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The cover features a large yellow cross on the left side. In the background, there is a stylized world map with several blue arrows pointing upwards and to the right. In the foreground, five diverse people are standing in a row: a woman in a green top and blue pants, a man in a dark suit, a man in a white shirt and tan pants, a man in a black clerical shirt and dark pants, and a woman in a blue and white sari.

Missio Apostolica

Lutheran Mission Matters

Volume XXIII, No. 1 (Issue 45) May 2015

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Lutheran Mission Matters
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About The Cover: You Can Judge This Journal By Its Cover

“Lutheran mission matters.” Yes, it does; and yes, Lutheran mission matters are what you read about in *Missio Apostolica*, now in its twenty-second year of publication. Ambiguity, double meaning—call it what you will. The journal’s subtitle packs much meaning into few words. Lutheran mission matters because it is based on God’s gracious gifts: His Word and His Sacraments. The Spirit plants faith in hearts as He wills, and so Lutherans ground their work of God’s mission in the tools that His Spirit supplies: His saving Word and Sacraments. The Lutheran mission matters in *Missio Apostolica* reflect the thinking and practice of Lutherans in many walks of life: theologians at seminaries, missionaries in the field and retired missionaries, pastors in the parish, teachers in classrooms, laypeople who bring God’s Word to their neighbors.

The new cover illustration, the subject of extended discussion by the editorial committee, is intended not to supersede the LSFM logo of a cross on an open Bible against a background of the globe. Rather, it is to expand on it—to display graphically that mission is about people, people of all cultures and colors. The stylized gathering on the cover depicts a representative sampling of all those who spread the Word and those who hear it. That the people stand in the southern hemisphere is no accident. It reminds us of the growing vibrancy of Christ’s church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, even as Christians in the “old” countries of Christendom, and even the “new world,” in the north struggle to maintain a vital presence. Mission is not a one-way street from north to south or from west to east. The arrows point in all directions, and the cross remains at the center of it all. God’s mission is everywhere, just as it always has been.

David O. Berger

Inside This Issue

Our readers may anticipate here a wide variety of points of view on a popular topic of our time known as Spiritism. That this hitherto relatively unnoticed movement is at work today substantially among Christians and Christian households is the focus of several essays in this issue.

These essays and narratives testify to direct divine intervention in people's lives in radically unfamiliar ways, especially in crises situations. When people were faced with dead ends and nowhere else to turn, God rescued them from peril and disaster, manifesting his power and might in dramatic ways. In retrospect, they recall that these were real occurrences when God intervened in unprecedented ways, abnormal and atypical as they seem to be for others. Was God whispering in their ears a new direction, when they thought that all doors were shut and they knew no place else to turn?

While many readers will nod their heads as they internalize these authors' testimonies, others will dismiss some as irrational, surreal, and hallucinatory, presuming them to be primitive, arcane, and cryptic—accounts that perhaps had in times past a place in infantile cultures and spiritualities, but are irrelevant to today's dominant culture. To the contrary, we notice that many of the writers are experienced teachers of religion and distinguished theologians who live stateside and are sufficiently informed of other cultures and religious traditions. The editors debated if all the testimonies would find a place in the journal, but by consensus agreed to proceed, bearing in mind that our mission impels us to engage the Gospel with a world awash in an assortment of worldviews.

Yet, we begin this issue with an intriguing article on the collapse of Christendom in America penned by Robert Newton, veteran missionary, seminary professor, and district president (LCMS—California, Nevada, Hawaii). Newton challenges the mainline denominations to ask themselves, "Who are we as Christ's church in this society? What is our role? How do we serve? How do we proclaim God's Word to people who seem increasingly indifferent to its saving message?"

Other articles in this issue include Armand Boehme's account of a mid-winter 2015 convocation at Luther Seminary titled "Religious but not Spiritual?," a new trend that bespeaks the apparent disconnect between spiritual and religious in contemporary America. Contrary to the historic traditions of this country, in today's culture an increasing number of young adults perceive the church as a place where religion happens but contributes little to spiritual nourishment and well-being. "Can a person be religious without being spiritual?" R. Lee Hagan, on the other hand

shows that Lutheran congregations thrive in America's rural neighborhoods, if only nourished and nurtured appropriately with the Means of Grace and properly guided to pursue the way of the Lord.

Internationally, Jeff Oswald describes how God accomplishes great things through little pastors, narrating the story of how Lutheran mission first entered China. Hailu Yohannes Bulaka from Ethiopia reflects on the Holy Spirit's activity within the prevailing culture of pluralism and a cacophony of spiritualities in that country. The reflections of a young Brazilian Lutheran on how the metaphor of warfare speaks directly to his native culture are compelling. Christian cross-bearing in any context is true testimony of the Crucified One. This journal is fully committed to making Him known throughout the world. Welcome to the conversation.

V. R.

Conflicting Missiologies

Victor Raj

English Protestant Missionary James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) is credited with the coining of the popular catchphrase, “The Great Commission,” although it is widely acknowledged that the actual origin of the term among Christians predates Taylor. Heeding the Lord’s directive (Mt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), the people of God had been engaging God’s mission long before mission societies were constituted and the Church became institutionalized in its historic and contemporary forms.

Especially in the two centuries that precede our generation, the Christian Church and her auxiliaries launched concerted efforts at witnessing the Gospel throughout the world with greater vigor and intentionality than all the activities put together throughout all the generations preceding them. Following the model of early apostles and disciples, Christians as individuals and in groups caught on to the mission vision the Lord had cast for His Church. Mission societies would be formed, with mainline denominations endorsing, sponsoring, and partnering with them toward the common cause of Gospel witnessing. Diverging from the centuries-old tradition of Christian missionaries from the Western hemisphere reaching out to the East, mission in the twenty-first century has become a global partnership among like-minded peoples and communities, Christians from all over the world together sharing personnel, resources, and methods for the common goal of making disciples for Christ.

Missionary Taylor dedicated fifty-one years of his life in China in the service of spreading the Gospel among the residents of China’s interior. At Taylor’s initiative, more than eight hundred missionaries went to China over five decades. They were instrumental in establishing thousands of preaching stations and hundreds of schools, at the same time engendering indigenous leadership for the missionary task in a huge country home to a fifth of the world’s population. Taylor’s unrelenting zeal for proclaiming Christ before all peoples, along with his erudite sensitivity to indigenous customs and cultures, brought him the recognition as a modern replica of the biblical apostle Paul. Taylor’s prototypes may be seen in the lives and services of numerous other missionaries preceding him, such as Roberto Di Nobili (1577–1656), Bartholomew Ziegenbalg (1682–1719), and William Carey (1761–1834).

Disagreements refuse to go away on how best to unpack the grammar of the biblical texts upon which the Great Commission has been founded. Questions continue to arise whether the Lord first addressed these words just to the eleven disciples who surrounded Him at the time of speaking or if, indeed, they were directed to everyone who would follow Him, beginning with His disciples.

Regardless of how translations read, the Greek text of Matthew 28:19 hinges on the single principal verb, “make disciples.” The verb appears in its Aorist imperative form, and its direct object signifies the people of all nations. Historically, heeding the Lord’s directive, Christendom has been on a journey to proclaim in His name repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Lk 24:47). The Great Commission has since propelled Christian people in the millions to reach out beyond their borders for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

Gospel proclamation, according to N. T. Wright, is enabling people to hear the good news of “life after life after death.”¹ Wright argues that, by raising Jesus from the dead, in Jesus of Nazareth, “God has brought his future, his putting-the-world-to-rights-future, into the present,” all of which is encapsulated in the prayer the Lord taught His people to pray.² When we pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are praying for “bread and forgiveness” at the same time, Wright argues. In that vein, Christian discipling is God’s instrument in our world for a demonstration of His forgiveness, life, and salvation. The proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord is the incarnation life in its fullness and abundance to all who are brought into the household of faith (Jn 10:10). Christian mission invests equally in the proclamation of salvation and in its demonstration in serving neighbors in their bodily, social, and material needs.

The missionaries of any time do not do otherwise. Christian discipling involves empowering those who are taught to live life in its fullness in Christ. The Lord’s witnesses care equally for the body and soul of their listeners, as the Early Church and the pioneers in mission have done. Reassured by the hope of the resurrection, Christians demonstrate before the world the reason for the hope they have in Christ, whom they honor in their hearts as holy.

If it appears that evangelism worldwide has plateaued somewhat, without a doubt the Lord continues to add to His Church people from all nations in His own gracious and mysterious ways, even though conflicting opinions persist, not only in understanding the mission of the Church, but also in the ways in which the Church encounters the world. Global Christianity is having an impact on our world in new ways, as the Gospel demonstrates its power in previously impenetrable communities through insider movements and missional communities anchored exclusively in the claims that Christ has made on their lives. These communities are seeking not bread from others but only to partner with other Christians in the Gospel. Christians globally are searching for methods of communicating the Gospel holistically, covering all the senses of body and soul.

Confessing Christ at any time is a scandal. The claims that the Lord and giver of life has made on the lives of all people by His life, death, and resurrection have no impact on un-regenerated reason. For the repentant sinner, however, Christ confessed brings to life a brand-new way of understanding human living in its ritual, ethical, social, and experiential dimensions. In this issue of the journal, we encounter how

spiritism is at work in our world today, even in American Christian households. Patterns of religion and religious practices have been changing, all too often bereft of their traditional moorings. As conversions occur, we pray only that the God who begins His good work in people will bring with that experience a baptismal renewal of life and service in the world holistically.

Christian faith is fundamentally in conflict with culture, any culture. If the Reformers strove to free the Gospel from the institutional culture of the time, today Christ's Church strives to relate the Gospel to the culture of our time, penetrating and transforming it for the sake of Christ and His kingdom on earth.

In India, for example, one of the major challenges that Christian witnessing faced early on was that it attracted primarily the disenfranchised and the marginalized of the community, with limited access to the cultural mainstream. In spite of intentional efforts to increase social mobility and effect cultural transformation that have been an integral part of Christian mission, as the lives of Carey and Ziegenbalg have shown, Christians in India continue to retain their cultural and national identities as Indians. Yet, they strive to overcome socio-economic conflicts by putting their faith to work in acts of love and service to others, regardless of the taboos that persist in the community.

As in the first century, the Lord of the Church continues to add to the household of faith peoples and nations of the world well beyond human reasoning and imagination. Through the Great Commission, the Church today participates in God's mission for the salvation of His people throughout the world.

Endnotes

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 197.

² *Ibid.*, 215.

Articles

Truly Confessional: Responding to the Collapse of Christendom

Robert Newton

Abstract: Postmodernism has pushed many Christian churches in America to a state of cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical crisis, marked by profound questions of identity. “What’s our purpose as Christ’s church in America?” “How do we remain faithful to Christ and His Word?” Its confessional moorings enable Lutheran churches to avoid two pitfalls prevalent among other Christian churches: Compromise of biblical truth and/or shallow discipleship. In their desire to remain faithful, however, Lutherans are tempted to circle their confessional wagons in defense of the Gospel, thereby diminishing their missionary vocation in the world. To remain truly confessional Lutherans must keep first and foremost their evangelical identity and purpose.

It was but a few years ago that I often heard the phrase, “America is a Christian nation.” Rarely do I hear those words anymore. I most often hear that America is “post-Christian,” even “anti-Christian,” referring to the direct assaults by secularism and religious pluralism against the church.

Post-Christian America presents formidable challenges to Christians and their churches, especially for their Gospel outreach to the unchurched world. Our churches have been thrown off balance. Having held for centuries the pole position of cultural relevancy in society, they continue to organize and operate with the assumption that the unchurched will be naturally attracted to their churches and ministries. They struggle to understand why individuals and/or families find the soccer field, Starbucks, or just sleeping in more appealing than going to church on Sunday morning. They feel threatened when people challenge the traditional Christmas tree in the town square, the Ten Commandments in a court of law, or, most recently, the traditional definition of marriage. For them, these radical changes make no sense.

Along with these challenges, however, come incredible opportunities for Gospel outreach. Making the most of these opportunities depends primarily upon our

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ministry approach to and attitude regarding them. St. Paul exhorted the Christians in Ephesus, “*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Eph 5:15–17). Maximizing the time requires that we understand the post-Christian arena in which we live and how it affects our responsibilities and roles as Christ’s light and salt in the world.

Collapsing Christendom

Dr. Timothy Tennent, in his recent and insightful book, *Invitation to World Missions*,¹ identifies seven mega-trends occurring in the Christian movement around the world. The mega-trend that leads the list, and has the greatest impact on my church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, he dubs “The Collapse of Christendom.” He writes, “The Western world can no longer be characterized as a Christian society/culture in either its dominant ethos or worldview. Christendom has collapsed², and twenty-first century missions must be re-conceptualized on new assumptions.”³ The issue boils down to this question: “Who’s in charge of leading and shaping our culture?” That is, “Who or what is determining its values, morals, and priorities?” Christendom would have answered the question: “The Christian Church is in charge. We are a Christian society.” That self-understanding was foundational in the forging of Western civilization. The fact of the matter is that Christendom and its prevailing worldview is collapsing. The institutional church⁴ is not in charge in America.

Tennent’s second mega-trend, “The Rise of Post-Modernism,” suggests that with the collapse of Christendom no one or no thing is culturally in charge. Our society, including its church population, is caught in cultural, moral, and religious free fall. He explains,

The West is experiencing a growing skepticism about the certainty of knowledge, an increasing distrust in history, and a general cultural malaise caused by the loss of meaning. In 1979, the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard coined the term postmodernism to describe these changes. . . . The key shift from modernism to postmodernism, argues Lyotard, is marked by the collapse of what he calls these “grand narratives,” which guided and produced stability in the formation of modernity. . . . Today, the rise of relativistic pluralism, the loss of faith in the inevitable progress of the human race, and an increasing uncertainty about normative truth claims have resulted in a cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical crisis.⁵

Postmodernism has pushed many Christian churches in our nation to a state of crisis, marked by a profound loss of identity. As our Judeo-Christian value structures collapse around us, churches are uncertain how to respond. As the church’s role in society is devalued and Christian leaders are marginalized from the mainstream of

decision making, identity questions loom large. “Who are we as Christ’s church in this society?” “What is our role?” “How do we serve?” “How do we proclaim God’s Word to people who seem increasingly indifferent to its saving message?”

Tennent identifies two responses by churches in America to this crisis: (1) compromise and (2) entertainment. Compromise is the price tag mainline Protestant churches pay in the hope of preserving a seat at the table of cultural relevance. Having long enjoyed a privileged position at the center of Western culture and decision making, they are desperate not to lose their influence in society. Postmodernism, however, has steadily chipped away at the credibility of churches by challenging their most essential and valuable asset, the “objective truth claims” of the Bible, especially the dual realities of (1) sin as defined by God’s natural and revealed Law (Rom 3:19, 23) and (2) salvation as found in no place, practice, or person other than the crucified and risen Son of God, Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). “[The] scandalous particularity of the Christian message [is] increasingly unacceptable to those at the center of the culture.”⁶ Tragically, many churches are choosing to compromise, even abandon, the essential truths of historic (creedal) Christianity rather than be marginalized by the cultural gate keepers of American society.

Tennent notes that many evangelical churches in America were equally unprepared to meet the challenges of postmodernism. While they were unwilling to compromise the essential truths of the Bible, they were equally unwilling to be culturally marginalized. They opted instead for packaging biblical teaching in a worship format that was practical, user-friendly, and culturally relevant. Tennent characterizes their approach as “entertainment,” and while it may be a sweeping overgeneralization, he put his finger on the primary concern:

[The] evangelical churches were just as unprepared to respond to the collapse of the cultural center as the mainline Protestants. They have not known how to respond to the loss of confidence in the gospel in many of their youth, who are growing up in a relativistic, pluralistic, entertainment-oriented culture. Many members of evangelical churches, who had been joyfully ushered into the church on a kind of minimalistic basis, remained poorly equipped theologically and were no longer convinced that those without Christ are lost. Evangelicals have not been immune to the general cultural malaise. They were ill equipped for the robust catechesis (theologically and experientially) that was required to counteract the wider cultural attitudes.⁷

A Lutheran Response

Engraved on the cornerstones of any number of LCMS churches are the words, “Evangelical (Ev.) Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession (UAC).”

These two words—Evangelical and Confessional—form the essential building blocks of Lutheran DNA and well position Lutheran Christians for engaging the post-Christendom world with the Gospel. In short, they call Lutherans to their missionary vocation, faithfully following their missionary Lord into the world (Mt 28:18–20).

Lutheran theology and practice centers in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession (AC), entitled “Concerning Justification”:

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God through our own merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26] and 4[:5].⁸

As the centerpiece of Lutheran theology (Material Principle), this article serves as the interpretive lens⁹ through which Lutherans read the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and apply them to their everyday life and ministry. To maintain our posture as Lutheran Christians in this post-Christendom era, it is essential that we take note that Article IV rests entirely on the missionary character and purpose of the Triune God (Jn 3:16–17). The Father *sent* His Son into the world to bear through His death the entire punishment of God’s judgment against our sins (AC III, IV). On the basis of Jesus’ sacrifice alone, God has pardoned us and declared us right with Him. He offers these gifts to all people freely, to be received through faith when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake (AC IV). Furthermore, the Father and the Son *send* the Holy Spirit into the world to create this saving faith where and when it pleases Him (AC V). The Lutheran confessors noted that the Holy Spirit does not float immaterially out in space somewhere, but anchors Himself to the Gospel as it is proclaimed throughout the world. “So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). St. Paul’s great missionary questions follow naturally and necessarily from these articles of faith, “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14–15)

This confession of the “Mission of God,” including its divine agency and universal dimensions, distinguishes Lutheran Christians from other Christian churches and provides them a sound, unambiguous understanding of who they are and what they are about in the present age. Distinct from those Christians who teach that we must first seek God in order to find him, Lutherans hold that God alone acts in seeking, finding, and saving us (divine monergism). He came to us; He died in our place; His Spirit works faith in our hearts through His external Word and Sacrament.

Lutherans cling to the confidence that our right standing with God is alien to us. That is, it's not of our making. Rather, it's a pure gift of God, without our energy or work.

Simultaneously, Lutherans confess the universal dimension of God's Mission: "[God our savior] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3–4). That distinguishes Lutherans from Christians whose interpretation of the Bible limits the scope of those God would save. Lutherans insist on the universality of God's grace in Christ. They evangelically ask the great dual questions, (1) "How can we be sure that God justified *us* if He did not justify all people everywhere in Christ?" and (2) "How can we be sure that our faith sufficiently grasps the salvation God offers in Christ if it is a product of our own human pursuit and sincerity?" The doctrine of justification by grace through faith is hollow if it does not assert the missional character and work of God who loved the world so much that He personally pursues it in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the whole world and whose love and forgiveness always come to all people as a gift, not a reward. Lutheran faith stands solely and securely on these missional assertions—God alone and God for all.

The necessity of lifting up the missionary nature of Lutheran doctrine has never been more critical than now. Over the seventeen centuries of Christendom, churches and pastors grew to assume (correctly or incorrectly) that the Christian church played an essential role in the mind of the general population; and, therefore, "going to church" was part of the normal pattern of life. More recently, particularly in the years following World War II, American church leaders assumed that the general American culture shared the church's value that Christian worship is a basic building block of our life and society. Believers and nonbelievers alike were drawn to worship by the "natural law" operating in creation "that [all mankind] should seek after God in the hope that they might . . . find him" (Acts 17:27). While the U. S. Constitution forbids the promotion of any religion over another, the American culture gave the Christian church a virtual monopoly on the "seeking after God" options. Lutherans did not have to *actively* consider the missional nature of their confessional theology. They could posture themselves as the confessional voice within the greater "Christian culture," attracting religiously leaning people to the pure Gospel. Since the pure Gospel was proclaimed in worship services, Gospel proclamation outside the church need only attract people to what was going on inside the church. As Tennent points out, "Because Christianity is part of the prevailing plausibility structure and lies at the center of all public discourse, evangelism occurs passively. It is assumed that citizens grow up as Christians"¹⁰ and are looking for opportunities to be a part of the life of the church.

As the phrase "post-Christendom" suggests, those days are gone. Our American culture no longer points people to the Christian church to find the answers to their spiritual questions and longings. It is neutral at best, even antagonistic, to the church's claim that it is the keeper of God's objective truth. Contemporary culture

increasingly questions the notion that there is even such a thing as objective truth. Lutheran Christians should not be surprised or disappointed to find that people are not seeking the church in their spiritual meanderings. The Lutheran Confessions teach plainly that humankind is “unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God” (AC II). If there is any seeking and finding to be done, it is God alone who must do it. More than ever, the Lutheran understanding of the broken nature of people and the missionary nature of God must inform our (the LCMS) self-understanding as a confessional church and our engagement with the world.

Confessional Significance

In his lifelong endeavor to call Christians of the Reformed tradition to their missionary vocation, Dr. Donald McGavran raised the need to pen new confessions that responded to the human predicaments of the twentieth-century world, particularly the billions of people still unreached by the Gospel.¹¹ By request, Dr. John Kromminga, then president of Calvin Theological Seminary, responded with an insightful article on the need and purpose of confessional writings. He identified three specific roles confessions play in the life of churches be they Reformed or Lutheran.

A confessional document as usually understood may be any or all of three things: (1) a witness to the world concerning the beliefs held by the church; (2) a teaching instrument for instruction of church members in those beliefs; and (3) a test of the orthodoxy of the members, particularly those entrusted with propagating and defending these truths.¹²

These three roles apply well to the Lutheran Confessions. The majority of the Book of Concord, including The Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles of Luther, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope were intentionally written for evangelical witness and apologetic defense of the true Gospel before the entire Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran church fathers make clear the intention of their confessions in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

In these last days of this transitory world the Almighty God, out of immeasurable love, grace, and mercy for the human race, has allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness for the German nation, our beloved fatherland. As a result, a short confession was assembled out of the divine, apostolic, and prophetic Scripture. In 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg it was presented in both German and Latin to the former Emperor of most praiseworthy memory, Charles V, by our pious and Christian predecessors; it was set forth for all estates of the Empire and was disseminated and has resounded publicly throughout all Christendom in the whole wide world.¹³

It is significant to note that of the three confessional purposes identified by Tennent the Lutheran fathers regarded as primary their evangelical witness to the world. They desired and intended that all peoples everywhere hear and believe the true Gospel and disseminated their confession accordingly. Understanding the evangelistic or missionary purpose of their confession is necessary for the proper application of the pedagogical and norming purposes of the confessions. The confessions serve no greater purpose than proclaiming the true Gospel of Christ for the eternal salvation and comfort of broken sinners.

This evangelical spirit underlies the two catechisms of Luther and the Formula of Concord. Upon seeing the deplorable condition of the faith life of the Evangelical¹⁴ Christians and their pastors, Luther wrote both the Small and Large Catechisms. He understood the need to provide consistent Christ-centered teaching on the chief doctrines of the church and to provide evangelical tools for parents and pastors to disciple their children and parishioners in the true faith. Years later, the Reformers drafted the Formula of Concord, both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration, in order to bring Christian unity to the Evangelical churches divided over key doctrinal concerns. The Formula, as well as the other Confessions, served the ecumenical purpose of keeping the churches in the unity of the true faith and of norming the teaching and practice of the pastors and churches according to the saving Gospel.

The importance of these three confessional functions has not waned in the almost five hundred years since their writing. In fact, they become an ever-increasing aid to Christian churches called to proclaim God's Word in and to a postmodern world. They aid the missionary task by first sharply defining the church's essence and purpose in this world by the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, including the divine intention that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Secondly, they recognize the need for the comprehensive discipleship of Christians in the Gospel, both old and young, equipping them to live "sober-mindedly" in this chaotic "no truth" world (1 Pt 1:13), to honor Jesus Christ as Lord, and to speak gently and respectfully to non-Christians of the hope that lies within them (1 Pt 3:15). Thirdly, they gather Christian churches together around the true Gospel, mustering and focusing their energies on the clear evangelistic proclamation of Christ crucified. Fourthly, they serve as a solid launching pad from which to address questions facing the church and the world today. Kromminga writes,

[There] is a comprehensive crisis faced by the church in today's world. It is the secularization of society, a secularization which has pervaded not only politics, economics, education, science, and the like, but also man's understanding of his own nature and destiny, his hopes, his aspirations, his values. . . . The crisis is comprehensive in its geographical scope. . . . [It] is comprehensive theologically. . .

. . . The church's response to the modern crisis should indeed be a missionary response. But behind and beneath this response there must be a great rallying of forces and a clarification of issues. This must take place in some way. In whatever way it takes place, it will be a confessional activity of the church. But the best way to gather the scattered efforts and undergird a positive Christian address to the world is in a confession which faces underlying issues.¹⁵

Retaining an Evangelical Center

The leaders and congregations of the LCMS, with our strong commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, have the ability and opportunity to avoid the pitfalls encountered by other Christian churches that have wrestled with their purpose and place in post-Christendom. The confessional subscription required of all LCMS congregations and rostered workers helps steel us from the dual sirens Tennent identified: theological compromise or shallow discipleship. In fact, the LCMS has responded to the postmodern crisis with an increased emphasis on the confessional fidelity of its pastors and teachers and thorough catechesis of its members. In our zeal to remain faithful to the Lord and His church, however, LCMS churches and leaders may fall prey to a trap equally dangerous to those identified by Tennent—losing our evangelical center and purpose. Kromminga observed regarding the evangelical function of confessions,

The element of witness to the world usually seems to enjoy its greatest prominence when a confession is first written and adopted. This is because a confession is ordinarily produced in response to some crisis on which the church must take a stand. But as time goes by and the particular crisis fades into the past, the accent tends to fall more and more on the second and third functions of a confession.

A confession, thus, is a living document whose role in the church varies with the passage of time and with changing circumstances. It may retain its full value as a teaching and testing device, but its freshness and spontaneity are in direct proportion to the imminence of the crisis to which it is addressed.¹⁶

Kromminga's observation alerts us to a grave concern. When the evangelical purpose is no longer the driving force of a church's confession, the teaching and norming functions of the confessions become twisted, curved in on themselves. "Confessional" displaces "evangelical" as the primary descriptor of Lutheran churches as the priority shifts from proclaiming the true Gospel before the world to preserving the true Gospel for its own members.

This danger is especially real as Christendom collapses. Faithfully following St. Paul's admonition, confessional church leaders need to position themselves to

protect their members from the vicious attacks mounted against the Christian faith and its values. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

They err, however, when they assume that protection assumes a defensive posture and that protecting doctrine is the primary function of a confessing church. Adopting a besieged mentality compels them to retreat from the unbelieving world into their ecclesiastical stronghold. Instinctively, faithfulness seems to require the thickening and sharpening of the church’s walls in order to protect itself and its confession from the assaults of secularism and religious pluralism. Consequently, they abandon the public square believing that the Gospel can only be proclaimed purely in those arenas in which the church retains complete and unchallenged control. That often limits their Gospel proclamation to the confines of their own sanctuaries—far from the ears of those who have not yet heard.

The Lord Jesus warned his New Testament church of this danger in its encounter with anti-Christian forces. His warning needs to be sounded again in our day and age.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.’” (Rev 2:1–4)

The resurrected Jesus, as Lord of the Church, addressed seven churches of Asia Minor, giving specific encouragement, rebuke, and admonition, calling them to remember who they were as His own and what they were to be about in a world hostile to the Gospel. He began with the church at Ephesus. Louis Brighton, in his commentary on Revelation, suggests that Ephesus may have been the oldest or foremost church of the seven and as such is addressed first.¹⁷ Within the priority of order, however, stands the significance of what the Lord commended and admonished, not only for Ephesus but for all churches: their faith and love.

The Lord commended the Church at Ephesus for its faithfulness in doctrine and practice. Doctrinal fidelity is essential for all who would follow Him and animates the confessional subscription of LCMS congregations, pastors, and teachers, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (Jn 8:31). In the Lord’s mind, however, love cannot—and therefore must not—be separated from doctrine. Thus, Ephesus’ loss of its “first love” became the locus for all manifestations of unfaithfulness.

“You have left your first love” (2:4) is the chief sin, from which all the others mentioned in the following six letters evolve and result. How the church had left her first love is not mentioned, but the sins and failings mentioned in the six following letters indicate what she had done to manifest her loss of it.¹⁸

Interpretations differ on the intended meaning of the word “first” as the modifier of “love” in this passage. Is it temporal, referencing the love that marked the Ephesian Christians in their earliest days? Or is it positional, that is, is it referring to a kind of love that exceeds all others? St. John’s ability to use the same word to mean more than one thing at the same time suggests that both interpretations are possible. Both interpretations depend on St. John’s identification of God alone as the author of true love:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:9–11)

God’s love is “first” in two ways. First, it precedes all other love: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Secondly, it exceeds all other love both in its scope and depth. God loves the entire world (Jn 3:16). Furthermore, He loves all the peoples of the world even as they remain His enemies (Rom 5:10). “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13) and again, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God’s “first love,” therefore, is missional. It cannot be stated more simply or clearly: “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16). Jesus’ call to radical faithfulness (Rev 2:10) requires an unadulterated love for His Word of truth and an unwavering love for His sinful world. LCMS churches, pastors, and teachers, in their desire to remain truly confessional in this present evil age, must keep the evangelical function of their confession their highest priority.

Keeping our first love requires, then, that we follow our Lord into the world rather than retreat from it. Jesus taught His disciples to face the forces of darkness without fear or compromise, believing that He builds His Church at the very “Gates of Hell,” which cannot prevail against Him (Mt 16:13–23). As much as the world’s growing hostility toward the church tempts us to feel besieged, confessional Christians must not surrender to its deception. No powers in the heavens or on the earth are able to shut the door on the Gospel’s proclamation. Only God can do that (Rev 3:7). Jesus didn’t teach that the world’s hostility threatens the Gospel; He taught the exact opposite. He taught that the Gospel thrives amidst the antagonism of the non-Christian world. In fact, by its very nature, the Gospel specifically comes to those hostile to its message: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

As evangelical Christians of the Lutheran Confessions, we are blessed to build our theology, and therefore our action plan in this world, squarely and exclusively on the “Theology of the Cross.” That theology confesses that our Lord Jesus was rejected by the world, condemned to death, and crucified in the public square. Rather than closing the door for the Gospel, the world’s hostility against the Lord opened it for all peoples. God not only anticipated this world’s hostility in His salvation plan; He harnessed it for His divine purposes.

Lutherans need to follow His lead. Rather than falling back to a defensive position, envisioning that our engagement with the postmodern world takes place at the gates of the church, we need to champion a strong missional posture, where we engage the world at its gates with the Gospel. Our Lutheran fathers praised God that in “these last days of this transitory world” Almighty God “allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness.”¹⁹ Their confidence in the powerful Word of God gave them the courage needed to proclaim to the world the evangelical message of God’s love for all in Jesus Christ. Fortified by this same Word and the testimony of their lives we, by God’s grace, may do the same.

Endnotes

¹ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010).

² Assuming the complete collapse of Christendom overstates the matter. Christendom, with its roots in the Roman Catholic Church, continues to enjoy great cultural and social significance in Latin America, including Latin American churches here in the United States. The collapse of Christendom is most keenly felt among churches born in Northern Europe, particularly of white Protestant traditions.

³ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 18.

⁴ “The institutional church” must be understood as distinct from the “One Holy Christian Church.” The institutional church is a sociological entity in which the true Church of Christ on earth resides (Augsburg Confession, Art. VII). The institutional church as we know it may fade; however, Christ’s Church will not. Despite the raging of human rulers and nations against the Lord and His Church, Jesus reigns over all things for all times (Psalm 2). Furthermore, we are assured that Jesus’ personal reign will continue unabated until His last enemy—death itself—has been destroyed (1 Corinthians 15).

⁵ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ Augsburg Confession, IV in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 38, 40.

⁹ In his German translation of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Justus Jonas highlighted the hermeneutical role the article on “Justification by grace through faith” plays in understanding the Scriptures by adding the following to Article IV: “which is especially useful for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, that alone opens the door to the entire Bible.” Apology to the Augsburg Confession IV in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 121.

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 20.

¹¹ Donald McGavran, “A Missionary Confession of Faith,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 7 (Nov. 1972), 135–145.

¹² John H. Kromminga, “The Shape of a New Confession,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 7 (Nov. 1972), 149.

¹³ Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.

¹⁴ “Evangelical” was the preferred self-designation of the Lutheran Reformers in the sixteenth century.

¹⁵ Kromminga, “The Shape of a New Confession,” 156–157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149–150.

¹⁷ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 59–60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹ Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.

Spirituality and Religion: The Shift From East to West and Beyond

Armand J. Boehme

Abstract: The spiritual but not religious phenomena is receiving increasing attention. People are becoming more individually religious, some are spiritual and religious, and some describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. Historical trends toward a more individualistic religion and spirituality are investigated. Various parameters of the religious/spiritual divide are examined. An overview of the broad range of modern spirituality is given. The conclusion sets forth avenues the church might pursue to address the trend to a more individualistic view of religion and spirituality and the need for further study of these trends.¹

Introduction

In times past, religion was granted a favored status in Western culture and society. However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, organized religion came to be viewed more negatively, something to be tolerated rather than approved of. This change coincided with the greater secularization of Western society, a gradual movement caused by a number of factors. One factor was *The Humanist Manifesto* (1933).¹ One of its signers, Paul Blanchard, wrote “We have an obligation to expose and attack the world of religious miracles, magic, Bible-worship, salvationism, heaven, hell, and all the mythical deities.”²

Some have said that the West has now entered a post-Christian or secular age. Religious faith is waning and will be replaced by reason and science. These same people noted that, as societies and cultures become more modern and advanced, the primitive superstitions of the dark ages—religion and religious faith—will disappear. Auguste Comte and Max Weber, among others, theorized “that wherever modernity advanced, religion would fade.”³ In the 1930s, reform-minded social scientists brought forward the thesis that “Fundamentalists and others would disappear once education based on scientific principles was sufficiently widespread. John Dewey was the high priest of this faith.”⁴ However, this secularization hypothesis has proven not to be true.⁵ Though organized religions may be having some difficult times, new religions and spiritualities are appearing all the time—few of which are in any way rooted in historic religions like Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.⁶ Although

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old established religions are not dying out, they are facing increasing competition from alternative spiritualities. A broad overview of this trend is set forth in this essay.

I. How Did We Arrive Here?

A. The Shift to the East: The major religious story of the 1960s and 1970s was the “extraordinary weakening of organized Christianity in the United States and a fundamental shift in America’s spiritual ecology—away from institutional religion and toward a more do-it-yourself and consumer-oriented spirituality—that endures to the present day.”⁷ That era saw the “emergence of a wholly new culture, based on a new spirituality” that flowed from Haight-Ashbury, communes, and Eastern belief systems.⁸

The “significant cultural shift” to an Eastern, New Age “spiritual subculture . . . gave birth” to channeling, the use of crystals, and belief in reincarnation. At the end of the twentieth century, “one out of five Americans” believed in reincarnation, and 35% of the British population did so as well. Christian denominations also experienced the incursion of Eastern spiritual beliefs and practices like yoga, alternative healing practices, astrological guidance, as well as belief in reincarnation. Christians in mainline denominations began to see their faith more therapeutically, believing that faith had “to do with self-improvement” and self-actualization in the present.⁹ These ideas began to overshadow viewing faith as dealing with matters of sin and eternal salvation. Authority in mainline churches moved from the Word of God to what “lies within the self.” A significant number of American Christians began to practice a faith “entirely of their own manufacture.”¹⁰

This Western turn to Eastern theology and a much more individualized spirituality has as one of its causes the historical-critical view of the Scriptures. Robert Bellah believed that the critical undermining of Scripture paved the way “for a positive response to Asian religions in a way different from any earlier period.”¹¹ Herrick also saw that “systematic public criticism of the Bible . . . has had greater impact on scholarly and popular attitudes toward Christianity than has perhaps any other” thing.¹² The historicity and facticity of the Bible having been undermined, new meanings and truths could be mined from the biblical texts. The spirit rather than the letter of the texts became important. Christ came to be viewed very differently. The biblical texts came to be viewed more as esoteric texts that are largely symbolic, mythic, and a-historical. This critical view of Scripture “shifted the very foundation of Western spirituality.” Scripture came to be viewed as one book among many that express matters spiritual. Scripture ceased being God’s Word and, for many, has become a record of human experiences and human actions and thoughts, such as the human invention of God. Thus many people began a process of exploring new spiritualities and began embracing a “new spiritual orientation.”¹³

B. Individualization of Faith and Spirituality: Religious faith came to be seen as something private and internal—something that was practiced individually with no need for a group of fellow believers. Already in the late 1970s Sidney Mead wrote that the “internalization or privatization of religion is one of the most momentous changes that has ever taken place in Christendom.”¹⁴

This more private spirituality was given evidence by a survey in 1978, revealing that 80% of Americans believed “an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues.”¹⁵

Another person in the 1980s said, “I feel religious in a way. I have no denomination or anything like that.”¹⁶

This radical religious individualism is seen in a member of a Lutheran congregation who said, “I am a pantheist. I believe in the ‘holiness’ of the earth and all other living things. We are a product of this life system and are inextricably linked to all parts of it. . . . Our very survival depends on the air ‘god,’ the water, the sun, etc. . . . I don’t believe in evil.”¹⁷

“A researcher asked a college graduate what her religious preference was. ‘Methodist, Taoist, Native American, Quaker, Russian Orthodox, and Jew,’ she replied. . . . Traditional scholars describe this as ‘cafeteria-style’ or ‘supermarket’ spirituality. Others, better disposed to it, prefer the more dignified term ‘trans-religiosity.’ . . . And it is not only on campuses that this mode of spirituality thrives.”¹⁸

Lutherans need to be aware that these changes have been occurring in their own denominations for some time. “A survey done in the 1970s of the three largest Lutheran synods found that 75 percent of Lutherans agreed that belief in Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation. But 75 percent also agreed that all roads lead to God and it does not matter which way one takes. Based on these numbers, at least half of the Lutherans polled hold two mutually exclusive theological positions at the same time. How is that possible?”¹⁹

In a 1998 survey, 60.7% of the Lutherans surveyed said that they could worship God just “as well on their own as they can with others in a formal worship setting.” Nearly 70% said that being a “good Christian” has nothing to do with “church attendance.”²⁰

This shift away from religion to free individualistic spirituality has contributed to the inability of many people to understand their religious and spiritual “lostness.” Thus, they turn “to a thousand other equally” spiritual solutions found in “tailor-made Westernized Hinduism or Buddhism, to the religion of L.S.D. and psychedelic happenings, to myriad superstitions and even to the world of the occult. . . . It is no accident that twentieth-century religious dialogue finds it so easy to pass from the bread and wine of an inter-denominational communion *agape* to marijuana and L.S.D. There are no distinctions, no alternatives, no choices for us to make . . . we

take them all . . . the language of the Bible, the philosophical speculation of ultimate concern, the Ground of Being, the reconciliation of opposites, the devil-god of Blake, the myriad deities of Hinduism, the experience of L.S.D.”²¹

Though there is a problem in discerning lostness, there is a desire for something in the area of religion/spirituality. Thus, religious bookstores feature a wide variety of spiritual books encouraging people to embark on their own individualistic spiritual journeys. The books sell like hotcakes. Himmelfarb²² notes several: “*The Celestine Prophecy*;²³ *The Ecstatic Journey: the Transforming Power of Mystical Experience*;²⁴ *Kything: the Art of Spiritual Presence*,²⁵ and, on a more mundane level, *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*.”²⁶ In addition, there are the books by Carlos Castaneda,²⁷ Deepak Chopra,²⁸ Shirley MacLaine,²⁹ and others which were often featured on Oprah’s book club.

C. This Shift Did Not Happen Overnight: This shift in the religious culture has been trending since the 1700s. The shaping of the “New Religious Synthesis” in Western culture began with a number of “gifted public advocates working in a number of genres and media” already three hundred years ago. This spiritual shift “has now successfully colonized Western religious consciousness.”³⁰ Martin Marty traces the gradual secularization of the Western world and the resulting “spiritual changes” during “the years of the Modern Schism” beginning in 1830 and extending to the twentieth century.³¹ Already in the eighteenth century, religious individualism was growing in prominence. “Thomas Jefferson said, ‘I am a sect myself,’ and Thomas Paine, ‘My mind is my church’. . . Many of the nineteenth-century figures were attracted to a vague pantheistic mysticism that tended to identify the divine with a higher self.”³²

Many who favor an individualized spirituality reference William James and his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James summarized his concept of religion and religious life in this way: (1) “the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe,” (2) our harmonious union with that “higher universe is our true end,” (3) “prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof”; whether that spirit be called “God or law” is immaterial. Prayer is “a process wherein work is really done and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects.” Spirituality includes a zest for life, lyrical enchantment, earnestness, and heroism, safety, a feeling of peace and “a preponderance of loving affections” toward others.³³ James and President Teddy Roosevelt described their religion as “good works.”³⁴

James was a humanist, though not a signer of the *Humanist Manifesto*. By the end of his life, James came “to see God as a cosmic consciousness, a pooling or weaving together of all individual consciousness.”³⁵ James’s view of religion was “a sophisticated example of the widespread combination of popular psychology and [a] vaguely spiritual religiosity that Americans from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale have offered as the key to happiness and health.”³⁶ The type of

individualized spirituality expounded by James is seen in most modern expressions of spirituality today. If James had written his book today, his title might have been “Varieties of *Spiritual* Experience.”

The issues and events of past days are similar to those leading to the lessening of the influence of religion today: questions about the authority and reliability of the Bible; questions about God (Is God within me or outside of me? Am I part of God or is He separate from me?); questions about science (Is science the only means for solving all human problems and for bringing us a better future?); the rise of non-religious philosophies and atheism; the influence of Marxist scientific atheism; the rise of new secular dogmas, such as positivism, humanism, and the rise of reason over faith; the individualization of spiritual reality; and the appearance of new spiritualities.³⁷ In 1992 one individual wrote that “as many as 12 million Americans could be considered active participants” in alternative spiritual systems “and another 30 million are actively interested.”³⁸

These trends through the years have given rise to “a transformation of American spirituality.” While many have retained membership in their faith communities (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.), “their practice of spirituality from Monday to Friday bears little resemblance” to the major teachings of their faith systems.³⁹ Though this move from religion to spirituality is true of all religious faiths, this essay focuses primarily on the effects this change has had on Western Christianity.

