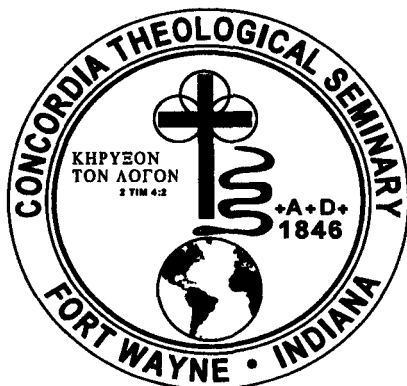


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# **The Other Gospel of Neo-Pentecostalism in East Africa**

**Anssi Simojoki**

## **The Religious Landscape of East Africa**

The Lutheran churches of East Africa, like other historic churches, increasingly have to live surrounded and besieged by a diverse, changing religiosity. The traditional position of mission work was one whereby long-established churches, with their historic mission organizations, were standing against old, crumbling African paganism, and backward Islam. This situation has changed decisively. Changes within Christendom contribute to the spread and fragmentation of the field of churches. In many areas, a veritable redistribution is taking place. Since Nairobi has been the gate to East Africa, religious plurality is the most diverse in Kenya. I have chosen six current religious factors in change:

1. Western churches have changed theologically, followed surprisingly swiftly by their established or integrated mission organizations. Together with the most significant ecumenical organizations, they have become channels for the values of liberal theology and western secularism into the African churches. The secularized liberal theology of Europe and North America has, for a long time now, trodden a separate path from classical Christianity. Whether we like to admit it or not—and usually we do not—the exponent of this parting of the ways within the church has for a generation been the question of the office of the ministry. The ordination of women has been item number one on the agenda of the Lutheran World Federation, for example, in Africa. Pure Lutheran doctrine is dragging far behind. Despite all their beautiful principles, the methods used on African church leaders to advance the ordination of women have been traditional: bribery, blackmail, and threats. The introduction of women's ordination has brought a new image of God and a new political theology into the historic churches, which diverges from biblical doctrine. This has brought a matching change in the definitions of right and wrong. They have been replaced by a post-modern and politically correct orthodoxy, which is familiar from the media, ambiguous in content, and very aggressive. It draws its strength from old neo-leftism, social Darwinism, feminism, and pluralistic Green ideology. In the Western world, this

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development moves hand in hand with a diminishing vision for mission and a waning missionary effort.

2. Islam is encountering Christianity from an entirely new perspective than before. It is being buttressed by millions of dollars from oil-rich Arab countries. The rise of Islamic fascism underlines its legalism, while its high moral values challenge Western immorality and lawlessness, still erroneously considered part of the Christian faith.

3. Oriental-type "New Age" religion has poured into the vacuum in the West, which secularization has created. With Hollywood and the rest of the entertainment industry in its engine room, its ideas and beliefs are spreading all over the world and leading the old paganism of traditionally Christian countries into a renaissance. In Africa, it has a genuine point of contact with the Hinduism of its Asian population, although the traditional attitudes of this ethnic group towards Africans will probably have been the most efficient obstacle to the spread of Hinduism. On the other hand, the white population is nowadays very receptive.

4. European ultramontaniam is a fanatical movement within the Roman Catholic Church that submits itself absolutely to Rome and the pope (which, from a Northern European perspective, are *ultra montes*, beyond the Alps). This movement, which culminated in the papacy of Pius IX and Vatican I, has now become a global movement. The prerequisite for the spread has been the development of the electronic media. The movements of the pope can be followed in every corner of the world. Wherever he arrives, a well-prepared pilgrimage of hundreds of thousands, even millions of Christians gather to hear the head of the Roman Church deliver his often very general, moralistic message. This rise of the importance of the Roman Church has taken place against all the expectations and predictions of liberals. Some might still remember the passionate Hans Küng debate. Borrowing the strange utterance of the late Karl Rahner, Küng was not a radical Catholic, but a liberal Protestant, and he never became the new Luther envisaged by the media, nor did many of his like-minded fellow-Catholics. The present traditional and ultramontanistic papacy believed itself to be in such a powerful position that in the year 2000, after decades of ecumenical activity, it once more declared Rome to be the only true church. In principle, there is nothing

new here.<sup>1</sup> In Africa, too, the power and importance of the Church of Rome is enormous. In practice, it does not seem threatened by the immorality in parishes, for example, in the area of the celibacy of the priesthood, though recent scandals in North America and throughout the world may change this.

5. African syncretistic prophetic movements are a mixture of ancient African religiosity and the Bible. Their rise started in the 1920s after the churches borne by missionary work had already established themselves. These prophetic characters have included Isaiah Shembe in South Africa, Wade Harris in Côte D'Ivoire, Garrick Braid in Nigeria, the Nigerian *Aladura* healing movement (which later merged with Pentecostalism), Simon Kimbangu of the Congo, and the West Kenyan Zakayo Kivuli. The prophets have included both men and women. These different Zionitic or *Roho* (Spirit) churches live in Kenya in the form of the Legio Maria and Roho Israel.<sup>2</sup>

6. Neo-Pentecostalism is currently changing Christianity very powerfully. The religion of salvation becomes a human-centered, voluntary program for the attainment of health, wealth, and success. The spread of a growing liberalism, and a fall in the cost of the mass media have significantly assisted the growth of Neo-Pentecostalism's Theology of Success. Praise and miracle meetings are weekly mass events in Kenya. On top of that, one is increasingly likely to come across them on television.

