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## **Biblical-Theological Foundations for Organic Spirituality: A General Description Part One**

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This article, and a projected one to follow, is adapted from his recent AGTS doctoral project, "Organic Spirituality: An Organizing Principle and Assessment Instrument for Christian Discipleship." Contact Randy at [rwalls@agts.edu](mailto:rwalls@agts.edu).

The following pages will attempt to demonstrate organic spirituality as that which flows through the life of a person who rightly discerns the presence and operation of the Spirit of God. This spirituality is an outgrowth of the relationship that occurs between God and believing humanity, the quality of which derives from the Spirit-produced fruitfulness that accrues. Neither human efforts nor systems based upon human ingenuity can produce the same kind of spirituality as generated by the Spirit of God.

Drawing upon the narratives of Luke-Acts, the paper will seek to explain the nature and expression of organic spirituality. Written in the early 60s of the first century C.E.,<sup>i</sup> Luke's narratives provide a historiographic picture of the life of Christ and the Early Church.<sup>ii</sup> From this depiction emerges a biblical theology of the spirituality of Christ, his hearers and his followers that has prescriptive value for a contemporary audience.

### **The Gospel of Luke**

Beginning with the birth narratives of the Gospel, Luke distinguishes between human and divine activity for the purpose of identifying true spiritual value. Zechariah, a

devout priest performing his normal duties in the temple, has an epiphany that changes the shape of his family's destiny (Luke 1:11-23). His wife Elizabeth, well beyond child-bearing years, conceives the son promised to Zechariah by the angel. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth offers a prophetic blessing on Mary and her child (Luke 1:24, 41-45). Mary, the betrothed virgin, conceives as no other woman in the history of creation to become the earthly vessel for bringing the Messiah to the world (Luke 1:35).

Jesus himself moves through Luke's narratives with a clear sense of Spirit-drivenness. From Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21-22) to his final days on the earth (Luke 24:49), the Holy Spirit sets his agenda and directs his ministry. Following his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert for his temptation (Luke 4:1).<sup>iii</sup> At every occasion of temptation by the devil (4:2-3, 4:5-7, 4:9-11), Jesus demonstrates the presence and the fullness of the Spirit in his life. He turns away each temptation with the Word of God (4:4, 4:8, 4:12). As his Galilean ministry begins, Jesus continues "in the power of the Spirit" (4:14) to his hometown of Nazareth. While there, he sets his ministry agenda within the larger context

of God's mission to redeem a people unto himself (4:16-30).<sup>iv</sup>

The most definitive point of Jesus' Spirit-drivenness occurs in his power encounters. Herein Luke presents Jesus' ministry in a cosmic dimension.<sup>v</sup> From the first recorded exorcism (Luke 4:33-36) and healing (4:38-39) to the last (11:14-23, 18:35-43), Jesus exhibits his power to deliver and to heal.<sup>vi</sup>

Other characters in the Gospel of Luke provide further insight into organic spirituality. Luke 7:36-50 introduces a pair of characters who represent the opposite poles of the spirituality spectrum. On the one hand, we have Simon the Pharisee, the supposed paragon of Judaistic spirituality. On the other, we have a sinful (uninvited?)<sup>vii</sup> woman of questionable moral character. Luke juxtaposes the two characters in relation to Christ by virtue of their service to him. While honoring Jesus by his invitation to the banquet (36),<sup>viii</sup> Simon fails to accord him the simplest acts of hospitality (44-46). The woman, with a humble and loving heart, attends to the customary services any guest would receive (38).<sup>ix</sup> While her service is intentional, it nevertheless happens in response to Jesus' act of forgiveness. It vividly demonstrates the essence of organic spirituality.

Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah in Luke 9:18-20 also shows an essential element of organic spirituality. In this prayer setting Jesus asks the disciples to identify not only the popular ideas about his identity, but also their own opinion. Peter, answering for the group, says, "You are the Anointed One of God" (v. 20). Green aligns Peter's confession with the prayers of Jesus so as to demonstrate that his identity "is supernaturally mediated."<sup>x</sup> What Peter himself was incapable of knowing or reasoning comes to full manifestation through him by the efficacy of Jesus' prayers.

A final episode from the Gospel (Luke 18:15-17) portrays Jesus blessing a number of infants. In *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, Richard Rohrbaugh offers valuable insight into Luke's inclusion of this pericope. Citing a study by Thomas Carney,<sup>xi</sup> Rohrbaugh relates the age structures of the populations for the typical preindustrial city in the Roman period.<sup>xii</sup> Table 1 provides a visual depiction of his data, presenting the mortality rate ages and percentages in columns two and three of those who survived each age grouping in column one.

**TABLE 1**  
**AGE STRUCTURES OF**  
**PREINDUSTRIAL CITIES OF THE**  
**ROMAN PERIOD**

<b>Survival through</b>	<b>Death by</b>	<b>Mortality Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	33%
6 <sup>th</sup> Year	16 <sup>th</sup> Year	60%
16 <sup>th</sup> Year	26 <sup>th</sup> Year	75%
26 <sup>th</sup> Year	46 <sup>th</sup> Year	90%
46 <sup>th</sup> Year	60 <sup>th</sup> Year	97+%
<i>Source: Rohrbaugh, Social Sciences in New Testament Interpretation, 4-5.</i>		

As Table 1 shows, less than three percent of the population lived to age 60. When consideration is given to the fact that infant mortality rates in the peasant communities of this period exceeded 30%,<sup>xiii</sup> Jesus' statement, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these," (verse 17) takes on greater significance.

Rohrbaugh continues his explanation, "Childhood in antiquity was a time of extreme vulnerability. Among the population, children suffered first from disease, first from malnutrition, first from poverty. Many never made it to puberty

before their parents were sick or dead. In Luke's account (18:15-17) the children brought to Jesus are probably being brought by frightened mothers seeking healing or protection for their babies, many of whom will likely die. The story is about the vulnerable, the frightened and the terror-stricken who make up the implausible kingdom of God.<sup>xiv</sup>

Organic spirituality draws richly from Jesus' metaphor. Kingdom citizens have no value or power of their own. They are totally dependent upon the King to protect, provide and preserve their lives. Thus, in its essential nature, organic spirituality is about complete dependence upon God who is present among his people to fulfill his purpose in and through them.

### Acts of the Apostles

Two primary characters in the Acts narratives portray organic spirituality well—the apostles Peter and Paul. The following pages will present a few key episodes in their lives in an attempt to provide further insight into the nature and scope of organic spirituality.

The first episode occurs when Peter and John encounter a crippled man as they are going to the temple for prayer (Acts 3:1-26). Peter takes him by the hand and speaks a word of healing in Jesus' name. The man begins to walk and jump around praising God (3:6-8). While this healing action alone clearly demonstrates the presence and the operation of the Spirit of God, Peter's words to the crowd make the point of the miracle clear. Neither human power<sup>xv</sup> nor piety<sup>xvi</sup> caused this miracle (3:12). Rather, the name<sup>xvii</sup> of Jesus, and the faith that comes through his name, has strengthened and restored the crippled man to perfect health (3:16).

The second episode (Acts 4:1-13) immediately follows the healing event described above. Peter and John now stand

before the council of the high priest to explain their actions (4:1-7). Luke relates Peter's response in dynamic fashion with the narrative aside, "filled with the Holy Spirit,"<sup>xviii</sup> specifying the source of the words which follow (4:8-12). The power of Peter's words convinces the temple authorities that he and John have been "with Jesus" (4:13).<sup>xix</sup> As an indicator of organic spirituality, it seems safe to assume that Jesus was also "with them."

