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MIRACLES AND MISSION REVISITED

By Gary B. McGee

In 1839 Alexander Duff, the renowned Scottish missionary to India, wrote about the role of Christian education in training indigenous teachers and preachers of the Gospel. With such an aim, said Duff, "Missionaries of the Church of Scotland have been sent forth ... in the absence of miracles." (n1) Teaching school in Calcutta, he was apparently unaware of what other missionaries working in Burma (now Myanmar) were experiencing during the same period in their work among the Karens. Venturing into the mountains, Jonathan and Deborah Wade lost their way until they came upon a Karen house. An elderly man sitting on the veranda gazed on them for a few moments in silence and then called out, "The teacher has arrived; the teacher has arrived!" Soon a crowd from the neighborhood gathered, for they had received a prophecy telling them that "the teacher is in the jungle, and will call on you. You must ... listen to his precepts." (n2) As a result, the Gospel received a warm reception, converts were baptized, and a permanent mission station established.

Yet, while the educational legacy of Duff has been endlessly recounted in histories of missions, few people today know about the miraculous events surrounding the introduction of the Christian faith in Myanmar. Historians of missions and missiologists have generally ignored these kinds of reports, ironically crucial pieces to the puzzle of how Christianity developed in non-Western countries. Consequently, this exclusion has seriously limited the insights of historical and missiological analysis. To correct misapprehended interpretations, such stories must be considered. Historians may have reservations about the wide-angle lens of providential narratives, but they cannot afford to crop them out of the picture.

In light of discussions in the last several years about how the history of Christianity in the former mission lands should be written, as well as interest in the phenomenology of religion among non-Western peoples, this inquiry briefly explores selected claims of paranormal happenings. (n3) It then analyzes why the anticipation of miracles declined, examines views in the Protestant missionary community on the possibility and

importance of miracles, and recounts what historians have said or failed to say about them in textbooks. While historians and missiologists have examined aspects of how the Christian message was inserted into various cultures and the level of acceptance it gained, the specific relationship of miracles to missions and how missionaries and mission leaders perceived their importance have been neglected.(n4)

Pre-Reformation Claims

Precedent for miracles in missions is found from the time of the apostles. However, their credibility has long generated disagreement in the West because of historical, theological, and philosophical considerations. Questions about sources, as well as the obvious ideological agendas of the authors who controlled the evaluation of evidence, have naturally and rightly troubled modern historians.(n5) Theological and philosophical presuppositions have been of no less importance in the debate. The theological issue has centered in part on whether miracles fulfilled their purpose in the first century. "No transition in the history of the Church [was] so sudden, abrupt, and radical as that from the apostolic to the post-apostolic age," wrote the German Reformed historian Philip Schaff. And then in a pronouncement of virtually ex cathedra proportions, he declared: "God himself ... established an impassable gulf.... The apostolic age is the age of miracles."(n6)

Presbyterian theologian Benjamin B. Warfield concurred. In his judgment the extraordinary "gifts of power" of the apostles had served to authenticate them as the "authoritative founders" of the church. In turn, they conferred this capability on their own disciples. But as the latter gradually passed off the scene, so did the demonstrations of miraculous power.(n7) Despite Anglican attempts to defend the occurrences of miracles into the patristic age, Warfield would have none of it. In his estimation, the "great harvest of miracles" that came with the evolution of Roman Catholicism grew from the tares of "heathendom."(n8)

In recent years historians have challenged this thesis, including Stanley M. Burgess and Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., who have reviewed the evidence and located new sources of information. Burgess insists that "cessationists" like Warfield failed to look objectively at the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. None of the early church fathers suggested that miracles and the charismata had been intended only for the New Testament church.(n9) In his analysis of patristic sources, McDonnell finds that the charisms of the Holy Spirit, including

the gifts of tongues and prophecy, were sought for and received during the rites of Christian initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist). Evidence provided by witnesses from around the Mediterranean seaboard extends from the end of the second to the eighth centuries.(n10)

More directly related to missions, records attest to supernatural demonstrations of power in the advance of Christianity, with some analogous to phenomena found in the New Testament. For instance, Basil of Cappadocia lauded the remarkable number of conversions in the ministry of Gregory Thaumaturgus ("wonder-worker"), a third-century missionary bishop in Asia Minor. "By the superabundance of gifts, wrought in him by the Spirit in all power and in signs and marvels," Basil reported, Gregory "was styled a second Moses by the very enemies of the Church."(n11) In Egypt the fourth-century desert father Antony became legendary for his prevailing in conflicts with demons, his feats being attributed to fidelity to Nicene Christology.(n12)

In the same era Nino, a slave girl taken captive to the Caucasus region and afterward canonized by the Orthodox Church of Georgia with the title "Equal to the Apostles," prayed for the healing of Queen Nana. The queen in fact recovered, which contributed to the conversion of King Mirian and the nation.(n13) The connection of a physical healing or some other kind of miraculous incident to the conversion of an individual, tribe, or nation can be found elsewhere, from that of the Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts (8:26-40), to the third-century King Tiridates of Armenia, to the fourth-century Emperor Constantine, to the fifth-century Clovis, king of the Franks, all the way to the mid-twentieth-century conversion of Gypsies in France.(n14)

While much can be said for the basic reliability of these stories, such accounts were sometimes transformed into fantastic tales. It happened in the case of Patrick of Ireland. Though he himself credited his escape from captivity and his calling to evangelize to the influence of voices and dreams, later accretions distorted his actual ministry.(n15)

Medieval reports reflect the same problem. In Britain the Venerable Bede, the eighth-century father of English history, recorded miracles that purportedly took place during the evangelization of England. Stories of healings, exorcisms, calming of the sea, raising the dead, signs in the heavens, and other unusual occurrences lie sprinkled throughout his History of the English Church and People.(n16) Responding to reports about Augustine of Canterbury and his fellow monks who were evangelizing the country, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)

praised their achievements and said they stood "resplendent with such great miracles ... that they seem to imitate the powers of the apostles in the signs which they display." (n17) To Gregory and others in the ancient and medieval periods, no "impassable gulf" separated them from the early church.

