

JOURNEY FROM CHARISMATIC TO REFORMED

Pastor Konteh has admirably succeeded in his stated aim — to highlight and correct the errors, in belief and practice, of the movement he is addressing. Although he does so with commendable brevity, clarity and cogency, one especially notable feature of this work is that it is marked by evident and sincere pastoral concern.

This concern is no doubt heightened by the partly autobiographical nature of the book — some of which must have been quite painful to live through. We heartily pray that the book will fall into the hands of those pastors and teachers who most need to read it, to release both them and those who hear them from these errors and their consequences.

— **Rev Kenneth Stewart**, Minister of Stornoway
Reformed Presbyterian Church

Rev Sylvester Konteh exposes Charismatic errors through clear biblical teaching, pairing rich Reformed theology with an experience of failed prophecy, tongues, and exorcism from his time in the Charismatic movement. This engaging read will help those in the Charismatic movement see the riches of Biblical, Reformed, Christianity

— **Rev Romesh Prakashpalan**, Minister, Zion
Presbyterian Church of Fredericksburg, VA

Pastor Konteh's testimony and journey to the Reformed faith is a clear indication that God can change people. I was impressed at Pastor Konteh's humility to share his past errors in order to help those who are still trapped in these movements. I was impressed at his scriptural critique of our Charismatic, Pentecostal and Word of Faith brothers, of which I was once a part.

Few people enjoy confronting others, knowing we often will receive in return hostile responses from hard hearts, but confronting others with the right spirit is the evidence of our love, and according to Scripture it is something that must not be neglected. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend' (Proverbs 27:6). Pastor Konteh's testimony is interesting, and I love the way he uses the objective truth of Scripture to show that his past experiences were not valid. This is a relevant and good work for those needing answers in the church today.

— **Rev Edrissa Colley**, Teaching Elder,
Presbyterian Church in the Gambia

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Sylvester John Konteh



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Cover image: A modern take on the journey up
Hill Difficulty, from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	9
Map	11
Introduction.....	13
Chapter 1. Speaking in Tongues.....	23
Chapter 2. The Prophetic Ministry	34
Chapter 3. Healing	52
Chapter 4. Deliverance.....	60
Chapter 5. Seed Faith	72
Chapter 6. New Anointing.....	84
Chapter 7. Celebrity Pastors and their Teachings	96
Chapter 8. The True Work of the Holy Spirit	108
Chapter 9. AReverent Way to Worship	120
Chapter 10. A Safe Way to Interpret Scripture.....	136
Chapter 11. The Lord's Supper.....	148
Chapter 12. A Brotherly Invitation.....	170
Appendix: <i>The Practicalities of Preaching</i>	172
Bibliography	180

Introduction

The material which is presented in this book is primarily intended for the benefit of Charismatic and Pentecostal preachers who are contemplating a reformation of doctrine in their lives and ministries, along with those who are perhaps not yet familiar with the Reformed faith.

I have made it my duty to deeply study some of the practices of the Charismatic church which are most abused in the name of Christianity. I have gained a wealth of experience in the Charismatic and Pentecostal movement. I know what it means to be passionate about something which is ultimately unbiblical.

I want to take my time to address such issues, so that after reading what follows, you can decide

whether the position which I now take is right or wrong, based on the biblical evidence which I seek to bring before you.

I write as someone who, by God's grace, has journeyed from error to truth. For those who are reading this book and currently find yourself within the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements, I do not write these words as a personal attack on you. Rather, I seek your spiritual good along with the good of Christ's church at large. Whilst I have repented of my former practices and I now reject Charismatic and Pentecostal doctrine and practices and wholeheartedly embrace the Reformed faith as Christianity in its truest and most consistent form, I write these words to you out of love. I write these words so that you might, by God's grace, begin your own journey from Charismatic to Reformed and from error to truth.

As I write, I will bring in some of my own practical experiences in these matters, prior to coming to the Reformed faith.

Allow me to say at the outset that while I was in the Charismatic church and experienced a great deal of the excesses of the movement, at the same time

there are some within the Charismatic church who consider themselves to be Reformed Charismatics. This is perhaps somewhat of a misnomer, but nonetheless they are Reformed in certain areas of their ministry and Charismatic in other areas. This is certainly not something I would encourage, but they differ in notable ways from the Charismatic church of my experience and would not be open to the same criticisms. It would be wrong to represent 100% of the Charismatic church with the greatest excesses of the movement, hence from time to time as you read, you will see the occasional reference to Reformed Charismatics.

My Path to Discipleship

Now I would like to tell the story of how I came to realise that I was sincerely wrong. I was a disciple within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. I was taught that I could manipulate God to get what I wanted. I was told that I could imitate and perform all the miracles of Jesus Christ, and more, if I had enough faith. Coming from a mystical background, I found this easy to accept.