Luke makes his point clear. Peter spoke with the same authority or boldness as did Jesus. In fact, Jesus' words to his disciples in Luke 12:11-12 confirm that the Spirit of God will tutor them when they stand before the religious authorities. As they speak under his inspiration, their witness will be inscrutable.

One other episode demonstrates the organic nature of Peter's spirituality. The well-known story of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) needs only a brief rehearsal. Herein Peter clearly operates "as a person of prophetic insight, one who can, by the inspiration of the Spirit, see into the hearts of others."<sup>xx</sup> As in the two previous episodes, the story highlights the charismatic activity of the Spirit of God. He supernaturally provides the insight for the occasion. Peter heals, speaks and discerns under the full inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He has no innate or latent skill on which he can rely. The source of the miracles he performs has nothing to do with his own power or piety (3:12).

A survey of the Pauline episodes reveals the same kind of qualities in Paul's life. Whereas the Acts narrative intends to show how the Early Church continued Jesus' mission,<sup>xxi</sup> it seems natural that there should be parallels between the ministries of Peter and Paul.

Acts 13:4-12 relates the account of the first traveling ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Having been commissioned by

the Antioch church (13:1-3), they proceed to the island of Cyprus (13:4). There they encounter Elymas, the sorcerer, in the consort of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (13:6-7). In the course of his ministry, Paul speaks a word of judgment upon him (13:10-11). Andrew Clark draws the parallel between this event and Peter's encounter with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In both accounts the Holy Spirit empowers them (5:3, 13:9) with insight into the hearts of each person (5:3, 13:10) and inspires them to pronounce supernatural judgment upon the offenders.<sup>xxii</sup> The elements of organic spirituality are clearly at work in both instances.

The second episode for Paul occurs in Acts 14:8-17, in the healing of a crippled man at Lystra. The story parallels Peter and John's encounter with the crippled man at the temple gate (3:1-26) in numerous ways.<sup>xxiii</sup> As with Peter's experience at the temple, this is the first recorded healing miracle in Paul's ministry. Each event occurs in a context of growing opposition (4:1-21, 13:45, 50, 14:2-5, 19). Both men make a major speech prior to the healings (2:13-36, 13:16-41).<sup>xxiv</sup> The audiences to each miracle assume that the two men have extraordinary powers (3:11, 14:11-13). They both deny any inherent power and proclaim that God performed the healings (3:12-13, 14:14-17).

The third area of parallel between Peter and Paul occurs in the defense of their ministries.<sup>xxv</sup> Witherington notes that Luke portrays Peter as carrying the load of preaching the gospel in the first half of Acts, whereas Paul does so in the last half.<sup>xxvi</sup> Table 2 presents a summary of the common points between them.

**TABLE 2**  
**COMMON ELEMENTS IN THE**  
**SPEECHES OF PETER**  
**AND PAUL IN ACTS**

<b>Peter</b>	<b>Paul</b>
Old Testament Quotations Psalm 16:10 in 2:27	Old Testament Quotations Psalm 16:10 in 13:35
Resurrection of Christ by God 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30	Resurrection of Christ by God 13:30, 34, 37; 17:31
Salvation for the Gentiles 10:34-35	Salvation for the Gentiles 13:26, 46-48; 22:21; 26:17-18, 23; 28:28

While the speeches contain similar elements despite different audiences,<sup>xxvii</sup> the focus should remain upon the inspiration and empowering of the Holy Spirit in their delivery. Kee places the entirety of the Early Church's witness, both its ground and its content "in the immediate and repeated evidence of God's ongoing presence and action through his people by means of the Spirit at work in their midst."<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Summary of the General Description of Organic Spirituality**

From the preceding pages a picture of organic spirituality emerges. First, organic spirituality is not the result of human intellect or initiative. Rather, the Spirit of God is the active agent who originates its expressions and produces its results. Second, organic spirituality exhibits sensitivity to and trust in the Spirit's agency by relying on him to direct the affairs of life and ministry. Third, organic spirituality evidences the power of the Spirit in discerning the

situations of life and ministry, and in demonstrating the supernatural power of the Spirit in the working of miracles. Fourth, organic spirituality prioritizes the mission of

God as its goal, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task for any setting or occasion.

