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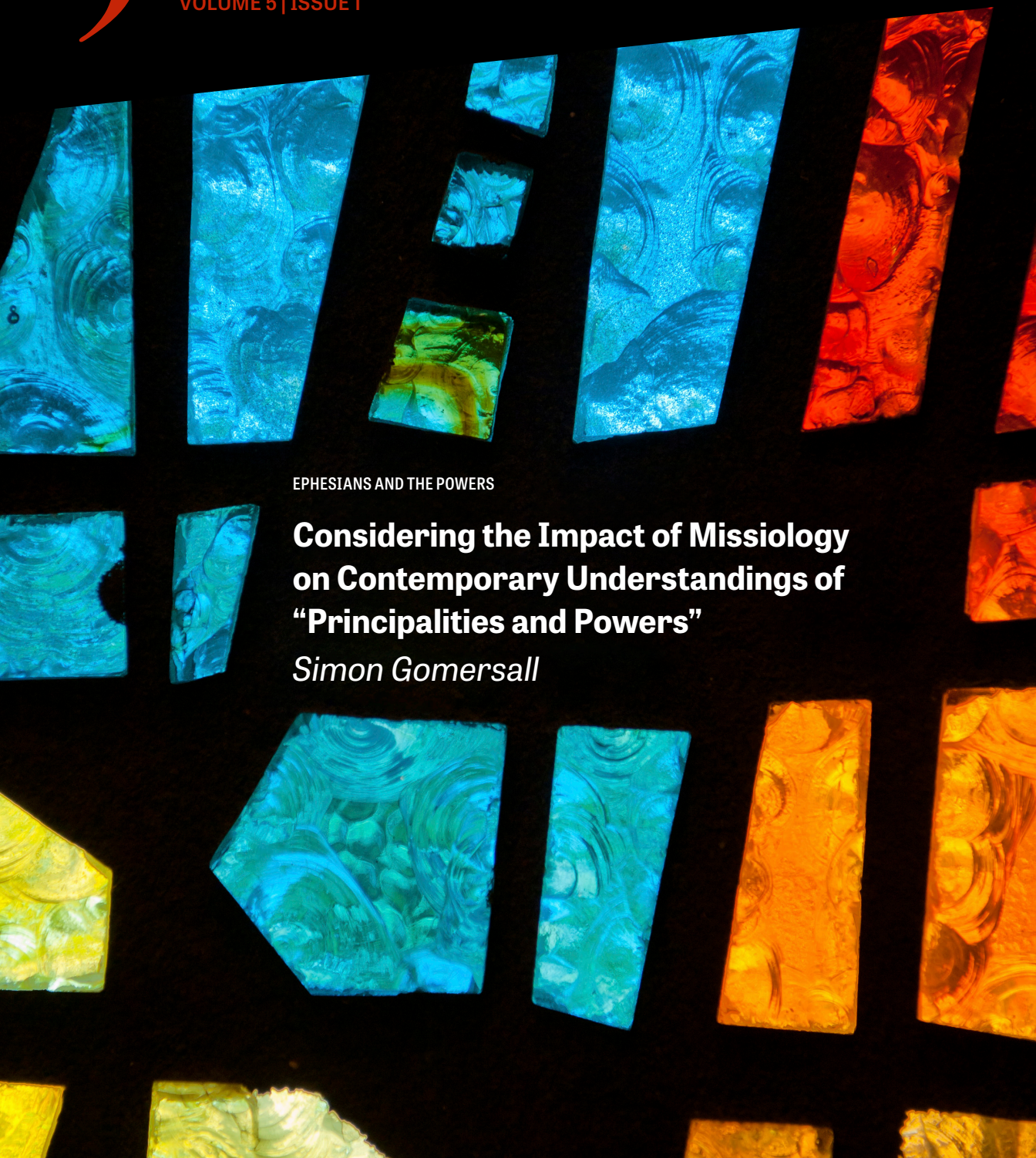

EPHESIANS AND THE POWERS

Considering the Impact of Missiology on Contemporary Understandings of "Principalities and Powers"

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Considering the Impact of Missiology on Contemporary Understandings of "Principalities and Powers"

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Abstract: While the early 20th century saw well-defined movement toward the depersonalizing and demythologizing of principalities and powers as they are described in the biblical text, the latter part of the century witnessed a reappraisal of this process as multi-cultural perspectives began to filter from the mission field into the academy. This paper traces key milestones in the former demythologizing process and then explores some of the reasons why these modernist assumptions have been revised, including: the experiences of missionaries, greater insight into the assumptions that lie behind worldviews, and the research of anthropologists. The paper finishes with the brief suggestion that each part of this journey brings value to the practice of Christian ministry.

