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find those who practice
in cross-cultural
work.

having evangelical convictions,

The bulk of the missionary force today, would be of the persuasion that when the Bible reports something that happened it is true whether it seems possible to us today or not. But at the same time some of these same missionaries would be reluctant to accept Christian healing as part of the churches ministry today. We will now look at some of the major theological arguments set forth today by evangelicals against the ministry of Christian healing.

Without a doubt ^{one of} the most influential theologian in recent times on this subject is Benjamin Warfield. Warfield delivered a series of lectures at Columbia Theological Seminary in 1917 entitled "Counterfeit Miracles". These lectures were published in 1918 under the same title. In 1953 Eerdmans republished it under the title Miracles: Yesterday and Today. The most recent publication was by Banner of Truth Trust in 1972 under the original title Counterfeit Miracles. ~~Everything I have ever read by Warfield has profoundly influenced my life. Warfield says in this book that part of being a Protestant is the denial of miracles for as today: part of the churches ministry today.~~

the great Princeton Theologian

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Pretensions by any class of men to the possession and use of miraculous powers as a permanent endowment are, within the limits of the Christian church, a speciality of Roman Catholicism (remember he is writing in 1918). Denial of these pretensions is part of the protest by virtue of which we bear the name of Protestants. "In point of of interpretation, the history of Protestantism," as an Edinburgh reviewer, writing in trying conditions in 1831, justly puts it, "is a uniform disclaimer of any promise in the Scriptures that miraculous powers should be continued in the Church." In point of fact (we may slightly modify his next sentence to declare), the claim to the possession and exercise of powers of this description by individuals has always been received in Protestant circles with a suspicion which experience has only too completely justified (Warfield, 1972:127).

100-300 A.D.

It is generally acknowledged that many of the Church fathers throughout this period acknowledged the continuing ministry of the miraculous in the Church. That is, that they seemed to have witnessed to these continuations. Warfield notes that Irenaeus speaks of the continuing gifts of exorcism, prediction, healing, raising the dead, speaking with tongues, etc. Tertullian speaks of exorcism and in one instance speaks of a prophetically gifted woman. Origen says that he saw many exorcisms, healings and prophecies. Cyprian speaks of gifts of visions and exorcisms (Warfield, 1972:12).

In light of this abundant indication of the continuation of the ministry of Christian healing, how do these men get around this historical problem? Warfield notes two problems with the evidence: one is that none of these men ever, themselves, purported to having seen these gifts or testified that they performed miracles. Warfield says:

And so we pass on to the fourth century in an ever-increasing stream, but without a single writer having claimed himself to have wrought a miracle of any kind or having ascribed miracle-working to any known name in the Church, and without a single instance having been recorded in detail. ... The miracles of the first three centuries, however, if accepted at all, must be accepted on the general assertion that such things occurred--a general assertion which itself is wholly lacking until the middle of the second century and which, when it does appear, concerns chiefly prophecy and healings including especially exorcisms, which we can scarcely be wrong in supposing precisely the classes of marvels with respect to which excitement most easily blinds the judgement and insufficiently grounded rumors most readily grow up (1972:12,13).

Warfield says that those scholars who see the

the body, along with other divine miracles, continued until well into the fifth century A.D. (1979:47,48).

The continued study of the writings of the early Fathers of the Church indicates that the healing ministry of the Church was an uninterrupted flow throughout this ante-Nicene period. Almost all of the major writers of this period touch on the subject of healing (which includes exorcisms). Tertullian in written protest to the political authorities in North Africa cited these specific facts:

All this (that is, the number of times Roman officials simply dismissed charges against Christians) might be officially brought under your notice, and by the very advocates, who are themselves also under obligations to us, although in court they give their voice as it suits them. The clerk of one of them who was liable to be thrown upon the ground by an evil spirit, was set free from his affliction; as was also the relative of another, and the little boy of a third. And how many men of rank (to say nothing of common people) have been delivered from devils, and healed of diseases! Even Severus himself, the Father of Antonine (the emperor), was graciously mindful of the Christians; for he sought out the Christian Praculus, surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodias, and in gratitude for his having once cured him by anointing, he kept him in his palace till the day of his death. ... (Kelsey, 1973: 136-137).