D. Who Do People Say that I Am?: In the midst of these shifting religious sands, Jesus has come to be viewed in many different ways: as a “Master, Guru, Yogi, Adept, Avatar, Shaman, Way-show-er,” the “Cosmic Christ,” a “Gnostic Revealer,” a “mystical magus, an Essene initiate, and a Christ-conscious master,” as well as a flawed and sinful human being. The personal and historic Christ has been turned into a universal spiritual Christ consciousness, which many others may also have. Jesus’ atoning death is not seen as having “any ethical significance for salvation,” and His resurrection is not treated as a real historical fact but is often turned into something like a spiritual triumph that other human beings, as “Ascended Masters,” may also experience.⁴⁰ Jesus is often described as the one who came to ignite the spiritual divine spark within human beings in this life.⁴¹

The teaching that human beings become divine is found in portions of Christianity that have drunk at the well of the same kind of spirituality. As one TV evangelist put it, “Spiritually we are born of God and partake of His nature. . . . You are as much the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ was.”⁴²

A significant number of books have set forth a view of Jesus far different from the biblical orthodox view of Jesus as the Son of God clothed in human flesh—the one who is the Savior of the world as revealed in Holy Scripture. Christ’s life and the texts of the Bible are seen as “esoteric” texts with hidden spiritual meanings, claimed to be the true meaning of the biblical texts as opposed to the stale, ossified shell of

dogma put forth by centuries of formal Christian teaching and religiosity. Most often these works attempt to set forth the “truth” about the lost years of Jesus, lost documents about His life, and about His supposed marriage.⁴³

This recasting of Jesus has also manifested itself in female depictions of Jesus and God. “For a period lasting from 100,000 to 60,000 years, a united sexuality and spirituality were represented by the body of the Great Mother, with her sacred vulva as the source of life. The masculine gods, making their entrance only six thousand or seven thousand years ago, moved into a preeminence which split the body from the soul, emphasizing intellect over instinct and dominance over cooperation, and subjugating the feminine to an inferior role. . . . Only a female goddess from the East can deliver humanity from the authoritarianism of the oppressive patriarchal style of religion that had dominated in the West.”⁴⁴ The image of the goddess is influenced by political and social agendas, the Western esoteric tradition, the modern esoteric tradition, and the Theosophy of Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Elizabeth Clare Prophet, one of her disciples.⁴⁵

E. The Bare Square: During the latter part of the twentieth century, American culture saw the desire on the part of some to remove religion from the public square because it was considered to be a “bane” on American public life.⁴⁶ Richard John Neuhaus responded to this movement with his classic work, *The Naked Public Square*.⁴⁷ Some consider religion, especially Christianity, as “*offensive* and perhaps even *dangerous*.”⁴⁸

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Western culture came to be heavily influenced by the idea that religion is “something that should be believed in privacy” and not visible in the public realm, thus the movement to remove religious symbols (crosses, manger scenes, prayer in school, etc.) from public view. This same perspective on religion “says that anyone who believes that God can heal diseases is stupid or fanatical” and that faith is a “mystical flight” from truth. This view says that religious faith “has nothing to do with the real world.” Religious believers are told in no uncertain terms that the things “they know to be true are wrong or irrelevant.” This same perspective militates against allowing religious ideas to “be debated in the forum of public dialogue.” Many see religion as something “like building model airplanes, just another hobby, something quiet, something private, something trivial,” something that is not “a fit activity for intelligent” rational adults.⁴⁹

F. The Role of Religious Education in the Shift: These trends were also accompanied by a downturn in the dissemination of religious knowledge, i.e., catechization, in various church denominations. *The Good Society* noted that in the late twentieth century, America’s mainline Christian churches encountered a “deconfessionalizing”—“a decline in doctrinal religious education” which led to a

“de-emphasis on the central beliefs” held by these church bodies.⁵⁰ These factors have produced a nation with a significant number of religious people who are religiously illiterate. Biblical illiteracy was evident already at the beginning of the 1990s, as noted in this statement from that era. “Most people in the mainline churches are theologically illiterate.”⁵¹

Lutherans should not assume that they are immune to this trend. The 1998 Lutheran Brotherhood survey on Lutheran beliefs reached this conclusion: “Our survey finds that many Lutherans are no longer anchored to a core set of beliefs. On topics ranging from original sin, to the Trinity, to justification, to the Gospel, to the place of Scripture in one’s life, many Lutherans tend to either misunderstand or disagree with the historic teachings of the Lutheran Church.”⁵²

The survey editors inquired as to the cause of disagreement with historic teachings. Its conclusion was that “it appears for many Lutherans, little or no worship, little or no Bible study, and little or no faith discussion all contribute to a rudderless Lutheran faith.”⁵³

By the end of the twentieth century, the shift toward viewing religion in a bad light led to having many young people outside of Christianity losing “much of their respect for the Christian faith.”⁵⁴

G. The Rise of Militant Atheism: In addition, our culture has experienced the rise of militant atheism, which sees all religion as a poison needing to be eradicated from culture and society.⁵⁵ The teaching of religious faith to children is described as evil and abuse. “Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. . . . Faith can be very dangerous and deliberately to implant it into the vulnerable mind of an innocent child is a grievous wrong.”⁵⁶

Militant atheists believe that theirs is a valiant crusade against bigoted parents who indoctrinate their children with evil superstitious religious views. Nicholas Humphrey argued that the task of liberating children “from the damaging influence of their parent’s religious instruction” is the same noble task as liberating “political prisoners” from their captivity. Parents have no right to limit their children’s perspective on life by bringing “them up in an atmosphere of dogma and superstition” or to insist that they follow it.⁵⁷ Richard Rorty argued that secular atheistic professors should see their task as “nothing less than an exercise in conversion.” They should “arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like” their atheistic professors. These students will thus have “escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents.” Rorty stated that such professors “are going to go right on trying to discredit you [parents] in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable.”⁵⁸

II. Spiritual, but not Religious (SBNR)

This growing negative estimation of religion has been accompanied by a rise in the positive estimation of generic spirituality. More and more people are saying “I’m spiritual but not religious,” or “I’m not religious, but I’m very spiritual.”⁵⁹

A. Religion and Spirituality: One might ask: What is the difference between “religion” and “spirituality”? Religion generally has referred to “the public realm of institutions, denominations, official doctrines, and formal rituals” enacted and lived out with one’s fellow religionists. In this new dichotomy, spirituality is generally viewed as having to do “with the private realm of personal experience,” of belief and actions with no need for sharing them with an organized group of fellow believers.⁶⁰ Another author writes: “Religion is public, a fact of society and culture” rather than being private. Religion involves public activity that people of the same beliefs do together. “Spirituality refers to attitudes, experiences, and feelings that are private and individual.” Spirituality speaks of *my* private individual beliefs—not necessarily with much formal doctrinal content—and *my* personal individual actions, whereas religion speaks of specific beliefs or doctrines that are publicly shared and enacted with others.⁶¹ In essence, religion is something you believe and live out with others, while spirituality is something one believes and puts into practice privately and individualistically, often without a formal organized group of others.

Examples of shared religious beliefs would be the Christian teaching of the trinitarian nature of God. Lutherans believe that the central doctrine of the Christian faith is justification. Lutherans gather with other Lutherans for Sunday worship. Spiritual people in this dichotomy do not necessarily express their spirituality with a group, nor is there a formal set of shared doctrinal beliefs. However, individual spiritual beliefs do have certain broad characteristics, as shall be seen below.

It is important to note the broad range of the relationship or lack thereof between religion and spirituality. Some studies indicate that the gulf between religion and modern spirituality is hardly as wide as supposed. Nancy Ammerman sets forth four broad, but not exclusive, categories of spirituality: the “Theistic Package,” an “Extra-Theistic Package,” an “Ethical Spirituality,” and “Belief and Belonging Spirituality.”

The Theistic group consists of those who have belief in a personal deity. Their spirituality is about this deity, about practices that are intended to develop a deeper relationship with that deity, and about mysterious spiritual encounters. This type of religious spirituality includes beliefs and practices that are institutionalized and the experiences that rise from them. The group is open to miraculous happenings in their lives. Seventy-one percent of the individuals in this group tied religion and spirituality together. Spirituality is a natural part of their religious faith. For most in this group, doctrine was of low interest; but living a virtuous life, helping others, and going beyond serving self were seen to be the essence of spirituality and religiosity.

Ammerman earlier had identified Christians with this type of religious spirituality as “Golden Rule Christians.” The emphasis on doing good permeates all groups. This type of spiritual discourse is more often found among Christians than any other group surveyed. Interestingly Neo-Pagans are also in this category, for they also have a theistic spiritual discourse, talk about gods and goddesses, speak about spiritual practices, a spiritual world, and spiritual mysteries.

The Extra-Theistic group includes those who speak about spirituality in naturalistic concepts without God or a supreme being. Their spirituality not linked to any theistic image or organized religious participation. Spirituality in this category is located in the self, in being individualistically connected to a wider community, in a non-dualistic (monistic) view of the world, in a sense of awe that comes from nature, good books, music, art, and plays, and to seeking philosophically the meaning of one’s life. The seat of authority here is in the self and in one’s experiences. This kind of spirituality can include finding in one’s self a spark of the divine, however that might be defined. There is also a sense of immanence that flows from interaction with the community, the world, or in seeing meaningful patterns in one’s life. Those who are religiously nonaffiliated, as well as many in the Neo-Pagan group, were most likely to speak of spirituality in these terms. (To emphasize the porous nature of these groups, the Neo-Pagans are in both the Theistic and Extra-Theistic groups.)

The Ethical Spirituality group is made up of three-quarters of those in the Theistic and Extra-Theistic groups. This Ethical Spirituality group focuses on living a virtuous life, on acts of compassion and kindness that help others, on actions that go beyond self-interest to do what is right because a spiritual life must include the doing of good deeds. It is spirituality described in moral terms. The emphasis on doing good includes a relative disinterest in doctrine. Those outside of religious faith systems desire to see spiritual and religious people put their faith into action in their daily lives. Ethical Spirituality exists in every segment of society—within religious groups and outside of them.

There is also a fourth category, which is somewhat disputed: the “Belief and Belonging” group. Roughly half of the participants in this study understood spirituality to be about belief in God and teachings about God. More than three-fourths of the participants stated that spirituality has to do with being part of a religious tradition. About half of these participants saw this union of religion and spirituality as a good thing, and about half of them saw it as a negative. Those who see believing and belonging as a good thing see spiritual authenticity in religion. Those who see believing and belonging negatively see this union as something that lacks any spiritual authenticity. This portion of the “Belief and Belonging” group reject the spirituality of the Theistic group and see religious spirituality as empty, lacking in authenticity, as just going through the motions of inauthentic religious rituals, as checking the boxes, as simply logging one’s time to get brownie points with God that will possibly gain them a good afterlife.

Those who see belief and belonging negatively are those most predisposed to espousing a spiritual but not religious perspective. Most participants who expressed this perspective were non-affiliated religiously. However, this group also includes very religious persons. The Christians in this group describe mere religion as empty and insufficient. They desire a true spiritual life—an intense deep personal spiritual relationship with Jesus.⁶² For these individuals, church membership is not very important—what matters is me and Jesus. These individuals would be in the category of those who say, “Don’t give me doctrine, just give me Jesus.”

Ammerman’s studies lead to the conclusion that the spiritual-but-not-religious category is more like a moral and political boundary than an empirical category. It represents the boundary between good or godly people and bad or ungodly ones. The disaffiliated tend to see organized religion as an oppressive power that deprives people of their rights and freedoms and inhibits the use of reason. Often what passes for the religion they are rejecting has little relationship to real religious beliefs and practices. One other interesting aspect of this study’s conclusions is that the rise in the visibility and influence of the spiritual-but-not-religious phenomena emerges from the old secularization theory, that is, as societies become more modern, organized religion will vanish. What will replace it is “a certain form of individual consciousness . . . individual worldviews and values.” Empirical studies indicate that religion and spirituality are still intimately bound together.⁶³ Further diligent study needs to be done on the spiritual-but-not-religious phenomena.

Factors driving those who are strongly committed to a definite dichotomy between religion and spirituality are a deep distrust of religious orthodoxy and its authority and of its ties (in their view) to conservative politics, as well as a condemnation of the emptiness of organized religion. These individuals generally view religion in psychological and therapeutic terms. Though religion is generally viewed in a negative light, some of these individuals also believe that pearls of wisdom can be mined from all traditional religions. They are highly individualistic and piece together their non-theistic spirituality with practices and teachings from many different sources.⁶⁴

The results of the studies done by Ammerman’s group and others emphasizes that the term “spirituality” is difficult to define, that the boundary lines between religion and spirituality are quite porous, and that the categories used to describe religion and spirituality are porous as well. The remainder of this essay examines some of the characteristics of the spiritual-but-not-religious phenomena.

B. Actions, not Words: As noted above, those in organized religion, as well as those who view organized religion negatively and individual non-religious spirituality positively, have a similar view of spirituality: “twenty-first-century spiritual folk believe that authentic piety is fundamentally a matter of practice” rather than being associated with a specific set of organized and codified dogmatic beliefs,

because “dogma is always stolid and ritual always empty.” Spirituality is related to actions and to experience. This kind of spirituality “denies” having a connection to established religious “institutions, stories, and doctrines.” Rather, it finds its common ground in the experiential and moral dimensions of religion. World religion gatherings affirmed Golden Rule ethical practices but offered little theology.⁶⁵

Organized religion has also experienced a change: “Evangelicals, no less than the Liberals before them . . . have now abandoned doctrine in favor of ‘life.’ . . . For evangelicals today, this life is also an ‘essence’ detached from a cognitive structure . . . and it really does not require a theological view of life. . . . Evangelicals today . . . have lost interest . . . in . . . the doctrines of creation, common grace, and providence . . . justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation.”⁶⁶

Those who identify themselves as spiritual rather than religious have been attracted to centering prayer, Eastern types of meditation, and non-dualistic Asian religions. Here again the trend seen is “religion . . . confined almost entirely to the experiential or moral dimensions.”⁶⁷ Prothero found that most Christians in the United States are in one of two camps⁶⁸: They are either moralists, who are concerned with ethical questions like abortion and homosexuality (“For Nan, the church’s value is primarily an ethical one.”),⁶⁹ or experientialists, who encounter God via emotions or feelings and who make statements like, How did this service make you feel? or I really felt the Spirit during that Bible study or “I felt my relationship with God was O.K. when I wasn’t with the church.”⁷⁰

Historically, a Western understanding of spirituality has been associated with Christianity. Those who sharply separate spirituality from religion do so because they generally view religion as an external, institutional, and often harmful entity rather than something personal, individualistic, and good. Many also view religion as a bad (more stridently conservative on social issues) political organization.⁷¹ But such a view impoverishes spirituality and religion and is not helpful for our culture. Why?

Ammerman’s studies found that political action was “rarely the subject of overtly religious or spiritual reflection.” The participants did not desire that “their religious communities” be “dominated by politics.” Those who linked their spiritual or religious commitments to political action were rare.⁷² Political action “was rarely the subject of overtly religious or spiritual reflection.”⁷³ The exceptions to this perspective are people like Robin Mitchell, who sees that “political action *is* her spiritual passion.”⁷⁴

C. Modern Spirituality’s Reach: Currently, spirituality has become a global entity that references “all religions and cultures.” Spirituality has become a code word for a holistic, positive, and supportive view of life. There now is “Eastern and Western spirituality, women’s spirituality, New Age spirituality, secular and esoteric spirituality, interfaith and ecumenical spirituality, children’s spirituality, even

spirituality and aging, spirituality and health, spirituality and gender spirituality and human well-being. There is also talk of spirituality in management, business, sociology, economics, and geography, even of spiritual capital in analogy to social and cultural capital. . . . This . . . points to the undeniable fact that, in its most inclusive sense, spirituality is so all-embracing that it does indeed touch everything.”⁷⁵ Thus, it might be better to speak of spiritualities rather than of spirituality.

Broadly speaking, being spiritual now describes—in addition to the categories above—the individual and communal spiritual experiences of Christianity⁷⁶, sex⁷⁷, science⁷⁸, New Age spirituality⁷⁹, science fiction⁸⁰, technology⁸¹, humanism⁸², transhumanism⁸³, drugs⁸⁴, tattoos⁸⁵, and atheism.⁸⁶

If it seems strange to cite sex, science, and atheism as spiritual experiences, one must remember that being spiritual is now more of an individualistic exercise that embraces almost all aspects of life. As can be seen from the above, spirituality—separated from religion—has become “an ill-defined, amorphous entity” covering “all kinds of phenomena,” those that are traditionally classified as religious and many more that in past times would have been considered heathen or pagan.⁸⁷ One other author has described this amorphous spirituality as “The God Within.”⁸⁸ The emphasis on God’s dwelling within and the understanding of the divine-human easily lends itself to the non-dual understanding in much of modern spirituality that mingles the divine and the human so that human beings become little gods (divine) in ways contrary to Scripture.

In matters of faith, there has been an invasion: Christianity and religion are, at times, being replaced or overtaken by a broad amorphous spirituality.⁸⁹ Some Christians believe that because all religions worship the same God that they can incorporate varied spiritualities into their faith system; thus, there exist Christian witches, as well as the notations of the mixed spirituality noted above.⁹⁰

D. Non-Duality/Monism: Many forms of modern spirituality express a non-dualistic view of the world—one which downplays a proper separation or distinction between God and human beings, as well as between God and all else in the universe. The most dramatic exposition of this perspective is found in the Interspirituality movement.

This non-dualistic/monistic view of life that teaches the unity of all things has flowed into Western circles from Eastern religions. For adherents of Eastern religions, there is no real difference between me and the river next to which I am standing. There is no real distinction between human beings and God.

Thus, in the monistic view, the ultimate reality is one, the indivisible One. It transcends definition and description. That One is everyone and that One surrounds everyone. When the individual self (Atman) comes to the

conscious awareness that it and the It (world soul) are one, there is celebration, ecstasy, liminality, and ultimate bliss. One has arrived. All is one. This is the essence of monism. . . . This monistic view is so inherent in Hinduism that a creator/creation distinction similar to that in the Christian faith is impossible to make.⁹¹

This monistic/non-dualistic perspective conflicts not only with a Christian theological view but also with the theology of Judaism and Islam, which teach that there is an essential distinction between God and human beings—between the Creator and the creation.

This non-dualistic view sees no difference between the many beliefs and religious symbols that exist, since they are all one—merely different pathways to the same divine being and to the whole of spiritual truth. Each religion has part of the truth, but not all of it. To find all the truth, all religious truths must be combined. A non-dualistic view also places greater emphasis on experience and feelings rather than on abstract logically reasoned intellectual or doctrinal arguments. It is believed that human experiences can be scientifically examined and validated, while abstract arguments cannot.⁹² The concept of non-duality is often an integral part of an atheistic view of the world.⁹³

Sam Harris, one of the militant new atheists, has great praise for the Eastern religious emphasis on non-duality and faults Christianity, Islam, and the Jewish faith, which are dualistic (God is other than human beings), for the vast spiritual difference between Eastern and Western spirituality. This non-duality is “a fundamental insight of most Eastern schools of spirituality,” and the removal of the lines between self and other breaks the “duality of subject and object.” This duality leads to “feelings of separateness” that need to be corrected.⁹⁴ In his book on spirituality, Harris makes extensive use of non-dualistic Eastern thought.⁹⁵ Richard Dawkins is an advocate of the position that “children have a natural tendency towards a dualistic theory of mind,” and he sees that religious belief is a “by-product of such instinctive dualism.”⁹⁶ In the atheistic view, dualism is tied to religiosity, Christianity, feelings of separation, and almost all of the world’s problems. These things must be eliminated.

Almost every problem we have can be ascribed to the fact that human beings are utterly beguiled by their feelings of separateness. It would seem that a spirituality that undermined such dualism, through the mere contemplation of consciousness, could not help but improve our situation. . . . There is clearly no greater obstacle to a truly empirical approach to spiritual experience than our current beliefs about God [i.e., that He is totally other—a dualistic view].⁹⁷

E. Interspirituality: Non-duality is at the heart of another aspect of modern spirituality: Interspirituality. This movement began in earnest in 1999. It espouses

interconnectedness, oneness, and unity that transcend boundaries in all parts of life: politics, ethics, social planning, culture, history, and religion. It is an attempt at religious globalization, for it desires to produce a universal spirituality that would be either added to or replace the world's religions. Some of the authors espousing this movement are Wayne Teasdale, Bede Griffiths, Thomas Keating, Eckhart Tolle, Richard Rohr, and Matthew Fox.⁹⁸ The tenets of Interspirituality have also been disseminated via *A Course in Miracles*.⁹⁹

Interspirituality appears as popular as the spiritualities promoted by Castaneda, Chopra, and Redfield; for it has its own seminary, sponsors seminars, conferences, the Universal Order of Sannyasa, and many other avenues for sharing its teachings. Interspirituality affirms the expression of spirituality in multiple faith traditions at the same time. For example, one could at the same time be both a practicing Christian and a practicing Buddhist.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the popularity of Interspirituality comes from the cement-like divisions seen in the world today. Our world today seems constantly to divide into ever smaller groups or tribes dedicated to this or that cause, political view, or subject. One of Interspirituality's goals is to break down such rigid divisions and promote greater peace and harmony in the world.

III: Conclusion: How Should the Church Respond?

Christians should be engaged in bridge building, working toward greater respect and understanding with others.

Christians should realize that many who are spiritual but not religious are desirous of living good, moral lives. They aspire to be good citizens, to help others, feed the hungry, care for the environment, engage in honest work, be faithful spouses, good parents, and many other exemplary things. Lutheran theology describes this kind of good living as "civic righteousness," and it should be commended whenever it is seen and practiced.¹⁰¹

Christians should be putting their faith into action in sanctified spirituality in the church and in the world. God's Word encourages Christians to let their light so shine by being, loving, kind, forgiving, meek, humble, penitent, serving and helping others (Mt 5:16; 25:31–49; Eph 4:32; 6:1–9). This kind of godly spirituality exhibits both civic righteousness and the righteousness of faith and is a positive witness to the world of God's love in Christ.

The Christian's spiritual calling or vocation in life is not just something extraordinary—like being a missionary in a foreign country—but is seen and expressed in the ordinariness of everyday living. Parents having daily devotions with their children, helping their children with their homework, holding them when they are sick, cleaning the house, paying their taxes, going to work joyfully, seeing that

they are serving God and their fellow human beings, all of this and more is godly Christian spirituality—being moved by God’s Holy Spirit to serve where God has planted us. This godly spiritual piety is lived out in church and in the world. Luther reminds us that the mother changing her baby’s dirty diaper and the father plowing his fields is doing just as godly and spiritual a work—if not more so—as the priest or the nun. The understanding of the Christian’s vocation is tied to the priesthood of all believers and the doctrine of the two kingdoms or realms. This ordinary religious spirituality of God’s priests must be diligently taught and preached in our churches today.¹⁰²

Christians need to be studying the various types of spirituality seen in this article, and they need to learn how to discuss lovingly and respectfully matters of faith and spirituality with those following different spiritual pathways. Such action also necessitates being a diligent student of one’s own faith. Daily Christians should be reading their Bibles, Catechism, the Lutheran Confessions, and other apologetic books¹⁰³ so that they are better able to give a winsome defense of the hope that lies within them. Christians should always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks of a reason for the hope that is in us, and to do so with meekness and love (1 Pt 3:15). Christians need to be trained in sound and carefully reasoned apologetic argumentation about the truths and doctrines of the Christian faith.

Lutheran Christians have a vibrant religious message to share with the world—a message of hope, of love, of salvation, of freedom, of comfort, of forgiveness and grace which fuels a vibrant meaningful spiritual life that is engaged with the world—a message of God’s help and blessings in this life and in the next. We need to be sharing our faith in love just as diligently as the “spiritual but not religious” are sharing their faith and beliefs. It is what Christ has called us to do. Go therefore and share the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Mt 28:16–20; Mk 16:15–16; Lk 24:44–49; Jn 20:21–23; Acts 1:8).

A valuable study of this trend away from religion to spirituality would include a study of the relationship between the rejection of forensic justification and the acceptance of salvation by works—or Golden Rule theology—the turn-away from doctrine and the greater acceptance of deeds. What prompts this suggestion are studies of Lutheran beliefs that have noted that Lutherans who know and believe justification by grace through faith have a greater tendency to be religious rather than material, desire the sacred rather than the secular, and the supernatural rather than the natural.¹⁰⁴

Since so much of modern spirituality is connected with Golden Rule theology, there is great need for the Christian church to be clearly teaching and preaching the doctrine of justification. It is God’s grace in Christ which fuels godly spirituality: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8–10, NKJV).

Endnotes

ⁱ This is an exhaustively annotated essay. For that reason, we have posted these valuable resources on the Lutheran Society for Missiology’s Web site (<http://lsfm.global>).

My Pilgrimage in Spiritism

Herbert Hoefler

Abstract: Herbert Hoefler shares with us his experiences and reflections concerning Spiritism. He draws both on experiences from his service in India and also from here in the States. He shares the challenges he has wrestled with as his Western worldview and theology have been challenged by these experiences.

My organizing principle in this article is chronological, basically my pilgrimage of views and experiences on the topic of Spiritism. My thought is that the readers might possibly identify themselves with me somewhere in this account.

My Original Views

I recall being visited by a couple of LCMS Board for Missions representatives after a few years in India. After hearing my views on Spiritism, one of them commented to the other, for me to hear: “I wonder why we send people like this.” I responded, “It’s not what we are when we are sent but what happens to us when we are here.”

This is true also concerning my views on the spirit worlds. While in the U. S., I had the common view on demons, visions, satan,¹ dreams, angels, etc. I thought these might possibly be real, simply because the Bible speaks about them a great deal. However, they weren’t real to me, either personally or intellectually. Even during my first years in India, I had heard about the different spirit worlds from Indian colleagues, but I really didn’t take these viewpoints seriously.

My first academic consideration of these otherworldly phenomena came through a course under Peter Wagner out of Fuller that I took by correspondence. He spoke about the “power encounter” phenomenon in missiology. The term refers to the supernatural resistance/war that breaks out when we bring the Gospel into a new place. The concept is that the “prince of this world” and his cohorts are already there, and they will defend their territory in supernatural ways.

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“Power Encounter,” then, refers to the battle that takes place between the Holy Spirit and the satanic spirits. While in the States, I had thought of this battle as only emotional and intellectual. However, this missiological concept also refers directly to the battle in the spirit worlds, which can impact us directly. For example, an Indian pastor related to me how one new convert had been having dreams and visions of satan confronting him and promising him a great deal of prosperity if he would return to his idol worship. (Later in this article, I will relate subsequent examples and experiences.)

A second influence was when I decided to learn some yoga. I felt that this was part of the Hindu worldview and practice that I needed to understand personally. There are Christian mystics and yogis in India, and I read some of their materials and met a couple of them for training. One of the cautions they gave was that one must be surrounded by prayer when going into meditation.

They explained that one removes one’s intellectual guard when in meditation. We use our intellect to filter experiences that we have, deciding what to absorb and what to reject. In meditation, these guards are down, and so evil presences might intrude and influence unhindered. Therefore, one begins by claiming the shield of God’s Spirit and committing the process to His guidance and blessing.

A third early influence was a few brief encounters with places and individuals who just “spooked me out.” I wasn’t at the point of processing these experiences theologically, but I did have a sense of the presence of evil, and I should just get out of there. I was also warned by Indian colleagues that in situations like this it would be best if we left.

In all of this, nothing particularly changed my views and theology. During my first missionary term of five years, I was still a product of Western post-Enlightenment, dismissing things that I couldn’t see physically or comprehend rationally. I was within the safe confines of a Western missionary community. The local Christians also had learned from experience that the missionaries didn’t take the spirit worlds seriously. They would do their exorcisms, for example, almost in secret or among Pentecostal fellowships. They knew we were incapable and unwilling to help in this area. We just winked at the practice.

My Worldview Is Challenged in India

During my next two terms, I was based at the pan-Lutheran Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Madras City (now Chennai) for almost four years as Director and then for four years as Research Director. In the ecumenical fervor surrounding the formation of the Church of South India, there had been a strong push by Western mission organizations for their partner Indian churches and institutions to become ecumenical and even to consolidate. In this process, Gurukul was convinced to end its academic program, sending faculty,

students, and books to the United Theological College in Bangalore. Gurukul, in turn, was to provide non-theological education and training ecumenically.

For me, it involved encountering pastors and lay leaders from many different backgrounds and traditions. At our various workshops, in-service training courses, and seminars, these seasoned leaders would share their experiences. Many frontline evangelists, particularly from Pentecostal backgrounds, spoke about these “power encounter” situations: visions, miracles, exorcisms, and healings that brought people to faith. At one workshop of thirty or so pastors, I pointedly asked how many of them had ever been involved in raising of the dead. To my astonishment, half of them raised their hands, and no one spoofed the claims.

Their experience was that people knew the power of the spirits they were now worshipping and serving. Before they made the switch of allegiance to Jesus, they had to be convinced that His power was greater. Otherwise, they knew they would face supernatural retribution from the spirits they had abandoned.

I encountered similar situations when I travelled around South India doing my interviews for my *Churchless Christianity*² book. Many of these “nonbaptized believers in Christ” (who now call themselves *Jesu bhaktas*) had come to faith through such direct encounters with Jesus, who had shown His personal attention and power to them. I learned from frontline evangelists and pastors, both during this research and in subsequent readings, that these kinds of supernatural experiences are the common way adherents of major religions come to faith.³

At one of our LCMS missionary conferences, held in Thailand, we had a husband and wife who were converts from Buddhism speaking to us. At one point, the lady posed a situation to us. She said, “If someone comes to you and says that the god they worshiped had miraculously helped them, what would you say?” No missionaries in our group ventured a reply. I recalled a comment by one of the Indian professors at our Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil, Dr. J. C. Gamaliel, on this question, and so I tried it out on her: “I think I might say that sometimes God answers even when He is addressed by the wrong name.”

She didn’t like my response. Instead, she said we should say, “I’m really happy for you. But let me tell you about the God who is above all gods.” Her point was that we cannot deny the fact of their experience. We must not deny the fact of the power of these demonic beings. We cannot change their worldview. Rather, we must add another layer, new depth, to their existing worldview. She didn’t say it, but the implication I drew was that it may well be that it was my own post-Enlightenment worldview that needed to be altered and expanded.

I decided I needed to try to see some of this demonic power at work. Sathiya Sai Baba was a highly popular Hindu guru who was famous for his miraculous powers. He was a devotee of the god Siva and was noted for showing his miraculous powers

at the annual Siva Rathri, when his devotees gather to honor this god and seek his blessings. I had four encounters.

The first encounter was soon upon arrival. I was staying in a tent on the grounds of Sai Baba's ashram in his home village in southern Andhra Pradesh state. As evening approached, I noticed a Westerner walking by and asked him why he was there. He said he was a devotee, and so I asked him if he had ever met Sai Baba personally and seen any of his miracles. He told of being in a group of ten or twelve devotees. As was Sai Baba's custom, he would present the devotees with a sacred ash. He said he simply opened his hand as he reached out to each devotee in the circle and produced this ash to put in their hands. However, he said, when he came to the last person, he saw that it was a small boy. Sai Baba then closed his hand again and produced a piece of candy instead for him.

I responded to this young man: "Well, I'd have to see that to believe it." To which he promptly retorted, "Even if you saw it, you wouldn't believe it," and moved on. As I reflected on that comment, I thought how true that is. Since I don't believe Sai Baba is a walking deity, I would question what I saw and try to interpret differently. You have to have faith first for a miracle to be convincing.

The second experience with the "miraculous" was a sacred tree that was on the grounds. There often were devotees in meditation around it because it was said to have sprung up from a plaque that Sai Baba had buried on that spot while a small boy. The plaque was said to have letters on it from some ancient script, and now these letters could be seen all over the bark of the tree. With my lack of faith, I inspected the bark. It seemed to me that they were carved markings, as one could see the scrape marks and also that there were no letters up higher on the tree, on the thinner branches.⁴

Later in the day, Sai Baba conducted a worship time. As the climax to that event, he took a brass pot and held it over his statue on the altar. Like a magician, he showed to the crowd that the pot was empty and then turned it upside down. He swiftly moved his hand around the inside of the pot and sacred ash came flowing out. As soon as he stopped, the flow of ash stopped, and then it started up again when he churned his hand. Once again, in skepticism, I thought this was just a trick that any magician could do with a rigged pot.

The big event with Sai Baba on this sacred night was when he would reveal his own divinity. As a Westerner, I was part of a group that had close-up seating to the front. He led his devotees in antiphonal *bhajans* for a while. Then he suddenly started convulsing and gagging. Within a minute, he vomited up fluid that included a stone lingam (the phallic-shaped symbol of Siva). Devotees around me commented that each year it was a stone of some rare kind and proved his divine nature as an incarnation of Siva. Once again, I was skeptical, thinking that anyone could learn to swallow an object and then spout it back up.

Except for the story by the Western devotee, I left surmising that everything was a fraud. Afterward, I often heard of Sai Baba walking through his free hospital clinic in Bangalore healing people. My desire to see the power of the demonic spirit world remained unfulfilled.

Then I had an experience while I was conducting the research for *Churchless Christianity*. I was walking down the street in Nagercoil when I ran across the commissioning of a roadside Hindu shrine. A priest was there conducting rituals, and suddenly he began convulsing and dancing.⁵ Then it suddenly stopped. The belief was that the spirit had entered him and then transferred to the shrine. Now the shrine was a sacred place with spiritual power.

It reminded me of a newspaper story that reported on a major museum desiring to have some ancient idols from the temple in a nearby village. The curators negotiated with the villagers, and they agreed that replicas could be made to replace the originals. The museum brought in a Hindu priest who did some rituals and transferred the spirits from the idols into pots of water. Now the idols were just pieces of stone as far as the villagers were concerned. After the replicas had been made, the report said, the priest returned and transferred the spirits from the pots into the new statues.⁶

My first truly convincing experience with the spirit world came during our trek to the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayas. It was an expedition organized and led by Michael von Brueck, a pastor from East Germany who was a colleague at Gurukul.⁷ After meeting the Dalai Lama and having a forty-five-minute theological discussion with him, we received a letter of introduction. With this document, we were able to gain entrance into the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries tucked away in the high Himalayas and have discussions with the monks.

Along the way, we learned of a shaman who was living in one village. He was just an ordinary peasant working the fields during the day and did his shamanic activity before and after work. The group went on to the next monastery, leaving me behind to keep track of the shaman and try to form a relationship. We had hoped to see him do some healing or miracle. When the group returned, we approached him. But the shaman discerned that we were just voyeurs, just Westerners wanting to take photos and tell stories. He said, "I have a good spirit, and I fear that he will end up beating you through me if you come with the wrong heart."

However, Michael did have a serious matter on which he wanted guidance. The shaman discerned his sincerity and agreed to see him. I guess because I had been around all the time, he agreed that I could join. Early in the morning, we gathered in his hut with our interpreters. He turned to his shrine and did some incantations, when suddenly he began talking in a high, squeaky voice. The spirit was possessing him and speaking through him. What was immediately striking was that the spirit began

addressing Michael and me as spiritual teachers. We looked like very scruffy trekkers, not at all like pastors, but the spirit knew who we were.

Michael told him his problem, and the spirit gave him advice. To confirm that the advice was from the spirit, the shaman asked Michael to take a grain of rice from his pile and place it on a small leather drum. If the grain turned in one direction, it was confirming the truth of the advice. (I don't recall which direction, clockwise or counter-clockwise.) It indeed started to spin around.

The shaman then turned to me and asked me what I wanted. I thought, "Oh no, I'm going to get beaten!" When I said I had nothing, he simply told me, "Be careful with your official registration." I had no idea what he was talking about. But when I returned to mainland India a month later, I learned that our permission to stay in the country had been revoked at that very time. It took a good deal of negotiations to get the permission renewed, but the point is that the spirit knew about this development two thousand miles away.

I had wanted a convincing experience of the reality of the spirit world. Now I'd had it. The shaman also gave me a long, dirty piece of cloth that is important to me. It is a cloth he used in his healing work. I was told that he would put one end of the cloth on the wound and then suck at the other end, spitting out some green stuff. Later, I read in the book, *A Journey to Ladakh*, by Andrew Harvey⁸ that he had seen a phenomenon like this.

Then I had another startling experience. I had been assigned by the LCMS Board for Missions to work with a U. S. attorney, Roger Ellison, on solving the complex legal and social problems of our partner church, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church. It entailed much travel to various reconciliation/negotiation meetings all over South India, frequently by night bus.

On one of these journeys, I was sitting in the front seat, opposite the driver. I had learned how to sleep in all kinds of conditions, including on night busses. On this trip to Nagercoil, we were traveling through a wooded, wilderness area around midnight, and I was awake for a while. As I watched the road ahead, suddenly a woman in a bright yellow *saree* jumped in front of the bus with her arms high over her head.

I jumped in my seat. To my amazement, the bus just passed right through her. I looked over at the driver, and he had just kept on barreling ahead, never hitting the brakes at all. My heart was pounding, but he seemed to be quite oblivious to the woman's appearance. I asked him in Tamil, "What was that?" He simply commented, "There are a lot of spirits in this region." Obviously, he had driven this route many times, and apparently had become accustomed to the spirits that reside there.

As I studied up on the spirit phenomenon, I learned that there are many different kinds of spirits. Tibetan Buddhism speaks of innumerable spirit worlds. One of these

spirit dimensions is trickster spirits. Apparently, the one on the road that night was from this dimension. A vestige of this ancient awareness in Western countries is the custom of knocking on wood when wishing something to come true. The belief is that these trickster spirits live in wood, and so you should knock on wood while (not after!) expressing your hope so that they can't hear.

Worldview Change Back in the USA

I never talked about the experiences once we returned to the U. S. and I took up parish ministry in River Falls, Wisconsin. I had been warned that one of the hesitations people have about taking on a longtime former missionary is that they will only talk about their overseas experiences and never really connect with life in the States. In addition, I knew that talk about spirits—and even angels—was considered hokey, not only by laypeople but by pastors as well.

Nonetheless, there were several times when congregation members shared with me their angel stories. The typical pattern is for some dangerous situation to occur when suddenly someone appears who rescues the situation, and then suddenly disappears. One person spoke of seeing an angel occasionally in her bedroom.

One specific instance is worth sharing. An elderly member of the congregation came to my office. She had been out shopping in St. Paul at a small strip mall. There were very few people there in the middle of the day, but an elderly lady approached her on the sidewalk. The woman asked her about the location of a post office. She replied, "There's one just over there. What do you need?" "I just need a postage stamp." "I have one," she said, and began looking through her purse.

As she looked down, she noticed that the woman's shoelace was untied (she even noticed that the laces were green!). She said, "Here, let me take care of that shoelace," and she knelt down and tied it. When she got up, she greeted the woman again and turned to leave. As soon as she had turned, she realized that she had forgotten all about the stamp and turned back. The woman had disappeared. There was no crowd or cars around, and the woman couldn't have ducked into a store that quickly.

In my office, the member asked me, "Pastor, what was that?" I said, "The only thing I can think of is Heb. 13:2. I think you just 'showed hospitality' to an angel."

Since my parish was a town/gown ministry, I did a lot of marriage preparation. One young lady said that whenever she entered a room, she could discern if the good spirits or the bad spirits were dominant or if they were in conflict. At the time, I had no idea what that was about, but now in later years, I have been blessed with a granddaughter who has this same spiritual sensitivity. All this certainly challenges and expands my worldview, but I've become more and more comfortable with these awarenesses when I understand how common these sensibilities are in other cultures,⁹ also among devout Christians.

Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, wrote an article in *First Things*, titled “A Tale of Two Demons,” on the contrast between the African and Western Christian worldviews.¹⁰ Here is a summary section:

Like the robust faith of the New Testament, this kind of affective Christianity embraces the charismatic, the visionary, and the apocalyptic. These are all held in deep suspicion by those who still find spiritual warmth in the dying embers of rationalist religion. As Kenya’s Musimbi Kanyoro wrote, “Those cultures which are far removed from biblical culture risk reading the Bible as fiction.”

Why do so many southern Christians take with utter seriousness spiritual things that seem to most of us as outmoded leftovers from a redundant worldview? Is it that we have allowed our hearts to become hardened to the spiritual realities all around us?

As I was preparing for my adjunct teaching in missions at Concordia University, St. Paul, while in the nearby River Falls parish, I came across a very stimulating book by Jacob Loewen, *The Bible in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, about mission work in Africa. I was attracted to it first because I had gone for a couple of weeks to teach among the Masais in Kenya a couple of years earlier.

In the book, Loewen provides five tables with four columns on African, Biblical, Western Materialist, and Western Christian views on topics such as spirits, healing, divination, and exorcism. In almost every instance, the African view is consonant with the biblical and the Western views are consonant with each other. Here are some samples from the forty-five illustrations in his tables:

African: Material things can change into spirit and spirits can be manifested in material form.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹¹

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: Bible is true but such things no longer happen.

Again:

African: Good and bad spirits both exist.

Biblical: Good and bad spirits both exist.

Western materialist: No spirits exist.

Western Christian: At least Spirit of God exists; bad spirits are more problematical.

Again:

African: Souls of the dead speak to the living.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹²

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: The dead do not communicate with the living.
Consulting with the dead is “of the devil.”

Again:

African: People communicate with spirits.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹³

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: Generally unknown except in exorcism.

Again:

African: Evil spirits cause illness.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹⁴

Western Materialist: Germs, malfunctions, etc., cause illness.

Western Christian: Hesitantly believe that evil spirits cause illness in Bible.

Again:

African: Evil spirit helpers can heal or kill.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹⁵

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: Some fundamentalists believe in Satanic miracles.

Again:

African: Certain people are mediums who communicate with spirits.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹⁶

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: Forbidden by scripture.

Again:

African: Amulets and charms have magic effect.

Biblical: Instances recorded.¹⁷

Western Materialist: Superstition.

Western Christian: Some people use amulets and charms.

Again:

African: Exorcism is normal, expected happening.

Biblical: Numerous instances recorded, but observers marveled.¹⁸

Western Materialist: Psychiatry frowns on exorcism because does not accept existence of demons.

Western Christian: Church at large skeptical, but some Catholics, charismatics, and others are exorcising.

These witnesses from non-Western Christian communities made me more comfortable with the possibility of direct supernatural intervention in our lives. Then my wife Carol and I had our own experience. A major reason for us returning to the States from missionary service in India after fifteen years was the realization that my mother was dying of cancer and my father would need a place to go.

During the months that my mother was bedridden at home, I would try to get back to Chicago once a month to see her and my father. One of these times, a congregation member offered to drop me off at the airport on his way to work. He was a little late, so as we neared the airport, I readied myself for a dash to the gate by putting my book and ticket on his dashboard. When I jumped out of the car and he sped off, I realized that I had left the book and ticket in the car.

His report was that a sudden wind blew through the car as he was driving out of the airport. He saw something fly out and stopped to get it, my book and ticket. He circled back and quickly gave it to a red cap at the curbside. In the meantime, I went to the counter and asked what I could do. This was pre-9/11, so they told me to go to the gate and see if I could get on. As I lined up at that counter, one of the agents answered a phone and said, "No, no one has come yet for that." I thought that this might well be my ticket so I raced to the front, and they directed me to go back to the ticket counter. When I got there, they said, they had no ticket. As I wandered rather hopelessly and aimlessly in the huge, milling crowd, an ordinary middle-aged woman suddenly approached me and said, "Here's your ticket." I don't even recall if I took the time to say thanks, but I ran off to the gate.

When I returned, Carol was supposed to meet me, but she was not at the gate. I thought that perhaps she was thinking I had checked luggage, so I went to baggage claim. She wasn't there either, and so I thought perhaps there was some trouble at home delaying her and I got into line to phone home. As I was standing there, I heard over the intercom "Carol Hoefer, Carol Hoefer, meet your party at . . ." I thought, "That's a great idea, Carol," and went off to the specified counter and found her waiting there.

I complimented Carol on making the announcement, but she replied, "I didn't do that. You did." I said, "I didn't do it, but somebody did." We went to the counter and asked if we could inquire who had paged us. They put us through to the pager, and the pager said there was no such page. Yet, we both heard it at different areas of the airport. The only explanation we could have is that an angel (and perhaps more than one!) was looking after us on that trip.

There were a few more experiences during these days in River Falls:

- My father shared how his mother had come to him in a dream the night she died back in Germany, to say good-bye. Only weeks later did he hear by letter that she had died on that date.
- Here's what our daughter Pamela reports one time when she was commuting from work in St. Paul, MN:

"I was in the left lane out of 3 lanes of traffic [plus onramps]. You'll remember the reason it's called Spaghetti Junction! All of a sudden, I spun out to the right. Of course, the freeway was absolutely packed. There was barely a spare square inch. I was spinning toward the middle lane when the next thing I knew, I was sitting in my car, facing forward like I should have been, with traffic moving at a slow and steady pace. No honking, nothing abnormal, as though nothing had happened at all. I had no whiplash, no back strain. Only this feeling of knowing . . . wow, you really don't go before your time and knowing absolutely for sure that Heaven had intervened and saved not only my life but the lives and cars of those around me. It would've been one awful pile-up."
- Another daughter was away in college in Colorado when she phoned and asked how to get rid of a bad spirit. It turned out that she and a couple housemates had been playing with a Ouija board, and some strange things had happened. She and another housemate returned to their rooms, and she said suddenly she felt very cold. She said she stepped out of her room to see what the heating problem was, and the other girl had felt the same thing and had stepped out of her room.