Key Words: powers, missions, missiology, demythologizing, worldview, syncretism, secularization, Christian worldview, global south, multi-cultural mission

Introduction

It has been said that mission is the mother of all theology.[1] Historically, theological advancement has almost always been in response to contextual challenges, forcing the church to better understand particular concerns and then articulate corresponding theological positions. Creeds, therefore, have been shaped out of controversy. If this is true, should it not follow that missiology demands an ongoing role in the development of theological perspectives? Missiologist Michael Goheen insists that reflecting missiologically on theology is as important as reflecting theologically on mission.[2] Similarly, David Bosch comments, "We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology

1. Commonly believed to originate with Martin Kahler, *Schriften zu Christologie und Mission: Gesamtausgabe der Schriften zur Mission* (Munchen: Kaiser Verlag, 1971), 190.

2. Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 87.

rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than to critically accompany the *Missio Dei*."[3]

Considering the powers in Ephesians,[4] it is important to not only unpack recent developments in theological studies regarding the powers' identity, nature, and function, but also to ask: what insights are offered through both the study and praxis of mission? This paper explores ways in which a contemporary understanding of the powers has been shaped, not only by theological reflection but also by missionary practice.

The Powers in Contemporary Biblical Studies and Theology

One of a missiologist's key tools is contextualization. Context plays an essential role in the way that the powers have been understood historically. Throughout the 20th century, in the philosophical environment of Western academia, the concept of the powers was clearly secularized and demythologized, having been previously conceived of in personal and supernatural terms. Bultmann's well-known quote captures the modernist assumption: "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of daemons and spirits."[5]

Yet, in reality the journey toward a more secularized understanding of the powers is far more complex and interesting than Bultmann's quip suggests. Clinton Arnold asserts that "any discussion of the powers would be incomplete without reference to the foundational work of Otto Everling published in 1888."[6] Everling's work, entitled *Die Paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie,*[7] sought to establish a connection between pre-Christian Jewish and heathen cultic activity, and the use of the terminology and concepts of the powers in Ephesians.[8] He asserted that the author of Ephesians worked in continuity with the Jewish demonology of such pseudepigraphal works as 1 Enoch and Jubilees, rather than being primarily

3. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 494.

4. As this paper is primarily an historical and pragmatic excursion regarding understandings of the powers, virtually no space is given to exegetical treatment of the relevant passages from Ephesians (or Romans or Colossians). Suggested resources toward this end include: Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003); Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

5. Quoted in Derek Brown, "The Devil in the Details: A Survey of Research on Satan in Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 9, no. 2 (2011): 201.

6. Arnold, *Power and Magic,* 42.

7. Otto Everling, *Die Paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1888).

8. Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 43.

influenced by gnostic ideas. Everling concluded that in Ephesians, one finds, "the existence of a multitude of devilish beings which live in the air under the supreme command of Satan."[9]

Better known than Everling is the work of Martin Dibelius whose *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*[10] is identified by Carr as one of the most influential books for theological study in the 20th century.[11] Like Everling, Dibelius attributes Ephesians to Pauline authorship but takes a broader view with regard to sources for Paul's thinking, seeing elements of Hellenism influencing a primary grounding in Jewish apocalyptic. In Ephesians, Dibelius sees Paul affirming "a world dominated by supernatural forces"[12] and believes Paul has a primary interest in responding to the question "Where does Christ stand in relation to the spirit world?"[13]

Scholarly understanding of the powers was broadened by Oscar Cullman's assertion that the word applies equally to angelic beings *and* human authorities.[14] Clinton Morrison significantly developed this hypothesis with particular attention to Romans 13:1–7.[15] He argued the "angel of the nations" concept from Jewish apocalyptic had correspondence with Greco-Roman thought, and suggested a significant relationship between civil rulers and spiritual powers.[16] Hendrik Berkhof took one further demythologizing step by questioning whether Paul even conceived of powers as personal beings, preferring to frame them as "structures of earthly influence."[17] Seen in this light, the teaching on powers in Ephesians better supports an agenda of Christian social action than overt spiritual warfare. George Caird reinforced a structural interpretation of the powers in his *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*, noting: "I have tried in these pages to expound Paul's view of man's dilemma, that he lives under divinely appointed authorities—the powers of state, the powers of legal religion, the powers of nature—which through sin have become demonic agencies."[18]

9. Everling, *Die Paulinische,* 119; quoted in Arnold, *Power and Magic,* 42.

10. Martin Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1909).

11. Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase* hai archai kai hai exousiai, SNTSMS 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

12. Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 1.

13. Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt,* 182.

14. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Conception of Time and History*, revised ed. trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964), 95–114.

15. Clinton Morrison, *The Powers that Be: Earthly Rulers and Demonic Powers in Romans 13:1–7* (London: SCM Press, 1960).

16. Morrison, *The Powers that Be*, 130.

17. Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. J.H Yoder (Scottdale, PE: Herald Press, 1977), 23.

18. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*. In Caird's commentary on Ephesians, published 20 years later, the powers are conceived as spiritual beings who operate in and through human structures. See G.B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 91, 101.