Just a few words about my choice of terms: I prefer "Neo-Pentecostalism" to the word "charismatic." "Charismatic" can be used to refer, correctly or incorrectly, to as many different things as a word such as "fundamentalism." In the absence of a precise definition, "fundamentalism" and "charismatic" mean absolutely nothing. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup>*Decretum Dominus Iesus*, August 6, 2000. Encyclica of Pius XII *Mystici corporis Christi* in 1943; Seppo A. Teinonen, *Suuntana ykseys*. Valikoima edumenisia asiakirjoja 1910-1967 (Helsinki, Finland: Kirjapaja, 1967), 74; Seppo A. Teinonen, *Uskonnot nykyhetken maailmassa* (Porvoo-Helsinki, Finland: Söderström, 1971), 149; John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1999), 275-277.

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa: A Survey*, second edition (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1987), 214-215; John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, second edition (Nairobi: Paulines, 1998), 490.

they are misleading. To illustrate the point: I have personally encountered orthodox, confessional, charismatic Lutherans. As the ancient Romans said, *mirabile dictu*, or to quote the song, "Wonder of wonders and miracle of miracles." In short, one can be a Pentecostal, liberal, or Lutheran charismatic. In the same way, the classical Lutheran biblical faith is not *eo ipso* fundamentalism.<sup>3</sup> For this reason I consider it more helpful to use the term "Neo-Pentecostalism" in preference to "charismatic." I consider it to be an accurate description of the religious tide that is currently rising in East Africa. "Neo-Pentecostalism" also expresses the change in emphasis from traditional Pentecostalism with its focus on sanctification.

### **"Come and Receive Your Miracle"**

The Neo-Pentecostalism that is spreading with force in Africa has essentially changed in comparison to traditional Christian proclamation. The change is true also in comparison to traditional Pentecostal proclamation. This is in spite of the fact that it is a logical development from it. Instead of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the center is occupied by miracles and the improvement of the quality of life, along with temporal blessings from God. Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, is one central stage — though by no means the only — for this type of Christian proclamation in Africa.

A whole new genre of Christian literature has arisen to serve this new type of proclamation. It is best characterized by the term "deliverance." The original point of departure was the healing of the sick, hence, the uncountable healing ministries on the African continent. I am not referring to the holistic health programs of churches and missions, but specifically to miraculous healings.<sup>4</sup> On the continent where the

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<sup>3</sup>N. T. Ammerman commits this kind of terminological error confusing orthodoxy and fundamentalism in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, A Study Conducted by The American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Fundamentalism Project, Volume 1. Edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-65.

<sup>4</sup>A holistic church medical mission can be also called 'healing ministry' as in the Makumira Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania 1967; John Wimber, with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today* (London: Hodder And Stoughton, 1985); John Goldingay, editor, *Signs, Wonders and Healing: When Christians Disagree* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1989).

population is exploding, where corruption is undermining the national economies and preventing development, there is unlimited demand for inexpensive cures for illnesses—whatever form these may take. The focus on miraculous healings has been central to and consistent with Pentecostal theology. A draft for a Pentecostal dogmatics published in Norway calls the preaching of miraculous healings “the lost gospel,” which Pentecostalism has returned to Christendom. The aim of a person who has been saved and who has received the forgiveness of sins is the baptism and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Its sign is considered particularly to be speaking in tongues. The reaching for the manifestations of the Spirit has produced a unique orgiastic liturgical tradition. A spiritual meeting starts with a warm-up. It is then taken by the power of praise to its climax, a kind of epiphany, in which heavenly forces break into the meeting place and take over both the collective and the individual. During this epiphany, supernatural forces are manifested in supernatural miracles, the most significant being the traditional speaking in tongues.<sup>5</sup>

The new message of deliverance has taken this process considerably further. Various miracles have taken the place of *glossolalia*. The range of miracles has also spread beyond the traditional expectation and promise of the healing of the sick to all areas of human life.

I see this development as the confluence of two channels. One has flourished in the program of the popular American television evangelists, the other spread forcefully from South Korea as early as the 1980s in the Theology of Success of Yonggi Cho, as he was then called. The effect of the Korean Theology of Success and mission funds in East Africa has been considerable. In both these channels there is a discernible change of emphasis from the gift of the gospel to the law of a volitional Christian life of wholeness.<sup>6</sup> In today's Kenya, several television programs offer

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<sup>5</sup>For more on traditional Pentecostalism, one may see E. Molland, *Konfesjonskunskap. Kristenhetens trosbekjennelser og kirkesamfunn* (Oslo, Norway: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1961), 267-271; A. Somdal, *Tro og lære. Et forsøk på en samlet presentasjon av pinsevennes tro og lære* (Larvik, Norway: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1990), 272-288. *Aladura-movement in Nigeria* stemmed from the disappointment with the results of the Anglican medical missions; Baur, *2000 Years*, 490.