They went downstairs and found the third housemate with a rather sheepish look on her face. She said she had continued playing the board and had asked for a really bad spirit to come. Then the place got really cold, and she couldn't get the board to respond anymore. Now my daughter said, "You are a pastor. What should we do to get rid of that spirit?" I said, "I really don't know. If you ask a spirit to come, it will come. But these are supernatural beings, and they do what they want. We can't control them. Nonetheless, you don't have to worry. You are a baptized child of God, sealed in the Holy Spirit. That spirit can do nothing to you."
- Later, when that daughter moved into an apartment in Minneapolis, she reported several instances of things moving mysteriously. But there was no harm done. She also writes:

"At that apartment in Minneapolis, I started waking up with nightmares every night at the same time, feeling very afraid. This went on for weeks. I read somewhere that at that time—3 am, I think—the spirit world is at its most active. Who knows, but it freaked me out. I remembered what you had told me, so when I woke up I would affirm my baptism, and that I was a child of God, and it gave me comfort. Ultimately, I took my baptismal

certificate, framed it, and put it on my nightstand along with my cross. My nightmares went away and I was able to sleep through the night.”

- I’ve never had the experience of a miracle happening in response to one of my prayers—though I still regularly pray for miracles. The one miraculous healing I experienced in my parish ministry came as a total surprise when I went to the ICU room of a dying parishioner. As her family gathered, I gave her a very small taste of the Sacrament. The elderly woman immediately shot up in bed, all her tubes flying around. Of course, all kinds of bells went off and the nurses came rushing in demanding to know what was going on. I went to see her a couple of days later, and she was convinced that God did this so that her grandson would see it and become a believer. She died a few weeks later.

Academic Experiences at Concordia, Portland

The first topic in my World Religions courses at Concordia University, Portland, was Animism. I would share with the students some of the experiences just related. After telling one or two of my angel stories, I would invite students to share theirs. Typically, it would take a little while for students to speak up, but usually three or four shared and sometimes twice that, out of a class of twenty-five to thirty. Often a student would begin by saying, “I’ve never told anybody about this but. . . .” It always was much more persuasive in class when students heard their peers confirming what I was saying.

In one more example that I recall, a student said they were driving on a beach in Washington when they got stuck in the sand. Suddenly, two guys appeared in pickup truck and pulled the car out. As the group was gathering back into the car, they turned to say thanks, but the truck had completely disappeared—the typical way angel appearances occur.

It’s my conviction that people in the West have spirit experiences just like anywhere else in the world. But the pervading worldview does not encourage them to process the experiences through this lens, much less to talk about them. Spirit experiences are considered “hokey” and unscientific. When they occur, people simply just say, “That was weird.”

At the very beginning of my World Religions courses, I announced that this word “weird” was banned in our discussions. I explained that we would be challenged with facts that may not fit our worldview. To simply dismiss these facts by calling them “weird” was an act of cowardice and fear. We will do anything to keep our worldview intact.

Back in the parish, when people asked me what would change in their life if they became Christian, I would tell them, “Everything will stay the same, and everything will change.” We begin to see the events of our life through a different lens, the lens

of faith. I think this is true also when one begins to acknowledge the reality of the spirit worlds active in our lives.

This reluctance to talk about supernatural events extends even to people who experience it in their own Christian context. Many Christians have a great difficulty explaining events that seem obviously to be the experience of angels or of divine miracles. Recently, a staunch church member, who knew of my comfort with the topic, shared an experience she says she's hardly ever told anybody.

She had a very debilitating hereditary long-term illness from an early age, as did several of her family members. Some Christian friends brought a healer to see her. Though she was very hesitant and skeptical about it, as she tells it: "She [the healer] just laid her finger on my forehead and I fell over 'slain in the Spirit.' My illness has not progressed since that date, though doctors had told me I would be in a wheelchair by now, at best, just as my relatives are now." In more evangelical circles, she would happily have shared this testimony, to the upbuilding of faith of many believers. Yet, in our circles, she has feared people's skepticism and even criticism. As Loewen illustrated above, we in the Western church are so much more imbued with the surrounding secularist worldview than with the biblical one.

Regarding my classroom experiences, one event was particularly striking. After we had discussed these phenomena in class, a thirty-year-old student approached me to discuss further. It turned out that she had been in training as a healer, which she understood as a form of *reiki*. The trainers talked about spirits helping them to heal. As a devout Christian, she had processed all the spirit talk as the Holy Spirit aiding her, and she had indeed been quite effective at her healing work.

However, for the final session, the trainers informed the group that they would be making commitments to some spirits to facilitate their healing. The student said she had discussed with her boyfriend, who warned her away from something like this, and she had resolved not to go through with the final step of a ritual commitment with the spirits.

After that, she said, she experienced spirit attacks. The first was when she was driving with her young son in the backseat. Suddenly, he began choking, so she stopped the car and eventually the choking stopped.

Then she began to experience the spirits coming to her in her home. She said there were five of them, and they looked very ugly. They clearly told her that she must proceed with the commitment ceremony, or they would continue to harass her. If she committed, they would help her. Of course, the woman was totally confused and afraid. She went to her pastor, but he just told her to get some psychological help. She knew it was more than that, and so she came to me, hoping that I would understand and direct her. We talked about the need for exorcism, but I told her I was unable to do that for her.

A week or so later, a very unsettling event occurred. I was working on my computer in my university office, and I got an e-mail from her address. It was a whole line of meaningless letters. I thought that was very strange and dismissed it. Then a few minutes later, I got another e-mail with just three random letters. I thought I should talk with her about this the next day in class. Then I got a regular e-mail from her with a class assignment. When I asked her about the e-mails, she said she had no idea. Do bad spirits mess with our computers?

A couple of weeks later, she shared with me that she had gone downtown to a church group that did exorcisms. She said they indeed exorcized five spirits, with the last one strongly resisting. Now, however, she felt free and released. That was the last she talked about it during the semester.

One more dramatic student report involved my asking a class to share any angel or spirit experience they had. One student spoke about a mission trip he had been on among the Navajos. He said their locked meeting room kept on getting broken into and ransacked during the night. Even when they put their Bibles into the safe there, the safe was opened and trashed. One of the Navajos volunteered to camp out overnight with his shotgun to catch the intruder. He reported that a huge wolf came. When he confronted it, it ran off, but he was able to shoot it square on. The next day one of the Navajos appeared with a huge hole in his chest. The “skin-walker” of Navajo lore.

Academically, as I taught various religions, I learned how almost all of them spoke about spirit worlds, the one exception being Theravada Buddhism. And it’s not only in religions like Animism, Hinduism, and Wicca/Druid, but also in Islam, Judaism, and Tibetan Buddhism. It is also striking how the description of these worlds is largely the same all over the world and all through history: good spirits, evil spirits, trickster spirits, spirits that marry and propagate just like us, wandering spirits, ancestor spirits, etc. How could this all be imagined when it is so universally the same across time and cultures and continents?

The other dimension that is so common is the involvement of ancestors in our lives and the belief in reincarnation. I could fit the spirit world into an expanded worldview because of its strong biblical authentication, but the beliefs in ancestors and reincarnation really does not fit in. Nonetheless, I have to deal with the evidence, as uncomfortable as it is for me.

Of course, the belief in reincarnation is very common in all ancient religions. Among major religions, it’s even in some forms of Judaism. Thus, only Islam and Christianity don’t share this belief. And even among Christians, it is not unknown. Once again, when the belief is so universal and ancient, one wonders how it could have developed and grown up in so many different locations if there wasn’t some truth/experience to it.

My experience with this belief has come in several ways. I'll begin with one that occurred in our own home. We have a special needs granddaughter who had a birth trauma and is unable to walk or talk. When she was around three, her mother was walking her along the hallway in our home that has a shelf where we display photos of our parents, both in their later years and in their youth. Our daughter said that the girl suddenly stopped when she saw those photos. She's able to nod her head for "yes" and "no," and the mother discerned that she was looking at the photo of my parents' wedding. She asked, "Do you see them?" and the girl nodded yes.

This prompted our daughter to research the matter a bit. She found that the belief is that ancestors appear as they were in the prime of their life, which would be their wedding.¹⁹ Is there a hint about this reality in the Hebrews 12:1 reference to the "cloud of witnesses"?

In my World Religions classes, we would talk about previous births. We discussed how people have had *déjà vu* experiences, such as visiting a European castle and knowing what would be in the next room. Sometimes, students would share how they've had similar inexplicable experiences. I recall one older student who shared that he was visiting Hindu temples in North India when he began realizing that he knew what was inside some of them before he entered.

In addition, I usually had a medium come to class to share her beliefs and practices. She would speak of having had experiences of spirits of dead people already in her childhood, and even as she travelled to different locations. She spoke quite emphatically—and credibly—about her experiences contacting ancestors for people and relaying messages from them. It's very much like what is portrayed in the TV series "Long Island Medium."

It's become my conviction that God comes to people in terms of their worldview. If their worldview includes visions and dreams and miracles, He will use those. If their worldview discounts all this, He will use other means, more intellectual. It is the general experience of missionaries working among adherents of major religions that people come to faith primarily through these supernatural experiences.

Such was certainly the case with a new church, the Everlasting Life Church, that I visited in the Punjab, North India, when I was working among the Sikhs. In my visits there in 2002 and 2014, the founding pastor, Pastor Daniel Masih, related that exorcisms are a common part of their ministry. When they enter a new area, typically they are soon confronted by an individual threatening them as a spirit. They need to do an exorcism, in a typical "power encounter." When the people see that Jesus has this power, they start coming to church worship and some eventually take Baptism.

I spoke at a couple of workshops for this church, supported by the LCMS mission organization, People of the Book Lutheran Outreach, in November 2014. They had asked for a study on outreach approaches in Acts and invited leaders from

all denominations. As I spoke about the way Jesus had come through visions, miracles, healings, and exorcisms, I asked them to raise their hands to indicate if they have had these experiences. In each case, more than half indicated that these were was part of their experiences in ministry too. They are in “power encounter” contexts.

Pastor Daniel himself had a crisis at the beginning of his ministry that was answered by a vision. His wife and he had no children, so people mocked him for promoting a deity who could not even do that for him. It was a very depressing time for him. But then he had a vision that he would have two children, a son to be named Wittness and a daughter to be named Vision. Within two years, they had their boy and girl.

Another dramatic event that sparked the success of his ministry was a miraculous healing. A wealthy man had a daughter who was gravely ill. They had gone to many doctors and visited many religious sites to get her cured. Finally, they came to Pastor Daniel, when the girl had hardly any pulse left. He prayed for her and, within five minutes, she was up and walking and totally cured. The family donated the land on which their church now stands in Dasuya, Punjab.

Another example: I had a Hindu student, Kanagasabai Umashaknar, originally from Sri Lanka, in a New Testament class at Concordia. He was quite withdrawn and almost hostile. Then, he also got a vision calling him. Here’s his story:

I don’t remember the date, but it was Fall semester of 1998 in Dr. Hill’s Humanities 351 class. It was a late evening class, 6:00pm– 9:00pm! We were covering the role of Germany in WWI when John Murray and I were sitting in back row. It was during that time, my mind drifted sort of . . . and I felt this overwhelming sense of calmness and peace. As I tried to wrap my head around what it was, I heard or felt this calling—really hard to explain, but the next thing I knew, I was leaning into John’s ear whispering that “He was calling me.” John was confused, and asked me “What?” I then said, “God is calling . . . Jesus is calling me.” This caused John to scream in delight, disrupting the class . . . and as Dr. Hill inquired, we both ran out of the class (Luther Hall 2nd floor), out through the back stairs and out to the area in front of Centennial. My memory gets fuzzy after that...but it was truly an amazing experience and I am glad John was there to be with me.

Uma was baptized, changed his studies from biology to theology, and now is a DCE serving in Tacoma, WA.

My wife Carol and I served a couple of years ago as trainers of ESL teachers in Northeast India, a tribal area that is largely Christian. The Christians there continue the cultural expectation of God’s coming to them in visions and dreams. They look for God to guide their lives through their dreams.

I recall one of our senior missionaries in India recounting how work began in one area to the north in another state. He said a delegation came to them from that area asking who Jesus is. They had been experiencing visions of someone named Jesus calling to them. Of course, the missionaries followed up, and now there is a vital church in that town and more around that state.

All of these supernatural experiences might easily be dismissed as weird or psychological disorders in our post-Enlightenment culture. When God uses them, they are not effective among us, but they are very effective in other societies. When Jesus comes to people of these non-Western cultures in these direct and personal ways, they respond and immediately accept Him as their Lord.

Conclusion

What do we make of all this? What do I make of all this?

A more relevant question is: What do we do with all this missiologically? In the May 2014 issue of *Missio Apostolica*,²⁰ I had already expressed how I have found these phenomena of spirit experiences as my most effective approach to confronting atheism, both in class and personally. These individuals want tangible evidence for any belief. When we can give personal, eyewitness testimony, they must either disbelieve us or reconsider their materialistic worldview.

Secondly, in terms of our world mission, we must seriously question the post-Enlightenment lens with which we Westerners see the world. Our goal must not be to change people's worldview, for our own worldview may be highly distorted and constricted. Indeed, the fastest growing churches are in those regions and denominations that take the spirit worlds seriously. The biblical witness and message speaks to them, where it often does not speak to us, as we saw in the Loewen charts. Celebrate and embrace the way God comes to them within their worldview.

Also, in our own society, especially among the youth, there is a growing interest in Eastern and animistic religions. They are not so interested in intellectual arguments and doctrines. These seem to them quite arbitrary and conflicting. Rather, they seek an authentic personal spiritual experience that is relevant and transformative. This does not mean that we encourage them to go to mediums, but it does mean that we help them to identify and embrace the authentic spiritual experiences that they do have, particularly with angels.

Next, we need to become comfortable personally and existentially with this phenomenon of spirit worlds. We need to expand our worldview so that we are comfortable talking about it, both with fellow believers and non-believers—with believers so that they can enrich their lives with this spiritual depth and encouragement and then share their faith convincingly with others.

Spiritism is not something we should fear. These spirit worlds are God's gracious creation, the One who is the Maker of "all things visible and invisible," in the words of the Nicene Creed. All these powers are "under His feet" (Eph 1:22). We should see this phenomenon as highly important and useful in our outreach. First, of course, we need to appreciate and understand it ourselves honestly and openheartedly.

Finally, we need to become comfortable with godly supernatural activity. Miracles should be expected and celebrated. Angels, in particular, are a gift of God that we should recognize and value. Let God become real for our people.

Endnotes

¹ In this article, I intentionally leave the word "satan" uncapitalized. I came to this realization from a laywoman in a Bible study hour at the Ascension Lutheran Church, where I'm a member in Portland, Oregon. She objected to giving such an evil force the prominence of capitalization, almost putting him/it on the same level of prominence as God.

² Herbert Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Chennai, India: Asian Programme for the Advancement of Training and Studies and Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991) and *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001).

³ Cf. Herbert Hoefler, "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," *Missiology* (October 2005), 435–450.

⁴ When I described this tree years later to one who had visited the ashram, he said that no such tree exists there. In my skepticism, I surmised that its fraudulent nature was too apparent so they had cut the tree down.

⁵ Andrew Harvey reports a similar incident in *A Journey to Ladakh* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984), 214–215.

⁶ The story also demonstrated to me that Hindus don't worship stones or trees or rivers. Rather, they worship the spirits that they believe reside in these objects.

⁷ We were with a group of two other Germans, a photographer and a journalist, and two interpreters, one a Tibetan college student who knew English and the other a Buddhist monk who knew the local languages.

⁸ Andrew Harvey, *A Journey to Ladakh*, 79–80.

⁹ An example of a Marxist atheist being challenged to open his worldview to the spirit realities in Buddhist Thailand is recorded in "The Visitor" as told to Thomas Fuller, *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, Feb. 22, 2015, 96.

¹⁰ Timothy George, "A Tale of Two Demons," *First Things* (June 2013) <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/06/a-tale-of-two-demons>.

¹¹ Jacob Loewen, *The Bible in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 137. Loewen's amplification:

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus when he was transfigured (Mt 17:3–7); dead saints appeared to the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem (Mt 27:52–53); Jesus appeared several times after his death (Jn 20:14–29, 21:4–14, Acts 1:3–9, Mt. 28:9, Lk 24:28–51); an angel appeared and freed Peter from prison (Acts 12:6–11); Philip

disappeared when the Spirit of God took him away (Acts 8:39); Aaron's rod became a living snake (Ex 7:10).

¹² Ibid.

Jesus talked to his disciples after his death and resurrection (Jn 20:26–29); dead saints appeared to disciples at Jerusalem (Mt 27:52–53); witch conjured up Saul's soul (I Sam 28:11–12); consultation with mediums and necromancers condemned (Deut 18:10–11).

¹³ Ibid., 138.

Jesus spoke to devil (Mt 4:4–10), to evil spirits (Mt 8:32, Mk 9:25); Paul commanded evil spirits (Acts 16:18); exorcists spoke to evil spirits (Acts 19:13).

¹⁴ Ibid., 139–140.

Bent woman (Lk 13:11); blind and dumb people (Mt 12:22, 9:32); epilepsy (Mt 17:14–21); insanity (Mk 5:1–13).

¹⁵ Ibid., 140.

Satanic miracles (2 Thes 2:9, Rev 13:13, 16:14).

¹⁶ Ibid., 141.

Medium at Endor (1 Sam 28:7); prohibitions against communicating with the spirit world (Lev 19:31, 20:6, Mic 5:12, Gal 5:19–20).

¹⁷ Ibid., 143. St. Christopher's medals, crucifixes, used for protection. I think Loewen might also have cited biblical references such as the high priest's Urim and Thummin (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21), Uzzah's touching the ark (2 Sam 6:6–7), the touching of Jesus' garment (Mt 9:21; 14:36), and Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15)

¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

Exorcism by Jews (Acts 13:6–9, 19:13, Mt 12:27); by Jesus (Mt 8:16, 9:33, Mk 7:29); by apostles (Acts 16:18); by people who did not follow Jesus (Mt 7:22).

¹⁹ It's the same way little Colton describes heaven in *Heaven is for Real*. Todd Burpo, *Heaven Is For Real* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 120–123.

²⁰ Herbert Hoefler, "Outreach to Atheists," *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 1 (May 2014), 150–151.

Spiritism in Papua New Guinea: The Challenges It Sets Before Western Christians

John Eggert

Abstract: Christians acknowledge the realities of the spiritual world. However, spiritual activity among the people of Papua New Guinea, where animistic traditions and Christianity exist side by side, provide interesting challenges to Western Christian practices. This article leads one to think about Paul’s words in Ephesians 6—“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” How is our world influenced by spiritual ways, not only with our Western scientific understanding of how the world works?

While there are varying levels of spiritual awareness among Christians (especially when compared with those who claim no religion, those who claim agnosticism or those who are atheists), spiritual realities among the animistic peoples of the highlands of Papua New Guinea take things to a whole new level. This paper will describe some of these spiritual realities as experienced by the author from 1985 to 1998, during his time as an evangelistic missionary in Papua New Guinea. Some of the descriptions are of actual events witnessed by the author. Others are summaries of events that were related to the author by the individuals who experienced them.

The charismatic movement, that was a growing part of mainstream Christianity during the 1960s through the 1980s, provides a starting point. The controversial nature of this increase in “spiritual activity” was evident in many ways, one of which was a request by convention of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod for a study by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of this movement. The resulting document was published in 1977.¹ While it is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the theological issues related to the charismatic movement, the existence of the movement within Christendom is an entry point into increasing spiritual awareness. Even in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, where spiritual awareness was (and continues to be) significantly greater than in the “scientific” Western world of mainstream Christianity, the charismatic movement was very much a part of the Christian communities. Both Lutheran and Catholic missionaries sought ways to address the divisions that developed among the pro- and anti-charismatic groups in

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the church.

As an evangelistic missionary, I was called on several times to lead Bible studies in different locations of the Gutnius Lutheran Church in an effort to shed light on the issues at hand. One of the most common manifestations of the “spirit movement” was an activity called “bung prayer,” or group prayer. In areas where it was part of the local Christian “culture” there was often a time during the worship service when the leader provided an opportunity for all to speak their own prayers out loud. Some of the people prayed in the local language. Others spoke in ways that were unintelligible to those around them, which was seen as speaking in tongues as led by the Holy Spirit.

Often division arose among Christians, some arguing that if you didn’t participate in “bung prayer” you were not a real Christian, while others argued that “the missionaries didn’t teach us in this way and it wasn’t right.” The Bible studies most often focused on portions of Scripture that emphasize the unity of the Body of Christ, the possibility of specific spiritual gifts (including speaking in tongues) that were meant for the building up of the Body of Christ, not dividing it, and the importance of acknowledging that the presence or absence of a specific spiritual gift does not determine whether or not one is a Christian. Needless to say, these issues were not quickly resolved and likely still provide challenges among the Christians of Papua New Guinea. The example of “bung prayer” is only one of the issues connected to the spirit movement, but it is one that provides a bridge from our Western Christian way of thinking to that of the thinking process of the Christians of Papua New Guinea. What follows here takes us more deeply into a spiritual world that is significantly different from that of our Western worldview.

Dealing with spiritual activity was often very much a part of the thinking process of the Enga people, among whom we lived. Timothy Lutheran Seminary was located on an eight-acre parcel of land along the main road. People lived on small plots of land handed down in the tribal community. Kutasi was one of the local landowners whose ancestors had agreed to lease land to the seminary. He was a young man with a family. From time to time, he would work at the seminary—mowing the lawn, doing basic construction projects, and other things as needs arose. One day, he came to my door looking very sick. He said, “John, I’m sick. I need to go to the hospital.” He knew I had a vehicle and wouldn’t charge him if I took him. I didn’t really want to go, nor did I want him to die because I didn’t help. We got into the pickup and drove the half an hour to the hospital to which he wanted to go. I dropped him off at the hospital and returned home.

About a week later, Kutasi was again around the seminary community. He still wasn’t well but was somewhat functional. A few days later, he was on my doorstep, looking even worse than the first time. He wanted to return to the hospital, but I simply didn’t have time to take him. Instead I gave him the equivalent of five dollars to pay for a public motor vehicle so that he could go on his own.

Two days later, word came that Kutasi had died at the hospital. Kutasi's tribe (close family) determined that a man named Raymond had "worked magic" that caused Kutasi's death. As an outsider, I was not privy to the decision-making process. What I did know was that Raymond was from a coastal area that was known for its use of magic, that is, using spiritual forces to affect the lives of people. He lived near Timothy Lutheran Seminary in a small village setting with some other non-Enga people, some of whom worked at a local community school and others (including Raymond) who worked for the Enga Provincial Government. He worked for the department of public works and was licensed to do blasting work in road construction. He, along with several others in his community, were members of the Betamanda Congregation that met every Sunday in the Timothy Lutheran Seminary chapel. Kutasi and his family also attended that service regularly.

As soon as Raymond was accused of using spiritual powers to cause Kutasi's death he was "gone" from the community. Had he not left, he would likely have been killed in retaliation. In the following days and weeks, negotiations went on between Kutasi's tribe and Raymond's community as to what the appropriate compensation was for Kutasi's death. Only when Raymond's community had paid the agreed upon number of pigs and amount of money in the local currency (Kina) was Raymond able to safely return to the community.

While I was not involved in any of the conversations associated with the situation, local pastors who were teachers at Timothy Seminary were involved. They were experienced in the application of Law and Gospel from the Lutheran Christian perspective and also fully aware of the cultural factors relating to spiritual understandings of the events. My Western worldview says: "How did they prove this? What evidence did they present?" At the same time, my mind goes to Paul's statement to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:10–12 ESV)

We find various ways to apply that statement to issues in our Western way of thinking, but it seems to connect rather directly to an understanding of the use of spiritual powers in the death of Kutasi.

Another example of attributing the actions of an individual to spiritual powers involved a woman, Andasowame, who helped my wife Jeanette with washing clothes and garden work when we lived at Yaramanda, the first Lutheran mission station in the Enga Province. Her son was attending high school and was accused of raping one of the high school girls. One day she arrived on our doorstep in tears. When Jeanette

finally got the complete story, the situation had taken a spiritual twist. The local leaders, including one of the old evangelists/pastors who had been trained by Rev. Otto Hinze, the first missionary, had come to Andasowame and explained that the reason her son was in trouble was her own fault. According to their understanding, she had not properly cared for her dying father-in-law and now the spirit of that dead man was repaying her by causing her son to engage in this inappropriate activity.

My initial response was: “How in the world could they even think of this?” However, as a new missionary, I was in no position to challenge them. The situation was in the hands of several local church leaders and they had to handle it in the way that fit with their culture and Christian theological understanding.

Unfortunately, we never did learn the outcome of the whole situation. Did she accept that it was her “fault?” What was the “proof” of this spiritual activity? However, we do know that this event did not destroy her Christian faith. Although Andasowame did not have the title “deaconess,” she was in actuality a deaconess. One evening, just as the sun had set and the evening rain had settled in, she came to our door with her kerosene lantern in hand to tell us about something that had happened that day. When we asked where she was going she replied, “To Bible study. One’s faith can’t be strong if one only worships one day a week.” With that, she set off in the dark, in the steadily falling rain, with her lantern to attend an evening Bible study. While she dealt with some spiritual realities that were quite strange from our perspective, her Christian faith shone through in ways that we could only hope many American Christians would emulate.

From time to time, former missionaries would return to Papua New Guinea to visit the areas in which they had worked and see some of the local people with whom they had worked. One such visitor, Pastor Gary Teske, had spent several years in a fairly remote location and was well-known for having been fluent in the Enga language.

One evening, before dinner, we were standing outside, talking with a pastor from another remote area, Pastor John Hulip, when Teske recalled an event in Hulip’s area. Pastors Marcus Felde and Teske were on a patrol into a rather remote area, and Hulip was with them. They came to one location and found the community in an unsettled state. After some inquiry, they learned that a local woman was dying. Being concerned for the woman’s welfare, they sought to have the woman brought to an open area for further evaluation and possible evacuation. The people were quite hesitant and resistant. After some time, and some rather persuasive arguments on the part of the missionaries, the people agreed and the woman was carried to a clearing. The missionaries examined her and found that she had a broken leg. Having access to a radio, they arranged for a helicopter to come in and evacuate the woman and her infant child for medical care.

After the evacuation, more discussion took place, and the missionaries learned the rest of the story. The woman had not had an accident. In fact, the local people suspected her of being a witch and were actually killing her when the missionaries arrived on the scene. Had they not arrived, the woman (and her son) would have died. Needless to say, the missionaries had various reactions, including relief at having saved the woman, but also concern as to whether or not they were in danger of some form of retribution for having interrupted the carrying out of a form of “justice” that had been decreed by the local community. Needless to say, the fact that Teske was standing there telling the story was proof that they had not suffered any negative consequences over the incident.

Having completed the story, Teske turned to Hulip and said, “Whatever happened to that woman?” Hulip replied, “She and her son returned to the area and she is still alive today.” He then turned to me saying, “Do you remember Nason? He is the little boy who was evacuated with her.”

Nason had been a student at Timothy Lutheran Seminary during my time there. He had graduated and gone out as a missionary to another remote people group. In a conversation with Nason, he described how he approached people with whom he was not familiar and who had no knowledge of the Gospel. He sought to get to know them, understand their issues and challenges in life, and slowly share how God had been at work in his life. I have no idea of whether or not he included this story about his mother, or if he even knew it. However, looking back at such events, one can’t but help standing in awe of the work of the Spirit of God in unusual ways. From the unknowing intervention of two missionaries that prevented the killing of a suspected witch came the proclamation of the Gospel to people who had never heard it before.

The words of St. Paul quoted above come to mind again. We don’t know the powers against which we labor. They are powers of which we can’t even conceive because of our Western worldview that downplays all things spiritual. Yet, the God whom we serve is there, in the midst of those spiritual powers, working all things for the good of those who are called according to His purpose.

Lest one say, “This was twenty-five years ago, things of this nature no longer happen today,” a couple of brief reports will bring things up to the present. In January, 2007, an article appeared on Yahoo News of Australia entitled “Four PNG women murdered for ‘sorcery.’” The first paragraph of the story read:

Four Papua New Guinean women, believed by fellow villagers to have used sorcery to cause a fatal road crash, were tortured with hot metal rods to confess, then murdered and buried standing up in a pit.

The third paragraph continued:

Black magic is widespread in the South Pacific nation where most of the 5.1 million population live subsistence lives. Women suspected of being witches are often hung or burnt to death.²

Further, as this paper is being written, Anton Lutz, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, is actively engaged in dealing with situations in the Hewa area of Papua New Guinea related to women accused of being witches. Some of his work has been reported by MAF Papua New Guinea and ABC News out of Australia, as indicated on his Facebook page.³ Western Christianity, highly influenced by the materialistic worldview that tends to push spiritual things to the side, has not had to deal with true spiritual challenges in the same way as those societies that continue to see life as highly spiritual. It is a truism that one can only find that for which one is looking. This applies also to our lives as Christians. Often we choose to overlook things that don't fit into our worldview and focus on those things that are part of our understanding. That doesn't make those things any more real. However, it does make it important for us as Western Christians to realize that we don't fully understand all the ways in which God is at work in the world today and to be open to those ways, even if they are "out of the ordinary."

One final experience brings the reality of spiritual activity very close to home in my own life. It was not some "witchcraft" experience, but, upon reflection, a very real "God-at-work" event in my own life.

One December in the mid-1990s, I was invited to preach at the graduation ceremony at Senior Flierl Seminary (a school of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG) in Lagoweng, on the coast of Papua New Guinea. We traveled to the coastal city of Lae by car, going on to Lagoweng by ship. Having completed the festivities, we returned to Lae with a student and his family from our local area. They had spent the school year at Senior Flierl Seminary.

It took a full day for us to travel by road from the city of Lae to our home in the Enga Province. As we embarked on the last leg of our journey, we began the climb out of the town of Mt. Hagen over the mountains that separated us from Enga Province. Slowly wending our way up the highlands highway, we were last in a string of vehicles. Loaded with five passengers and all the possessions of the family we were bringing back with us made it slow going.

As we rounded one of the hairpin curves, we saw a young man standing alongside of the road. When we passed him, he pounded a stone on the guardrail. It was strange, but not overly alarming. A couple of hundred feet farther up the road, two men stepped out on either side of the road with rifles pointed at us. Needless to say, I stopped. The passengers in the backseat were praying aloud. My mind racing, I decided that stopping was not really a good choice, and so I proceeded to go forward again. The men threw a rock at the windshield, indicating that they meant business. Knowing that it was not possible to outrun them up hill, I decided to back up. One side of the road was a drop-off of several hundred feet. I guess I hoped to back around the curve fast enough to get away from them. As I backed up, the pickup turned to the side of the road, backed between two trees within six inches on each side of the vehicle and into the yard of a small Catholic church. From there I was

able to drive out onto the road again and return to Mt. Hagen. The only damage was a broken windshield where the rock had hit it.

Needless to say, I was not driving the pickup. My hands were on the wheel, my feet were on the pedals, and my eyes were looking around. But, I didn't know it was possible to back through the ditch. I didn't know there were trees through which I had to back. I didn't know it was possible to back into the yard of that Catholic church. Very simply, God was at work, His angels guiding the movement of the pickup. Had I not been there, I would not know what to think of the experience. Even today it is hard to explain. It is an experience outside of our ordinary scientific Western worldview. Yet, I have no doubt that it happened.

As I talk with my World Religions classes about the animistic approach to life, I encourage them to think carefully about the spiritual world. From an animistic perspective, "Nothing in man's environment escapes the influence or manipulation of the spirit world. The world is more spiritual than it is physical, and it is spiritually upheld."⁴ That is not how we see things from our Western scientific/materialistic perspective, even as Christians. We acknowledge the truth of the Word of God, and yet we can have a difficult time truly understanding how Paul's words in Ephesians about spiritual powers really fit in our lives. The spiritual realities of peoples who have a spiritual instead of a scientific/materialistic worldview, give us greater insights into the biblical understanding of God's creation. We gain valuable insight from learning about their experiences, even if they challenge our own worldview and even our theological understandings.

Endnotes

¹ "The Lutheran Church and The Charismatic Movement: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors," A Report of The Commission of Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Concordia Publishing House, April 1997.

² "Four PNG women murdered for 'sorcery,'" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 2007, accessed May 31, 2015. <http://www.smh.com.au/>.

³ Anton Lutz, "Stone Turners and Witch Killers," MAF Papua New Guinea, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://maf-papuaneuguinea.org/stone-turners-and-witch-killers/> and Liam Fox, "Women accused of witchcraft in PNG saved," *Australian Broadcast Corporation*, January 23, 2015, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-23/women-accused-of-witchcraft-in-png-saved/6043968>.

⁴ Philip M. Steyne, *God's of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists*, (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 37.

Powers and Principalities/Signs and Wonders

Kent R. Hunter

Abstract: The power of God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, though our culture, training, and worldviews challenge us to believe this. Comfort levels are stretched when we start to personally experience the power that is in the name of Jesus Christ. The supernatural elements of our faith (spiritual gifts, signs, and wonders) are still active and at work today. Many Christians in North America may be surprised to learn of the increasing numbers of deliverances and healing taking place in churches and ministries across the country. There is power in the name of Jesus, and revival is upon us.

mir•a•cle (mir-i-kəl) n. 1. An event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, especially to an act of God. 2. A remarkable event or thing.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

My seminary education provided in-depth focus on Greek, Hebrew, church history, theology, preaching, and biblical exegesis. It was a good education, strong on theory but weak on practice. I learned nothing about spiritual gifts, including discovery of my own. Perhaps the greatest missing piece was the element of spiritual activities. No one seemed interested in teaching about demons, deliverance ministry, or prayer for healing. I heard nothing about the so-called “sign gifts”: tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles, and exorcism. Through subtle absence, it seemed that Christianity operated largely by Webster’s second definition, not the first. God did miraculous work, but primarily through the power of Word and Sacraments.

My professors, in a conservative branch of Lutheranism, were strong on the Word of God. My denomination even battled for the truth of Scripture in an era when “those liberals” were demythologizing the miracles in the Bible. Yet, no one spoke of the everyday reality of the supernatural.

In Acts 2, one of the elements of the Christian movement is “signs and

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wonders.” It was generally “overlooked” in the seminary classroom. One of my professors spoke briefly about dispensationalism, an approach to biblical interpretation which states that God uses different means of working with people during different periods of history. In this context, it means that once the Scriptures had been written God no longer used signs and wonders. They were no longer needed. The Bible was enough. The professor didn’t propose it as a doctrine of Lutheranism, just alluded to it as a position held by some Christians. It seemed to me that the burden of proof was on those who believed certain selected elements of Scripture disappeared at some point in history, while other parts were worth dying for, or at least fighting over. Yet, who was I, a student, to question my professors about some aspect of Scripture which, it seemed, they ignored?

While scanning channels on television, I would come across one of those “charlatan” TV evangelists. The evangelist would pray for people who were healed, or had fallen down. None of that ever happened in my home church. Honestly, that stuff scared me a little. If you asked me, I would say, “It made me uncomfortable.” However, what gnawed at me was that it doesn’t take much study to encounter such events in Scripture.

The Apostle Paul, who is practically a Lutheran saint, wrote that we are “fighting against principalities and powers” (Eph 6:12). What do we do with that? Martin Luther talked and wrote about the devil a lot. At one time, he threw an inkwell at the devil. It never came up in a class at the seminary. Around this time, the movie *The Exorcist* came out. I watched it out of curiosity. It freaked me out.

Most of my classmates went off to ministry after graduating from the seminary. However, I stayed at the seminary and entered a PhD program. One of the optional course offerings was a class in charismatic renewal. I expected the professor to discredit charismatic and Pentecostal behavior, but he didn’t. We read authors from the charismatic and Pentecostal branch of Christianity. I discovered some credible theologians who made a good case for the supernatural elements of Christianity. Then I discovered there was a “Renewal Movement” among Lutherans. They received a lot of heat from denominational officials, but they were a growing number of pastors and their churches. I remember that one of my Lutheran college classmates was required to leave because he admitted he spoke in tongues.

One of the requirements of the class on charismatic renewal was that we attend a charismatic worship community. There were many of these communities in the area. My wife and I chose one closest to where we lived. They were a group of Catholic charismatics, meeting in a high school. We were a little nervous, but since it was a requirement for the class, we crossed the threshold of comfort. It helped that the people were warm and welcoming. On the surface, they looked like any Lutheran congregation. The greatest difference was that they were mostly young adults. Most Lutheran churches I attended were an older crowd.

When the worship began, the songs were modern in both words and style. This was my introduction to contemporary worship. The seminary chapel services were enthusiastically focused on *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which provided songs and tempo from another century, and another continent. In this worship service, I experienced an indigenous, incarnational connection. It was a wonderful experience to worship in my heart language. At the end of one of the songs, many of the four hundred worshipers continued singing, a cappella, in tongues, and in harmony. It was, at first, frightening. I had never experienced that before. Then I became curious: "How do they do that?" It was beautiful.

The Realm of the Supernatural

By the time I finished my PhD in theology, I was confident in my training. I felt prepared to discuss theology at any level, with anyone. However, as I soon discovered, I was not prepared to lead the church where I was placed.

My first assignment was to become senior pastor of a church with 1,200 in attendance. The congregation worshiped five times a week, with three services on Sunday and a different service Wednesday morning and Wednesday evening. It was an inner-city church in Detroit, Michigan. The congregation was 100% white. The neighborhood and surrounding area was 87% African American. Most of those in my congregation were elderly. By contrast, most of those in the neighborhood were young families with children.

The church had declined by 67% in the previous ten years, prior to my arrival. It had been a model church several decades earlier, in the 1950s. At one time, the congregation had the largest Sunday School and largest Vacation Bible School in the denomination. Now, the community had radically changed. Most of the members commuted into the "old neighborhood" from the northeast suburbs.

To understand what happened next, it is important to understand my passion for reaching the lost. I grew up in an active Lutheran family. The evidence of strong faith was clear in both my parents. In spite of their faithfulness, by the time I was in high school, I was a nominal Christian. My church attendance was at the insistence of my parents. My life in high school was football, girls, and my guy friends. My grades were poor. My interests in academics were almost negligible, and my spirituality registered near zero.

A football injury put me in the hospital during my senior year. While recovering from knee surgery, my hospital roommate almost died one night. I watched as the medical staff worked with him. They brought him back from the brink of death. It was sobering. A person my age could die? I was not ready, spiritually. God moved my faith from my head to my heart. God put in me a strong desire to reach lost people for Jesus Christ.

When I began leading this dying church, I had a passion for reaching those in our community. I discovered most of the black families in our area did not attend church. We began an outreach program. We equipped twenty people from our church to make evangelism calls in the community. After a year and a half, it was clear: nothing worked. We failed to reach even one person. I was distraught. How can I be educated with four years of college, four years of seminary, and four years of graduate school, with a PhD in theology, and have no clue how to reach those in our community? I was frustrated.

The Fuller Experience

One day I read a brochure that arrived from Fuller Theological Seminary. It was about a DMin program. What caught my eye was the paragraph that claimed the largest school of missions in the world. I thought, “That’s it. I’m like a missionary on a mission field in this cross-cultural challenge.” At the time, it didn’t occur to me that every Christian in every place is to be a missionary.

The leaders of our church agreed to give me the time to attend Fuller, two weeks, three times a year, for three years. My wife agreed: we would pay for tuition, lodging, and travel. She added, “Are you going to be a student forever?” It was a rhetorical question. I had to know: Is it possible to reach people for Christ cross-culturally in Detroit? What is the strategy I hadn’t yet learned?

My work at Fuller brought me into contact with some of the top missiologists in the world. I consumed my classes. This was what I have always wanted to learn. Over time, our church developed a culture of mission and reached our community. We began to grow, in a multicultural setting. However, there was another dimension of my work in the DMin program.

At Fuller, my professors opened class each day with a prayer. That may not seem monumental, but I had rarely experienced it before. In my class with C. Peter Wagner, he prayed for DMin students—pastors—who were healed. I watched as one of the pastors was healed: I saw his leg grow to the length of the other one. The spiritual atmosphere opened me to greater awareness of the supernatural. It had an impact my ministry at the church.

One day, I discovered Billy Graham’s book on angels. It was fascinating to me. Graham included teaching on fallen angels—demons. In grade school, with my father, I had watched Billy Graham preach on television. He was not an evangelistic charlatan and TV preacher. He was someone who was credible. And he was writing about demons?

By this time, our church had an associate pastor. With my growing interest in the supernatural, the assistant pastor and I agreed to develop and teach a class at church: “The World of Evil and Supernatural Powers.”

We did our homework. We read a number of other books, talked to a palm reader, investigated articles about witches and warlocks, tarot cards, and Ouija boards. We advertised the Bible class, which would last six weeks. It was the largest attendance at a Bible class anyone could remember.

All Hell Breaks Loose

We were not prepared for what happened next. The first incident occurred late one afternoon. The church office received a call from one of our elders, John, who sounded frantic. He said something very unusual and troubling was happening to his wife, Dana. I stopped at my associate's office on the way out the door. "Want to go with me?" I asked. He grabbed his coat, we were on our way.

When we arrived at the house, John met us outside. "She's not herself," he said. I was thinking mental breakdown. As we sat in the living room with Dana, I took the lead. I asked her a few diagnostic questions. Neither my gifts nor training were in the area of counseling, but I thought I could discover enough to point them in a direction for help.

Dana looked distraught. I took John out of the room for a moment. "Any chance she took drugs?" I asked. He was certain she had not. I really didn't know what to do, so I offered to pray. What occurred next would change my worldview forever.

In my prayer, I mentioned "Jesus Christ." Her countenance changed. A male sounding voice came out of her mouth. I felt I was in a horror movie. I was slightly overcome with disbelief. I wondered, "Could this be real?"

I spoke to her—to it—the voice. This is where I made a mistake. It was a lesson I would not forget. I tried to argue, rationally, with this voice. How stupid! A human being arguing with a supernatural being? I had not processed that yet. I wasn't sure what we were facing. Perhaps I didn't want to believe what was happening. I continued to argue. At that point, the voice told me—in front of my associate and an elder, about something I had done years before. It was a shameful act. So shameful, I had not told anyone, not ever. No one on this earth knew what I did. I knew I had been forgiven. I had almost forgotten about it. How could this be? I was embarrassed, way out of my comfort zone. I was definitely not equipped to deal with this.

This encounter with "whatever" was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was frightening, and it was clear I was beyond my level of competence. As we got into the car, I thought, "It is a lot easier to talk about this in theory, in a Bible class. But, to come face-to-face with it?"

Dana needed help. I didn't know where to turn. I recalled that our neighboring Lutheran pastor, Jim, was part of the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Movement. On

the occasions when local pastors gathered, I was impressed with his spiritual depth. I gave him a call and described what happened at John and Dana's house.

He calmly replied, "It sounds like a situation that calls for a deliverance." He continued, "She is probably oppressed by a demon." I thought, "This is language I've ignored. How does he know about this?" Jim asked me to talk to John and Dana and invite them to my church office at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday. I responded, "Can't it be before that? That's two days." He said, "That is as early as I can send this lay couple over. They are out of town."

"You're sending a lay couple?" I asked, astonished. "Aren't you coming?"

Jim replied, "No, I don't need to be there. Besides, I have a counseling appointment. I have meetings the next two nights, so I'm covered up. These folks can handle it. They have a deliverance ministry. We trained them years ago. They have a lot of experience. They have handled this ministry for a long time."

I was speechless. I made the appointment with John, to bring Dana, to my office. The couple from Jim's church came early, and we met and talked before John and Dana arrived. They were an older couple. They didn't look like a "deliverance" ministry team at all. I'm not sure what I expected. They were lifelong Lutherans. Really? They were calm. I was not. But I tried not to show it.