Caird suggests that only the sacrificial love demonstrated in the cross can rob the corrupted powers of their tyrannical influence. It is well known that Walter Wink has published numerous volumes on the topic.[19] Despite establishing more rigorous exegetical and historical grounds for a demythologizing agenda, Wink's approach broadens the base on which an understanding of the powers rest. He writes: "Unless the context further specifies (and some do) we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense, understanding them to mean both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, good and evil powers.[20]

In his volume, *The Powers That Be*, Wink asserts: "What people in the world of the Bible experienced as and called 'principalities and powers' was in fact the actual spirituality at the center of the political, economic and cultural institutions of their day."[21] According to Wink, the powers are best understood when seen in light of the "spirit" that develops in human institutions, often initially as the collective attitude and ethos of those participating in the institution, but often becoming more than a sum of the parts, with the potential to develop a life of its own that, in turn, profoundly influences the culture and behaviour of the organization out of which it grew.[22] Powers is an apt description for such a reality. Addressing the question of whether demons are personal metaphysical beings, Wink writes, "I prefer therefore to regard them as the impersonal spiritual realities at the centre of institutional life."[23]

The Powers in Contemporary Literature, Philosophy, and Social Activism

While these understandings were developing in the theological world, a corresponding intellectual renovation was occurring in the worlds of literature, philosophy, and social activism. For example, C. Norman Kraus provides an account of two influential awakenings to the phenomenon of the powers in a broader institutional sense. The first figure is lawyer, author, activist, and lay theologian, William Stringfellow, who, in the late 1960's, analyzed the social crisis in America in terms of unseen powers. Stringfellow "spoke of the demonic power ruinating human beings and ruling society by the threat of death."[24] In 1967 French philosopher Paul Ricoeur

19. The four best known include his Powers' Trilogy: Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992); and *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999).

20. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 39.

21. Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 24.

22. Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 24–30.

23. Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 28.

24. C. Norman Kraus, *An Intrusive Gospel: Christian Mission in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 95.

produced a similar construction in *The Symbolism of Evil,* which was the fruit of a re-examination of the New Testament teaching about the principalities and powers through a philosophical lens.[25]

Both authors recognized the congruence between the spiritual authorities referred to in the New Testament and the powers which so often tend to control or at least influence human affairs in the form of social and ideological systems and institutional empires. Their studies engaged critical questions: Are the principalities and powers inherently evil, or are they created orders gone wrong? Are they projections of the human subconscious? Are they to be identified with the institutional empires that dominate the lives of individuals? Or are they the personification of ideologies, myths, and rationalizations that sanction the self-centered systems that control society?[26]

In responding to these questions, Kraus asserts that the powers are not inherently demonic or evil. God did not create these powers as demonic forces. Rather, they were "created by God as part of the human reality. They are creaturely—that is, they are limited in their ability to achieve their goals. They are subject to what sociologists call 'the law of unintended consequences.'"[27] Kraus sees these ideas corresponding with Colossians 1:16 where Paul indicates that all the "thrones," "dominions," "rulers," and powers were created by Christ and for him. Kraus contends that the powers "have become perverted and alienated (fallen) through their idolatrous self-centeredness."[28]

In an account used by numerous Christian writers to illustrate the satanic character of the powers influencing world systems, Psychologist David Bakan has vividly described the dehumanizing impact of institutionally conceived powers (in contrast to the redemptive power of genuine community):

> Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in a sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in lack of separations. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation and aloneness; communion in contact, openness and union. Agency manifests itself in the urge to master; communion in non-contractual cooperation. Agency manifests itself in repression of thought feeling and impulse; communion in the lack and removal of repression.[29]

The powers dominate through a system that controls and constrains the possibilities of individuals. In this conception, the inclination toward self-centeredness lies at

25. Paul Ricouer, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Beacon, 1967).

26. Kraus, *Intrusive Gospel*, 96.

27. Kraus, *Intrusive Gospel*, 98.

28. Kraus, *Intrusive Gospel*, 98.

29. David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence: Isolation and Communion in Western Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 14–15.

the heart of all human social and political systems. It is important to note that these understandings of the powers are not just hypothetical constructions. Bob Ekblad grounds our conception of the powers in daily categories as he encounters the powers' destructive reality in the training of pastoral agents inside contemporary Seattle jails and prisons.

> These powers are embodied in laws, rules, protocols, and activities such as profiling, categorizing, sanctioning, and relocating. They also manifest as addictions, mental health disorders, immigration holds, impending new charges, trials, and sentencing. They exert influence among inmates subservient to gang protocol and the code of the street. The powers are the ever-present landscape within which Jesus's mission must be somehow proclaimed and enacted.[30]

The Powers in the Works of Contemporary Missionary and Ministry Practitioners

In keeping with the assumptions of modernity, a significant theological reconstruction of the powers has occurred that shifted from viewing the powers as personal, spiritual entities to either social influences or the impersonal spiritual inclinations that lie behind them. In the modern imagination, the powers are real and influential, but certainly not personal and supernatural. Yet the traffic in this journey has not all been one way. Through the decades of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, numerous voices have been advocating for a return to earlier understandings of the principalities and powers. A few, relatively isolated cries have come from the halls of academia,[31] but the primary chorus has come from an interesting quarter, echoing out of the daily experience of ministry and missionary practitioners, generally finding a demythologized hermeneutic of the powers inadequate to address the realities of their daily labor.