Reformation and Later Perspectives

With the coming of the Protestant Reformation, the reformers Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin disavowed the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints. In so doing, they brushed aside the value set on the saints, holy relics, pilgrimages, shrines, and the miracle stories that developed around them. Generally speaking, they believed that miracles had vanished with the apostolic church, a view shared by the post-Reformation Lutheran and Reformed scholastic theologians as well. (n18) In clearing away what they considered to be the debris of medieval Catholicism, they rejected the miracle claims. One could trust in the veracity of the biblical miracles, but none afterward. Thus, Calvin contended that both Catholics and Anabaptists sought to certify their false doctrines with spurious claims of miracles. (n19) Luther faced a challenge from charismatic prophets who insisted that God had given them new revelations, which they viewed as superior to Scripture. (n20)

In the great bombardment of reason against Scripture and tradition in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, aimed its fusillades of skepticism on anything deemed miraculous, whether found in Scripture or in popular religion. Humankind had only now come of age thanks to the liberation of rational thinking from superstition. Hence, whether from the teachings of the Reformers or the disbelief of the rationalists, confidence in the possibility of super-natural interventions declined or was eliminated altogether in the minds of many people. (n21)

Evangelical Christians also waded into the intellectual currents of the time. Evangelical faith and features of Enlightenment thought, coupled with the notion that the spirit of investigation should be encouraged and proceed without restrictions, seemed to pave the way for the future of Christianity. (n22) When launching into missions, pietists and evangelicals remained true to their theological convictions by preaching to secure "heartfelt" conversions and exhibited their optimism about human progress by pressing their educational and social agenda. Like Duff, they did not anticipate that miracles would accompany the verbal proclamation of the Gospel as in

apostolic times. Therefore, the likelihood of divine displays of power rarely appeared in discourses on mission practices.

At the same time, revivalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought heightened interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, a development that gradually focused on the baptism and charismatic gifts of the Spirit. The attention given to pneumatology by the nineteenth-century Wesleyan and Keswickian wings of the Holiness movement stirred people to seek for the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-29) to supply the spiritual energy necessary to bring about societal reform and evangelize the world. Inadvertently, revivalism also opened the door to controversial forms of behavior and phenomena that frequently came with experiential piety, including falling down "under the power" of the Holy Spirit, dancing, shaking, cries, and groans, as well as visions, dreams, and signs in the heavens. To the faithful, they too were of divine origin and constituted valid spiritual experiences. Though notably absent in the histories of missions, reports of extraordinary experiences found their way into chronicles of revivals, books that sometimes round out a more accurate picture of events in the mission lands.(n23) Unfortunately, the sources for these publications have been underutilized for mission studies.

Paranormal occurrences often profoundly affected the reception of the Christian faith and stimulated spiritual renewal in believers. Records and publications from nineteenth-and twentieth-century Protestant missions contain stories of miracles and related experiences. Primary sources such as autobiographies, periodicals, reports, and agency histories occasionally provide treasures of information. In some instances missionaries considered the miracles to be pretended and the bodily contortions to be caused by "animal excitement."(n24) Their appeal could stem only from "weaknesses incidental to human nature, especially among a people unaccustomed to exercise self-control" -- a perspective revealing that missionaries and indigenous peoples lived worldviews apart.(n25)

In most publications the supernatural dynamics that propelled the early church took a back seat to other priorities. For most Protestants the postmillennial calendar with its hopefulness of Christianizing society nurtured the belief that after an extended period of progress, Christ would return. In the meantime mission schools trained students in Western learning so they would see the light of Christianity and ultimately embrace the faith. Theoretically, civilizing and evangelizing would work hand in hand to lead them out of heathen darkness.

Nevertheless, unplanned events frequently interrupted the process. Following on the heels of revivals in America and northern Ireland, "a very remarkable revival of religion" took place in Jamaica in 1860 that impacted the entire island.(n26) Lengthy prayer services that set aside fixed liturgical practices, seekers being "stricken" or prostrated on the ground presumably by the might of God, and public confessions of sin marked the awakening. Impressive results ensued. Many "rum-shops" and gambling houses closed, separated spouses reconciled, wayward children returned to their parents, ministers grew in spiritual zeal, sinners were converted, churches became crowded, and the demand for Bibles exceeded supplies. According to Richard Lovett, historian of the London Missionary Society, "A movement of this kind among a dense population of semi-civilized, excitable negroes was certain to produce extravagances and much that was repugnant to quiet, unemotional people" (an allusion to unsympathetic missionaries and other Euramerican residents). But, continues Lovett, "The testimony of men of sober judgment is that at least 20,000 souls were savingly awakened at this period. The missionaries on the spot believed it to be a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit in response to prayer."(n27)