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<sup>i</sup>See D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, eds., *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 116-117.

<sup>ii</sup>Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 2-6. Herein Green clarifies the differences between Luke as ancient historian, biographer and historiographer, the latter being the one he, among many others, chooses to describe Luke's intentional selection and ordering of recent historical events in his narrative so that he may present a unified account that suits his audience's needs.

<sup>iii</sup>It is interesting to note that Luke uses the inceptive imperfect passive form of the Greek word *ago* ("to lead") to describe this action of the Holy Spirit in directing Jesus into his temptation. The idea suggests that the Holy Spirit has been with and in Christ up to this point, as is clear from his reference to Jesus being "full of the Holy Spirit" at the beginning of Luke 4:1. The Spirit now takes a more active role in directing Jesus' life and ministry agenda. Joel Green, *Gospel*, 191 describes this Spirit activity in terms of Luke's narrative intention to demonstrate that Jesus is not acting on his own. Rather, he is God's agent, fully empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit-drivenness of Jesus is the prototype for the organic spirituality model proposed by this project.

<sup>iv</sup>Luke has previously depicted Jesus in conflict against the devil. At this point in the narrative he moves the conflict to the human level. What Simeon predicted in his prophetic utterance at Jesus' dedication in the temple (2:34-35), Luke now presents as occurring at the most unlikely of places, his hometown. Jerome Neyrey and Bruce Malina, eds. *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.), 97-122, presents the social psychology principles of conflict in the Mediterranean world. They note that the conflict of the region "has always been over practical means to some end, not over the ends themselves" (98). Thus, Luke's narrative portrays this conflict in Jesus' synagogue ministry at Nazareth. While Jesus and his adversaries do not debate the result of heeding the command of God (4:18-19, 22), they vehemently disagree over the practical means of fulfilling this obedience (4:25-27,28).

<sup>v</sup>Note however, that the Lucan narrative depicts power encounters in a variety of ways. The opening words of the Gospel, "in the days of King Herod of Judea," place its historical setting in a period of significant political conflict. See the article "Herod" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia in BibleWorks for Windows Version 5.0.034a* (Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, LLC, 2001). See also Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7-8, for a description of other political settings throughout the Gospel.

<sup>vi</sup>Luke's juxtaposition of exorcisms and healings is no accident. His intent is to demonstrate that the in-breaking of the kingdom of God results in deliverance for both the bound and the diseased. Green, *Theology*, 96, says that Luke regards "all (almost?) diseases as expressions of evil," so that the language that he uses to describe Jesus' healing ministry, i.e. "rebuking" diseases *and* demons, shows the cosmic battle at hand. Kee supports this view in *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 204, noting Luke's intent to show "Jesus' healings and exorcisms...as essential factors in the defeat of the God-opposing powers."

<sup>vii</sup>Green, *Gospel*, 309, questions the acceptable presence of this woman in a home that would have been aligned with the holiness and purity practices associated with Pharisaic meals.

<sup>viii</sup>*Ibid.*, 308. The use of the word *kataklin*, "reclining at table" identifies this event as a banquet.

<sup>ix</sup>*Ibid.* Green provides an in-depth social critical understanding of the status and character of the Pharisee and the woman. Utilizing the honor-shame model, he shows how Luke places the two characters in opposition to

each other in his narrative. The Pharisee failed to honor Jesus by providing the simple dignities of hospitality, i.e. water for cleaning his feet, a kiss of greeting, anointing his head with oil. Therefore he, in fact, shamed Jesus. The actions of the woman, i.e. cleaning his feet with her tears, kissing his feet, anointing his feet with precious perfume, which were viewed as improperly sensuous (shameful) by the Pharisee, become deeds of loving (honoring) service. For a detailed description of the honor-shame principles of the Mediterranean world, see Malina & Neyrey, *Social World*, 25-65.