One early European example of this can be observed in the experience of German scholar and pastor Rev. Johann Christoph Blumhardt, who in 1843 encountered an unexplainable manifestation of evil in the lives of two women while pastoring a small Lutheran Church in Möttlingen. Although he did not believe in evil spiritual beings, Blumhardt found himself in a great battle of prayer involving terrifyingly real dialogues with demons that spoke through the possessed women. The struggle reached a climax one night when the spirits left the women howling,

30. Bob Ekblad, "Communicating Jesus' Liberating Love Amidst Hostile Powers," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72 (2018): 255.

31. Some examples: Graham Twelftree, *Christ Triumphant: Exorcism Then and Now* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985); Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982); Peter T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church,* ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 110–50.

"Jesus is the victor, Jesus is the victor." There was an immediate transformation in the women's lives and a sudden revival in the church as dozens of people embraced the Christian faith.[32]

Michael Pocock is Senior Professor Emeritus of World Missions and Intercultural Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Despite many years of overseas ministry and lecturing in mission studies, he candidly recounts a similar paradigm shift that took place in his thinking the first time he encountered a demonized person.[33] Kenyan philosopher and theologian John Mbiti humorously tells of an African student sent to Europe for academic theological education, which comprehensively failed to prepare him for the first task he encountered upon his return—exorcising an evil spirit from his aunt![34] Mbiti points notes: "Every African who has grown up in the traditional environment will, no doubt, know something about this mystical power which often is experienced, or manifests itself in the form of magic, divination, witchcraft and mysterious phenomena that seem to defy even immediate scientific explanations." Mbiti further documents a number of cases where Western-trained missionaries were forced to revise their worldview in the face of realities in the field .[35]

Several times now, this author has encountered pastoral situations in which people have exhibited behavior which is difficult to explain apart from the manifestation of a personal, evil, spiritual entity. On one occasion, a young professional woman was presented who, with both distorted facial features and voice, fired a near-continuous stream of vile and blasphemous language, which was instantaneously stopped with the simple command to, "Be silent, in Jesus' name." Assistance was then sought to prayerfully free this young woman from the evil that had tormented her for years, resulting in a dramatically transformed life.

The difference between this encounter and other interactions with people claiming demonic interference, but actually experiencing mental health issues, is significant. Addressing these two types of issues is fundamentally different in both engagement and result. This is supported by several empirical studies (though admittedly with small case sizes) where psychologists could clearly differentiate symptoms, diagnoses, and treatment between patients presenting with psychotic symptoms and cases involving spiritual activity. [36]

32. Friedrich Zundel, *Pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt: An Account of His Life* (Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2010), 281–285. Blumhardt's story was popularized after inclusion in Barth's *Church Dogmatics.* See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* IV.3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961*),* 165.

33. Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rehhnen, Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 195.

34. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 11.

35. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 253–254.

36. Millard J. Sall, "Demon Possession or Psychopathology: A Theological Relationship? A Clinical Differentiation," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 4 (1976): 288. For another

In the preface to Phillips and Coote's 1993 text, *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Mission*, Lesslie Newbigin highlighted the subconscious syncretism that Western missionaries carried into developing world contexts where their Christian faith had been shaped and, in some ways, constrained by the naturalistic and rational assumptions of modernity. Supernatural considerations were treated with suspicion, or at least deemphasized. Therefore, missionaries often had no idea how to deal with events such as demon possession.[37]

Philip Jenkins asserts that the growing edge of the church worldwide is attuned to "a very strong supernatural orientation."[38] Jenkins makes the interesting observation that the "newest" Christianity of Latin America, Africa, and China is remarkably like the "oldest" Christianity that one finds in the Book of Acts with accompanying supernatural manifestations.

> These signs of power usually imply the concept of spiritual warfare, of confronting and defeating evil demonic forces. For African Christians, one of the most potent passages of the New Testament is found in the letter to the Ephesians in which Paul declares that "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the forces of evil in the heavenly places." However superstitious and irrelevant it appears to mainstream Northern Christians the passage makes wonderful sense in most of Africa as it does for believers in Latin America or East Asia.[39]

Michael Pocock's research from Nepal is revealing. In 1950, the amount of known Christians in Nepal numbered twenty-five. In 2005, there were over 400,000.[40] In his research investigating the means by which people embraced the Christian faith, the most frequent response related to people being troubled by demons which had resisted traditional Hindu remedies. Without specialist training, regular Christians seemed able to address these issues, consistently effecting transformational results.[41] Reflecting on the application of these experiences to Western culture in general, Pocock comments:

> There is no way that a growing, more supernaturally oriented faith would not influence the West in the same way that Western technology and culture have influenced the rest of the world. This is particularly true when a great deal of

discussion of this issue see T. Craig Isaacs, "The Possessive States Disorder: The Diagnosis of Demon Possession," *Pastoral Psychology* 35 (1987): 263–273.

37. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honour of Gerald H. Anderson* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 3–4.

38. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

39. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 129.

40. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 193.

41. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 193.

> Western Christianity, particularly in Europe, seems to have stalled. It needs the help of majority world Christians because, in many ways Western Christianity has become indistinguishable from the secular culture that surrounds it.[42]

We shall address Pocock's assertion again shortly. Ernst Wendland and Samilo Hachibamba, both faculty of a Lutheran Seminary in Zambia, offer a fascinating piece regarding the cultural translation of Paul's teaching on principalities and powers in Ephesians into the culture of the Tonga people, an indigenous tribe of southern Zambia. One helpful insight from Wendland and Hachibamba relates to the personalized nature of the powers within the Ephesian economy. They assert:

> "Most modern speakers of English—those of a western background and worldview at any rate—tend to think of and refer to power only in an abstract de-personalised, and attributive sense. An essentially rationalistic, secularised, anti-supernatural worldview prefers to demythologise such passages in order to contextualise them hermeneutically for the modern mind."[43]

As we have seen, this results in the term "power" being applied to the religious, social, economic, and political structures of the ancient world[44] or to the inner spirituality of these institutions.[45] But this stands in significant contrast to the original biblical sense and context. Ephesus and its surrounding areas of Asia Minor was immersed in an understanding of personal powers in the latter part of the first century. Wendland and Hachibamba, explain: "For the multitudes that were obsessed with such pervasive superstitious beliefs, these powers were neither visible, nor inclined to be benevolent, but they were spiritual in nature and more often than not perceived to be diabolical in intention."[46] This meant that the powers needed to be continually placated or counteracted by supernatural means via a range of magical practices. Thus, Ephesus was a center of magical arts and "a home for magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts."[47] Prominent among these was the cult of Artemis (also known as Diana) frequently associated with fertility and Mother nature. Arnold explains:

> The overriding characteristic of the practice of magic throughout the Hellenistic world was the cognizance of a spirit world exercising influence over virtually every aspect of life. The goal of the magician was to discern the helpful spirits from the harmful ones and learn the distinct operations and the relative strengths and authority of the spirits. Through this knowledge, means

42. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 193.

43. Ernst R. Wendland and Salimo Hachibamba, "A Central African Perspective on Contextualizing the Ephesian Potentates, Principalities, and Powers," *Missiology: An International Review,* 28, no. 3 (2000): 342.

44. Caird, *Principalities and Powers,* 242.

45. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 5.

46. Wendland and Hachibamba, "Central African Perspective," 343.

47. Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 14.

> could be constructed (with spoken or written formulas, amulets, etc.) for the manipulation of the spirits in the interests of the individual person.[48]

So, "in the conception and practice of the adherents of African religions, it is the occult world of lesser spirits and witches and sorcerers which is of dominant spiritual and existential concern."[49] The worldviews and metaphysical assumptions of believers from the developing world must contribute to the matrix of data through which we read the Christian Scriptures. This is one of the key insights that the discipline of anthropology has gifted to the Western world.

Craig Keener's massive volume *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*[50] is a comprehensive attempt to systematically address the philosophical and intellectual assumptions that prevent contemporary readers from accepting accounts of supernatural activity in the form of miraculous occurrences. In addition, Keener gathers an impressive collection of credibly attested, present-day events that fall within the miraculous category. Of particular relevance to this paper from Keener's work are two appendices entitled "Demons and Exorcism in Antiquity"[51] and "Spirit Possession and Exorcism in Societies Today."[52] Keener articulates his goal: "What I hope to show is that the accounts of possession and exorcism in the Gospels and Acts are plausible from a cross-cultural standpoint."[53] Keener points out:

> Possession experiences are widely attested in anthropological literature. But where the leading collectors of data on the subject have been anthropologists, whether actual spirits could be involved in some extreme cases is a matter of the interpretation of the data and can vary according to the philosophic interpretations.[54]

Missionary anthropologist, Paul Hiebert reports an experience/data-based conversion to a belief in personal spiritual entities. Serving in India, he eventually identified a personal blind-spot, resulting from "his scientific training (which) stressed a naturalistic, empirical approach."[55] Alongside this, his theological preparation allowed for the existence of only one spiritual being, God, but he lacked a functional

48. Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 18.

49. K. Fernando, "Screwtape Revisited: Demonology Western, African, and Biblical," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons, and the Realm*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 122; as quoted in Wendland and Hachibamba, "Central African Perspective," 345.

50. Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

51. Keener, *Miracles*, 769–787.

52. Keener, *Miracles*, 788–856.

53. Keener, *Miracles*, 788.

54. Keener, *Miracles*, 829.

55. Keener *Miracles,* 845.

category for supernatural activity that was not directly theistic. Struck by the correspondence between the biblical accounts and his present Indian context, he coined the phrase "the flaw of the excluded middle" to describe the significant spirit world between a sovereign God and the natural order. He eventually concluded that this understanding made best sense of both the biblical texts and the realities with which he was daily dealing.[56]

Missiologist Alan R. Tippett writes about the reality of "power encounters," such as exorcisms and the transformational capacity they carry: "Western missions might do well to face up to the statistical evidence that animists are being won today by a Bible of power encounter, not a demythologized edition."[57] Tippett asserts that in his Melanesian missionary experience, first generation Christians who relapse into paganism tend to be those who for some reason or other failed to experience faith through some act of power encounter. Such an encounter was often accompanied by the destruction of shrines and other paraphernalia which helped to mark a crucial point of decision and commitment.

The work of several academics has significantly raised the profile of a more personal understanding of spiritual powers in the Western academic economy. Peter Wagner, with extensive mission experience in Latin America, taught on the topic of church growth under Donald McGavran at the Fuller School of World Mission. In the 1970's he identified that church growth was most prolific amongst Pentecostal and charismatic churches. In 1983 Wagner taught a class called "Signs and Wonders" with John Wimber of the Vineyard Church. Cultural anthropologists Allan Tippett and Charles Kraft, also Fuller faculty, interacted with the class bringing "a deep awareness of the worldviews of traditional tribal peoples, sometimes called animism."[58] Pocock notes that as "missionaries and anthropologists, they had witnessed rites of possession and exorcism."[59] They also witnessed the impact "power encounters" (the ability to effect transformative outcomes) had amongst adherents to traditional folk religions.[60]

Critiques of the concept of a "power encounter" abound and must be taken seriously.[61] Such critiques often focus on the perception that power encounters promote confrontation and "power-over" others, which reinforce the very values

56. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 54.

57. Alan R. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), 312.

58. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 186.

59. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 186.

60. Charles H. Kraft, "Contextualisation and Spiritual Power," in *Deliver Us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission,* ed. A. Scott Moreau, Tokunboh Adeyembo, David Burnett, Bryant Myers, and Hwa Yung (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 290–308.

61. See, for example Martha Fredericks, "Kenosis as a Model for Interreligious Dialogue," *Missiology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 212–213; Johan Verukyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 168–173.

the powers themselves use to subjugate humanity. From a missiological point of view, this carries potential to align with a "colonialist" agenda, now extensively critiqued, which we shall consider shortly. Concerns about the use of power and the sustainability of credible worldviews remain essential issues in this conversation.

One of the more extreme expressions of this personal approach to defining powers developed largely, again, through the work of Peter Wagner. This is called Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare and was expounded in Wagner's books *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders*[62] and *Confronting the Powers*.[63] The key assumption behind this practice is that through a process called spiritual mapping, spirits controlling certain areas can be identified, allowing them to be "bound" in the name of Jesus, limiting their effectiveness in opposing the gospel and often leading to significant and rapid conversions. Spiritual mapping is often practiced in conjunction with "identificational repentance," involving a representational group repenting on behalf of a larger group with regard to past sins.

While it is recognised that such an approach appears to have sometimes produced significant results, it is unclear whether the results are because of the spiritual warfare techniques or because the techniques were accompanied by focused efforts in prayer and evangelism which, in themselves, may have produced the results. Wagner's perspectives have received significant critique. Pocock and Van Rheenen list a number of key limitations: many of Wagner's ideas are not found in the Bible, nor are they practiced by Christians in the biblical narrative; they tend to turn prayer into a transaction rather than a means of entering into relationship with God; an overemphasis on territorial spirits reduces human responsibility in processes of repentance and restoration; and the practices may encourage a form of Christian "magic" and superstition.[64] Scott Moreau comments: ". . . tension is especially evident in the discussion on territorial spirits and spiritual mapping, in which one side trumpets identification and binding of territorial spirits as the key to world evangelization while the other condemns such practices as Christian magic."[65] Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare might therefore be conceived as an overcorrection to the secularizing influence of modernity which itself needs to be carefully considered and evaluated.

This raises important questions regarding the ethical issues created when worldviews clash. It is well known that the spread of Western culture was often

62. C. Peter Wagner ed., *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders* (Chicester, UK: Sovereign World, 1991).

63. C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996).

64. Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 191.