Such events could prove threatening to established Western doctrines and practices. When news of the same revivals reached South India in 1860, Christians in Tinnevely (now Tirunelveli) experienced similar phenomena. The revival there prompted believers to evangelize and fostered local modes of worship. Initial approval, however, waned as claims about the restoration of New Testament gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12 and 14) and offices (Eph. 4:11-12) exasperated missionaries, whose status and authority now came into question. On one occasion, a missionary complained that believers reported having visions in which appeared the names of twelve Indians to be appointed as apostles and evangelists, and seven as prophets.(n28) To indigenous Christians, such revelations happily demonstrated God's willingness to bypass imported ecclesiastical structures in the appointment of church leaders.(n29)

The calling of John Stewart, an American of mixed European and African descent, illustrates how supernatural factors could direct a person's life and impact other people. While living in Virginia, he heard the voice of a man and then of a woman "from the sky" say to him, "Thou shalt go to the Northwest and declare my counsel plainly." Afterward, a "peculiar halo" became visible and filled the Western horizon.(n30) Traveling to the northwest region of Ohio, he began preaching to the Wyandott Indians with

great success in 1816. As a result, Stewart's example helped inspire the establishment of the Methodist Missionary Society four years later, an agency whose personnel eventually circled the globe. The appearance of a halo--an ancient pagan symbol adopted by early Christians and used in the depiction of angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary--combined with what seemed to be masculine and feminine voices of God, denotes the blending of popular and biblical modes of piety that made "respectable" Christians cringe.

Textbook Histories

The period of the Enlightenment, which preceded the "Great Century" (1800-1914) in Christian missions, left no room in its worldview for the traditional New Testament understanding of miracles or for a recognition of the supernatural activities that characterized the expansion of the ancient and medieval churches. The new vision of Christianity resonated with a strong ethical orientation, acceptable to the emerging Western mind-set and freed of the superstitions of the "prescientific" era. Moreover, this view dictated that history be written with complete objectivity, scientific in methodology and interpretation.(n31) As Mark Noll observes, "Christian historians took their place in the modern academy by treating history not so much as a subdivision of theology but as an empirical science. This choice meant that they have constructed their historical accounts primarily from facts ascertained through documentary or material evidence and explained in terms of natural human relationships."(n32)

The end result becomes tangible in standard histories and surveys of missions, in required texts in Bible institutes, colleges, universities, and seminaries, which rarely mention miracles.(n33) The word "miracle" seldom appears in the indexes. One looks in vain for "healing," "exorcisms," "dreams," and "visions." "Revival" sporadically surfaces, and the information given may briefly describe the unusual phenomena sometimes associated with such movements. A few indexes contain "apostolic methods." I have selected several publications to illustrate the penchant of Protestant missiologists and historians of missions to ignore or underrate what were in fact vital factors in the development of Christianity in the non-Christian world. Whether they personally believed that miracles could happen or happened the way they were reported remains beside the point; the issue centers on the data they chose to include and the meaning they attached to it.

In 1884 the best-known German missiologist and historian of missions, Gustav Warneck, published his *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*. In the introduction he refers to the apostolic age as the "heroic age of early Christianity ... the age of classical missionary enterprise, a model for missions in all ages." Still, he neglects to cite the miracles associated with the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. In retrospect, he notes that the periods of apostolic, postapostolic, and medieval missions had been sovereignly opened and closed. Modern missions was thus shorn of any miraculous dimension.(n34)

Edwin Munsell Bliss, a former missionary to the Middle East with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), also avoids reference to New Testament miracles in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Concise History of Its Objects, Methods, and Extension* (1908). Oddly enough, he mentions Gregory Thaumaturgus because of Gregory's reputation for performing miracles.(n35) In contrast, Philip Schaff questions the "stupendous" claims about Gregory in his *History of the Christian Church* (1858-92) and makes a point of noting that they were recorded one hundred years after his death. "Deducting all the marvelous features, which the magnifying distance of one century after the death of the saint created," he writes, "there remains the commanding figure of a great and good man who made a most powerful impression upon his and the subsequent generations."(n36) For Schaff, a downsized "good man" more appropriately fit the modern era.

William Owen Carver, a Southern Baptist missions historian, begins his *Course of Christian Missions: A History and an Interpretation* (1932) with a presentation of the biblical foundations of mission. Without discussing the miracles of Jesus, he briefly refers to the signs and wonders done by the apostles. The focus then predictably shifts to expansion, agencies, and the social, educational, and medical benefits of missions.(n37) Paradoxically, in the year after its publication, Southern Baptists in North America learned about a revival at their North China Mission in Shandong Province, where, according to Mary K. Crawford in her *Shantung Revival* (1933), "the sick are being healed; devils cast out; men and women, boys and girls are preaching with a power hitherto not known; hundreds are crying for mercy and are being saved."(n38) From this revival also arose the independent spiritual gifts movement, the influence of which has continued in the region to the present day.(n39)

