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EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: the Gospel in the Power of the Spirit

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

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I Introduction

This article examines the inseparable relationship between the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The subject matter is considered from the viewpoint of contemporary Christianity in the global south, particularly, African-led Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity. We will look at how these African churches, including a very fascinating African-led charismatic church in post-communist Europe, are invoking the power of God in ministry in order to bring the interventions of the Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to people with all kinds of soteriological concerns.

The central concern of the African and African-led Pentecostal/charismatic churches represented here is to witness to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, unlike the historic mission denominations of the nineteenth century, the newcomers put a lot of emphasis on the manifestation

and power of the Holy Spirit. Seen in terms of 'the anointing', Pentecostal/charismatic churches draw attention to the need to bring together in ministry the Word and Spirit in order that God's power may be evident in Christian witness.

Indeed, patterns of global Christian growth confirm the viability of pursuing a theological agenda that believes in the connection between the Holy Spirit, the gospel of Jesus Christ and signs and wonders in ministry. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take what is of God, animate it with his *Presence* and through that restore life to human brokenness. For, as J.I. Packer writes, 'the essence of the Holy Spirit's ministry, at this or any time in the Christian era, is to mediate the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ'.¹ He proceeds to commend the contribution of the charismatic renewal movement 'as a God-sent corrective of formalism, institutionalism, and intellectualism'.²

1 J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in our Walk with God*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 49.

2 Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 184.

II Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity

Lesslie Newbigin identifies three main streams of Christian persuasions in the history of the church with each defined by a particular theological orientation. Roman Catholicism puts its emphasis on structure, ritual and the sacraments, while 'orthodox' Protestantism gravitates towards the centrality of scripture and Pentecostalism operates with the conviction that 'the Christian life is a matter of the experienced power and presence of the Holy Spirit today'.³ The distinctive contribution of the Pentecostals and their charismatic progenies to Christian theology is the emphasis on 'the here and now activity' of the Spirit of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Pentecostal/charismatic emphasis on power is evident particularly in Africa where the movement functions within a cultural context that holds ardently to belief in a universe alive with benevolent and malevolent powers.

Thus Christians in Africa have found the categories of power, dominion and alleviation of suffering by the power of the Spirit relevant in the general struggle with fears and insecurities within a universe in which supernatural evil is considered hyperactive.⁴ Members of the African pneumatic movements and churches studied here have often profiled the mainline

churches as 'benchwarmers' and accused them of losing 'the power of the gospel' that was very real in the early Jesus movement.⁵ Conversion in Africa, as far as Pentecostal/charismatic churches are concerned, is ultimately a contest between alternative sources and resources of supernatural power.

Thus in African Pentecostalism, Jesus is, above all else, the one who rescues people in the power of the Spirit. In his recently published *African Pentecostalism*, Ogbu Kalu talks about how in contradistinction to the cerebral and rationalistic theologies of historic western mission Christianity, African Pentecostals 'creatively wove the Christ figure into the African universe as the person who could rescue, the *Agyenkwa*, as the Akans [of Ghana] would say'.⁶ Commenting on the role of Christ as *Agyenkwa*, literally meaning 'Saviour', or the one who grants abundant life, Mercy A. Oduyoye explains:

The *Agyenkwa*, the one who rescues, who holds your life in safety, takes you out of a life-denying situation and places you in a life-affirming one. The Rescuer plucks you from a dehumanizing ambience and places you in a position where you can grow toward authentic humanity. The *Agyenkwa* gives you back your life in all its wholeness and fullness.⁷

3 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London: SCM, 1953), 95.

4 André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 5.

5 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

6 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, ix.

7 Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 98.

The apostles, with whom it is expected the church would have a continuing ministry, understood too the relationship between the message of the gospel and the manifestation of the power of the Spirit. Thus, following Pentecost, Peter said of Jesus, 'God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour so that he might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him' (Acts 5:31-32).

A little earlier the apostles had been released from prison after their incarceration for preaching the resurrected Christ. They accredited to the power of Jesus Christ the miraculous healing of a cripple at the Beautiful Gate. The response of the apostles to a subsequent injunction 'not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus' (Acts 4:18), was to pray that God might confirm the message of the gospel with signs and wonders wrought in the power of the Spirit. Gathered in prayer, they first affirmed the sovereignty of God before asking him to confirm his word in acts of power:

You made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit...Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24-30).