<sup>x</sup>Ibid., 368. Green's reasoning derives from his belief that there is no causal connection in the narrative between the feeding miracles, etc. that the disciples have previously witnessed. Thus, the only narrative hint that Peter's confession is from above is the prayer context for the pericope. It is interesting to note that Luke does not explicitly identify this as a divine revelation. Of the three parallel NT texts that depict this event, only Matthew 16:17 includes the statement by Jesus that the revelation was not of human reasoning, but rather divine origin. As Green reasonably argues, Luke's narrative selection makes this overt statement unnecessary.

<sup>xi</sup>Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado, 1975), 88.

<sup>xii</sup>Richard L Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), 4-5.

<sup>xiii</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>xiv</sup>Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 85, notes this as the same power by which Jesus performed healings in his public ministry, now exercised through his disciples.

<sup>xvi</sup>David Peterson, "The Worship of the New Community" in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds., I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 381. Peterson notes that this healing does not occur simply because Peter states a proper formula. Rather, Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the only source of help and salvation, thus, the healing comes from him.

<sup>xvii</sup>H. Douglas Buckwalter "The Divine Savior" in Marshall and Peterson, 119, shows how Luke's use of Jesus' name (*onoma*) parallels the Old Testament usage of *Yahweh* as the personal, active and authoritative presence of a transcendent deity among his people. This link between the name and the person is so great that the understanding is clear. What believers do in Jesus' name is in essence being done by Jesus himself.

<sup>xviii</sup>Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 177-178, notes that Luke uses a variety of phrases for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Acts narratives. Whatever the phrasing, it seems clear that the same work is in view—the Spirit coming upon kingdom agents as the source of prophetic inspiration and the one who empowers them to carry out their divinely appointed tasks.

<sup>xix</sup>Bruce, *Acts*, 102, identifies the means by which Peter and John astounded "the supreme court of the [Jewish] nation," noting their lack of education in the formal rabbinic schools. However, though they were "untrained laymen" (*agrammatoi ... kai iditai*), they spoke with a boldness and certainty in their theological disputation with the ruling council of the temple just as Jesus had done before them.

<sup>xx</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 215. He notes the examples in the Gospel of Luke wherein Jesus operates in the same kind of inspired insight, cf. Luke 5:22; 7:39-40; 24:38, which he calls "one of the trademarks of a prophetic person."

<sup>xxi</sup>Bruce, *Acts*, 32.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Andrew C. Clark, “The Role of the Apostles” in Marshall and Peterson, 187. See also Leo O’Reilly, *Word and Sign in the Acts of the Apostles: A Study in Lucan Theology* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1987), 131-133, wherein he verbally and thematically aligns these two miracles with Jesus’ healing of the crippled man in Luke 5:17-26, thus, “guaranteeing the continuity of the church’s teaching with the message of Jesus.”

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-187. Clark notes that the healings of the crippled men by Peter and Paul are the two parallel miracles that have the greatest verbal links. Luke’s use of the same or similar words to describe the two events shows clear evidence that the parallel is intentional.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Joel Green, “Salvation to the End of the Earth: God as Savior in the Acts of the Apostles” in Marshall and Peterson, 98, notes the theocentric emphasis in the two speeches. Luke’s soteriology is thus, theocentric before it is Christocentric. Therefore the narrative emphasis is upon the God who is at work to complete his salvific mission, a part of which is granted by the Lord in the working of miracles through his agents.

<sup>xxv</sup> Peter’s defense speeches occur in Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 10. Paul’s occur in Acts 13, 14, 17, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 119. He further notes that most of their speeches are presented to non-Christian audiences.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxviii</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1990), 95-96.