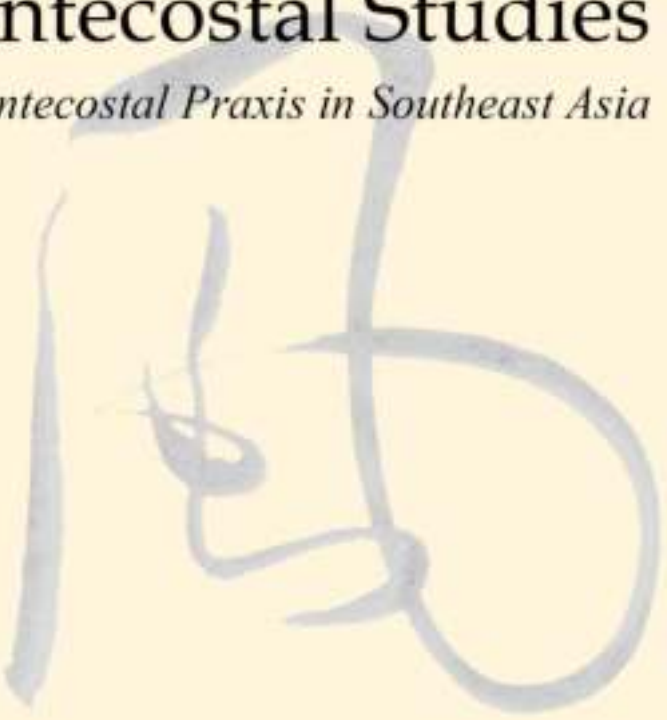
Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

Pentecostal Praxis in Southeast Asia



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THE JOURNAL SEEKS TO PROVIDE A FORUM: To encourage serious thinking and articulation by Pentecostals/Charismatics in Asia in all disciplines within the field of Pentecostal studies; to promote interaction among Asian Pentecostals/Charismatics and dialogue with other Christian traditions; to stimulate creative contextualization of the Christian faith; and to provide a means for Pentecostals/Charismatics to share their theological reflections.

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EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

[AJPS 27.1 (February 2024), pp. 1-2]

Pentecostal Praxis in Southeast Asia

Pentecostals in Asia are well known as ministry practitioners. In this edition, our focus reflects that ethos in Southeast Asia. Jenny Siow leads off this edition by reflecting on a Christian response to Taoist funerary rites among the Chinese in the multi-cultural and religious context of her native Singapore. She contends that these rites and, more to the point, the value of the filial piety that stands behind them, are a major stumbling block to the Chinese coming to Christ. Her goal, focusing more on the anthropological issues than the theological ones, aims to help Christians come to an understanding of the various beliefs and values underlying Chinese funeral rites so that they can meaningfully express the value of filial piety and respect within their Christian faith.

Ngo Lam Khai, who hails from Myanmar, writes on the church's response to one of the hundreds of festivals in his country, the Taungbyone Nat Festival, which is dedicated to two of the thirty-seven *nat* spirits there. He begins by describing the mythological history of the festival, as well as the details of the festival itself. Then he proceeds to delineate the theological issues involved. Finally, following Hiebert's well-known model of critical contextualization, he outlines what parts of the festival may be acceptable to followers of Christ and which must be changed or discontinued.

Lew Belcourt then takes a look at the *ziarah kubur* rite among Javanese Folk Muslims in Indonesia. This rite involves visiting places where supernatural power is believed to be found in order to seek a blessing. Rooted in the *ziyara* (visitation) concept found in the hadiths of formal Islam, this rite has been contextualized in the animistic traditions of the Javanese. Belcourt then asks whether a critical contextualization of this rite "may result in a bridge for Javanese Muslims to encounter the God of the Bible, rather than the spirits of the dead, as the true source of blessing." In other words, can an anthropocentric rite like this be transformed into something that is theocentric, allowing the people of Indonesia to be authentically both Christian and part of their own culture?

Josiah Ang then takes us to a growing trend, at least in Singapore, his homeland, of expressing prophecy through the arts. His purpose

is twofold: "to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of prophetic arts" and to clarify what prophetic arts are, seeking to provide clarity to the discussion. He argues "that the process of inspiration in prophetic painting is dynamic, where God and the artist collaborate in the process of painting, where the Holy Spirit gives the message, and the artist gives expression to the message." Furthermore, he also "argues that prophetic arts should be defined as artworks that the artists paint to report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration."

Joel Tejedo, a leading scholar in the rather nascent field of Philippine Pentecostal studies, concludes this edition by taking us once again into the world of megachurches in Manila (see AJPS 26.2 at www.aptspress.org for his first article). He contends that these churches significantly impact society, especially when it comes to mediating the sacred to their members and adherents in a world undergoing rapid change.

As with the previous article, this one focuses on a survey of the pastors and leaders of two megachurches in Metro Manila, Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF) and Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF). The research was sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation and, amazingly, was successfully completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the challenges presented by significant restrictions regarding social contact. While the research focused on important, basic doctrinal issues, all of the biographical and other data will also be useful to missions scholars and anyone interested in studying the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements in the Philippines.

Thank you for taking this journey with us into the ever changing ministry contexts of Southeast Asia. As always, feel free to reach me through our website, www.aptspress.org.

Respectfully,
Dave Johnson, D.Miss.
Managing Editor

[AJPS 27.1 (February 2024), pp. 3-24]

Chinese Death Rituals: Upholding the Value of Filial Piety within the Christian Faith

by Jenny Siow

Introduction

Singapore is a small island city-state. With an area of approximately 72.1 kilometers and a population of about 5.7 million people, it serves a vibrant melting pot of cultures, languages, and religions. Despite its small size, Singapore has made a global mark as a financial, economic, and technological hub. Because of its strategic location along major trade routes, nestled at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, Singapore began as a trading port. Over the years, its dynamic governance and pro-business policies have fueled remarkable economic growth.

The nation's population comprises a diverse mix of ethnic groups– Chinese, Malay, Indian, and other backgrounds, with the Chinese as the clear majority. Not only is Singapore multi-ethnic, it is also multi-religious. The major religions are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Taoism.[1] According to the 2020 "Census of Population" report from Singapore's Department of Statistics, Christians make up 18.9 percent of the country's population. Among the Chinese religions, Buddhism holds 31.1 percent while Taoism stands at 8.8 percent.[2]

Ingrained at the core of all these Chinese religions is the practice of ancestor worship. To many Chinese, it is easier to give up the worship of their pantheon of gods than it is to forego ancestor rites. To turn away from ancestor worship is to face the consequence of being ostracized from the family and the community. With this tight hold on the Chinese

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[1]Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Managing Religious Diversity and Multiculturalism in Singapore," in *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 19.

[2]"Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion" (Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2020), https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx.

culture and way of life, ancestor veneration is thus recognized as one of the greatest obstacles to the spread of Christianity.[3]

The notion that Christianity is commonly viewed as a Western religion among the Chinese population in Singapore holds merit within the cultural and historical context of the region. The introduction of Christianity to Asia was often associated with Western colonial expansion and missionary activities, leading to the impression of it as a foreign import. This perception can indeed create certain barriers to evangelization, particularly when it intersects with deeply entrenched traditional practices such as ancestor worship, which are integral to Chinese cultural identity. Furthermore, the impact of Westernization on Singaporean society has naturally brought about changes in cultural values and norms, potentially contributing to a sense of disconnection from traditional Chinese roots, especially among the younger generation.

Many new Chinese converts to Christianity face the tension between their new faith and the traditional family rituals. The interval between the time of their conversion and their water baptism can sometimes be long because of the fear of objections and repercussions from family members, especially with regard to the expectation to continue the rites of ancestor worship. Without a fuller understanding and appreciation of the social aspect of ancestor worship, Christianity can oftentimes dismiss it too casually, contributing to the tension and disconnect for new converts.

Death, together with the rituals associated with it, is not just a collection of events and activities. It is meaningful and expressive and helps the family members to make sense of life.[4] Death is the beginning of the tradition of ancestor worship. For a new Christian, the death of a family member is a traumatizing and stressful event. Not only do they have to deal with the loss, but they will also be faced with the tension of whether it is permissible for a Christian to participate in Chinese funeral rites without violating their Christian beliefs and values. The animistic nature of ancestor worship, where "spirits depend on human care and need to be propitiated with offerings and rites lest they cause

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[3]James Thayer Addison, "Chinese Ancestor-Worship and Protestant Christianity," *The Journal of Religion* 5, no. 2 (1925): 143.

[4]Chee Kiong Tong, *Chinese Death Rituals in Singapore* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004). https://web-s-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.sg/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEwNTk4Nl9fQU41?sid=181b7337-07df-45cd-b71b-6c56424c8074@redis&vid=1&format=EB&rid=1, n.d.), chap. 1, under "The Problem of Death" (accessed September 4, 2023).

misfortune, illness, and disaster,"[5] is the usual motivator for ancestor worship. Undergirding this is the Chinese value of filial piety, which is the cornerstone of Chinese culture and tradition. In a funeral setting, all these elements come into play and often put the Christians in a dilemma as to how they can respond sensitively to family and friends.

Thesis Statement

This paper aims to help Christians come to an understanding of the various beliefs and values underlying Chinese funeral rites so that they can meaningfully express the value of filial piety and respect within their Christian faith.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this paper will focus on the Chinese community in Singapore and the Taoist funeral rites practiced by them. Through this examination of how a Christian can respond to ancestor worship in a funeral context, it is hoped that Chinese Christians will be encouraged in their commitment to their faith and discover how their rich heritage can profoundly enhance and enrich their faith journey.

The study's primary focus on the Chinese community in Singapore and Taoist funeral rites as practiced by them restricts the generalizability of the findings. Chinese funeral traditions can vary significantly across different regions and even within the same country. Therefore, the findings and recommendations of this paper may not fully apply to Chinese Christians in other cultural or geographic contexts. This limitation could be addressed by acknowledging the need for further research in other Chinese communities to explore the diversity of beliefs and practices related to filial piety and respect within Christianity. Due to the page limitations of this paper, the theological issues are not discussed thoroughly and will need further development.

Filial Piety

The earliest appearance of the word for filial piety or *xiao* (孝) is on a bronze vessel that can be dated to the very last years of the Shang

[5]Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser, "Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia," in vol. 5, *Asian Anthropologies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 1.

dynasty or the earliest years of the Zhou, that is, roughly around 1000 BC.[6] From antiquity, the concept of filial piety denotes an extreme devotion to parents and is reflected in the daily lives of the people.[7] It involves how families act, the rituals they follow, their feelings, and thoughts related to taking care of and respecting their parents, older family members, and ancestors, whether they are alive or have passed away.

Filial piety has its roots in Confucian ideas and is a valuable quality to possess in Confucian philosophy. It is cultivated when a person develops a deep love and care for their parents, revering them with honour and respect. Not only does it bring pride to the parents, but this devout loyalty in turn also enhances the children's dignity and identity.[8] Filial piety as expressed in the Analects,[9] is considered the most important virtue,[10] and Confucius considers it as mankind's highest and central value. It not only expresses itself towards living parents, but filial piety also continues in the form of reverent funeral and memorial rites for deceased parents.[11]

This aspiration is a cultural value among the Singaporean Chinese and a moral virtue endorsed and promoted by the Singapore government. "The ideas of respecting the elderly and of children looking after their aged parents remain strong as an ideal among the Chinese in Singapore."[12] However, with its fast economic growth, urbanization drive, and modernization of Singapore, the government was concerned that the ethnic group was becoming "westernised" and losing their culture. In the 1970s, the government implemented an educational policy that taught Confucian ethics together with other mainstream religions

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[6]Donald Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety in Ancient China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 2 (1998): 186, https://doi.org/10.2307/605890.

[7]Holzman, 190.

[8]Phua Voon Chin and Jason Loh, "Filial Piety and Intergenerational Co-Residence: The Case of Chinese Singaporeans," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 660.

[9]The "Analects" (Chinese: 论语, Lúnyǔ) is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius (Kong Fuzi or Kongzi), an influential Chinese philosopher and teacher who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China (around 551-479 BC). The Analects is one of the most important texts in Confucianism and Chinese philosophy.

[10]Ryan Nichols, "The Origins and Effects of Filial Piety (Xiao): How Culture Solves an Evolutionary Problem for Parents," *Journal of Cognition & Culture* 13, no. 3/4 (September 2013): 204, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685373-12342092.

[11]David Moonseok Park and Julian C Müller, "The Challenge That Confucian Filial Piety Poses for Korean Churches," *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (2014): 3, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.1959.

[12]Voon Chin and Loh, "Filial Piety and Intergenerational Co-Residence," 664.

in secondary schools.[13] To promote strong family and intergenerational ties, the government launched a Family Values campaign in 1994. The "Five Shared Family Values" clause that would enhance the well-being of families and undergird the progress of Singapore were identified as:

(1) love, care and concern
(2) mutual respect
(3) filial responsibility
(4) commitment
(5) communication.[14]

> Embracing these five values would not only enhance a family's well-being but would also serve as the foundation to facilitate Singapore's continued progress. The ideas of respecting the elderly and of children looking after their aged parents remain strong as an ideal among the Chinese in Singapore.[15]

Besides running campaigns and educating the younger generation on cultural values, a filial piety law was passed in Singapore that states:

> Any person domiciled and resident in Singapore who is of or above 60 years of age and who is unable to maintain himself or herself adequately (called in this section the parent) may apply to the Tribunal for an order that one or more of the person's children pay him or her a monthly allowance or any other periodical payment or a lump sum for his or her maintenance.[16]

Two customs that are traditional yardsticks used by the Chinese to express filial piety are co-residence and monthly allowance.[17] In traditional Chinese families, the eldest son will usually take on the responsibility of looking after his aged parents by staying together under one roof, together with his own family and children. This will create a three-generational family household that is the ideal symbol of social

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[13]Terence Chong, "Christian Activism in Singapore," in *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 39-40.

[14]Ah Keng Kau et al., *Understanding Singaporeans: Values, Lifestyles, Aspirations and Consumption Behaviours* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2006), 17.

[15]Voon Chin and Loh, "Filial Piety and Intergenerational Co-Residence," 664.

[16]"Maintenance of Parents Act 1995 - Singapore Statutes Online," https://sso.agc.gov.sg:5443/Act/MPA1995. (accessed September 9, 2023)

[17]Voon Chin and Loh, "Filial Piety and Intergenerational Co-Residence," 669.

family success and self-fulfilment.[18] Because of the scarcity of land in Singapore, most families stay in public housing or HDB flats (apartments) built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), Singapore's public housing authority. With an exploding population, most of these flats are small, comfortable living spaces for small families. To encourage the extended family unit to stay together, several incentive schemes by the HDB were launched. Married children applying for new government housing were given incentives to choose the location of their new homes to be near to their parents. This model will help families stay in close proximity and promote bonding where children can easily return to their parents' home for meals, or grandparents can be tapped upon to babysit the grandchildren. "Many practices may demonstrate filial piety but inter-generational co-residence remains as an ideal because of its history as the main manifestation of filial piety."[19] Besides staying near to one another, adult children will usually give a monthly allowance to their parents as a sign of honour and filial piety. "Other forms of expression include bringing goods when visiting parents, taking them on family trips locally or abroad, taking them out to eat, meeting to have long conversations, and simply being together in a house."[20] "Regardless of whether filial piety is practised or is merely symbolic, or that its practised form varies, filial piety serves as the 'glue' that binds the family together."[21]

Ancestor Worship

Ancestor worship has been around since ancient China, shaping thought and behaviour for millennia. Evidence of ancestor veneration rituals and activities has been discovered in archaeological sites dating as early as the Neolithic period. These artifacts point to an evolution from group ancestor veneration to individual ancestor worship.[22]

Such practices are also closely intertwined with the classical Confucianism value of filial piety, which emphasizes respect, obedience, and care for one's parents and ancestors. Within Confucianism's system of ethics and philosophy, ancestor worship is recognized as an expression of filial piety.[23] The significance of ancestor worship in Confucianism lies

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[18]Ibid., 662.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 670.

[21]Voon Chin and Loh, 671.

[22]Li Liu, "Who Were the Ancestors? The Origins of Chinese Ancestral Cult and Racial Myths," *Antiquity* 73, no. 281 (September 1999): 602-3.

[23]Chee-Beng Tan, "Chinese Religion in Malaysia: A General View," *Asian Folklore Studies* 42, no. 2 (1983): 222, https://doi.org/10.2307/1178483.

in its role in fostering family unity, social regulation, and the enduring connection between the living and the dead.

Confucius was known to be an agnostic and indifferent to the religious beliefs and the supernatural while at the same time, preoccupied with upholding codes of etiquette.[24] He believed perfect harmony and equilibrium in society could be achieved when the relationship and behaviour towards one another are correct. Especially in the paired relationships:

1. Father to son (kindness from father/piety from son [*filial piety*])
2. Elder brother to younger brother (gentility from elder/humility from younger)
3. Husband to wife (righteous behavior from husband/obedience from wife)
4. Elder to junior (consideration from elder/deference from junior)
5. Ruler to a subject (benevolence from ruler/loyalty from a subject)[25]

Remembering and representing one's ancestors therefore demonstrates deep respect and devotion to one's lineage, serving as a way of maintaining strong connections to one's roots.[26] Traditional customs associated with ancestor worship bring entire families together, enabling them to express their collective identity. These rituals address the social and psychological needs of individuals and provide a way to instil moral values which in turn reinforce proper behaviour. In this way early ancestor worship was more of a family institution and social custom verses a religion; for the living rather than the dead.[27] Only after the death of Confucius did his disciples gradually mix his teachings with the religious practices already existing in China. Therefore today, Confucius is deified and worshiped as one of the many Chinese deities.[28]

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[24]Garry R. Morgan, *Understanding World Religions in 15 Minutes a Day* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 126.

[25]Ibid., 128–129.

[26]Seok-Choon Lew, Woo-Young Choi, and Hye Suk Wang, "Confucian Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Korea: The Significance of Filial Piety," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 175.

[27]Henry Newton Smith, "Chinese Ancestor Practices and Christianity: Toward a Viable Contextualization of Christian Ethics in a Hong Kong Setting" (Ph.D. diss., Fort Worth, TX, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 78-79.

[28]Tan, "Chinese Religion in Malaysia," 223.

Today, the rituals and practices associated with ancestor worship are more religious than veneration. Soul or *ling-hun* is "central to the study of Chinese folk religion."[29] The underlying belief behind these rituals is that the souls of the deceased continue their existence after death as *'ancestors'* and are able to interact with and influence the lives of their descendants. "The ancestors behave, in certain contexts, much as normal living people are expected to behave, and they have distinct personalities within the bounds of this normality, as do the living."[30] Ancestral rites are necessary and must be carried out by family members to ensure the continued well-being of ancestors as well as to secure blessings and favour for themselves. Ancestors are viewed as having the power to influence, protect, bring good luck, help friends, and harm enemies.[31]

Different cultures have different sets of criteria to define ancestorhood. In Chinese folk religion, ancestors are seen as the souls of one's paternal forebears. If the deceased were exceptionally powerful or praiseworthy in life, their soul could become a deity. Otherwise, if they lacked descendants or died a violent death, then their soul would become a ghost.

The ancestral worship and filial piety landscape in Singapore is transforming due to several influential factors. The relentless emphasis on education in Singapore has propelled many individuals, including the Chinese population, towards a more secular and critical-thinking mindset. As the country continues to urbanize and modernize, traditional practices often associated with rural settings are gradually giving way to contemporary urban lifestyles. Secularization, in tandem with globalization and cultural adaptation, has led to a shift in priorities, with some individuals placing less emphasis on ancestral worship and more on secular values. This evolving landscape is particularly evident in the generational divide, where younger Singaporean Chinese tend to adopt more modern and secular worldviews compared to their elders. Despite these changes, it's important to note the coexistence of traditional and contemporary practices as a hallmark of Singapore's multicultural society. Therefore today we see many individuals and families choosing to blend elements of both old and new in their expressions of filial piety and ancestral reverence.

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[29]Stevan Harrell, "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (1979): 519, https://doi.org/10.2307/2053785.

[30]Harrell, 527.

[31]Park and Müller, "The Challenge That Confucian Filial Piety Poses for Korean Churches," 2.

Taoism

Taoism, as we understand it today, encompasses a multifaceted realm within Chinese culture and spirituality. This term carries a dual connotation, referring either to the Taoist religion or the Taoist school of philosophy. In the context of this paper, we will specifically focus on Taoism as a religion.