65. Scott Moreau, "Spiritual Warfare/Territorial Spirits/Demons," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 371.

considered to be a primary task of missions throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was often considered a moral obligation to elevate indigenous populations to a higher standard of living enjoyed by Europeans. This usually was motivated by a theistic worldview that, contrary to prevailing opinion, identified the equal humanity of indigenous peoples. Referring to the early North American context, missiologist Craig Ott comments, "To neglect the virtues such as industriousness among Indian converts would be to deny their equal humanity."[66] Missionaries also often encountered poverty, illiteracy, and traditional practices such as slavery, Sati (the ritual burning of widows), and ritual child sacrifice that could not be ignored. Woodberry comments: "We should not lose sight of the positive legacy of missions in the areas of racial attitudes, education, civil society and colonial reform. Many missionaries resisted imperialistic endeavours, exposed abuses and fought for the rights of indigenous peoples."[67]

But this is not to underplay the massive damage done by the colonialist agenda which served to advance the esteem and profit of European nations at the expense of indigenous populations and their cultures. Loss of language, deconstruction of social networks, introduction of disease, displacement of values, and loss of identity were consequences for native groups following European colonial expansion. The relationship between "mission organization" and "colonial forces" was often complex. Sometimes missions were used to justify colonization and sometimes the church simply followed the colonial frontier, at times working hand-in-glove with the colonial authorities and at times adopting a more critical, restraining disposition.

But it was not unusual for missionaries to view host cultures with condescension. Both missionaries and indigenous populations tended to confuse the Christian faith with Western culture which led, often unintentionally, but sometimes intentionally, to the promotion of Western assumptions such as a materialistic worldview, individualism, and competitiveness, alongside various political dogmas from their country of origin. Francis Hiebert comments on recent critical perceptions of this dynamic:

> . . . in the twentieth century, missions became the whipping boy of secular post-modern critics. In a drastic swing of the pendulum, the social sciences began to deny their own Enlightenment theories about "civilizing" the so-called primitive cultures. Absolute cultural relativism and cultural absolutism became the order of the day. Changing another culture in any way, especially

66. Craig Ott, Stephen Strauss, Timothy C. Tennant, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 167.

67. Woodberry, "Reclaiming the M-Word: The Legacy of Mission in Non-Western Societies," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 4 (2006): 4.

> the religion, was deemed cultural genocide. Missionaries came in for an exceptionally large share of the blame.[68]

But the colonization of the developing world also had converse implications. In addition to a growing awareness of the social destruction that colonization perpetuated, as the major colonial powers were slowly dis-membered through the twentieth century, indigenous populations steadily began to identify, articulate, and reclaim the uniqueness of their cultures that had been lost to varying degrees through the process. Of course, they could never return to what they were before colonization, but the situation also forced a sustained exploration of cultural self-awareness that had never previously been needed.

In this historical period the colonizers also woke up to find they had been changed by their global excursions. The engagement with alternative worldviews likely contributed to the intellectual milieu out of which postmodern thinking was birthed. This is very significant for our purposes, because the postmodern agenda called into question the very assumptions that drove the previously articulated demythologizing agenda.

But the transformation of the West continues. Ironically, as the Christian faith has flourished in the developing world during the last century, one of the unexpected outcomes has been "reverse mission," which refers to a purported historic shift in the direction of mission. Paul Freston suggests that reverse mission is closely linked to late modernity's evolving relationship between the global and the local, and is marked by two main elements: a reversal in the geographic direction of mission and a reversal in the direction of colonization.[69] In other words, it is marked by "an inversion of centre-periphery relations in Christianity, whereby the formerly colonised are now evangelising the former colonisers."[70]

So, mission is no longer conceived as an activity from Western cultures to the developing world. It is now from "Everywhere to Everywhere," to borrow from the title of Michael Nazir-Ali's influential text.[71] Global patterns of migration, alongside other globalizing factors particularly in relation to communication, have distributed the world's population in a manner never previously seen. Beside this, the shifting center of gravity of global Christianity has resulted in Europe and the West (traditionally the sender of missionaries) experiencing such decline that, in the minds of many, revitalization requires outside assistance. Harvey Kwiyani, a UK-based pastor originally from Malawi, writes, "The typical identity of a missionary in this

68. Francis F. Hiebert, "Beyond a Postmodern Critique of Modern Missions: The Nineteenth Century Revisited." *Missiology: An International Review.* Vol 25 (1997): 259.

69. Paul Freston, "Reverse Mission: A Discourse in Search of Reality?" *Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9 no. 2 (2010): 155–156.

70. Richard Burgess, "Bringing Back the Gospel: Reverse Mission among Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4 (2011): 432.

71. Michael Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World View of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

century will no longer be that of a Westerner serving in some remote areas of Africa, but probably that of a Mexican, a Nigerian, or perhaps a Korean serving practically anywhere in the world."[72] In the same manner, Prayer Mission UK, a South Korean Mission group, have sent more than 300 Korean missionaries to the UK since 2010.[73] According to a report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, half of the top twenty mission-sending countries in 2010 were in the "global south" including Brazil, India, the Philippines, and Mexico.[74] Though I am unaware of any empirical data exploring the impact of reverse mission on Western theological convictions, it is difficult to imagine that it has not accelerated the softening of traditional western assumptions and encouraged an openness to rethinking the metaphysical nature of principalities and powers. This could be an important and interesting area for further research.