<sup>6</sup>Methods to achieve temporal success and blessings: Paul Yonggi Cho, *Guds ord hade framgång* (Stockholm, Sweden: no publisher, 1978), 136-151.152-157 and Paul Yonggi Cho, *Skapande tro* (Bromma, Sweden: no publisher, 1976), 105-119. The author

performer-centered preaching of miracles from dawn till dusk. In newspaper advertisements, the final vestiges of modesty have been abandoned. For instance, before arriving at the meeting, the participant can cut a coupon out of the paper and mark on it the precise miracle that he or she needs in the meeting. In addition to health problems, one finds the middle-class issues of relationships, marriage, career development, and finances. There are also ministries that are entirely specialized in the needs of business people, the generation of income, and the problems of enterprise, which are to be solved by the power of the Spirit. Moreover, large bazaars have sprung up adjacent to the meeting grounds, where one can buy duty free or lightly taxed imports, typically electronics imported from the Arab Emirates. The world famous Pentecostal preacher, Reinhard Bonnke, is the representative of the most moderate wing on the African market, which is still concerned primarily with the proclamation of the gospel and the conversion of people.

If one is to believe advertisements on billboards and in newspapers, Nairobi alone is in a constant state of the pouring of the Spirit, the explosion of the Spirit, explosions of miracles, spiritual conflagrations, and total breakthrough. As well as phenomenal church attendance, "Nairobbery," as the city is also known, is sadly also the dwelling place of large scale and growing paganism, corruption, drunkenness, prostitution, unfaithfulness, and violent crime.

### The Methods and New Laws of Recurring Deliverance

One of the central concepts of the Neo-Pentecostalism of East Africa is deliverance. It is understood solely in terms of demonology. In short:

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emphasises, besides the word of God, Christian obedience, which is like a law according to which men live in God's kingdom. Christian obedience is manifested in the dutiful observance of beseeching, holiness, Bible studies, prayer, and witnessing. Obedience is a volitional attitude of life, rather than a gift given through the gospel. The influential German theologian Johann Tobias Beck (1804-1878) created a similar biblical and legalistic system. The faith was understood primarily as being a restoration of the biblical way of life. This is also the basic intention in Adventism, Anssi Simojoki, *Apocalypse Interpreted: The Types of Interpretation of the Book of Revelation in Finland, 1944-1995, from the Second World War to the Post-Cold War World* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1997), 85-111; Robert Kübel and Albert Hauck, *Beck, Johann Tobias* (Leipzig, Germany: J. E. Hinrichs's Buchhandlung, 1897), 500-506.

the Christian is at every moment the target of the attacks of satan and evil spirits. Consequently, the life of the Christian is one of constant wariness and warfare against evil spirits. Because these attacks also always reach some degree of success, they manage to prevent the abundant, full life God wills for the believer.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the life of the Christian – instead of the abundance willed by God – is ordinary, imperfect, burdened, and bound up in temptations, sins, poverty, disease, gluttony, marital problems, insomnia, evil spirits, and other influences. When the evil spirits are exorcised out of the Christian by a certain mass-meeting technique, they have been released, delivered into a life of abundance, in which spiritual and temporal blessings flow without hindrance. Such an exorcising deliverance activity as this, cursing evil spirits, is ongoing.<sup>8</sup> To carry it out, “anointed preachers,” “men filled with fire” (and increasingly also women) are needed. Their titles are usually rather high church – preferably nothing lower than bishop. Their followers are “victors,” or if the congregation has broken up in the quarrels between the leaders, “victors” and “achievers.” To them, everything is possible, because they believe.

Deliverance Christianity comes with a new set of laws. Following them guarantees God’s temporal blessings. The most important of these is tithing. The law of tithes is a revealing detail because it exposes the arbitrariness of their use of the Bible. Since the New Testament lacks a tithing law, Neo-Pentecostals derive it from the Old Testament by a rather tortuous route: because Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Abraham’s offspring are also under the same law. The New Testament era of grace does not abolish this law. Tithes are in actual fact “a

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<sup>7</sup>Περισσισσενειν/περισσευμα/περισσων are being translated with various words. Yet, “abundance” and “full/fullness” are the most important equivalents.

<sup>8</sup>The field of this literature extends beyond the horizon: T. L. Osborn, *How to Receive Miracle Healing* (Nairobi: no publisher, 1977); Symons Onyango, *Set Free From Demons* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1977); Gordon Wright, *In Quest of Healing* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1984); Cal R. Bombay, *Sin, Sickness and God*, second edition (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangelical Publishing House, 1991); Peter Horrobin, *Healing Through Deliverance: Biblical Basis*, second edition (Tonbridge, Kent: Sovereign World, 1994); Peter Horrobin, *Healing Through Deliverance: Practical Ministry* (Tonbridge, Kent: Sovereign World, 1995); and Francis Wale Oke, *Victory in Spiritual Warfare* (London: Eagle Press, 1996). Kurt E. Koch, *Demonology, Past and Present: Identifying and Overcoming Demonic Strongholds*, translated from the German (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1973), 133-161, employs the word “deliverance” in the context of exorcism.