Following this very direct request for the gospel to be mediated in the power of the Spirit, we are told that 'the place where they were meeting

was shaken'; the apostles 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit', and consequently, they 'spoke the word of God boldly' (Acts 4:31).

Pentecostal/charismatic power approaches to the gospel suggest that these occurrences have not ceased. They defiantly resist the position of Pentecost cessation theories that signs and wonders ceased with the death of the last apostle. In our time, the growth of the Christian church has not occurred in places where there is theological sophistication and high church order and where rational theology reigns supreme. Rather, it has been felt mostly in the two thirds world where Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality with its emphasis on experiential theology is particularly cherished. Thus the greatest contribution of this stream of Christianity to theology, world mission and evangelization is its insistence that the gospel of Jesus Christ is most effective when presented in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America and African-led churches in Europe are growing, I argue, it is because they have come to the realization that the gospel must be preached in the power of the Spirit with signs following. The pneumatic orientation of churches in the two thirds world defies western enlightenment approaches to the gospel, evangelism and mission by taking seriously what Rudolf Otto refers to as the non-rational aspects of 'the Holy'. This is seen in the emphasis placed on the experiential dimensions of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although as I point out later, they may sometimes lose sight of the element of weakness in it, St. Paul is a particularly loved character in this type of

Christianity because his theology of power sustains the inseparability of the gospel and signs and wonders of the Spirit.

In the power of the Spirit, we discover the graces of conversion, healing, deliverance, comfort and strength for this life and the assurance of eschatological hope. In the words of St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthian church: 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on [human] wisdom, but on God's power' (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

I have come to the conclusion through my reading of scripture, personal ministry and by observing patterns of growth and success in contemporary African Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity that the viability of the Christian message lies in holding together in the same breath belief and experience in theology.

III Gospel, Power and Anointing in Africa

The belief in supernatural power means Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality is popular in Africa because its interpretations and responses to evil are not discontinuous with traditional religious ideas in which evil is believed to be mystically caused. In this worldview, belief and experience always belong together.

For example, in her work, *Translating the Devil*, which is based on ethnographic data on the Peki-Ewe of Ghana, Birgit Meyer notes how the inability of historic mission churches to take the experience of the Holy

Spirit seriously, and to 'ward off or cast out evil spirits' and offer people 'protection and healing' in his power, became causes of drifts into Pentecostal/charismatic churches and movements.⁸ Wherever Pentecostalism has emerged in Africa the ministries of exorcism, healing and deliverance have been its main means of evangelizing.

It is in these ministries of the Holy Spirit that people see the existential meaning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the mission of the Spirit is 'to bring glory to Jesus' by taking from what is his and making it known to the disciples (Jn. 16:14). When the imprisoned John, out of his own uncertainty, inquired about Jesus, he responded by using the language from Isaiah 61 as the authentication of his messiahship (Lk. 4:18) and cited the acts of deliverance that accompanied his ministry as evidence. From this it could be concluded that our gospel is not simply that of saving souls, it is rather, as with Jesus, the bringing of wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress. In other words, the kingdom of God comes with power.

The 'power approach' to evangelism, which takes demon possession seriously is one that, as we note, coheres with African philosophical thought. The underlying worldview differs from that of the typical western-oriented historic mission church in which the Christian faith, as Ghanaian

⁸ Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), xviii.

theologian Kwame Bediako points out, reflects that which has been transmitted through the intellectual history of the West:

Coinciding as it did with significant advances in scientific discoveries, the Enlightenment acted to direct intellectual attention away from the realm of transcendence to the empirical world that could be seen and felt, that is, from the intangible to the tangible. By and large, Christian theology in the West made its peace with the Enlightenment. It responded by drawing a line between the secular world and the sacred sphere, as it were, and so established a frontier between the spiritual world on the one hand, and the material world on the other, creating in effect, a dichotomy between them. Many earnest Christians have been attempting by various means since then to bridge the two worlds.⁹

It is here, as Bediako further points out, that Africa has followed a different path culturally and intellectually from the Enlightenment heritage.¹⁰ Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, 'evil' is *mbusu* and most of the time it is supernaturally caused. When used in connection with life generally, *mbusu* is that which prevents people from living a holistic lifestyle.