With evidence like this it is no longer possible to get around the fact that the church continued to believe in and to practice a healing ministry. The least we can say is that they only thought that healings took place, because they were simply caught up in the incredulity of their times. That this view is inadequate is proven by the fact

He found that healings took place thorough innumerable means. Sometimes it was through the relics of the Church, especially those connected with the martyrs of the Church; sometimes it was through a dream or a vision; and at other times it was through the laying on of hands. Most of these recorded miracles were performed by or in connection with others, but in some specified cases, Augustine hñmself was instrumental in healing others through prayer and laying on of the hands (City of God, 1909:484).

Some of the means used in healing recorded by Augustine makes 20th Century Christians a little uneasy. Even those who strongly advocate a healing ministry within Protestantism have a strong suspicion of miracles such as the following:

The miracle which was wrought at Milan when I was there, and by which a blind man was restored to sight, could come to the knowledge of many ... (being) witnessed by an immense concourse of people that had gathered to the bodies of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius which had lain concealed and unknown, but were now made known to the bishop Ambrose in a dream, and discovered by him. By virtue of these remains the darkness of that blind man was scattered, and he saw the light of day. (City of God 1909:485).

Granted these means seem to be different from the healings recorded in the New Testament. But it must be remembered that Christ used such means as dirt, saliva and water not to mention the Apostles use of such things as their shadow and pieces of cloth. As we will see later the means used is determined to some extent by the culture in which healings take place. This is not to say that there is no such thing as superstition and syncretism. But as it is often said: one man's religion is another man's superstition. For example, there is at least one very unusual incident in the Bible in connection with saints:

Every year bands of Moabites used to invade the land of Israel. One time during a funeral, one of those bands was seen, and the people threw the corpse into Elisha's tomb and ran off. As soon as the body came into contact with Elisha's bones the man came back to life and stood up(I Kings 12:21).

supernatural, I immediately begin to try and figure out a natural explanation. This is part of me as a Westernized person. This mentality is what has led to such fantastic discoveries in medicine and technology. The danger is that this mentality will so dominate my thinking that I will limit what God is able to do in and through me. As a person thinks so is he.

Benson Saler, in an article in Ethos in 1977 discussed the categories of the natural and supernatural. He noted the tendency of the anthropologist to see and describe a non-Western culture in categories of the Western culture. In discussing this problem he traces the origins of the terms natural-supernatural. His discussion of this concept may be helpful in reminding us that our Western categories are not sacrosanct and that other peoples of the world may be more nearly "biblical" at this point than are we missionaries.

There is no hint in the Bible of a division of reality into that which is natural as opposed to that which is supernatural. All this world is seen as God's world and all things find their source in God. Laws are never said to cause something to happen. God sends rain, thunder, lightning, etc. But there is a distinction made between nature and grace. That is, grace comes in and supersedes nature. Contact with God operates in the realm of grace as Paul makes so clear in his discussion in Romans 9-11. There is also a distinction made between the creation and the creator. There is also a distinction made between the creation on earth and the creation in heaven. Angels have access to heaven and earth but do not live on earth. Saler says this view of reality continued through the early Fathers:

The early Fathers of the Church accepted the Jewish view of a transcendental creator apart from nature, and they accepted the idea of revelation as a source of knowledge about him. ... Kenny (1967:812) tells us that no word that might be classed 'supernatural' is to be found in the New Testament, the patristic writings of the early centuries, or the

ancient liturgical texts. The fundamental opposition celebrated by the Church Fathers was not between the supernatural and the natural, but rather, it seems to me, between the creator and his creation. ...

The domain of creation included not only human beings and other objects that we would describe as "natural", but also entities that we should probably term "spiritual": angels, for example, and demons. ... We, of course, would put angels and demons in the same box as God, and label it "supernatural", while putting human beings, elephants and whatever into a different box, labeled "natural" (1977: 43-44).

Saler says that the origins of the supernatural as a category can be found in two areas;

The eventual development of a clear concept of the supernatural in Christian Theology was prompted both by dialogues with heretics and by the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy.

...

... in combating Gnostic dualism, Christian thinkers elaborated a dualism that they did not endorse, a distinction between matter and spirit that they shared to a significant extent with the Gnostics. And while they did not regard the world as evil in itself, as evil in essence, they clearly regarded things spiritual as ultimately more desirable than things material. These points of view, I think, paved the way for the eventual advancement and acceptance of a theology of the supernatural (1977:44-45).

Though the origins of the supernatural can be found here, it was many centuries later before a clear distinction was made between the natural and the supernatural.

When various works of Pseudo-Dionysius were translated into Latin in the Ninth Century ... supernatural, as Kenny (1972:94) puts it, made its 'debut' in the theology of Western Christendom. ...