When John and Dana arrived, Dana seemed to be herself, talking in her normal voice. She had no recollection of what the voice said at their house. It was like it never happened. The lay couple from Jim's church asked Dana a few questions and then asked her if they could pray. When they mentioned "Jesus Christ," Dana's looks changed, and so did her voice. The couple remained calm. They prayed in the name of Jesus. They ordered the demon out. They kept praying in the name of Jesus. Dana made a coughing type noise and, according to the couple, she was delivered.

They asked Dana to read the Bible every day and told John to keep her around Christians. Dana was compliant, but she showed no evidence of knowing what happened. They gave John a business card with the name of a Christian counselor. They gave one also to me and told me to go with them. After John and Dana left, the couple talked with me for a few minutes. They said this demon would likely return. "How would they know that?" I thought.

Three days later, we were at the counselor's office. I saw the certificate on the wall indicating that he was a certified counselor in the State of Michigan. I was a little surprised when he prayed with Dana. The voice came out again. It sounds strange, but when the voice started, the room temperature turned very cold. In a matter of seconds, I could see my breath. I have no explanation. The counselor acted as if it was "business as usual." Dana was delivered. The counselor said the demon had come back. He would see her again.

She saw the counselor three more times and then was released from his care. John kept his number, just in case. He never needed it. Dana had no further episodes. A year later, John left his job and entered the seminary. In a few years, Dana became a pastor's wife.

Belinda

My next encounter was about eight months later. A woman who attended our church made an appointment to see me. I didn't know her very well, just as a face in the crowd. We met in my office at church. She explained that her daughter, Belinda, was a resident in a mental hospital. On several occasions, Belinda tried to take her life by cutting her wrists. She had been under doctors' care for a year. Occasionally, she would have a day pass to spend time with her mother.

The mother asked if I would see Belinda. She said the doctors were not making progress. She wondered if something "spiritual" was going on with Belinda. It was then that I remembered: This woman had attended our Bible class, "The World of Evil and Supernatural Powers." The woman was curious to know whether I might help. I said I would meet with them.

A week later, Belinda and her mother arrived at my office. They sat on the couch. I pulled up a chair so I could get out from behind my desk and be a little closer. Belinda spoke normally and showed me her wrists. I saw the scars of her tortured life. Actually, she seemed quite normal, except for the scars. I asked her why she thought she cut herself. She said, "I don't really know. Sometimes it just feels like something takes control of me."

I looked straight into her eyes. With authority, I said something that takes a lot of faith: "In the name of Jesus Christ, who am I talking to?" I had seen the counselor do this. You must realize, I honestly half expected her to say, "What? My name is Belinda. What are you doing?" She did not say that. At first, she didn't say anything.

Then, a male sounding voice said, "You leave Belinda alone. She is mine! I am going to take her life." I said, "You are not! In the name of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus Christ, I demand you leave Belinda right now." Belinda's body moved with some mild contortions. I said it again, "In the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of Jesus Christ, leave Belinda right now."

Belinda's body went limp, her eyes closed. Then she opened her eyes and said, "What were you saying?" It was as if she picked up the conversation that occurred just before the deliverance. She was completely unaware that anything occurred.

I gave Belinda a modern translation of the Bible and asked her to read it. I asked her and her mother not to tell the doctors they had visited me. I asked her mother to read the Bible with Belinda when she visited the hospital. They both agreed.

Almost a month later, the mother called. The doctors had told her, “We can’t explain this, but we have come to the conclusion that Belinda is emotionally healthy. It is not necessary for her to be hospitalized any longer. She seems fine.” Belinda’s mother took her home. Belinda is living a normal life.

International Ministry

Our church continued to grow. It was unusual in my denomination for a church in the inner city to experience a turnaround, reaching out cross culturally. Some of the denominational leaders asked me to write a book. Over the next few years, I wrote several books. During that time, I spoke at several conferences and conventions. With the help of an attorney, I incorporated a not-for-profit ministry. Eventually it became Church Doctor Ministries.

The church grew more, as did Church Doctor Ministries. I could no longer split the duties. There was too much demand. Our staff at church had grown from four to thirty people. We started an inner-city grade school with attendance of two hundred and fifty. It was a connecting ministry that met a felt need among the families of our community. It served as a platform for developing relationships and, through those relationships, sharing the Gospel. It became a mechanism leading to greater church attendance and church membership—with African-American leaders in the mix of our congregation.

I chose to move on. The associate pastor took over the congregation and I took a call to a small church in Indiana. They couldn’t afford a full-time pastor and paid for my leadership half time. This meant that in the time remaining, I could write, travel, and teach, growing Church Doctor Ministries.

I was in my second year at the church in Indiana, when I received my first invitation to serve overseas. A group was planning a pastor’s conference and asked me to teach five thousand pastors in Lagos, Nigeria. My wife, Janet, was with me on this first trip. The leader of this movement in Nigeria was Uma Ukpai. Uma held an evangelistic rally before the conference. As he preached, several whole rows of people fell over, “slain in the Spirit.” I had never seen anything like that. At the end of his message, people came forward for prayer to receive Christ. He asked if anyone had a need for healing. Several more people came forward. Janet and I were seated in the front row on the platform. A mother and father brought their young daughter forward. It was obvious—she was blind. The mother said she was born blind.

Uma asked one of the American pastors to pray for the little girl to be healed. Her eyes opened and it was obvious she could see. She was looking around for the first time in her life. She reached up and touched her mother’s face. Previously, it was the only way that she had ever identified her mother. She was seeing her mother’s face for the first time in her life.

The major newspaper in Lagos is owned and operated by Muslims. The next day, there was a picture of the young girl, with the story, on the front page. The experience was like living in the Book of Acts.

On another trip, we taught pastors in Moscow, Russia. As I prayed for a young woman, she fell over. One of the American pastors who had come with me later asked me, "How did you do that?" I said, "I did not do that. I have no idea how that works."

We taught a conference a year later in Almaty, Kazakhstan. At the beginning of the conference, one of the pastors who had come with me fell over in the main lobby of the conference center. He lay on the floor for about thirty minutes. People just walked around him. Later that night at the hotel, I asked him what happened. He said, "I don't know. But I felt so peaceful. It was a wonderful experience." I asked him if he was going to report the experience to his church members at home. He smiled and said, "Probably not!"

On another trip to the former Soviet Union, our team visited a city six hours south of Moscow by train. It was Sunday, and the people there had arranged for me to preach. In those days, communism was unraveling. There was new freedom across the former Soviet Union; but the government still did not allow anyone to own property, and so, many new churches met in rented theaters. I preached, with a young Christian student from the University of Moscow serving as interpreter.

After the worship service, I asked, through my interpreter, if anyone wanted prayer for any reason. A number of people lined up. As each one approached, I asked, "What do you want prayer for?" The young man interpreted the question and then would tell me, in English, what I should pray for. On this trip, a woman named Judy from our team was assigned my prayer partner. Judy was from a Pentecostal church in northern Michigan. During this prayer time, I laid hands on the heads of people. Judy stood behind the person and put her hands on the back of the shoulders to provide silent prayer support.

The last person in line reached us for prayer about forty-five minutes after the service ended. I asked about her prayer need. The interpreter said, "She has a cold in her throat and upper chest." I put my hands on her head and prayed for her to be healed. However, when I mentioned Jesus Christ, her body jerked, and she made a guttural sound.

I said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, who am I talking to?" The voice responded in English! At that point, my young interpreter almost fainted. He had already determined that she spoke no English. Of course, that is no problem for a supernatural being. The voice said, "I am 'group.' We are many."

I said, "How many are there of you?" The voice wailed. I repeated, "How many are there of you?" The voice made a screaming sound. I said again, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I demand you to tell me, how many?" The voice said, "Nine."

I prayed and the power of Christ cast out the first one, then the second, the third, and so on. When we got to the last one, number nine, I asked, “Are you the last one?” He said, “Yes, but you can’t touch me.” I said, “You stupid demon, He who is in me is greater than you, He is the King of the universe. You are a fool. You stupid demon. You weak coward.”

Just then, the demon made the woman put her right arm into the lower part of her chest, at the bottom of her rib cage. He buried her arm to the elbow. This woman had a shirt on, and a heavy wool sweater over the shirt. I can’t explain this, of course, because there is no way to get through that sweater. But I saw it, and so did my interpreter, who seemed stunned.

Just telling this part of the story makes me uncomfortable. I know it sounds like I was hallucinating. I can’t explain it. It just happened. I said, “You stupid demon, I’m going to send you to the pit, by the power of Jesus Christ by the blood of Jesus, the Ruler of the universe....”

Her arm came out. However, then, as I was focused and praying with total focus, my hands on her head, and my eyes closed, all of a sudden my arms were stretched higher and higher, as she “got higher.” I just kept praying. Finally, the demon came out as she made a sound like vomiting, followed by a screech. Her head and body went back to its original height. Her voice returned and she looked very peaceful. She knew nothing about what happened.

I got my interpreter back on the job with a little coaxing. I asked her about her life, where she lived. She said she lived with her brother. I asked what her brother did. She said, “He is a warlock.” I asked her if she had friends in the church she could stay with. She said that she did. I suggested she move in with them immediately. She left the church building.

After I thanked the interpreter for his work, I prayed with him. Judy and I left the now empty theater and walked toward the bus. There we would meet other members of our team, who had been serving in other churches in the city. When we got away from the crowd, I asked Judy, “You had your hands on her shoulders. Did they really go up?” She said, “Absolutely.” I asked, “Did the demon stretch her, or make her levitate?” Judy said, “I had my eyes closed. I was praying so hard, I don’t even know.” I said, “Me too.” Judy said, “But I know she did something, because to keep my hands on her shoulders, I had to stretch on my tiptoes.”

Fifteen years later, I saw Judy when I was visiting some support partners for our ministry in northern Michigan. I didn’t know she was going to be there. She was invited to a dinner gathering where my support partners had gathered.

Somehow we got on the topic of the supernatural and miracles. I asked Judy, “After all these years, I wonder if I have just embellished the story and added to it. I believe it is important to be accurate. It is such a bizarre story. I want to know if the details are as you remember.” She said, “Oh yeah, that’s exactly the way it

happened. I will never forget it.” I was glad to hear that, because Judy is more of a detail person than I am. For her, it was a singular experience. I have had many such experiences around the world. It is important not to embellish or exaggerate ministry.

Ministry in the United States

In my work for Church Doctor Ministries, I have consulted with almost two thousand churches in the U.S. and Canada. They represent about seventy different denominations, networks, fellowships, independents, and nondenominational congregations. My interviews with pastors are always confidential.

In my perception, most North American Christians would be surprised by the number of deliverances and healings that occur on this continent. If my sampling is accurate, there is more of this ministry than most would imagine. In most churches, healings and deliverances are not reported in church bulletins or newsletters. They are personal ministries with individuals.

I have a theory, but it isn't original with me. I first heard it from an Anglican vicar who is a good friend of mine in the U.K. We have worked with him during the last thirteen years. We take North Americans to England to experience the revival taking place in the U.K. This vicar has a statement, a biblical worldview that reflects what I have witnessed in several countries where revivals are occurring. It represents, in my perception, Kingdom culture: “The God of the Bible is the God of today. Anything that occurred in the Bible can and does happen today.” It is my observation that this posture toward God, Scripture, and the supernatural is present wherever revival is breaking out.

Partnering in Ministry with Amerindians

John J. Babbitts, Jr.

Abstract: Outreach to the Amerindian people requires that we overcome both internal and external challenges. These challenges touch upon current conditions, matters of culture, heritage, and old wounds. It also requires that we look beyond our own contributions to be made so that our Amerindian brothers and sisters in Christ can take their rightful place in the work of God’s kingdom. This article will address what partnership should look like and the necessity of genuine reconciliation.

At the 2013 Synod Convention of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, a resolution was passed encouraging outreach to American Indians. The language of the resolution reflected Christ’s command in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20) and Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 19:19). The resolution points to the negative statistics of disproportionate and crisis levels of poverty affecting American Indians: a level at four times that national rate, as well as the problems of abuse of women and children, homelessness, physical and mental suffering, lack of access to health care and untimely death.¹

One of the great mistakes of the past has been to treat these chronic problems as single events requiring “quick-fix” situations. Such short-term activity appeals to our time-conscious society. As we look at the many needs of our Amerindian brothers and sisters, it is easy for us to think of quick and easy fixes, such as food drives and Habitat for Humanity projects. However, often the best intentioned efforts to help fail because such efforts are unable to carry over into long-term changes.²

The immediate response of many Christians to real and perceived needs is to adopt a “get in, fix it, and get out” mode. If we look at the Scriptures, Jesus offers no quick fixes, no certain aid; rather, He offers Himself.³ He enters our world to live, to walk, and to work alongside us. He meets us where we are in our need. Fixing people is God’s job.⁴ He recreates us every day in His mercy.

As Americans, we are motivated by crisis; crisis helps us prioritize. However, the list above is not a list of crisis situations. We are not dealing with natural disaster that wiped out homes and resources in a matter of minutes. The negatives listed above are chronic problems that need long-term solutions. These solutions will need to incorporate faith-based private and public involvement.⁵

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As Christians, we are called to show mercy (Lk 10:37) and compassion (Zec 7:9; 1 Pt 3:8–9). However, these are not our final destinations.⁶ It is not the goal to show mercy and be compassionate. Action must be taken. Such action must place those we serve above our need to look or feel good about our actions or merely to fulfill the letter of the Law.

When seeking to help, we must safeguard the dignity of those we are helping. Members of the tribes that we intend to assist should be involved in planning from the idea stage. It would help to make clear our intentions not to impose anything upon the Amerindian people, but to partner with them as equals.

For example, in a recent document, the Nuu-chah-nulth felt compelled to emphasize to the Canadian Government that they would be the final determiner of what development was best for their people and the environment. Having members of the tribe we seek to assist involved from the beginning should communicate that such a declaration is unnecessary.⁷

The Amerindians are not charity cases, nor do they wish to be perceived as such. The Amerindian people should not be perceived as the sum total of their need.⁸ They are proud members of their tribe and wish to partner in contributing to improving the situation of their people and to the work of the body of Christ. They are a people who for five hundred years have sought to find a cultural identity and recognition in the body of Christ.^{9 10} It is hurtful to the proclamation of the Gospel when, with the best of intentions and Christian love, we rush in like a parent fixing a toddler's mistake and do not guard the dignity of those we seek to help.

If we look from Jesus' perspective, which of us is not poor? Which of us is not in need of aid? Yet Christ did not overcome our suffering but shared it with us. He did not seek to eliminate all sorrow, but descended into it, becoming a Man of Sorrows (Is 53:3) among us. He did not only raise Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:43), but wept (Jn 11:35) with Mary and Martha and all the other mourners before showing Himself to be the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25).

A "take-charge, quick-fix" mentality can lead to additional barriers. For example, Christ may be perceived as the God of people of European descent rather than the one true God of all people. Age-old animosities may surface in ways that would sabotage well-intended efforts to aid.

Solomon warns us "By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom" (Prov 13:14 ESV).

As written, the Synod resolution places us in the role of a superior over an inferior seemingly helpless people. If we are to help to any extent, we will need to become partners in ministry, not counting ourselves greater than those we wish to serve (Col 3:13).

Becoming partners in ministry will mean that we need to work side by side, offering plans, opportunities, and making resources available, not doing for others what they can do for themselves. The goal will be development so that they are able to reach the full capacity of their strengths as a people and effect a long term solution

to their challenges.¹¹ Such effort will require us to commit ourselves to involvement for an extended period of time, at least a ten-year period, in order that we may obtain meaningful measurable results.¹²

For this activity to be successful, leaders of our efforts and leaders of the Amerindian tribes with whom we work must be committed to outcomes, not just activity.¹³

To unleash the potential of the ministry, questions will need to be posed and answered: Who in the community are the producers? From where does the energy and passion of the community emanate so that others will be motivated?¹⁴ What are the assets of the community?¹⁵

“The poor, no matter how destitute, have enormous untapped capacity; find it, be inspired by it and build upon it.”¹⁶

It may also be necessary, because of historical and politically charged circumstances, to create a Community Oversight Committee, a board of individuals active in the community who would serve on a rotating basis to keep the members of the ministry efforts apprised of needs and issues that prove most important as time progresses. Such an oversight committee would serve to give the ministry efforts a transparency that should help to build trust. The committee would serve only in an advisory role to help keep the ministry current on tribal needs and would have no power to make decisions for the church or decide matters related to doctrine.¹⁷

Just as the Amerindians are not to be regarded as a sum of their needs, it will be necessary as well to communicate that God is not a sum of His provisions, so that we may move the Amerindians into a relationship of God’s presence.¹⁸ Most Amerindians have a fear of the spirit world rather than a faith in it.^{19 20} Through our words and actions, we need to communicate the loving God through whom His messengers have taught us to have no fear concerning Him because His perfect love drives out all fear (1 Jn 4:18).

Working from within also needs to be encouraged with a tribe so that native leaders are raised up and equipped to share the Gospel within the tribe in culturally appropriate ways. The church needs to be rooted in the community. Raising up indigenous leaders will help establish this community rootedness.²¹ History is replete with examples of outsiders who have done this successfully, and so it is not to suggest that the Holy Spirit cannot work through an outsider. However, when dealing with Amerindian tribes, we must evaluate the approach of those missionaries who have gone before us to a particular tribe if we are to understand the importance of this principle.

Historically, in some instances missionaries gave Amerindians a choice of being who and what they are, Amerindians, or being “Christian.” Some tribes were taught they could not be both. One can only imagine how European History might be different had St. Patrick told the Irish they had to choose between being Irish or Christian or had St. Boniface made the Germanic tribes choose between being German or Christian. Instead, these early missionaries challenged the pagan, druid

beliefs and practices that they encountered. Had they had insisted on the people's making choices between their family or tribal heritage and their faith, many of us would not know of Christ to this day.

The Amerindian tribes that wrestle with this type of misguided teaching seek a resolution that enables them to be both members of their tribes and Christians at the same time. Some Amerindians are finding their answer in forming bi-cultural identities in which they preserve a traditional Amerindian worldview but develop the necessary skills to be successful in the American mainstream society. This should not be mistaken either as a renunciation of their tribal or cultural heritage or as syncretistic Christian belief and practice. When missionaries have mistaken cultural art, such as the totem pole, for false religions, it has led to a situation that is fertile soil for these tribes to continue to be alienated from the one true God.²²

While addressing these mistaken efforts by previous missionaries, we must be careful not to apologize for their failings in a way that suggests we ourselves are not making mistakes today. While admitting that mistakes were made and explaining those mistakes within the historical context of those who made them, we may begin the process of healing. The hope and expectation is that this approach will open the doors to Amerindians forming a new bi-cultural identity²³ that includes their Christian faith, knowledge, and discipleship, as well as celebration and affirmation of their cultural identity.

We also need to recognize the fact that culture and language are never static; culture and language constantly change. To bemoan or attempt to prevent changes that are based on necessity or to try to preserve or re-establish a culture that no longer exists, or may never have existed except in the public mind, would be foolhardy.

For example, consider the loss of the culture of the hunter-gatherer tribes of southern Texas. These tribes²⁴ faced extermination. Their members accepted the invitation of the Franciscan Friars to build and enter a walled mission where they became Christians. They learned new skills and survived. Some find the loss of their nomadic way of life and unique tribal culture as tragic. Yet, from these necessary changes for survival, a new culture and a new people were formed as tribesman and Spaniards were combined into one community.^{25 26}

When seeking to understand barriers to outreach, we must begin by confronting a number of issues that originate with ourselves before we reach out to our Amerindian brothers and sisters. Most important, we must ask why are we reaching out to them? We reach out because Jesus calls us to share His love with our brothers and sisters of all tribes so that they may become His children, knowing and confessing the one true God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The goal of reaching out is not to help them to become more like us. Nor can our motive be our own need to feel good about ourselves and our efforts.

As children of faith and those under Christ's great commission, we are compelled to share that faith. Amos (Am 3:18) and Paul are among those who

attested to their compelling role of speaking God's word: "For if I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

Amerindian children today are seeking to discover who they are culturally based on their heritage.²⁷ Culture without a link to God is dead and empty.²⁸ However, many of the original practices have been forgotten, and traditions are being borrowed from the heritage of other tribes, creating a "pan-Indian" expression.²⁹ In other cases, rituals and traditions are being created that never existed as expressions of the original beliefs.

One of these new "traditions" is to burn the clothes and possessions of a person one year after his/her death. The reason this act was done originally was to prevent the spread of disease and was performed immediately after the death of the individual.³⁰ Today it is morphing into a new religious ritual.

Jesus needs to be part of new identity formation. He calls all people to an identity in His life, love, death, forgiveness and resurrection.

As Amerindians seek a new bi-cultural identity it is important to note that in social identity formation a person seeks an identity in connection with a group that has a positive connotation.³¹ Henri Tajfel, a British social psychologist, argued that "social groups are needed to establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups to provide their members with a positive social identity."³² The terms "Christianity" and "Christian" in the minds of many Amerindians have negative connotations. This is especially the case as more stories of horror and abuse committed by "Christians" surface.³³ As a result of such offenses, and to avoid the negative baggage associated with Christians and Christianity, many Amerindians prefer to call following Christ the "Jesus Way."³⁴

In Acts 9:2, "followers of The Way" is the term used for the Early Church. As a church body proud of our heritage, striving to stay true to the pure unadulterated Gospel, this may make us uncomfortable. Some may even fear such terminology to be a means by which doctrine and scriptural teaching might be compromised. However, it is almost certain that if we get hung up on the semantics we will fail to achieve the purpose for which Christ has put our church body in this mission context.

Pride in the heritage of our church body can also become a stumbling block. Denominational elitism has caused confusion during past efforts at outreach as each missionary declared the only way to heaven to be through his religious body's belief and practice.³⁵ It was simply not good enough to follow Christ as His disciple and accept a biblical worldview. Instead it was proclaimed that only by accepting the professed tenets of truth as communicated by the latest denomination could one be redeemed. Some Amerindians would turn away because of this apparent squabbling amongst the different members of the Body of Christ³⁶.

To be a partner in ministry also means we must be prepared to welcome our Amerindian brothers and sisters to work alongside us to help us with our needs and in our mission context.

An example of cultural elitism can be seen in the life of Spokane Gary. The son of a Spokane Indian Chief, Gary was voluntarily sent to an Episcopal school for theological training. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was able to bring many of his tribe to Christ. Among his efforts Gary was instrumental in translating the Lord's Prayer and the Bible into his people's native language.³⁷

When more settlers moved into closer proximity with the tribe, greater levels of temptation accompanied them. Sensing a need for a revival effort Gary requested help from the church. The church sent a Rev. Burnett, whose first acts were to purchase land and plant crops on Amerindian land. The appointment of Bennett proved to be a disaster, and Gary never again asked for help from the church body.³⁸ Burnett assumed himself superior to those he was sent to help.

Our Lord's Amerindian disciples may prove not only to be the most successful at reaching members of their own tribes but may prove to be the greatest evangelistic force in Christ's body of believers to reach those involved in Eastern religions, Wicca, druidism and extreme environmental movements.³⁹ Many New Age and Neopagan leaders have been drawing upon Amerindian rituals and beliefs and teaching them to their followers. Through the Amerindian teachings and rituals, these leaders try and help people pursue enlightenment for their spirit and a unity with the earth.⁴⁰ Neo-Wiccans also practice integrating Amerindian sweat lodge sessions⁴¹, totem animals and vision quests⁴² into their rituals and beliefs. Often however though these groups adopt these aspects of Amerindian practices as their own, they are ignorant of the meanings behind them.⁴³ An Amerindian of the Jesus Way would be able to speak with an authority concerning these appropriations from their culture and lead the misguided followers of these leaders to Christ in a way someone outside those communities never could.

Another barrier is found in the distinction between a "collective identity" and an emphasis on the individual. Every Amerindian is an American. But Americans who are descended from many other nations will never be able to become Amerindian because they do not have the blood line. To the ear of a person outside the blood line, the corporate identity of the tribe in saying "my people" reminds us that we are forever outsiders, and this distinction may seem offensive though it is not intended to be. This identity issue can be overcome in Christ as fellow believers experience joy at the approach of another member of the body, regardless of bloodline, ethnicity, or past history.

Before any of these efforts take place it is necessary to deal with the centuries of pain that separate us. Tears create a cleansing and a bridge between sorrow and joy.⁴⁴

Our Lord commanded that if our brother has any complaint against us before we are to present our offering at the altar, first we must go and be reconciled with our brother (Mt 5:23–24). At no point does Christ clarify this by saying the complaint must be legitimate or justified.⁴⁵

"When the heart is filled with racial, cultural, ideological or denominational strife, there is little room in the heart to hold love, honor, respect and admiration for

those different from us; we certainly find it difficult to recognize and admit our need for them.”⁴⁶

Emotions infested with sin can cause physical, mental, and emotional pain to those that harbor them.⁴⁷ This is also attested to in the Scriptures: “A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones” (Prov 14:30).

The Scriptures attest to both the benefits and downfalls of not reconciling. In Acts 9, we see Paul reconciling with the apostles as Barnabas vouches for the truth of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:27–28). God had called Paul to his service (Acts 9:3–6). Because Paul had the reputation of persecuting and killing followers of Christ, there was fear and hesitation in meeting him (Acts 9:13–14).

In Genesis, we have the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers. The reconciliation between Jacob and Esau is as much a story of reconciliation between two brothers as it is between two peoples soon to become nations. When Esau sees Jacob, he falls on his neck, kisses Jacob and weeps. Tears show the genuine forgiveness that has occurred in Esau’s heart. In Genesis 33:4, “Although hypocrites can simulate love, nevertheless, both the gestures and the individual words indicate that there were burning emotions in both of them, and that Esau’s heart was truly appeased and reconciled.”⁴⁸

In the story of Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers (Gn 45:2), we see Joseph weeping as well as he reveals himself to his brothers. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that he wept so loudly that Pharaoh and the Egyptians heard the sobs.

These accounts from the Scriptures show us the powerful impact of forgiveness and the cleansing power of tears to bridge the journey from hurt to joy. Tears can make us uncomfortable. We may even try to deny their place in the reconciliation process in our attempts to comfort those hurting. Often we believe that if we are able to control our tears we are able to control the pain. Getting that pain out is necessary if we are to move forward.

Not being reconciled can have disastrous results, as can be seen in the relationship of David and his son Absalom. David spares Absalom’s life (2 Sam 14:2), though Absalom has killed his brother (2 Sam 13:23–29). However, David says that he does not want to see Absalom at first (2 Sam 14:24), and David does not restore Absalom’s rank as prince, in spite of the fact that with Ammon’s murder Absalom is still to be considered David’s heir to the throne.

Time and a clever deception soften David’s position, and he agrees to meet with Absalom. Although Absalom bows before the king and David kisses Absalom’s neck, the pain remains. The reconciliation seems to have been mainly ceremonial. Unhappy with his father’s slowness to declare him the official heir, Absalom decides to take by force what he feels his father should have given him already. Absalom will show an official and complete break with his father during his rebellion. From these examples we see the importance of genuine reconciliation, as well as the consequences of failure to reconcile.

Ultimately, God shows us the importance of reconciliation in Jesus, though we

were the offenders and cause of the broken relationship.

In the Amerindian context, we see that it is necessary to identify the issues that challenge Gospel outreach and pluck them out of the politically and historically charged atmosphere surrounding them in order to take advantage of the current opportunity to bring the message of the Good News. Broken treaties between the United States government and the tribal leaders in which both sides contend the other broke the treaty have consequences for our work.⁴⁹ In addition, the attitude that becoming Christian means becoming culturally and in appearance more like the missionaries has caused damage as well. Both Amerindians and people of European descent have spoken of being treated condescendingly by the other. Communicating the Gospel without a genuine reconciliation will only appear as empty words.

It is difficult for such a reconciliation to occur and have the need authenticity from native-born Americans whose European ancestors may never have seen an Amerindian. A painful history remains a huge obstacle.

God has provided the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with a unique bridge to break down this barrier in the person of Synod President Matthew Harrison. He has a unique opportunity to bring powerful healing. In his comments before the United States Congress, Harrison noted that he has ancestors who fought in the American Revolution, served with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and in the Civil War.⁵⁰

In 2003 a collection of essays was written for the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, all of them by Amerindian authors. The viewpoints vary from dismissive to proud. For example, Sacajawea was portrayed by one author as a traitor and by two tribes both anxious to claim the honor of her as a member. A couple essays view the Lewis and Clark expedition as the fulfillment of an Amerindian prophecy. It was also noted that it took less than fifty years to “progress” from the announcement of United States ownership of the Louisiana territory to Amerindians living on reservations. The arrival of the Corp of Discovery was the first herald that the way of life that many of the western tribes knew was coming to an end. The Lewis and Clark expedition, therefore, regardless of how the members themselves interacted with the tribes they met and regardless of the relationships that the members of the expedition built, marks an important turning point in the Amerindian fortunes.

Will the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today take a God-given opportunity to lead a time of reconciliation, asking forgiveness for past mistakes of the Christian community, of which we as Christians and citizens the nation are a part⁵¹, and to receive at the same, a confession and admission of mistakes from the Amerindian communities?⁵² Doors would swing wide open, allowing the Holy Spirit to dispel the pain, the anger, and the bitterness that exists in many a wounded Amerindian heart.

We live at a pivotal moment in mission history—a time of opportunity to reach the Amerindian while many are forming a bi-cultural identity. It is a time to call every tribe and First Nation people to embrace Christ as part of that bi-cultural

identity. With Christ at the center of that formation, Amerindians—whose cultures/religions have historically recognized strong spirit forces—may become a vital evangelistic bridge and force to reach those involved in Eastern religions, Wicca, Druidism, and extreme environmental movements. As we work toward a mutual confession of offences and creating a partnership in Christ, the Holy Spirit will bring healing between people groups and reconciliation between all people groups and the Father, for which Jesus has already paid the full reconciliation price.

Endnotes

¹ Resolution 1-14 “2013 Convention Proceedings.” Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, July 2013. Web. Jan. 2014. To Advance Native American Ministry Resolution 1-14, 105–106.

² Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 6.

³ Michael Card, *The Hidden Face of God: Finding the Missing Door to the Father through Lament* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷ On September 11, 2014, the Nuu-chah-nulth delivered a message to the Canadian Government in which they stated “Each and every Nuu-chah-nulth Nation has the independent sovereign authority to decide which projects in their territories they will support or reject, balancing economic needs with their responsibilities to the people and the environment.” It would be wise for us to apply this to our efforts before the tribe feels the need to inform us of it.

⁸ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (S.l.: Readhowyouwant.com, 2012), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ The approaching five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation brings home for us as Lutherans just how long a struggle this has been for the Amerindian people.

¹¹ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 167.

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷ James D. Buckman, *I pray* (Bridgewater: Church beyond Walls, 2013), 80. “Another great opportunity exists if you will be intentional about connecting with the pillars of your community (your mayor, public school superintendent, local TV, radio and newspaper reporters, business owners, celebrities, notable retirees, the police chief, etc). It is perfectly appropriate for a Pastor to set an appointment with these pillars, the purpose of this visit would be to encourage these public servants in their tasks; learn about their vision and hopes as well as the current challenges they face. . . . It is common for this special guest to offer resources to help you in this shared work.”

¹⁸ Michael Card, *The Hidden Face of God*, 49.

¹⁹ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 103.

²⁰ Debra Magpie Earling describes spirits rapping on her window, knocking on the walls above her bed and a fiery spirit walking down the Missouri river (Alvin M. Josephy and Marc Jaffe, *Lewis and Clark through Indian Eyes* [New York: Knopf, 2006], 25–48).

²¹ Alan Roxburgh, *Moving Back into the Neighborhood The Workbook*, 1st edition (West Vancouver, BC: Roxburgh Missional Network, 2010), 9.

²² Totems were seen as pagan worship by missionaries were symbols of family (David Sternbeck, telephone interview, Dec. 23, 2013. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have informally interviewed and asked clarifying questions of LCMS Pastor Rev. David Sternbeck who was able to help me understand cultural and ministry issues from an insider's point of view.).

²³ Michael Tlanusta Garrett, "'Two People': An American Indian Narrative of Bicultural Identity," *Journal of Indian Education*, 36, no.1 (Fall 1996), <http://jaie.asu.edu/v36/V36S1pt1.htm>.

²⁴ These tribes are identified as the Aranama, Arbadao, Cacaxtle, Cotzal, Juanae, Katuhano, Pachal, Palache, Pampoia, Pantaya, Queven, Sullajam, and Tamaqua. (*Gente De Razon*, directed by John Gralsowska [1997], DVD. This film, which won the George Sidney Independent Film Competition, is shown by the National Park Service at the San Antonio Missions National Historic Park in San Antonio, Texas.)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ This was not a case of forced assimilation.

²⁷ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁹ Marsha Bol, *Stars Above, Earth Below: American Indians and Nature* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rhinehart for Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 1998), 42.

³⁰ Sternbeck, telephone interview, Dec. 23, 2013.

³¹ Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. (London: Routledge, 1999), X.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Mohawk Nation News published an article on April 26, 2013, in which they accuse the Canadian government, the Vatican, and the Crown of England of exterminating 50,000 first nation children and burying them in mass graves. These graves were then covered with plants and trees. (Kahntineta. "Mohawk Nation News Service." *Mohawk Nation News Service*. Kahntineta, 26 Apr. 2013. Web. 27 Sept. 2014.) It is not in the scope of this study to evaluate the truth of such claims. Whether we accept them of being true or not, these alleged actions serve to separate Christ from the Amerindian people.

³⁴ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁶ James M. Kaiser, "William Loehe and The Chippewa Outreach at Frankenmuth" *Missio Apostolica* 22, no.1 (May 2014), 81, "Instead of cooperation, there was competition between the Lutheran outreach to the Native Americans and that being done by the Methodists. This often lead to one side criticizing the other in the attempt to influence the Native Americans.

³⁷ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 148.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 206. Twiss writes "The New Age movement has really latched on to Native spirituality. In any New Age store today you will find all types of Native articles of clothing,

herbs, and items used for traditional ceremonies. There are music tapes, pipes, ceremonial objects and even Indian tarot cards.”

⁴⁰ Nancy Butterfield, “New Age Movement Stealing American Indian Ceremonies,” Editorial. *Seattle Times* 07 Apr. 1990: <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19900407&slug=1065168>, 17 Jan. 2015.

⁴¹ A structure in which a person is caused to “sweat” the impurities in body and soul away.

⁴² A spiritual coming of age event in which the person determines what their purpose on the earth is.

⁴³ Patti Wigington, “Native American Spirituality.” About.com, n.d. 18 Jan. 2015.

⁴⁴ Michael Card, *The Hidden Face of God*, 29.

⁴⁵ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 148.

⁴⁶ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 49.

⁴⁷ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 149.

⁴⁸ Martin Luther, American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 6 Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31–37* (1542–44), eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia House, 1970), 164.

⁴⁹ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, “The breaking of treaties, or covenants, has caused a huge chasm of distrust and great animosity in the hearts of Native people toward Whites,” 177.

⁵⁰ Matthew C. Harrison, “Transcript of LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison’s Feb. 16 Testimony before the House Committee on Government and Oversight.” Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, n.d. Web. 23 Jan. 2014.

⁵¹ Frieder Ludwig, “Mission and Migration: Reflections on the Missionary Concept of Wilhelm Lohe,” *Word & World* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 159. Speaking about Lohe, Ludwig writes “He expressed the thought that even if Lutherans had not participated in these activities, they should still accept responsibility for what their protestant brethren had done.”

⁵² Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 165. “As Native people we must also own up to the fact that our people committed many heinous acts of violence against innocent white settlers and homesteaders.”

Spirits and Spiritism among the LDS

Phillip L. Brandt

Abstract: Despite being the product of post-Enlightenment culture and rooted in the industrialized West, the LDS tradition has retained significant space within its piety for practices and sensibilities which admit a spiritual realm which has a direct impact upon the person. The author, through personal reflection and experiences, seeks to introduce the reader to LDS approaches to that spirit realm and the consequences of those approaches. The article focuses primarily on experiences with LDS individuals with whom he came into contact during a decade of pastoral service in Utah and subsequently as a professor of Theology at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon.

Any time one reads a paper about the Latter Day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, one must first ask a methodological question of the author, especially when it is penned by a Lutheran. The methodological question arises from a fundamental fact about the LDS. The LDS are almost completely non-doctrinal. Where most Lutherans understand themselves and just about everyone else through a lens of doctrine, the LDS are most appropriately defined less by doctrines than by practices. While it is true that practice and doctrine are intricately connected, one can extract doctrine from practice. It is also certain that the stated doctrines of the LDS church may have very little to do with the religion of an LDS individual.

This truth leads to the methodological question. Most of the articles and books I have read about Mormonism attempt what is best described as an exposé of the many peculiar LDS tenets of the faith. With lurid glee, they pull the curtain back upon the secret things of Mormonism: pre-existence as a spirit child of Heavenly Father, plural marriage, multiple levels of heaven, and the idea that Jesus came to preach to the descendants of a Jewish prophet (Nephites) in Central America two thousand years ago, just to name a few. There is an entire cottage industry of Christian

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ministries that will bring a knowledgeable presenter to a congregation to lead workshops with the goal of educating Christians about these LDS beliefs, thus “equipping” the flock to rescue these benighted souls from the “maze of error.”¹

The quotes should suggest that I do not find this approach terribly useful. As with many religious people, most LDS do not actually know that much about what their church teaches and for the most part they are not terribly concerned about it. Christians who argue from the basis of official church doctrine are perplexed by the indifferent shrugs that are the only response to their exposing these things to their LDS friends and neighbors.² These LDS did not join the church because they agreed with the doctrine. They are LDS because of practices.

Any fruitful discussion of LDS beliefs needs to be rooted in practice and conversation with Mormons themselves. While this is simply good methodology in any discussion of the adherents of another religion, I have found it to be especially important when talking about the LDS. Exploring the rich trove of peculiar ideas to which the LDS Church has subscribed at various times simply is not useful, nor does it offer an accurate picture of the folks who gather in the LDS Ward³ down the street in your city.

Another distinction needs to be made when talking about LDS practice and belief. There is a significant difference between the LDS believer who has been born, reared, and lived inside LDS-dominated communities and those who have either converted to the LDS faith or been shaped by extensive exposure to non-LDS communities. The LDS community numerically dominates a significant swath of the intermountain West within the U.S. (Utah, extending into Nevada, Idaho, Arizona, and Wyoming). These communities are further isolated by the vast expanses of desert which make up the Great Basin. Provo, the Cache Valley, even Salt Lake City residents must drive upwards of six or seven hours to encounter a sizeable non-LDS community. This has produced something of a religious ghetto. Reinforced by a preponderance of coreligionists and durable practices, the LDS faith offers the adherent a comprehensive lens through which one can see the whole world, even those non-Mormon elements that come through television and computer screens. If they do not have extensive experience outside this community, these LDS often have a significantly different view of the world than their coreligionists who have lived outside of what they call “Zion.” My experience with those who live outside of these LDS-dominated communities suggests that the comprehensive lens of the LDS faith has largely been superseded by the general post-enlightenment attitude toward spirits that dominates much of American Protestantism. My LDS students at Concordia University, Portland, will occasionally manifest the markers of the LDS from Utah, but most of them are indistinguishable from their classmates in this regard.

This paper will largely focus on the beliefs of LDS who live inside the community dominated by the LDS Church. My experiences have been both with current and devout LDS individuals and with those who had opted to leave the LDS faith and become members of the parish I served in Utah.

The issue of spirits in the LDS became a matter of interest to me shortly after my arrival in Utah in 1991. My neighbor was himself an adult convert to Mormonism. A World War II veteran from Arkansas, he had joined the LDS church in the course of his military service. He had come to Utah and married a lifelong LDS member and Utah native. He pursued higher education and was a professor on the faculty at the University of Utah. Well respected in his community for both his intellect and wisdom, he had served as the Bishop of the local Ward but was now spending his retirement years volunteering in the local LDS temple. An open and truly decent man, he was unfailingly charitable and kind to me, the young Lutheran pastor who lived next door.

His wife, however, was a different story. The only word to describe her expression when we bumped into each other at the flower bed near our property line was terror. She was willing to talk to my wife, but would flee inside the house whenever I was around. It was my wife, ever more observant than me, who noticed this first. Once alerted to it, I began to notice it in others who knew that I was a Christian pastor. The conversation would be quickly and not always politely ended, and the person would seek a speedy exit. The behavior was primarily observed among older, lifelong, and devout LDS.

A member of my parish, who was a convert from Mormonism, explained this to me. The LDS rites within the temple had for many years included the assertion that all Christian clergy were agents of Satan. This oath, which had been part of the ceremony spoken upon entering a temple, had been changed only about fifteen years before I arrived in Utah. My neighbor's reaction to me was not personal; it was because I embodied something of which she was afraid.

We eventually became friends with our neighbor's wife. She and my wife got along well, although I am not sure she ever lost her discomfort with me. We even convinced her to join her husband and come to our home for an open house after our first child was born. While her husband had been in our home several times, it was the first time she had ever set foot in the parsonage near which she had lived for decades. It was not easy for her. My wife and I both noted her reactions after the event. She believed that she was not merely walking into the home of her young neighbors who wanted to show off their new baby to friends but she was walking into a place of spiritual danger for herself. She was very uncomfortable. We both regretted not bringing our child to her home instead.

The LDS have a number of very interesting and, for many ears, odd beliefs about the spirit world. But even more remarkable is that for a post-enlightenment and thoroughly Western community, spirits are remarkably vivid and real for people like my neighbor. While LDS scriptures frequently relate divine messengers, angels, who visited faithful adherents of Heavenly Father (the LDS term most often used for God), these angels do not seem to occupy a significant role in the spirituality of the average LDS. The spirits present in the LDS world are of another sort entirely. They are the source of great fear. It will be interesting for this author to compare his experiences with the LDS attitudes about spirits with the experiences of those authors whose missionary service brought them to communities that are not situated in the post-enlightenment, industrialized West. I suspect that many similar manifestations will be observed.

LDS cosmogony and cosmology suggest that this world is the creation of Heavenly Father, who created it as a place for his many spirit children to gain a corporeal body in order that they might progress to the next levels of being. But before the world was created, a dispute arose among the spirit-children of Heavenly Father. Those who followed the eldest, Jesus—about one third of the spirit children—fought a war against those who followed the next eldest child of Heavenly Father, Lucifer, again about a third. The remaining third took no sides.

While this teaching has been muted of late, early LDS teachings suggested that one could see how valiant the person had been in the pre-corporeal battle against Lucifer by the fairness of the skin. The fairer or lighter the complexion the more valiant the warrior. The spirit children who fought for Lucifer were denied the privilege of gaining a physical body and they became the evil spirits, often called demons, who would always work against the wishes and plans of Jesus and his followers. Tormented by their lack of a body, they are seen to be hostile and constantly seeking to thwart the progression of the children of Heavenly Father to their heavenly goal, preferably the celestial heaven in which the faithful may achieve godhood themselves. Lucifer, also known as Satan, is the primary actor, but he has many servants still. In LDS afterlife, almost no one goes to any sort of hell, but apostate Mormons and demons do. The demonic attack has serious consequences in the minds of LDS faithful.

The LDS rely upon a number of defenses against these demonic forces. They count on Holy Spirit and Holy Ghost, who are in their theology understood to be two different beings. But the most important protection is afforded by temple garments. These are special undergarments into which are woven various symbols. Extending to the mid-thigh and past the shoulder, these garments are the reason the BYU dress code stipulates that all shorts must reach the knee and shirt sleeves must reach the elbow. While this practice is partly attributable to a sense of modesty, it is also the

case that these sacred garments are not to be worn in a way that unbelievers could see them. Granted to those who have earned a temple recommendation from the Stake president, the garments are believed by many pious Mormons to provide substantive protection. One of the parishioners of the congregation I served had grown up as a Mormon and told of bathing her elderly aunt, who insisted that one foot always be outside the tub and her temple garment still about her ankle. When the other foot was washed, she would extend it outside the tub and pull her new set of garments over that ankle before removing the old garments so that she could wash that leg. She was unwilling to be exposed for a moment, even while bathing, without that protection.