This mindset has been sustained in popular Pentecostal/Charismatic dis-

course and so in the Christology of one Ghanaian gospel music, Jesus is 'the changer of evil destinies'. In that sense in both traditional and indigenous Christian worldviews, evil is anything that destroys abundant life. Thus the performance of traditional ritual, described by Meyer, as 'the pivot of Ewe religious life' is aimed at achieving 'health, fertility, protection, and success in life'.¹¹

In the process of conversion, the Ewe Christians, we are told, 'measured the success of Christianity by its capacity to counteract evil at least as successfully as Ewe traditional religion'.¹² In response to the challenges of preaching the gospel in the African context, Pentecostalism provides alternate ritual contexts within which the consequences of evil and spirit possession may be dealt with. Thus in Ghana, the Pentecostal/Charismatic phenomenon of 'ayaresa ne ogyee' ('healing and deliverance') has been consciously integrated into the evangelizing efforts of many Christian traditions, pressurizing even historic mission denominations to hold national evangelistic crusades that emphasize the power of the gospel in acts of deliverance.

Wherever I have seen growth in Christian ministry the power of the Spirit has also been evident. It is my custom to ask the initiators of these ministries about what, in their thinking, accounts for the successes they may be having. In almost every case the word 'anointing' has come up in the conversation. As one such charismatic

9 Kwame Bediako, 'Worship as Vital Participation: Some Personal Reflections on the African Church', *Journal of African Christian Thought* vol. 8 (2005), 3.

10 Bediako, 'Worship as Vital Participation', 3.

11 Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 61, 68.

12 Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 138.

church leader put it to me recently, 'the anointing makes the difference'. The anointing is a mediated phenomenon and the openness of the leadership of new Pentecostal/charismatic churches to these graces has served as a major challenge to traditional understandings of ministry.

What the new crops of African charismatic Christian leaders understand by 'the anointing' is continuous with the understanding with which Jesus worked. The anointing accounts for the viability of the relationship between the gospel and the power of the Spirit as succinctly outlined in St. Luke's proclamation of the mission of Jesus Christ:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk. 4:18-19).

Luke makes it clear that both the Saviour himself and his followers are empowered for the life and ministry of the kingdom by the Holy Spirit. He singles out the Spirit as the power for the life and mission of Jesus. Streams of Christianity that believe in this mission statement, as outlined by Luke, and appropriate it for their ministries do not usually have to search their archives for evidences of the power of the gospel in the work of evangelization.

The experience of the Spirit brings results: the Bible talks about it; the history of the church proves it; and the promise of Jesus Christ that those who believe in him would do greater works

does confirm even today that there is a relationship between the Spirit and the power of the gospel.

IV Jericho Hour

In the lives of the Pentecostal/charismatic streams of Christianity, the expression 'anointing', used by Jesus in his mission statement in Luke, simply implies 'the power of God in action'. At the Christian Action Faith Ministry's (CAFM) imposing Prayer Cathedral in Accra, Ghana, a weekly non-denominational prayer meeting dubbed 'Jericho Hour' is held from nine o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock noon. The four thousand seat auditorium is always filled to capacity at this time. People from all walks of life come into the Prayer Cathedral to pray that God will release them from the burden of sin and other encumbrances of this life. They pray that he will bring the deep-seated problems of their lives down, as he did the walls of Jericho in Joshua's day, and then set them free from sickness, financial indebtedness, unemployment, barrenness and sterility. In short, people patronize Jericho Hour in search of 'healing and deliverance'.

Testimonies abound that the prayer time works. Evident in the testimonial narratives I have encountered week after week at the CAFM Prayer Cathedral are a number of identifiable areas of emphases relevant to our discussion: forgiveness of sin, healing for the physically sick, deliverance for the possessed and prayer for the reversal of evil destinies that people may prosper in life; in short, holistic salvation. On several occasions, including during a visit on Thursday, 3 January 2008,

participants were anointed with oil 'for breakthrough' in whatever brought them to the 'presence of the Lord'.