commandment of the Lord." Even Luke 11:42 is interpreted to say that Jesus commended the Pharisees for their tithing of mint, dill, and cumin. If one neglects tithes, they are attached to "tithe redemption" – a fee for reopening the closed channel of blessing.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of new laws, a representative of traditional Christianity asks about the place of the sacraments and the office of the word in this Neo-Pentecostal teaching. Sacramental teaching is missing altogether. There is no place for baptism in the new style deliverance Christianity. Exorcism has completely lost its ancient place as part of the baptismal liturgy, and its connection to the church's teaching office – in just the same way as it disappeared out of the liturgies of the Scandinavian Lutheran churches at the turn of the previous century under the influence of the theology of Albrecht Ritschl and Johann Tobias Beck. Baptism is not even necessary for the Christian, according to East African Neo-Pentecostalism. In that respect the Quakers and the Salvation Army are no longer alone. It is enough to make a conscious decision of faith, come to the front, and raise a hand at the meeting. However, if such a person nonetheless wants absolute certainty of having become a Christian, he might be anointed with oil.<sup>10</sup>

The ministry is prophetic. Any thoughts concerning the church's historical continuum through doctrine, the sacraments, and the office are completely alien. The external call, *vocatio externa*, is unknown. The "anointed" preacher, "filled with fire," believes he or she has received a call directly from heaven. Such an internal call is confirmed by miracles worked by the preacher – or at least claimed by the preacher. They are considered incontrovertible proof of the divine origin of the call. Consequently, they also demand unreserved acknowledgement and obedience. The critic is easily seen as being on the devil's business, which is quite understandable in the frame of reference I have described.

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<sup>9</sup>George K. Adjeman, *Tithing Your Passport to God's Abundance*, forward by D. Oyedepo (Lagos, Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>10</sup>The author has interviewed Christians coming to the Lutheran Heritage Foundation centre in Karen, Kenya, who have attended these meetings and received impulses from there. Naturally, no names can be disclosed.

### The Syncretistic Frame of Reference

One of the sources of strength of the modern theology of success is its union with traditional African religion and the latter's expectations. This is true despite the fact that the original Neo-Pentecostal movements hail chiefly from North American Pentecostalism. Naturally, these features are not limited to Africa, but are more or less universal. However, on the African continent they offer a particularly apt explanation for the explosion of Christian miracle and success theology. At this juncture one must, of course, be careful about over-generalizations.

Africa has no tradition of anti-religious ideology, such as has been particularly strong in Europe and in Communist countries.<sup>11</sup> Instead of an atheistic vacuum, traditional African religiosity sees the world full of mysterious forces and spirits, with which it is necessary to learn to cope and to control if one desires to succeed. In Kenya, a pagan reaction of the ilk of the Mau-Mau uprising has found a new expression in the Mungiki movement. Traditional religion still bears a strong influence and causes worries for the government, which wants to have nothing to do with pagan beliefs that are considered primitive.

Spirits are a constant source of danger and threat in a person's life. Reality as a sort of "Solaris" sea of mysterious forces offers what are in theory endless resources for controlling and altering one's life. Against this background, the observer may be better placed to understand the strong part played by satan and evil spirits in the proclamation of the miracle preachers. At the same time, the model of a reality loaded with

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<sup>11</sup>It is quite characteristic that such dictionaries as *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG), *Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 4., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage hrs. von H. D. Bentz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, E. Jüngel (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) and *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, Hrsg. von Cancik, B. Gladikow, and M. Laubscher (Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: Kohlhammer, 1988) consider demons and demon-possession solely in psychological terms. This is due to a secular immanent world view. Accordingly, demonology and the respective phenomena are considered as patterns of thought in pre-industrial societies. In a post-modern fashion, exorcism is criticised as a kind of power play and psychological subjugation. Demonology in the Bible and in the Early Church is erroneously ascribed to dualism. Lutheran baptismal exorcism is completely unknown; P. Habermehl in *Handbuch religionswissen* 2, 401-404 in accordance with Katharina Elliger. The question remains, however, how can such modern deliberate and industrialized acts of evil and atrocities as those under Bolshevism and Nazism be explained without the existence of the realm of evil?

supernatural forces offers a point of departure for the search for, and offer of, supernatural deeds.

The supernatural powers of life can be used for good or bad. That explains the ongoing existence of witches, the majority of whom are women. In western Kenya, witches are still burnt alive in their huts from time to time, in retaliation for the spells of black magic, which are believed to be quite real. A positive control and use of the same supernatural forces has been represented by the *mganga* medicine men, who, as the term indicates, have mainly been men.<sup>12</sup> In addition, there are soothsayers, prophets, priests of sacred places, herbalists, and rainmakers. The leader of a community, be it a family, a clan, or tribe, must be able to protect his own and to guarantee their well-being. In the field of politics, such expectations have created networks of dependencies, perks and services, which resemble the ancient Roman system of clients. Today, as everything is changing, the clear boundaries between different roles have also become murkier in many respects.<sup>13</sup>

Taking these traditional models as a point of departure, it is easy to apply the roles of the exorcist, prophet, healer, and rain or miracle maker to the roaring stage magnets of the mass meetings. The continent's cultural traditions set certain expectations, changes, and the demands for the religious leader as a prophet, fighter of evil, healer, and the guarantor of well-being. Instead of the Solaris of supernatural forces there is the force field of the spirit. Its possibilities in human life are limitless, as long as one learns to utilize them.