The origins of Taoism as a formalized religion can be traced back to a period coinciding with the spread of Buddhism in China. At first, Taoist religion and Buddhism reinforced one another mutually. Buddhist concepts were expressed in Taoist terms while Taoist religion incorporated many ideas from Buddhism."[32] Taoism also emerged from the rich tapestry of indigenous beliefs and mystical practices that characterized ancient China, including astrology, almanac studies, geomancy (Feng Shui), and divination. What sets Taoism apart is its syncretic nature, as it readily incorporates elements from other belief systems, particularly Buddhism, along with various folk religions. Central to Taoism is its main concern over immortality and the avoidance of death. Within the realm of Taoism, a pantheon of deities takes centre stage, and those who dedicate themselves to its practices are commonly referred to as Taoist priests.

In Singapore, most Taoist priests are not formally trained but learn the trade from their fathers or from other Taoist priests who have taken them as disciples. Without formal training, most Singaporean Taoist priests lack the theological aspect of the religion and tend to be more superstitious and materialistic. Most of them are also part-timers.[33]

One of the distinctive features of Taoism is the highly personalized nature of its religious expressions. The sacred text that serves as the foundational guide for Taoism is the Dao De Jing (道德经). However, it is essential to acknowledge that Taoism is not a monolithic or homogenous faith. Rather, it thrives on diversity, with different Taoist priests offering their interpretations of this revered text. Each Taoist priest, guided by their individual beliefs and spiritual journey, forms a unique connection with a specific set of patron deities. As a result, Taoism exists as a complex tapestry of beliefs, practices, and rituals, marked by a remarkable degree of fluidity and individuality.[34] In essence, Taoism is a religion that does not fit neatly into a box. There is not one

[32]Tan, "Chinese Religion in Malaysia," 224.

[33]Vivian Lim Tsui Shan, "Specializing in Death: The Case of the Chinese in Singapore," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 23, no. 2 (1995): 72.

[34]Tan, "Chinese Religion in Malaysia," 228-32.

Taoist sect, but many. This religion is as diverse as the immense number of deities it includes.

In Singapore, Taoism is listed as one of the country's major religions, among Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Although Taoism and Buddhism are listed as distinct religions, most Chinese practice a mix of both in their religious rituals. However, those groups professing Taoism as their religion have the lowest adherents and in my observation, their percentage has been on the decline for many years. This waning could be due to the influence of several factors such as modernisation, secularisation, higher education, changing worldviews, and generational differences.

Taoist Funeral Rites

Death Rituals

Death is a profoundly distressing occurrence, and if not managed appropriately, there can be negative consequences. Funerals or death rites are therefore needed to help families get through the separation and make sense of the meaning of life and death. According to Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, the tradition of death rites serves several purposes:[35]

1. It makes sense of the loss and gives direction for the next steps.
2. It provides a set of rituals that help the family to mourn, grieve, and continue the relationship with the deceased.
3. It helps to define the new social order for familial relationships.
4. It transforms the deceased into ancestors, to continue the mutual benefits for the living and the dead.

According to Howell and Paris, rituals can be classified into three significant categories—rites of intensification, rites of affliction, and rites of passage. Rites of intensification involve making aspects of society, beliefs, values, or behaviours more vivid, heightened, or authentic than they are in everyday life. Conversely, rites of affliction are rituals aimed at easing suffering or solving a problem. Finally, rites of passage or life-

[35]Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 102–3.

cycle ceremonies transition individuals or groups from one stage of life to another.[36]

Funeral death rituals are rites of passage and are important because, in the uncertainty of life after death, these rituals can bring family members a sense of security and predictability. Through religious rituals, people can then make sense of the world around them.[37] In the case of the departed loved ones, funeral death rituals transit the departed from parents or elders into the higher hierarchy of ancestors. And as long as the descendants continue to remember and represent their ancestors, the eternal existence of ancestors is confirmed.[38]

Preparation for Death

Although discussion of death is a taboo topic in Chinese culture, it is not uncommon for families to purchase and reserve popular spaces with "good fengshui" in temples, clan ancestral halls, or funeral homes to house ancestral tablets. This practice is popular in Singapore today as the family homes are very small apartment spaces. Most families have difficulty fitting a family altar table in the main living room. As daily offerings or sacrifices to the ancestors are required, the younger generation often prefers to turn these rituals over to specialists such as temple monks and funeral home staff. They ensure daily rituals are kept up and even organise important ancestral veneration and worship events on important days such as the Qingming festival and the death anniversaries of loved ones.

As the loved one nears death, family members are expected to be present to bid their final farewell to them. Not being present connotes the idea of being unfilial. Even children who are out of the country are expected to return in time. However, pregnant women are not required to be at the bedside of the dying for fear that the spirit of the dead might enter the unborn child and possess it.[39]

Preparation of the Body

As with Taoist customs and tradition, it is usually the eldest son and daughter-in-law who will do the ritual cleansing of the body. "This ritual

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[36]Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 189-91.

[37]Howell and Paris, 183.

[38]Lew, Choi, and Wang, "Confucian Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Korea," 175.

[39]Tong, *Chinese Death Rituals in Singapore*, chap. 2, under "Preparation for death."

washing is to purify and prepare the dead for their journey through hell and their final passage to heaven."[40] The blessed water for cleansing is to be purchased from the Earth Deity using joss paper.[41] The deceased is then brought to the funeral home for the embalming process. The children will choose the deceased's best set of clothes for the deceased to wear. Red colour will usually be omitted as red is meant for auspicious and joyous occasions. Alternatively, in some dialect traditions, a "longevity costume" (寿衣) is used to dress the deceased. This is to show that the deceased lived a long and good life. The body is then placed in the coffin together with personal articles that they would usually wear or carry around (spectacles, dentures, comb, etc.). A mirror guides their way, a bag of rice ensures they won't go hungry, and paper money (joss paper) for use in the Netherworld all accompany the departed. To further prevent them from becoming a hungry spirit, the eldest son symbolically feeds the deceased a spoonful of rice. Additionally, a pearl is gently placed in their mouth to protect their journey into the afterlife. The encoffining process concludes with the lid of the coffin secured by four nails. A fifth nail, known as the "posterity nail," is then added by the eldest son atop the coffin, symbolizing that the departed will have many generations of descendants who will continue to honor and remember them.[42]

Funeral Wake

Once the loved one has passed on, the funeral home from which the family has engaged will handle all funeral arrangements. This will include the three, five, or seven nights of the funeral wake where family and friends are given the opportunity to come and pay their final respects to the deceased and to show support and express condolence to the grieving family members. Traditionally in China, the wake could potentially last for years and an auspicious date and place had to be selected for burial. Today, however, due to various economic and social reasons, wakes are typically between three to seven days. In Chinese belief, even numbers signify completeness and odd numbers signify continuity. Hence odd number of days are selected for the duration of the wake to show that

[40]Chee Kiong Tong, "The Inheritance of the Dead: Mortuary Rituals among the Chinese in Singapore," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 21, no. 2 (1993): 133.

[41]Tong, chap. 2, under "Preparation for Death."

[42]Tong, "The Inheritance of the Dead," 133-34.

the deceased loved one will continue to "live" on and perform important roles in the family.[43]

The average Chinese individual believes in the existence of three souls for each person. Through funeral rites, one of the souls of the deceased is assisted in their journey to purgatory. This is achieved by burning paper replicas of material objects to help the deceased reduce their suffering, through bribery of hell officials and by procuring a better future life for them. A second soul resides with the dead body and receives special attention during major festivals such as Qing Ming. The third soul resides in the ancestral tablet placed on the home altar, where it enjoys regular care as part of the family.

A reciprocal connection is established between the living and the deceased, wherein both are interdependent. The underlying reasons that propel these rituals are a general fear of the dead, the hope of receiving blessings, and a wish to guarantee the well-being of those who have passed on. Respect, appreciation, and love for deceased parents along with a longing to perpetuate their legacy and memories all serve as powerful motivators behind the customs of venerating ancestors. Furthermore, the conviction in the ancestors' reliance on their living descendants for sustenance in the afterlife significantly underscores the nature of these ceremonial practices. All of these constitute an expression of continued filial piety. For the living, the desire to concretely express their love, compassion and remembrance of the departed loved ones is motive for participating in these funeral rites as well as ancestral sacrifices.

Mourning Clothes

The moment following the death of the parent or elder, immediate family members have to don mourning clothes. All the family members will don either black or white tops and pants. On the sleeve of each top, a small square piece of cloth with be pinned on for the entire duration of the funeral wake. From the differentiated colour of the cloth patch, outsiders will be able to determine the relationship of the family member to the deceased. On the final night of the wake, more elaborate mourning clothes will be worn. Outerwear made of coarse materials will be worn on top of the T-shirts and pants. Again, differentiated coarse clothing will be given to different members of the family to denote their relationship to the deceased. A sash will be tied around the waist of the family members.

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[43]Chee Kiong Tong and Lily Kong, "Religion and Modernity: Ritual Transformations and the Reconstruction of Space and Time," *Social & Cultural Geography* 1, no. 1 (January 2000): 40, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649369950133476.

This sash cannot be knotted but tucked into the garment as the belief is that a knot will signify that the deceased will be trapped and unable to complete their journey.[44]

During the wake, Taoist monks will also be engaged to perform religious services to help the dead transit to the afterlife. Services are carried out with family members to transfer merit to the deceased spiritual account and assist their progress through purgatory. With the belief that the deceased still needs the usual necessities of life, burning paper replicas of the goods needed to ease one's sufferings in the underworld is done during the funeral service: houses, servants, cars, clothes, money, handphones, aircon, television and so forth.

Burial and Cremation

On the final day of the funeral wake, friends, family, and relatives get ready to send the deceased on the final journey to the grave site or columbarium. Usually, a Taoist priest will be present to perform the burial rituals. Together with a short period of chanting, food offerings will be placed on the altar in front of the coffin. The eldest son will kneel and offer each dish of food to the deceased to eat before the journey. Then the family will kneel beside the coffin while the rest of the friends and relatives pay their final respects to the deceased. The procession of walking behind the hearse begins as it slowly moves out of the funeral site. One superstition is that any person other than the family who touches the coffin will be struck with bad luck.[45] That is why all the people will avert their faces and not look at the coffin as it is being placed into the hearse. In Singapore, most of the deceased will be cremated and the ashes put into an urn to be kept in a columbarium, temple, clan hall, or at home.

Biblical/Theological Issues

Can the Dead Return?

In Chinese beliefs, ancestors have the power to influence (either good or bad), can eat the sacrificed food, and their spirits can reside

[44]Smith, "Chinese Ancestor Practices and Christianity: Toward a Viable Contextualization of Christian Ethics in a Hong Kong Setting," 33-34.

[45]Tong, *Chinese Death Rituals in Singapore*, chap. 2, under "The Process of Death."

in the ancestral tablets. Fear of this power to harm and desire for their power to bless are motivating factors for ancestor worship.

In Christianity however, God is the sovereign power over all creation. He who gave life is the only one who can take life. After death, Christians are immediately brought into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). For the wicked, they will enter the underworld called Sheol in the Old Testament (hades in the New Testament). There they will suffer in torment until the final judgment where they will be raised to stand before Christ. Ultimately, they will be cast into Gehenna, the lake of fire.[46]

Therefore, the dead are cut off from the living without any connection between them and no power to curse or bless the living. They cannot return. We are also not to be in communication with the departed. "Many of the ceremonies performed for the deceased ancestor before the burial and memorial services after the burial fall into the category of necromancy and being in contact with the spirits."[47] But God can sometimes bring them back for his specific purpose. For example, the raising of Lazarus in John 11:38-44 and the spirit of Samuel in 1 Samuel 28.[48] For the Christians, we await the blessed return of our Lord Jesus Christ that will signify the time of reunion for all the saints of God, the living and the resurrected dead. Our ancestors might not be with us now but eventually, there will be a great reunion in the new heaven and new earth.

Biblical filial piety

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12 NIV 2011). Honour is filial piety and scriptural filial piety is directed towards the living and not the dead. Both the Old and New Testaments talk about honouring parents and the results that follow. Unlike ancestor worship, the motives, beliefs, and actions that undergird biblical filial piety are love and respect. For Chinese Christians, there is the same need for a concrete expression of remembering and representing their loved ones

[46]Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Dead, Abode of The," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 591-593.

[47]Jeffrey Oh, "The Gospel-Culture Encounter at Chinese Funeral Rites," *Journal of Asian Mission* 4, no. 2 (2002): 197.

[48]Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2013), 112-14.

and especially showing their filial piety even after death.[49] Often, the pressure from family members, shame, and guilt drive Christians to participate in the funeral rites and ancestor worship rituals.

Power Encounters

"At their core, folk religions are human efforts to control life."[50] The purpose of ancestral worship is to gain the power to manipulate outcomes in life, to trade sacrifices and offerings for blessings and well-being, and to have control over one's enemies.

For the Christian believer, there is a need to understand the concept of power in God's Kingdom. How the world views power is in opposition to God's view. The world desires power to demonstrate superiority and overcome resistance. Sometimes Christians, in their zeal to show God's superiority through powerful encounters with demonic forces in the form of healing and deliverance, forget that his power is based on his love. The Cross is a good example of this. Instead of hate and retribution, love and redemption powerfully overcome the enemy. When there is a need to have powerful encounters with Satan and his cohorts, God will empower Christians with the necessary gifts and resources. Under submission to God, the believer can confidently manifest God's power without fear. The only caution to heed is not to go after the sensational and use this power of God for one's personal glory and prestige.[51]

Bridging the Cultural Differences

In today's context, ancestor worship is becoming more of a social ritual supporting the Chinese sense of tradition. Although it still carries religious elements and superstitious practices, the social element of the ritual is the main draw for families to come together, especially during major festivals.

Before examining the re-interpretation and recommendations for the Christian response to the funeral rites as discussed above, one must first look at the four adaptation theories proposed by Smith.[52]

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[49]Alexander Jebadu, "Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of Its Incorporation into the Christian Faith," *Exchange* 36, no. 3 (2007): 278-79.

[50]Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 371.

[51]Ibid., 373-4.

[52]Smith, "Chinese Ancestor Practices and Christianity: Toward a Viable Contextualization of Christian Ethics in a Hong Kong Setting," 90-163.

The Displacement model strongly believes that ancestor worship is wrong, viewing it as idolatry or influenced by evil forces. According to this view, Christians should completely reject all ancestor-related practices. It suggests that Western Christian civilization is superior to Chinese culture and argues that fear drives people to perform ancestral rituals to avoid misfortune and divine punishment. This model encourages a confrontational approach, insisting on the absolute authority of Christ.

The Substitution model recognises the social and emotional value of ancestor worship but still sees it as incompatible with Christianity. It suggests replacing certain aspects of ancestor worship with Christian-friendly practices. For instance, instead of traditional offerings, Christians can visit and tidy the graves of their ancestors during festivals like Qing Ming, placing flowers on the graves and observing a moment of silence. However, critics worry that these substitutes might become shallow and miss the deeper meanings of the rituals.

The Fulfilment model takes a different approach. It believes that Christian faith can complement and fulfil the positive aspects of ancestor worship while discarding the superstitious elements. This model emphasizes finding common ground between Christian values and aspects of ancestor worship, such as the importance of virtuous living, the Golden Rule, and filial piety. It aims to enrich and complete the meaning behind these rituals and sees continuity between Christian ethics and Chinese values.

The Accommodation model views ancestral practices as primarily social and ethical rather than religious. It seeks to understand and appreciate different cultures without imposing Christian values. This model emphasizes the ethical motives behind ancestral rites and looks for commonality with Christian principles. It promotes respect and tolerance for other cultures and allows Christians to participate in some traditional practices while avoiding syncretism (blending different religious beliefs). However, it's cautious about practices that may still carry religious connotations, as they could lead to confusion or idolatry.

Reinterpretation of Funeral Rites

The approach that will be best suited for responding to the Chinese funeral rites and ancestor worship is one of contextualization. In the biblical and theological context, Christianity and culture are not exclusive entities; rather, they intersect and intertwine in profound ways. The Bible itself reflects the idea that faith is lived out within cultural contexts. Throughout Scripture, we find instances of God engaging with diverse cultures, speaking to people in their languages and through their unique

traditions. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, who lived as a cultural being in his time, further illustrates this point. The Apostle Paul's teachings emphasize the transformative power of Christ's message within various cultural settings. He famously stated, 'I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some' (1 Corinthians 9:22). This verse highlights the adaptability of Christianity to different cultures while preserving its core truths. Thus, the Bible suggests that Christianity, far from excluding culture, can thrive within it, embracing the richness of human diversity while conveying eternal truths.

As the loved one approaches death, it is important that the Christian family member be present, especially if it is one's parents or grandparents. It is a tremendously sad and stressful time for the family and might be a fearful time for the dying family member. If the majority of family members are of a different religion, it is best to be respectful and begin to internally pray for the peace of God to reign in the place, among the family, and especially for the one who is dying. As for the belief that pregnant ladies cannot be around the dying for fear of the spirit going into the unborn child upon death, the response to this will depend upon the context. If she is a Christian and is the daughter or granddaughter of the dying person and has a close relationship, she cannot be denied the opportunity to be with her loved one. As Christians, we believe that the child is a gift of God and as the Holy Spirit is in the mother, the child is protected as well and no evil can come upon either of them without God's permission.

In the preparation for death, if the family opts for a Taoist funeral, then most of the elements involved in preparing the dead will be religious and should be avoided by the Christian. However, the Christian can still participate by helping to choose the favourite clothes to be worn by the deceased and accompanying the family in selecting the coffin and photograph. Should the Christian be the eldest son of the deceased and be expected to perform the religious cleaning of the body, they can respectfully explain and decline and give the right to the alternative person.

During the funeral wake, the Christian should participate in non-religious elements. In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to wear sackcloth on occasions of grief, sorrow, and repentance. The death of a loved one is an occasion of grief. "Black and white clothing is fairly 'universal' mourning attire and is a cultural rite that Christians can abide by to show our love and respect to our deceased ancestor."[53] Black or white tops and pants can be worn and the cloth patch pinned on the

[53]Oh, "The Gospel-Culture Encounter at Chinese Funeral Rites," 198.

sleeve is permissible as these have no religious connotations except the designation of how the family member is related to the deceased. This is to help those coming to pay their respects to family members during the wake. The elaborate course outerwear is to be avoided as these are worn for the final night's funeral rituals conducted and led by the Taoist priests. Christian members should not participate. Instead, they can still express solidarity with the family by offering to take care of the guests at the wake.

Bowing in Chinese and other East Asian settings is an act of paying respect and showing honour or greeting someone who is older or in a higher authority. During a funeral wake and especially during the religious portion of the wake service conducted by the Taoist priests, bowing is a form of worship to deities and the deceased. However, there are other occasions during the funeral wake when bowing is devoid of religious components and is in the context of paying respect–when visitors come and pay their final respect, they will typically stand in front of the coffin and bow their heads slightly. Holding or offering joss sticks or offering of joss sticks are also to be avoided as this is intimately associated with idolatrous worship of gods and the deceased.[54]

Because of the folk belief that the spirit of the deceased is still residing in the physical body and that the spirit has to be helped into the other world through religious rituals, Christians should silently pray for their living family members, that God's benevolence and kindness will help to preserve them and allow opportunities in the future for them to respond to the Gospel.

Conclusion

Churches should continue to explore, examine, and find points of connection between Christianity and Chinese culture. However, simply prohibiting ancestral worship is to leave a vacuum without solving the problem. Efforts must be made to help Chinese Christians perpetuate the values of filial piety, remembrance of the dead, and unity of the family.[55]

As a start, the church should encourage its members to continue participating in the family's commemorative rites concerning the departed loved one. As death is always a time of great emotional stress and anxiety, the Christian must develop a sensitivity to the family's need to express grief in tangible actions. To help Christians express filial piety wholeheartedly and without being burdened by ignorance of

[54]Ibid.

[55]Addison, "Chinese Ancestor-Worship and Protestant Christianity," 147.

Christianity's beliefs and values, the church must help contextualize and provide clear guidelines.

Through continued study and examination of Scripture and Singaporean Chinese culture, greater clarity and guidance will help Chinese Christians navigate this very important value of filial piety within their culture and tradition, especially in times of great emotional stress and grief from the passing on of loved ones. A sensitive Christian approach to funeral rites with a clear understanding of what is religious versus what is cultural can lovingly bridge the gap between the Gospel and ancestor worship.

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Taungbyone Nat Festival and the Response of the Church

by Ngo Lam Khai

Introduction

The Tuangbyone Nat Festival is one of the most popular animistic festivals in Myanmar. When Anawrahta, the great king of the ancient city of Bagan, unified all of Burma into one kingdom in the eleventh century, he made Theravada Buddhism the state religion. However, there were several animistic religions already in existence at that time. The proponents of these animistic religions worshiped spirit beings called *nats*.[1] Anawrahta tried to abolish *nat* worship but he was unsuccessful; the people continued to worship them. The Taungbyone Nat Festival, the topic of this paper, was started during the reign of this king. The festival is still held at the end of August in Taungbyone village each year, and honors the two *nat* brothers, Shwepyingyi, and Shwepyinlay, known popularly as the Taungbyone brothers.[2]

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to explore the background, historical context, practices, belief systems, and worldviews of animism in Myanmar based on the Taungbyone Nat Festival and to describe how the church should respond.