Jericho Hour serves the same purpose as the many Pentecostal/charismatic healing camps found in various African contexts where the sick and troubled may even be quarantined as they await 'a visitation' from the Holy Spirit. E. Kingsley Larbi has studied these healing camps and his thoughts on why people patronize them are worth quoting at some length:

Suppliants primarily go to the camps in search of salvation that relates to the here and now. They go there because of sickness and the need for healing; they go there because of financial and economic problems; they go there because of problems related to marriages, children, employment, family needs; they go there because of lawsuits; they go there because they are struggling with drunkenness and they want to overcome it; they go there because of educational issues...they go there because of alleged problems with demons and witchcraft. But this is not all: some, in addition to their material needs, seek 'spiritual upliftment'.¹³

At Jericho Hour and at these healing camps, people go in search of anointing to break their yokes. 'Anointing', we have noted, is a mediated phenomenon and the expression is used primarily in the context of the application of olive oil either to persons to effect healing or to

things in order to transform their conditions for the better. Thus the sick may be anointed and so may be haunted homes and physical objects in order to restrain evil influences upon them.

This idea of anointing is illustrative of the African worldview in which sin and evil on the one hand and sickness and suffering on the other go together. The Bible does not always see things this way. So in John 9, Jesus did not consent to the interpretation that the condition of the man born blind could have been caused either by personal sin or generational curse. Nevertheless, it is also true that as Christians we believe that to accomplish anything in life, God's favour is required. It is thus instructive that in the mission statement of Jesus in Luke, 'anointing' and 'favour' come together within the same context.

Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity takes this relationship seriously and to this end, anointing services are meant to, as one charismatic church program in Ghana was themed, 'activate God's presence' in the lives of believers. African Pentecostal/charismatic believers are aware that the 'anointing' originates from a source more profound than a bottle of olive oil. The anointing oil points to transcendence as Pastor Joseph Eastwood Anaba of Ghana puts it in his book, *The Oil of Influence*: 'It is the personality, power, and glory of the Holy Spirit released in the believer and upon him to saturate his spirit, soul and body so that he can operate and live like Jesus on earth.'¹⁴

¹³ Emmanuel K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: CPCS, 2001), 407-408.

¹⁴ Anaba Eastwood, *The Oil of Influence* (Bolgatanga: Desert Leaf Publications, 2000), 18.

The anointing is therefore synonymous with the power of the Holy Spirit. My participation in anointing services has always established very forcefully the thinking that 'anointing' is the power of God in action. This is how I also understand St. Paul's submission that his message and preaching did not occur with 'wise and persuasive words' but with a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. In contemporary Pentecostal/charismatic thought, St. Paul would be spoken of as someone with 'anointing'. In the context of general Pentecostal/charismatic theology this power of God is available for ministry in keeping with the promise of the glorified Christ: 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8).

To this end, Bishop David O. Oyedepo of the Living Faith Ministries Worldwide notes that 'every believer requires the anointing for sustenance, performance, success, breakthrough and fulfillment'. The different levels of anointing, he submits, make the difference between degrees of impact in the proclamation of the message of the gospel.¹⁵ I point out elsewhere that the line between 'anointing' and 'power' appears very thin indeed. This power is authenticated in things and persons by virtue of their becoming effective and influential. Thus ultimately, the anointing is God's abiding presence, his Holy Spirit, who empowers those who speak in his name, enabling them to function in various gifts of grace and through that demonstrate the liberat-

ing mighty power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁶

V The Spirit, Anointing and Power of Conversion

The anointing, something Jesus had and of which the church stands in need today, is akin to what G. van der Leeuw describes as 'the power of God poured out and absorbed', which enables recipients to perform miracles and operate in 'the gifts of grace'.¹⁷ Having established that there is a connection between the experience of the Spirit and the power of the gospel, I now turn to a very contemporary example through the ministry of Pastor Sunday Adelaja.

Pastor Adelaja is founder of 'The Church of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations' based in Kiev, Ukraine. He is a man anointed by God. Pastor Sunday Adelaja has taken Eastern Europe by storm with a very forceful message that 'Jesus makes a difference'. Since its formation in the mid 1990s the Embassy of God has grown from a handful of people praying in a living room to a 25,000 member strong church in 2007. In the last three years part of my research has focused on this church. The Embassy of God marked its fourteenth year of existence in April 2008.