From a different vantage point, V. Raymond Edman, a missionary to Ecuador with the Christian and Missionary Alliance and later president of Wheaton College, Illinois, barely hints of miracles in the progress of the early church in his volume *Light in Dark Ages: Eighteen Centuries of Missions from the Giving of the Great Commission to the Beginning of Modern Missions Under William Carey* (1949).⁽ⁿ⁴⁰⁾ A similar approach appears in *The Progress of World-Wide Missions* (1924), a best-selling history and survey of missions written by Robert Hall Glover, a medical missionary to China with the Alliance and later U.S. home director of the China Inland Mission. He describes the New Testament as the "most practical textbook on missionary principles and practice for all time." The methods of Jesus and the apostles, Glover wrote, though necessitating "reasonable adaptation," constitute the best and most effective strategies still used in modern missions.⁽ⁿ⁴¹⁾

For Glover, as for Edman, revival held the key to evangelization: the "pentecostal experience of the Holy Spirit's infilling has been the forerunner of every fresh missionary inspiration and advance in the centuries" since the Day of Pentecost. Nevertheless, while Glover highlights the importance of a postconversion baptism in the Holy Spirit for empowerment to witness and favorably mentions several miraculous events in the missions of the ancient church, he ignores later claims.⁽ⁿ⁴²⁾ He does so, despite his association with the Alliance, which took one of the most extreme positions on the value of prayer for the sick in the work of missions.⁽ⁿ⁴³⁾

More than other historians, Kenneth Scott Latourette analyzes the issue of miracles in his *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (1937-45). Acknowledging the scholarly debate about the authenticity of Jesus' miracles, he suspects that some of the physical healings could be explained simply as the cure of "nervous disorders." Furthermore, the miracles were not designed "to prove the validity of his message" but simply demonstrated his compassion for the "unfortunate and the suffering."⁽ⁿ⁴⁴⁾ The truth of the gospel message, Latourette writes, did not require the confirmation of divine displays of power. He then considers potential pagan influences behind later miracle stories, noting that in the medieval period they had "an appeal to the untutored mind."⁽ⁿ⁴⁵⁾ The subject of miracles in missions receives a mere fourteen pages in this seven-volume work.

A noteworthy paradox emerges in two publications by J. Herbert Kane, a missionary to China with the China Inland Mission and later professor of missions at Moody Bible Institute and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In his *Concise History of the*

Christian World Mission (1978), Kane favorably mentions in reference to Gregory Thaumaturgus that "the transition from paganism to Christianity was facilitated by the widespread use of miracles."(n46) He also comments on the importance of miracles of healing in the growth of Latin American Pentecostalism.(n47) But apart from these fleeting remarks, the Concise History has the same orientation as the other books. Yet in his Twofold Growth (1947), published thirty-one years earlier when he still served in China, he acknowledges from firsthand observation that "hundreds of our finest Christians in the Fowyang field entered the Christian fold by way of the miracle gate. They were driven to Christ not by a sense of sin, but by a sense of need." The "needs" usually preceded the sense of culpability for sin: "A parent with a sick child, a husband with a demon-possessed wife, a woman with an opium-smoking husband, a widow bowed down by oppression, a soldier with an infected foot, a merchant whose only son had been kidnapped, an aged father with an unfilial son, a bandit serving a prison term."(n48) "Where the need for miracles exists--as it surely does in heathen lands," Kane recalls, God "always responds with alacrity."(n49) What was appropriate for Twofold Growth, however, did not qualify for the Concise History.

Factors Prompting Exclusion

Several factors lie behind the exclusion of supernatural claims, among them the underlying historiographical presuppositions in the academy that do not allow for speculation about metaphysical cause and effect. Mission historians generally adhered to the established rules of their profession. In a reflection of his central thesis about the history of Christian expansion, Latourette writes: "It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy, unequalled in the history of the race. Without it the future course of the faith is inexplicable." "Why this occurred," he cautions his readers, "may lie outside the realms in which historians are supposed to move."(n50)

Together with other objectives, the textbook histories informed their readers about the movement of Christianity throughout the world. They were often crafted to portray missions in a positive light and to inspire their readers toward deeper Christian devotion, to contribute to missions, or to become missionaries themselves. Drawing attention to controversial aspects of religious enthusiasm might deflect from the credibility of the missions movement itself before incredulous Western audiences. The top-down coverage also looked primarily to the missionaries and their stories, not to the native believers who had entered

the faith from non-Christian religions and were more prone to accept the legitimacy of paranormal phenomena. Finally, skeptical assumptions about the possibility of miracles after the apostolic period--a stance reinforced among Protestants by negative attitudes toward Roman Catholic miracle stories like the reputed healings at the shrine of Lourdes--clouded the authenticity of all such accounts.(n51)

Consequently, gaps appear in the textbook narratives due in part to the absence of reports about unusual phenomena. Despite making valuable contributions, the legacy of the miraculous has been neglected in Western interpretations of events and spiritual dynamics that shaped Christianity outside Euro-America. Modern writers have perpetuated this sanitized approach by highlighting the development of mission societies, geographic extension, and charitable, educational, and social achievements (e.g., Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* [1964]); they generally offer limited insight into the spirituality of indigenous Christians.