Scope and Limitation

It should be noted that this study will not cover all thirty-seven *nats* and all the belief systems of animism in Myanmar. The only *nats* that will be examined are the Taungbyone *nats*: Shwepyingyi and Shwepyinlay.

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[1]Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 1.

[2]Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 113.

The Meaning of *Nat* and *Natkadaw*

The term "*nat*" comes from the Sanskrit word *natha*, signifying a protector or lord. People believe *nats* are spirits that dominate a group of people or a group of objects,[3] and that they have dominion over a particular village or district. The domination of a *nat* is both territorial and personal. The worship of *nats* is entirely indigenous in origin developed from a form of animism that is still popular among some of Myanmar's mountainous peoples.[4]

Believers think that the *nat* guardian of a village has authority over all those born in the village or born into a family in the village, no matter where they are located now. They also believe the *nat* has authority over all who come to his village while they are there. Supposedly the *nat* will not harm them, but he will protect those who recognize his dominion. This recognition of *nat* dominion can be expressed by an offering of rice or fruit, a few supplications, or a gesture.[5]

Originally, *nats* were perceived as impersonal, and local, such as: "the god of the banyan tree," "the hill," "the lake just outside the village," and "the *nat* who protects the village." Later on, thirty-seven individual and national *nats* were identified, and are still revered throughout the country.[6]

Since Anawrahta could not abolish *nat* worship in the country,[7] he eventually accepted the *nats* into the Buddhist faith assigning them the position of subordinates. The images of the thirty-seven *nats* were placed in the temples on the same pedestal as the Buddha and depicted as worshiping the Buddha. This established the pattern of Burmese Buddhism in which gods and spirits are powers that are glorified and appeased in the right context but are always subordinated to the transcendent power and value of the Buddha.[8]

The word *nat* means "spirit" and *kadaw* means "wife;" therefore, *natkadaw* means the "wife of a *nat"* or "a spirit medium." Nyunt says, "Nat-believers can encounter *nats* through possessed *natkadaws* (spirit mediums), an oracle, a medium, a diviner or a cult officiant, as they

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[3]Russell H. Bowers Jr., ed., *Folk Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Cambodia: Training of Timothys, 2003), 22.

[4]Aung, 2.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., 4.

[8]Winston L. King, "Burma," in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese,* ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 103.

take a mediator's role in the relationship between the *nats* and their followers."[9] Benedict Brac de la Perriere says, "Spirit mediums are supposed to have been personally called by a *nat*, and seduced by him, that is to say, to have been chosen by him to become spirit mediums-as expressed in Burmese as *natkadaw*, or *nat* wives."[10] The consecration of a new *natkadaw* is seen as a marriage to a specific *nat* within the pantheon, transforming the *natkadaw* into a medium through a process of being called upon by a specific *nat*.[11]

The *natkadaw* is also called a shaman. A shaman is not just a mediator between the *nat* and the cult members, but is also considered a *nat's* wife, although not all *natkadaws* are women. Her responsibility is to appease her husband (as well as other *nats*) by dancing.[12] Steyne notes, "Shamans are thought to be in direct contact with the spirits. They act as mediums by going into trances, or use others as mediums to channel messages."[13]

Taungbyone Village

Taungbyone village where the festival is held is about twenty kilometers north of Mandalay, the last capital of the Burmese monarchy, located in central Myanmar. It is typically a hot, dry, and dusty place. During the festival period, all the space in the village is occupied by temporary infrastructures. The festival includes a section of the audience that is replaced each day as well as other participants, such as fairground people and mediums, who arrive with their group of clients, and settle into temporary bamboo camps before the festival begins.[14]

There is also a large, temporary market. It consists of all kinds of stalls selling food, fruits, flowers, wares, toys, clothes, tools, handicrafts, and

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[9]Peter Thein Nyunt, "Christian Response to Burmese Nat Worship in Myanmar," in *Seeking the Unseen: Spiritual Realities in the Buddhist World,* ed. Paul H. De Neui (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), 260.

[10]Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, "Nats' Wives or 'Children of Nats': from Spirit Possession to Transmission among the Ritual Specialists of the Cult of the Thirty-seven Lords," *Asian Ethnology* 68, no. 2 (2009): 285, https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid= 4&sid=a1c564f4-bd88-46f9-acb8-258fed0eb887%40redis.

[11]Benedicte Brac dela Perriere, Perriere, "Being a Spirit Medium in Contemporary Burma," in *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, eds. Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 165.

[12]Spiro, 205-206.

[13]Philip M. Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists* (Columbia, SC: Impact International Foundation, 1996), 154.

[14]Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, "The Taungbyone Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords," in *Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Monique Skidmore (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 65-71.

jewelry as well as restaurants, side shows, traditional Burmese drama, or *Anyeint* (*Anyeint* is a traditional Burmese entertainment form that combines dance with instrumental music, song, and comedy routines, in theatrical performances). There are crowds of people shopping, dining, dancing, partying, and having fun on the premises.[15]

Historical Background

As aforementioned, the Taungbyone Nat Festival has its roots in ancient Burmese animistic practices that predate the arrival of Buddhism. The festival's origin is tied to the legend of Shewbyingyi and Shewbyinlay who are two famous brothers born to a Muslim father and an ogress mother who lived during the Bagan period.[16] Byatta, the father of Shwepyingyi and Shwepyinlay, was given the job of flower officer by Anawrahta, the king. The king assigned him the daily task of collecting flowers from Mount Popa and bringing them to Bagan. Unfortunately, Byatta delayed going back to Bagan because he loved his wife Mekuwun and his kids so much. This irritated the king.[17] When he failed for a third time to fulfill his duty of providing the king with daily flowers, he was executed.[18]

Byatta's wife died of a broken heart and became a *nat* called Popa Medaw. Anawrahta took Byatta's two sons, Shwepyingyi and Shwepyinlay, under royal patronage. They became heroes and served him.[19] After a few years, Anawrahta wished to possess the tooth of the Buddha, which was held in China. To obtain the Buddha's tooth, the two brothers went to China with Anawrahta's troops. After taking it, Anawrahta placed the tooth in a case carried by a white elephant. On the return journey, when they arrived at Taungbyone village, the elephant stopped and knelt there. The king constructed a pagoda on the spot.[20]

While the Pagoda was being built, Anawrahta ordered all his soldiers to share in its construction by contributing one brick each. The Taungbyone brothers chose not to partake in this activity since they were more interested in playing marbles. The monarch commanded them to

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[15]Ibid., 71-74.

[16]Daw Khin Moe Moe Kyu, "Taungbyone Pwe: Motivating of the Ritual in Myanmar," *Academia* (Aug 10, 2023), 5, https://www.academia.edu/10381446/Taungbyone_Pwe_motivating_of_the_ritual_in_Myanmar.

[17]Spiro, 113-114.

[18]Wilhelm Klein, *Insight Guides: Myanmar Burma*, 1st ed. (Singapore: Apa Publications, 1992) 210.

[19]Aung, 73.

[20]Spiro, 114-115.

be punished by being struck with a short cane. The brothers managed to get away, but they were eventually apprehended near Taungbyone. There, the brothers were beaten with bamboo sticks with the assistance of the locals, but due to their superhuman strength, the beatings had no impact on them. However, in the end, their testicles were crushed. Thus, they passed away and evolved into *nats*, also known as the Taungbyone Brother Lords.[21]

On the king's return journey to Bagan, his boat abruptly stopped. The two *nat* brothers appeared posthumously when the king used a stick to beat the waves of the river. They reportedly threatened to stop him unless he provided them with a place to reside. The king ordered that a temple be erected for them in Taungbyone.[22]

Later, people started worshiping the two *nat* brothers and other *nats* through offerings and dancing at Taungbyone village. People called this practice the Taungbyone Nat Festival and still celebrate it every year to appease the two *nat* brothers. The brothers are numbered among the thirty-seven great *nats* and revered for their powers. The Burmese believe that these two *nats* are their ancestors who can bless, heal, and protect them. They also believe that they can contact them through *natkadaws* during the Taungbyone Festival.

Practices

Worship (Propitiation to the *Nats*)

Tens of thousands of people attend the Taungbyone Festival each year. Since the ancient land of these brother *nats* is quite large, a big portion of the participants come because of inherited responsibilities to appease them. Others show up on their own initiative regardless of whether the two brothers are their supposed ancestral spirits.[23] It should be noted that the Burmese people worship *nats* to attain success in their earthly lives, not for salvation. There are different types of propitiation: offerings provided by laypeople, and dancing and other ceremonial actions carried out by *natkadaws*.[24]

[21]Ibid., 115.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid., 116.
[24]Ibid., 119.

Bringing Offerings to the Shrine

The Taungbyone brothers' shrine is undoubtedly the most spectacular *nat* shrine in all of Myanmar. The usual shrine is a miniature house-like structure attached to a tree or resting on a pole. However, this Taungbyone brothers' shrine is an ornate ark built at one end of a very large open-walled meeting hall called the Nat Palace (*nat nun*). The *nat* images are preserved inside the ark, which is only opened on rare occasions but is left open throughout the festival. Offerings are deposited on an "altar" in front of the ark, and a *nat* dance is performed both on an elevated stage and in the large hall below the ark.[25]

Since *nat* propitiation is a private issue, occupying only a few minutes, it is similar to Buddhist worship in that it is composed mostly of individual offerings and brief prayers.[26] The *nat* votaries can deliver their gifts to the shrine on any day of the festival. The usual donations include coconuts, bananas, clothes, cash, alcohol, bouquets, and ferns. After pressing the ferns against the images of the brothers, *natkadaws* return them to the person who offered them. It is thought that the power (*mana*) from the images, which has been transferred to the ferns, would bring the owner luck and rewards in the form of money.[27]

Tradition prescribes the nature of the *nat*-human interaction as well as the type and quantity of contributions that various households must make. Some families choose to display their contribution rather than deliver it to the *nats*, in actuality keeping it for themselves. Some families obtain an exchange offer from the *nats* after presenting their original offering.[28]

Dances

After setting flowers on the altar, many worshippers join the vast groups of people who are already dancing before the *nats*. Shouting and chanting accompany the dancing, which can occasionally result in spirit possession.[29] In Myanmar, the "chief shaman" (*Nat-Ouk*), who is chosen by a custodian (the custodian is administrator for the keeper of the images of *nats*), is in charge of all *natkadaws*. Four prominent female *natkadaw* known as the "Queens" (*Mibaya*) serve as his underlings. They are the

[25]Ibid., 117.
[26]Ibid., 118.
[27]Ibid., 119-120.
[28]Ibid., 120.
[29]Ibid.

key dancers in the dances that represent the significant moments in the brothers' lives and which are performed at the ceremony. In addition, the custodian names four male *natkadaws* known as "royal ministers" (*Wungyi*), who preside over the rituals as the main male officiants.[30]

During the festival booths of the different *natkadaws* surround the palace on all four sides. Each booth features the image of the *nat* to whom the *natkadaw* is "married," and some booths have pictures of the traditional thirty-seven great *nats*. These *natkadaws* perform in the palace, and they are accessible as mediums for any issue said to fall under the purview of the *nats*—business, illness, marriage, divorce, and so forth—for a fee.[31]

The *natkadaws* dance, each in turn, in front of a great audience seated in the palace every evening. The dances are solitary and are done in front of the *nat* shrine.[32] Since these two *nats* died violently, it is said that dancing soothes and calms their thoughts. By donning a *nat's* outfit and playing out scenes from his narrative, the dancer is personifying the *nat* rather than just praising him. Thus, the dance serves as both a *nat* performance and a symbolic depiction of the *nat*.[33] The dance has yet a third connotation; while the *nat* is both a spectator of and symbolically portrayed in the dance it also takes possession of the *natkadaw* while she is dancing. Although it is the *natkadaw's* body that appears to be dancing, the dance is actually perceived as being performed by the *nat*. The dancing *natkadaw* is both the one making propitiation and the one receiving propitiation.[34]

Before each dance, a *natkadaw* who serves as the "announcer" sings the ode (*Nat Than*), which begins in the first person and recounts the life of the *nat* who is about to be impersonated and ends with an invocation to the *nat* to possess the dancer. The orchestra begins to play the *nat* song after this incantation (*Kadaw Gan*), and the *natkadaw* starts to dance. Only a few dancers are really in trances or states that resemble trances. However, each of them maintains that their *nats*, not they, are the ones dancing. Some claim they are not conscious of entering the dance and that they are only conscious of their surroundings once the music stops and they stop dancing.[35] They claim they are in an altered state of consciousness. When this occurs, another *natkadaw* sprays water on the dancer and rubs her head and back and occasionally fans her until she

[30]Ibid., 117.
[31]Ibid., 117-118.
[32]Ibid., 120.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid., 120-121.
[35]Ibid., 121.

awakens. It should be noted that towards the conclusion of the dancing, all dancers, whether in a trance or not, tremble and are fanned by another *natkadaw*.[36]

During the performance, the *natkadaws* undoubtedly give off the impression of being in a trance. The dancers look to be unconscious of their surroundings and act like they are controlled by someone other than themselves. This image is reinforced by the fact that the dancers continue to shake wildly with glassy eyes and blurred focus as the orchestral music reaches its last crescendo, signaling the conclusion of the dance.[37]

Two *natkadaws* who dance while holding swords (the brothers, it will be remembered, were warriors) perform the Taungbyone brothers' dance. The dancers carefully circle two piles of bananas that are set on the ground and gently poke them with their swords to represent hunting rabbits that were prepared as food for the brothers.[38] The audience watches the *natkadaws* dance sitting calmly on the palace floor, paying attention to the action with a serious yet passive curiosity.[39]

The Shower Ritual

The shower ritual consists of bathing the Taungbyone *nats*' images. The images are pulled behind a barge in small boats and carried on royal palanquins. The "ministers" and "queens," supported by the orchestra, dance in front of the images on the barge itself. The procession doesn't return to shore until mid-afternoon because the festival takes place in August when the plains are up to a mile deep in water on each side of the river.[40]

The Rabbit-offering Ceremony

The ritual for offering a rabbit takes place on the fifth day of the festival. A hamlet close to Taungbyone village is where the Taungbyone brothers had their first supper of wild rabbit meat. Every year the men of the village go out hunting and kill one male and one female rabbit on the fourth day of the celebration. They transport these sacrificed rabbits into Taungbyone village the next day to be presented to the *nat* brothers' images. After the rabbits are cooked, they are brought inside the palace.

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[36]Ibid. 122.
[37]Ibid., 121-122.
[38]Ibid., 122-123.
[39]Ibid., 123.
[40]Ibid.

The *natkadaws* subsequently consume them, which purports to give them magical power.[41]

Tree-cutting Ceremony

The tree-cutting ceremony takes place on the morning of the festival's last day. This rite entails the ritual cutting of two branches (one for each brother) from the *Leinbin* tree, which is planted on the day of the ritual. The *Leinbin* tree is a large hardwood tree bearing winged fruit pods (*Nauclea parviflora*). According to *nat* devotees, the ceremonial cutting down of the tree is a form of symbolic revenge against the *nats*. The chief queen suddenly grabs the top branch and uses her sword to chop off a chunk. The festival comes to an end with the destruction of the tree.[42]

Why the Burmese Perform the Taungbyone Festival

There are many reasons why the Burmese people annually perform Taungbyone Festival.

To Honor and Venerate Taungbyon Brothers *Nats*

The Burmese people annually celebrate the Taungbyone Nats Festival to honor and venerate the Taungbyone *nats* brothers. They believe that dancing before these *nats* appeases them.

To Seek Blessing, Fame, Healing, and Protection

Pilgrims from various parts of Myanmar gather at the festival grounds near Taungbyone village to pay homage to the *nats* and seek their blessing. As previously stated, *nats* are believed to influence various aspects of human life, from health and prosperity to misfortune and disease. People worship *nats* to receive blessings.

To Maintain Ancestral Heritage

The Taungbyone Nat Festival holds deep cultural and religious significance for the Burmese people. It serves as a bridge between ancient animistic beliefs and the country's Buddhist traditions. The festival provides a platform for people to express their spirituality, maintain

[41]Ibid., 124.
[42]Ibid.

connections with their ancestral heritage, and strengthen community bonds. Steyne notes, "Animists believe that death is a new birth into a spiritual body, without any change in character. They also believe that the living continue in dialogue with the dead and that the dead have the capacity to communicate with the living, either directly or through mediums."[43] Burmese people believe that during this festival, mediums can give them contact with their ancestors, the Taungbyone brothers.

Business

Local vendors and artisans set up stalls at the festival, selling traditional crafts, food, and other items. This contributes to the local economy and provides opportunities for income generation, particularly in rural areas. The festival gives *nat* practitioners and other business people an opportunity for commercial development at the festivals. The event features two different types of commerce: 1) shamanic enterprise, 2) festival-related products and guest houses.

Kyu notes, "The shamanic business is aimed at *Shwetait Sayin Win*. This means to attend and dance at the great temple. After attending the temple, most votaries believe that the *natkadaw* becomes more powerful than in the past."[44] Therefore, to become Shwetait Sayin Win, the *natkadaws* pay to dance inside the temple.

Secondly, the festival comprises a sizable marketplace for the public. Shops that accept donated flowers and offerings, traditional food vendors, guest houses, transportation companies, and the village's home-based weaving industry (*Yetkan Yone*) are all busy over these eight days.[45]

The Church Should Respond to the Taungbyone Nat Festival

Most foreign missionaries do not know the belief system and worldview of animism in Myanmar. As a result, many foreign missionaries and evangelists fail to effectively preach the gospel to the Burmese people. Therefore, it is important to deeply understand animism and how the church should respond to it.

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[43]Steyne, 184.
[44]Kyu, 8.
[45]Ibid., 7-8.

The Taungbyone Festival Celebrates Beliefs Which Directly Contradict the Theology of the Church

Anthropocentric

Nat worship is anthropocentric. People worship the Taungbyone *nat* brothers to bargain for blessing, healing, fame, and protection. This is a human effort to succeed in life; it focuses on self-centeredness and self-possession, which the Bible rejects. "The gospel calls humans to submit themselves to God, and to live not by control but by faith in His plan (Isa 8:19-22; Jer 27:9-10; Gal 5:20; Rev 21:8)."[46]

Idolatry

The physical representations and shrines dedicated to *nats* in the festival raise concerns about idolatry. The Second Commandment in the Bible explicitly warns against making graven images or idols to worship (Exod 20:3-6). Hence, the practices of worshiping *nats* or propitiating *nats* cannot be accepted by the Church. Believers must not turn to *nats* for anything because the source they are turning to is not from God but from Satan.

Spiritual Intermediaries

Nat mediums claim to serve as intermediaries between the human world and the *nats*. They claim to be possessed by the spirits while delivering messages and blessings to the devotees. According to Steyne, "These practitioners were called astrologers, mediums, diviners, magicians, soothsayers, sorcerers, spiritists, and false prophets. Any type of spiritistic practice was severely denounced and condemned in the Bible."[47] Steyne continues, "Priests are believed to know how to communicate with the spirit world, using words, rituals, correct posture, and clairvoyance. The priest is more efficacious than the layperson in his prayers and ritual performances."[48]

People believe that spirit mediums are spiritual intermediaries and they can bless people with spiritual power. God warned people not to

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[46]Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 371.

[47]Steyne, 186.

[48]Ibid., 151.

become involved in these practices (Deut 18:10-12), and, as referenced before, God even commanded those practitioners to be killed (Lev 20:27). "Shamanism and seeking the help of any religious specialist who consorts with spirit beings are condemned and forbidden by Scripture."[49] I Tim 2:5 states that there is only one spiritual mediator, Jesus Christ, and he mediates before God—the one who is the Supreme Lord of the spirit realm.

Spirit Possession vs the Holy Spirit

Van Rheenen notes, "Possession is the intrusion of a personal spiritual being into a human body. The person possessed, called a medium, provides the spirit with "a voice, a body, and a physical apparatus to express himself."[50] From my observation, some Burmese people believe that demon possession is good because the possessed person can heal the sick and bless and give guidance to people. However, others believe that demon possession is bad because it causes a person to lose consciousness and awareness of what goes on around them and to act differently; sometimes, the person involved becomes physically or mentally dysfunctional because of the demons.

In Christian theology, spirit possession is associated with demonic forces rather than benevolent spirits. The Bible records instances of demonic possession and the exorcism of evil spirits by Jesus and his disciples (Matt 9:32-33; Mark 5:1-20). In the gospels, the demons identified Jesus as the Son of God Most High. Dave Johnson says, "In every case, the absolute authority of Jesus Christ over demons is demonstrated by his ability to cast them out of people. When he spoke, Hell obeyed."[51] Satan is called a "strong man" because of his wide-ranging power and authority. He is the ruler over an entire army of evil spirits (Mark 3:22), and he possesses a measure of authority over all the kingdoms of the world (Matt 4:8-9; Luke 4:6).[52] Even though Satan has such a great power over the world, Jesus Christ defeated Satan through his death and resurrection (Heb 2:14; Col 2:15).