If invited into a pious LDS home, one may also notice several other features. Most notable will be a large picture of the local temple prominently displayed near the entrance. One might also note the absence of a cross anywhere in the home. When someone converts to Mormonism, faithful members of the community will come and strip out all the crosses from the home. When living in Utah, I noticed that LDS folk frequently were made uncomfortable by the presence of a cross. Again, my former LDS parishioners helped me understand this. They spoke of the picture of a temple and the absence of a cross as more than simple aesthetic sensibility or a loyalty to a brand or movement. The picture of the temple marked the home as a spiritually safe place and in part conveyed that security. It functioned as a talisman. Crosses, on the other hand, were more than a symbol of Christianity, a religion from which Mormons initially sought to distance themselves. The cross was viewed far more negatively as part of the corruption of the church after the death of the original apostles, a corruption which would only be expunged upon the restoration of the true church through the revelation granted to Joseph Smith. The cross embodied the work of evil forces.

One more experience bears on this subject. In large part, this article is built on the education of a young pastor. As one who had grown up in a traditional LCMS parsonage, I had been told that Jesus truly did cast out demons long ago. I was sure that demons were real, but I only understood them to be an element of the distant past recounted in my New Testament. I had never lived in visceral fear of the demonic.⁴ Demons occupied a safe distance from my own world, or at least I thought so. My world was not one in which a person was truly and personally threatened by spirits.

I have also come to understand conversion to be more than a single point in time in which a person becomes a believer. Growing up and throughout my time in the seminary, I had operated with an assumption that conversion was primarily an intellectual event, a changing of the mind. Indeed, conversion is God's saving act but how often it is followed by daily struggle and repentance. The grace of God must

percolate through a human being, and that can take years before it brings a true and lasting peace to a person. Indeed, on this side of heaven, we remain in a struggle between the old man and the new man (Romans 7).

Upon arrival at my first parish, I was introduced to a couple. The man was a rare lifelong Utah Lutheran. His wife was a recent convert from Mormonism and, like many recent converts, was at times somewhat strident in her rejection of the LDS, feeling that she had narrowly escaped something terrible. The next years of our pastoral relationship were, in retrospect, a speedy re-education of this young pastor. Distraught, this young woman would regularly call me and another pastor who had served the vacancy prior to my arrival. These were often long conversations, filled with much emotion. At times, she seemed to be emotionally and mentally disintegrating before our very eyes.

Many would have concluded from these conversations that she was mentally or emotionally unstable, a candidate for psychiatric care. While I cannot absolutely deny this, she asserted that her spirit was under some sort of attack. She had been quite active in the LDS church, undergoing, by her own admission, hundreds of baptisms on behalf of the dead.⁵ Members of her large and extended family were to various degrees actively Mormon. Through the course of some continuing education that forced her to reevaluate some elements of her self-conception, her crisis seemed to be coming to head.

It took a great deal of time for the message of grace to take root in all the corners of her life. She never seriously wanted to go back to Mormonism, but a significant pressure was being exerted upon her to reject grace as a possibility. Again and again, we would come back to this in our conversations. Her unworthiness and failures seemingly could not be expunged. I must admit that my initial attempts to deal with this were pathetically inadequate. I assumed that this was an intellectual question for which my Lutheran Confessions and doctrinal preparation had an answer. I supposed that the pressure was purely internal, a matter of not being convinced. I had never been seriously prepared for someone to claim demonic oppression in all seriousness to me. In retrospect, my response to her was pastorally inadequate. Fortunately for her, she had married into a family that knew and practiced unconditional love. Fortunately for her, Christ had made a promise to her in her Baptism that did not depend solely on me to keep.

I am not able to say whether hers was a demonic oppression or something else. Even with some distance from the event and time to consider and pray about it, I am not sure. I am sure that she felt at the time that it was a spiritual battle in which she was engaged and not a mental illness. She believed that she was the object of a personal and malice-filled activity.

One subsequent observation suggests that her estimation of this event was accurate. The peace and obvious joy which I have seen in her subsequently suggests that this period in her life was episodic and not chronic, as most mental afflictions tend to be. I am delighted that she has come to a place of much greater peace and stability.

There are several conclusions one might draw from these anecdotal experiences. All of them need to be recognized for what they are: conclusions based on anecdotal experiences.

1. Within the LDS community, there is a vibrant community of people who, contrary to modern or post-enlightenment sensibilities, hold that spirits are very real and present.
2. Almost exclusively negative, these spirits are a source of fear, or at least that is how the LDS spoke of these spirits in my experience.

I would also say that the LDS church is changing in this regard. There were young people who held these beliefs, and undoubtedly there remain many who do. These beliefs were much stronger among the older members. The LDS church no longer seems to be reinforcing these ideas, either liturgically in the temple rites or through teaching.

The implications of this for ministry and mission are mixed. The nicely dressed and pleasant young men who knock on your door or walk your street while they fulfill their mission are not likely living in terror of a spirit or even thinking about such things, but I cannot rule that out. They will likely look forward to the reception of their temple garments for reasons beyond spiritual protection. Completing a mission and admission to the temple are signature marks of full participation in the LDS community.⁶ That said, the young man or woman whom you meet on a mission may be laboring under this sort of fear. My advice to all who meet these young missionaries is to realize that the missionaries themselves are the primary object of the LDS missionary program. The program is really about locking them into the LDS church. I encourage people to see an LDS missionary for what he is, a young person who is out on his own for the first time in his life, probably far from home, walking or biking all day. Do not get in a theological argument with him; rather, show Christian hospitality. Feed him, give him a glass of water or lemonade, and be kind to him. Ask about his family and what he likes to do.

More likely the individual who lives down the street from you, especially if you live in a conservative LDS-dominated community, knows this fear. See him as someone to love. Arguments have gotten me nowhere with the LDS. The first Baptism I ever performed was an old LDS man. He had been married to his Lutheran wife for over forty years at that point. It was not an argument that brought him to that

font. Her persistent, prayerful love brought him there. When I think about my own Baptism, it was no different.

Endnotes

¹ The best known of these is Utah Lighthouse Ministry founded by Gerald and Sandra Tanner of Salt Lake City.

² Perhaps the best of the resources for this approach to talking with the LDS is Mark Cares' text *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* (Northwestern Publishing, 1998).

³ The LDS are hierarchical. LDS congregations are called Wards and are overseen by an elected lay leader called a Bishop. The size of a Ward is limited, membership being split when numbers grow beyond several hundred members. Wards are established geographically, and every Mormon within a Ward is expected to be an active member of that Ward. A cluster of Wards is called a Stake. The Stake is governed by a President and two advisors, who form the Stake presidency. In Utah, where multiple Wards would meet in one building, Stakes usually comprised about eight Wards.

⁴ Growing up in the midst of a Minuteman nuclear missile cluster, I was well acquainted with things to be afraid of, but these demons would come raining down on us from above.

⁵ This is the practice within Mormonism in which the name of a deceased person is spoken over a member of the LDS church, who then undergoes a full immersion baptism on behalf of that deceased person. For many devout young people in LDS communities, many hours are dedicated to undergoing repeated baptisms for the dead.

⁶ My barber in Utah was a "Jack" Mormon, a non-attending LDS member, who had elected not to go on a mission. He lamented the difficulty he had in finding a date while attending BYU until he had faked having temple garments on under his slacks.

HMong Spiritism

Kou Seying

Abstract: At the heart of any Spiritism is suffering—a suffering without hope. Articles written about the HMong religious practices rarely touch on this aspect of life. This article exposes the central difficult issues, presents the historical problems of remedies, and finally offers a true theology of the cross approach to deal with this devastating disguise of the devil, namely HMong Spiritism.

A Description of the Problem

HMong Spiritism is as complex today as it was in history when the first Christian missionaries reached the HMong people in Asia. It varies as widely as the clans that exist in the HMong society. It is analogous to the varieties of Christian denominations. One clan, even a subgroup within a clan, will define its own Spiritism differently from another. However, there are some basic fundamental similarities of the belief system that thread all HMong Spiritism and universal Spiritism together.

Before further discussions on HMong Spiritism, it is important first to establish the primary reason for such writing as this. People who are influenced by Spiritism are afflicted, oppressed, and in constant fear. The bottom line is that they are suffering. As one woman has said, “Spiritism is like food with poison to someone who loves life.”¹

HMong Spiritism fits into the belief system of *henotheism*, including a strong element of ancestral worship. This belief system deems it important to adhere to a certain spirit or god, while recognizing the existence of others.² In the case of HMong Spiritism, it expresses itself in this way, *ib tug dlaab ib tug qhua*, “one spirit, one guest.” This strict adherence has numerous ramifications in the socio-religious-political facets of HMong society, both positively and negatively. It bonds the group together tightly in all aspects of life. At the same time, it challenges the trust and support that are essential in communal societies.

From the scriptural point of view, Spiritism is none other than one form or

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another of diabolical possession. One may speak of a universal diabolical possession that began already in the Garden of Eden; the religious diabolical possession that one sees in such a people group as the HMong; or a personal diabolical possession that afflicts an individual in a way that is recognizable by both the one that is afflicted and the loved ones that surround him or her.

What makes HMong Spiritism so complex has to do largely with the history of the HMong people as they migrated from one region to another and came under various religious influences in the Far East. Much of the influence took place over many centuries of living in China and the struggles for survival there. Therefore, there is a strong element of ancestral worship as well as a strong element of the ancient Chinese religious practices that include various Chinese gods and goddesses. There is a strong hint of pantheism as well. It embraces the strong notion of reincarnation with all the related philosophical challenges and questions that go unanswered.

One thing is clear, however. No one group within the HMong people will agree upon a set system of beliefs for HMong Spiritism. For examples, there is no agreement as to how many souls a person has, anywhere from three souls to multiple souls. There is no agreement as to how many spirits one worships with the intent of appeasement. Even within the same clan with a close adherence to the same spirit, there will be differences. For example, certain families of the same clan may claim five spirits or thirteen which they must appease. “The inconsistency or even contradiction between two sets of beliefs does not give the HMong any concern. They are interested in gaining practical benefits from the spirits, not in orthodoxy of belief.”³ The goal is magical efficacy, which is dealing almost exclusively with power encounter. If a certain ritual or shaman does not bring about the desired remedies, the HMongs are not shaken by it. They just repeat or seek another ritual or another shaman until a perceived success is achieved or the desired benefit is no longer needed.

Today in the U.S., HMong Spiritism will express itself in a variety of animistic practices and categories. The traditional religious practice of Animism remains the main practice. Various surveys over three decades of different concentrations of HMong communities throughout the U.S. consistently reveal that around 80–85% still practice the traditional religion. Other relatively recent movements that have taken root, as described by the Center for HMong Studies at Concordia University St. Paul, include *Poj Koob Yawm Ntxwv* (ancestors), which focuses on how we as human beings relate to each other. It begins with the premise that we do not believe in God, but that God believes in us. Many believe that this group venerates all mothers. Many of the elements are simply a revival of another religious practice that took place after the Vietnam War in Laos. It was called *Dlaab/Dab Caub Fab*, or

Prince of the Sky Spiritism. The New Shamanism believes in the Chinese goddess of mercy and fertility, Kuan Ying (Guan Ying). Some of the spiritists in the New Shamanism even believe that they are the reincarnated Kuan Ying. The traditional HMong animists make an offering of the first crop to this goddess also. One of the latest movements is Hmongism, which claims to be a simplified version of the traditional religion of the HMong people. On other occasions, the founder claims it to be a new religion. Many of these new movements are derivatives of the traditional beliefs and do have “cult” flavors to them. As the result, many are suffering; families are painfully divided in these religious matters.

People who are heavily involved in Spiritism will experience the following kinds of symptoms. They will say that they are crazy, *vwm*. They have sleep disorders due to the recurring of unusual dreams and/or premonitions. They feel the helpless paralytic bodily experience during sleep, *raug tsuam*. People will say that they see shadows moving. They hear voices and display fears of persecution that people are out to harm them. There are unusual numbers of suicides committed or attempted within one family. The tendency to divorce is accepted as normal by the family. Individuals have paranormal powers, such as knowing what will happen before the event occurs, *pum hab paub ua ntej lawm*. They possess astro-projections (knowing something without having studied it) or *tsi tau nyeem tsi tau kawm los tub paub has tas phoo ntawv has le caag lawm* (claiming to have encounters with extraterrestrials).

These beliefs may sound incredible, inviting a great deal of cynicism, and the Western medical establishment may simply label these symptoms or characteristics as mental illness. We are not saying that there is no mental illness among the HMong people. However, it is important not to ignore the spiritual dimensions. As incredible and skeptical as these symptoms may sound, the bottom line is that people are suffering. It is only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ with the power of His Holy Spirit that the HMong people can live above the powers of Satan.

It is of paramount importance to recognize that people who are involved in Spiritism, the occult, do not just come out of it. An individual cannot just one day decide to leave. As St. Paul states in Ephesians 6:12 (ESV), “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” It is impossible with human ability to deal with such forces of darkness and evil. This is why it is critically important that the church must be ready to be God’s instrument of deliverance and put on the whole armor of God to stand against the schemes of the devil (v. 11). It is only through the deliverance of the Lord, Jesus Christ, through the power of His Holy Spirit, that one can come out of

Spiritism, the occult, and be free to experience true peace, freedom, forgiveness, life, and real purpose.

People generally do not heed the Gospel and come to Christ unless there is a strong dissatisfaction with the way things are. This has been well documented by the Early Church scholars and missionaries who have worked and/or studied among animistic, pagan societies. It is important for Christians to recognize when people are suffering and to stand ready in a given moment of notice to step in and deliver God's Word of power. When individuals and families that are afflicted by Spiritism have come to a point of hopelessness, realizing that all animistic rituals have been exhausted, they can see that the only option left is Christ's deliverance offered in the context of His church.

“Remedies” that Introduce Their Own Problems

Various paradigms or approaches have been attempted in the history of Christian missions among the HMong people with varying degrees of effectiveness. The following are brief synopses of the three distinct paradigms that historically have been used to address HMong Spiritism:

1. Roman Catholicism—Jesuit Missionary Paradigm

This paradigm was greatly influenced by Karl Rahner's theology, which says that the Spirit of God permeates the whole universe. All religions adhere to the same Spirit, whether they realize it or not. Therefore, it is simply a matter of relabeling to the correct divine name in these religions. The Jesuit missionaries working among the HMong people took this to heart and simply retain many of the animistic rituals. This paradigm opened the way to syncretism among the HMong Catholics. Many families could not completely break from their animistic practices. Many claim to be both Catholics and Animists at the same time without any concern. A break from HMong Spiritism is nearly impossible in this paradigm.

2. The Reformed—Evangelical Paradigm

The greatest challenge with this paradigm has to do with the strong emphasis upon the response to the Gospel rather than the Gospel itself. Much of the effort focuses upon the good works, leading to the heart of Semi-Pelagianism. Although the power of God in Jesus Christ is not denied, the confusion comes as a result of the misunderstanding between the relationship of faith and good works. The burden of breaking from Spiritism rests upon both the individual's ability and the power of Christ. The power of the Gospel alone is thus compromised.

3. The Pentecostal Paradigm

When the surface Christian labels are stripped away from this paradigm, one sees clearly that it doubtlessly parallels the traditional HMong animistic practice of spiritual power manipulation. Therefore, a close look reveals that the function of the pastor/spiritual leader is no different from the role of a shaman. Highly emotional events manipulate the spiritual power, using Christian labels but functioning in the same animistic realm. This paradigm is problematic because the burden rests solely on the human being's ability to manipulate spiritual power to bring about the deliverance sought by the spiritists. It is difficult to break cleanly from Spiritism, because much remains the same and one is easily trapped by Satan. This approach is quite attractive to the animists and spiritists, since it approaches spiritual power in the same way. Therefore, avoiding making spiritual conflict into Christian magic is nearly impossible.

A Scriptural Perspective and Remedy Are Required

These three main approaches, or paradigms, to the question of addressing HMong Spiritism deserve further investigation. All three have a long history among the HMong people throughout the world. Their perceived successes and failures will provide helpful missiological insights to the all-important question of how one may approach such a penetrating issue and subject as Spiritism. Up to this point, the approaches have been, for the most part, sociological and religious rather than biblical and missional.

From the biblical and missional approach, one sees that the way of the cross, when properly applied, has all the "ingredients" to address the question of HMong Spiritism. First of all, suffering is not something that the way of the cross avoids or shies away from. It deals head-on with suffering. Spiritism is clearly related to the matter of suffering, as we have established in this article from the outset. The way of the cross tackles the challenge directly. At the same time, the way of the cross opens up only one option to remedy this problem, namely the grace of God. It leaves no room for any syncretistic or human idea that human beings can actually do something about it.

Luther, in his journey to rediscover the Gospel, simply emphasizes over and over again that we can only come to God through suffering and the cross. The paradoxical side of suffering is that it opens up our hearts for the Gospel to enter. Only in this context can we truly confess the Word of God to take our cross and follow Him (Mk 8:34) and rejoice in our suffering (Rom 5:3-4). Therefore, Luther's profound understanding of faith is quite helpful in this context, especially that faith comes out of existential knowledge instead of cognitive knowledge. This is how

most of the world learns best and understands faith: through the channel of orality, the narratives of life. As we deal with suffering intimately, the cross shines brightly for us to see God's grace and mercy. And the Gospel works its power mightily in overcoming the darkness of Spiritism.

All people who are caught in the darkness of HMong Spiritism will come to the point of hopelessness sooner or later, as the suffering mounts to the point of being unbearable. The Christians must stand ready with the armor of God and proclaim the pure Gospel. It is in these profound suffering moments that Satan's chains are broken and the grace of Christ enters in such an undeniable and salvific way. Similar to the New Testament context, a HMong individual and family that practices Spiritism will not consider Christianity unless the conversion, radically, "presupposes some kinds of strong prior dissatisfaction with the way things are," as Wayne Meek notes in his book, *The First Urban Christian: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*.⁴ For a HMong individual and family, "Conversion was a crisis experience, a transfer from absolute darkness to absolute light."⁵

These two statements describe the HMong context succinctly. So, what does it mean in a biblical, missional, and practical way? It means that we take the rite of Baptism seriously. It begins with renouncing the devil, all his works, and all his ways, crystal clearly. In fact, there ought to be a pre-baptismal service of deliverance immediately when a family is ready to confess Christ, the truth, and renounce the false, the devil. For the HMong, outwardly, it means that all animistic paraphernalia are dismantled and destroyed, paralleling the setting up the stone of witness in the days of Joshua and the burning of their books by Ephesian magicians. These actions were not individualistic in nature, but communal.

The HMong society by nature is communal. There is no doubt that there is a strong pull for the younger generations to become a part of the autonomous individualistic society in America. However, this change has not been able to take place successfully, mostly because of the identity crisis process that has not resolved itself. Regardless, they are still a part of the communal society. In many cases, at the very least, a third communal culture has formed as the result of no longer fitting neatly into the first culture, yet at the same time not finding a good fit with the second culture completely either. When a family turns to God as a family, then the lapse or reversion into the old way of life is less likely. Every generation must be reached for Christ. Often, this means within the same one family.

We have seen this conflict played out clearly for more than a decade of intentional ministry among people who have been struggling with Spiritism. When only one member of the family comes to Christ, he or she tends to not last very long in the church before reverting to the old way of life. When a family as a whole comes to Christ, the protection from a lapse into the old way is much greater and

they are less likely to fall into syncretism or some form of pluralism. Paul writes to the Corinthians who had this challenge: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor 10:21). This conflict is the ultimate test in today’s missional work among the HMong people in America. The table of demons comes in more ways than the traditional religious practice or any derivative of it. Spiritism of any form is truly the table of demons.

The story of a former-shaman-turned-evangelist is a good demonstration of God’s grace and mercy in rescuing him and his family from the stronghold of Spiritism. He came from the generation in Laos that had the opportunity to be educated under the French system in Indochina. The usual assumption is that people that had this level of education should not fall into Spiritism.

Life in America did not turn out to be easy either. The American dream had taken its toll as well by forcing the family to work multiple jobs at the same time to get ahead in the new land. Therefore, both husband and wife diligently focused on making the new life in America as productive as possible. The family has always practiced the traditional animistic religion that has been passed from one generation to the next.

However, Spiritism hit him and the family very hard seventeen years ago. The suffering, oppression, affliction, and the constant fear were so intense that the only way to find any relief from this affliction was to turn shamanic. Becoming a shaman is not by choice; one must be chosen, and there is no manual to learn how to be a shaman and how to perform all the rituals that are expected. A new shaman must be guided by a seasoned shaman and the spirits. And so he experienced all the symptoms of Spiritism: feeling crazy, problems with sleeping due to premonitions, possessing paranormal powers, astro-projections, and so on. He even developed a HMong logographic writing system overnight that to this day, even now that he has become a strong Christian, he still recognizes and is able to write in. It resembles the traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Korean writing system. But to his frustration, it is not recognized by any of the Far Eastern logographic languages. On top of all the spiritual sufferings, he endured a stroke as well.

The wife was at a loss; she did not know what to make of her husband, even though she herself was a devout animist in the traditional sense of the religion. This new “craziness” was beyond her comprehension.

Thanks and praise be to God for His grace and mercy upon this man and his family. He began to listen to the Light of Life, the first ever HMong radio programming in the U.S., radio broadcasts that we (Pastor Kou Seying was the speaker and Maykou Seying was the host/announcer) put on weekly for eleven years.

Unlike other Christian programs that he had heard but had no particular interest in, this radio program was different according to his recollection. He heard the saving good news of Jesus. When a new ministry started in his town, he became a part of the original leadership core group. Casting away the spirits was his first priority prior to the big baptismal event that took place on Easter Sunday eight years ago. The family was baptized along with other families and individuals for a total of more than 35 Baptisms and confirmations. The entire family became Christians. The Holy Spirit called him and his family by the Gospel; it was dramatic and radical. The service of deliverance was quite moving, as his animistic paraphernalia and his enormous well-organized animistic altar were dismantled and destroyed, burned to ashes. The tears of JOY were unstoppable; the sense of freedom from Satan's bondage cannot be expressed adequately in words. Today, he and his wife are our strongest evangelists. They are not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power unto salvation for them in a prolific way.

In summary, the following are steps to keep in mind in reaching out to those who are under this thick cloud of darkness, called HMong Spiritism:

1. Recognize that these people are suffering, afflicted, oppressed, and in constant fear despite the exotic nature of Spiritism under the disguise of traditional religion.
2. Recognize that Spiritism is a diabolical possession of one form or another and it is idolatry—worshipping creation rather than the Creator.
3. Use the natural lines of relationship of the HMong society to help identify those who are suffering under this darkness of Spiritism in order for an effective outreach.
4. Be ready as Christians at all times, with the armor of God, to bring about the deliverance that can only come through God's grace and mercy through the power of the Gospel. The church prepares for this by conducting intentional evangelistic leadership training regularly so that there are trained leaders ready to bring the saving Gospel into this dark cloud of Spiritism—turning from darkness to light at a moment's notice.

The footprints of God are everywhere in the traditional HMong belief system, HMong Spiritism: the story of Creation, Adam and Eve, the Flood, the Old Testament sacrificial system, Levitical laws governing marriage, the imposition of ash, and so on. The traditional religious and cultural customs reflect the Old Testament a great deal. These are common areas that are helpful in opening up a fruitful conversation.

HMong Spiritism affects the young, the middle-aged mothers and fathers, the professionals, and the golden age group of grandmothers and grandfathers. No one can escape the effect of Spiritism. It penetrates deeply and devastates the families in

a cyclical manner from which there is no breakthrough unless Christ is the breakthrough.

Our Christian catechetical emphasis on God's grace through faith—that He has rescued us from sins, death, and the devil—has a profound intimate impact on those who have come out of Spiritism. It accentuates and penetrates deeply into the hearts and minds of former spiritists. The hardest sins to overcome are pride and idolatry. Christ's being the once-and-for-all sacrifice is embraced extraordinarily for people with a Spiritism background. Such books as *Jonah* and *Hebrews* resonate profoundly in these new Christians, especially the multiple gods and spirits in *Jonah's* urgent situation. The book of *Hebrews* brings the entire sacrificial concept into a single salvific sacrifice that culminates in the Lamb of God, the person of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate sacrifice. Thus, the oral nature of *Jonah* and *Hebrews* makes the books existentially connecting for those who come out of this dark journey.

Achieving the American dream for many did not bring about the desired happiness that seemed plausible from across the ocean. There are those who, no matter what they have done or not done, the American dream seems unreachable. And then there are those who simply gave up on the dream or never had the dream in the first place. No matter where a HMong individual or family fits into this American scene, apart from life in Christ, Spiritism is the alternative navigating system in the attempt to make sense of life. It is alive and aggressively afflicts many across the generations of HMongs in America.

May the church be ready to stand firm: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil . . . extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph 6:10–11).

Please consult the previous issue of *Missio Apostolica* for further discussion on HMong cosmology and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's mission work among the HMong people of the first two decades of its history: "HMong Mission in LCMS."

Endnotes

¹ Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Conversion: Turning from Darkness to Light," March 14, 2011, www.missiology.org.

² *Spirit of Truth and Spirit of Error*, compiled by Steven Cory (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

³ Nusit Chindarsi, *The Religion of the HMong Njua* (The Siam Society: Bangkok, 1976), 17.

⁴ Wayne Meek, *The First Urban Christian: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 184.

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 317.

Halloween: A Fun Neighborhood Event or Participation in the World of Spirits?

Miriam Carter & Jeanette Dart

Abstract: Halloween is a very popular holiday in the United States. This article reviews its history and explores connections to spirits, witches, fear, and ongoing practices. The article seeks to clarify ways in which Christians can respond to this holiday and even be in mission.

Introduction

Halloween is an obvious contact point for many people in the United States with that which is dark and spooky. Ghosts and skeletons hanging from trees, tombstones and witches in yards, neighborhood get-togethers, trick or treating, lots of little kids' books and TV shows bring Halloween to almost everyone. Because we Christians who live in the United States live with this holiday, it seems profitable to explore Halloween's history, what goes on in the present day in our country, and some applicable teachings from Scripture. Halloween is celebrated different ways in different places, and Christians serious about living out their faith have come to a wide variety of positions concerning this holiday. It is hoped that this article will contribute to compassionate conversation and also offer helpful insights as we react, interact, and just plain live with Halloween.

Halloween appears to have to do with spirits, death, the dead, ghosts, witches, and more. Is Halloween an introduction to hidden spiritist activities or just pseudo-spiritual stuff for amusement? Is Halloween a dangerous dabbling in the spirit world or a fun neighborhood event? To begin the conversation, here is a brief look at the history of Halloween.

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Miriam is a retired elementary teacher. She and her husband were missionaries in Nigeria before settling in St. Paul, MN. When not traveling for volunteer missions, she finds joy in tutoring immigrants in English, learning about other cultures and traditions, and sharing God's love in Jesus.

Jeanette grew up in Nigeria and Minnesota, attended Concordia Seward, taught high school, and earned an MA in systematic theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. As a Navy wife, Jeanette has been able to observe autumn ceremonies in Germany, Washington, California, Connecticut, and Japan and been challenged to live her faith in those different contexts.

Historical Roots of Halloween

Halloween is thought to have roots in at least three major influences. The Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced Sow-in) appears to be the earliest of those. The festival related to Pomona, Roman goddess of agriculture, added certain aspects; and the Western Christian Church contributed with All Saints remembrances. Finally, the opportunity to make money by selling costumes, candy, and decorations has helped to shape the Halloween that most of us know today.

Some two thousand years ago, Samhain was the most important festival of the ancient Celts, celebrating a night for Samhain the god of the dead and his re-judging of those who had already died. Celts believed that spirits of the dead, both good and evil, were set free to roam in the land of the living.¹ They put out food and drink for refreshment of the spirits of the beloved dead, whom they hoped Samhain would allow to stop in their homes. Some people also dressed up in costumes to hide from,² frighten away, or lead away evil spirits for the protection of the living. Druids and others who dealt with omens saw this night also as particularly important for divination, because of the possible contributions from the visiting spirits.³ In general, Samhain seems quite similar to events connected with spirits in other cultures. For example, during Día de los Muertes in Mexico and O-bon in Japan, food and drink are offered for visiting spirits of the dead.

The Romans celebrated a harvest festival for the goddess Pomona. This festival also had romantic connotations because Pomona had been tricked into falling in love. Her festival reflected this particularly by the use of apples, the Roman symbol of love. When the festivals related to Pomona and Samhain merged, many people in the British Isles used games with apples and nuts to predict one's spouse.⁴

As the Christian church grew in Europe, Christians lived out their new faith next to neighbors celebrating Samhain and other festivals. In AD 610, Pope Boniface IV began the All Saints tradition by setting aside May 13 of that year to remember all early Christians who died for their faith.⁵ Around a century later, Pope Gregory intentionally moved the official remembering to November 1, coinciding with Samhain, as if the church "was trying to absorb the pagan celebrations taking place at this time."⁶ Thus, it is that Halloween received its name from the Christian church. All Saints Day was then called All Hallows and the evening before, All Hallows Eve. It isn't hard to see how that was shortened into Halloween.

The church remembered its dead on Halloween and All Hallows with customs similar to what was done in the past. The church encouraged Christians to pray for the dead, and in the British Isles a custom developed of baking "soul cakes," which were given to the poor; in exchange, the poor would pray for the giver's dead relatives.⁷ It was the custom that people would put out wine with the soul cakes for the souls of the departed whom they still believed visited on that night.⁸ Young people went "guising," dressing in costume, going from house to house and asking

for food, drink, or money in exchange for singing, poetry reading, or telling jokes.⁹ Carved-out, candle-lit turnips sat on gate posts to ward off evil spirits.¹⁰ Ghost stories were often told around bonfires at harvest time. While the Druids did this more out of fear, with Christians it was to honor the dead.¹¹

As the centuries passed, Halloween changed into what we know it as today. For a time in the Middle Ages, some Reformers tried unsuccessfully to do away with All Saints Day and the evening that went before it. Indeed, Christians not only held on to this celebration, they brought it with them wherever they went.¹² The Christian colonists who brought Halloween to North America also believed in witches and the occult. In Virginia, for example, “settlers in trouble were often as likely to consult astrology, chiromancy, fortune-telling or divination as they were their God.”¹³ At that time, people did still believe in the spirits and spiritual activity. An eroding of belief in the reality of the spiritual world enabled the Halloween to be more about fun than genuine spirituality. In the United States today, Halloween is second only to Christmas for revenue, bringing in around six billion dollars each year for such things as costumes and candy.¹⁴ On a different note, starting in 1950 on Halloween, children were encouraged to go door to door but to ask for donations to UNICEF instead of candy, and many children have done this.¹⁵ Although traditions vary slightly around the United States, Halloween is a standard, unavoidable part of mainstream culture.

Seeing the connections between present-day Halloween traditions and the past traditions comes rather easily. Already in the days of the colonists, black cats and broomsticks were associated with witches, providing our time with much used decoration ideas. Switch pumpkins for turnips and one has jack-o-lanterns. “Guising” easily provides a background for trick-or-treating. And apple bobbing finds its roots in the Roman time! On a slightly different note, the sexualized costumes and activities that sometimes also appear on Halloween may find their roots in the festival of Pomona. Although the visiting spirits of the dead are clearly central to the history of Halloween, it is well worth noting that not all of Halloween’s history points in the direction of the spirits. The Christian church’s contribution of remembering the saints fundamentally changed and named the holiday we know today.

Halloween in the United States in the Twenty-First Century

Halloween is hardly limited to the 31st of October anymore. For at least the month of October, grocery stores push candy and decorations. People also decorate their homes and yards before Halloween. The decorations often are spooky and have to do with the dead. Bones stick out of the ground, and grave stones lean in yards. Giant cobwebs and spiders, or even ghosts, skeletons, or fake bodies may hang from trees. Although it is likely that those decorating are doing so in fun, the connections to earlier celebrations of the dead are obvious.

Children often get to dress up in their costumes more than once, because many communities have parties or other events, like Trunk or Treat, on nights before the 31st. Costumes may be of their favorite hero, a cartoon, or something different. Some people try to make themselves look scary and others are creative with famous people or occupations. Some families work around a theme like characters from *Alice in Wonderland* or s'mores, so that each member in the family plays a part. Some churches offer Halleluiahs Nights or Trunk or Treat. At a Trunk or Treat event, children walk from one decorated car trunk to others in a parking lot to receive candy or pencils. In some places, neighbors gather to hang out. Some may bring out fire pits. They sit together with their supply of candy and visit while they have fun distributing it. People also get together for parties as adults.

Perspectives:

People from different walks of life and different ages may vary in their opinions of Halloween. The following is a sample of perspectives and ideas from various sources, ending with the range of answers from Christians.

- Two people commented that people today don't think of the spirit world when they have fun with goblins, witches, or zombies. They think it is just clean fun that they see in movies and on games.
- A Christian, who knows a number of Wiccans, said that when asked the Wiccans are very tight-lipped and unwilling to share about their celebration of Halloween.
- Other Wiccan said that they didn't really celebrate Halloween, as it is too commercialized.
- A retired public school teacher said that she doesn't like Halloween. She remembered, though, that when she taught in the public school, they had the children dress up as storybook characters and each classroom would have a parade through the school. This event pushed children into books and being creative with their parents.
- One person said that in some Minneapolis schools they celebrate Orange Day instead of Halloween. Apparently some religions took offense to Halloween, and so they removed it from the schools, substituting something else so that the schools can still have a party atmosphere.
- A university instructor spoke of Wiccan students asking to be excused for "their holiday."
- An article written to Muslim parents warned them to first examine what the holiday Halloween is really about and that they might not want to participate once they knew.¹⁶

Christians take various stances, ranging from total avoidance to complete participation.

- One Christian family has a tradition of going out to eat at a certain restaurant in order not to be home during the normal trick-or-treating hours. Their children did not dress up in costumes.
- One mom commented that she hates Halloween. She remembered her children seeing and disliking the ghosts and manikins hanging in trees.
- One lady said that, until she and her husband had children, they just kept their door closed. She believes that, historically, Halloween comes from a pagan source that glorifies fear and death. Now they let their children dress up in appropriate costumes and try to teach them to figure out who they are going to glorify. She also figures that smiles and friendliness to the neighbors is a way to share God's love. She thinks that tracts would probably just become litter.
- Some churches offer a Hallelujah Party for children and young people. Games and activities are provided in hopes of offering Christ-centered fun.¹⁷
- A young mother shared that Halloween gives her an opportunity to share about Jesus. With her children and others, she explains the history of Halloween but then also brings in her faith. Her children know that we don't have to be afraid of evil spirits because God sent Jesus to defeat them. Jesus is more powerful and is with us.
- The Rev. Ronald Hodges, pastor of Salt Lake City's Christ United Methodist Church, is not concerned about Halloween and its pagan origins. He said: "If [we] believe fully in the omnipotence of God, then concern about witches, ghosts and goblins, and things that go bump in the night, is misplaced. It is God alone who rules creation, and persons need not fear . . . the dark side of the human experience." Referring to Wiccans, he commented: "We do not condemn [them]. Nor do we believe that what they practice brings them the peace, hope or joy of the Christian faith."¹⁸
- A Lutheran school has fun on Halloween with a Creation Day. Classrooms pick a theme from creation, like bats, study about it and make costumes accordingly.
- A college student said that doing something with the original purpose for All Hallows' Evening might be a good thing.
- Similarly, a mom thought that taking time to remembering the saints who have gone before us in the faith can offer us heroes to emulate. She plans to look up stories of some saints and share those with her children and make that a part of their traditions. (The beginning of the Lutheran Reformation with the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses gives Lutherans an obvious story for starting such a tradition.)
- Another family emphasized the Reformation, but also let the children go trick-or-treating.

- The Rev. Paul Kucynda, a priest at the Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Church in Wayne, N.J., shared that they have a fall festival at which the children of the congregation make scarecrows and play games.¹⁹
- Anderson M. Rearick III, a university professor, shared, “Give up nothing—I have always considered Halloween a day to celebrate the imagination, to become for a short time something wonderful and strange, smelling of grease paint, to taste sweets that are permissible only once a year. How wonderful to be with other children dressed up as what they might grow up to be, what they wished they could be, or even what they secretly feared. All of us, dreams and nightmares, were brought together on equal footing, going from door to door to be given treats and admired for our creativity. How delightful to go to parties with doughnuts, apples, brown cider, and pumpkin cakes—and to hear spine-tingling ghost stories and feel our hearts skip a beat when the teller grabbed for us.”²⁰

Applicable Christian Teachings

Although Christians hold such varied opinions about Halloween, there are certain teachings upon which it may be hoped that all Christians would agree. These teachings may form a foundation on which each of us can build, as Christians, in our varied situations, in conversation with one another and with those outside our family of faith.

1. God alone is God.

The Triune God is God alone. “You shall have no other gods” (Ex 20:3, NIV). Fortune-telling, reading palms, contacting the spirits are ways that people try to get around God alone being in control. A Protestant pastor said, “Exodus 22:18 reads, ‘You shall not permit a sorceress to live.’ It sounds to me like God is serious about this issue. . . . To have our kids dress up as witches or the devil, if we have paper ghosts in our windows or have tombstones in our yards or attend haunted houses, are we not imitating evil, even glorifying it?”²¹ God is serious about such things not only for His own sake, but also for our protection.

Many Americans likely miss the need for protection because they do not believe that evil spirits and demons really exist. Spirits and ghosts appear in movies just like Batman, Captain America, and Darth Vader. It is easy and more comfortable to dismiss the spirits as imaginary and amusing. Playing around with spirits, like being frightened by ghost stories or in haunted houses, seems fun. These pseudo-spiritist trappings of Halloween are generally accepted or embraced by American society at large. For someone who doesn’t believe in the real existence of spirits, there seems to be no need to be cautious.

2. Evil Spirits, the devil, and witches are real.

However, the devil, evil spirits, and witches are real. The devil and spirits are mentioned many times throughout the Bible. One source put the number of witches in the United States today at more than 400,000.²² Two stories serve as an example of modern-day spiritism. A woman named Barbara shared her struggle with the spirit world. In her video, she explained that she was dedicated to be a medium before birth, and it was a long road to get out of it. She also said that people seem to have a fascination with the supernatural, but getting close to the spirits opens the door to the enemy.²³ Another young woman, a Hmong, was told that she was supposed to be a shaman. She had a horrible time getting out of that spiritual realm. These things are real, and those involved have realistic fear of spirits and their power.

3. Death is real.

While this may seem an obvious point, death is not normally a part of everyday life in the United States, and it is generally an uncomfortable topic to discuss. People don't die, they "pass." Halloween, with its ghosts and skeletons, is a time where death is put right in front of us again. The reality in our world is that death lies ahead of us, unless Christ returns beforehand (1 Cor 15:22). Especially for families with young children, Halloween decorations may spark questions, opening an opportunity for conversation about death and what happens, and what Christ did for us so that we don't need to fear our own deaths. Ultimately, Christ is exactly the Savior we needed because no one else faced death and won (1 Cor 15:20–28).²⁴

4. Spiritual warfare is ongoing.

Since spirits are real, everyone is involved, knowingly or not, in a spiritual battle. For Christians, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12, NIV).

Sometimes discovering that spirits actually exist and that there is this ongoing battle might be disconcerting or even frightening. Christians have an answer for that, which the following story shows. Our family's attitude toward spirits changed a lot during the six years that we lived in Nigeria. Many people in our area still worshiped their ancestors and other spirits, including sacrificing to them at times. It was difficult to ignore the reality of the spirit world. One incident will always stay with us. A young pastor was holding his little baby and was explaining that, according to their customs, he should be making a sacrifice to the spirits of the ancestors to protect the baby. We expected him to say that he would not do it because he now knew that those spirits weren't real. Instead of that, he said, "The reason that I won't do the libations is because the Spirit of Jesus is stronger."

5. Christ is greater than all the forces of evil.

This, then, is the answer concerning the spirits and Christianity: Christ is supreme. John clearly states, “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4, NIV). Christ’s supremacy is reinforced by many recorded instances of His casting out evil spirits. Finally, for those who belong to Christ, the issue is not “Are there spirits?” but “I belong to Christ and so I need not fear the spirits.”

6. Avoid toying with danger.

Belonging to Christ is a treasure worth protecting. Does Halloween with its pseudo-spirit stuff pose a spiritual danger to Christians? To be sure, and most things in life do. Christians need to be watchful of danger in all things. The devil is crafty and seeking whom he can devour (1 Pt 5:8). As Paul also wrote, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor 10:12, NIV). Two aspects of Halloween do raise concerns: things with spirits and some sexual practices that happen today.²⁵ It would be foolish to dive completely into spiritist practices, like consulting mediums. It would also be foolish to participate in sexual practices forbidden by God.²⁶ These things endanger our souls. Letting our children dress up and pass out candy is not exactly the same thing. Also, communities, neighborhoods, and situations differ from one another, and Christians need to be aware of their own situation and to be responsible and faithful there.

7. Refrain from judging one another.

Within the Christian community, we can find some Christians who are seriously bothered by Halloween and other Christians who are seriously bothered that the other Christians are bothered. This may be an unfortunate example of a tendency within the church to judge one another. Many Christians live with the feeling of needing to measure up and be good enough. We sometimes revert to judging others as we seek to satisfy ourselves that we really are okay. Both by judging others and fearing to be judged, we often descend into closed-mindedness, refusing in our fears to be open to the conversations with our neighbors, whether at home or at church. We can too easily latch on to what seems to be the “right” answer concerning Halloween and then shut our minds to other things because someone else’s “right” choice may make us feel condemned for our own.

The most obvious answer to any struggles with judgmentalism is grace. It is exactly the person who fears judgment who is most likely to judge others. God’s grace says that you are forgiven, beloved, and okay. And that can be our starting point for looking at life and Halloween.

Indeed, all of life is affected by sin. Isaiah wrote that everything, even seemingly good choices and actions, in our world is tainted by sin (Is 64:6). Setting ourselves the task of choosing “rightly” concerning Halloween or anything else sets us up for failure, because it is impossible to choose perfectly. We are called to live lives of faith, and living faithfully is walking in the light. We don’t pretend that we don’t have sin. Instead we just walk in the light with our sin made visible and “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7, NIV).

More than just cleansing us from all sin, God also works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). And that also includes Halloween. Good is not just done by Christians, because God uses many, many people and events for the sustaining of His creation. God can and does work good, even with Halloween. Although some Christians may doubt it, Halloween is definitely included in “all things.” He has promised it. And His protection, His promise of doing good, may provide the safety net that some Christians need to be able to see that their neighbors might just be trying to be involved, to be good neighbors when they put up scary decorations. Can we enjoy that instead of condemning them?

8. Be willing to be different.

Paul wrote that we are not to “conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Rom 12:2). At times, it is important to be different: when we believe participation might endanger our faith and when we think participating may give an inaccurate picture of who we are and who Christ is. If we go along with something we know to be wrong only to fit in, we betray the freedom of the Gospel because we allow other people to think either that we don’t really believe what we say we believe or that we aren’t free in Christ to not worry about the opinions of other people. Many people would love to be free of peer pressure, and when we are willing to be different by not doing what is obviously wrong, we can shine like a light to other people who may feel trapped by the situation. If there is a way we don’t need to fear what other people think, then maybe they could learn about our way. It is still important not to judge, but being different need not be the same as judging. We can show the world the difference.

9. Be light.

Halloween provides at least two opportunities for being light. We can be light in what we teach our children, and we can be light in our relationships with our neighbors and community. God’s love for us and the peace He offers us enable us to be different not for the sake of standing out, but for the sake of the hope that is in us.

We can teach our children our faith, the hope that we have. We can teach them they need not fear any spirits or death because Christ holds them close and He is

stronger. We can teach them to love their neighbors even when they might disagree with them or choose different actions. Even the words we use to talk about things that our neighbors do are an avenue for teaching our children.