There is no reason to believe that the numbers are exaggerated. In May

¹⁵ David O. Oyedepo, *Anointing for Breakthrough* (Lagos: Dominion House Publications), 63.

¹⁶ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Unction to Function: Reinventing the "Oil of Influence" in African Pentecostalism', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, vol. 13 no. 2 (2005), 231-256.

¹⁷ G. Van Der Leeuw, Hans H. Penner, J. E. Turner, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper Row, 1963), 35.

2004, I joined members of the Embassy of God in street evangelism procession, the 'Jesus March'. At the time, membership was supposed to be around 20,000 and given the numbers that showed up at the Jesus March, it was obvious that this was a truly mega-sized church. My second more extensive visit took place in December 2007 during a Winter Prayer and Fasting program that afforded me the opportunity to hear and see presentations from the various ministries of the Embassy of God church. The testimonies of transformation sounded genuine and moving and as each ex-convict, ex-drug addict, ex-leader of a mafia gang, former prostitutes and alcoholics narrated how they came to Jesus Christ through the ministry of Pastor Sunday Adelaja, my mind kept returning to the interventions that Jesus made in the lives of such persons as the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20.

Starting the new ministry with seven people as a home fellowship, Pastor Sunday Adelaja began to reach out to the 'outcasts' and 'oppressed', which, as he explained to me, meant those whose human dignity had been eroded through addiction to narcotics, armed robbery, prostitution, and alcoholism. These were people whose families were ashamed of them, and whom the Ukrainian establishment was finding difficult to deal with and rehabilitate. The extent of drug abuse in many European countries threatens to overwhelm the resources available to rehabilitate its victims. For many such people scientific and clinical solutions have simply not worked.

At God's Embassy, such problems, Pastor Sunday says confidently, are confronted with the mightier power

and intervention of the Holy Spirit. The personal transformations, restorations, and reclamation of dignity that followed forced Ukrainians to take a keen interest in the mission of Pastor Adelaja in their midst. Today people whose lives were going nowhere either serve the church as pastors, leaders or else have settled down as responsible citizens who have re-channelled their gifts and talents into viable economic ventures to the glory of God and a blessing to those who are still in the 'world' and under the influence of the evil one.

VI Jesus, the Gospel and the Power of the Spirit

I pointed out earlier that the story of the Gadarene demoniac is particularly instructive as an interpretative model in the expression of the gospel through the power of the Spirit. A significant number of Bible scholars and theologians make much of the fact that this particular healing miracle of Jesus took place in Gentile territory, supporting the fact that the kingdom of God was now universal. Jesus asked the healed man to spread the word about the mighty deeds and mercy of the Lord and he did so enthusiastically. In line with the emphasis on his Gentile background, Eckhard J. Schnabel concludes that the result of the proclamation of the healed demoniac, though not recorded, 'implies that a positive outcome of his witness was not considered futile'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Eckard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 337.

This outcome, I suggest, would have depended not so much on the fact the man was a Gentile, important as that may be, but on the fact that Jesus had power over demons and evil powers. He has grace, that is, the anointing, to restore God's distorted image in the human person destroyed, not just by sin, but its other consequence of making the human person vulnerable to the activities of evil powers. To that end, we encounter in this story of the Gadarene demoniac three main themes:

First, we find a message of the reality of evil. Whether it is personified as Satan, the devil, or seen through multitudinous demonic powers as found in the passage, the important point is that the power of the gospel comes out forcefully in the encounter with evil. The victim of demonic possession who came out to meet Jesus from the tombs, we are told, operated with some form of superhuman strength: 'For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him' (Mk. 5:4).

Usually, I distinguish between demon possession and demon oppression. Demonic oppression refers to cases in which malevolent supernatural powers influence a person's life for ill. In demonic possession, evil spirits actually take over the executive faculties of a person and so he or she suffers some form of personality dissociation. The extreme case of demonic possession, which is the type we encounter in this passage, is insanity. The ministries of healing and deliverance offered in places like Jericho Hour and the healing camps are designed purposely as interventionist methods in such cases.