Along with the rest of the continent, East Africa has seen, and is constantly seeing, fragmentation of movements and the birth of new ones, caused by the strong leader figure. Of such a leader, who is a miracle-maker-cum-prophet, the expectations are, consequently, high. Christian and traditional role models become intertwined. In the *Roho*

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<sup>12</sup>Swahili: *Mganga*; Lloyd Schwantz, "Health and Healing in Traditional African Thought and Practice," The Makumira Report, February 1974, 37-46.

<sup>13</sup>Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989; Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 1993) 67-79; John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London-Ibadan-Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), 65-76, 150-163, 164-174; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi-Ibadan-London: Heinemann, 1989), 75-91, 166-193, 194-203; Schwantz, *Health and Healing*, 37-46; P. Habermehl, "Exorzismus" in *Handbuch religionswissen* 2, 401-404.

*Israel* groups, which are particularly prominent in Western Kenya but also in the slums of Nairobi, High Church vestments are coupled with marching behind a flag *a la* the Salvation Army. Curiously, though, marching is often replaced by jogging incredibly long distances at a time, beating a drum and shaking a little sleigh-bell-like chime, *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*. The *Legio Maria* movement, which has attracted a very large following, has combined the traditions of the original church of the founder, namely Roman Catholicism, with the Old Testament and traditional culture. Of these, not the least significant is polygamy. After the death of the leader, the followers have sometimes prayed continually for days, expecting his resurrection from the dead – though with no success as yet. The communities continue their existence, limping along, or as if nothing had happened. The same feature is also familiar from various millenarian movements, whose predictions of the end of the world have been disappointed – but which, nonetheless, continue their existence. It would be intriguing to compare their experiences with the early church, for whom the proclamation of the hope of resurrection was absolutely central.

In summary, Africa has a great demand for the charismatic, prophetic religious leader, who can consolidate his or her position by means of miracles and promises of a secure life. Tradition provides a basis for a great readiness to believe and follow their message. The community's expectations can, in fact, force the religious leader onto a course of which he or she may have had no idea. Promises on the one hand, and expectations on the other, can create a self-perpetuating development, which, depending on one's viewpoint, can be called a vicious circle or some other kind of flywheel.<sup>14</sup>

Through the prophet figure, we are approaching traditional African paganism and sometimes also Islam, as in the *Mugiki* movement and some other, lesser known, groups.

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<sup>14</sup>According to a piece of research by the Daystar University, Nairobi (Stan Downes, Robert Oehrig, and John Shane, "Summary of the Nairobi Church Survey" [Nairobi, Kenya: E. M. Bassett Christian Outreach in a World-Class City, Daystar University College, 1989]) the church attendance was divided as follows: Roman Catholic services 30%, Anglican 8%, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans and other traditional Protestant churches 36%, Coptic and Greek Orthodox 1.8%, independent African churches and groups 25%.

For reasons enumerated above, I see nothing miraculous in the high number of the miracle preachers. Moreover, there seems to be no ebb, cul-de-sac, or other end to its growth currently in sight. It is odd, however, that there seems to be no scientific observation of this activity. For instance, alleged healings are not compared with medical examinations; the real number of miracles is not counted, nor is that of their absence in the face of contrary claims, as happened in the case of Maurice Cerullo, who declared in India his thousands of listeners healed and who subsequently had to escape under police protection from the rage of the deceived crowd, because no one had been healed.

### Deliverance Theology and New Testament

Has the traditional mainstream of Christendom lost the gospel, or at least its essential part? After all, the New Testament holds promises of signs following the apostles (Mark 16:17-18). The disciples had the promise of doing greater signs than Jesus (John 14:12). So, is Neo-Pentecostalism returning something that is essential to the gospel, to Christian proclamation and work? Do we only have the "full gospel" after this necessary restoration?

The problems of the "deliverance theology" I have described above start already in its terms and concepts. In fact, available material is rather thin in comparison to the centrality of the doctrine in Neo-Pentecostalism.<sup>15</sup> The English word "deliverance" and its derivatives have been translated from two Greek word clusters:  $\rho\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  and  $\lambda\upsilon\tau\rho\omega$ . The sentence ". . . to rescue us from the hand of our enemies (KJV: Being delivered out of the hand of our enemies)..." in Zechariah's *Benedictus* (Luke 1:74; see also "salvation" and "saved" 1:70) has a wider meaning than freedom from the demons. In actual fact, only the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 is close to the meaning "deliverance theology" gives to the word "deliverance." Generally in the New Testament, "deliverance" means being set free from the powers of darkness, the coming wrath, evil people, and the persecution of Christians. Salvation and deliverance from the powers of darkness is only one shade in the broad range of meanings. Even then, it does not justify the continual