Being light with our neighbors necessitates being in relationship with them. A light shut up in our own homes, separate from the others, does not aid them. Interacting with our neighbors, inquiring about their lives, being present and available to listen or to help when the car won't start—these are ways of being lights for our neighbors. All of that forms a foundation for how we interact with them around Halloween. Sometimes older neighbors are really excited to give out candy and see costumes of our little children. Sometimes it might be teenagers whom we can welcome to celebrate with our kids in perhaps a different way. We need to be willing to listen and to learn about them. We can make our choices to fit the context, the neighborhood, in which we live.

10. Christian life as a life of celebration

God filled the year of the Hebrews with memorials, events to remember certain parts of their history. As the creator of all, God also invented laughter, enjoyment, and celebrations. At times, Christians can forget both the celebrating and the remembering. We can become somber and stuck, looking only at the daily run of our lives. Halloween in times past was for Christians to remember saints who had died in the faith. Today we don't need to worry about putting out food or drink for famished spirits of our loved ones, but we can celebrate their lives and Christ who saved them. We can tell stories of our loved ones and of Christians from years ago and build those into our Halloween traditions. In the midst of our hectic lives, we can relax, celebrate, and laugh, trusting that God, who made a path through the Red Sea, who sent Christ to die for us, who has promised to work all things for our good, will take care of us tomorrow. For a night, we can relax, hang out with friends and neighbors, and be goofy, if we so choose.

Celebrating wholeheartedly may be an answer for any parents concerned with their children's missing out. In our society, not doing what other people do is often associated with missing out, with not having enough. Christian parents may have a legitimate concern about restrictions, like no trick-or-treating, putting a negative connotation on the Christian faith. It is good to remember that God, His love for us, and the lives He gives us are all worth celebrating. This attitude might enable us to find ways to really and truly celebrate life, including Halloween or not, and the gifts God gives us.

Conclusion: Living Freely in a Broken World—Mission

Finally, as Christians, we are enabled to look at Halloween as we look at all of life. First, we begin at the cross as sinners who are forgiven and loved. As sinners, we can remember that we are not in a position to judge others or ourselves; and because we have been forgiven, we can remember that God dealt compassionately with us and that He loves all the people around us exactly the same way.

Second, we consider that Halloween may push us into interactions with those who believe differently than we do, both Christian and non-Christian. Living in confidence because God has us and He has promised never to let go, we can relax. God has given us the freedom to make mistakes and not be perfect.²⁷ We can pray and ask God to help us, not so that we make the perfect choices, but so that in the interaction, the difference that Christ makes in our lives will be revealed, also at Halloween.

Endnotes

¹ Lesley Pratt Bannatyne, *Halloween An American Holiday, An American History* (USA: Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group, USA, 1990), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ “Ancient Origins of Halloween” in “History of Halloween,” History Channel, A&E Networks, LLC, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween>.

⁴ Bannatyne, *Halloween An American Holiday*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ “Today’s Halloween Traditions” in “History of Halloween,” History Channel, A&E Networks, LLC, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween>.

⁸ “England” in “Geography of Halloween,” Wikipedia, May 11, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Halloween.

⁹ “Bet You Didn’t Know: Halloween,” History Channel, A&E Networks, LLC, video, 3:00, <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-halloween>.

¹⁰ Bannatyne, *Halloween An American Holiday*, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ “Bet You Didn’t Know: Halloween,” History Channel, video.

¹⁵ “Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF,” Wikipedia, Oct. 28, 2014, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trick-or-Treat_for_UNICEF.

¹⁶ “13 Tips for Dealing with Halloween,” *SoundVision.com*, Tip 1, <http://www.soundvision.com/info/misc/hollo/13tips.asp>.

¹⁷ B. A. Robinson, “What Various Faith Groups Believe about Halloween,” *Religious Tolerance.org*, Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, Oct. 29, 1999, http://www.religioustolerance.org/hallo_re.htm.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anderson M. Rearick III, “Matters of Opinion: Hallowing Halloween— Why Christians should embrace the devilish holiday with gusto—and laughter,” *Christianity Today* (October 2, 2000), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/october2/29.79.html>.

²¹ Robinson, “What Various Faith Groups Believe about Halloween.”

²² “Bet You Didn’t Know: Witches” History Channel, A&E Networks, LLC, video, 3:00, <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-witches>.

²³ Barbara Arthur, “The Truth about Witchcraft,” *Christian Broadcasting Network TV*, 2012, video, 5:49, <http://www.cbn.com/tv/1434206552001>.

²⁴ Jesus defeated death.

²⁵ N. Rogers, *Halloween—From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Rogers tells of the party and sexual side of Halloween in his book.

²⁶ Centuries ago when the Christian Church was trying to figure out what behaviors were important for Gentile Christians to do, the leaders of the church chose to ask them to abstain from sexual immorality as one of the two requests. Acts 15:29.

²⁷ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 189.

Big Challenges for Small-Town Congregations

R. Lee Hagan

Abstract: There are significant challenges facing rural communities and congregations today. However, there has been little consideration of the great mission opportunities that exist in rural and small-town settings. This article will identify some of the challenges that exist, but also point out the opportunities for community engagement by our congregations. Rather than simply ignoring our rural congregations or writing them off altogether, this article seeks to affirm the congregations by reminding them of the gifts with which God has blessed them and encourage them in God's mission to their particular communities.

The film, *The Final Season*, tells the true story of a small-town school in rural Iowa that wins the state baseball championship in its final season before being consolidated into a new school in a neighboring town. The bittersweet story is eerily familiar for the countless small towns across the country that have witnessed the closing of their schools, businesses, farm co-operatives, and even churches. Not just another "Cinderella story" of a sports team that triumphs against all odds, it strikes a familiar chord in towns where consolidation has become a painful way of life. It focuses on the emotional connection of an entire town with its school and the grief that they face as the school is closed. While the team wins the championship, there is no happy ending. Ultimately, the movie serves as a commentary on the changes affecting rural communities, including their churches.

Not All Small Towns Are The Same

An estimated half to two-thirds of the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are located in rural and small-town settings, from the villages of New England to the border towns of the Southwest to the Alaska wilderness, though it would be presumptuous to make too many comparisons between small towns in Iowa and Oregon or New York and Mississippi. This study identifies some of the challenges facing small towns and points out particular issues that affect rural congregations. While the issues delineated are general in nature and are not applicable to all communities and congregations, the intent is to provide insights into

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the resources of small-town congregations and suggest opportunities for community outreach.

What constitutes rural? Some people would presume an agricultural setting. But the answer is more complicated. The number of people actually farming today is less than 5% of the U.S. population. Iowa State University professors Cornelia and Jan Flora touch on the challenges of defining rural America:

Which is the *real* rural America—ski slopes of California, mines of West Virginia, farms in Iowa, or exurban resort and manufacturing communities in Georgia? Family farms and small farming communities dominate popular images of rural areas, in part because politicians, lobbyists, and the media cultivate those icons, supporting the myth that agricultural policy is rural policy. In fact, rural areas embrace ski slopes, mines, manufacturing, farms, retirement communities, Native American reservations, bedroom communities, and much, much more. In the twenty-first century, rural communities differ more from each other than they do, on average, from urban areas. The diversity found among rural communities extends to the problems felt as each responds to the social and economic change under way.¹

Recognizing the diversity in rural America regarding geography, population, and community resources is vital. For the congregations of the LCMS to be able to respond to the needs and challenges of rural and small-town communities, leaders should first recognize that there is no single solution that fits every setting. “There is no simple way to define what makes a place *rural*. Part of this is due to changing economics and demographics. At the beginning of the 21st century, the term *rural* is very different from what rural was in the year 1900.”² Pastors must be aware of the particular needs of their respective communities, and district and national leaders must guard against offering uniform solutions without doing the hard work of determining what is unique to each setting.

Big Challenges for Small Towns

1. Poverty

While poverty in rural communities is nothing new, the rural poor today are different from those in previous generations.³ Both traditional traits and developing factors of small-town communities are causes of poverty. Because the cost of living is dramatically lower than in the cities and suburbs, small towns have become havens to which the disconnected and the forgotten of society flee. While public transportation may be lacking, jobs are often within walking distance. Many lower income families, retreating from the dangerous environment of inner cities, arrive with little education and money, and no job; yet they often find it easier to secure housing and employment in the rural setting.

On the other hand, small towns are often less equipped to provide the support needed for lower income families because, traditionally, such responsibility fell to the extended family. However, lower income families in small towns generally lack a traditional family support system, or the family they do have may not be able to take on the responsibility of supporting others. “Rural poverty is especially persistent and intractable when the people left behind live in places that have been left behind. . . . Poverty is a factor of limited income, but is also fundamentally connected to limited access to social resources like health-care, education, housing and political power.”⁴ Such lack of resources in rural communities can be found across the country and contributes to the “vicious cycle” of poverty that mirrors urban and inner-city settings. Other observers note that “the economic downturn that the whole country has been experiencing since 2008 has been with rural communities for quite some time; it is little wonder that the social fabric of rural America has become tattered. Macro structures that impact food costs, the environment and rural communities’ economics have wrested control from local communities.”⁵

One of the most significant aspects of the challenge of rural poverty is that it clashes with the dominant values of work and self-reliance commonly found among the traditional rural population and thus contributes to the lack of support systems for lower income families in small towns and rural areas.

Rural communities are noted for their ability to respond to extraordinary tragedies that lead to temporary poverty, such as fires, tornadoes, or floods. But rural communities are much less able to respond to conditions of chronic poverty. . . . Rural residents tend to feel that proper attitudes lead to hard work, and hard work should lead to material success. . . . The dominant view is that rewarding such moral failings by providing “handouts” to those out of work or with low incomes should be avoided.⁶

2. Transient Population

Often, the people moving into small towns are not only from larger cities. Many people in small towns move frequently from one town to another, depending upon work opportunities, relationships, custody arrangements, and many other factors. Thus, it is difficult for them to establish lasting relationships. Renters moving out overnight is a common occurrence as circumstances change. An underlying factor is the absence of marriage in the equation. Divorce, children born out of wedlock, and cohabiting relationships that break apart are contributing factors in both the transient nature of small-town residents today and the level of poverty.

Another factor contributing to the transiency of population in small towns today includes an increase of “couch surfers,” homeless individuals who reside with family and friends. It is estimated that between 1–2% of the national population is “couch homeless.”⁷ Hoback and Anderson’s study suggests that the percentage of “couch

homeless” in the more rural areas of Southern and Western Michigan is equal to that of inner city Detroit.⁸

Another significant factor in agricultural settings is the transient nature of the population related to planting and harvest seasons. Migrant workers are considered essential to the workforce in many such settings, but the migration of workers means that they often are unaware of resources, such as health care and other social agencies.

3. Distance to services

While urban and rural settings face similar challenges regarding health care and education, the distance to access such services is a stark contrast between the two. Whereas people living in urban settings may rely completely on public transportation, transportation and distances to health care, education, and consumer businesses are constant challenges in rural areas. “The cost of transportation and the lack of public transportation often force families to depend on old and unreliable automobiles that get poor gas mileage. Not only is getting to work difficult, but it is also challenging and costly to get to places to purchase groceries and other necessities at a reasonable price.”⁹ The challenges also apply to governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide important support for families. Access to the various needed services is virtually denied because many rural residents do not have the necessary means to travel such distances. “Public transportation, always deficient in rural areas, has become virtually nonexistent in many communities.”¹⁰

Health care is of particular concern for lower income families in rural areas. Consolidation has hampered struggling small-town families, “Both schools and hospitals have faced consolidation and closure, while local governments have faced decreasing state and federal support at the very time that their responsibilities have increased as a result of devolution.”¹¹ Hoeft, Jung, and Marshall describe the challenges related to health care in rural settings: Cost and transportation are among the particular difficulties facing the health care providers. Notably absent from rural settings are mental health services and dentistry.¹² They write, “In almost every text that deals with rural health care, whether from the perspective of physicians and doctors, hospitals, nurses, governmental agencies, or mental health practitioners, consistently notes the difficulties for rural communities to provide broad health care services.”¹³ The challenges of distance and lack of public transportation have led to a lack of health care and food, as well as to legal and other community services.

4. Lack of Opportunities

We often hear about the “graying of the church,” but the reality is that rural and small-town settings are also becoming increasingly older in terms of population. Smaller family size is one significant contributing factor to these changing

demographics. Causes such as birth control and less “need” for hands on the farms have led to significantly smaller families in rural America today. Another factor affecting rural demographics is the lack of opportunities for young people. Students who excel academically are faced with the dilemma of limited options in rural settings and often migrate to larger suburban and urban environments, described by many as the “brain drain” that rural America faces when the best and the brightest leave for better options in urban settings. Ironically, “rural communities (and congregations) tend to invest most heavily not in their future leaders, but in those who will leave the rural community.”¹⁴

Few take an honest look at the reality of life in small towns today. Older generations want to address today’s challenges with solutions of the past, without recognizing how communities and culture have changed. Brown and Schaft observe, “Clearly today’s rural economy differs greatly from the past, and from the romanticized vision of rural areas as being dominated by agriculture. . . . It is a mistake to conflate rural and agricultural in today’s society.”¹⁵

5. Breakdown of Family

Rural areas are not immune from the breakdown of the family that plagues America across all social and geographical classifications. “The family, once a mainstay of the rural community, is experiencing the same kind of disintegration that is taking place in urban areas. For instance, the number of single-mother families in non-metropolitan communities has been increasing at a faster rate than metropolitan areas.”¹⁶

Divorce has been on the rise in rural settings: “Forty years ago, divorced people were more concentrated in cities and suburbs. But geographic distinctions have all but vanished, and now, for the first time, rural Americans are just as likely to be divorced as city dwellers, according to an analysis of census data by *The New York Times*.”¹⁷ Another obvious change has been the increase in children living with cohabiting couples. From 2000 to 2009, the percentage of children living in cohabiting households has nearly doubled;¹⁸ and rural children in cohabiting households are more likely to be living in poverty than in urban settings.¹⁹

Big Challenges for Congregations

The insights below come from discussions with rural ministry leaders. These are three practical concerns that are readily voiced from by those serving in rural America.

1. Finances

One of the most significant challenges facing rural and small-town congregations is the cost of health care. While there are creative solutions and models for addressing this issue, we must acknowledge that the rising cost of health

care makes it difficult for many congregations to afford a full-time (single vocation) pastor, serving only one congregation. Several district presidents and district executives echoed this concern. District officials urge congregations with less than 80 on the low end and 150 on the high end to strongly consider whether they can afford a full-time pastor going forward.

Dual parishes are also struggling to afford a full-time pastor's salary and benefits. By providing a parsonage, rural parishes have been able to afford more easily the pastor's salary. However, guidelines for seminary graduates today call for combined packages of salary and benefits often above \$60,000. This will be a challenge for many congregations because the health care projections call for constant increases into the foreseeable future.

Related is the issue of the educational debt of our seminary graduates. In 2012, I conducted a rural ministry module at one of our seminaries. Discussions revealed that fourth-year men often have reservations about receiving a placement in a rural setting strictly over the issue of student loans. Conversations with classmates serving in the field had sounded this alarm for them. They were open to serving in rural settings, but genuinely concerned about the potential financial pressures awaiting them.

These financial pressures are having a ripple effect across the Synod. Many rural and small-town congregations are not able to provide adequate salaries for their pastors. Going years without receiving even a cost-of-living adjustment, much less a raise, is not out of the ordinary for pastors in rural settings. Student loan repayment also increases the pressure on pastors, as they must deal with creditor calls in addition to member calls. The strain takes its toll on the pastor's family as well. These pressures have caused some pastors to leave the ministry and others to accept calls to serve in new settings, strictly for financial reasons. The church certainly has theological challenges in the post-Christian world, but it would be naïve to fail to recognize how such financial challenges are affecting congregations and pastors.

2. Absence of Children and Families

Sunday School is becoming a thing of the past in many rural settings. Congregations simply do not have enough children to sustain a weekly Sunday School. Lutherans have become so reliant on Lutheran day schools and Sunday Schools to "handle" the Christian education of children that congregations do not know how to respond once they close their school or discontinue weekly Sunday School. Children always seemed to come back for confirmation in past years, but that is no longer the case. Some congregations may be hesitant to consider other means by which they could provide Christian education for their younger members and members' children. Parents are often not equipped to carry out their godly calling of teaching the faith in the home. Sadly, the only way some notice the change

is that the size of the confirmation class is increasingly smaller or “Confirmation Sunday” occurs only every few years.

3. Lack of Resources

Many small-town congregations are simply “tapped out.” Not enough people are willing to serve to fill out the slate of officers. Positions of leadership are often handed around among a few faithful members, and that can lead to burn-out and frustration. Repair and maintenance needs mount up because of a lack of funds to make the necessary improvements. People with relevant skills are lacking to deal with such matters as websites, health care plans, cemetery regulations, and background checks for staff or volunteers working with children.

Rural and small-town congregations are often older established congregations with older buildings. The ongoing need for capital improvements is daunting for congregations. In the past, volunteers have been able to take care of many of the physical needs of the facilities. However, century-old buildings can have a variety of structural needs that require significant expense for already struggling congregations.

Opportunities for Small-Town Congregations

While big challenges face small towns and the congregations in their midst, great opportunities for mission work abound. The concept of mission work in “Small Town America” may have seemed almost absurd thirty years ago. However, the challenges outlined above bring to light new opportunities for reaching the lost not as apparent in previous generations in small towns. Unchurched people in rural settings have always been with us, but congregations now realize that Christians find themselves in the minority even in rural and small-town settings.

1. Immigration

States along the Mexican border have been dealing with immigration issues for decades. The growing Latin American population has spread beyond the Southwest to small towns across the country. However, the non-Hispanic immigrant population has also been on the rise in small-town settings. African and Asian immigrant communities have appeared in states such as Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas. In 2012 in Storm Lake, Iowa, Caucasians total less than 50% of the population (48.3).²⁰ The Latin American population comprises 37.1% and Asians total 8.9%.²¹ The 2012 LCMS Rural and Small-Town Mission Conference held in Storm Lake, Iowa, included a roundtable of ministry leaders who discussed how the Iowa District West office and area congregations have worked to engage the Hispanic, Asian, and African immigrant populations. This small town in Western Iowa now includes a Buddhist temple as part of its religious landscape.

Immigrants in our country struggle because of language barriers and an inability to satisfy such basic human needs as clothing, food, or child care. Meeting such needs can provide opportunities for engaging immigrant populations in our own backyard. Offering English classes, distributing food and clothing, and providing children's activities (bear in mind that the children often speak English) are just a few of the simple ways that congregations can reach out to their neighbors.

While immigration presents many opportunities for outreach, the topic is often a difficult one to discuss because of the political issues involved. Concern about illegal immigrants can lead to hesitancy on the part of congregations to reach out to ethnic populations.

2. Congregations Working Together

Congregations of all sizes have ample opportunities to work together to care for members and to engage the unchurched population in their respective communities. As sole pastorates become more difficult to maintain with shrinking rural congregations and increasing costs to support full-time pastors, it is a good time for congregations to consider how they can work together for the sake of the Kingdom. Large congregations can explore entering into partnerships with small congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor. New models (beyond just dual parishes) are being developed to be able to care for the growing number of small congregations and to pool resources for efforts to engage communities. Dialogue between pastors and lay leaders of congregations is necessary to consider the needs of their respective flocks and to explore mission opportunities.

Such cooperation is not without challenges related, for example, to potential conflicts over history, facilities, and finances. However, when congregations are committed to reaching out into their communities, they are also willing to consider the possibility of collaborating with other congregations for the sake of God's mission.

It is good for congregations to consider their unity based upon Christ and their common confessional commitment. It is from the font and the table that their unity is established through Christ. Efforts to build congregational partnerships require patience and also intentional teaching regarding identity and unity in Christ.

3. Congregations Working with Community Organizations

As Lutheran immigrants began to spread across the country in the middle of the nineteenth century, they did more than plant congregations and establish schools. The early years of the Missouri Synod saw the founding of homes for orphans and the aged, hospitals, and various social ministry organizations. Lutherans were leaders in striving to address the needs of people in their communities. Congregations today have opportunities to partner with organizations that Lutherans helped establish to

demonstrate their care for the sake of the Kingdom and our communities. Lutheran social ministry organizations can be effective partners as the church seeks to provide for the particular human care needs of each community. Some congregations have found great support from these organizations. They are often more acquainted with legal issues and government regulations that might otherwise prevent congregations from considering potential human care projects. Congregations today are venturing out into such areas as housing, health care, food and clothing banks, and counseling services through cooperation with other Lutheran organizations.

Potential partners for congregations in addressing community needs include banks, hospitals, and local businesses that might cooperate with congregations in ventures such as support groups, English classes, legal aid workshops, and financial education classes. Such community-oriented programs are never carried out in place of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, but can be done to help congregations to reach those outside of the congregation by demonstrating loving care for the neighbor.

Quo Vademus?

There are both challenges and opportunities for rural and small-town congregations today, but where is the hope? Pastors and congregations are constantly told what they lack rather than being reminded of the gifts that they have received from God. Pastors of small-town congregations are made to feel unsuccessful or inadequate in serving in such small settings. Congregation members are aware of the limitations of their resources, but they are not left without the Lord's gracious provision.

One of the significant differences between rural settings and suburban settings is that in the rural congregation members often have deep congregational roots. In many cases, the younger and middle-aged families that live in these communities have chosen to do so. They have considered the opportunities that larger communities offer (and in some cases they have even lived in them), but they have made the conscious decision to return to a small town. A "Century Farm" sign, for example, is a symbol of a family's commitment to the land and their community. These families are tremendous resources because they understand the history and remain committed to its future.

A second asset of smaller congregations is that often they are more responsive to emergent needs. There is no need for a committee to be formed or a resolution to be passed when circumstances arise. In fact, smaller congregations are often more aware of problems faced by people in their communities than congregations in larger communities. Smaller congregations often function like families so that they are capable of responding quickly to specific needs.

Today, rural and small-town congregations see the challenges ahead. They do not shrink from these challenges because even the smallest congregations are blessed with the Means of Grace. Their confidence is in Christ who continues to give life through the preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Christ's Church is sent to proclaim the Gospel to all the world, even small towns that were once thought to be predominantly Christian.

There is indeed hope for small-town congregations in their work to engage those outside the faith. The late Swedish theologian, Bo Giertz, wrote of the church's contemporary task of proclaiming the Gospel:

The message is continually confronted with new circumstances and changing times. If the church only possessed a mechanically memorized gospel and would she only be able to reproduce and repeat the past, she would soon be dead. But she is not a lecturer of ancient wisdom. In the Spirit's power, she proclaims from the fullness of Christ. The very life of Christ pulsates in her veins. In each new generation new people are received into this mysterious fellowship. And they are children of their time, filled with its questions and need. But they are also children of the Church, filled with the life of the Spirit and the power of the Word. Therefore they are able to present the old message as the innermost possession of their own being. And in the language of their own time, they will answer the questions of their own generation. Thus the church can handle ever new situations with an ever regenerated and refreshing gospel. Yet it always remains the same gospel.²²

It is the Lord's Church to which we have been called, and we participate in His mission. Therefore, we do not despair or lose hope. We make use of those gifts with which God has blessed us as we go about His Kingdom work today. Klaus Detlev Schulz writes hopeful words for all congregations, "Affirming the Holy Spirit as the subject of mission from the cross frees Lutheran mission from seeking ambitious goals of expansion. Rather, the Church concentrates on one major activity: the proclamation of the Gospel, from which the Church as community emerges and lives."²³ However, this emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work through the Word that is found in Lutheran missiology is not an excuse for quietism or retreat from engagement with the world. As we consider the challenges facing the world today, we are reminded that each Christian is called to be God's instrument in His mission. Schulz further writes of this aspect of the Christian's vocation:

The most important role for all Christians is participation in the mission of God and the Church. There may be divergent views on defining exactly what the missionary obligation entails. However, the underlying premise should be that the Church's mission engages all Christians, not just a few. . . . Christians contribute to furthering God's kingdom through their witness, which speaks to their cultural situation yet flows from Word and Sacrament

into their lives and their Christian vocation. The arena of mission is precisely where Christians are placed at home in the family, at work, and in their daily activities. This is a fundamental Lutheran doctrine.²⁴

So where do we go from here? It is impossible to turn a blind eye to these challenges and pretend that they do not exist. We need to be informed about the challenges facing our communities and consider ways to respond with the gifts that God has provided. There are many opportunities for mission work and amid a population that is more than half unchurched across rural America. God's mission to the world flows from the font, pulpit, and table as the gifts of God are shared with God's people. The Church is those who are called out by God from the world, but then are sent back into the world to proclaim His Word where God has placed them. Such is the mission of every congregation, whether centered in the urban core or found among the suburban sprawl or among the small towns. Big challenges face small-town congregations today. The people of God have been called by God as part of His mission for a time such as this.

Endnotes

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Theology of Holy Spirit: Experiences of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Hailu Yohannes Bulaka

Abstract: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is the largest Lutheran church in Africa which proclaims the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and fast growing Church. The Church is not only serving for spiritual needs of a person but also physical needs. The motto of church service is “serving the whole person” better known as Wholistic Ministry. The church has been called by God to proclaim Christ as Lord and Savior of all humankind. The church believes and professes that the Bible both Old and New Testaments are the Holy Word of God and the only guiding source of her life and ministry. My article is to show the role in its evangelistic growth and its challenges as the church grows very fast. The article meant to give sound and biblical understanding of “Theology of Holy Spirit” and experience of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. I hope this article blesses many believers around the globe. May God bless those who read this article.

Introduction: A Brief History of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Mission in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is a national Lutheran Church with its own remarkable history going back to the seventeenth century when Peter Heyling, a Lutheran missionary from Germany, arrived in Ethiopia in 1634 and started evangelical work within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) for a short period. This pioneer missionary helped lay the foundation for later missionary work in Ethiopia. In the eighteenth century, a great evangelical revival took place in the British Isles. This revival emphasized the transformation of the individual through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Believers were urged to deny self, dedicating their lives to serve others and to win them for Christ. The revival resulted in bringing about social reform and initiating new mission societies dedicated to bringing the Gospel to those who had never heard the good news.²

Hailu Yohannes Bulaka was born on May 23, 1967 in Southern part of Ethiopia, Sidama, Aleta Wondo. He is married and has 4 children: 3 boys and one daughter. He graduated in Theology from Mekane Yesus Seminary in 1997. He is pastor in one congregation and president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus South Central Ethiopia Synod (EECMY/SCES) since 2008. He currently is a student in the Doctor of Ministry Program Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

At the beginning, it was not the intention of these newly formed mission societies to plant new churches on Ethiopian soil, but rather to aid the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in carrying out its mission. In order to revitalize ancient churches like the EOC, the Protestant mission societies planned to distribute Christian literature and Bibles in the local language of the people. However, when cooperation between the new converts and the structures of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became difficult, the Protestant societies felt compelled to plant a denominational church.³ Lutheran missionaries eventually established Lutheran congregations in different parts of the country. Following a series of consultations and meetings among the leaders of these congregations, a consensus was reached to form an Ethiopian Protestant national church.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, pietistic and Moravian ideas entered the country and helped bring revival to the church. These ideas stressed individual conversion and increased lay influence. The pietistic and the Moravian movements had a positive influence on many believers and led them to read the Bible with interest and promote the formation of cell groups in which Bible study and group prayer took place.⁴ Together these events helped lead to the establishment of a national church. The draft of a constitution was articulated and a general assembly was called for the formation of the new church. Eventually, delegates representing the twenty thousand Lutherans in Ethiopia gathered and approved the draft constitution, founding a national Lutheran church known as “The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus” (EECMY) on January 21, 1959.

The mission organizations that played significant roles in the establishment of the EECMY were the Sweden Evangelical Mission (SEM), the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM), the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), the Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM), the American Lutheran Mission (ALM), and the American Presbyterian Church, which joined at a later date.

The first group of missionaries from Sweden arrived in 1861. The evangelistic and church planting efforts of the Swedes were confined to the northern part of the country. Under the leadership of Hermann Bahlburg, missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission in Germany (GHM) arrived in Ethiopia on December 30, 1927. They were to play an important role in the founding of the Ethiopian Lutheran Church. Heeding the request of the SEM, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) sent missionaries formerly stationed in China to the mission field in Ethiopia. Arriving in 1948, the Norwegians started work in the former Sidamo and Gamo Gofa Provinces in 1949. By 1953, there were more than three thousand members in the congregations in Sidamo. The Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM) also arrived in Ethiopia in 1948, inaugurating mission work in Dodola, Bale province, after securing permission from the Ethiopian government. The Danish missionaries laid the

foundation for the later work of the EECMY in the southwestern part of the country, a predominantly Muslim area.

The coming of the American Lutheran Mission (ALM) to Ethiopia in 1957 was unique in that the request to evangelize in this ancient land was extended by the Crown Prince of Ethiopia. The ALM started work in the province of Wollo in northern Ethiopia and laid there the foundation for future mission work in the north.

We have seen that the eighteenth-century evangelical revival in Europe and the Second Great Awakening in America resulted in the formation of a number of missionary organizations that were very enthusiastic about reaching unreached people groups with the Gospel. The mission societies that came to Ethiopia, such as CMS, SEM, GHM, AUPM, SIM, SMBW, with the exception of the NLM, DLM, and ALM, all entered Ethiopia before the 1930s. CMS, SEM, and SMBW started their mission work in the northern part of Ethiopia. SEM, GHM, and AUPM started their mission work in the western part of Ethiopia among the Oromo and other peoples. SIM, DLM, and NLM began their mission work among the Sidama, Kambata, Wallayta, Bale, Gamo, and other ethnic groups in the south.

The mission societies eventually established Lutheran congregations in different parts of the country. Following a series of consultations and meetings among the leaders of these congregations, a consensus was reached to form an Ethiopian Lutheran national church body. As a result, a draft constitution was articulated and a general assembly was called for the formation of the new church. Consequently, delegates of the twenty thousand members throughout the nation gathered and approved the draft constitution of a national Lutheran church body known as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) on January 21, 1959. This was the beginning of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Now this church body is the fastest growing Lutheran church in the world. The combined membership of its twenty-five synods exceeds 6.35 million souls. Sixty-five percent of the membership is young people.

A Brief History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC)

The history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church dates back to the Book of Acts. It is recorded in the Book of Acts (8:26–40) that the evangelist Philip converted to Christianity a certain eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. The treasurer had traveled to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. On his way back home, he encountered Philip, whom God had sent to proclaim the Gospel to him. Upon confessing Christ as his savior, Philip baptized the royal treasurer. According to the Ethiopian tradition, the treasurer returned home in 34 AD and evangelized his people. He also opened chapels for worship. According to Lule Melaku, the royal treasurer was the first to bring Christianity to Ethiopia.⁵ In the fourth century, Rufinus⁶ wrote the romantic story about how Christianity was brought to Axum by

Frumentius and Aedesius. There is good reason to assume that the story of Frumentius and Aedesius is authentic. It is supported by archeological evidence, which seems to show that the young king at the time was Ezana, the son of Ella Amida, a person who started out as a pagan ruler but in his later years had the cross stamped on the coins of his realm. The king died young, leaving behind his wife and his sons Ezana and Saizana to rule his kingdom. Although they were heirs to the throne, Ezana and Saizana were too young to succeed their father. Consequently, their mother, the queen, begged Frumentius and Aedesius to remain in Ethiopia to help her administer the kingdom until her sons reached maturity and were able to rule.

Frumentius and Aedesius accepted the queen's invitation and stayed in Axum, where they faithfully carried out their commission. According to Sergew, in addition to helping govern the country, Frumentius and Aedesius brought up the children and taught them in the Christian faith. The missionaries built a place of prayer for the princes, where the children were taught to sing psalms and hymns.⁷ Later, the same source tells us that the names of the two brothers were Atsbeha (Ezana) and Abraha (Saezana). (*Atsbeha* means "he brought the dawn"; *Abraha* means "he illuminated.>"). Atsbeha and Abraha were converted to Christianity in 330 AD.

The so-called Nine Saints play a prominent role in Ethiopian history. Their coming must be put somewhere about the end of the fifth century (479 AD). They seem to have been learned monks who migrated from different places in the Roman Empire. At least some of them were Syriac or Aramaic speakers.⁸ The mission of these saints was intended to accomplish two main objectives: to consolidate the moral life among the Christians and to convert and baptize the non-Christians of the country. The first objective was achieved during their stay at Axum, and the second was fulfilled when they left Axum and moved to the countryside. Their work was the starting point of expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Lutheran Church (EECMY)

In this article, I would also like to discuss some ideas that deal primarily with Baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and miraculous healing, since these phenomena have played an important part in the growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

The mission statement of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus stresses the connecting of people to Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel so that the church becomes an embodiment of God's love in holistic service to the world, planting congregations, empowering ministers, nurturing believers, and making disciples in Ethiopia. This mission statement exists to proclaim, to teach, and to empower the members of the church. Various evangelistic and church growth

efforts throughout the EECMY in recent years have given attention to the place of “spiritual gifts” in the life and growth of the church and have sought to help people identify and use such gifts.

In order to accomplish her mission, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus employs a decentralized structure, both on the national and the grass roots level. Church government in the EECMY is structured on four administrative levels: local congregations, parishes, synods, and the national church. There is a decision-making body at each of these four levels of church government. The highest decision-making bodies at the national level are the general assembly, the council, the executive board, and the management committee. The decision-making bodies of the synods are the convention, the council, the executive board, and the management committee. The decision-making bodies of the parishes are the parish convention and the parish executive board. At the congregation level, the decision-making bodies are the congregational convention and congregational elders and lay leaders.

Even though the church has such a strong institutional structure, the influence of the charismatic movement upon the members of the EECMY has not been hindered. This movement has rather helped the church to grow in faith and to fulfill the Lord’s mission. “The Charismatic movement is a constant reminder that God is not dead, nor he is nonexistent. This movement has done an enormous amount to kindle and rekindle faith in the living God who delights to answer prayers, to build his people into one, and to equip them with his gifts.”⁹

By the help of Holy Spirit, Ethiopians have been the pioneers of the planting of new churches in Ethiopia. “Indigenous evangelists were also prominent in bringing about church growth. Commissioned and sent out they preached, taught and organized carrying out their threefold function as missionaries, catechists and teachers.”¹⁰

One of the significant developments in Ethiopian church life during the past decades has been the rapid spread of the charismatic movement within the church. In the early 1900s, experiences and practices usually associated only with Pentecostal denominations began to manifest themselves with increasing frequency in the EECMY. By the mid-twentieth century, it was clear that this movement had also spread to some pastors and congregations of EECMY. “If the Charismatic movement can, in the providence of God, impress on the institutional captivity of the church the truth that every member is called to serve, that leadership exists to equip the saints for their God given work of service.”¹¹

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Mission

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God. The activity of the Holy Spirit in mission is too important to be unnoticed. “All scriptures are inspired by God and are useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and

giving instruction for right living” (1 Tim 3:16). The Spirit through His Word teaches the truth. For example, He teaches through the Word that Jesus alone saves from hell. He also teaches that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The Holy Spirit through His Word rebukes error. One error, for example, is that there are other ways to salvation for those who haven’t heard of our Savior. The Holy Spirit confers right teaching through the Word. That Word declares that Jesus gives salvation to those who come to Him.

The Holy Spirit through His Word corrects faults. One fault, for example, is that of a missionary dominating the young church he has come to serve, or using the Gospel message to make gain—psychological, if not financial. The Holy Spirit brings people to the incomparable understanding that everything that goes against the Word is incorrect. He corrects such faults. The Holy Spirit through His Word gives instruction for right living. Love, for example, should be so pervasive, so visible, that people will know whose disciples we are. The giving of the Word is the first activity through which the Holy Spirit empowers mission.

The gift of the Holy Spirit helps the Ethiopian church to do its mission. But this has been a challenge for a conservative institutional church. “The movement of the Spirit always poses a challenge to the conservatism of the institution. Somehow the Church of Christ must embody both charisma and order. Movements of renewal movement will remain a lasting challenge to those who exalt institution over life.”¹²

The Holy Spirit Helps the Church to Do God’s Mission

Christ said, “I will build my church” (Mt 16:18), and the Book of Acts is devoted to describing how He did it. In Acts, we see the Holy Spirit empowering people to start local congregations. Jesus said His Church would be unshakable—the powers of hell can’t overcome it, or even withstand its onslaught. Since it is built by the power of the Holy Spirit, other powers never defeat it. Throughout the Book of Acts, it was the Spirit who took the initiative. For example, it was in a prayer meeting that He called the leaders of the church at Antioch to start an intentional worldwide missionary movement (Acts 13:3–5). When Paul and his missionary team miscued on God’s strategy, it was the Holy Spirit who stopped them dead in their tracks and redirected them, not once, but twice (Acts 16:6–10). The Holy Spirit instructs and guides people for mission work. I believe it is the work of Holy Spirit that is responsible for the remarkable growth and maturity of EECMY during the past years since January 1959.

The Holy Spirit Energizes the Messenger

The Holy Spirit alone can empower believers for supernatural living and supernatural ministry. We call this work the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12–14; Eph 4:1–11). The Holy Spirit is the only one

able to work unity among strong-minded pioneers, among people of diverse cultures, and among egocentric, fallen humans. He is the only one who can take individuals bent on securing their own lives and make them willing to throw all away for the sake of Gospel. Such is the evidence of the Spirit at work. The Holy Spirit alone can empower people for a missionary vocation. If a person doesn't have the supernatural gift of evangelism, how can he even begin to carry out the apostolic task, planting the Church of Christ in places where it is not? The Holy Spirit is central for missionary life and service. It is He who energizes the evangelists. A few decades ago, the charismatic movement in Ethiopia was the agent of dissention within the church. But now, its concern is for evangelism. The members of the church have come to understand that gifts are not given for self-fulfillment, but for service of God and building of His Church. Now the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is concerned about evangelism and mission work outside the country.

The Holy Spirit gives power to His people so that they perform miracles, such as healing and the casting out of demons. Many who have witnessed such miraculous works of God's Spirit have been transformed from hopeless men and women of this world into children of God. As children of God, many have found great happiness in discovering opportunities to serve God publicly. "Mercifully, I find that many who have come to faith and subsequently to baptism and confirmation, take the opportunity to give a public testimony and to explain the difference the Spirit is making in their lives. Many who have become alive in the Spirit, do not seek to be rebaptised but rather to serve Christ and witness to his power to transform lives."¹³

Christ sent the Holy Spirit expressly to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn 16:8). This work of the Spirit is directly tied in with His original work of Creation—creating humankind in the image of God. By making us God-compatible, the Spirit gives us the capacity to belong to God in an intimate, loving relationship. But, by violating that relationship, we humans have been alienated from the Lord, and the divine image we have received has been made dysfunctional. Yet, it is that basic compatibility, implanted in us by the Spirit, that makes possible His communication with us, convicting of sin and need for repentance.

The Holy Spirit needs to transform the individual's core nature so that the activities of the Holy Spirit have meaning in his life (Jn 3:5–8; Ti 3:5). God only is the final judge of who has been regenerated. He wants His people to be interim fruit inspectors, to discern and lead people God-ward.

The Church and Mission

In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to proclaim faithfully the whole teaching of Christ and to share the Good News of the kingdom—that is, the totality of apostolic faith, life, and witness—with everyone throughout the entire

world. Thus, the Church seeks faithfully to proclaim and live the love of God for all, and to fulfill Christ's mission for the salvation and transformation of the world, to the glory of God.

God restores and enriches communion with humanity, granting eternal life in God's Triune Being. Through redeemed humanity, the whole world is meant to be drawn to the goal of restoration and salvation. This divine plan reaches its fulfillment in the new heaven and the new earth in God's Holy Kingdom. "Healings, exorcisms, tongues, prophecy are merely the spectacular tip of the iceberg, the heart of which is a living, loving, believing Christian fellowship."¹⁴

The community of Jesus Christ exists first and supremely for God. This means God is a relational God who creates relationship with His people, and His people have full authority to communicate with Him. The community of Jesus Christ is that of human creatures whose existence has meaning and purpose because of the opportunities for service they have been given as His disciples. His disciples do not live for themselves, but for the world and all humankind. God calls, gathers, and up builds His community; He rules and is Lord and shepherd.

God has given Himself to and for the world to reconcile it to Him. Supremely and truly, God in Christ has become a human being. He lived among His people as a real flesh and blood human being. It is this incarnate Lord who decides the meaning, mission, and purpose of the community that calls itself by His name. God acts and speaks in Jesus Christ through whom His own true divinity is expressed precisely in His true humanity. By living in and with His people, Jesus transforms the lives of His people.

The true community of Jesus Christ is the community that God has sent out into the world. He Himself is the foundation of that community. How could a church exist for the world and not yet be of the world? Christ's Church exists for others. It is not "of the world," even though it is "in the world" (Jn 17:11), even as He who sends it forth with plenary divine power is not of the world (Jn 17:16). Nor is the power that sustains the community in its mission of the world. Through the members of the Body of Christ living in the people of this world, the Spirit brings a tremendous change in the lives of many. God has placed His people in the midst of people of many different cultures and languages in order to bring His life to those whose lives have been ruined by all kinds of distress and suffering.

The Spirit-filled Church is Missional Church

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts sinners of their sin and guilt, opens their eyes to see Christ, draws them to Him, enables them to repent and believe, and implants life in their dead souls. Before Christ sent the Church into the world, He sent the Holy Spirit to the Church.

In the Upper Room, Jesus emphasized that the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father was sending to make the Son known. The Spirit, above all else, would delight in glorifying and making manifest the Son (Jn 16:14). In the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, the Holy Spirit would be the chief witness. “He will bear witness to me.” Only after saying this, did Jesus add to His apostles, “and you also are witnesses” (Jn 15:26–27).

The church that carries out the mission work in this world must be a missional church, a church that goes or moves to reach unreached people and areas.

1. The missional church proclaims the Gospel. The story of God’s salvation is faithfully repeated and preached in a multitude of different ways. This task is the task of the church. The members of the church must return to the Bible and to find nourishment in God’s Word for their lives as God’s children.
2. The missional church is a community in which all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus. Since all church members are disciples by definition, growth in discipleship is expected of all the people of God. All must experience what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. The public worship in the church brings the members into total expectant dependence on the Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible is normative in the church’s life. The members of the church meet together to read the Bible together in order to learn what they can learn nowhere else—God’s good and gracious intent for all creation, the mystery of salvation, and the identity and purpose of their life together. A participatory style of public worship of praise and prayer are very important in the life of the church.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform its life to the Lord instead of to the conflicting demands and lifestyles of the surrounding cultures. It is very significant to use spiritual gifts for ministry in the church by every member.
5. The church seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members. A communal lifestyle is very important for the ministry. The church has made “mission” its priority and in overt and communal ways seeks to be and do “what God is calling us to know, be, and do.”
6. A missional community is characterized by how Christians behave toward one another. Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another, both in the church and in the local community, are characteristics of a missional church. An active commitment by the members of the church to reach out to

the needy in evangelism and service is very important for the growth of the church.

7. It is a community that practices reconciliation. The church community is moving beyond homogeneity toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender, and socioeconomic makeup.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love. Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality; welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role in the church's mission.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. There is a significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.
11. The community has a vital public witness. The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.
12. There is recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God. There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere—and that "somewhere" is a more faithfully lived life in the reign of God. This means the church is still waiting for the "not yet" kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit Empowers the Church for Mission

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to resist misusing power. This is a foundational aspect of reconciliation: restoring the relationship between God and human beings. In the church, every baptized believer is endowed with a special gift for mission, for mutual up-building and encouragement. Whether they be male or female, lay or clergy, young or old, all their gifts are to be developed, appreciated, and availed.

God's empowerment extends also to society at large through the mission activities of the church as one of God's empowering instruments in the world. Through its service and diaconal ministries, the church provides help for the immediate needs of people in distress. However, the church is called to go beyond a "hand-out" or charitable ministry to a mission of empowerment. The church seeks ways to assist those in need, regardless of their origin or creed, to regain their human dignity by asserting control over their own lives.