The Son of God came to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8b). All who have faith in Christ can participate in his victory over Satan and the

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[49]Ibid., 186.

[50]Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 189.

[51]Dave Johnson. *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2013), 160.

[52]Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 80.

powers of darkness.[53] The armor of God is essential for a believer to face the power of darkness. The armor of God is the strength of believers that allows them to withstand the evil powers of darkness.[54] Believers need to arm themselves with spiritual weapons such as truth, the righteousness of God, the gospel, faith, and prayer. "Paul also shows us the mighty weapons for attack—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and prayer in the Spirit."[55]

Burmese people understand the idea of spirit possession because of their animistic worldview, but they may think of the Holy Spirit as one of several spirits. They may struggle to understand the fundamental differences between the Holy Spirit and the other spirits, especially if they are new believers. One of the important things is that they need to understand that the source of spirit possession in the animistic worldview and the source of the baptism in the Holy Spirit are different. Johnson notes, "The power that possesses the spiritists is from Satan, while the power of God is the source of the Holy Spirit baptism."[56] Another is that demon possession is anthropocentric and being filled with the Holy Spirit is theocentric. The Holy Spirit always glorifies God and seeks to draw people to Christ, whereas demon possession establishes a connection with Satan (John 16:13-14; 15:26; Mark 5:1-20).

According to Burnett, demon "possession contradicts the very dignity of humankind as created by God, and robs the people concerned of their integrity and true self-respect. Possession, and allied rituals, must therefore be condemned by Christians."[57] God didn't create humankind to be possessed by demons but to be baptized or filled by the Holy Spirit and to have fellowship with him. Demon possession breaks the relationship between God and humans. Therefore, "the church must be willing not only to acknowledge the reality of spirit possession in

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[53]Ibid., 83.

[54]Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 110.

[55]Patrick Johnstone, "Biblical Intercession: Spiritual Power to Change our World," in *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues,* Evangelical Missiological Society Series Number 3, ed. Edward Rommen (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 157.

[56]Dave Johnson, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit vs Spirit Possession in the Lowland Philippines: Some Considerations for Discipleship," in *A Theology of the Spirit in Doctrine and Demonstration: Essays in Honor of Wonsuk and Julie Ma,* ed. Teresa Chai (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), 223.

[57]David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion* (Eastbourne, UK: MARC, 1988), 173.

its various forms but should be able to minister to those afflicted in this way."[58]

Critical Contextualization

Offerings

During the Taungbyone Nat Festival, people bring offerings such as coconuts, bananas, clothing, cash, and alcohol to the shrine. They believe that making these offerings is honoring and worshiping *nats*, hoping to receive blessings, glory, healing, and protection from them. It is a common custom in Myanmar to bring offerings to *nat* shrines. Churches can also accept offerings such as coconuts, bananas, clothing, and cash for the altar of God, because the Bible encourages us to honor God with our wealth and the first fruits of all our produce (Prov 3:9-10; Lev 23:10; Mal 3:10). Moreover, we are to give God our best (2 Tim 2:15; Col 3:23-24).

However, believers who were animists before conversion should not give offerings to *nat* shrines, as pagans make offerings and sacrifices to demons rather than God. Moses and Paul warned us against cooperating with demons (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20). A Christian cannot partake in both the Lord's table and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21). Therefore, the church should prohibit its members from giving offerings or sacrifices to other gods and also eating and drinking from the table of demons.

Dancing and Playing Traditional Music Instruments

Many devotees dance with *natkadaws* in front of the *nat* statues. As people dance and sing, musicians play traditional instruments such as *Ci Wain* (gong circle), *Saung* (harp), and *Oozi* (pot drum). The church can allow Burmese people to dance and play traditional instruments in worship services because they can praise and worship God through dancing and playing these instruments. The psalmist invites us to take up our instruments and dance and praise God. (Ps 150:3-5; Ps 33:3; see also Jas 5:13).

According to Segler, "The purpose of music in worship is to create an awareness of God and a mood for worship, enhance the inner life of man, unite the congregation for a worship experience, and express the convictions of the congregation."[59] Churches can allow the use of any

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[58]Ibid.

[59]Franklin M. Segler, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 98-99.

traditional musical instruments in worship to create an atmosphere of the presence of God and worship. When the hearts of the worshipers are in harmony with God, God accepts their worship and praise, no matter what instrument they play. God looks at the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Sam 16:7).

Animal Sacrifice

On the fifth day of the festival, people slaughter two rabbits, cook them, and take them to the palace to offer to the *nats*. Burmese animists always sacrifice animals when celebrating the *nat* festivals. In the Old Testament, God required animal sacrifices to please him and atone for sins. However, in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ had already died on the cross and paid the price for the sins of everyone on earth (Rom 3:24; 1 Pet 2:24). Therefore, there is no more need for animal sacrifices after the death of Jesus on the cross.

Maintaining the Ancestral Heritage

Celebrating the Taungbyone Festival is preserving the heritage of the ancestors. During this festival, people try to contact their ancestors, the Taungbyone brothers, through the mediums. Steyne says, "Although many seek to justify this practice, and some Third World theologians include it in their ethnotheologies, the Bible strongly denounces it."[60] According to Steyne, "Ancestors become a substitute for God, thus making reconciliation with God, relationship to God, and worship of God redundant."[61] Hence, God, a jealous God, demands complete loyalty from his followers, as obedience to him leads to total welfare.

Selling Traditional Crafts, Food, and Other Items

Local merchants and artisans set up stalls at the festival, selling traditional crafts, food, and other items. This contributes to the local economy and provides income, especially in rural areas. The church can allow its people to sell traditional crafts, food, and other items. However, some traditional items such as amulets and talismans are used for protection against evil spirits or, to bring good luck, business, and success. God is against these magic charms (Ezek 13:20). As these items are connected to the power of darkness, the church must forbid the sale

[60]Steyne, 184.
[61]Ibid.

of such things. However, Christians can still trade with other traditional crafts and food.

Conclusion

This essay discusses the background, historical context, practices, belief systems, and worldviews of animism in Myanmar, focusing on the Taungbyone Nat Festival, and how the church should respond to them. This festival is a problem for the church because it is anthropocentric and idolatrous. Moreover, people believe that *natkadaws* are spiritual intermediaries who are condemned and forbidden by God.

All significant acts of this festival are critically contextualized in the light of God's Word. The church should accept making offerings to God, dancing before the Lord, using traditional instruments in worship, and selling traditional items in business. However, the church should prohibit making offerings to *nats*, participation in the devil's table, animal sacrifices, maintaining ancestral heritage, and selling magical amulets.

There are many other *nat* festivals in Myanmar which are held across the country every year. This essay should help missionaries, evangelists, ministers, and pastors in Myanmar to critically understand the traditional practices of Burmese animists and to critically contextualize these practices in the light of God's Word.

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A Biblical Evaluation of the Rite of Ziarah Kubur as Practiced by Javanese Muslims

by Lew Belcourt

Introduction

Ziyara is a practice of visitation in which Muslims attend "venerated places such as graves and shrines of saints, trees, wells, and rocks."[1] More narrowly, the term "specifically designates grave visitation, or *ziyarat al-qubur*, which is recorded in the prophetic tradition (hadith)."[2] In Indonesia, this practice is called *ziarah kubur*. As practiced by Javanese Muslims, *ziarah kubur* goes beyond classical Islam and has taken on elements of animism in light of the Folk Islam practiced by the Javanese.

Thesis Statement

This article examines whether a critical contextualization of the *ziarah kubur* Folk Islamic rite may be useful as a bridge for Javanese Muslims to encounter the God of the Bible, rather than the spirits of the dead, as the true source of blessing.

Scope

Ziarah kubur is practiced by Javanese Muslims living in Central Java. A discussion of pre-Islamic Javanese culture and religion is included to determine any correlation with the worldview of Folk Islam. Three classes of Javanese society are identified to evaluate how each class practices *ziarah kubur*. Sunan Tembayat, one of nine evangelists who brought Islam to Java, will be used as the object of *ziarah kubur*.

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[1]Ondrej Beranek and Pavel Tupek, *From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction: The Question of Ziyara through the Eyes of Salafis* (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 2009), 1, https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/papers/pdfs/cp2.pdf.

[2]Ibid., 1-2.

A biblical examination of the practice and an evaluation of possible contextualization follows.

Limitations

Ziarah kubur is practiced in many ways among the Muslim populations on all the major islands of Indonesia, but this examination of the practice of *ziarah kubur* is limited to the grave of Sunan Tembayat by Javanese Muslims living in Central Java. The Javanese worldview affects many concepts of Javanese culture but only two, *slametan* (safety) and the *Raja Adil* (Just King), are discussed here.

This article offers a cursory review of Islamic and Christian doctrines as they relate to the practice of *ziarah kubur*, specifically praying to the dead and identifying the source of true blessing. More detailed examinations of Islamic and Christian theology are recommended for future research. Since several sources were written in Indonesian, I acknowledge possible limitations in translating and presenting the positions of Indonesian scholars in the English language.

The Practice of *Ziarah Kubur*

Before looking at the practice of *ziarah kubur* by Javanese Muslims, one must consider the rite in classical Islam and the Islamic worldview.

Classical Islam

The "veneration and visitation of tombs . . . must be considered one of the most important and wide-ranging features of Islamic devotion and piety."[3] Interestingly, *ziarah kubur* seems to run counter to the worldview that underlies classical Islam. The structure of the classical Islamic worldview is threefold: first, the belief that Allah is the only God, creator of the universe, and the source of everything; second, God gave the Qur'an as his revelation to mankind through angelic intermediaries; and third, that "all creation comes from Allah and is temporary in nature."[4]

Given this worldview that God is the center of everything, the practice of *ziarah kubur* with its prayers to saints and visitation of tombs

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[3]Werner Diem and Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Epitaphs as Texts* (Weisbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 11, Google Books.

[4]Hadi Yasin et al., "Islamic Worldview," *Tahdzib Al-Akhlaq* 5, no. 1 (2022): 128, https://doi.org/10.340051tahdzib.v5i1.1947.

has been controversial from the beginning of Islam. Certain Islamic movements reject the practice. The Wahabi movement in Saudi Arabia "considers the practice to be heresy (*bid'ah*) that is categorized as one of the greatest sins in Islam."[5] The Salafi movement follows the teaching of Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who condemned the practice of building monuments over the tombs of Islamic holy men as a form of idolatry.[6] However, these condemnations of *ziarah* occur primarily among scholars and theologians, far removed from the common practices of the average Muslim adherent.[7] This includes the prohibition of women performing *ziarah*, which was decreed but not enforced in early Islam.[8]

Many Islamic schools of thought accept the practice of *ziarah kubur* as a valid spiritual practice or *ibadah*. The Sunni movement believes that visiting the grave of Muhammad is permitted. According to the Sunnis, "More than any other tomb in the Islamic world, the shrine of Muhammad is considered a source of blessings for the visitor."[9] A hadith of Muhammad states, "Whoever visits my grave, my intercession is guaranteed for him."[10] Gibril Fouad Haddad notes,

> The emphasis and encouragement on visiting his noble grave is mentioned in numerous hadiths, and it would suffice to show this if there was only the hadith whereby the truthful and God-confirmed Prophet promises that his intercession among other things becomes guaranteed for whoever visits him, and the Imams are in complete agreement from the time directly after his passing until our own time that this [i.e., visiting him] is among the best acts of drawing near to Allah.[11]

According to the Shī'ah, *ziyara* is permissible if the visit does not involve worship of the dead saint.[12] Shī'ah scholars also teach that God

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[5]Jamhari, "In the Center of Meaning: Ziarah Tradition in Java," *Studia Islamika* 7, no. 1 (2000): 56, https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika/article/view/716.

[6]Beranek and Tupek, 11.

[7]Ibid., 24.

[8]Ibid., 8.

[9]Diem and Schöller, 7-8.

[10]Gibril Fouad Haddad, "The Hadith: 'Whoever Visits My Grave, My Intercession Is Guaranteed For Him,'" As-Sunnah Foundation of America, https://sunnah.org/2012/06/03/the-hadith-"whoever-visits-my-grave-my-intercession-is-guaranteed-for-him" (accessed September 13, 2023).

[11]Ibid.

[12]"Ziyarat," Sensagent, https://dictionary.sensagent.com/Ziyarat/en-en/ (accessed September 15, 2023).

favors prayers offered from certain locations, including the tombs of the saints.[13] Asking for the intercession of the deceased saint is a main objective of the *ziyara*. "They [the holy figures] are being requested to supplicate to Allah, to deliver the person in need from his affliction, since the supplication of these saintly figures is accepted by Allah."[14] Another purpose of *ziyara* is to receive *barakah*, or blessing, from God. "The *Ziyarah* of the Imāms is also done by the Shī'ah, not only as a means of greeting and saluting their masters who lived long before they were born, but also as a means of seeking nearness to God and more of His blessings (*barakah*)."[15]

The Sufi movement ascribes several meanings to the practice of *ziarah*, including forming an "intellectual link to the Sufi who is buried in the tomb."[16] For example, a visit to the grave of a Sufi teacher who was an expert in Islamic theology creates an intellectual link to that teacher, increasing one's credibility and acceptance.[17]

To summarize, the rite of *ziarah kubur* in classical Islam is meant to remind the visitor of the reality of death and the afterlife.[18] The visitor asks the saint to intercede with God on his behalf.[19] *Ziarah kubur* also contains the hope of a *baraka*, or blessing, received from God through the mediation of the saint.[20] These goals are in keeping with the Islamic worldview that is strictly monotheistic and considers God the source of all things. Although the use of a saint as an intermediary is a matter of controversy among the different movements in classical Islam, this is not the case among Javanese Muslims. Their practice of *ziarah kubur* rests on the foundation of a very different worldview than that of classical Islam.

Javanese Muslims

Over 116 million Javanese live in Indonesia, with the majority living on the island of Java. The Javanese constitute 42 percent of the total population of Indonesia. Every president of Indonesia has been

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[13]Ibid.
[14]Ibid.
[15]"Ziyarat."
[16]Jamhari, "In the Center of Meaning," 56.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Beranek and Tupek, 14.
[19]Ibid., 2.
[20]Jamhari, "The Meaning Interpreted: The Concept of Barakah in Ziarah," *Studia Islamika* 8, no. 1 (2001): 91, https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika/article/view/696.

Javanese. Ninety-three percent of Javanese are Muslim. However, an estimated 70 percent of Javanese Muslims practice Folk Islam, a blend of classical Islam and pre-Islamic Javanese religion.[21]

The Islam that came to Java in the 1300s was Sufism, an open and accommodating kind of Islam that allowed its followers "to encounter and embrace the local culture and religions uncritically."[22] When this form of Islam met the existing religion on Java, a mixture of Hindu and Javanese indigenous religious practices was called *Kejawen* or "Javanized," and the resulting form of Islam was called *abangan* Islam. This still exists in southern Central Java.[23]

Based on his anthropological study on the island of Java, Geertz divided Javanese Muslims into three distinct groups: *santri*, *prijaji,* and *abangan*.[24] The *santri* were a conservative group who held closest to the formal teachings and practice of Islam. The *prijaji* comprised the ruling class who led both religious organizations and the government. The *abangan* were primarily "people of low social status, uneducated, illiterates, villagers, farmers or factory workers, peasants, and marginalized" who held to the worldview and *Kejawen* religious practices of their ancestors.[25] This article primarily focuses on the worldview of the *abangan* Javanese Muslims and their practice of *ziarah kubur*.

Worldview

Hiebert defines worldview as "the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture."[26] Worldview is the deepest of four levels of cultural knowledge that begins with the "world outside" and continues into the "world inside."[27] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, following Laudan, separate the "world inside" into three levels: theories, belief systems, and worldviews.[28] Theories, the

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[21]"Country: Indonesia," Joshua Project, https://joshuaproject.net/countries/id (accessed July 13, 2023).

[22]Ferry Mamahit, "*Abangan* Muslims, Javanese Worldview, and Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia," *Transformation* (2020): 4, https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820965602.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 5.

[25]Mamahit, 4.

[26]Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 45.

[27]Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 38.

[28]Ibid.

outermost level, "answer questions raised by belief systems and order experience into theories."[29] Belief systems, the middle level, "determine the domain of examination, define questions to be asked, provide methods for investigation, integrate theories in belief systems and worldview, and mediate between empirical realities."[30] Worldview, the innermost level, "provides ontological, affective and normative assumptions on which the culture builds its world, and integrates belief systems into a single worldview."[31]

Without penetrating to the core of the "world inside," an examination of a religion in terms of its "beliefs and practices such as ancestor veneration, witchcraft, magic, or divination . . . misses the point that beliefs and doctrines are part of larger belief systems that seek to answer fundamental questions in life."[32] In turn, belief systems rely on worldviews to "provide the fundamental assumptions about the nature or reality and of right and wrong which belief systems use to build their theories."[33]

Confining a study of *ziarah kubur* among Javanese Muslims to the rites and rituals will fail to identify the worldview that underlies the practice. An understanding of the worldview through which the Javanese view the practice will be useful not only when examining why *ziarah kubur* diverges from the practice in formal or classic Islam, but also when analysing *ziarah kubur* theologically and considering if the practice can be contextualized as a bridge for the gospel.

Javanese Worldview

The Javanese worldview is described as

> the conviction of the essential unity of all existence. It views the divine, human beings, and the cosmos as one integral unit or system. It means that the survival of such a system depends on the relationship among each other. Every Javanese has a responsibility to attune to the universal order, mainly to maintain a harmonious relationship with the divine and the world. It thus implies that he or she has to acclimate himself/herself with all existence, seen or unseen.[34]

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[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid., 40.
[33]Ibid., 41.
[34]Mamahit, 6.

This Javanese worldview is reflected in "ancient Javanese indigenous religion and culture."[35] *Kejawen*, the syncretic result of Javanese indigenous religions and Hinduism, displays a belief system that includes the unseen cosmic beings, local gods, goddesses, spirits, and the spirits of ancestors that exist in the world, and the visible world consisting of humans, plants, animals, and the earth.[36] In an effort to maintain harmony and balance (thereby avoiding calamity and incurring goodwill), the Javanese attempt to control the spirits through various rites and rituals. Mamahit notes,

> The Javanese people usually do not want to engage with the spirits because they prefer to be in a safe condition or of being safe (*selamat*) from the fear or difficulties caused by such spiritual beings. However, their presence is necessary for keeping the universe in balance. It thus reflects a prevailing oriental-animistic worldview, a belief in the existence of the spirits that [are] essential for cosmic harmony.[37]

Spirits

In his research into the unseen spirits that inhabit the world of the Javanese, Geertz records three categories of roaming spirits, *memedi* (literally, frighteners), *lelembut* (literally, ethereal ones), and *tujul*.[38] According to Geertz, *memedi* are generally harmless and merely like to scare people.[39] *Lelembut*, on the other hand, can "make one ill or drive one crazy" and are "very dangerous to human beings."[40] The third category, *tujul*, appear as young children and bring financial gain to the person who gains their loyalty. People gained control of a *tujul* through "fasting and meditation," often at Hindu ruins found in Central Java or at the graves of Islamic saints.[41]

Geertz notes two other types of spirits, *demit* and *danjang*, which do not roam but are linked to a specific geographic location. *Demit* are spirits "with a fixed abode who may support the wishes of men."[42] These spirits typically "live in holy places called *pundèns*, which may

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[35]Ibid.
[36]Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, 49.
[37]Mamahit, 6.
[38]Geertz, 16.
[39]Ibid.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid., 21.
[42]Ibid., 24.

be marked by a small Hindu ruin (perhaps one little broken statue), a large banyan tree, an old grave, a nearly hidden spring, or some such topographical peculiarity."[43] A *danjang* is the guardian spirit of a village, often identified with a specific individual, usually the founder of the village, and located at his grave.[44] Both *demit* and *danjang* "respond to people's pleas for help."[45]

Slametan

The worldview of the Javanese, with its desire for balance and harmony, is reflected in certain concepts and practices that "have their roots in ancient Javanese indigenous religion and culture."[46] One is *slametan*, which literally means "safety." *Slametan* "relates to the animistic belief, particularly a belief in the existence of the good and the evil spirits, which also imply the positive and negative forces. These spirits can generate a positive attitude toward a harmonious living with other beings inhabiting this world."[47] *Slametan* is a broad term that refers to numerous Javanese rites or rituals centered around the cycles of life (birth, coming of age, marriage, child-bearing, death) and circumstances (for example, illness, war, and the choosing of leaders).[48] *Slametan* is an attempt to appease the spirits, avoid evil and bad luck, and to bring good fortune to an individual, a family, or a community.