Second, the devil or demons are agents of destruction: 'Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones' (Mk. 5:5). Blinded by the demons, the situation that confronted the demoniac reeked of 'triple uncleanness'—he lived in the midst of unclean pigs, he lived in the unclean world of the dead (tombs) and was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits.¹⁹ The behaviour of the demoniac recalls the statement of Jesus that 'the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy', but Jesus comes that humankind may have life and have it in its fullness (Jn. 10:10). The demoniac's behaviour before the encounter with Jesus was an indication of his need for some form of intervention. He needed to be delivered from the destructive powers of the demons that were controlling his life and bringing him to ruin.

African initiated Christianity has always focused on this message. Witchcraft, for example, is not only real but for African Christians it is also an instrument of the devil for the destruction of victims. The prophets of African independent churches won followers by acknowledging the older spiritual powers and absorbing them with a new Christian synthesis. As the new African initiated churches established prayer centres to tackle the evils of witchcraft, the historic mission churches dismissed it as a figment of people's imagination and a psychological delusion. Members of the older denominations troubled by witchcraft

¹⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 508.

voted with their feet and walked out of the churches to look for help where it could be found.

Third, Jesus demonstrated, as he did so many times in his ministry, that he indeed had power to overcome evil. Jesus, 'far from being contaminated himself through his contact with such Gentile pollution, transforms it by his presence and word'.²⁰ It is not insignificant that in the Bible the *presence* of God is synonymous with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The reference Wright makes to 'presence and word' underscores the fact that Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit. He did not only cast out the evil powers destroying the man's life but Jesus also restored the glory he lost as a result of demonic control.

When the former demoniac's neighbours heard of his deliverance and came running to see this spectacular act of power encounter, they saw a transformed human being: 'they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind' (Mk. 5:15). The man became a living testimony and Jesus turned him into a disciple to go and spread his own story of healing and deliverance (v. 19).

VII Mission, Transformation and Influence

When the gospel is carried in the power of the Spirit, the evidence from the life of the early church suggests that there is first 'transformation' and then 'influence'. There is transformation because lives are turned around and there is

influence because the effects of the gospel on others become palpable. The evidence of the transformation of the Gadarene demoniac, one can conjecture, gave some weight to his proclamation that God's salvation in Christ works. It is easy to imagine how his transformed personality was enough testimony to the power of the gospel.

A similar submission could be made of the effects of the gospel on the people one encounters at the Embassy of God and other such places where testimonies abound regarding the transforming power of the Spirit of God. Based on the work of Kenneth S. Latourette, Andrew Walls has reconsidered the history of Christian expansion in terms of the 'influence of Christ'.²¹ This influence of Christ is seen in the 'greater works' of those who follow the footsteps of Christ in mission. Three major influences are identified in the work of Latourette: first, the spread of Christian proclamation in particular areas, which Walls recasts as, the 'Church test'; second, the number and strength of new movements owing their origin to Christ, which he recasts as the 'Kingdom test'; and third, the effect of Christianity on humankind as a whole, recast as the 'Gospel test'.

In looking at this threefold means of measuring the influence of Christ, I find Walls' use of these tests helpful tools in explaining the importance of carrying the gospel in the power of the Spirit as evidenced in the story of the man from Gerasa and in the mission of

²⁰ Wright, *Mission of God*, 508.

²¹ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

Pastor Sunday Adelaja and his Embassy of God church.

In Walls' reinterpretation of Latourette's work, the first sign of the influence of Christ is the physical presence of a community of people willing to bear his name, that is, 'the existence of a statistically identifiable, geographically locatable Christian community, however small'.²² What has made God Embassy in the Ukraine the talking point in terms of Christian mission is the identifiable community of transformed people in a supposedly atheistic environment testifying to the influence of Christ upon their church as a community functioning in the power of the Holy Spirit. With a sense of what the church as a community of believers stands for, Pastor Sunday Adelaja gives voice to the 'church test' when he writes that, 'God wants everyone to actively participate in the life of the church, so that his greatness, might, and glory could be manifested through us'.²³ It is for the same reason that the former demoniac was mandated to '[g]o home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you' (Mk. 5:19). The ultimate aim of this kind of testimony was to generate a community that believed in Jesus Christ and his mission.