It has been a great privilege for the pastors and evangelists and other church workers to be allowed to work with God in this time. The *qalichas*, which in the Sidama language are people who are ritual experts and spirit cult specialists, had tremendous power over the people in many of the areas where the Evangelical revival was well received. Words such as freedom, peace, and safety were new and beautiful and have helped many people come to faith. It can also be underlined that the liberating power of the Gospel gives people a new sense of self-respect. Many of the Evangelical Christians were landless peasants, more or less at the mercy of the landowners. "If the son makes you free, then you will be really free." The Evangelical movement within the church has created a great need for instruction, counseling, and even administration. *Sheetane*, a spirit of possession or an evil spirit in the Christian understanding, had never been for the people a lord they gladly served. The common people felt exploited by the traditional religion and the economic pressure it exerted upon them. They, therefore, received the Gospel or the message of Jesus Christ, who was stronger than Satan, with joy. The strong desire to be delivered from the yoke and chains of Satan prepared the people for the news of Jesus Christ. The acceptance of Christ also made the economic burdens on the family lighter. Through the power of Jesus Christ, many Christians have been delivered from both the oppression of Satan and of the economic burden of the traditional religion.

Is the Charismatic Movement a challenge?

The charismatic movement is a challenge for Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). One of the problems is the tension and division among the believers themselves. The charismatic movement in an Ethiopian context presents many challenges. One of the problems is the idea that God is still revealing new truths beyond those revealed to us in Scripture. For example, many believers in the church expect messages and new revelations to come from self-proclaimed prophets. Another problem is that the charismatic movement has put a gap between common believers and the extreme charismatics, who claim to have moved to a higher level of spirituality. This leads people to derogate reasons and elevate feelings. Another challenge is that, in our church, many believers repeat over and over again such words as "Hallelujah" and "Amen" without understanding their meaning.

Problems have arisen between the so-called "Spirit-filled believers" and "non-filled believers." Extreme charismatics tend to criticize their leaders and fellow members. Some leaders are said to be "dry ones" and in need of being filled with the Holy Spirit. For that reason, many believers are filled with doubt concerning their salvation and are unable to witness about Jesus Christ. According to the charismatic movement, spiritual dryness is the absence of manifesting outward emotions such as shouting, jumping, roaring, shaking, and many other actions. Charismatics see believing in Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit as different. In this

view, they go beyond Scripture. If there are tensions and divisions, we can easily understand that they have an effect on church growth. These are the challenges of the charismatic movement in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

How Is the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia (EECMY) Handling the Charismatic Movement and Its Challenge?

1. The church leaders, pastors, evangelists, and lay congregation elders are exhorted to prayerfully study the Word of God and its exposition in the Lutheran Confessions and to carefully govern the use of spiritual gifts—taking care to correct any abuse of any spiritual gift in the life of the church in accordance with biblical teaching.
2. Even though the Ethiopian Christians have been delivered from the oppression of Satan and their economic burdens through the power of Jesus Christ, the church believes and teaches that a person is saved by faith alone. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that people are saved, and not through the spiritual gifts they may have received.
3. As we recognize, in certain areas of the church, tensions and even divisions due to the charismatic movement, the church leaders should warn gently and encourage one another with love and patience. And those Christians who claim that they received a charismatic experience should evaluate their gifts, not by personal feelings and emotions but in the light of the Word of God.
4. As we receive the gifts of Holy Spirit and exercise them in the church, we have to be aware that spiritual pride or undisciplined enthusiasm may cause serious offense to the Body of Christ. Thus, the members must pray and work to edify the church and not to be cause for division of the congregations.
5. It is very important to devote greater attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the rapid and wide spread growth of the church today. Since the Spirit comes to the church in Word and Sacrament, the church must use the Word and Sacraments at every level of its ministry so that the church members may have a renewed sense of joy, peace, and power that God has promised.
6. The members of the church should admonish and encourage one another with love and patience. The wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible are also being given to God's people today. However, God's people must seek them according to the sovereign will of God.

7. The church should accept those members who claim the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as Lutheran (EECMY) members and teach them the Word of God and instruct them how they should use their experience and their gifts in a harmonious, edifying manner in their local congregations.

The Benefits of the Charismatic Movement in EECMY and Its Role in Growth of the Church

The charismatic movement is playing a significant role in the growth of EECMY. The important aspects in the charismatic movement influencing church growth are love and zeal for others, prayer, Christian living in harmony with others, relevant and good teaching, voluntary ministers, and the place and role of the Bible in healing and exorcism. This is the positive side of charismatic movement for church growth. However, the church can grow without the charismatic movement. Before the charismatic movement became influential in the EECMY, the church was growing both inwardly (spiritually) and outwardly. Consequently, this tells us that we need to focus on various aspects, positive as well as negative, of the charismatic movement for understanding its effects on church growth. I hope the church at large might learn from the EECMY that we pastorally handle the charismatic movement within the church to use it for mission and evangelistic outreach for church growth for the glory of God.

Summary

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the largest Lutheran church in Africa. Its membership is more than 6.35 million. It was established as a national church on January 1959. At that time, there were only twenty thousand members, and it is still a fast growing church. One of the important developments in the church life during the past decades has been the rapid spread of the charismatic movement within the church. In 1963, experiences and practices usually associated only with the charismatic movement were occurring with increasing frequency, also in the EECMY. By 1975, it was apparent that this movement had also spread to some pastors, evangelists, and elders in the congregations of EECMY.

The author is the president of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus South Central Ethiopia Synod (EECMY/SCES), which has 1,344 congregations and about five hundred thousand members. Of that number, 65% are youth and 52% are women, the majority of whom are experiencing the so-called “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Because some of the basic beliefs of this movement resemble those of Pentecostal churches, in the South Central Ethiopia Synod the charismatic movement is referred to as neo-Pentecostalism. However, the movement gradually and increasingly has come to be known as “charismatic”—a word meaning the gift of God’s love. In the word “charismatic,” Ethiopian Christians have found a term that is

both biblical and popular, without bearing the stigma that has often in the past attached itself to the emotionalism of Pentecostalism. That said, the charismatic remains an important ministry challenge.

Endnotes

¹ Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: Epsforlaget, 1978), 45.

² *Ibid.*, 45.

³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ Lule Melaku, *History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: Part I* (Addis Ababa: Tsedenia Publishers, 2008), 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45–47.

⁷ Sergew Habte Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 99.

⁸ M. Geddes, *The Church History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1696), 2 quoted in teaching material of Mekane Yesus Seminary College of Distance Education—Ethiopian Church History (EOC & EECMY) (Addis Ababa: Jan. 2014), 7.

⁹ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 295.

¹⁰ Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry Patterns and Functions within EECMY* (Uppsala: Solum Forlag, 1987), 195.

¹¹ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 297.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

From Everyday Language to a Culturally-Embedded Metaphor: Identifying a Tool for Teaching about the Christian Life in Brazil¹

Samuel Fuhrmann

Abstract: By noticing how people speak of life in everyday language, one can better understand their cultures. Such an understanding can help one think about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be preached and lived out in particular contexts. This paper is an attempt toward that end. In what follows, then, we apply metaphor theory to Brazilian culture and move on to a theological reflection in order to offer a tool to teach about the Christian life in Brazilian context. In such an attempt, we pay special attention to the important distinction between salvation and Christian life narratives, in order that the biblical teaching about the Christian life may be fostered and the believer comforted in times of distress.

Pastor, I need your help! I have been through great trials in life and not been able to overcome them. I know I have to ‘continue fighting’—I have to ‘fight’ for the future of my family—but I just cannot see a way to overcome the difficulties and temptations I’ve been through.

This hypothetical plea for help from a parishioner to his pastor illustrates a common approach to life in the Brazilian context. “To continue fighting” is a particular Brazilian expression, a metaphorical utterance, to say that life is not easy, that a person needs to overcome the bad things in life, even the person’s own weaknesses, in order to continue living and to achieve his goals in life.

The way people speak of life and the exact concerns they express are things that pastors need to pay attention to. In comforting someone with concerns like the foregoing parishioner, pastors need to be able to talk about the believer’s daily struggle of the Christian life along with the work of the Holy Spirit, and not only about Jesus’ work for our salvation. While the latter is foundational to understand the former, one should not be confused with the other. Neither should an (over)emphasis on Jesus’ work obscure the biblical teaching of the Christian life. Therefore, besides saying that *difficulties and temptations are part of life because of sin, but Christ has died on the cross to forgive you*, it is also necessary to affirm the Holy Spirit’s daily guidance in times of distress, and all this needs to be done with a language, a vocabulary, that the person can understand. Otherwise, misunderstandings and

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confusion between narratives can lead to theological confusion. How, then, can pastors appropriate of Brazilians' daily language in teaching about the Christian life and still preserve the necessary distinction between salvation and Christian life narratives?

In regard to the above, the present paper has a twofold purpose. First, it aims to show how the Brazilian culturally-embedded metaphor of "life is a battle" can be used for teaching about the Christian life in Brazil. Second, this paper intends to demonstrate how, on the other hand, this image might render the Gospel incomprehensible if the proper distinction between salvation and Christian life narratives is not made.

It is also important to say what we do not intend with this paper. In affirming that the Christian life can be spoken of in terms of a battle, we are not saying that warfare imagery should shape the way Christians engage in conversation with those who think different from us. This would imply that we have to be always in conflict with others and that we have to "defeat" those who think different from us, which would make the communication of the Gospel much more difficult. Moreover, to see our conversation with other people in terms of warfare imagery would require an investigation of another metaphor, such as "argument is war,"² which is not the focus here. In this paper, on the other hand, the warfare imagery is intended to affirm the biblical teaching about "fighting" primarily our own sinfulness for the sake of serving and helping our neighbors.

In order to accomplish our purpose, we first offer a description of how such a culturally-embedded metaphor is identified. A proposal for speaking of the Christian life to Brazilian culture will be developed in the second section.

The paper requires of its readers a basic prior knowledge of Metaphor Theory, which has been explained by Justin Rossow in *Preaching the Story Behind the Image: A Narrative Approach to Metaphor for Preaching*,³ from which we borrow its suggested methodology. Also, the paper is informed by the discoveries of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* to the extent that they affirm the pervasiveness of metaphor and its relation to experience and thought. Their main idea is that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action."⁴

1. "Life Is a Battle": Identifying a Culturally-Embedded Metaphor in Brazilian Culture

"Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it."⁵

In presenting a study about how people read poetry, George Lakoff and Mark Turner have shown that the metaphorical language used in poetry is not beyond ordinary language and that great poets use the same "tools" (like metaphor and metonymy) that we use in our daily conversations. The difference in using such tools resides in the fact that poets pay careful attention to and use them intentionally, while we use these tools "unconsciously and automatically."

This idea of metaphorical language as unconsciously and ordinarily used, which Lakoff and Turner have demonstrated by presenting different metaphorical expressions in ordinary language, is also evidenced by a Brazilian way of speaking about life. Hardly noticing that they are using metaphorical language, Brazilians sometimes talk about their lives in terms of a *battle*, in which whoever wants to continue living should never stop *fighting*. In their daily conversations, there are many linguistic expressions in which *fight*, *battle*, *struggle*, *victories*, and *defeats* serve as ways of describing a person's view of or situation in life.

For Lakoff, Johnson, and Zoltán Kövecses, metaphorical utterances like these indicate that “there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system”⁶ and that people of the same culture share what we are calling here “culturally-embedded metaphors.” These are metaphors that are formed by shared experiences and become part of the way that people process experiences and communicate. Such metaphors shape our understandings of the world and everyday practices without our even noticing them. They underlie everyday metaphorical utterances and allow one to understand such utterances. For instance, expressions such as “He is *wasting* time” and “I could *save* one hour if I used my own computer,” both present in American culture, presuppose the culturally-embedded metaphor that time is money.⁷ In the view of the forgoing authors, Americans use and understand these expressions because they share this metaphor embedded in their culture, present not only in their language but primarily in their thought, as part of their conceptual system.

The list below shows some common expressions that Brazilians use when they talk about their ordinary lives. These expressions identify a culturally-embedded metaphor for life in Brazilian culture. Each expression in its original language (Portuguese) in the left column is followed by a translation into English in the column on the right:

Everyday Expression	Translation
- <i>A vida é feita de vitórias e derrotas</i>	<i>Life is made of victories and defeats</i>
- <i>Vai à luta!</i>	<i>Go ahead and fight for it!</i>
- <i>Não desista de lutar</i> ⁸	<i>Do not give up fighting!</i>
- <i>A luta continua</i>	<i>The struggle (or fight) continues</i>
- <i>Você tem que encarar as batalhas do dia a dia</i>	<i>You have to face the daily battles</i>
- <i>Este cara é batalhador</i>	<i>This guy is a fighter</i>
- <i>Não está morto quem peleia</i>	<i>Whoever still wrestles is not dead yet</i>
- <i>A morte venceu esta batalha</i>	<i>Death has won this battle</i>
- <i>Estou lutando por uma vida melhor</i>	<i>I am fighting for a better life</i>
- <i>Estou lutando pelo futuro da minha família</i>	<i>I am fighting for the future of my family</i>
- <i>Esta pessoa venceu na vida</i>	<i>This person has won in life</i>

In light of what has been said thus far, one could say that these metaphorical expressions are possible because there is a metaphor present in Brazilian thought by

which people process their understanding of life.⁹ We suggest that the expression, “life is a battle,” is a culturally-embedded metaphor in Brazilian culture that allows Brazilians to understand and even experience life in terms of battle. As Lakoff and Johnson recall, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”¹⁰

In this sense, one can think of metaphorical utterances in terms of correspondences between two conceptual domains. In the present paper, such a correspondence is between Brazilians’ understandings of the domain of “battle” and of the domain of “life.”

These are some correspondences between the two domains:

- A person leading a life is a fighter/soldier;
- His or her purpose is survival, protection, and a better life for his or her loved ones;
- The means for achieving purposes are hope and fight;
- Difficulties in life are enemies to be overcome;
- Counselors are commanders;
- Plans are strategies;
- Professional success is victory.

Another relevant aspect regarding metaphors is their connection with narrative contexts and their structures. One of Rossow’s main arguments is that metaphors have implicit or implied narratives and that what will guide the interpretation of a given metaphor is how one handles the implied narrative relationships of the metaphor.¹¹ For instance, to say that a person “fights for the future” of his or her family places this person within implied narrative relationships proper for a soldier, who has to fight the enemy for the best for his nation. Here, in the narrative context of a battle, then, the terms “soldier,” “enemy,” and “nation” have roles and relate to one another creating a certain relationship structure.

For handling these relationships, Rossow suggests the use of the structuralist Actantial Model developed by A. J. Greimas.¹² This model is “helpful shorthand for these narrative relationships,”¹³ as it allows one to visualize the roles and structure of the implied narrative relationships of a given metaphor.¹⁴

For the purpose of this paper, then, the narrative roles and relationships that shape the inference structure of the metaphor, “life is a battle,” are plotted on Greimas’ model (see below).

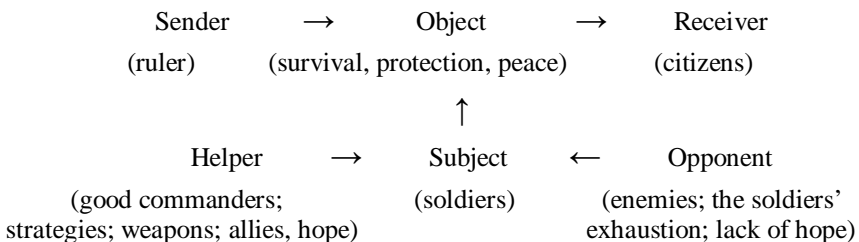


Figure 1 (A Horizontal Actantial Model)

This is the implied narrative relationships of the **Source Domain** of the “battle” metaphor put into Greimas’ Actantial Model. A second step to be taken here would be to map onto the Target Domain of “life” on the basis of the correspondences of the two domains listed above. However, since the goal of the present paper is to demonstrate how one can helpfully speak not of life itself, but of the Christian life in terms of a battle, the mapping onto the target will be made in the second section, as we offer our proposal for speaking of the Christian life.

What is important here is what the model helps to clarify, that is, the positions occupied in the narrative, the “who is doing what for whom and how,” to put it in Rossow’s words.¹⁵ This way, the actantial positions in the model are helpful also for understanding and clarifying the distinction between the biblical narratives about salvation and those about the Christian life. This matter will be approached in the next section, as we map onto the target domain, attempting to suggest a way of speaking of the Christian life.

2. The Christian Life Seen in Terms of a Battle

Talking about, thinking of, and experiencing the Christian life in terms of battle are not alien ideas to Christians. According to David J. Williams, the Apostle Paul talks about both his own life and Christians’ lives in terms of warfare. Sometimes, says the author, Paul “felt himself to be more like a soldier at war than anything else.” In such warfare, sometimes the enemies are “human antagonists” (2 Cor 7:5) in the world; at other times, the human nature is the enemy to be fought—in the inner conflict between “the flesh and the Spirit of God” (Rom 7).¹⁶ Also, the devil is seen as an enemy who, like the world and sin, has already been defeated by Jesus’ work but “is still able to cause great distress.”¹⁷

This said, and taking into consideration what was presented in the first section, I suggest that “the Christian life is a battle” is a metaphor that might foster the biblical teaching about Christian life in Brazilian culture.¹⁸ In this metaphor, then, the Christian is located within implied narrative relationships appropriate for a soldier. Such narrative relationships can be visualized by the Actantial Models that follow this paragraph. Unlike the first model presented above (see Figure 1), Figure 2 places two Actantial Models next to each other so that the correspondences of each actant in both the source and the target may be clearly seen.¹⁹

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A BATTLE

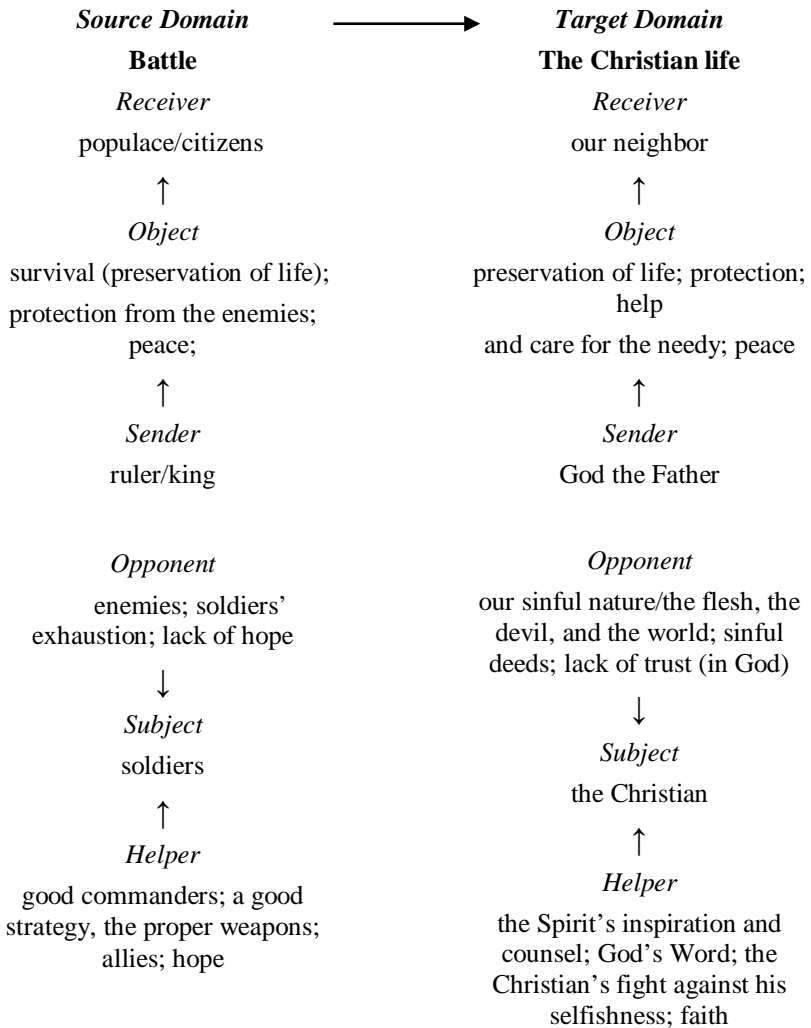


Figure 2 (Vertical Actantial Models in the Source and the Target²⁰)

In approaching the Christian life in terms of battle, then, just as the Ruler or King wants to provide survival, protection, and peace to the citizens through the soldiers, God wants to preserve life and provide protection, help, and care for the needy through the Christian.

And, while in the source the enemies, the soldiers' exhaustion and their lack of hope oppose the soldiers, in the target our sinful nature, the devil, the world, and the lack of trust oppose the Christian. Such oppositions intend to hinder the delivery of the Object to the Receiver. And that is why the function of the Helper is so important. Just as the commanders and good strategies help the soldiers overcome the Opponents and deliver protection and peace to the citizens, the Holy Spirit and God's Word, for instance, help the Christian fight his or her selfish sinful nature and thus care for his or her neighbors in their needs. The function of the Helper, therefore, is fundamental in the present metaphor.²¹

Another fundamental point for the purpose of the present reflection is that the actant/actor who does something for the Receiver is the Subject. Although the Sender sends the Object to the Receiver, the one who actually does what has to be done to deliver the Object is the Subject. Therefore, the structure of the narrative relationships leads to the conclusion that protection of and care for the needy, for instance, come from God and, still, that the Christian is the one who protects and helps the needy; the believer is the one who performs these works. When one's selfish and sinful nature drives him to care for himself only, or when, in fighting sin, the believer gets exhausted or even fails, he can resort and cling to the Helper.

Having in mind this clear understanding of the metaphor, Brazilian pastors could speak of and teach the Christian life in such a way that the good works performed by Christians are clearly understood as not done for God—for God is not the Receiver—but for their neighbors. As Gustaf Wingren has put it, "God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does."²²

At the same time, when offering comfort to their parishioners who are facing distress and temptations, pastors can affirm in a proclamatory way the presence of the Holy Spirit and point to Him as the one who can lead the parishioner during times of struggle. Pastors can assure parishioners, "The Holy Spirit will never abandon you!" In this way, "the Christian life is a battle" metaphor can be helpfully used to teach about the Christian life and to comfort believers in the daily struggles of this life.

2.1. Avoiding Theological Confusion in Interpreting the Metaphor

As noted above, the narrative relationships of any metaphor are of great importance. In the salvation narratives central to Lutherans, for instance, God (probably in the person of Jesus) will always be the active Subject, while we will always be the passive Receivers. In the Christian life narratives, on the other hand, the Christian may be the active Subject (as shown above), without compromising the biblical salvation narratives. As Rossow has pointed out,

Though Christians may be told to "fight the good fight" (1 Tim 6:12) or to "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor 9:24), the narrative structure of these metaphors for Christian living, with believers in the Subject position, will not set aside the passive nature of salvation highlighted in the more

central metaphorical blend of courtroom/sacrifice, where believers are clearly placed in the Receiver slot.²³

Earlier, we affirmed that confusions between narratives (salvation and the Christian life) might create also theological confusion. This is another instance for this point: if, due to the fear of compromising the “passive nature of salvation,” one places the Christian in the role of the Receiver in our metaphor, then the implied narrative is changed. It is changed from a Christian life narrative to a salvation narrative. In the latter, Christ fights on the cross alone and wins the battle for us; in this case, we are indeed the Receivers. This victory is independent of our struggles; it does not depend on us at all. But if one is teaching about the Christian life, or comforting someone who is facing daily temptations and struggles, this change or confusion between narratives may confuse the person. “If Jesus won the battle on the cross, why do I still struggle in life? If Jesus has defeated sin, do I still have to fight sin?” These are doubts that this kind of confusion may generate.

In explaining the warfare metaphors in Paul, Williams makes a clear distinction between these two narratives:

The decisive battle was “out there” on the cross. But “in here,” in terms of our thoughts and words and deeds, the battle still rages. The flesh will not “lay down its arms” and is fighting a stubborn rearguard action. Thus, we must strive, under the command of God’s Spirit, to overcome the flesh by refusing to carry out its desires.²⁴

The non-distinction between these two narratives (and their narrative relationships) has apparently caused a theological problem in some Neo-Pentecostal churches in Brazil. Informed by the so-called “theology of glory,” leaders and members of Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal churches believe that the Christian life is a life of *victory* only, in which there is no room for *defeat*.²⁵ Then, the achievement of financial success, social status, happiness, and even a claimed overcoming of sin, all of which seen as “victory,” are said to be the characteristics of Christians’ daily lives. Perhaps, a more comprehensive study of theology of glory could provide a more detailed description of the given problem; but for the purpose of the present paper, it should suffice to say that complete victory as a result of Jesus’ work—an eschatological victory—is understood by Neo-Pentecostals as something to be enjoyed here and now, and this shapes their so-called “over-realized eschatology.”

Another way of putting it would be to say that the final and complete victory as a result of Jesus’ work—salvation narrative—is being located in the present only and being applied to the Christian life in the sense that, instead of facing daily struggles, a true believer (supposedly) experiences only daily victories.

How could, then, the present proposal help respond to such a view of the Christian life? Before attempting to give an appropriate response to the problem at issue, it would be helpful to look at David Maxwell’s study of the Old Testament narratives that have served as the frameworks for understanding Jesus’ death and resurrection: *The Resurrection of Christ: Its Importance in the History of the Church*.²⁶ Concerned with the place of the resurrection in salvation narratives, Maxwell identifies in Luther what the author calls “stomping narrative”—an account

of Jesus' work in light of Genesis 3:15. Maxwell's concluding paragraphs highlight the most relevant aspects of the study for the purpose of our investigation:

The Day of Atonement narrative sees the cross as satisfying God's wrath over sin. The problem with the Day of Atonement narrative is that it has no obvious place for the resurrection. The Passover narrative understands the cross as a victory over death because the blood drives the Angel of Death away. The resurrection is also seen as a victory over death because through it God leads His people out of bondage of Egypt and crosses them over to the Promised Land. . . . *In the stomping narrative the cross is seen as a temporary victory for Satan, but resurrection reverses this victory, crushing the serpent's head. This narrative works well for dealing with the experience of defeat in the Christian life.*²⁷ (Emphasis added.)

By approaching these three narratives and showing how some Church Fathers and Luther worked with them, Maxwell addresses the "zero-sum mentality that says if the cross saves us, then nothing else can."²⁸ Maxwell's study comes to meet our reflection because of what he calls the "stomping narrative," which, in his own words, "works well for dealing with the experience of defeat in the Christian life" (as quoted above). Maxwell identifies this narrative in Luther's sermon on Mark 16 in which the reformer says that the resurrection saves (and not only the cross). To come to such a conclusion, Luther refers to Genesis 3:15, where God affirms that "he [the offspring of the woman] will crush your head and you [the serpent] will strike his heel." On the basis of this text, and viewing sin as an "enemy power," the cross is described as a defeat and the resurrection as the victory; Satan and sin seem to win but, at the end, they are defeated by Jesus' resurrection.

This salvation narrative allows us to see Jesus experiencing defeat before the final victory in the resurrection and thus leads us to expect the complete victory only in our resurrection. While we are in this world, however, we will experience both victories and defeats in our daily lives. Regardless of whether a Christian has more defeats than victories in life, the final and complete victory has already been guaranteed to us by Jesus' resurrection.

In this sense, Paul says that God "gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57). This text is within a resurrection setting in which the apostle emphasizes that such a victory will come to a completion only at Jesus' second coming, "at the last trumpet" (15:52) on the day of the resurrection.

Therefore, unlike Paul, in expecting only victories in their lives, in our opinion, Neo-Pentecostals are mistakenly locating the complete victory achieved by Jesus' resurrection here and now. In this way, salvation and Christian life narratives are confused, and the warfare image, in this case, hinders the Gospel incomprehensible.

2.1.1. Testing the Limits of the Metaphor

"Metaphors both reveal and conceal important aspects of any Target Domain,"²⁹ says Rossow, as he suggests that, in working with metaphors, pastors might find it necessary to test the limits of a given metaphor. In doing so, misinterpretations may be avoided and important things may be added to what is being taught and

proclaimed; this is one of the *four metaphor moves* mentioned above (see footnote 14).

“The Christian life is a battle” metaphor might be useful for both catechetical and homiletic tasks, as well as for pastoral counseling in Brazil. In any of these three pastoral tasks, *Testing the Limits of the Metaphor* may help the pastor use the metaphor more effectively. This is due to the fact that the Brazilian culture might drive parishioners and hearers to draw unintended inferences from the “battle” metaphor. Following are some possible misunderstandings of which Brazilian pastors should be aware:

- Since we are living in a very individualistic culture, parishioners/hearers might think that they have to fight for themselves and not for others. This idea is opposed by what the Actantial Model (See figure 2) shows—that a soldier fights for the benefit of the citizens, and so the Christian fights for the benefit of his or her neighbors, and not for himself only.

- Since the Scriptures talk about demons’ possessing people, about Jesus’ casting out demons, and about the devil as an enemy, some people might think that the world is a battlefield in which there is a fight between good and evil, and that we have to help God (the good one) fight the devil (the evil one). In this case, Jesus’ victory in the salvation narratives could helpfully respond to such a view.

- Since the world is portrayed also as an enemy in the Scriptures and thus occupies the position of *opponent* in the narrative relationships (described above), the parishioner might forget that the world is, at the same time, the focus of the mission of the Church. “For God so loved the World . . .” and Jesus told the disciples “to make disciples of all nations.” Therefore, in using the suggested metaphor in a sermon or in catechesis, it would be very important to explain these aspects regarding the term *world* in the Scriptures.

In sum, in order to avoid these wrong inferences, *Testing the Limits of the Metaphor* provides a way for pastors to talk about those kinds of things concealed by the present metaphor. Such things might be other important aspects of the Christian life, or even some aspects of Jesus’ work on the cross for our salvation (the objective fight), referring, then, to a salvation narrative without confusing them.

In this way, pastors can, in *testing the limits*, remind their parishioners/hearers that, although the war is not over yet, our enemies have already been defeated. Pastors boldly affirm, with Paul, that when Jesus comes again the war will come to an end; then, the Christian’s enemies will be finally destroyed. Also, pastors can emphasize that our *struggle continues*, not because God needs our help, but because our selfish nature needs to be fought so that our neighbors may be protected and helped in their needs.

Conclusion

“Life is a battle” is a culturally-embedded metaphor in Brazilian culture. By such a metaphor, and taking into consideration Paul’s way of speaking of the Christian life, we have suggested that “the Christian life is a battle” metaphor might

well communicate biblical teaching about Christian life and foster Christian proclamation to Brazilians.

Also, the use of actantial models for both the source domain and the target domain placed next to each other allows us to see the correspondences of the two domains; we can see how they are related. In addition, the narrative relationships of the metaphor at issue, clearly visualized through the actantial models, can help Brazilian pastors/preachers work with the present metaphor, making the proper distinction between the Christian life and salvation narratives. If such a distinction is not properly made, then the image renders the Gospel incomprehensible.

Finally, “the Christian life is a battle” metaphor, along with the “stomping narrative” of Luther, has helped us to address the problem of an over-realized eschatology in which Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal Christians understand the Christian life as a life of victory only. We have argued, however, that seeing the cross as a defeat and the resurrection as Jesus’ victory against Satan, as Luther did, along with Paul’s understanding of our resurrection, leads us to locate the Christian’s final and complete victory in our resurrection on the last day. To speak, therefore, of a complete victory is something that belongs to a salvation narrative in which Christ has already fought, alone.

In the Christian life narrative explored in this paper, however, the Christian is seen as a soldier who will continue fighting until the war is over. But the Christian is not alone, for just as a good commander never abandons his soldiers, the Holy Spirit will never abandon the Christian.

Endnotes

¹ A previous version of this article has been posted on JustinRossow.com in parts. Samuel Fuhrmann, “The Brazilian Metaphor LIFE IS A BATTLE,” March 6, 2013, <http://justinrossow.com/2013/03/06/brazil-life-is-a-battle/>.

² For the implications of this metaphor in one’s conversation with non-Christians, see <http://justinrossow.com/2012/07/17/outreach-and-warfare/> (accessed on February 9, 2013).

³ Justin Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image: A Narrative Approach to Metaphor for Preaching*, Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (2009).

⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xi.

⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 6. The so-called *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* defended by Lakoff and Johnson affirms that a conceptual system “emerges from our constant successful functioning in our physical and cultural environment. Our categories of experience and the dimensions out of which they [conceptual systems] are constructed not only have emerged from our experience but are constantly being tested through ongoing successful functioning by all the members of our culture” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 182–183). This is basically what the authors call the “experientialist” approach. It focuses on the relation between (culturally-shared) experiences, thought, and everyday language.

⁷ See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 9.

⁸ The word “luta” is the noun “fight,” while the term “lutar” is the verb “to fight,” in the infinitive form.

⁹ In the words of Zoltán Kövecses, “metaphorical linguistic expressions make conceptual metaphors manifest.” See *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

¹⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

¹¹ Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image*, 34. What is meant here by implied narrative relationships can be exemplified as follows: the biblical metaphor, “Jesus is the Lamb of God,” has as its implied narrative the sacrificial rite of the Old Testament as well as Jesus’ death on the cross. The metaphorical utterance, “I am Jesus’ little lamb,” on the other hand, has another implied narrative, which is one of a shepherd that cares for his frail sheep. In both instances *lamb* is the source domain, but in each image *lamb* has a different role. In the former image, the lamb (Jesus) saves us; the lamb has an active role in the narrative relationships of the metaphor. In the latter image, the lamb (us) is frail and in need of protection, which is provided by the shepherd; here, unlike in the former image, the lamb is passively gathered and protected by the shepherd. It is these kinds of relationships between shepherds and lambs or sacrificial lamb and the sinner that we refer to as implied narrative relationships.

¹² On this model, see Daniel Patte, “Structural Network in Narrative: The Good Samaritan,” *Soundings* 58 (1975), 229. According to Greimas’ structuralist model, it is assumed that every narrative has a structure that consists of a *Subject* communicating an *Object* to a *Receiver*. These three actants are also accompanied by a *Sender* (usually implied), a *Helper* (who helps the *subject* to deliver the object to the *Receiver*) and the *Opponent(s)* (who tries to hinder the delivery of the *Object* to the *Receiver*). These are the “actantial positions”; they form a basic structure that is found in every narrative, from a structuralist point of view.

¹³ Justin Rossow, “Narrative Structure and Metaphor,” accessed April 6, 2015, <http://justinrossow.com/the-basics/narrative-structure-and-metaphor/>.

¹⁴ Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image*, 44. See footnote 7.

¹⁵ Justin Rossow, *Preaching Metaphors We Live By*, accessed February 9, 2013, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-metaphors-we-live/id468118579?i=117881938>.

¹⁶ David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 213.

¹⁷ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 211–213—Divine Warrior.

¹⁸ The idea of working with the given metaphor in this paper is not to use a specific Bible passage but the general biblical understanding of the Christian life in terms of warfare. When using one specific passage in which the warfare metaphor is played, the pastor could work with the expressions and development of the given text. In Romans 7, for instance, “waging war” and “making me captive” would play a very important role in the development of the sermon.

¹⁹ Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image*, 54. Rossow suggests this way of placing the two actantial models next to each other so that it may be more clearly seen “how the two domains relate to each other.”

²⁰ Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image*, 55. In presenting the actantial models this way, Rossow provides a clear visualization of how “relationships and outcomes assumed by the source are intended to correspond to relationships and outcomes in the target: Helpers align with Helpers, Opponents with Opponents, and so on.”

²¹ This explanation of the narrative relationships is not, of course, what pastors/preachers will explain in a sermon. In preaching, the source domain, for instance, should be evoked in such a way that the preacher not only tells things but shows those kinds of things in the source which will help the hearers make the proper inferences in the target. Since in the present metaphor the *Helper* has a fundamental role, in evoking the source, the preacher could, for example, emphasize the *soldiers' exhaustion* and *lack of hope* in the *battlefield* along with the importance of having a *good commander* who never abandons his *soldiers*. This will lead to the inference that the *Holy Spirit* will never abandon the Christian in his daily struggles.

Since the goal of the present paper is not primarily to work with the suggested metaphor in a sermon, but to show how the culturally-embedded metaphor, "life is a battle," can be helpful for speaking of the Christian life to the Brazilian culture, we are not going to provide examples of how this metaphor should be used in a sermon.

Still, we consider Rossow's suggestion as being very relevant to the homiletic task, as one works with metaphors in preaching. The four metaphor moves suggested by Rossow may serve for structuring the progression of a sermon and for its development, as rhetorical units. <http://justinrossow.com/the-basics/preaching-metaphors-we-live-by/> (accessed February 10, 2013).

²² Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 10.

²³ Rossow, *Preaching the Story Behind the Image*, 210, 211.

²⁴ Williams, *Paul's Metaphors*, 214.

²⁵ Ricardo Mariano, "Neopentecostalismo: O Novo Modo de ser Pentecostal," in: Márcio Fabri dos Anjos, *Sob o Fogo do Espírito* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1998), 19–37.

²⁶ The study was presented at the *17th Annual Theological Symposium, September 19–20, 2006, "Recapturing a Full-Bodied Theology of the Resurrection: Christ's and Ours."*

²⁷ David Maxwell, "The Resurrection of Christ: Its Importance in the History of the Church," *Concordia Journal* 34 (January–April 2008), 35.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ Justin Rossow, *Metaphor, Text, World: Preaching Metaphor*, accessed February 9, 2013, <http://metaphortextworld.wordpress.com/the-basics/preaching-metaphors-we-live-by>.

Great Things through Little Preachers¹

Jeffrey A. Oswald

Abstract: Martin Luther's high esteem for the pastoral office is well known, well documented, and well loved. Although Luther did not write extensively on the Acts of the Apostles, he does return again and again in a variety of contexts to the apparent contradiction of the "little preachers": Stephen, Philip, and Apollos. Luther's discussions of the way God used these men forces us to ask important questions about our understanding of the task laid upon the church today and the situation(s) of the church around the world. Luther's words also invite us to celebrate the great things God continues to do through His "little preachers."

Perhaps the only connection this article has with Eduard Arndt and his 1913 arrival in China is that the path my thoughts took to get to this place has been every bit as circuitous as Arndt's road to China. I have never regarded myself as a missiologist by any stretch of the imagination; on the contrary, I used to say I was the thing that missiologists studied. Now, I can't even claim that about myself. So what can a former missionary who now serves as a professor of exegetical theology at a seminary bring to the conversation?

In recent reading, I happened to come across some of Luther's reflections on the significance of Stephen and Philip in the Acts of the Apostles. I know of no systematic treatment of Acts by Luther, no series of lectures or sermons, and so I don't generally think to consult him on that book. It will most likely not raise esteem for Dr. Luther in missiological circles to learn that, when he opens the Book of Acts, he finds there not a great treatise on mission strategy, nor an inspiring Mission Sunday sermon, but rather a treatment, actually an incarnation, we might say, of the doctrine of justification. "Look at all the preaching of SS. Peter, Paul, Stephen, and Philip," Luther writes in his 1546 Preface to the book, "You will find that it all adds up to one thing: we must come into grace and be justified only through faith in Christ, without law and works."²

Therefore this book might well be called a commentary on the epistles of St. Paul. For what Paul teaches and insists upon with words and passages of Scripture, St. Luke here points out and proves with examples and instances to show that it has happened and must happen in the way St. Paul teaches,

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namely, that no law, no work justifies men, but only faith in Christ. Here, then, in this book you find a beautiful mirror in which you can see that this is true: *Sola fides justificat*, “faith alone justifies.” For all the examples and incidents contained in this book are sure and comforting testimonies to this doctrine; they neither deceive nor lie to you.³

This is not a very promising start for a paper on Martin Luther as a champion of global mission, but elsewhere in his writings Luther does say some things that I think have some relevance for the context of this article.

To begin with, Luther is very clear that God uses us men to accomplish His work. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther had written to Erasmus:

[God] does not work without us, because it is for this very thing he has recreated and preserves us, that he might work in us and we might cooperate with him. Thus it is through us he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, comforts the afflicted.⁴

Note that Luther is here speaking in the context of regeneration and preservation. The “us,” therefore is really all of us, and the description of the work is meant to be equally inclusive. God uses all of us to accomplish all of His work.

These thoughts are developed and made even more specific in his 1523 thesis entitled “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture.” What follows is a fairly long quote, but it is important for understanding the point Luther is trying to make.

For no one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest, as Christ says, John 6[:45], “They shall all be taught by God,” and Psalm 45[:7], “God has anointed you with the oil of gladness on account of your fellows.” These fellows are the Christians, Christ’s brethren, who with him are consecrated priests, as Peter says too, 1 Peter 2[:9], “You are a royal priesthood so that you may declare the virtue of him who called you into his marvelous light.”

But if it is true that they have God’s word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his word], as Paul says, 1 Corinthians 4 [II Cor. 4:13], “Since we have the same spirit of faith, so we speak,” and the prophet says in Psalm 116[:10], “I came to believe, therefore I speak.” And in Psalm 51[:13], he [God] says of all Christians, “I will teach the ungodly your ways, and sinners will return to you.” Here again it is certain that a Christian not only has the right and power to teach God’s word but has the duty to do so on pain of losing his soul and of God’s disfavor.

If you say, “How can this be? If he is not called to do so he may indeed not preach, as you yourself have frequently taught,” I answer that here you should put the Christian into two places. First, if he is in a place where there are no Christians he needs no other call than to be a Christian, called and anointed by God from within. Here it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love, even though no man calls him to do so. This is what Stephen did, Acts 6–7, even though he had not been ordered into any office by the apostles. Yet he still preached and did great signs among the people. Again, Philip, the deacon and Stephen’s comrade, Acts 8[:5], did the same thing even though the office of preaching was not commanded to him either. Again, Apollos did so too, Acts 18[:25]. In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none. Thus it is the duty of love to help if there is no one else who could or should help.⁵

*Denn nott bricht alle gesetz und hatt keyn gesetze.*⁶ “For need breaks all laws and has none.” That has the ring of a German proverb to it, but neither the Weimar nor the American editions of the text note any source for it.

These three, Stephen, Philip, and Apollos are regularly mentioned together as examples of men who don’t fit particularly well into sixteenth-century models of the preaching office, hence the objection at the beginning of the quote.

In his treatise entitled *Concerning the Ministry*, published in the same year, Luther brings these three preachers together again. You will note the similarities with the previous quote, but you will also observe a new thought or two.

If we ask for an example [to show that we have been born and called into such a ministry of the Word through baptism], there is one in Acts 18[:24ff.], where we read of Apollos who came to Ephesus without call or ordination, and taught fervently, powerfully confuting the Jews. By what right, I ask, did he exercise the ministry of the Word except by the general right common to all Christians, as described in I Cor. 14[:30], “If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent,” and in I Pet. 2[:9], “That you might declare his wonderful deeds”? This man was afterward even made an apostle without the formality of ordination, and not only functioned in the ministry of the Word but also proved himself useful in many ways to those who had already come to faith. In the same way any Christian should feel obligated to act, if he saw the need and was competent to fill it, even without a call from the community. How much more then should he do so if he is asked and called by the brethren who are his equals, or by the whole community?

Another example is provided by Stephen and Philip, who were ordained only to the service at the tables [Acts 6:5, 6]. Yet the one wrought signs and wonders among the people, disputed with members of the synagogue and refuted the council of the Jews with the word of the Spirit [Acts 6:8ff.], and the other converted Samaritans and travelled to Azotus and Caesarea [Acts 8:5ff., 40]. By what right and authority, I ask? Certainly they were not asked or called by anyone, but they did it on their own initiative and by reason of a common law, since the door was open to them, and they saw the need of a people who were ignorant and deprived of the Word. How much more readily they would have done it had they been asked or called by anyone or by the community! And the eunuch converted by Philip [Acts 8:36], whom we may reasonably believe remained a Christian, undoubtedly taught the Word of God to many, since he had the command to make known the wonderful deeds of God who called him from darkness into his marvelous light [I Pet. 2:9]. From his word resulted the faith of many, since the Word of God does not return in vain [Isa. 55:11]. From faith sprang a church, and the church through the Word received and exercised a ministry of baptizing and teaching, and of all the other functions enumerated above. All these things a eunuch accomplished through no other right than that inherent in baptism and faith, especially in places lacking any other ministers.⁷

Here Luther looks beyond the initial question of how these three uncalled men found themselves preaching and focuses our attention on the manner and outcome of their work. Apollos, the “lay apostle,” proved himself useful and competent. Stephen’s preaching was accompanied by signs and wonders. Philip’s work led to the establishment of an entire church body. One would not expect such things to accompany ministries that did not enjoy the blessing of God.