"Just King"

A second Javanese concept is that of a "Just King," or *Ratu Adil*. This concept reflects the desire for fundamental balance expressed in the Javanese worldview. Although its origins are lost to antiquity, the concept of a "Just King" was born from the desire to be delivered from difficult circumstances. It is "a cultural-social expression of the people who resist and protest against life-suffering or affliction. Besides, it is a kind of people's messianic hope for liberation or freedom from harsh circumstances."[49] According to Javanese prophetic literature, the final epoch of world history will be a time of great suffering and affliction. The "Just King" will appear during the last days to liberate the Javanese

[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid., 26.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Mamahit, 6.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid., 6-7.
[49]Ibid., 8.

and bring them to "a state of order, peace, justice, abundance, and well-being."[50] Imam Mahdi, "an Islamicized manifestation of *Ratu Adil*," will fight against *Raja Iblis* (the King of the Devils) and establish peace in Java for one thousand years. On the last day of history, the "day of doom," Imam Mahdi will destroy *Raja Iblis*.[51] The concept of the "Just King" influences the Javanese practice of *ziarah kubur* by providing a foundation for the belief that prayers may bring relief from suffering and affliction and bring life back into balance.

Wali Sanga

Ziarah kubur as practiced by Javanese Muslims reflects the different worldviews and belief systems of the *santri*, *prijaji*, and *abangan* Javanese. All three groups perform *ziarah kubur* at the graves of the nine saints, or *Wali Sanga*, who brought Islam to the island of Java beginning in the 14th century.[52] The *Wali Sanga* are Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Muria, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Gunung Jati, and either Seh Siti Jenar or Sunan Tembayat, depending on which Javanese tradition is accepted.[53] According to Jambali, there are three reasons why being acknowledged as a *wali* is important.

> First, it relates to the legitimation of the existence of the *wali*. There are many tombs of pious people in Java, which are considered by the local people to be *wali* tombs. Second, it has become a truism in Java that the *wali* spread true Islamic teachings. Therefore, if the person is recognized as a *wali*, he brought the true teaching of Islam. Finally, the acknowledgment of *wali* is to provide a legitimation for the tomb as an appropriate place to acquire *baraka*. This is because a *wali* is believed to be a person who is close to Allah and who can transmit baraka.[54]

Particularly for the *santri* and *prijaji* Javanese, *ziarah kubur* reflects the classical Muslim monotheistic worldview that sees Allah as the source of all things. Prayers are offered according to established Islamic practices. Recitation of the Shahada or the repetition of Qur'anic verses

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[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid.
[52]The word *wali* in Javanese means holy person or saint. *Sanga* means nine.
[53]Jamhari, "In the Center of Meaning," 61.
[54]Ibid.

during *ziarah kubur* are all directed towards God. The saint is seen only as an intermediary or intercessor. Blessings are believed to come only from God, and the pilgrimage to the tomb of the saint only brings the pilgrim to a place where God is known to be attentive to prayer.

Sunan Tembayat

The rite of *ziarah kubur* is practiced at the grave of one of the Wali Sanga, Sunan Tembayat. First, let us explore the historical background of Sunan Tembayat.

Historical Background

The life of the ninth *wali*, Sunan Tembayat, is obscure. He purportedly lived in the 16th century. Various traditions say that he was Brawijaya V (the last king of the Majapahit empire), the ninety-fourth son of Brawijaya V, or the son-in-law of Brawijaya V.[55] Tradition agrees that Sunan Tembayat was converted to Islam after an encounter with Sunan Kalijaga, the most important *wali* in Central Java.[56] Sunan Kalijaga then tasked Sunan Tembayat to bring Islam to the southern part of Central Java. His success earned him the status of *wali* and his tomb has been the site of *ziarah kubur* since the 17th century.[57]

Myths about Sunan Tembayat contain tales of his supernatural powers, including transforming the physical appearance of his two disciples and turning a sack of rice into sand. The relocation of the first mosque he built on top of a mountain is also the subject of legends. According to one, in order to determine the new location of the mosque, Sunan Tembayat hurled a spear down the mountain. The place where the spear landed became the new location. Another legend holds that Sunan Kalijaga admonished Sunan Tembayat that locating the mosque on the top of the mountain was not the way for a new *wali* to show his identity and that it needed to be moved lower on the mountain. The first legend affirms the supernatural powers of Sunan Tembayat; the second strengthens his spiritual link with Sunan Kalijaga.[58]

[55]Ibid., 64.
[56]Ibid., 61.
[57]Ibid., 63.
[58]Ibid., 65.

Ziarah Kubur at the Grave of Sunan Tembayat

The influence of Javanese culture on the Islamic practice of *ziarah kubur* in Java cannot be overstated. The Majapahit Empire was the height of Javanese culture. Its decline led to a sense of loss of Javanese traditions.[59] By linking Sunan Tembayat with the Majapahit Empire, either as the last king or being related to him, the Javanese maintain a connection with their cultural past. Identifying Sunan Tembayat as both a disciple of Sunan Kalijaga and as the ninth *wali* gives Javanese Muslims a reason to perform *ziarah kubur* at his tomb while expressing "the desire for the re-emergence of the Javanese superiority."[60] The rites of *ziarah kubur* performed at the tomb of Sunan Tembayat reflect this connection with Javanese culture and *kejawen* religion, both based on the Javanese worldview.

Javanese pilgrims to the tomb of Sunan Tembayat generally perform *ziarah kubur* for one of three purposes. For those who consider Sunan Tembayat a pious *wali*, the visit is *ziarah*, the purpose of which is "to obtain a reward from God through the mediation of Sunan Tembayat."[61] For those who believe he was Brawijaya V or a close relative, the visit is *sowan*, the Javanese tradition of visiting respected people such as kings, teachers, superiors, and parents.[62] For those who consider him the *pundhen*, or founder of the village of Bayat, the visit is "a means of showing respect."[63]

Visitors to the tomb of Sunan Tembayat perform *ziarah* in Bayat in different manners depending on whether they are *santri*, *prijaji*, or *abangan*. *Santri* and *prijaji* generally perform *ziarah kubur* in the Islamic manner. Visitors recite verses from the Qur'an, the *tahlil* (reciting the Shahada 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger') or the *dzikr*, the recitation of special words from the Qur'an. Similar practices are conducted by Muslims around the world and reflect the worldview of classical Islam.[64] Those who practice *ziarah* in the Javanese manner, the *abangan* Javanese, "conduct *ziarah* with meditation or with other special procedures such as *nenepi* (a meditation with special attitude and procedure)."[65] The differences in practice reflect both the different Javanese social groups and their worldviews. This "effects a

[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid., 66.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Ibid.
[64]Ibid., 67.
[65]Ibid.

different articulation of an understanding of the *wali*, and influences the explanations of the purpose of *ziarah*, including the perceptions of *baraka* and its transmission."[66]

The ritual of *ziarah kubur* at the tomb of Sunan Tembayat is generally divided into three stages: the preparation, the *ziarah*, and the follow-up to the *ziarah*. Preparation begins with ritual washing and changing into new clothes. Visitors are led to a hall where they meet the *juru kunci*, a spiritual guide who is said to have power derived from the *wali* and is the intermediary between the *wali* and the visitor. The *juru kunci* asks the visitor why they have come and what offering they have brought, normally incense and flowers. The *juru kunci* invites the visitor to pray while burning the incense. The prayer usually consists of asking forgiveness for disturbing the *wali*, asking for specific blessings, and thanking the *wali* for their help. The *juru kunci* echoes the prayer to the *wali*.

During the second stage of the ritual, the *juru kunci* leads the visitor to the tomb of the *wali*. The *juru kunci* prays before opening the door to the tomb and leading the visitor to sit cross-legged in front of the tomb. Then the visitor

> rubs the saint's gravestone with his hands three times, then he wipes his face three times. After this has been done, by lowering his head face down to the earth, he begins to pray silently. When he finishes his prayer, he puts the flowers on the tomb. He selects the Kantil (white flowers that have 5 leaves)—sometimes, in a crowded situation, visitors struggle to obtain the flowers. The flowers are believed to be Sunan Tembayat's gift. Therefore, like other visitors, he takes the flower home as a *baraka* from the Sunan. Whenever he feels sick or suffers misfortune case, he will take the flower to help him.[67]

During the third stage, the visitor leaves the tomb with the *juru kunci*. Outside the hall, the visitor drinks water from a clay jar as a symbol of receiving *baraka*. Finally, the visitor spends the night in the graveyard. This is a time of waiting for a special sign, or *ngalamat*, of *baraka*.[68] The sign may be in the form of a dream but is sometimes an animal encountered in the graveyard. The visitor consults with the *juru kunci* to interpret the sign in order to understand what blessing he has received.

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[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid., 77.
[68]Ibid., 78.

The *juru kunci* is considered a "special mediator" who can interpret the *ngalamat* due to his close relationship with the saint and because of his previously successful interpretations of the *ngalamat*.[69]

The influence of *abangan* Islam is seen in both the source of the *barakah* and what blessings are requested by the pilgrims. Unlike classical monotheistic Islam that sees God as the only source of blessing, *abangan* Javanese expect to receive blessings from the saint himself. *Abangan* Javanese ask for spiritual blessings and good fortune but also request job promotions and even winning lottery numbers. A successfully conducted *ziarah* may also give a pilgrim power over a *tujul*, the spirit that can bring wealth and fortune.[70]

A final consideration of the practice of *ziarah* at the tomb of Sunan Tembayat involves the physical elements of the ritual: incense, water, and flowers. The use of incense in religious rituals is common. Although some Javanese use incense to call upon spirits, including in rituals where people are possessed by spirits, the use of incense in the *ziarah* ritual primarily helps the prayers of the visitors rise to heaven. The aroma of incense is also to please the saint. It follows "the Prophet Muhammad's support in using something aromatic while praying."[71]

The use of flowers in the ritual, similar to the incense, brings a pleasing aroma to the tomb of the saint.[72] Unlike the incense burned during the *ziarah*, flowers are gathered by the visitor after completing the *ziarah* and taken home. Visitors believe these flowers are imbued with *barakah* by the saint. Men and women wear the flowers on their person. Some make tea from the flowers to drink during times of illness or misfortune.[73] One visitor performed *ziarah* whenever their supply of flowers ran out, in order to have *barakah* available at all times.[74]

Finally, water is used both in preparation for *ziarah* in the ritual ablutions as a symbol of cleansing from sins and as protection from evil spirits, and after the *ziarah* as a symbol of blessing received from the saint. Like flowers, pilgrims often take water home after the *ziarah* and drink it when they need physical healing or good fortune.[75]

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[69]Jamhari, "The Meaning Interpreted," 97.
[70]Ibid., 91.
[71]Jamhari, "In the Center of Meaning," 57.
[72]Jamhari, "The Meaning Interpreted," 107.
[73]Jamhari, "In the Center of Meaning," 77.
[74]Ibid., 73.
[75]Jamhari, "The Meaning Interpreted," 107-108.

Summary of Formal and Folk Islamic Teaching and Practices

Ziarah kubur conducted following classical Islam and the Islamic worldview sees God as the source of all blessings. During the ritual, the pilgrim prays directly to God or asks the saint to intercede on his behalf. The pilgrim is reminded of death and the last days. Blessings may be sought from God, but never from the saint.

In contrast, *Abangan* Muslims perform the ritual by blending classical Islam with the *Kejawen* religion and the Javanese worldview. Although *santri* and *prijaji* pray to God or ask the saint for intercession, *abangan* Javanese Muslims pray to the saint and expect to receive blessings from him. The *juru kunci* functions as an intermediary and translator of dreams. The pilgrim brings gifts for the saint and asks for practical help, not just spiritual benefits. Physical aspects of the ritual are important (flowers for healing tea, water for healing, inspiration). Some seek to gain wealth by gaining control of a *tujul*, or spirit, through *ziarah kubur*.

Biblical Evaluation of *Ziarah Kubur*

The *ziarah kubur* practiced by *abangan* Javanese reflects a worldview that stands in opposition to biblical teachings. This Javanese worldview considers "the divine, human beings, and the cosmos as one integral unit or system" and stresses finding a "harmonious relationship with the divine and the world," to the point that an individual must "acclimate himself/herself with all existence, seen or unseen."[76] The *abangan* Muslim seeks power not only from God but also from the spirits of the dead who occupy the middle ground between the divine and mankind. The Christian worldview does not acknowledge the spirits of the dead as operating as part of the unseen world. Rather, the unseen spirits that exist in the world are "related to the activity of demons."[77]

Praying To the Dead

A substantial difference between Muslim and Christian worldviews is further seen in the biblical evaluation of two of the practices of *ziarah kubur*, praying to the dead and obtaining blessings.

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[76]Mamahit, 6.

[77]Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2013), 70.

Muslim Doctrine

The rite of *ziarah kubur* is either permitted or forbidden depending on the teaching of different movements of Islam. The controversy rises from the classical Islamic monotheistic worldview that considers prayers to anyone other than God a type of idolatry. The prophet Muhammad originally forbade *ziarah kubur* but eventually changed his mind. Nurhadi, an Indonesian Muslim scholar, notes that those who allow *ziarah kubur* refer to the following hadith that quotes Muhammad: "I previously forbade you to practice *ziarah kubur*. But now visit the graves, for in visitation you will be reminded of death" (Abu Daud - 2816).[78] Regarding the practice of praying and asking the dead to intercede on behalf of the living, Gibril Fouad Haddad cites the hadith that again quotes Muhammad: "Whoever visits my grave, my intercession is guaranteed for him."[79] These two hadith form the basis for the practice of *ziarah kubur* among the movements of Islam that allow the practice.

Although practiced by classical Muslims, the worldview that accepts praying to the dead more closely reflects *abangan* Islam than classical monotheistic Islam. Javanese pilgrims performing *ziarah kubur* and praying to the saints to intercede on their behalf will experience no conflict with their Javanese worldview.

Christian Doctrine

In contrast, praying to the dead is strictly forbidden in the Bible. "Let no one be found among you . . . who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).[80] The Bible teaches that the living must pray directly to God (Luke 11:13) rather than to the spirits of the dead. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to the Father in his name (John 16:23). There are no biblical instructions to pray to the dead. Rather, prayers are offered to the Father in the name of the risen Savior.

Further, the Bible does not teach that the dead can intercede on behalf of the living. The Old Testament portrays death as the end of one's participation in this world (Psalm 115:17). Daniel is told that after his death he will rest until the "end of days" (Daniel 12:13). In the Gospels, Jesus refers to both the righteous and the wicked dead

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[78]Nurhadi, "Kontradiktif Hadis Hukum Ziarah Kubur Perspektif Filsafat Hukum Islam," *Al-'Adl* 12, no. 1 (January 2019): 11, http://dx.doi.org/10.31332/aladl.v12i1.1379.

[79]Haddad.

[80]Scripture quotations are from the NIV 2011.

being in their graves when the Son of Man returns (John 5:28-29). The church in Corinth struggled with issues surrounding death. Regarding 1 Corinthians 15:29, Horrell notes, "The crucial point in this context is that the Corinthians' baptism for the dead is a practice that is believed to make some difference to the fate of the dead, to effect or ensure their transfer to salvation."[81] In response, the Apostle Paul rejects the thought that baptism could be effective for someone who had already died.[82] Finally, 1 Thessalonians 4 portrays the dead returning with Jesus at "the coming of the Lord." There is no mention of any activity of the dead while they wait for that day.

Regarding the act of intercession, the New Testament teaches that the role of intercession is not assigned to the righteous dead but to living believers (Ephesians 6:18). Indeed, believers have the privilege of approaching God directly "with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12). Besides intercession by living believers, intercession is an active role within the Godhead. Jesus intercedes on behalf of believers (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25), as does the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26).

Source of Blessing

There are also crucial differences between Muslim and Christian understandings of the sources of blessings. This is especially true of animistic Muslims.

Muslim Doctrine

For the movements who accepted it, *ziarah kubur* in classical Islam is a legitimate rite as long as pilgrims do not pray to receive a blessing from the one whose tomb they are visiting. This is consistent with the classical Islamic monotheistic worldview in which God is the source of everything. The *abangan* Javanese, whose worldview links the cosmic, spirits, and world, are willing to seek blessing wherever it may be found.

Seeking solutions to worldly problems from the spirits of the dead was common practice. In pre-Islamic Java, pilgrims visited Hindu temples and the graves of holy people to seek wisdom, wealth, safety,

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[81]David Worrell, "Who are 'The Dead' and When was the Gospel Preached to Them?: The Interpretation of 1 Pet 4.6," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2003): 86, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688503000055.

[82]Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 767.

and power.[83] This practice becomes engrained in Javanese culture. After Islam arrives, *ziarah kubur* as practiced by the *abangan* Javanese reminds the pilgrim of death as he pays his respects to the saint. However, he also considers the saint as the source of blessing that is "useful to the living."[84]

Christian Doctrine

For the Christian, blessing does not come from the spirits of the dead but rather from the Lord. The earliest examples are found in Genesis. Wehmeier sees God's punishments in pre-Abrahamic times always paired with an example of God's blessing.[85] Adam and Eve eat from the tree in the garden but do not die in their sin. Rather they are blessed when God makes clothing for them. Cain is sentenced to wander the earth as a murderer but is also given a mark to protect him from other men. The Flood narrative displays God's wrath on mankind, yet he provides a future for mankind through Noah and the ark. Only the punishment of the nations at Babel in Genesis 11 is not immediately paired with an example of God's blessing.[86]

Wehmeier sees the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3 as the paired blessing for the judgment of the nations. He sees the covenant as not simply a blessing of Abraham, but a four-step blessing that expands far beyond the individual.[87] In verse 2, Abraham receives a blessing and becomes a blessing. In verse 3, a blessing is extended to those who bless Abraham. The final step of blessing is intended for the entire world: "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3b). This global blessing, says Wehmeier, completes God's pairing of blessing with the judgment of the nations pronounced at Babel in Genesis 11.[88]

God is also the source of the patriarchal blessings Jacob pronounces upon his sons. This is most clearly seen in Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Genesis 49:25, with the Almighty blessing Joseph with "blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb." The blessings pronounced by Moses upon the tribes

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[83]Zaura Sylviana, "Ziarah: Antara Fenomena Mistik dan Komunikasi Spritual," *Darussalam* 10, no. 1 (2018): 127, https://doi.org/ 10.30739/darussalam.v10i1.273.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Gerhard Wehmeier, "The Theme 'Blessing for the Nations' in the Promises to the Patriarchs and in Prophetical Literature," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 6 (1974): 2, ATLA.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., 3.

[88]Ibid.

of Israel before his death are also clearly from the Lord. Moses invokes the Lord, "who came with myriads of holy ones" (Deuteronomy 33:2). Moses declares it is the Lord who surely "love[s] the people; all the holy ones are in your hand" (Deuteronomy 33:3). Only then does Moses pronounce the blessings on the individual tribes.

The New Testament continues the theme of blessing coming from the Lord. Referring to the Abrahamic Covenant, Peter declares that the Jews are the recipients of God's blessings if they believe in the risen Christ and repent of their sins (Acts 3:12-26). The Apostle Paul also refers to the same covenant when he says that the blessing is for the Gentiles who receive the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith (Galatians 3:8).[89] To the church in Ephesus Paul declares, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The biblical source of blessing is clearly not humanity but God. This stands against the *abangan* Muslim view that blessings can come from the dead saints whose graves are the objects of *ziarah kubur*.

Christian Response to Ziarah Kubur

We have described the rite of *ziarah kubur*, examined the Javanese worldview and *abangan* Islam, and evaluated two of its concepts from a biblical perspective. Now we must ask whether a critical contextualization of the rite may result in a bridge for Javanese Muslims to encounter the God of the Bible, rather than the spirits of the dead, as the true source of blessing.

Accept, Modify, or Reject?

The practice of *ziarah kubur* by *abangan* Muslims is based on a worldview very different from Christianity. Considering the divine, humanity, and the cosmos as equally important has led *abangan* Muslims to seek solutions to their problems through prayers to the spirits of dead saints. They pursue safety and balance from a saint at the expense of acknowledging God as the only source of blessing. The two worldviews conflict, and an attempt to contextualize the rite of *ziarah kubur* as a bridge for the gospel falls at this hurdle.

Additionally, the two main practices of *ziarah kubur*, praying to the dead saint and seeking blessing directly from him, contradict biblical teaching. The former is strictly forbidden by Scripture, which

[89]Ibid., 3-4.

declares that prayers must be offered only to God. The latter is opposed by Scripture, which in both the Old and New Testaments portrays God as the only source of blessing. Therefore, based on a consideration of both worldview and practice, the rite of *ziarah kubur* as practiced by *abangan* Muslims cannot be accepted or modified to become acceptable to God and must be rejected. However, this conclusion does not mean that *ziarah kubur* has no value as a bridge for the gospel.