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<sup>15</sup>King James Version: Matthew 6:13; Luke 4:18; 10:22; 11:4,27; 26:15, Acts 2:23; 7:35; Romans 4:25; 7:6; 8:21,32; 2 Corinthians 1:10; 4:11; Galatians 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 11:35-36; 2 Peter 2:7; Judah 3. New International Version: Matthew 6:13; Acts 7:35; Romans 4:25; 11:26; 2 Corinthians 1:10.

exorcism, firstly because the kingdom of darkness is more than the individual demonic attacks, and secondly because the question of baptism is intricately connected to it. Therefore, the nearest meaning is a once-for-all redemption. There is a christological hymn or confession in Colossians (1:12-23), which leads us to the center of baptismal theology (Colossians 2:6-15): "For he has rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

Here, then, the synonym of the word "redemption" is "the forgiveness of sins." According to the rabbinic Mishnah, the redemption of the Exodus was also a "forgiveness" as the releasing of the Hebrew slaves.<sup>16</sup> Ἀφίημι in the New Testament means the release from the slavery of sin to a heavenly inheritance. This deed of God is directly linked to baptism, as found in the main section of the Colossian epistle. "Redemption" or "deliverance" is the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and holiness: "In (Christ Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God" (Ephesians 1:7).<sup>17</sup>

"Redemption" in the New Testament also refers to protection from the last temptations, and to the final releasing at the second coming of Christ. Resurrection is the day of redemption for the Christian body.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, deliverance or redemption has already taken place, once for all. At the same time, it is also eschatological, true according to hope—ἐν ἐλπίδι. Therefore, it must be taken possession of by faith. The theology of deliverance in the New Testament refers backwards to the once-for-all action of God in the salvation given in Christ; it is the forgiveness of sins and it will be fulfilled on the last day in Christ's second coming and the resurrection of the body. There is no biblical basis for the program of continual exorcism and miraculous healings described above. In that respect, the "deliverance theology" of Neo-Pentecostalism is one good example of how a theological term has got a secondary derivation from the biblical text, namely from the English translations,

<sup>16</sup>In Acts 7:35 Moses is called λυτρωτης.

<sup>17</sup>Jukka Thuren *Heprealaiskirje, Paavalin kirjeet Filemonille, Kolossalaisille, Efesolaisille* (Helsinki: SLEY-Kirjat, 1992), 129-130. Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 9:15.

<sup>18</sup>Luke 21:28.; Romans 8:23.

without an accurate connection to the original text. The teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses provide similar examples.<sup>19</sup>

### The Pure Gospel is at Stake

The power speculations and methods of Neo-Pentecostalism fatefully displace Christology and Christ's real presence in the church. With Christ, the forgiveness of sins and the sacraments are also pushed aside. Baptism, which is so central in the New Testament, has no place in proclamation and teaching.

When a Lutheran Christian puts forward such criticism as this, he will often meet with the clever-sounding, but biblically erroneous, claim that it is not the sacraments and doctrines that save, but Jesus! This kind of reasoning also lies behind the contemporary "Jesus First" ideology in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Jesus' Great Commission is directly bound with baptism in Matthew and Mark, just as in Luke and John it is bound with the preaching of repentance and the power of the keys. The Swedish systematician Hj. Lindroth returns in his dogmatics again and again to two New Testament passages, 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 1:2-14. God's salvation in Christ was present already at creation, fulfilled on the cross and deposited in the body of Christ,  $\epsilon\nu \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omega$ .<sup>20</sup> According to Paul, Christology is the organizing principle of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The same is true of the John's gospel. The gift of the Holy Spirit is given "in Christ."<sup>21</sup> The traditional Latin phrase arises out of this fact: *Ubi Christus, ibi Spiritus – ubi Spiritus, ibi Christus* ("Where Christ is, there is the Spirit—where the Spirit is, there is Christ").<sup>22</sup> We are sacramentally united with Christ precisely in baptism.

<sup>19</sup>Goldingay, *Signs*, 180: "There remains, then, a worrying absence of mandate from the New Testament for undertaking the kind of healing ministry that Jesus, his immediate disciples, and the apostles did."

<sup>20</sup>Hjalmar Lindroth, *Kyrklig dogmatic 1-3. Den kristna trosåskådningen med särskild hänsyn till det eskatologiska motivet och den frälsningshistoriska grundsynen. Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 12:1.* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1975), 2:71-97. The central Pauline term  $\epsilon\nu \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omega$  has obviously been a crux for modern Bible translators. For example, the Good News translation systematically avoids the expression 'being in Christ' with other constructions. In this way the translation also distances itself from Saint Paul's central christological mysticism.

<sup>21</sup>2 Corinthians 3:17-18; John 14:18-20, 23.