Saint Thomas Aquinas (d 1274) employed supernatural in its Neoplatonic acceptance of superior being or substance. ... (and) to surpassing effects (Kenny, 1976:812), and it was out of this usage that a technical theology of the supernatural emerged (1977:46-47).

Salter says that Aquinas' distinction between the natural and supernatural was rooted theologically in the historical distinction between law and grace.

Saint Thomas' important contribution to the emergence of a technical theology of the supernatural represents a special development of the concept of surpassing effects. Saint Thomas and others of the Scholastics have left us as one of their legacies a dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural that is theologically rooted in a distinction between the Order of Nature and the Order of Grace (1977:47-48).

While having its base in the distinction between nature and grace, it is probably true that these terms have become loaded with new meanings through the influence of science. Today we tend to see everything visible as having a natural cause. If we see a physical problem we automatically think that this problem has a natural cause. This hinders us in seeing the non-Western view of reality. The non-Western person may see a natural element involved and still look for the real cause in the spiritual realm. For instance, a person may be sick from a germ, but not be satisfied that this germ is the real cause of his sickness. His deeper question may be: Who sent this germ to me?

*Basileus ...
1977
"Supernatural as
Western ...
31-53*

new pressures on modern man. But the real crisis stems from a more foundational base. It is not the content of knowledge, but the fact of knowledge that has brought on this crisis. How do we know? What is knowledge? These are the questions that modern Western man is asking.

Numerous voices have been and are continuing to be raised in regard to this crisis. Voices are being raised from such diverse fields as physics, anthropology, and religion. But one of the first places this crisis has been recognized is in the natural sciences. McGlashan says in a striking way:

Science today is in the awkward position of a young woman who has inadvertently become pregnant and wonders how long she can continue in her job. She realizes that so far nothing has been noticed, everybody being far too occupied with their own affairs. But she also knows that something has happened which is bound very soon to transform the world she lives in (1976:9).

Nature of this crisis

What then is the nature of this crisis that McGlashan is referring to? The nature of this crisis gives us a feel for its seriousness. It is a crisis that touches on the most basic presuppositions of the scientific world. Modern Western society has been built on the assumption that the scientific method is completely valid and produces absolute, objective, testable truth. Reality can be seen, tested and proved. According to popular belief, scientists have been able to arrive at absolute truth through the discovery and application of natural laws. But today there are fundamental questions being raised about whether it is possible to arrive at objective truth.

Everyone knows that science is passing through a fundamental crisis. This is not just a moral crisis exemplified by Einstein and Oppenheimer in connection with the effects of science, but a crisis over methods

*Alan McGlashan
Gravity is Love
Behr & Hamilton
Milton 1976*

and attitudes. For example, the very possibility of scientific objectivity has been called in question, as have the absolute character of scientific discoveries and laws, the value of all the epistemologies of all the methods, and even of the results which one took for granted. ...

This is a far cry from the heyday of scientific optimism, the conviction that science and truth are one and the same thing, and the notion that rationalism is the only reasonable guide for human life (Ellul, 1977:110).

Almost all scientific studies, experiments and advances have been carried on with the assumption that the world the scientist is looking at is the real world. The common consensus in Western culture has been that scientific knowledge is absolute. Now there is a questioning of this basic assumption. It is nothing less than catastrophic to suddenly realize that "science and truth" are not synonymous. This is not to say that scientific statements have always been accepted uncritically, but the assumption has been that true reality is only discoverable through the five senses. All real knowledge is the result of observation, experiment and logical deduction.

The nature of this crisis in knowledge is growing.

Early in the twentieth century awareness was growing that the nineteenth century outlook--the rational materialism which saw man with a closed materialistic system--was too narrow. ... (through Einstien's work) man's whole conception of time and matter and scientific truth were undergoing a traumatic change. The scientific method had not produced final and certain truths after all, but only

*J. Ellul
The Crisis of
Inst. Res. 1977
Lxvi
1977*

Many Protestants are suspicious and believe that it is only a surface change. But what has happened to the Catholic Church is that their epistemology is changing, which in turn is affecting in a revolutionary manner the entire life of the Church.

For instance, the Catholic Church took the position, up until Vatican II in 1961 that their perception of truth was accurate and absolute. This led them to dogmatism and to a view that their doctrine was static. That is, once a truth was clearly formulated and stated by a church council, this settled it for all time. It could not be reopened for debate. Vatican II took a tentative step in moving beyond this mentality.