Finally, Luther compares the work of these “little preachers” to that of the apostles themselves. In his *circa* 1530 *Second Book of Isaiah*, Luther writes:

This is what happens to the apostles. Under the appearance of barrenness they bring forth many children. This is a comfort to us so that we may not despair. If there is no evidence of our descendants, they will come nevertheless, while we are unaware of it, and cities are converted day by day. So it happened to the apostles as they went about in the world that the Gospel would speed into an area before the apostles came there. So Philip converted Samaria, and the Ethiopian taught Samaria. “My Word shall not return to Me empty” (Is. 55:11). Today, too, we see God accomplishing great things through little preachers. It is a grammatical figure to say that he is with child who by God’s design every day strives to bring forth, as it really comes to pass. But the ungodly are like mountains in labor, but a mouse and a blade of straw are brought forth [which, apparently, is not very

much]. The godly, on the contrary, sit in hopelessness and do not think they will bring forth, and yet they are the ones that do. Summary: The Word of the Lord will run and fly when we do not expect it. This is a wonderful state of affairs: The daughter of Zion will bear children, not thinking that she will. So in our times everything about us seems barren with never any prospects of bearing children. It is not to be thought of. But when the time comes, there are countless children, so that we say, “Where do these children come from?”⁸

This is a beautiful passage, and any of several of the phrases Luther uses here could also stand as a summary of Acts: It is the testimony that, in spite of the appearance of barrenness, many children are born; it is the travelogue in which the Gospel speeds ahead of the apostles who race to catch up with it; it is the field where we see the Word of the Lord run and fly; it is the record of the Lord accomplishing great things through little preachers.

All of this is background, context, and introduction to the one place where Luther actually intends to comment on the story of Stephen: his sermon for St. Stephen’s Day from the Church Postil of 1522.⁹ The main body of the sermon is taken up with an exposition of “Stephen’s Example of Faith.” Interestingly, Luther focuses on the point that “building churches does not secure God’s favor,” a valid application of Stephen’s words about Solomon’s temple, but not one I was expecting to find in Luther. We are well into the message when Luther takes up the question that he must have thought was on the minds of many of his hearers: Should an ordinary layman be allowed to preach?¹⁰ I ask you to indulge me one last time in quoting Luther at length.

Though Stephen was not appointed to preach—the apostles, as stated, reserved that office to themselves—but to perform the duties of a steward, yet when he went to the market-place and mingled among the people, he immediately created a stir by performing signs and wonders, as the epistle says, and he even censured the rulers. Had the Pope and his followers been present, they certainly would have inquired as to his credentials—his Church passport and his ecclesiastical character; and had he been lacking a bald pate [head] and a prayer-book, undoubtedly he would have been committed to the flames as a heretic since he was not a priest or a clergyman. These titles, which the Scriptures accord all Christians, the Papists have appropriated to themselves alone, terming all other men “the laity,” and themselves “the Church,” as if the laity were not a part of the Church. At the same time these people of boasted refinement and nobility do not in a single instance fill the office or do the work of a priest, of a clergyman or of the Church. They but dupe the world with their human devices.

The precedent of Stephen holds good. His example gives all men authority to preach wherever they can find hearers, whether it be in a building or at the market-place. He does not confine the preaching of God's Word to bald pates and long gowns. At the same time he does not interfere with the preaching of the apostles. He attends to the duties of his own office and is readily silent where it is the place of the apostles to preach.¹¹

Now, unless you simply take delight in reading Luther, you're probably wondering what all of this is about. My primary reasons for sharing these words of Luther have more to do with questions raised by Luther's words than with the answers provided. On the one hand, I think it is very refreshing and encouraging to see Luther acknowledge the rich and the necessary variety in the way the Church has carried out her calling with regard to the world. I think Luther perhaps even felt himself to be among the "little preachers" that God uses. In commenting on Psalm 82, Luther wrote:

But perhaps you will say to me, "Why do you, by your books, teach throughout the world, when you are only preacher in Wittenberg?" I answer: I have never wanted to do it and do not want to do it now. I was forced and driven into this position in the first place, when I had to become Doctor of Holy Scripture against my will. Then, as a Doctor in a general free university, I began, at the command of pope and emperor, to do what such a doctor is sworn to do, expounding the Scriptures for all the world and teaching everybody. Once in this position, I have had to stay in it, and I cannot give it up or leave it yet with a good conscience, even though both pope and emperor were to put me under the ban for not doing so. For what I began as a Doctor, made and called at their command, I must truly confess to the end of my life.¹²

I don't want to misrepresent Luther; he is adamant about the central importance of the preaching office even in the evangelization of the world. He constantly reminds his readers of the need for order in every place and time of the Church's life. Still, he, as subservient to the Word, must acknowledge the presence and the wonder of these "little preachers," of the men and women who find themselves by necessity and by circumstance the voices of God for neighbor and world.

What most attracted my attention to Luther's writing, however, is the question it raises for us very directly of the way we view the situation we are in when speaking of Chinese mission in the twenty-first century. In the passage I quoted above from Luther's treatise on the Christian assembly, he tells the reader that he must decide in which of "two places" a person finds himself. Are there other Christians around or not? Is there a Church there or not? Is there an established ordained ministry there or not? From Luther's perspective, how a Christian behaves and the perception of the task confronting the church will be greatly affected by the answers provided to these questions. I suspect that much of the frustration we experience in the conversations

among us concerning mission strategy, policy, and practice stems from the fact that we may have very different understandings of the situation in which we carry out our service and live out our lives—especially in the complex and ever-changing Chinese context.

Finally, in a statement that may leave him open to the charge of understatement, Ingemar Öberg has noted that “Luther is not much involved himself in the concrete problems of foreign mission.”¹³ You know even better than I do myself that this is also true of almost the whole of our dogmatic tradition. As we work together as a church to nurture a living and growing understanding of Lutheran work in the Chinese world, we will require both the contributions of our great theological heritage and the rich history of experience of which the past century of Chinese work is no small part. It is my prayer and hope that we will be able to keep alive the great Lutheran tradition of *table* talk and sit down together at tables around the world and work out in fear and trembling the way we can best continue to serve as God’s “little preachers.” And it is my hope and prayer that it won’t simply be *table talk*.

Endnotes

¹ This article is adapted from a paper delivered at a conference held in connection with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Eduard Arndt, LCMS missionary in China. The theme of the conference was “Lutheran Mission Works to the Chinese People, Past, Present, and Future.” It was held at the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, Kowloon, Hong Kong on October 26, 2013. The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) Literature Department granted permission to publish this article, as it along with photos was previously published in the *Lutheran Bimonthly* 521 (Dec. 2013).

² Martin Luther, “Preface to the Acts of the Apostles” (1546) in *Luther’s Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 364.

³ *Ibid.*.

⁴ Martin Luther, “Bondage of the Will” (1525) in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 243.

⁵ Martin Luther, “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture” (1523) in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 309–310.

⁶ Martin Luther, “Das eyn Christliche versammlung odder gemeyne recht und macht habe, alle lere tzu urteylen und lerer tzu beruffen, eyn und abtsetzen, Grund und ursach aus der Schrift” (English: “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture”) 1523 in D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 11 (Weimar: Hermann Boehlaus Nachfolger, 1900), 412.

⁷ Martin Luther, “Concerning the Ministry” (1523) in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 37–38.

⁸ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Isaiah Chapters 40–66” (1529ff.) in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), Is 66:7.

⁹ Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. 3.1–2*, ed. John Lenker; trans. John Lenker et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 194–211.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 206–207.

¹² Martin Luther, “Commentary of Psalm 82” (1530) in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), Ps 82:4.

¹³ Ingemar Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, trans. Dean Apel (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 198.

Mission Observers

A Story from Saudi Arabia

Farrukh Khan

This account is a personal experience from the time that I was working in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I am using made-up names for all the persons so that no one gets into trouble in Saudi Arabia. It is a closed country that does not allow you to carry your own Bible. If you are caught with more than one Bible, you are a Bible distributor and you are given a long jail term. If you are caught worshipping the Lord even in your own house, you are arrested and deported. In many cases, you are jailed for some period.

Saudi jails are not like American prisons. You are deprived of all the basic needs of life. God forbid that you are in a jail during the Ramadan (month of Muslim fasting). You are not given any food and water from sunrise to sunset. Many Christians are behind the bars in this country just because they were caught worshipping the Living Lord in their own house with their own family. That is why the security of the persons in this story is so important and also why the names have been changed to very common Saudi names.

I was working as an engineer in Saudi Arabia and had witnessed many hardships faced by people just because they were Christians. One day while I was talking to a Saudi person, “Abdullah” (name changed), he seemed very worried and little uneasy. I asked him the reason that he seemed worried. He sat down across from my desk and started to explain what he was going through.

He had a younger brother, then twelve years old, who could not hear or speak. According to Abdullah, his brother was absolutely fine until the age of four. After that, he stopped talking and could not hear anything. Since they had no arrangement for such a child in the country, he could not go to any school or get educated. Abdullah was an engineer by profession and belonged to an educated family.

Abdullah took his brother to two different European countries for treatment but returned with no success and results. He had spent a lot of money for his brother’s treatment at home and abroad, but all efforts were in vain. After making so many efforts he was exhausted, and so were his parents and family.

In the Muslim book, it is written that Allah does not like those who are deaf and

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dumb. So, in the eyes of the society, they would look at this boy as cursed, like the disciples who asked Jesus about the person who was blind by birth: Was it the fault of his parents that he was born blind? (Jn 9:2)

He asked me if I would pray for his brother because in the Quran Surah 3:49b it is written that Jesus used to raise the dead, heal the blind and the paralytic, and cast out demons. I promised to pray for him. I did pray for his brother a few times, but, upon inquiring, learned that his condition had not changed.

One day I was reading an article written by an Indian missionary who had experienced a similar case where the child was in the same situation. He had written that the child stopped speaking and listening because he was possessed by a deaf and dumb demon.

I invited Abdullah to come to my office one afternoon and related the story told by the Indian missionary. He came back to me after a couple of days and asked if his brother's case could be identical. He further requested me to look for a Christian person who is gifted and also speaks the Arabic language. This combination was very hard to find. Then I found Dr. GSA (name changed due to security), who was visiting Saudi Arabia and was from Jordan. I had heard him at a convention in the country of my origin (names and place withheld for the security of this person who still visits the Kingdom).

Abdullah was very excited to know that Dr. GSA was coming and that he would pray for his brother. For security reasons, Abdullah did not know the name of Dr. GSA until he had met him. After a wait of a month and a half, Dr. GSA arrived.

Abdullah brought his brother to Dr. GSA's prayer meeting, which was held in a compound with about two hundred people attending. After the meeting, Dr. GSA, who has a PhD and MDiv from the U.S.A., talked to Abdullah. Dr. GSA asked Abdullah permission to visit his home to pray with them. Dr. GSA told me that he knew what the problem was but that he would not pray among other people who were weak in faith at that meeting. Dr. GSA told me that he would like to visit Abdullah's home so that he could witness to Abdullah's whole family.

That same evening, Dr. GSA was invited into Abdullah's home, where he preached the Gospel to the entire family. Then he anointed the boy with oil and placed his hands on him and asked the whole family, "Do you believe that Jesus can heal your boy?" They all answered, "Yes." He informed them that the boy was demon-possessed and that the demons were more than one. He first asked the family to pray along with him, and then he prayed for the boy.

No sooner had he started praying than the boy began to groan and then screamed loudly. Then he almost collapsed. After the prayer, Dr. GSA asked for water to give the boy a drink. The boy got up and thanked Dr. GSA in his own voice. Dr. GSA said to the boy, "Do not thank me, thank Issa Al-Masih," which means, "Thank Jesus Christ."

The whole family was joyful and also came to faith. Abdullah told me the next day that in their hearts he and his entire family are believers, but they cannot openly declare because they will be killed. How lives change when our Lord touches them! When we read our Scriptures, we see that the people around Jesus always wanted to see signs and wonders.

“Religious but not Spiritual?”

Mid-Winter Convocation 2015
Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN
January 28–30, 2015

A summary by Armand J. Boehme

In today’s culture, an increasing number of people are describing themselves as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). Historically, spirituality has generally been understood as the lived-out reality of one’s religious faith. But as religion has come to be seen in a less favorable light, many more people are choosing the designation “spiritual” rather than religious.

The conference title was intriguing, for it raised a question: Can one be religious without being spiritual? Three main speakers addressed the assembled group of over 450 clergy and laity. The speakers in order were Lois Malcolm, professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary; Nancy Ammerman, professor of sociology of religion at Boston University’s School of Theology; and Nadia Bolz-Weber, pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado.

Malcolm Presentation

Professor Malcolm noted that the question of spirituality is not just a question of demographics out there, for it has to do with how Christians live their religious faith in their homes, churches, and communities. Secondly, she asked what the empirical data is telling us. Finally, she asked how can we discern the Holy Spirit as the Spirit works with the proclamation of the Law and the Gospel that frees us in the here and now? What do we see the Holy Spirit doing in this SBNR age and why does it matter? She expressed concern about whether the organized church (the ELCA) will continue to exist, whether the seminary will continue to be there to train future pastors, etc. As we look to the future, it is important to discern where the wind of the Spirit is blowing the Church today.

Malcolm laid out the distinctions between being spiritual and being religious—seeing a drift away from organized religion into a more private spirituality. People regularly come to our churches desirous of an authentic spirituality, as are most of the people who are SBNR.

Why is this turn from religion to spirituality happening now? Malcolm suggested globalization, the influx of world religions, changes in family patterns, the enhancement of individualism, the rise of the therapeutic mindset, religious illiteracy, and the political battles viewed as tied to religion (abortion, homosexuality, etc.)

There are temptations to focus on boundaries—an “us vs. them” mentality. As they wrestle with this turn away from religion, Christians need to take care not to lose sight of their spiritual center—the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. Our spirituality is rooted in Jesus and the spiritual freedom He gives.

To avoid missteps, Malcolm encouraged a return to our Baptism and the Spirit’s work in and through this Sacrament. Through the Spirit, Christ’s saving ministry was firmly grounded in the Father’s will, and the Kingdom of God was established. Being firmly grounded in the Father’s love in Christ, we live in God’s Kingdom and bring that authentic spirituality wherever we go. The attendees were encouraged to study Isaiah 61 as a pattern for authentic spirituality. Malcolm also encouraged studying 2 Corinthians and Philippians. Paul found the ground of confidence for his ministry in the work of the Spirit.

The distinctiveness of ministry in the New Testament comes from Christ’s death and resurrection and the call of God’s Spirit for ministry. Baptism is not about tradition and the letter of the law; it is about the justifying power of Christ brought to us by the Spirit in Word and Sacrament. He empowers the use of our spiritual gifts and our lives of service in the church and the world.

Malcolm emphasized the truth that the Christian’s calling and vocation is the spiritual ministry of our bodies in three estates—church, family, and government. Christians are freed by the Gospel to live for God and the neighbor. In Christ, we die to old ways and rise to new life and spirituality. This pattern of death and resurrection frees us from destructive patterns in life. SBNR people say that churches talk too much about sin. But these same people embrace twelve-step programs based on recognizing bad actions. The recognition of the value of such twelve-step programs by SBNR people can be helpful to enable them to see the need for Spirit-led confession and the recognition of sinful patterns, in order that those patterns may be overcome by God’s grace in Christ.

Malcolm expressed the hope that the SBNR movement would force Christians to examine carefully who they are and what is at the center of their faith. Are Christians more of the Spirit or of the letter of the law? Our calling is to embody God’s love and service to the world through the spirituality of our faith. Each Christian should ask, “What has God called me to do? What is the purpose of my life?” As the Church we are Christ’s body. As the Spirit leads, how do we serve in that body and in the world?

Spirituality is not about credentials or position; it is about God’s power in human weakness. The theology of the cross is prominent in authentic spirituality. Clergy are called to be midwives to others in the faith—to assist as they are born in the Spirit, to help them to grow in the Spirit, and to live spiritual religious lives as Christian people.

Ammerman Presentation—“Being Religious? Being Spiritual? Being Faithful”

Nancy Ammerman’s presentation featured information that she and her research group had discovered in their studies of religion in modern life.

In responding to the title of the convocation, Ammerman asked, “How does the Church keep spirituality and religion together?” Christians are not to be merely religious, nor merely spiritual, but both.

Many today don’t want to be identified as religious for a number of reasons. In a recent study by the Pew Research Center, 1 in 5 Americans categorize themselves as being “nones.” This number rises as the age gets lower: 1 in 3 in the 30 and below category classify themselves as nones.

What does this mean? Among the nones, there were few atheists and few agnostics; most are religiously indifferent. Sixty-six percent of them said religion is not important in their lives, 28% indicated no faith in God, 38% were SBNR, and 45% were neither religious nor spiritual.

The studies also revealed that the designation of a high percentage of people changed from one study to another, e.g., only half remain nones from one study to another.

As hard to pin down as the nones are, it is clear that growing numbers are not religious, not spiritual, and not seeking any religion or spirituality.

A disconnected Group 1 sees being religious as tied to conservative politics—as being right wing. Hence their rejection of religion is a political issue. They do not want to be aligned with Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson.

Disconnected Group 2 are those on the religious margins for various reasons and are not only not religious, but are probably not even spiritual.

Ammerman emphasized the fact that being spiritual requires a spiritual tribe, because a spiritual life is not an individualistic life as many seem to understand it. Rather it is a communal life.

Forming a spiritual community in the twenty-first century is difficult because of the current culture. Geographic and job mobility make for a fragmented culture and fraying communities. One-third of young adults below 35 move out of their local community in five years.

Another cultural complication is the question of when one becomes an adult. (This is the problem of “adulthood.”) Traditionally our culture said that one became an adult when one left home, got a job, got married, and had kids. These are happening less and happening later in life than in the past. In addition, many older adult children are still living at home or have moved back there.

Because physical communities are changing and people are moving at much greater rates, communities now sometimes grow around social media rather than by face-to-face contact.

Another complication is that fewer people fit what many understand to be the church mold—married with kids. In the 1950s, this category was 50% of the population; today it is 20%. Hence there are many more who do not see themselves as church material, for they don’t fit their conception of the pattern. The church needs to share a better image of itself and of those who should be in church. That vision should include everyone, because Christ died for all! In our current culture, church is an important place for those in minority communities—Blacks, Hispanics, etc.

In this SBNR age, congregations need to provide space in which people can feel comfortable and be given a sense of belonging—congregations have an important role in forming spirituality in their members.

Congregations have importance in the larger society as well. They have a part in equipping people to be good citizens, in helping them to learn to communicate with others, to work with others, to join in common labor, to deliberate on, to debate, and decide issues. Religious people are statistically more engaged citizens and good neighbors. They learn in church to live by the Golden Rule. In congregations—their religious tribe—they learn more about their faith, gain experience in expressing that faith and spirituality, and have the opportunity to network with others.

Another Pew survey indicated that 75% of the non-religious people who join congregations join because of the preaching and music; 55% join because they feel called by God to be part of His Church.

Spiritual concerns bring people to church. Once they join, they desire to put their faith into action—to express their spirituality.

Ammerman’s studies identified patterns in how people think about what spirituality is: Spiritual people (a) are moral people, for being spiritual means that it should show in one’s life, e.g., the Golden Rule; (b) cultivate an inner self; (c) experience a sense of love because they are encountering something bigger and more awesome than self—from God to art, to music to nature, etc.; (d) have a sense of connection to others—one has a larger community, a tribe, and a sense of responsibility in that community; and (e) have a sense of meaning in life.

In addition, spirituality is most commonly talked about in theistic or religious terms, focusing on God, a sense of mystery, and practices like prayer and meditation. Some people include Bible study or the study of a religious book, but there are many practices and spiritualities—including the spirituality of tattoos.

The research indicates that there are four spiritual populations, each with different relationships to the church and different spiritual needs.

(1) The *spiritually serious* are at church, in worship, active in spiritual practices, have friends and family in the congregation (a spiritual tribe or community), social relationships, and conversations with one another.

(2) *Typical members* are there for worship, but not every Sunday. They are not as engaged as the first group. They are very appreciative of good preaching and good music, but have fewer friends in the congregation.

(3) *Marginal members* are those whose connection with the congregation, its clergy, and members has frayed. They are somewhat spiritual. They rarely attend, having drifted from the church because of conflicts with church beliefs, or because the church failed to care for them in time of crisis.

(4) The *truly disaffected* have little intentional spirituality. They have been outside of the religious community since they were children—if, indeed, they were in the religious community to start with. These people view religion very negatively.

Bolz-Weber Presentation

Nadia Bolz-Weber spoke as a one of those who for ten years had left the church because of the hurts and has now returned and serves as a pastor of a congregation.

She noted her distrust of the term “spirituality” because of the faulty concepts of Christian spirituality—both a legalistic spirituality as well as the New Age concept of spirituality, which is simply a put-on show or performance. She also has little sympathy for the “sappy be nice” spiritual piety often seen in the church.

Bad religious spirituality that emphasizes being nice doesn’t allow religious people to see the true messiness of life in a sinful world, nor does it allow the person to see oneself as one who is both sinner and saint.

The good spiritual practices of the Christian faith are those that assist people to see the reality of their brokenness and the blessing of grace in Christ (Law and Gospel). Good religious practices that build up a Christian’s faith are not ways to get closer to God, for God is already close to us in Christ.

Bolz-Weber shared a chapter from her forthcoming book that dealt with her pastoral response to the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary—and her congregation’s response. Since the event occurred near Christmas, there was need to help people see the reason why Christ came—for the world is filled with hatred, horrible violence, suffering, and death all caused by sin. Religion is not a means of escaping the real world. Rather religious faith is to help God’s people deal with the realities of that world—the world’s brokenness and our own brokenness. The slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2 was the biblical focal point of her response to Sandy Hook. In the service, the names of the children and teachers killed at Sandy Hook were read—as well as the name of the shooter. Speaking the name of the shooter was prompted by Bolz-Weber’s intern, who noted that Christ came to die for

Herod as well as for the children and parents in Bethlehem and in Sandy Hook. The focal point of the service was that Christ came to deal with the pain and sin of the victims and sins of those who victimize. Christ died for all—the little children who were murdered, the shooter, the parents of the children killed, and Herod.

The congregation also erected a shrine to the 141 Pakistani children who were murdered by terrorists. Why? Because the church—the local congregation—is God’s unique place to deal with the trauma inflicted on people. The problem is that, at times, the preaching does not deal with the trauma and sin of life. There is rather the dispensation of cheap grace, wishy-washy praying, and the use of the pulpit as a soapbox for causes. All of those things are in opposition to the real purpose of the church service, which should be proclaiming Law and Gospel, applying the text of God’s Word to people’s lives in the midst of hurts and joys, pain and trauma.

There are times when people want answers. There are other times when they need a place to grieve, to talk, to wonder, to sort things out, to hear God’s Word applied to the hurt and trauma. This is religion!

On Good Friday, the emphasis must be on Christ, on the Christ who dies on the cross, on His paying for human sin, on His being involved with the muck and mire of life, its pain, suffering, and death. All of these things should be brought to the fore, because they are noted in the Scripture readings. These truths should also be sung and proclaimed in the hymns. This is religion.

Church is the place for sound Law and Gospel preaching so that people can see their own sin, confess it, and receive God’s grace, which enables them to go to their lives of service in the world—to live their faith in godly living. This is religion.

Following her presentation, Bolz-Weber responded to questions from the floor, including questions about the differences between spirituality and religion and questions about the atonement. She encouraged the assembly to deal with brokenness—their own or the brokenness of others—by means of the Gospel. She noted that if a pastor uses illustrations about self in the sermon, the illustration should be from the scars rather than from the wounds. Why? Because the scars reflect healing by the power of the Gospel. The wounds do not. She encouraged sound liturgical worship and emphasized the fact that the pulpit is not a therapy couch.

Bolz-Weber concluded her presentation by reading another section from her upcoming book. In this portion of her presentation, she noted her own personal demons and how God’s grace has enabled her to deal with them. She noted that Jesus sent the healed back into a community, for a community of faith is always important. Christ has sent her back into a religious community to bring God’s Word of Law and Gospel to broken lives so that God’s help and healing in Christ would be given to the hurting.

Panel Presentation/Q&A Session

The three speakers also answered questions in a Q&A panel forum on the last day of the conference. Themes of the necessity of a spiritual tribe and/or worship community were again emphasized. The assembly was encouraged to find power for godly spiritual living in their Baptism. The reality of the strong ties between spirituality and religion were again noted, as well as the fact that some have come to see spirituality as something entirely separate from religion.

Workshops

Wednesday and Thursday featured workshops centered on the theme of the convocation. Some featured the primary speakers, and others featured workshop leaders who dealt with various aspects of spirituality, from the spirituality of biblical texts, to helping congregations avoid stumbling blocks for the nones, to spirituality from a Lutheran perspective, to Paul Tillich, to the nones, and today's church. A panel of pastoral interns also reflected on the theme of the convocation.

The convocation illustrated the need for Christian church bodies to continue to study the "spiritual-but-not-religious" trend and to work at effective ways to address those caught up in the trend with a vibrant spirituality that speaks to the religious and spiritual needs of this age.

Learning about Home from *The Hobbit*

Andrew R. Jones

Since returning from missionary service in July 2013, I have been on a quest to better understand reverse culture shock, the concept of home, and my own identity. Part of this quest involved seeking a way to express the stress of reverse culture shock to those who have not experienced it. As I re-acclimated to the United States, I benefited from and suffered through many eye-opening observations and experiences. In sharing these conclusions, I hope to articulate some of the difficulties of returning missionaries and also help others to support returning missionaries with grace, interest, and understanding.

Ultimately, I wanted to answer these three questions: What is home? Where is home? Who is home?

My mind was first drawn to these three questions when I went to see the *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, the first installment of the book turned into three films. As I watched, I was struck by several things. First is a conversation between a wizard, Gandalf, and the main character, Bilbo Baggins. Gandalf is trying to persuade Bilbo to join him and a group of dwarves to go on an “adventure.”

Gandalf: You’ll have a tale or two to tell when you come back.

Bilbo: Can you promise that I will come back?

Gandalf: No. And if you do, you’ll not be the same.¹

As I thought about this conversation, I was struck by how well this conversation would fit into a missionary orientation. Missionary activity involves risk, no matter where a person serves. If you are sent, you may not come back. Whether that is due to persecution and martyrdom, or because you decide to stay permanently, there is always a possibility you may not come back.

And if you go, you will certainly not be the same. It does not take long for missionary service to change a person’s life. It is impossible to experience the depth of another culture and remain unchanged. Your perspectives broaden. Your care for people expands. You change.

Secondly, as the journey is just beginning, Bilbo insists they must return because he has forgotten his handkerchief. Gandalf’s response is: “You will have to do

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without pocket handkerchiefs, and a great many other things, before we reach our journey's end, Bilbo Baggins. You were born to the rolling hills and little rivers of the Shire, but home is now behind you. The world is ahead."²

There's another solid piece of advice for missionaries. Many common comforts are left behind when one leaves home for missionary service. You'll hear missionaries speak about missing peanut butter, ice cubes, Dr. Pepper, and pancakes with maple syrup. The thrust of Gandalf's words might be easily missed. When he says, "Home is behind you," I think he means it in an all-encompassing, permanent sense. Home is behind Bilbo Baggins. Even when the journey ends and he returns to the Shire, home is gone. Home is no longer what it used to be, and not only because his relatives hold an auction to sell all his things, presuming Bilbo has died.

Some may believe Bilbo Baggins' quest to help the dwarves return from exile and reclaim their homeland does not relate to a missionary's quest to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. Some may even bristle at such a notion. I believe there is abundant applicability here. Paul writes,

But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything (2 Cor 6:4–10).

Think about all the things that Bilbo and the dwarves struggled with on their journey. They were chased by orcs and goblins. They were surrounded and forced up trees by wargs. They were captured and imprisoned by trolls, spiders, and elves. They wandered through the oppression of Misty Mountains and the Forest of Mirkwood. They suffered many hardships, afflictions, and calamities. They nearly starved to death on several occasions. Sleepless nights abounded. But they always endured and persevered. They (especially Bilbo) were treated as destined to die, but they lived. Thorin was treated as nothing, but he was the one true king under the mountain. The experiences of the dwarves and Bilbo in *The Hobbit* sound remarkably like Paul's description of his own missionary journeys.

Furthermore, in the narrative arc of the story, when Bilbo and the dwarves finally find the kingdom of the dwarves and all its treasures, it is guarded by a great dragon: Smaug. As missionaries go out into the world to reclaim God's kingdom, they find God's treasured possessions, His creatures, guarded by the great dragon: Satan.

The Hobbit has the alternate title of *There and Back Again*. I believe there is a reason Tolkien uses the word “back” instead of the word “home.” When we endeavor to travel to other lands on a mission, when we leave home to help others, have an adventure, and share the Gospel with all nations, we leave home as we know it behind, and the journey of faith is one of forward motion, with eyes fixed on Jesus.

But what is home?

What is Bilbo leaving behind to go on this adventure? What are missionaries leaving behind to answer the call of their Lord to serve and share the Gospel? Again, turning to *The Hobbit* gives us a bit of an idea of what home is.

Tolkien begins his classic: “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”³

A hobbit-hole was a hobbit-home, and that means comfort. When Bilbo Baggins leaves his hole in the ground, he leaves behind his comfort. As already noted, he had forgotten his handkerchief and was warned of the many things he would have to do without on this adventure. Home was behind him. Comfort was behind him. Even though Bilbo returned to his hobbit-hole, he never truly returned home. All of the comfort that existed in that hobbit-hole before the adventure does not comfort Bilbo upon his return, at least not in the way it used to. He was changed—“cracked”—as some of his peers observed. Bilbo went from the most ordinary of hobbits to the strangest of hobbits, from normal to not normal, because he had experienced something that nobody else in his community had ever experienced. His community could not relate to Bilbo anymore, and he could not relate to his community.

So it is with missionaries.

Here we find the answer to the first question: What is home? Home is comfort. When a missionary leaves home, they leave behind comfort, and they may leave it behind permanently. Even if a missionary returns to the exact house where they had once lived, that place may never feel quite as comfortable as it once had. The illusion of narrowness has been destroyed by the missionary’s experience of a different part of the world.

The place a missionary once knew as home is no longer as comfortable. I think this happens, in part, because the community around the missionary is no longer a community that can relate to the missionary’s experiences. The returning missionary has had experiences without his former community, leaving them behind. As missionaries become grafted into new communities, cultures, and countries, their level of comfort with the country that raised them shifts, wanes, withers, and may never be fully regained.

It's as if a missionary is a tree; the missionary is uprooted and placed somewhere else. As the missionary seeks to drop down roots in its new location, at the location of his former home, there is a hole in the ground where the uprooted tree used to be. That hole is gradually filled in. When the missionary returns, the pathways of the roots are no longer the same; they have changed, just like the missionary. The fit is wrong and strange, uncomfortable and unexpectedly so. When returned to what is supposed to be home, there is a hollowness in the ground below where the roots are missing. Stability and security are lost. When such security is lost, identity is also vulnerable.

When Bilbo does return from his journey, Tolkien writes, "Gandalf looked at him. 'My dear Bilbo!' he said. 'Something is the matter with you! You are not the hobbit that you were.'"⁴ Bilbo is indeed changed. His identity is different. He is no longer the respectable, normal hobbit everybody knew and liked. Now Bilbo is cracked and different. People discourage their children from associating with him. He is thought to be a liar. He finds himself entirely misunderstood.

One of the themes I hear from former missionaries is how difficult it is to relate to other people who have not had international experiences. Relationships become difficult. Friends do not know what questions to ask. Peter Jordan observes: "Re-entry stress can take the form of feeling disorientated and out of place; feeling disillusioned; feeling irritated with others and with certain aspects of your culture; or feeling lonely, isolated, depressed, and misunderstood."⁵

Tolkien describes Bilbo as feeling quite content with his community's distrust of him. Bilbo did not seem to mind losing his reputation. He liked being known by his peers as an adventurer. But Bilbo is not content enough to stay put. He goes around visiting elves. In fact, Tolkien concludes *The Hobbit* with a visit to Bilbo by the wizard Gandalf and Balin, one of the dwarves. Tolkien writes, "They fell to talking of their times together, of course."⁶

Somehow, much like Bilbo, missionaries are able to find comfort with people who have had similar experiences. The need for mutual understanding is high. While Tolkien may paint Bilbo as content, it is quite clear that Bilbo is not content. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo leaves home and goes to Rivendell for several years before finally going on another adventure, this time into the West.

As they depart, Bilbo remarks, "I think I'm quite ready to go on another adventure."⁷ And Bilbo goes on this adventure with people who can relate to one another in a rare way. They are all ring-bearers. They have all felt the isolation of bearing magical rings. They form a community of people who mysteriously understand one another, who create a sense of comfort.

As I began to struggle with my identity as a former missionary turned seminary student, I found others who had experienced international life to be very helpful. One day after class, I reminisced with Dr. Robert Kolb about German Christmas markets.

As our conversation continued, we landed on the topic of home, a confusing concept for me, who had returned to the United States five months before, and a confusing concept for Dr. Kolb, who spends about half the year in Germany and the other half in St. Louis. Dr. Kolb told me something that I did not realize the profundity of until months later. He said, “For me home has always been the church.”

As I considered this, I began to realize its truth. Whenever I felt disoriented overseas, it was always members of the Body of Christ who helped to ground me back into my identity and security as a child of God. At every stage of culture shock, the church had been my home. It provided comfort.

So I found the answer to the second question: Where is home? It is anywhere where the Lord has planted His people.

This leads us to the final question: Who is home? While I would be entirely correct to answer with “the church,” just like the previous question, I think there is a better answer, a more correct answer. In John 14, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the *παράκλητος*—the helper or comforter. If home is comfort and the Holy Spirit is the comforter, then the Holy Spirit is home. If the Holy Spirit is home and His job is to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the true Christian church on earth, then it is to be expected that we find home in the church. We find home in those who have the Holy Spirit.

Paul locks on to this idea in the opening chapter of 2 Corinthians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort (2 Cor 1:3–7).

The “God of all comfort” comforts us. As God comforts us, we are able to comfort others with that same comfort we have received from God. Having received the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, we receive comfort and are able to share that comfort, the Comforter Himself, with others. We are “homed” by God in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we are able, as the church, to be home for others.

To conclude, I would like to stretch the point. Before Bilbo leaves for Rivendell, abandoning his home in the shire and naming his nephew Frodo as his heir, Bilbo says to Frodo, “I don't know why I took you in after your mother and father died, but it wasn't out of charity. I think it was because of all my numerous relations, you were the one Baggins who showed real spirit.”⁸ Frodo goes on to his own adventure,

leaving home, changing. Bilbo recognizes in him a kindred spirit, a spirit of adventure, of daring. Bilbo is right in recognizing Frodo's infusion of such a spirit. Bilbo takes Frodo into his home. The two are able to be home to each other, even before Frodo goes on his own adventure. It is fascinating to me that even though after his adventure Frodo has Sam, Merry, and Pippin, who have traveled with him, Frodo finds himself restless, misunderstood. He cannot re-acclimate fully. Eventually, Bilbo and Frodo take the ship into the West together, where they find their eternal home in the undying lands.

We may take the kindred spirit between Bilbo and Frodo as merely a propensity for travel (and mischief) and a love of adventure. This spirit is in every missionary. It is a spirit that cannot be fully tamed. It is a spirit that desires and yearns to see and experience God's creation and share His love. I think this spirit can be recognized as a gift of the Spirit, a zeal to go and a heart to serve. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, thrusts us out into the world away from what we had once called home. He changes us and challenges us to recognize where and who our true home is. Our true home is in those who have been called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept in the true faith. Our true home is with those who have the Holy Spirit. Our true home is with the Body of Christ, the Church, of which Jesus is the head.

Endnotes

¹ *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, film, directed by Peter Jackson (Los Angeles: New Line Cinema, 2012).

² *Ibid.*

³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁵ Peter Jordan, *Re-Entry: Making the Transition from Missions to Life at Home* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1992), 53.

⁶ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 271.

⁷ *The Return of the King*, film, directed by Peter Jackson (Los Angeles: New Line Cinema, 2003).

⁸ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, film, directed by Peter Jackson (Los Angeles: New Line Cinema, 2001).

Book Reviews

RAISING THE DEAD: A Doctor Encounters the Miraculous. By Chauncey W. Crandall IV, MD. New York: FaithWords, 2012. 204 pages. Paperback, \$15.00.

Raising the Dead is a biographical account of a medical doctor whose son becomes gravely ill with leukemia. In desperation, he and his wife add the quest for supernatural intervention on behalf of their son. In this process, Crandall is “slain in the Spirit” (32; see also 142–44) and finds himself gifted with supernatural powers. The supernatural events that he recounts are indeed amazing:

- Raising the dead (5, 126, 184)
- Visions/dreams (17–18, 137, 147)
- Audible voice messages (31, 47, 73, 186)
- Spiritual gift of healing (17, 31, 35)
- Miraculous healing (39, 52, 74, 85, 102, 152–153, 172, 178, 181)
- Evil spirits in physical objects (78, 87)
- Evil presence (85–94, 109–110)
- Signs (136, 153)
- Exorcisms (142, 146, 164, 167)

Crandall states that our physical ailments are simply one tactic of Satan in his cosmic battle for our soul. Therefore, Crandall says his personal mission “is to gather souls into God’s kingdom. It’s not to heal people, as important as that is” (197). It is the same mission for everyone, “the work of restoring the world through Christ’s cross and resurrection, [responding] to the world’s evil with His love” (191). So he concludes: “All healings are ultimately only signs of God’s resurrection power—His promise to raise every believer from the dead to new life in God” (151; see also 197).

While affirming and experiencing God at work in these miraculous ways, Crandall makes clear that God also works through traditional medicine (41). He also makes clear that while we pray for healing, God alone decides. It is no indication of inadequate faith if one is not healed, for “I have seen people with great faith—like Chad [his son]—whom God chooses not to heal” (179).

Crandall’s book reminds us that we must not limit what God can and will do to make His saving presence and invitation real to people. The cosmic battle is real, and so is His victorious power in Christ.

Herbert Hoefler

TATTOOS ON THE HEART: The Power of Boundless Compassion. By Gregory Boyle. New York: Free Press, New York, 2010. 240 pages. Paperback. \$14.99.

Fr. Boyle, a Jesuit priest, relates his experiences working with Latino gang members in Los Angeles. From 1986–1992, he served as the parish pastor of the Dolores Mission, situated in the heart of LA’s notorious gang activity. Boyle started “Homeboy Industries,” providing not only job training and income but also personal dignity to these wandering, violent young people.

Fr. Boyle has received multiple awards and honors for his courageous, pioneering work. However, what is most significant for missiologists is his willingness to let the spirit of Christ’s unfailing, unrelenting love live through him. Fr. Boyle seeks to model his ministry after Jesus, not just standing “for the poor,” but “with the poor.” He sees our call as “casting our lot with the gang member” (173), thus taking upon ourselves all their pains and losses, sharing our common humanity.

Fr. Boyle shares vignette after vignette of his struggles and his parishioners’ struggles. The reader is emotionally moved time and again over both the successes and the defeats. Fr. Boyle persists in the confidence of God’s love as the only path to redemption and rescue—a living Theology of the Cross. To survive emotionally in such a ministry, one needs a strong sense of humor and irony. Fortunately for the reader, the author also shares his wit in his writing, giving some welcome moments of comic relief.

The book can serve as a resource and guide for anyone looking to serve meaningfully in a mission situation among the marginalized. It would be most helpful for congregation members to read so that they understand sympathetically the struggles of the dispossessed and of those who seek to serve among them. For the church’s many detractors, reading the book would provide a way for them to internalize the inspiration of a Christlike life.

Herbert Hofer

The Lutheran Society for Missiology has
launched its new Web site.

<http://lsfm.global>



Everyone can download either a PDF of the entire journal or individual articles for use at conferences, workshops, or in the classroom. These articles already have copyright permissions provided in the footer to help promote good missiology within the church.

The News tab is a link to the LSFM Facebook page, where posts impacting the mission of Christ along with news items are shared. Mission Work around the world and in the U.S. probably has never faced greater challenges or greater opportunities.

If you like the articles in this journal, be sure to visit the LSFM Web site to learn more about the challenges and opportunities for sharing the Good News of Jesus, and to join with a growing number of Lutherans committed to the missionary task God has given to His people.

Missio Apostolica Call for Papers

For the Lutheran Society for Missiology and its journal, *Missio Apostolica*, Lutheran mission matters. This journal has been for more than two decades serving as an international forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

September 15, 2015 is the deadline for submitting complete articles, editorials, and book reviews for the November 2015 issue of *Missio Apostolica*. This journal welcomes items from mission fields, studies and research, new developments and challenges, and reviews of recent books on mission and missions. You are invited to submit articles, editorials, or book reviews.

Contributions are welcome also for inclusion in the “Mission Observer” section of the journal. These brief items describe a current mission practice, significant event, or topic for discussion. It may be possible in the future to post these on the Web site of the Lutheran Society for Missiology. At this time for the November 2015 issue you may send contributions directly to the issue editor, Rich Carter, at carter@csp.edu and Dr. Victor Raj, journal editor, at rajv@csl.edu.

A focus for the November 2015 issue of *Missio Apostolica* will be “Education in Mission.” In particular this issue seeks “crossover” material, educational content touching on theology, theological content related to education; and both related to Gospel and mission. Authors are invited to explore many facets of this theme including:

- 1) Schools as they relate to mission work but also non-school educational activity, including educational theory (e.g., brain-based learning, or financing education in mission at all levels).
- 2) Mission as overseas (from where to where?) service but also mission service “next door.”
- 3) Facets can be examined, reported, or explored as matters of history or current practice; and vigorous debate is welcome in individual or paired articles. E.g., what challenges does educational theory offer to missiology and current mission practice; what challenges does (Lutheran) theology offer to current educational practice or theory.
- 4) Appropriate critique of (Lutheran) educational practice in mission is welcome; as is affirmation of Lutheran Educator long-standing contributions to the mission of the Church in the US and beyond.
- 5) Writers from around the globe and other Christian traditions are welcome to offer items.

Completed articles on this theme or any theme of the writer’s choosing should be in the range of 3,000–5,000 words, editorials and Mission Observer comments up to c. 1,000 words, and book reviews 500–700 words.

Proposals for articles, editorials, etc. for the November issue can be considered any time before the September 15, 2015 deadline for completed work. We have welcomed good work at the last minute, but submissions that come in early help in the planning of the issue and give author and editors a chance for team work. Proposals for articles should be approximately 200–300 words, focusing clearly on the author’s goals for and content of the proposal. Please include complete contact information; a brief personal introduction would be welcome—why the proposer comes to know and care about the proposed topic. Questions, clarification, and conversation about submissions are welcome. You may address them to the issue editor, Rich Carter, at carter@csp.edu and Dr. Victor Raj, journal editor, at rajv@csli.edu. We value your interest in sharing with the church and the world through these pages.

LSFM welcomes book reviews. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto at okamotoj@csli.edu if you are interested in writing a review.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology’s Web site (<http://lsfm.global>). Click on the Publications link to view PDFs of previous issues for free.

Another reason to check out <http://lsfm.global>

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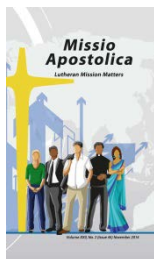
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