Cultural Bridges

Diverse opinions and practices regarding the value and use of culture exist between various Christian leaders. For example, Pinoejadi, former pastor of the Gereja Kristen Jawa church in Banyubiru, Central Java, rejected using Javanese traditions at the church. He disallowed the feasts or celebrations marking occasions like circumcisions or funerals that were traditionally celebrated in Javanese culture.[90] The current pastor, Utomo, graduated from Bible college in 1994 and became senior pastor of GKJ Banyubiru in 1997. As a younger pastor, he is willing to use Javanese culture and traditions as long as they don't directly conflict with Scripture. To that end, he encourages the congregation to study the Bible and make their own decisions when their culture appears to be in conflict with the Bible.[91]

As previously discussed, praying to the dead and expecting blessings from the *wali* are contrary to Scripture and must not be practiced. However, certain aspects of Javanese culture such as the concept of safety, protection from evil spirits, salvation, and the "Just King" may all find parallels within the Christian worldview and biblical teaching. Even the classical Islam purposes of *ziarah kubur* of respecting the dead and being reminded of the reality of death are not in conflict with biblical teachings.

Accordingly, Christians may use certain Javanese concepts to create contextualized rites in which the dead are remembered, God is acknowledged as the one true God, and in which God is thanked for the deceased's life and contributions to their families. The focus of the rites becomes theocentric rather than anthropocentric. Prayers are directed to God in the name of Jesus. In keeping with Javanese cultural traditions, these remembrances may take place at the graves of the departed, use

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[90]Emmanuel Satyo Yuwono, "Kejawaan dan Kekristenan: Negosiasi Identitas Orang Kristen Jawa dalam Persoalan di Sekitar Tradisi Ziarah Kubur," *Humanika* 16, no. 1 (2016): 104, https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/humanika/article/view/12139.

[91]Ibid.

Javanese cultural forms of language, dress, and music, and may take place on the seventh, fortieth, one-hundredth, and one-thousandth day after their passing. Visits to graves may involve cleaning them, placing flowers on the graves, thanking God for the life of the departed, and asking for God's blessings on the family that is left behind.

Evangelism Bridges

Participating in lifecycle celebrations in ways that combine Javanese culture and a Christian worldview creates cultural bridges that help Christians minister to Javanese Muslims. Understanding the *abangan* Muslim worldview and the practice of *ziarah kubur* can help Christians make a clear presentation of the gospel.

Abangan Muslims live in the world of spirits. They live in fear and are constantly seeking power. Unlike in the West, discussions about spiritual issues are common. *Abangan* Muslims will pray for blessing in the form of physical healing, financial prosperity, life partners, or the desire to have children. They will also pray for protection from curses and evil spirits. A Christian who is aware of the worldview of *abangan* Islam can engage Javanese Muslims through three specific encounters.

Power Encounter

The first encounter is power. Christians who are aware of the spiritual environment in which an *abangan* Muslim lives can offer the power found in a relationship with Jesus as protection for them. This fulfills the Javanese need for safety. Love notes that practitioners of Folk Islam need a power encounter to fully understand the gospel.[92] Wagner defines a power encounter as "a visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than the false gods or spirits worshiped or feared by a people group."[93] Christians can pray in the name of Jesus for *abangan* Muslims to break the power of curses and evil spirits. Christians in the Majority World are equipped to do this as they understand the spirit world.

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[92]Rick Love, "Power Encounter Among Folk Muslims: An Essential Key of the Kingdom," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1996): 194, https://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/13_4_PDFs/05_Rick%20Love.pdf.

[93]C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 102, Google Books.

Truth Encounter

The second encounter is truth. Kraft says a truth encounter "counters ignorance or error and brings people to correct understandings about Jesus Christ."[94] A truth encounter must follow a power encounter. Those practicing Folk Islam often see displays of spiritual power. Without proper instruction, they will not understand the true source of the divine power they have experienced. Love, a former missionary on the island of Java, estimates that only ten percent of Folk Muslims who experience divine healing become followers of Jesus.[95]

The truth encounter about the source of blessing becomes a bridge for the gospel. *Abangan* Muslims pray to the spirits of the dead to receive blessings and to have their felt needs met. A valid question is, "Why pray to the spirit of a dead person when you can pray directly to the God who created that person?" *Abangan* Muslims know that the spirits are lower than God. A conversation about where the souls of the dead reside and how demons (*jinn*) pose as the dead can lead to a discussion of the fall of Satan from heaven. By contrasting a righteous and holy God and the fallen spirits, they can be encouraged to pray directly to God for their needs. As Christians share that God is the true source of all blessings, they can also share the ultimate blessing of God for mankind, the gift of Jesus as the Savior of the world (John 3:16).

Allegiance Encounter

The third encounter is allegiance. Kraft writes, "Allegiance encounters are the exercise of the will in commitment and obedience to the Lord. The initial allegiance encounter leads a person into relationship with Jesus."[96] The ultimate goal of Christian evangelism is for the hearer to choose to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. For an *abangan* Muslim, an allegiance encounter will follow a power encounter and a truth encounter. A demonstration of power to Muslims living in a world of hostile spirits earns the right for the Christian to be heard. The truth encounter points them to the true source of blessing and introduces them to the ultimate blessing from God. After these encounters, the Muslim must be challenged to commit to faith in Jesus. This is the allegiance

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[94]Charles Kraft, "Three Encounters in Christian Witness," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. 4th ed., ed. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 446, Global DTL.

[95]Love, 194.

[96]Kraft, 447.

encounter, where they renounce the *abangan* worldview and Muslim religion and adopt a new worldview and relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

The rite of *ziarah kubur*, or visiting the graves of holy men or ancestors, has taken on an anthropocentric focus in the Folk Islam practiced by the Javanese. *Abangan* Muslims pray to the dead saints to receive blessings such as money, promotion, or healing. Scripture expressly forbids praying to the dead and encourages Christians to pray directly to God. Scripture also teaches that blessings only come from the Lord.

A biblical analysis of the practice of *ziarah kubur* and the underlying Javanese worldview concludes that the practice cannot be redeemed. However, some aspects of Javanese culture can be used by Christians to minister to Javanese Muslims in ways that are theocentric, adhere to Scripture, and honor the Javanese value of community.

Finally, by discussing *ziarah kubur* with *abangan* Muslims, Christians will find many bridges across which the gospel can penetrate into the *abangan* worldview, beliefs, and felt needs. Through power and truth encounters, they can be challenged to commit their allegiance to Jesus.

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PROPHECY, ART, AND INSPIRATION: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF PROPHETIC ARTS

by Ang Wei Yang

Introduction

In recent years, many Pentecostal churches have set up a prophetic arts ministry department, where prophetic artists are seen painting in church during worship services. While this is a phenomenon that is gaining momentum, relatively little has been written on it in the scholastic world. The definitions proposed by prophetic artists are varied. Some view prophetic arts as visual expressions of the prophetic ministry mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:3, whose purposes are to strengthen, encourage, and comfort.[1] Others consider prophetic arts as "a physical demonstration" of worship, where the act of painting itself is worship unto God.[2] Another definition focuses on the spontaneity of prophetic arts and defines it as "divinely inspired unpremeditated and unrehearsed artmaking."[3] While prophetic arts may have different meanings among these artists, one common denominator is knowing the Holy Spirit is the source of inspiration.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of prophetic arts; (2) define what is "prophetic arts." To provide clarity to the discussions, in this paper, "prophetic arts" refers to the artworks, while "prophetic painting" refers to the act of painting the artworks.

This paper argues that the process of inspiration in prophetic painting is dynamic, where God and the artist collaborate in the process

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[1]Barnabas Bay and Theresa Tan, "Prophetic Painting: The Art of Worship," *CityNews*, November 29, 2018, https://www.citynews.sg/2018/11/29/prophetic-painting-the-art-of-worship/.

[2]Justine Ocampo, "Prophetic Art: 3 Artists Discuss What It Means to Deliver a Message from the Father," *Thir.St*, March 11, 2020, https://thirst.sg/what-is-prophetic-art-worship-painting/.

[3]Wendy Manzo, "Towards an Understanding of the Spontaneous Prophetic Artist in the Pentecostal Church," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 23, no. 1 (2022): 36.

of painting, where the Holy Spirit gives the message, and the artist gives expression to the message. This paper also argues that prophetic arts should be defined as artworks that the artists paint to report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration. Many of the prophetic arts in Pentecostal churches can be included under this definition. However, a wider understanding or purpose is needed to explore other manifestations of prophetic arts.

The Role of The Holy Spirit in Inspiring Prophetic Arts

Before discussing how the Holy Spirit inspires prophetic artists in prophetic artmaking, it is helpful to examine how he inspires Scripture writers and discuss the differences between inspiration in Scripture writing and inspiration in prophetic painting. Steven Félix-Jäger's contributions regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in artistic inspiration provide a good foundation for this discussion.

Inspiration

In Christian theology, the term "inspiration" typically refers to the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers in the process of inscripturation that renders the faithful record of the revelations, which qualify the writings to be the Word of God.[4] In the aesthetics world, the concept of "inspiration" refers to "the motivational insight that an artist experiences" before the creation of a work.[5] Patrick Sherry proposes that the concept of "inspiration" can "serve as a bridge" between the Holy Spirit and aesthetics and calls for a broadening of the understanding of "inspiration" beyond biblical inspiration and subsuming it under the communication of the Holy Spirit.[6] According to Sherry, this claim is aligned with the older theological traditions, and restricting the concept of "inspiration" to the process of Scripture writing is a contemporary theological development.[7] Broadening the understanding of "inspiration"

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[4]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 169, Kindle.

[5]Steven Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 81.

[6]Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*, Second Edition (London: SCM Press, 2002), 100–106. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 81–82.

[7]Ibid., 107. Ibid., 82.

would allow one to understand "inspiration" to mean the "way in which God through His Spirit lets us share in His creativity."[8]

Félix-Jäger draws a parallel between the inspiration in Scripture writing and the inspiration in artmaking. He subscribes to a dynamic view of inspiration for both which views the process of Scripture writing or artmaking as a collaboration between God and humans to form something.[9] This view humanises the process of Scripture writing and inspirates the process of artmaking.[10] Such a view may be problematic as the Scripture is authoritative and artwork is not. While this paper agrees that God does not bypass or dictate the writers or artists in the process of creative work, this paper argues that the inspiration in Scripture writing is more extensive and intensive than artmaking.

Inspiration in Scripture Writing

The questions that need to be addressed now are: (1) How does God inspire? (2) What is the difference between the inspiration of Scripture writing and that of prophetic painting? Erickson discusses five theories of inspiration in his book:

1. The intuition theory holds that inspiration is a permanent natural endowment, which religious geniuses possess, and the Scripture is a great religious literature reflecting their spiritual experiences.[11]
2. The illumination theory maintains that the Holy Spirit only heightened the writers' sensitivity and perceptivity to discover truth without special communication of truth or guidance in the content written.[12]
3. The dynamic theory emphasises the collaboration of God and humans in the writing of the Scripture.[13] The human writers give voice to divinely guided thoughts, allowing one's

[8]Ibid., 103. Ibid.

[9]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics,* 87.

[10]Shane Clifton, "Steven Félix-Jäger, Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 18 (March 6, 2016), https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/article/view/9495 (accessed November 16, 2023).

[11]Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 174.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

distinctive personality to be expressed in the choice of words and phrasing.[14]

4. The verbal theory insists that the Holy Spirit's influence is so intense that each word chosen by the writers is exactly what God wants to use to express the revelation.[15]
5. The dictation theory teaches that God dictated the Scripture to the writers, instructing them exactly what to write.[16]

The intuition theory and illumination theory should be ruled out with regards to Scripture writing as the former would mean that the Scripture is a compilation of the spiritual experience of the religious geniuses, while the latter would mean that the Scripture is a compilation of observations of the writers under heightened spiritual condition. Under these theories, Scripture can only be considered as humans' writings, not God's Word. To consider the Scripture as God's Word, it must be truth communicated to us by God. Therefore, the inspiration can only be dynamic, verbal, or dictation.

This paper argues in favour of verbal theory concerning the inspiration of Scripture writing. First, stylistic differences can be observed among the different writers. If God is the dictator, being an unchanging God, it is unlikely that the style of writing would change. Second, Erickson rightly points out that God can providentially prepare and equip writers with the necessary repertoire to express God's message in the exact words that he wishes to use. This makes it possible for the Scriptures to reflect the writers' stylistic distinctions and God's selection of the exact words.[17] Third, the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament indicates that the lexicological and grammatical features are vital to interpreting God's message.[18] If inspiration is dynamic, the writers have the freedom to express the divinely directed thoughts in their own words. In this case, the lexicon and grammar are not as important as the thought expressed. If the New Testament writers regarded the lexicon and grammar of the Scriptures with great intensity and drew theological inferences from them, the intensiveness of the inspiration must be down to the selection of the exact words. Therefore, it is likely that verbal theory is more applicable to the process of Scripture writing.

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[14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., 185.
[18]Ibid., 180.

Inspiration in Prophetic Painting

Steven Félix-Jäger cited Garberich's categorisation of the popular views of how artists understand the source of their inspiration:[19]

1. The supernatural.
2. Dreams or unconscious/subconscious manipulation of ideas.
3. An unfathomable mystery.[20]
4. A lightning bolt or eureka moment.
5. External images.
6. The result of problem-solving.

The first category, the supernatural, is more applicable to our discussion of prophetic arts as prophetic artists believe that the Holy Spirit is their source of inspiration. As discussed above, the intuition theory and illumination theory are merely human reflections and observations, God did not communicate his truth to the writers. These can apply to categories 2-6 in Garberich's categorisation.

It is necessary to differentiate the extent of inspiration between Scripture writing and prophetic painting. First, the Scripture is authoritative while prophetic arts are not. Therefore, the Holy Spirit doesn't need to dictate how the artists paint the content. Artists are free to give artistic expression to the message. Second, the Old Testament prophets often convey their message through visions, however, the vision was not the message, but the occasion for the message.[21] Understanding the message of the prophecy does not require an interpretation of everything in the vision as the features of the vision are incidental.[22] Likewise, prophetic arts as visual expressions are only occasions for the message, not the message itself. This allows flexibility in expression and it is not necessary for everything in the artwork to be interpreted to convey the message. Therefore, exact expression is not required. Considering these points, this paper argues that while the Scripture is verbally inspired, prophetic arts are dynamically inspired, where the

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[19]Mark David Garberich, "The Nature of Inspiration in Artistic Creativity" (PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 2008), 70, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

[20]Garberich differentiated "mystery" from "mystique." His defines "mystery" as "the inability to determine what exactly is taking place at crucial points in the creative experience. Garberich, "The Nature of Inspiration in Artistic Creativity," 77.

[21]Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 508. Kindle.

[22]Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 508.

artists give expression to the divinely directed thoughts in a way that is distinct from the person.

The implications of considering prophetic painting as dynamically inspired are that:

1. Prophetic painting is a collaboration between God and the artist to convey his message.[23]
2. It acknowledges the importance of developing artistic skills.[24]
3. It allows artists to draw inspiration from various areas and incorporate them into their work.[25]
4. God does not bypass or supplant the artist's humanity but secures it.[26]
5. The expression of prophecy in the prophetic arts can be limited by human factors.

This understanding of the inspiration is consistent with the experience of the prophetic artists. Many of them claim that they try to ask God for the message he wants to convey, and they are conscious of what and how they are expressing.[27]

Pentecostal Imagination

Félix-Jäger discusses the importance of imagination as a concept that precedes inspiration.[28] He contends that divine inspiration can be seen "either as God endowing the imagination through some religious experience from which the artist could draw, or by bypassing the imagination and inspiring the artist directly, or perhaps as a combination of the two."[29] The first scenario presupposes that imagination stores past experiences from which one can draw inspiration.[30]

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[23]J. Scott McElroy, *Finding Divine Inspiration: Working with the Holy Spirit in Your Creativity* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2008), 32. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 87–88.

[24]McElroy, *Finding Divine Inspiration*, 23. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 88.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Steven Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 113. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 88.

[27]Bay and Tan, "Prophetic Painting"; Ocampo, "Prophetic Art."

[28]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 89.

[29]Ibid., 91.

[30]Ibid.

Félix-Jäger builds on James K. A. Smith and Amos Yong's works in defining the Pentecostal imagination. Smith articulates that one's worldview is more a matter of imagination than the intellect and the imagination is fuelled by the images that are attained by senses.[31] The imagination is shaped by the things perceived through the senses. Amos Yong claims that Pentecostals have a "pneumatological imagination," "a way of seeing God, self, and world that is inspired by the Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the Spirit."[32] According to Yong, for Pentecostals, the imagination is funded by the experience of the Holy Spirit and conversely, the pneumatological imagination informs the experience.[33] With these as the theoretical bases, Félix-Jäger writes:

> Since divine inspiration cannot only be seen as God bypassing the artist's imagination, but also as God endowing the imagination through religious experience from which the artist draws, one begins to see that a Pentecostal artist's experiential spirituality greatly structures his or her inspiration. If one considers a Pentecostal artist as an artist who holds a Pentecostal worldview, then the artist's inspirations are thoroughly Pentecostal whether the resulting artwork is explicitly religious or not in content. The artwork would, in one way or another, be the outer expression of the artist's own experiential spirituality. In this way, the Pentecostal's artwork is an expression of his or her confessional appeal to a divine experience.[34]

Félix-Jäger summarises how the Pentecostal experience can be drawn upon and shaped in the process of inspiration. As discussed earlier, the prophetic painting is dynamically inspired, and the human factor is always present in the process. A Pentecostal artist with a Pentecostal worldview will often find it being expressed in the artworks. Therefore, the Pentecostal experience can be one way in which the Holy Spirit shapes the artist's imagination.

In conclusion, this section discussed how the Holy Spirit inspires prophetic artists in the process of prophetic painting. Due to differences in Scripture writing and prophetic painting, the extent of inspiration

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[31]James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 57. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 91.

[32]Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 102.

[33]Ibid., 171.

[34]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 93.

varies. While the authoritative nature of the Scripture requires the exactness of verbal inspiration, the non-authoritative nature of prophetic arts only requires dynamic inspiration. As the dynamic theory holds that the process of painting is a collaboration of God and humans, the human experience influences the artworks. For a Pentecostal, it means that the Pentecostal experience, which is shaped by the Holy Spirit may be expressed in one's artworks.

The Prophetic Ministries

After considering how the Holy Spirit inspires the prophetic artists, this paper shall discuss the differences between Old Testament and New Testament prophecies to define the prophetic nature of the prophetic arts.

The Old Testament Prophets

In the Old Testament, a prophet functions as God's spokesperson, commissioned to deliver his word.[35] Wayne Grudem points out the divine authority that was attached to the Old Testament prophecies. First, the Old Testament frequently highlights that the prophets were speaking the exact words which God has commanded them to deliver (Exod 4:12; Deut 18:18; Jer1:9; Num 22:38; Ezek 2:7).[36] Second, the Old Testament prophets frequently speak for God in the first person (2 Sam 7:4-16; 1 Kings 20:13, 42; 2 Kings 17:13; 19:25-28, 34; 21:12-15; 22:16-20; 2 Chr 12:5), which is an indication that they were speaking the words of God, not their own; the hearers would have recognised that the prophet is relaying God's words and not speaking his own words.[37] Last, the Old Testament prophets often prefaced their prophecies with words that indicated the divine origin of the prophetic words.[38] For example, "Thus says the Lord"[39] (1 Kings 21:19) and "the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant… the prophet" (1 Kings 14:18; 16:12; 2 Kings 9:36; 14:25; 17:23; 24:2; 2 Chr 29:25; Ezra 9:10-11; Neh 9:30; Jer 37:2; Zech 7:7, 12).[40]

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[35]Aaron C. Fenlason, "Prophets," in *Lexham Theological Workbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos Bible Software.

[36]Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 18-19.

[37]Ibid., 19.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

[40]Ibid.

On the other hand, the penalty for false prophets for false prophecies was fatal (Deut 13:5; 18:20). The prophets were evaluated as either true or false prophets and not by the various parts of their prophecies.[41] The presence of one bit of falsehood would disqualify the whole prophecy and the prophet would be regarded as a false prophet.[42]

In essence, divine authority was attached to the Old Testament prophecies as the prophets were to deliver the exact words of God. The prophets were evaluated by their prophecies, no allowance was given for the presence of falsehood.