The second test is the 'Kingdom test' and relates to the demonstration through the church of the transformative power of God. In the words of Walls, 'the kingdom is declared when

demons are cast out by the finger of God. The kingdom of God has drawn near in the presence of Christ with his acts of power'.²⁴ In other words, the kingdom of God comes with power and when it does, the dark night of sin and all that detracts from human wholeness are chased away so that God's image in people may be restored. The image of the Gedarene demoniac after his encounter with Christ, found by witnesses to be 'sitting there, well dressed, and in his right mind' (Mk. 5:15) is one that may also be invoked here to explain what the coming of the kingdom upon people is like.

It is instructive that many African Pentecostal/charismatic ministries like the Embassy of God can point to former narcotics and prostitutes who are now turned around for Jesus after encountering his power. Kingdom signs like these, Walls notes, mark the new innovative movements that reflect true Christian expansion. Like the kingdom, he writes, 'they sprout and stir up; they produce a more radical Christian discipleship'.²⁵

The kingdom test signifies how God intervenes in the lives of people in order to restore them—a message that, as we have noted, is an underlying theme of Pentecostal/charismatic theology. As with true kingdom movements, the Embassy of God and the other movements have established as movements of reformation, renewal and revival. And indeed when I asked Pastor Sunday Adelaja to summarize his vision in one word, he told me: 'God has called us to effect another reformation'.

²² Walls, *Christian History*, 10.

²³ Sunday Adelaja, *Church of the Embassy of God Eighth Anniversary Brochure* (Kiev: Fares Publishing, 2002).

²⁴ Walls, *Christian History*, 14

²⁵ Walls, *Christian History*, 14.

The final test is the 'gospel test' and relates to the difference that the resurrection of Christ makes in the here and now.²⁶ Out of the chaos that is associated with lives wasted on narcotics and other vices the Pentecostal/charismatic movement sees itself as an instrument of newness in the land and in people's lives. The motivational messages of Pastor Sunday Adelaja, for example, help bring the message of the resurrection as newness to a people looking for hope after 'death' in post-communist Europe. In all the cases of transformation and intervention we encounter in the Bible including those of the prodigal son, the woman of Samaria and Zacchaeus, this metaphor of 'death' and 'resurrection' applies. As the father in the story of the prodigal son captured his son's transition in the explanation to the complaining older brother: 'this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (Lk. 15:32).

VIII The Cross and the Power of the Spirit

The rejuvenation, empowerment and restoration that come from the experience of the ministry of the Spirit have often led to a certain triumphalism on the part of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. In the contexts of the social tremors that many experienced in post-communist Europe and the harsh and debilitating economic conditions of Africa, Christian triumphalism has often left those who may still be going through 'the valley of the shadow of death' without testimonies.

This is particularly so because testimonies invariably focus on the interventions of the Spirit and demonstrations of his power in healing and restoration. Smail notes how, bolstered by what has happened to us, we can easily come to see ourselves as 'living in a world of supernatural power that leads us from triumph to triumph, where the weak, desolate sufferer of Calvary has been left behind, or at any rate has ceased to dominate the scene'.²⁷ Pentecostal/charismatic triumphalism is evident in its choruses, the names of churches, testimonies permitted in public worship and in the very sermons that are preached. Further, the bulk of African Pentecostal/charismatic sermons come from the Old Testament. The reason is simple. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jabez are easily used to support theologies of prosperity and triumph on which preachers like to dwell.

Celebrating our victories in Christ is in order. However, Smail counsels that we should begin to be in constant guard in case, without any conscious intention, we should begin to evade the cross by devising and promoting a charismatic theology of glory: 'A spirit who diverts us from the cross into a triumphant world in which the cross does not hold sway may turn out to be a very unholy Spirit'.²⁸ The experiences of Jesus Christ on the cross and those of St. Paul, particularly in the refusal of God to answer his prayer to remove his thorn in the flesh, are indications that

²⁶ Walls, *Christian History*, 19.

²⁷ Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker, eds., *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK, 1995), 56.

²⁸ Smail, *Cross and Spirit*, 58.

sometimes God's purpose in those difficult situations may be to grant the grace of endurance. If Jesus bore our grief upon the tree, the call to take up our cross and follow him must be seen as a call to bear pain and suffering by standing with those who need our empathy in a fallen world.