<sup>22</sup>Hermann Sasse, *Jesus Christus der Herr: das Urbekenntnis der Kirche.* In *Statu Confessionis. Gesammelte Aufsätze und kleine Schriften von Hermann Sasse.*

Baptism is directly connected to God and the Lord of salvation history: "... one body, one Spirit; ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all ..." (Ephesians 4:4-6). Because Jesus saves, His baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21), and *vice versa*.<sup>23</sup> The eucharist unites the believers with the body and blood of the Lord: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

In the New Testament, the gospel is the gospel of God and also the gospel of Christ. Paul rarely uses the term "Kingdom of God," and when he does, it is with reference to the common tradition of catechetical teaching.<sup>24</sup> He does not define the gospel in his letters, but expresses summaries of it (Romans 1:1 and following, 1 Corinthians 15:1 and following), because the gospel is familiar both to him and to his readers. There is no essential difference between the "gospel of the Kingdom" and the "gospel of Jesus," because the proclamation of the gospel always and primarily points to Jesus. The gospel, then, does not contain things with which it would be a "full gospel," but the gospel is christological, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, by God's power. This gospel and its teaching is "the eternal gospel" (Revelation 14:6 and following), because it is lasting and immutable: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).<sup>25</sup>

The Lord's true presence was also the gospel, which Isaiah proclaimed<sup>26</sup> in his prophecy of the great feast, where the Lord who is present in Zion will be seen, who will destroy death forever: "In that day they will say,

Band 2. Herausgegeben Von F.W. Hopf. (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1932), 39-40 (2 Corinthians 3:17).

<sup>23</sup>David P. Scaer, *Baptism*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, volume XI (Saint Louis, Missouri: The Luther Academy, 1999), 110-111.

<sup>24</sup>Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5.

<sup>25</sup>Heprealaiskirje, *Paavalin kirjeet*, 129-130.

<sup>26</sup>Jerome translated the verb  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\zeta\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  (Isaiah 52:7; 61:1-3) in LXX for his Latin Vulgata Version with "euangelizare." Modern translations, which have been under the influence of the historical-critical studies and their philosophical premises for a century and a half at least, or under the influence of nineteenth-century Biblicism, have remarkably diluted the connection between the Old Testament "gospel" and the New Testament "gospel" with various "good news" wordings.



‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’” (Isaiah 25:6-9).<sup>27</sup>

Theologically, we have to return time and again to the fateful split that had appeared earlier in Christendom, but which was crystallized in the Protestant catechisms and confessions of the Reformation. At this point, Lutherans on the one hand, and the followers of Zwingli and Calvin and the Anabaptists on the other hand, differed decisively, although the Calvinists opposed and persecuted the deniers of infant baptism. The dispute concerning Christ’s true presence was in fact a dispute about the doctrine of Christ and the church. When the key passages of the New Testament were interpreted symbolically, from the basis of humanist philosophy, it came to bear upon the whole of Christian faith as “being in Christ.” A rift opened as to cleave the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith.<sup>28</sup> Calvin, defending his symbolic doctrine, thought himself able to distinguish between the whole person of Christ and His natures, as if Christ were divided.<sup>29</sup>

This kind of distinction has, in its consistency, affected everything from the center to the fringes. The distinction between Christ and the Spirit leads onto the division of the gospel. There are two kinds of gospel in Adventism and the teaching of J. N. Darby and his followers, which in turn have influenced Pentecostalism. In Adventism, the watershed ran in the year 1844, after which the proclamation of the “eternal gospel” of the

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<sup>27</sup>Meticulous linguistic analysis of the passage in Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, volume VII of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 436-441; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, translated by David M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1969), 45-46; G. Friedrich, “Ευαγγελίζομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, translated by G. W. Bromiley, volume 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 707-725; W. Elliger, *Deuterjesaja 1. Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament* begr. von M.Noth. XI,1. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsverein, 1978), 34-36; Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja. 2. Teilband Jesaja 13-27, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament*, Begr. Von M. Noth. Hrsg. von S. Herrmann und H.W. Wolff. X/2. (Neukirchener-Verlag, 1978), 899-900.

<sup>28</sup>Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, translated with revisions and additions by Theodore G. Tappert (1966; reprint, Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 118-130.

<sup>29</sup>Johannes Calvin, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Institutio Christianae religionis*, Nach der letzten Ausgabe übersetzt und bearbeitet von Otto Weber. 3. Aufl. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 26-30.

Advent church was due to begin. Darbyism distinguishes between the "gospel of the Kingdom," proclaimed to the Jews, and the "gospel of Salvation," which belongs to Christians. We have already encountered the idea of an ordinary gospel and the "lost gospel" of miraculous healings, or the gospel and the "full gospel," which is, however, offered emptied of the sacraments. The same division is found in the distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism, in opposition to the "one baptism" of the New Testament: new birth by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). How many artificial explanations have been created to separate water from the Spirit! The church, the body of Christ, and the Kingdom of God move apart. Yet further, on innumerable occasions, the last days of the New Testament have been divided into "time" and the "end times," even though, according to Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the end times began when the Holy Spirit was poured out in Jerusalem. All in all, "being in Christ" is exchanged for "being in the Spirit" and only the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

When Pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is lifted out of its inseparable connection with Christology, Christ's real presence, mediated and guaranteed by the means of grace, is exchanged for a type of epiphany spirituality, wherein experiences and signs interpreted by humans indicate the Lord's presence. What is especially dubious in these signs is that they lack the support of a disciplined biblical interpretation, and that they are produced by a certain lively method that appeals to the emotions. The error in these methods is that they aim to turn the singular events in salvation history into products that are repeated from time to time, meeting to meeting. The one, unique deed has its continuity in its effects, not in the accurate imitation of the deed. After all, we do not attempt a daily repetition of the incarnation or the crucifixion, either.<sup>31</sup>

The history of the church is full of reports of miracles. They follow the gospel, but they are not part of it, let alone a condition or a prerequisite. In the Sermon for Maundy Thursday in the Church Postil, Luther discusses the nature and function of genuine miracles, salvation, and that

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<sup>30</sup>For example, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, editor, *The Scofield Study Bible*, Scofield Facsimile Series (New York: no publisher, 1917 edition); Simojoki, *Apocalypse Interpreted*, 71-78, 85-92, 94-98; Scaer, *Baptism*, 107-110.

<sup>31</sup>Kurt Marquart, "'Church Growth' as Mission Paradigm: A Lutheran Assessment," Luther Academy Monograph (Houston: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 1994), 54-56.

God's deeds linked to it are hidden in the means of grace.<sup>32</sup> Antiquity and Judaism knew of miracle makers and exorcists. Shamanism is making a forceful comeback. The miracles that occur within Shintoism, Islam or, say, in the Hindu cobra cult of Southern India, are beyond the scope of this paper. Miracle makers were also common in the Middle Ages, particularly as part of pilgrimage spirituality, and during the Reformation.<sup>33</sup> When he expounded the Eighth Commandment in 1518, Luther—who, as we saw, accepted the possibility that miracles are biblical—turned against such people who are especially guilty of bearing false witness about God and other people. According to the Reformer, among them were lawyers, heretics, scholastics, Thomists, and the preachers and performers of miracles. The latter bear false witness about God and His saints with their deceptive tales of miracles.<sup>34</sup>

We encounter the practical consequences of the denial of original sin in Neo-Pentecostal demonology. With the biblical doctrine of original sin, we can face seriously all the weakness and fleshliness, which burdens humanity from the cradle to the grave. When one loses a realistic biblical view of humans, one winds up either with an optimistic anthropology alien to the Bible, as in theological liberalism, or everything is demonized, as happens in Neo-Pentecostal miracle preaching. What the Bible calls nature, or the weakness of the flesh in a fallen humanity, is either brushed aside with a shrug, or seen as thoroughly demon-possessed; and in both cases, there is no serious individual responsibility. The doctrine of original sin, on the other hand, explains temptations, battles, falls, powerlessness—all as part of the reality of sin, which is lingering in the world for the time being. However, the gospel declares them beaten powers, although they have not yet been removed because Christ has not yet returned in heavenly glory to his own people. The sinful woman did not get an exorcistic deliverance treatment like the demon-possessed man in the land of the Gerasenes. Instead, Jesus forgave her sins (Luke 7: 36-50).

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<sup>32</sup>Martin Luther, *Kirchenpostille*, 3<sup>rd</sup> gospel Sermon, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 98 volumes (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger Edition, 1883 and following), 10 I. Hereafter referenced as WA.

<sup>33</sup>Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup>Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen 1: Die zehn Gebote*. Herausgegeben Von Gottfried Seebass (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), 288-289; *Decem praecepta Wittembergensi praedicata populo*, 1518. WA 1, 505-514.

Humans are from conception and birth corrupted by original sin and under the power of Satan, though not satans themselves. There is a difference between slave owner and slave. The baptism transfers one from this darkness to Christ's kingdom of grace, where sins are daily forgiven. Hence, since the ancient church, the baptismal liturgy has included renouncing the devil, *abrenuntiatio*, and the driving out of the evil spirit, exorcism.<sup>35</sup> This miracle of eternal life is the greatest of all miracles, but it is only understood by faith. Beside it, everything is secondary. Before this miracle, when he beheld the tortured Christ, Isaiah, the prophet of the Lord's real presence, cried out, "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1)

Who will cry it out and teach it pure, undiminished, trusting in its own power, everywhere in today's world? Liberal, politically correct missiology cannot do it because of its lack of God's word. The "other gospel" of Neo-Pentecostalism is not that message. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring the gospel" (Isaiah 52:7).

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<sup>35</sup>Scaer, *Baptism*, 181-193. C. F. W. Walther and W. Löhe restored the orthodox Lutheran baptismal ceremony by returning *abrenuntiatio* and exorcism to their original places whence they had been removed under the influences from the Enlightenment. In Sweden and Finland these elements were removed as late as towards the end of the nineteenth century under the influence of A. Ritschl and J.T. Beck's Biblicist theology. Gustav Kawerau, "Exorcismus" in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche begr. Von J. J. Herzog*, 5. In dritter verbesserter und vermehrter Auflage hrs. von Albert Hauck (Leipzig, Germany: J. L. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1898), 695-700; Kawerau obviously does not comprehend Luther's realistic anthropology as he criticizes the Reformer's decision to include these same elements into the baptism of infants.