In her comprehensive study of 488 diverse, ethnographically representative societies, Erika Bourguignon[75] discovered a majority of normalized beliefs with regard to personal spiritual beings and spirit possession in 74% of those societies, with significant minorities in many of the others.[76]

In an ever-increasingly globalized world, attentive to the need for intercultural dialogue, it seems inevitable that the hard assumptions of any one culture or worldview will increasingly be moderated, or at least informed by the perspectives of the majority. Given these assertions, we must obviously be attentive to our responsibility to respectfully learn from indigenous perspectives.

Conclusion

In a multi-cultural world, noted anthropologist Edith Turner[77] questions the ethics of imposing a traditional positivist paradigm on local cultures at all costs, despite the evidence favoring indigenous interpretations.[78] The ongoing potential for damage is significant. Nineteenth century missionary pioneer John Nevius frequently observed fellow Western missionaries encountering demon possession in China. Dismissing

72. Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 12.

73. http://prayermission.org/about.php. Accessed August 16, 2019.

74. https://gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/publications/#2018. Accessed August 19, 2019.

75. Bourguignon (1924–2015) was for 40 years a faculty member at Ohio State University, eventually chairing the Anthropology Department.

76. Erika Bourguignon, "Spirit Possession Belief and Social Structure," in *The Realm of the Extrahuman: Ideas and Actions,* ed. A. Bharati (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 19–21.

77. Edith Turner is the wife and professional partner of equally noted anthropologist, Victor Turner.

78. Edith Turner, "The Reality of Spirits," *Re-Vision* 15 no. 1 (1992): 28–32.

possession as a naïve phenomenon of pre-scientific cultures, he watched them sow despair into the lives of people often with disastrous results.[79]

Even where Western missionaries simply cannot accept the premise of supernatural beings, Tippett suggests they are better off acting within the belief system and worldview of the people with whom they are communicating. He recounts the experience of a Western missionary, Penny, working amongst a Melanesian people-group, who realized it was pointless to try to convince the local people that spirit forces don't really exist at all. In her mind, her prayers for them did not expel evil spiritual beings, but nevertheless she used Christ's name to free them from powers and systems which were controlling and defeating them. She comments:

> That this dynamic experience should be conceptualized in terms of personalized or spiritualized encounter, is perhaps a better way of formulating these vital and determinative experiences than our modern, sophisticated, disbelieving explanations in terms of chemicals mathematics and gastric juices-which, be it well noted, in the final analysis have to be described in symbols themselves.[80]

But caution is also needed in the other direction. David Powlison comments: "Both the disenchanted world of modern rationalism and the charmed world of pre-modern spiritism are wrong . . . the deliverance mentality often grafts Christian elements onto an underhung demonic and superstitious world-view, creating a hybrid perhaps acceptable to pre-modern minds. But the biblical Christian faith needs to stand alone; it should not be grafted onto other world views."[81] Wendland and Hachibamba refer to this phenomenon as the twin problem of syncretism and secularization.

> Those who tend to reduce life to spiritual warfare imagery accuse those who downplay the reality of the demonic of being secularists, while the latter accuse the former of being Christian animists. Both need to listen carefully to each other if discussion is to move forward; neither side accurately represents the full biblical picture.[82]

This is good advice. Both need to listen carefully to the other if discussion is to move forward. Perhaps rather than choosing between conflicting views of syncretism or secularization, we can identify the strengths of each and forge a better understanding of Hiebert's excluded middle way. Let us conclude with Susan Garrett's helpful comments regarding the need to creatively dwell in the tension between the two:

79. John L. Nevius, *Demon Possession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publishers, 1968), 159.

80. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* 319.

81. David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995), 25.

82. Wendland and Hachibamba, "Central African Perspective," 355.

> Whether evil angels and evil powers are ontologically real or mere projections of psychological, interpersonal, and inter-social forces may not matter in the end. The potential for damage—and, I will argue, the potential for victory in Christ—is just as great either way. So, let us refuse to forfeit the New Testament's personal language for the powers but instead continue to use that language . . . acknowledging . . . that the powers are always incarnated in people and structures and that we are complicit in them . . . let us see our mission as one of naming the powers, unmasking their pretensions to idolatry and their sinful domination of the weak, and redeeming them by calling them back to the Creator's purposes for them in this world. But . . . let us also insist that the power to redeem is not actually ours but Christ's—and that it is *real* power, power beyond what we as mortals can muster, not merely human power to unmask but *divine power to create anew*.[83]

83. Susan Garrett, "Christ and the Present Evil Age," *Interpretation* 57 (2003): 380 (italics original).