Theologians of mission have also overlooked the missiological importance of miraculous happenings in their historical analyses (e.g., David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [1991]). The pattern of ignoring or minimizing the worth of paranormal phenomena turns history into a broadcast where only carefully screened "instant replays" can be seen, filtering out other plays equally important to the game. The exclusion of the full range of intercultural dynamics thus produces an incomplete picture of what actually took place.(n52)

Five General Views

Missionaries and their supporters at the home base have held at least five views toward miracles (with some overlapping of categories). However, textbooks and other mission studies seldom treat the diversity of opinions held by Protestant missionaries and mission leaders, whose judgments ranged from outright rejection to hesitation to unbridled enthusiasm. First, those with a progressive or liberal theological persuasion blurred the definitions of "natural" and "supernatural." Since the exorcism of demons, healings, and other such experiences stretched their credulity, they identified divine workings with natural processes. "The supernatural may be seen everywhere," penned Robert A. Hume in *Dnyanodaya*, the Anglo-Marathi newspaper published by the Ahmednagar Mission (ABCFM) in India. "The signs which reveal a Power supreme in nature and in history [direct] the universe toward an end. The supernatural is nothing else but

the spiritual working through the medium of physical nature."(n53) Another editorial speculated that if "competent physicians and specialists in nervous diseases" had examined the "cases of supposed 'demoniacal possession' which have taken place in India within the last few years," they would have recognized them as "forms of disease well-known and described in medical books."(n54) The progress of medical science would inevitably lead to a better understanding of Jesus' ministry of healing and signal an advance over the traditional claims about New Testament miracles.

Second, certain missionaries of a conservative theological bent, who affirmed the integrity of the biblical miracles, had little faith in their prolongation after the period of the early church, even though they believed that God answered prayer and acted sovereignly in human affairs. Falling short of a full-scale cessationism, they dismissed the relevance of miracles for evangelism and missions. Typical of this perspective, Mrs. H. Grattan (Fanny) Guinness, editor of the prominent evangelical missions magazine *The Regions Beyond* (Regions Beyond Missionary Union), asked, "What use would supernatural powers, such as were committed to the twelve and to the seventy, be to the modern missionary among the heathen? Miracles cannot enlighten their dark minds, or soften their hard hearts." Speaking for the majority of missionaries, she added, "Our aim is to enlighten, not to astonish."(n55)

Third, as a result of witnessing for themselves or learning about unusual incidents on the mission fields, other evangelicals compared the first-time proclamation of the Gospel in non-Christian countries to the experience of the first-century church. Acknowledging the veracity of such events, Johannes Warneck (the son of Gustav Warneck) saw no further need for miracles after the successful introduction of Christianity on a foreign field. A missionary to the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) with the Rhenish Mission, he recorded that from the 1860s the Christian community increased after the coming of sensational phenomena, including dreams, visions, signs in the heavens, and several instances where missionaries (e.g., Ludwig Nommensen) unwittingly consumed poison in their food given by their enemies and remained unharmed (see Mark 16:18).(n56) But, Warneck contended, such miraculous events "have nothing more than a preparatory significance" and "lead no further than to the door of the Gospel." Convinced they had "fulfilled their purpose of pointing the stupefied heathen to the gift of the Gospel," he saw "the power of working signs and wonders" as simply temporary, just as they had been in early Christianity. Nonetheless, "We must not banish such experiences to the realm

of fable. They are too well attested; and they are met with everywhere among animistic peoples with considerable regularity."(n57)

Fourth, evangelicals of a more radical persuasion allowed for the continuation of miracles and extraordinary spiritual manifestations, but within limits.(n58) Theodore Christlieb, a German theologian and premillennialist, maintained in *Modern Doubt and Christian Belief* (1874) that "in the last epoch of the consummation of the Church ... she will again require for her final decisive struggle with the powers of darkness, the miraculous interference of her risen Lord, and hence the Scriptures lead us to expect miracles once more for this period."(n59) As evidence of this position, he cites stories including one from the life of Hans Egede, the first evangelical (Lutheran) missionary to Greenland, who arrived there in 1721. Before mastering the languages of the natives, he gave a pictorial presentation of the miracles of Christ. "His hearers, who, like many in the time of Christ, had a perception only for bodily relief, [urged] him to prove the power of this Redeemer of the world upon their sick people." Egede took the challenge and, with many "sighs and prayers," laid hands on the sick, after which several testified to being healed. "The Lord could not reveal Himself plainly enough to this mentally blunted and degraded race by merely spiritual means," Christlieb adds, "and therefore bodily signs were needed."(n60)

No one publicized the occurrences of miracles in missions more than Arthur T. Pierson, editor of the influential *Missionary Review of the World*, who between 1891 and 1902 wrote a series of four books entitled *The Miracles of Missions: Modern Marvels in the History of Missionary Enterprise*. In volume 1 Pierson pays warm tribute to Christlieb, whose insights inspired the title of his books.(n61) Still, he and others in this category did not share what seemed to be the reckless expectancy of those who form the fifth category below. Pierson was content to discover a broad range of divine intervention in human affairs: unusual circumstances leading to conversions; amazing answers to prayer as in the case of financial needs; deliverances from danger; opened doors for ministry; the "miracles" of medical missions, advancing technology, and transportation; and sometimes even physical healings.(n62) For example, Pierson relates the healing of a Chinese epileptic after prayer by C. T. Studd, Stanley Smith, and other members of the famous Cambridge Seven,(n63) and he tells of his own healing from an ear problem.(n64)

The story of W. J. Davis, the Methodist "missionary Elijah," further illustrates this outlook. In a Bantu-speaking part of