New Testament Prophecy

In the New Testament, a prophet is one of the fivefold ministries that God equipped to lead the church through edification and encouragement of believers.[43] J. Rodman Williams discusses the ministry of the New Testament prophets. First, they could foretell events to come.[44] For example, the book of Acts recorded Agabus's prediction of the great famine (11:27-28) and Paul's arrest (21:10-11).[45] In the second prediction, Agabus prefaced his prophecy with "Thus says the Holy Spirit," which is similar to the fashion in which the Old Testament prophets introduced their prophecies. However, Grudem notes that though Agabus's second prophecy is generally correct, there are two minor mistakes. Agabus predicted that Paul would be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem, but Luke reported that Paul was bound by the Romans instead of the Jews.[46] Agabus predicted that the Jews would deliver Paul to the Romans by choice but Luke reported that Paul was forcibly rescued from the Jews by the tribune and his soldiers (Acts 21:32-33).[47] Grudem further argues that Agabus's prophecy is an example of the New Testament prophecy where "the prophet receives some kind of revelation and then reports it in his own words."[48] In this case, Agabus was generally correct but the details were somewhat wrong.[49]

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[41]Ibid., 21.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Fenlason, "Prophets."

[44]J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 171.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 96.

[47]Grudem argues that "will . . . deliver" (παραδώσουσιν) implies the idea of "actively, consciously, willingly 'delivering, giving over, handing over.'" Ibid., 97.

[48]Ibid., 99.

[49]Ibid.

By the Old Testament's standard, Agabus would have been put to death. However, in the New Testament, divine authority was not attached to the prophecies like in the Old Testament. Therefore, the evaluation is different; the believers are commanded to test the prophecies and hold fast to what is good (1 Thess 5:20-21).[50] New Testament prophecies were evaluated by various parts and there was allowance for mistakes.

Second, Williams also notes that the selection of Barnabas and Saul for missionary work was the result of a prophetic utterance that came forth from a gathering of teachers and prophets (Acts 13:1-2).[51] It seems that the prophet in the New Testament continues the role of providing spiritual direction.

Third, Judas and Silas who were identified as prophets fulfilled an important spiritual role of encouraging and strengthening (Acts 15:32).[52] Apart from that, Paul also teaches that the gift of prophecy is available to all believers, all can exercise the gift, and all are encouraged to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24, 31).[53] Grudem points out that the New Testament prophecy is "simply a human being reporting in merely human words something which God has brought to mind."[54]

To sum up the discussion above, it seems that the New Testament prophets have similar roles as the Old Testament prophets to foretell, instruct, and encourage. However, these prophets report the revelations in their own words, so mistakes may be present. Therefore, the believers are commanded to test the prophecies and hold fast to what is good.

Defining the Prophetic Arts

Defining "Prophetic"

Based on the discussions above, it seems appropriate to use the term "prophetic" to describe the activity where the believers report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. When applied to prophetic arts, the artists simply draw or paint (report) the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration.

Erickson argues that the reception of a message is a work of the Holy Spirit. Two people hearing the same message may have different

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[50]Ibid., 104.

[51]Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 3:171.

[52]Ibid.

[53]J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 380–81.

[54]Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 262.

responses. He cites his own experience where he thought he had preached poorly but a person who hears the message was blessed though he did not consciously intend it.[55] He then points out that the "prophetic" aspect may sometimes be in the reception more than in the declaration.[56] The Holy Spirit can also speak to a person "prophetically" through different means on various occasions. Considering the reception aspect may result in overgeneralising the term "prophetic." However, this paper argues that the reception aspect should be considered as the Holy Spirit may influence the process of preparation and declaration though the one who declares may not be aware of it.

Prophetic Arts

As mentioned above, "prophetic" describes the activity where the believers report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. Prophetic arts can be defined as artworks that the artists simply draw or paint to report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration.

It is helpful here to differentiate the term from other types of art that are closely associated. "Christian arts" as defined by Félix-Jäger is "art that comes from a Christian worldview or backdrop."[57] Similarly, Félix-Jäger defined "Pentecostal art" as "art that comes from a Pentecostal worldview or backdrop."[58] "Prophetic art" is both "Christian art" and "Pentecostal art," but not all "Christian art" and "Pentecostal art" are "Prophetic art." In terms of function, there are arts with didactic functions, which explicitly depict biblical or moral scenes to teach the viewer about Christian narrative.[59] "Prophetic art" must be differentiated from "didactic art" as they have different purposes. Though, "prophetic art" may sometimes use "didactic" elements to convey God's message, its purpose is not to teach Christian narrative. Some "prophetic arts" may convey God's message without using Christian elements. Therefore, it is paramount to highlight the importance of purpose when defining "prophetic arts."

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[55]Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 811.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 9.
[58]Ibid.
[59]Ibid., 199–200.

Discerning Prophetic Arts

Discerning whether artworks are prophetic arts is a complex issue. How do we know if the artworks are inspired by the Holy Spirit, other spirits, or human imagination? Discernment is crucial in identifying the source of inspiration.

In assessing the source of inspiration for ritual, Yong characterises Spirit-inspired rituals as those that promote social cohesion, enable practitioners to bring social change, transform practitioners emotionally and aesthetically, bring healing and liberation, and intensify human creativity.[60] While demonic rituals are those that destroy human integrity, disrupt social relations, produce alienation and estrangement, obstruct personal healing and communal reconciliation, and inhibit human creativity.[61] Félix-Jäger acknowledges the helpfulness of these categorisations when it comes to considering the source of inspiration for artwork.[62] However, he also notes that a piece of artwork may display both characteristics, which makes identification of the source of inspiration problematic.[63]

Félix-Jäger proposes a three-step process of discernment to identify the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within a piece of artwork.[64] First, one must consider the artist's purpose and tradition while assessing the ideologies in their context.[65] Second, one must compare the artist's purpose and tradition to God's larger purpose.[66] Last, one must evaluate the artwork by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.[67]

Fee points out that while Paul instructs the believers to test prophecies, he did not give specific criteria but some general principles can be observed from Paul's writings.[68] First, Fee suggests the test of purpose can be applied since Paul says that the one who prophesies speaks edification, encouragement, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3).[69] Second, the test of content can be applied as Paul exhorts believers to "stand firm

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[60]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s),* 135.
[61]Ibid., 136.
[62]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 101.
[63]Ibid., 102.
[64]Ibid., 103.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid.
[68]Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 1994), 60.
[69]Ibid.

and hold to the traditions" taught by the apostles (2 Thess 2:15).[70] Félix-Jäger's first two steps aligns with the two criteria that Fee outlines.

The third step is somewhat subjective. In 1 Cor 14:29, Paul teaches that prophecies should be weighed by the others. Grudem convincingly argues that "the others" is not an exclusive group of prophets or gifted people but the entire congregation.[71] This can offer some objectivity to discerning as the responsibility of discerning is not rested only on one or few.

Jesus also teaches the disciples to recognise the false prophets by their fruits (Matt 7:15-16). Likewise, Jesus did not specifically identify the "fruits." France comments that the "fruits" is an ethical metaphor, assuming that true allegiance to God will cause one to exhibit appropriate behaviour.[72] Therefore, by the lifestyles of the speakers of prophecies, one can recognise if they are true prophets.

Clifton points out that considering inspiration from the perspective of the purpose of the artist may not offer a complete picture.[73] Clifton suggests that it is better to consider it from the perspective of the viewer as interpretation is subjective and the Holy Spirit might speak to two viewers of the same artwork differently.[74] This is the case where the "prophetic" is in the reception. Even so, discernment is still necessary. The recipients can test the content and allow others to weigh the interpretation.

Suffice it to say, that though a definite conclusion of the source of inspiration is beyond reach, some helpful guidelines can be put in place. The subjectivity involved certainly adds to the complexity of the discernment. Nevertheless, one needs to critically evaluate artwork while being open to the prophetic.

Evaluation of Various Definitions

Visual Expression of Prophecy

One of the definitions that is popular among prophetic artists is based on 1 Cor 14:3, where prophetic arts are considered visual expressions of

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[70]Ibid.

[71]Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 73.

[72]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 291.

[73]Clifton, "Steven Félix-Jäger, Pentecostal Aesthetics."

[74]Ibid.

prophecy to strengthen, encourage, and comfort.[75] In the New Testament, prophecy is one of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit. Schreiner defines "prophecy" as "communicating revelations from God in a spontaneous utterance."[76] One might question, is the artwork a valid expression of prophecy? In the New Testament, many of the instances mentioned in the Pauline epistles discuss prophecy as expressed through spoken words. However, it does not mean prophecy can only be communicated through words. For example, in Acts 21:10-11, Agabus bound himself with Paul's belt as a prophetic symbol to express the message of the prophecy.[77] Old Testament prophets proclaimed their messages through many verbal and nonverbal elements of communication.[78] However, the very few records of these communications may be due to the inherent theological and ideological nature of the preserved text, which places importance on the messages rather than the way the messages were communicated.[79] Art may be a nonverbal way that prophecy can be communicated. Moreover, God spoke through the Old Testament prophet using vision as an occasion for his message.[80] In this case, artwork as a visual expression is a more direct way to present the vision. However, it should be noted that just as with visions, the artwork is just an occasion for the prophecy to be communicated, it is not the message itself. In practice, some churches also request prophetic artists to write the message in words and attach it to the artwork to guide the viewers in interpreting the artwork.

Manzo defines spontaneous prophetic arts as "divinely inspired unpremeditated and unrehearsed artmaking" and states that prophetic arts may be created "intuitively in public religious arenas or cultural spaces within liturgical and ecclesial functions."[81] This definition limits the nature of prophetic arts and settings of prophetic artmaking.

Citing Fee, Manzo argues that the charismata is meant for the church and is to be operated in the setting of Christian worship.[82] Does the painting need to be done in the church services to be considered

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[75]Manzo, "Towards an Understanding of the Spontaneous Prophetic Artist in the Pentecostal Church," 36.

[76]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 360, Logos Bible Software.

[77]Ibid., 361.

[78]K. G. Friebel, "Sign Acts," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 707.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 508, Kindle.

[81]Manzo, "Towards an Understanding of the Spontaneous Prophetic Artist in the Pentecostal Church," 36-37.

[82]Ibid., 37.

as prophetic art? To answer this question, one must inquire whether prophecy can be uttered outside of the church services. When Paul discusses the charismatic giftings, it was often discussed in the context of the church gathering to strengthen, encourage, and comfort the body of Christ. This might lead one to conclude that the charismatic gifts can only be operated within the church services. This paper argues that charismatic gifts can be operated outside of church services. The lack of didactic teachings on the use of charismatic gifts outside of the church is probably because the epistles were written to the church to address issues within the congregation. The Book of Acts records instances where charismatic gifts are exercised outside of the context of church gatherings. For example, Peter healed the lame outside the temple gate and healing took place where his shadow fell on the sick he passed by (Acts 3:1-9; 5:12-16). In modern days, encouragements and prophecies can be sent over text messages or through recorded videos or audio outside of church gatherings. Since the charismatic gifts are operational outside of the church services, the prophetic artists can paint prophetically even in their studios. Due to the limited time, in practice, some of the prophetic artists painted most of the artworks beforehand and did their final touches during the worship session.[83] Moreover, this paper calls for an expansion of the definition to include artworks painted prophetically outside of the church services to be prophetic arts.

The last thing to address here is the "spontaneity" in the gift of prophecy. It is true that spontaneity is suggested in 1 Corinthians 14 since "revelation" comes to another while one is still "prophesying" (14:29-32).[84] However, it may not necessarily mean "no previously prepared message is contemplated here."[85] The objection is not to the notion of "spontaneity," but to the exclusion of preparation. As discussed in the earlier section, the dynamic process of inspiration usually draws on the human experience to give expression to God's message. While the message may be spontaneously given in the church gathering, the content of the message may be prepared. Blomberg argues that believers should consider thoughtfully what God wants to convey to a particular congregation at a particular time and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to lucidly speak what is most appropriate.[86] He added that preparation aids spontaneity, as one can draw from the wealth of previously considered

[83]Bay and Tan, "Prophetic Painting."

[84]Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 171.

[85]Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 361.

[86]Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, in *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 272.

thoughts at the moment.[87] Lack of preparation, conversely, may hinder the successful articulation of God's message as one may be at a loss for words or a logical flow of thought and "lapses into a disconnected 'stream of consciousness.'"[88]

This paper argues that spontaneity refers to the point where one is spontaneously prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak, rather than the spontaneous generation of content. However, it should be noted that the Holy Spirit is free to bypass the speaker's experience and inspire the speaker directly to speak of unpremeditated content spontaneously, though the expression is still limited by the speaker's capabilities. Manzo argues that "in the spontaneous moment, the artist may create solely from their memory of existing skills and experiences with their art materials, or they may create from an unknown place beyond their current ability fully inspired by the Holy Spirit."[89] This paper agrees with Manzo in that the artists may be prompted by the Holy Spirit spontaneously. However, this paper considers "memory of existing skills and experiences" as preparations and that prophetic artmaking may not necessarily be unpremeditated and unrehearsed. Therefore, just as spontaneous prophetic painting is valid, premeditated and rehearsed prophetic artmaking is also a valid form of prophetic art.

Prophetic Painting as Worship to God

Some artists also define prophetic painting as a physical demonstration of one's worship.[90] This definition focuses on the act of painting rather than the product as one is painting unto God. Jim Watkins suggests that the congregation participates in this act of worship by witnessing the skill and gift that God works through (or with) the artist.[91] Félix-Jäger asserts that this type of spontaneous painting is an example of liturgical (visual) arts.[92] If taken out of the church, it loses its liturgical functions and would fail to fulfil its intended purpose.[93] Initial inquiry may exclude this from the definition of "prophetic arts" proposed in this

[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Manzo, "Towards an Understanding of the Spontaneous Prophetic Artist in the Pentecostal Church," 37.

[90]Ocampo, "Prophetic Art."

[91]Jim Watkins, "Spontaneous Performance Jesus Painting . . . huh?," *Transpositions* (blog), August 16, 2010, https://www.transpositions.co.uk/spontaneous-performance-jesus-painting-huh/.

[92]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 205.

[93]Ibid.

paper as its purpose is to express worship instead of conveying God's message.

As discussed earlier, sometimes the "prophetic" is in the reception more than it is in the declaration. Sometimes, an artist may unconsciously paint something "prophetic." This does not mean that the Holy Spirit dictates the painting and the artist is painting in an unconscious state. Rather, the impression that the artist conceives may be the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which the artist may not be aware of. Though it is differentiable in theory, it is difficult to differentiate in practice. One might advocate accepting all such works so as not to quench the Spirit. On the other hand, some might be concerned that some works are false claimants to inspiration or worse, diabolical inspirations.[94] It is prudent to exercise discernment rather than to uncritically accept works as Spirit-inspired.

Prophetic arts as critical cultural engagement

Some Pentecostal scholars consider charismatic gifts as a foretaste of things to come.[95] Félix-Jäger proposes that if art is a foretaste of things to come, it gives art "a prophetic function that ultimately underscores the eschatological hope of the coming kingdom of God."[96] Smith argues that the ability to imagine the world otherwise is an important aspect of Pentecostalism.[97] The prophetic imagination seeks an alternate social consciousness from the dominant one.[98] Walter Brueggeman points out that one of our prophetic imagination's tasks is criticism and dismantlement.[99]

As mentioned in the earlier discussions, the Pentecostal worldview as part of the human experience is a source of inspiration. When painting under the charismatic influence of the Holy Spirit, the artworks can portray the eschatological hope that runs contrary to the dominant culture of the world that sometimes may involve criticism and deconstruction. This would be considered prophetic art as well, as it conveys the eschatological hope in God under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In this

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[94]Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty,* 112. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 82.

[95]Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 151.

[96]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 138.

[97]James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 84. As cited in Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 140.

[98]Félix-Jäger, *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 140.

[99]Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 81.

sense, the message is like that of the Old Testament prophets. However, this form of prophetic arts may not be seen in the church as frequently as preparation, meditation, and refinement may be involved. The time given to paint in the church may be insufficient unless the artist completes most of the artwork and delivers the final touch in the church setting.

Some are concerned that through preparation, meditation, and refinement, the artwork may become more of human imagination than the Holy Spirit's inspiration. This is a valid concern and could be a similar case to Agabus's prophecy where parts are correct and parts are presumptuous. On the other hand, the images that God has impressed upon the hearts of artists may require them to take time to prepare, meditate, and refine. Some artworks simply require more time to complete. Limiting the time for artists may restrict prophetic arts to only those that can be completed in a short frame of time, or in the context of some churches, the duration of the service. Moreover, even within a short time, the artwork may be the artist's imagination rather than the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Therefore, it is more advisable for prophetic artists to be careful, faithful, and prayerful in depicting the images that God has impressed in their hearts than to limit the time, preparation, meditation, and refinement. During preparation, meditation, and refinement, the artists can also discern the source of inspiration.

In summary, most of the understanding of prophetic arts can be subsumed under the definition proposed by this paper, where "prophetic arts" is defined as artworks that the artists paint to report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration. Consequently, this paper calls for an expansion of understanding of prophetic arts in the Church to explore the other aspects of prophetic arts. For example, many churches would confine prophetic art to the artworks painted during church services and further limit it to spontaneous painting. Prophetic artists may explore prophetic painting in studios or even public spaces, where the reach can be extended beyond the four walls of the Church. On the other hand, artists should not limit inspiration to that which is spontaneous, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit may be a prolonged process as well.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the Holy Spirit inspires prophetic artists dynamically in the process of prophetic painting, where the artists give human expression to the divine message. This paper also proposes that "prophetic arts" should be defined by the prophetic function in that the artists simply paint to report the revelation that God has laid on their hearts

or brought to their minds through artistic inspiration. Consequently, this paper calls for an expansion of understanding of "prophetic arts" and encourages churches and prophetic artists to explore other aspects of "prophetic arts" to discover the fullness of God's gift to the Church, while they continue to trust the Spirit's guidance and remain discerning.

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The Urban Face of Megachurch Leadership: A Comparative and Quantitative Analyses of Megachurch Leadership in the Context of Urban Centers in the Philippines[1]

by Joel Agpalo Tejedo

Introduction

Megachurch pastors in the Global South play an important role in mediating the sacred to their adherents in the context of rapidly changing urbanization, secularization, and globalization of metropolitan cities. Therefore, how megachurch leadership thinks, behaves, and practice spiritual leadership in their environment is a question that is worth answering. Expanding the survey questionnaires of Bird and Tumma of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research on Megachurches (Bird and Tumma 2020, 26) by the scholars of the Templeton Megachurch Project (TMCP) and using the Qualtrics online survey template, we interviewed leaders and compared their doctrinal beliefs about the Scriptures, discipleship and Christian life, beliefs about charisms, attitudes about ancestors, Satan and his demons, attitudes toward government, finances, response to social issues such as gender and sexuality, socio-political engagement, and responses to COVID-19. Two case studies of megachurch leadership were chosen to advance our knowledge about the nature of megachurch leadership in the Philippines: Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF) and Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF). Between these two case studies, there are no significant differences as to what they believe and practice as spiritual leaders. However, we provide empirical evidence in our findings to assert that these two groups of megachurch leaders are creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial religious actors who are shaping the religious landscape in the Philippines.

[1]This research project was funded by the generosity of the John Templeton Foundation under the "Templeton Megachurch Project in the Global South" of Canisius College in New York.

The Historical Formations of CCF and VCF in the Urban Center Metro Manila, Philippines

Christ Commission Fellowship

Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF) is a megachurch planted in one of the business hubs of Metro Manila, with a staggering membership of 110,000 people who worship at the ten-story building in Frontera Verde in Pasig City. Pasig City is the eighth-largest city in the Philippines, with a population of 755,300. In 1982, the pastor, Peter Tan-chi and Deonna, started a Bible Study fellowship with three other couples in Brookside Subdivision in Cainta Rizal. As they grew in number, the Bible study moved to the garage of Loreto Carbonel in San Juan, Metro Manila. This Bible Study fellowship became a core group of forty business people and professionals with their families. They began their first Sunday worship at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and formed the Christ Commission Fellowship in 1984. In 1987, they transferred from one theatre to a bigger theatre as attendance increased. In 1988, CCF occupied the 4,500 seats of the Philippines International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City, then moved to the Country Club of Valle Verde in Pasig City until CCF found its new home in St. Francis Hall in Ortigas Center in 1997. During this period, CCF was steadily growing as an influential megachurch in Metro Manila.

With an influx of worshipers from south of Metro Manila, CCF in Sucat Road in Paranaque was formed and established as the first satellite congregation in 1994. In 2000, new CCF satellite congregations began to emerge in Metro Manila and other provinces. As CCF grew and spread its influence in other major cities of the Philippines, CCF congregations were planted in Pampanga, Cebu, Bukidnon, and Davao, along with CCF in Alabang, Pasig in Ever Gotesco, Malolos Bulacan, and Marikina. In 2006, CCF Singapore became the first international CCF congregation.