The Pentecostal/charismatic emphasis on signs and wonders as integral to Christian ministry is certainly a turning away from what Roger Bowen refers to as the 'closed' Western worldview and a turn towards the world of the Spirit and the manifestations of his power.²⁹ However, the triumphalism associated with signs and wonders which we have discussed must necessarily be balanced with the theological worldview within which Jesus carried out his own ministry. His also was a ministry carried out in the power of the Spirit but one that was 'always exercised out of weakness, sorrow, conflict, suffering and even defeat'.³⁰

With the increasing use of the media in particular there are clear abuses and faulty theological interpretations occurring in churches. In a case recalled by Jenkins, the church sells anointing oil for healing and television viewers are asked to place glasses of water and bottles of oil by their sets that they may be infused by divine power through remote control. Giving in particular is fast losing its place as part of our response to God in worship. The church offering is now given the same interpretation as a secular

investment in which what is 'reaped' depends on what one 'gives' and even the rewards are seen more and more in material terms.³¹ The numbers of people one meets at African healing camps who have not had their problems solved tend to be many more than those who testify to different breakthroughs.

There is reason to thank God for the victories but it is equally important to appreciate the grace that God grants to those who must necessarily go through one form of pain and difficulty or another. God's power, Bowen perceptively concludes, 'is at work not only *for* the poor and weak but also *in* the poor and weak, and there is no escape from the way of the cross'.³²

IX Conclusion

In spite of some obvious deficiencies in its theological understanding, the centrality of healing and deliverance in the message of salvation and its import for Christian mission cannot be overemphasized. It provides some evidence of the practical difference between African indigenous Pentecostal thought and the inability of traditional western mission Christianity to respond adequately to the theological questions raised by African Christians in particular.

In the neo-Pentecostal ministry of healing and deliverance, God's salvation is given active expression as a salvation of power meant to be experi-

29 Roger Bowen, *So I Send You: A Study Guide to Mission* (London: SPCK, 1996), 164.

30 Bowen, *So I Send You*, 164.

31 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65.

32 Bowen, *So I Send You*, 164.

enced. Information gleaned from interviews, messages, and the writings of exponents and observations of the phenomenon in practice suggest that the phrase 'healing and deliverance' is used correlatively in African Pentecostal/charismatic theology to refer to the deployment of divine resources, that is, power and authority in the name or blood of Jesus—perceived in pneumatological terms as the intervention of the Holy Spirit—to provide release for demon-possessed, demon-oppressed, broken, disturbed and troubled persons, in order that victims may be restored to 'proper functioning order'. That means they are restored to 'health and wholeness' and are thus freed from demonic influences and curses, that they may enjoy God's fullness of life understood to be available in Christ.

Our world stands in need of a gospel carried in the power of the Spirit. This

way of doing ministry should not be considered confessional or denominational but rather the way Jesus Christ did his ministry. It is the way to remain relevant to the Bible and the task of the church. A word of caution as we end. Miracles do not actually prove anything about God. Therefore the focus of discussion ought always to shift from their actuality to the nature of God, in whom truth alone resides. That nature is one which intervenes in our lives in order that we may be translated from destruction, whatever form it takes, into abundant life in Christ. In the prophecy of Zechariah as quoted by St. Luke: '[God] spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets...that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives' (Lk. 1:68-79).

Aspects of the Atonement

Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity

I. Howard Marshall

The Christian understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ and its relationship to the salvation of sinful humanity is currently the subject of intense debate and criticism. In the first two chapters Howard Marshall discusses the nature of the human plight in relation to the judgment of God and then offers a nuanced defence of the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners. The third chapter examines the place of the resurrection of Christ as an integral part of the process whereby sinners are put in the right with God. In the final chapter Marshall argues that in our communication of the gospel today the New Testament concept of reconciliation may be the most comprehensive and apt expression of the lasting significance of the death of Christ. The papers are expanded versions of the 2006 series of Chuen King Lectures given in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

I. Howard Marshall is Emeritus Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Honorary Research Professor at the University of Aberdeen. He has authored many books on the New Testament.

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