South Africa during the late 1840s, a severe drought caused the soil to dry up, and cattle began to die. Fears of famine led the tribal chief to employ the services of professional rainmakers. When they were unsuccessful, they blamed their failure on the presence of missionaries. Realizing the danger to his family, Davis knew that he had to act quickly. Riding on his horse into the chief's village and interrupting ceremonies in progress, he announced that the rainmakers and the sins of the people were the real culprits. Emulating the prophet Elijah in challenging the prophets of Baal to a test on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17-46), he proposed to his startled hearers, "Come to chapel next Sabbath, and we will pray to God, who made the heavens and the earth, to give us rain, and we will see who is the true God, and who are His true servants, and your best friends." After the chief accepted his offer, Davis and his fellow believers spent the next day in fasting and prayer. On Sunday, and without a cloud in the sky, the chief and his retinue entered the church. Then as Davis and the congregation knelt in prayer, "big rain drops begin to patter on the zinc roof of the chapel.... The whole region was so saturated with water that the river nearby became so swollen that the chief and his mother could not cross it that night, and hence had to remain at the mission-station till the next day."(n65)

Even though William Taylor, the pioneer Methodist missionary bishop in Africa, recorded the episode in his *Christian Adventures in South Africa* (1880), he doubted its enduring value. While it "seemed to produce a great impression on the minds of the chief, his mother, and the heathen party in favor of God and His missionaries, ... signs, wonders, and even miracles, will not change the hearts of sinners." Taylor's opinion stemmed from his admitted disappointment that the chief's family did not convert.(n66) Although conceding that the Africans now considered the missionary to be a rainmaker, he failed to understand the implications of Davis's transformed status as a shaman or how the tribe's perspective on Christianity may have changed.

Interestingly, during the twentieth century a considerable number of missionaries found within the foregoing categories aligned themselves with autonomous "faith missions," whose personnel often lived abroad without advertising their financial needs. Some went alone as independent missionaries, but all prayed for the Lord's provision to come through the financial support of friends and backers at home. Critics decried the faith mission as the "Vagabond Mission."(n67) This novel and hotly debated strategy, with its own unique claim on the miraculous benefaction of God, can be traced back at least to

Edward Irving (Missionaries After the Apostolic School [1825]) and Anthony Norris Groves (Christian Devotedness [1825]) early in the nineteenth century.

Turning the cessationist hourglass upside down, the radical evangelicals, who form the fifth category, anticipated the full restoration of miracles and spiritual gifts. Going one step further than those in the fourth category, these leaders on the fringe of the missions movement embraced unusual positions for their time. They believed that missionaries should pray for the sick and trust God for their own healing, which would serve as a witness of his power before the heathen. This notion was premised on the belief that healing is immediately available to every believer by the exercise of faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 8:17).(n68) In addition, they believed in intercessory prayer for spiritual victory in the cosmic realm to bind the power of satanic forces that resist the successful evangelization of the nations.(n69) Others suggested that God might bestow the "gift of tongues" on missionaries so they could preach immediately upon reaching their destinations, a major concern to premillennialists whose "zero-hour" eschatology left little time to evangelize.(n70)

Together they evoked a virtually apocalyptic scenario of God's direct intervention in "signs and wonders" (Acts 5:12) to ensure that every tribe and nation would hear the Gospel before the coming of Christ. The expected "last days" outpouring of the Holy Spirit, perceived by many as the only hope for enabling Christians to reach the world with the Gospel, led them to seek for the return of key elements of New Testament evangelism for their overall stratagem: an approach to mission centered largely on the action of the Holy Spirit invading Satan's realm with great demonstrations of power to gather out souls for Christ during the end-times harvest.(n71)

Supporters of God's direct involvement in mission through providential and miraculous events included A. B. Simpson, founder of the Alliance and the Missionary Training Institute in Nyack, New York, and A. J. Gordon, chair of the American Baptist Missionary Union and founder of the Boston Missionary Training School.(n72) After reflecting on the sad state of Protestant Christianity, Simpson expressed his discontent with the pedestrian and seemingly ineffective mission practices of the day. He lamented that mainline Protestantism "has lost her faith ... in the supernatural signs and workings of the Holy Ghost, she has lost the signs also, and the result is that she is compelled to produce conviction upon the minds of the heathen very largely by purely rational and moral considerations and

influences."(n73) Now at the close of history, wrote Simpson, the return of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit would expedite the evangelization of the world.(n74)

Other controversial proponents included Benjamin Hardin Irwin, leader of the "fire-baptized" wing of the Holiness movement; the colorful John Alexander Dowie, the faith healer who established the utopian community of Zion City, Illinois; Frank W. Sandford, founder of the Holy Ghost and Us Bible School at Shiloh, Maine; Levi R. Lupton, a Friends evangelist, director of the Missionary Home and Training School and the World Evangelization Company in Alliance, Ohio; Elizabeth V. Baker, leader of the Elim Faith Home and the Rochester (N.Y.) Bible Training School; and Charles F. Parham, a Holiness evangelist who started Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. These and others envisioned sending out end-times missionaries filled with the Holy Spirit in whose ministries unusual displays of God's power would be the norm rather than the exception.

