to Sola Scriptura?

For all the noise they make about the Scriptures alone, it became amply evident that their base was not the Scriptures alone but the Scriptures plus Augustine, Calvin et al. Speaker after speaker quoted Calvin and in all the sessions I attended Calvin was quoted more (in total) than the Bible! Augustine, yes the father of Catholicism and allegoricalism, was frequently upheld as one of the most vital links of the truth between the Apostles and Sproul/MacArthur. It therefore appears that MacArthur is closer to Rome than to evangelicals since he shares a common root in Augustine while the rest of us find our base in the Scriptures.

## Ignorance

While the speakers had set themselves up as experts on the subject, they were all remarkably ignorant about the many complexities, history and theological positions of Pentecostals. It seems to me, that if you are going to produce a book and begin a world-wide attack on something, you would at least have made a study of Pentecostals and Charismatics. If their education is so superior (they love flashing their PhDâ€™s), how come they never learnt that you cannot study a subject, as complex as Pentecostalism, by watching TBN a few times? (MacArthur freely admits that this goes back to a time he had surgery and had nothing else to do but watch TBN.)

Every presentation was filled with inaccuracies, exaggerations and plain old lies. They had drawn a caricature, based on what they saw on TBN, and proceeded to convince themselves that all Pentecostals looked just like the caricature.

#### Conclusion

This was, for me, a very sad and frustrating experience. I had long admired, read and defended MacArthur, in spite of what I believed to be idiosyncrasies. He wanted division and he certainly got that with me. If he does not believe I am saved, what should I think of him?

Watching and subsequently digesting all this, I realized with horror that Calvinists are, by definition, NOT Sola Scriptura. They do not base their doctrines on Scripture but primarily on Calvin who in turn based his doctrine on that of Augustine. They are therefore, at least, twice removed from the Scriptures.

The Sola Scriptura slogan is just that – a slogan. If they really were committed to the Scriptures they would not come up with TULIP, amillennialism, paedobaptism, replacement theology and cessationism, to name a few. These doctrines cannot be arrived at through a simple study of the Scriptures, they have to be taught by someone external to the Scriptures.

It seems one of the things MacArthur is hoping the conference will achieve is a revival of Reformationism. He made reference to this idea a couple of times and wrote in the booklet we received: “Tetzel was a medieval monk whose high-pressure selling of indulgences” so enraged Martin Luther and touched off the Protestant Reformation. He then continues to liken Tetzel to TBN leaving one to conclude that he sees himself as a modern Luther who is ushering in a modern Reformation. I hope he is wrong, but I fear he may well be right as thousands have already left the craziness of Charisma for the coldness of Calvinism.

May the Lord Jesus come soon!

from: <http://moriel.org/MorielArchive/index.php/discernment/impressions-from-strange-fire>

#### **Re: Impressions from Strange Fire by Anton Bosch, on: 2013/10/25 22:55**

Everytime I read one of the reviews I become more disheartened. It seems MacArthur has declared war on those who are non Calvinist and charismatic.

I sense an arrogance coming out of the MacArthur camp. The scriptures tells us that knowledge makes arrogance but love edifies. Knowledge and arrogance come out of the MacArthur camp. But no love.

MacArthur wants another reformation. The spirit that is coming out of this Strange Fire conference is that same Spirit that persecuted and martyred many non Calvinists during the Reformation, many of them Anabaptists.

One wonders if history could repeat its self.

Bearmaster.

#### **Re: , on: 2013/10/25 23:43**

Even if MacArthur did think that all "Continuists" are not saved he should not be mockingly condescending. Was Christ mockingly condescending to the lost?

But the fact of the matter is that many are saved and his attitude is just unabashedly smug at best and demonic at worst. Why does anyone listen to him? What is he an authority on except division? Thank God this man is not the mayor of Geneva.

**Re: - posted by ArthurRosh, on: 2013/10/26 0:02**

Thank you brother Greg for posting this informative article.

**Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2013/10/26 0:36**

RE: ///Why does anyone listen to him?///

for the same reason that men listen to many such preachers, as Luther often boasted of himself, they are professional orators and men are attracted to those with great orator skills.

In a world that men lack answers the professional orator attracts the multitudes by his appearance of complete confidence and his great word smithing abilities.

I listened to mainstream conservative radio preachers since my preteen days hours and hours daily, I can not seem to be able to accurately articulate it, but there is something different with many of the preachers and sermons presented on Si.

I feel that Si has done a very good Job of selecting preachers and sermons that are Spiritually edifying vs just being intellectually stimulating.

**Re: - posted by proudpapa, on: 2013/10/26 1:40**

RE: ///I sense an arrogance coming out of the MacArthur camp.///

I agree it is extremely disturbing

from John MacArthur tweeter, I found this very disturbing as with many of the other tweets, not necessarily John but from the conference :

John MacArthur @johnmacarthur 17 Oct :

"We're not trying to divide the body of Christ with this conference. We're trying to identify the body of Christ." #StrangeFire

"A charismatic Calvinist is an oxymoron." -Steve Lawson #StrangeFire

Steve Lawson's statement has to even hammer a wedge within the Calvinist camp, what about the Martin Lloyd Jones, Paul Washer , John Pipers etc ?

<https://twitter.com/johnmacarthur>