The obsession with power, control, and mysticism dominates the Charismatic movement, in my experience. The name of Jesus Christ was used as a charm to get what you wanted. Like the inquisitive person I was, I wanted to see more power displayed in my life. I would go for three days without food and water, trying to chase all the demons away and remove all the mountains before me in my life.

When my father died, they practically chased me out of the room where the remains were laid because I said I was going to raise my father from the dead. I tried to do the same with many dead people, along with attempting to heal those who were mentally ill, but to no avail.

The pastor would say, 'You need more faith,' or, 'Go to the mountain for prayer.' Some of my pastors kept mentally ill people at home to pray for them. Life is more difficult and frustrating when you expect and demand God to give what he has not promised you.

Since I had become very active in the church, some of the pastors attempted to convince me to become a pastor, but I refused. I just wanted to assist the pastors. I felt sorry for most of them as they went

through financial difficulties and struggles. I sought to do my best to help, but it was never enough.

I began evangelising and going out for the morning cry, as it was known, which was intended to wake people up in the morning, from house to house, by preaching the gospel to them. I went to my friends and to the places I used to go to as the sinful, inquisitive boy I was. I was preaching what I knew to be true, whilst adding my own testimony to it.

Due to the outreach I was engaged in, the church made me a preacher, despite the fact that I had received no theological instruction. My name appeared as a Sabbath School teacher and a preacher on some occasions. I was told that all I needed was power — theology was not important.

In 1999, after three months of training, I was sent from my home country in Sierra Leone to The Gambia to plant a church. Again, the pastor told me that all I needed was power and if I conducted miracles, I would establish a very large church. I planted the church, and I had about 70 to 80 people in attendance, as I was preaching and prophesying as a young man of 21.

In the end, however, the result of false doctrine was frustration, disappointment, and resignation. If you promise people that all will be well with them in their earthly lives when they believe the gospel — that Christianity is the route to a happy marriage and success in business and good health — they will wear out the pastor and the church, as in reality nobody is permanently without difficulties in life. In fact, we are promised difficulties and tribulation (John 16:33). All our lives long, we will keep moving from one challenge to the next. What we need to know is how to live in the storm, through the Lord's help, and not to run away from it. Eventually I resigned from this church plant.

The Lord saw fit to bring a turning point in 2014, when a Scottish charity, the Gambia Partnership, visited The Gambia and we met at a fellowship. The team included members from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Scott Maciver, who was amongst them, was particularly used by the Lord to introduce me to and disciple me in the Reformed faith. I was supplied with books and video lectures that taught, for instance, the sovereignty of God, divine providence, the doctrines of grace and the kingship of Christ. With the help of Scott, who was

replying to every one of my questions and walking me through different Reformed doctrines and practices, I started dropping my preconceived notions and beliefs, which were contrary to true biblical Christianity. I eventually relinquished control.

The most enticing thing for humans is to have the same power as God to control events, and yet it is the most difficult thing to do in this world — indeed, impossible! The sovereignty of God and the kingship of Christ taught me that I am not in control, that there is a supreme leader and ruler of both the church and the world, who is not subject to the whims and caprices of men. Nobody dictates to God, no one tells him what to do. He does everything in accordance with his own purpose and in his own time.

For the first time in my Christian life, I stopped trying to be God. Oh, what a joy to behold the sovereignty of God and the kingship of Christ! These truths were comforting, enriching, and liberating to my soul. I saw my errors for what they were and repented as the light of God's Word shined in my soul. I started giving up my superhero mentality, which is prevalent in pastors in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles.

The Charismatic movement taught me to believe that I was the dispenser of God's grace and everything revolved around me, as a pastor. The church gravitated towards the pastor, not in a healthy, biblical way but as if the church was like a shrine and the pastor was like a witch doctor. All the people needed was the outward administration of the pastor— the water, the oil, the touch of the man of God—and all would be well.

My reformation experience changed all of those beliefs. Now I understood that the ordinances of the church are made efficacious by faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit — not by the will of man. God sovereignly dispenses his blessings according to his will, not according to the dictates of any pastor.

It was a serious burden to bring my wife along with me on my journey, to believe what I now believe is biblical. I read books out loud during the day or in the evening for my wife to hear and to spark discussion. When we had finished reading or talking, I would stop and pray. Knowing the kind of person I was, with God's help she started to listen to me and eventually joined me in reformation.

With this by way of background, I would like to discuss some of the heretical teachings found in the Charismatic and Pentecostal movement, which have no biblical foundation, and are leading many Christians astray. At the same time, I would humbly and prayerfully ask you to consider Reformed theology as the most biblical and consistent form of theology. When we come to grasp Reformed theology, our understanding of salvation changes. In fact, our understanding of everything changes!