Conclusion

Schaff's claim that no transition in the history of Christianity was so "sudden, abrupt, and radical as that from the apostolic to the post-apostolic age" reflects the dramatic shift away from the miraculous that was encouraged by the Reformers, post-Reformation scholastic theologians, and philosophers of the Enlightenment. Because of the impact on historiography and the ethnocentricity of historians and missiologists, accounts of paranormal happenings have been largely excluded in the composition of textbook histories and related mission studies.

Despite the reservations of Western academics, paranormal phenomena have indeed played a vital role in the growth of Christianity, although whether in every local context and to what extent must still be determined. Far from being peripheral, they explain much about the acceptance of the faith by native peoples whose non-Western patterns of reasoning paralleled that of the audiences to whom the apostles and Gregory Thaumaturgus preached. Fortunately, scholars now exhibit more interest in learning about the worldviews of indigenous Christians.(n75) This development has important ramifications for the writing of Christian history in the twenty-first century, for historians and missiologists now have an unparalleled opportunity to show the interchange between often overlooked but visible spiritual dynamics and religious and cultural changes.(n76) Though such phenomena represent just one factor in the shaping of Christianity, their importance should not be underestimated as the "decolonization" of history proceeds.

American Baptist missionary Francis Mason, who recorded the early years of missions in Myanmar for a Western audience, perceptively noted that "the introduction of Christianity among the Karens is, perhaps, too full of 'truth stranger than fiction' to be believed by those who have not been actors in the scenes themselves." (n77) Incredible though it all may have seemed to him, Mason preserved the story to enable his readers to grasp the full scope of how the Karens became Christians. For this reason, we are in his debt.

From another perspective, had Alexander Duff been aware of how the Karens accepted the faith after Jonathan and Deborah Wade entered their village, it might have broadened his understanding of the worldview of his Indian students. He would have discovered dynamics beyond verbal proclamation and Western learning that could have potentially influenced their reception of the Gospel. Indigenous peoples like the Karens, Indians, Jamaicans, Bataks, and Bantus knew much better than their missionary mentors the relevance of Paul's description of the founding of the church at Thessalonica for their own contexts: "Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5).

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Notes

(n1.) Alexander Duff, *India, and India Missions* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, Hunter Square, 1839), p. xiii.

(n2.) Francis Mason, *The Karen Apostle; or, Memoir of Ko Thah Byu* (Bassein, Burma: SGAU Karen Press, 1884), p. 160.

(n3.) Wilbert R. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2 (April 1996): 50-57.

(n4.) For the purposes of this article, the definition of paranormal phenomena or "supernatural" demonstrations embraces (1) claims of miracles, that is, events perceived as divine interventions into the realm of humanity and nature; (2) unusual incidents viewed by those in attendance as divine that have no biblical precedents but have some connection to main events in Scripture; and (3) manifestations of the "charismata" such as the gifts of prophecy, tongues, healings, and discerning of

spirits (1 Cor. 12:7-11). See Robert Bruce Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), p. 6.

(n5.) Mark A. Noll, "The Potential of Missiology for the Crises of History," in *History and the Christian Historian*, ed. Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 113-15.

(n6.) Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek New Testament and the English Version, with facsimile illustrations of mss. and standard editions of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), p. 81.

(n7.) Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972; originally published in 1918), pp. 23-24; cf. Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 193.

(n8.) Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, p. 64.

(n9.) Stanley M. Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), p. 14; idem, "Proclaiming the Gospel with Miraculous Gifts in the Postbiblical Early Church," in *The Kingdom and the Power: Are Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* ed. Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1993), pp. 277-88.

(n10.) Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 314.

(n11.) Basil, cited in Burgess, "Proclaiming the Gospel," p. 281.

(n12.) Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony*, trans. R. T. Meyer (New York: Newman Press, 1978), pp. 78-79.

(n13.) D. M. Lang, ed., *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, 2d ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), pp. 13-19.

(n14.) Walter F. Adeney, *The Greek and Eastern Churches* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), pp. 540-41; Gregory, Bishop of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), pp. 38-40; Kenneth Ware,

"Revival Among the Gypsies," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 22, 1961, p. 8.

(n15.) For Patrick's own account, see Joseph Duffy, *Patrick: In His Own Words* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1972), pp. 12-38.

(n16.) For examples, see Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 1.18, 20; 4.24; 5.2, 3-6.

(n17.) Gregory the Great, "The Book of Pastoral Rule and Selected Epistles of Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d ser., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans., 1969), 12, 7, 30.

(n18.) For the views of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, see Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 143-71; also John W. Beardslee III, ed., *Reformed Dogmatics: Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology Through the Writings of Wollebius, Voetius, and Turretin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1965), p. 141.

(n19.) Ruthven, *On the Cessation*, p. 34, n. 1. See also Mullin, *Miracles*, pp. 12-16.

(n20.) Martin Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments," in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 3:157-301; for evidence that Luther altered his views on healing and miracles later in life, see Burgess, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 151-52.

(n21.) Ruthven, *On the Cessation*, pp. 33-40.

(n22.) D. W. Bebbington, "Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment," in *The Gospel in the Modern World*, ed. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells (Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), pp. 76-77.

(n23.) For example, J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in Southern Asia* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975).

(n24.) "Revival Movement in North Tinnevelly," *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East*, 1860-1861, pp. 131-32.