The Catholic theologian Hans Küng in his book on Infallibility: An Inquiry, discusses the whole question of whether theology is absolute or not. He says:

Articles of faith are propositions. Formulas of faith, professions of faith, and definitions of faith are propositions--simple or complex--and are not a priori free from the laws that govern propositions. Nor are propositions of faith ever directly God's word, but at best God's word attested and mediated by man's word: perceptible and transmissible by human propositions (1971:157).

Kung goes on to point out another factor that is always present in the formulation of doctrinal truth.

If every human statement of truth, as humanly limited, borders on error and easily turns into error, this holds in a special way for polemical ecclesiastical definitions. ... For instance, as long as an Evangelical Christian unpolemically observes the "the just man lives by faith", ~~that~~ shadow of error, which accompanies the proposition, does

and from subculture to subculture(1979:273).

To summarize, then, a particular view of Scripture is culture-conditioned. It represents truth as perceived at that particular time by a person of that time. It is valid for another culture for comparative purposes, but may prove on examination to be totally irrelevant to that particular culture just as DeRidder found reformed theology to be irrelevant to Ceylonese people.

Christian Healing and Contextualization

He learned German, Greek, French, Latin, Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis, and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally, he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology. It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return. He was anxious to reach home as soon as possible, so he flew, and he was glad to pay for his excess baggage which, after all, consisted only of the Bible in the various languages he had learned, plus Bultmann, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Buber, Cone, Kung, Moltmann, Niebuhr, Tillich, Christianity Today, Time Magazine ...

At home, relatives, neighbors, old friends, dancers, musicians, drums, dogs, cats, all gather to welcome him back. ... Dancing, jubilation, eating, feasting—all these go on as if there were nothing else to do, because the man for whom everyone had waited has finally returned.

Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister, now a married woman with six children and still going strong. He rushes to her. People make room for him, and watch him. "Let's take her to the hospital," he calls urgently. They are stunned. He becomes

quiet. They all look at him bending over her. Why doesn't someone respond to his advice? Finally a schoolboy says, 'Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few buses that go there.' Someone else says, 'She is possessed. Hospitals will not cure her!' The chief says to him, 'You have been studying theology overseas for 10 years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt.' He looks around. slowly he goes to get Bultmann, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament. Of course he gets the answer; Bultmann has demythologized it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, 'Help your sister; she is possessed!' He shouts back, 'But Bultmann has demythologized demon possession.' (This story is entirely fictional and is not based on the experience of a real person.)

Fantasy? No, for these are the realities of our time. (Mission Trends No. 3, John S. Mbiti, 1976:6-8).

John S. Mbiti's fictionalized (but true to life) account, not only shows the inadequacy of Western theology to answer the basic questions of non-Western people, but uses as an illustration the very issue that is under discussion. Our Western theology has left a vacuum in the whole issue of Christian healing and demon possession.

This world-wide cry for a theology of healing that will meet the needs of people outside the orbit of Western culture cannot be ignored. The vast missionary force that encircles the globe must give itself to remedying this doctrine.

African Independent Churches

The number of churches that have broken away from mission groups or that have originated apart from Western missions in Africa has been so great that these churches have received the name African Independent Churches. David B. Barrett

The Western missionary's presupposition in regard to illness is that it is caused by germs, and with adequate knowledge the antidote can be discovered. The question is to know what kind of a microbe does the sick person suffer from, and what is the specific antidote. The African presupposition is quite different. Disease comes as punishment for wrongdoing. Watchful ancestral spirits punish wrongdoers with illness or other misfortune. They use weather, events, or even germs as their agents, but ancestors are the originators. Again, illness can be the result of sorcery or witchcraft which usually results from strained interpersonal relationships. The questions for the Africans always are: Who sent it? And why? in that order. As a result of this difference in presuppositions, the missionary builds hospitals, encourages research, and tries to find more and better antidotes. The African will not deny the efficacy of Western medicine, but usually will insist that it deals only with the physical or symptomatic aspects of the illness. It never deals with the cause. It is unconcerned with the who or why. For this reason Africans frequently say Western medicine leaves the spiritual dimension of illness completely untouched (1976:410-411).

Loewen

Most of the churches that break away from mission groups develop an approach to healing that meets these felt needs to know the who and the why of the disease. Loewen tells of visiting a mission church where the membership roll was over 3000 with only about fifty in attendance. After the service he inquired into the reasons why so few people were attending the church.

A little further probing revealed that the gospel of Muchopi, the anti-witch medicine, had overrun the whole area, and church people conjectured that many of the members, especially the sick ones, would probably be in one of the Independent churches which believed in Muchopi medicine. 'But,'