- (n25.) "Notes and Intelligence," Indian Evangelical Review 4 (October 1876): 246.
- (n26.) Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society, 1795-1895* (London: Henry Frowde, 1899), 2:381. J. Edwin Orr discusses the phenomena of the Jamaican revival in his *Evangelical Awakenings in Latin America* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1978), pp. 22-29.
- (n27.) Lovett, *History*, p. 385.
- (n28.) G. H. Lang, *History and Diaries of an Indian Christian* (J. C. Aroolappen) (London: Thynne, 1939), p. 199.
- (n29.) Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 87-89.
- (n30.) N. B. C. Love, *John Stewart: Missionary to the Wyandots* (New York: Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, n.d.), p. 5.
- (n31.) Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, 2d ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), pp. 239-76.
- (n32.) Noll, "Potential of Missiology," pp. 110-11.
- (n33.) It can be no less problematic in other historical accounts, such as agency histories and autobiographies.
- (n34.) Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, 3d English ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), p. 5.
- (n35.) Edwin Munsell Bliss, *The Missionary Enterprise: A Concise History of Its Objects, Methods, and Extension* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), pp. 19-20.
- (n36.) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 2:800.
- (n37.) William Owen Carver, *The Course of Christian Missions: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1932), pp. 36, 311-12.
- (n38.) Mary K. Crawford, *The Shantung Revival* (Alexandria, La.: Lamplighter Publications, 1933); p. 27. The unusual happenings

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(n39.) Norman H. Cliff, "Building the Protestant Church in Shandong," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 2 (April 1998): 67.

(n40.) V. Raymond Edman, *The Light in Dark Ages: Eighteen Centuries of Missions from the Giving of the Great Commission to the Beginning of Modern Missions Under William Carey* (Wheaton, Ill.: Van Kampen Press, 1949).

(n41.) Robert Hall Glover, *The Progress of World-Wide Missions*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 32.

(n42.) *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36, 368-70.

(n43.) A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, rev. ed. (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1915), pp. 54-57.

(n44.) Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970), vol. 1, *The First Five Centuries*, pp. 57-58.

(n45.) Latourette, *History*, vol. 2, *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty*, p. 8.

(n46.) J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 11.

(n47.) *Ibid.*, p. 149.

(n48.) J. Herbert Kane, *Twofold Growth* (Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1947), p. 106.

(n49.) *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

(n50.) Latourette, *History*, vol. 1, *The First Five Centuries*, p. 167-68; for his thesis, see his *History*, vol. 7, *Advance Through Storm*, p. 494.

(n51.) Mullin, *Miracles*, pp. 114-23.

(n52.) Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," p. 56.

(n53.) Robert A. Hume, "The Natural and the Supernatural," *Dnyanodaya* [ca. 1907].

(n54.) Robert A. Hume, "Is There Demoniactal Possession?"
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(n55.) Mrs. H. Grattan Guinness, "Missionaries According to
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(n56.) Johannes Warneck, The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism,
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(n61.) Arthur T. Pierson, The Miracles of Missions: Modern
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(New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), pp. v-vii.

(n62.) For Pierson's views on faith healing, see Dana L. Robert,
"Arthur Tappan Pierson and Forward Movements of Late-Nineteenth-
Century Evangelicalism" (Ph.D. diss., Yale Univ., 1984), pp.
345-46.

(n63.) Arthur T. Pierson, Forward Movements of the Last Half
Century (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1905), p. 393.

(n64.) Robert, "Pierson," pp. 345-46.

(n65.) William Taylor, Christian Adventures in South Africa (New
York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880), pp. 275-76.

(n66.) Ibid., pp. 276-77. As it happened, neither Davis's name
nor this astonishing incident appears in Wade Crawford Barclay's
detailed multivolume History of Methodist Missions (New York:
United Methodist Church, 1949-57), published over a century
later.

(n67.) Robert Needham Cust, Notes on Missionary Subjects (London: Elliot Stock, 1889), p. 107.

(n68.) Simpson, Gospel of Healing, pp. 57, 77-79, 183.

(n69.) For example, Alfred E. Street, Intercessory Foreign Missionaries: Practical Suggestions from a Missionary to Earnest Christians (Boston: American Advent Mission Society [ca. 1903-ca. 1923]), pp. 5-11. The tract was also published by the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and later by Moody Press. A more radical approach came with Frank W. Sandford; see his Seven Years with God (Mont Vernon, N.H.: Kingdom Press, 1957), pp. 142-45.

(n70.) Gary B. McGee, "Shortcut to Language Preparation? Radical Evangelicals, Missions, and the Gift of Tongues," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 25, no. 3 (July 2001): 118-23.

(n71.) See Dana L. Robert, "'The Crisis of Missions': Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," in Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880- 1980, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 29-46; James R. Goff, Jr., Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1988), pp. 32-86.

(n72.) Note Warfield's fierce polemic against Gordon's views on faith healing in Counterfeit Miracles, pp. 160-64.

(n73.) A. B. Simpson, "The New Testament Standpoint of Missions," Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly, December 16, 1892, p. 389.

(n74.) A. B. Simpson, "Connection Between Supernatural Gifts and the World's Evangelization," Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly, October 7 and 14, 1892, p. 226.

(n75.) For example, Julie C. Ma, When the Spirit Meets the Spirits: Pentecostal Ministry Among the Kankana-ey Tribe in the Philippines (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000).

(n76.) Noll, "Potential of Missiology," p. 112.

(n77.) Mason, Karen Apostle, p. 155.

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