Peter Tan-chi, the pastor, and the leadership team dreamed of a mega-worship hall for two decades. In 2008, they held a groundbreaking ceremony for a ten-thousand-seat auditorium in a ten-story permanent worship hall for CCF. The magnificent structure in Frontera Verde in Ortigas Center, Pasig City, was a four-year design by a young Filipino-Chinese architect, Daniel Go, from the University of Santo Thomas. Five years after its groundbreaking ceremony, CCF officially transferred its church offices and worship services to the new center. With its growing influence in the Philippines' religious landscape, CCF started an online live-streaming worship service. As a result, many CCF satellite churches were born in Metro Manila and other provinces. In 2012, CCF expanded

its influence and aggressively planted satellite churches overseas in Auckland, Paris, Toronto, and Los Angeles.

Celebrating its 36th anniversary in 2020, CCF estimated that they have 155,000 members and seventy-five satellite congregations in the Philippines and forty overseas, ten-thousand small groups nationwide, and thirty-three-thousand house churches in thirty countries (CCF 2022 at 0.28-0.42). Following the first-century church's indigenous leadership model of ministries without foreign affiliations and financial support, CCF is a rising megachurch in the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere.

Victory Christian Fellowship

Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF) started in Manila in June 1984 through the ministry of founding short-term missionaries Al Manamtam, Rice Broocks, and Steve and Deborah Murrell. They visited Metro Manila when the Philippines was experiencing political turmoil and students protests due to the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino on the tarmac of Manila International Airport. The Philippines were in a state of collapse because investors pulled back their capital during the political instability caused by the assassination. These short-term missionaries arrived at University Belt in Metro Manila and started a church for nearby college and high school students. Their original two-week evangelistic effort resulted in 150 members who met in the basement of the Tandem Theater in Recto Avenue (Murrell 2019).

VCF formed as a megachurch through the collective ministry of Western missionaries and local Filipino Christians. Murrell is fond of saying that without the faithful and active contribution of local Christians like Manny Carlos, Juray Mura, Jun Escosar, Luther Mancao, and Ferdie Cabiling, the first and original members of VCF, the work of evangelism and discipleship would not have been possible (Murrell 2011, xiv, 1). Murrell compares VCF to a Wikipedia that welcomes anyone to write any information that can be quickly disseminated. He believes in "empowering volunteers and imperfect people to spread the most important message worldwide." Murrell takes seriously the "Same Ole Boring Strokes" principle of sports coaching that patiently teaches people "every day, over and over," until they master how to "engage, establish, equip, and empower" other people to also become disciples. Murrell points out that "if we simply focus on making disciples who are equipped and empowered to make disciples, then health, strength, and growth happen naturally" (Murrell 2011, 6, 7, 8). In 1994, ten years after its first inception, Rice Broocks, Phil Bonasso, and Steve Murrell began

to visualize turning their church into a powerhouse for campus ministry, church planting, and world missions. For this purpose, Every Nation, a worldwide church planting movement, was born. One of its founding members was VCF, whose main church is located in Global City, Taguig City. Taguig City is the seventh-largest city in the Philippines with a population of 804,915. VCF is surrounded (within one thousand meters) by premier universities and schools.

Murrell recalls that VFC's fifteen locations in Metro Manila had eighty weekend services in 2009. In addition, forty-five VCF churches were planted in the islands of the Philippines and overseas in Thailand, Bangladesh, China, and Dubai, with overall members of fifty-two-thousand. While some attendees are in their thirties, most are young professionals or college students. These young professionals are responsible for their "weekly discipleship groups in coffee shops, dorm rooms, living rooms, and board rooms all over Metro Manila" (Murrell 2011, 2, 4). In 2015, VCF reported 110,000 attending their weekly services. In 2019, VCF claimed to have 102 provincial local churches in the Philippines and 50 satellite campuses around Metro Manila. VCF also successfully planted local churches in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iran, Laos, Spain, and Vietnam (Murrell 2019).

Methodology

The methodology used for this study is a combination of multiple approaches. The research team made field visits and communications to our target projects, secured a research agreement with megachurches' leadership, and observed research protocols by communicating clearly what the research project intended to do. We examined hundreds of online sermons, TV interviews of megachurch leaders, and testimonials of CCF and VCF members. In addition, we joined the CCF and VCF social media platforms to receive and continually update each one's published videos. Finally, while we were restricted from attending the physical services due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we participated in online services of both churches almost every Saturday and Sunday. The survey instrument used for this study was a leadership survey from the 2015 Survey of North American Megachurches of Hartford Institute for Religion Research, designed by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird. The research team from the Global South led by Timothy Wadkins spent one year of online Zoom meetings to create a more robust survey instrument. During the Zoom meetings, we revised, enhanced, and added important variables to the Leadership Surveys to make the instruments more appropriate in the context of the Global South. Important variables added

were engagement with the world, theological questions, and COVID-19 questions. We used the Qualtrics Online Survey and Google Form Online Survey to collect data from CCF and VCF. The survey was conducted by the Philippine Regional Team in partnership with the leadership of CCF and VCF.

The leadership survey was pretested with senior pastors of the Light of the World Church and the Guiding Light Church, two thriving and growing churches in Baguio City. Since data collection required the endorsement and recommendation of megachurch leadership, we sent the draft to CCF and VCF for review after pretesting. We emailed the leadership of both churches, charting our plan to implement the surveys. Methodological predicaments encountered during the research process involved meeting the expectations of the megachurch leaders. There was reluctance and skepticism from VCF regarding whether data collection could be successful due to the New General Community Quarantine (GCQ) imposed by the national government in Metro Manila, Philippines. The pandemic gravely affected church attendance and the timely implementation and collection of data. To formally administer the survey questionnaire to the main churches of CCF and VCF in Metro Manila, we crafted three survey versions: long, short, and abridged, and made the study available in Qualtrics and Google Forms. We also published and printed hard copies of the instruments to make them available on all fronts. Data collection procedures at CCF and VCF were strictly observed by researchers in the Philippines, from sending an official letter to the leadership of megachurches to submitting the survey instruments for review. Survey instruments were sent to the executive secretaries of CCF and VCF who copied and furnished them to the pastors and leaders.

Demographics of Pastoral Leadership of CCF and VCF

The respondents of the pastoral leadership survey are current pastors of the main campuses of CCF and VCF in Metro Manila and other satellite churches in the provinces in the Philippines. Most identified their names, though some did not want to be named for confidentiality's sake.

Ages (Year of birth)	CCF (N=21)	VCF (N=20)
30-40 (1981-1990)	0 (0%)	4 (20%)
40-50 (1971-1980)	4 (19.04%)	12 (60%)
50-60 (1961-1970)	4 (19.04%)	4 (20%)
60-70 (1948-1960)	13 (61.90%)	0 (0%)

Regarding age, the survey shows that CCF pastors are older than VCF pastors. No CCF pastors were born in the 1980s and 1990s, indicating that no CCF millennials participated in the survey. Four (19.04%) CCF pastors are in their forties and fifties, while another four (19.04%) are in their fifties and sixties. Thirteen (61.90%) are in their sixties and seventies. At VCF, four (20%) are in their thirties and forties, twelve (60%) are in their forties and fifties, and four (20%) are in their fifties and sixties.

Gender		
Male	21 (100%)	20 (100%)
Female	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Marital Status		
Married	20 (95.24)	20 (100%)
Widow/Widower	1 (4.76%)	0 (0%)

Regarding gender, male preachers dominate both megachurches. All CCF and VCF pastors who were interviewed are male. While both churches empower women to assume an essential role in their church ministries, women are rarely seen in the ministry of preaching. All male pastors are married, with one from CCF recently becoming a widower.

Race and Ethnicity		
Filipinos	13 (71.42%)	15 (75%)
Other Asian/Chinese	7 (33.3)	5 (25%)
Caucasian/White	1 (4.76)	0 (0%)
Birthplace		
Philippines	20 (95.32%)	20 (100%)
USA	1 (4.76%)	0 (0%)
Passports/Citizenship Status		
Philippines	16 (76.19%)	20 (100%)
USA	4 (19.04%)	0 (0%)
Taiwan	1 (4.76%)	0 (0%)

Regarding the race and ethnic identity of CCF leadership, thirteen (71.42%) respondents are Filipinos, seven (33.3%) are Asians of Chinese descent, and one (4.76%) is an American. Regarding the birthplace country, twenty pastors (95.32%) were born in the Philippines and one (4.76%) was born in the United States. While sixteen (76.19%) respondents hold Filipino passports, four (19.04%) are US citizens, and one (4.76%) has a Taiwanese passport. At VCF, fifteen (75%) respondents are purely Filipinos, while five (25%) are Filipino-Chinese. All are born in the Philippines and have Filipino passports.

Proficiency of Languages

One Language (English)	2 (9.52%)	1 (5%)
Bi-Lingual	13 (61.90%)	17 (85%)
Tri-lingual	4 (19.04%)	1 (5%)
Quad-lingual or more	2 (9.52%)	1 (5%)

Regarding language proficiency, CCF and VCF leaders are multi-lingual, speaking two, three, or four languages. Only two (9.52%) CCF pastors speak only English; thirteen (61.9%) are bi-lingual with fluent English and Tagalog. Four (19.04%) are tri-lingual, speaking three languages. Another two (9.52%) pastors are quadrilateral and speak four or five languages, including English, Tagalog, Cebuano, Chinese, Spanish, or Bahasa. Regarding VCF, one (5%) can only speak English; seventeen (85%) are bi-lingual, fluent in English and Tagalog. One (5%) speaks English, Tagalog, and Ilocano dialects. One (5%) speaks four or five languages, such as Tagalog, Chinese, English, Ilocano, or Cebuano.

Educational Attainment

Some College or Technical Schools	2 (9.52%)	1 (5%)
College with Bachelor's Degree	9 (42.86%)	9 (45%)
In-House Training for Ministry	1 (4.76%)	3 (15%)
Master's Degree	6 (28.57%)	4 (20%)
Doctoral Degree	2 (9.52%)	1 (5%)
Others	1 (4.76)	2 (10%)

Regarding educational attainment, pastors of CCF and VCF are highly educated, trained at national and overseas colleges and universities. At CCF, two (9.52%) leaders have technical and associate college degrees; nine (42.86%) have a College Bachelor's Degree; six (28.57%) have a Master's Degree; and two (9.52%) have a doctoral degree. One (4.76%) has In-House Training for the Ministry and one

(4.76%) has specialized training from a different school. It is striking to observe that most respondents with a Master's degree earned their degree from universities in the USA or overseas. Others obtained their Master's Degrees at theological seminaries in Manila, like the Asian Theological Seminary and International Graduate School of Leadership. Five (25%) of the respondents completed their doctoral studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and Ateneo de Manila University. One respondent is a medical doctor.

At VCF, one (5%) respondent attended a college and technical school; nine (45%) completed bachelor's degrees; three (15%) completed an in-house training center in ministry; four (20%) have Master's Degrees, and one (5%) completed his DMin. Two (10%) received other training not indicated in the survey. Two (10%) pastors completed their graduate and post-graduate degrees in a USA seminary or college. The rest studied at the Evangelical seminaries in the Philippines and major universities in Manila. Pastors primarily sought graduate and post-graduate education in the USA.

Profession before Entering the Ministry[2]

Senior Officers/Managers	13 (61.9%)	4 (20%)
Professionals	6 (28.57%)	12 (60%)
Technicians and Associate Professionals	2 (9.52%)	4 (20%)

Megachurch pastors of CCF and VCF belonged to the highest professions in the corporate world before entering the ministry. When asked whether they had an occupation before entering the ministry, twenty (95%) had jobs and careers before assuming a leadership role at CCF. Only one (5%) indicated that pastoral ministry is his sole occupation. When asked about the classifications of their jobs and professions, thirteen (61.9%) had been senior officers, CEOs, and managers in corporations; six (28.57%) worked as professionals; and two (9.52%) had been technicians and associate professionals. At VCF, four (20%) were previously senior officers and managers, twelve (60%) were professionals, and four (20%) were technicians and associate

[2]International Labor Organization, "The International Standard of Classifications of Occupations (ISCO)" available at: International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO)–ILOSTAT. The classification of occupations, skills, and jobs of megachurch pastors is based on the International Labor Organization. Based on this classification, megachurch pastors in the Philippines belonged to the highest professions and occupations before entering the pastoral ministry.

professionals. In addition, respondents listed occupations such as engineers, business people, entrepreneurs, managers, and marketing professionals, before becoming pastors.

Years of Service in the Ministry

5 years	5 (23.8%)	2 (10%)
10 years	6 (28.57%)	5 (25%)
20 years	9 (42.85%)	4 (20%)
30 years	1 (4.76%)	7 (35%)
40 years	0 (0%)	2 (10%)

Most megachurch pastors have been serving in the ministry for decades, and many of their wives share the work of the ministry. When it comes to longevity, ministry, and family participation at CCF, five (23.8%) started serving as pastors five years ago; six (28.57%) served as pastors ten years ago; and nine (42.85%) served as pastors twenty years ago. Only one (4.76%) was serving as a pastor thirty years ago. Asked whether they served on a church staff before becoming pastors, fourteen (66.67%) said no; four (19.05%) said yes; and three (14.29 %) said the question was not applicable. Regarding spousal partnership in ministry, eleven (55%) said their wives shared in leadership, while ten (45%) said their wives are not involved.

At VCF, two (10%) pastors have served for five years; five (25%) for ten years; four (20%) for twenty years; seven (35%) for 30 years; and two (10%) between thirty to forty years. Asked whether they previously served on a church staff before becoming a VCF pastor, sixteen (80%) were on a staff, while four (20%) did not. Regarding spousal participation in leadership, fifteen (75%) said their wives do not share in pastoral leadership responsibilities. Five (25%) said their wives are involved in leadership.

Data Analyses and Findings

The Bible and Its Interpretation

Regarding their perspectives about the Bible, twenty-one (100%) of CCF pastors said that God inspires the Bible, that it is the authority for faith and practice, and that it is a system of truth that is entirely complete, infallible, and free from error. Regarding how the Bible is interpreted among CCF pastors, fourteen of them (66.67%) said that although it is an inspired and infallible document, it must be studied and applied like

an architect studying the blueprint of a building while seven (33.33%) said that while the Bible has a truthful literal sense, the Holy Spirit can add meaning to the Bible. No CCF leaders believe that quoting specific texts or having a Bible in one's possession can be a force of healing, deliverance, and protection from demonic assault.

Most Megachurch Leaders Place a High Value on the Holy Scripture and Affirm that It Has To Be Interpreted Creatively by the Leading of the Holy Spirit

Table 1: CCF Perspective on the Bible Interpretations
Source 1: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

Table 2: VCF Perspective on Bible Interpretations
Source 2: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

Regarding VCF pastors, nine (47.62%) agreed that God inspires the Bible and that it is the authority of faith and practice. Eight (42.86%) said the Bible is an entirely infallible and error-free system of truth. However, two (7.14%) said the Bible is a human document containing outdated cultural norms, some textual contradictions, and factual errors. One (2.38%) respondent also believes that the Bible is a human document that reveals an aspect of the Jewish and Christian traditions and points to the radical message of Christ. However, it is neither inspired, free from error, nor absolute authority for faith and practice. Regarding how VCF interprets the Bible, twelve (63.33%) of the respondents said that the Bible is an inspired and infallible document, and it is to be studied and applied like an architect would study and apply a blueprint when constructing a building. The other seven (33.33%) said that while the Bible has a truthful literal sense, the Holy Spirit can add meaning to the Bible. Only one (3.33%) said that quoting certain texts or having the Bible in one's possession can be a force of healing, deliverance, and protection from demonic assault.

Salvation and Deliverance

Regarding the theology of CCF about salvation and deliverance, the theological themes that received the most complete answers in the field are as follows: all CCF pastors believe that heaven and hell are real, and at the end of life every human being is destined for one or the other. All agree that salvation is an immediate event when people turn their lives over to Christ, accept him as their Savior, and are "born again." While eighteen (90%) of CCF leaders said that humans have free will to reject and receive the gift of salvation, nineteen (92.31%) think that humans are predestined to salvation and damnation. Fifteen (75%) are still studying whether salvation can be lost. When it comes to the role of faith in salvation, all agree that salvation requires personal faith. Salvation is a process and a growing realization that a person wants to be a disciple of Jesus. For CCF pastors, faith is a kind of hope or trust in God's overall faithfulness; faith is a certainty that God will provide whatever an individual asks for (as long as they have faith). Asked whether faith can be made stronger through positive confession or confessing the result of something asked for as though it has already been given, only thirteen (63.64%) agreed with the statement, and eight (36.36%) said they are unsure of it. Regarding the issue of deliverance, nineteen (93.75%) agreed that Christ can forgive sin, and he can be counted on to deliver an individual from demonic possession, psychological burdens,

physical infirmity, or economic poverty. Nineteen (93.33%) agreed that deliverance requires faith, while two (6.67%) are uncertain.

Megachurch Leaders Adhere to the Fundamental Belief and Doctrine of Evangelicals Regarding Salvation and Deliverance

Table 3: CCF Perspective About Salvation and Deliverance
Source 3: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

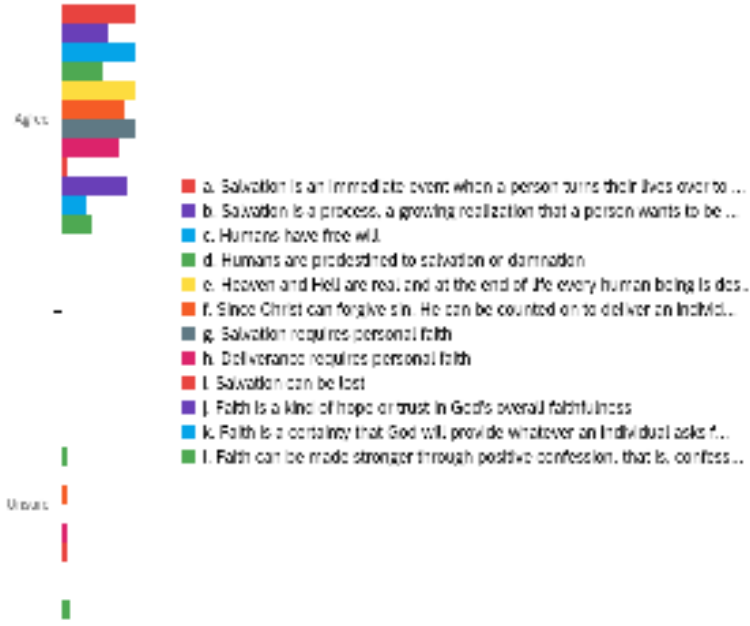


Table 4: VCF Perspective About Salvation and Deliverance
Source 4: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Regarding the VCF perspective of salvation and deliverance, all pastors agreed that salvation is an immediate event when a person turns their lives over to Christ, accepts him as their Savior, and is "born again." All believe that salvation is a process, a growing realization that a person wants to be a disciple of Jesus, and all agreed that humans have free will. As to whether humans are predestined to salvation and damnation, sixteen (80%) agreed, and four (20%) are unsure about the statement. Asked about their perspective of heaven and hell, twenty (100%) agreed that heaven and hell are real; at the end of life, every human being is destined for one or the other. With regards to the power of Christ to forgive sins, twenty (100%) agreed that Christ can be counted on to deliver an individual from demonic possession, psychological burdens, physical infirmity, or even economic poverty. Regarding the role of faith, twenty (100%) of pastors agreed that salvation requires personal faith. Eighteen (93.33%) concured that deliverance requires faith. All are unsure whether salvation can be lost. Nineteen pastors agreed that faith is hope and trust in God's faithfulness. About the certainty of faith, that God will provide whatever an individual asks for as long as they

have faith, seventeen (87.50%) agreed with the statement; the same percentage of pastors also agreed that faith can be made stronger through positive confession; that is, confessing the result of something asked for as though it has already been given strengthens faith.

Living as a Disciple of Christ

The church is called to live out the Christian life as disciples of Jesus Christ. Christian churches believe that the church, the body of Christ on earth, is the practical expression of Jesus in our broken world. They are called to become a mouthpiece of God and a moral conscience of society. This study asked how megachurches define the meaning of Christian discipleship and to rank how Christians should live as disciples of Christ. Eighteen (85.7%) pastors said living as a disciple of Christ means loving others as God loves them and becoming more morally like Christ. Second, for seventeen (80.95%) pastors, it is essential to have a disciplined life, be inclusive and welcome others into the Christian fold, and engage the world to spread the good news. Ranked third in importance by CCF pastors is solidarity with the poor and marginalized people of the world. Ranked fourth is having a counter-cultural impact on the negative influences of modern culture. Fifth, it is important to use their talents to succeed in the world. Ranked last is influencing others by living a prosperous life, and being prophetically and critically engaged with the world.

Table 5: CCF Leaders' Perspective on Living as Disciples of Christ
Source 5: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

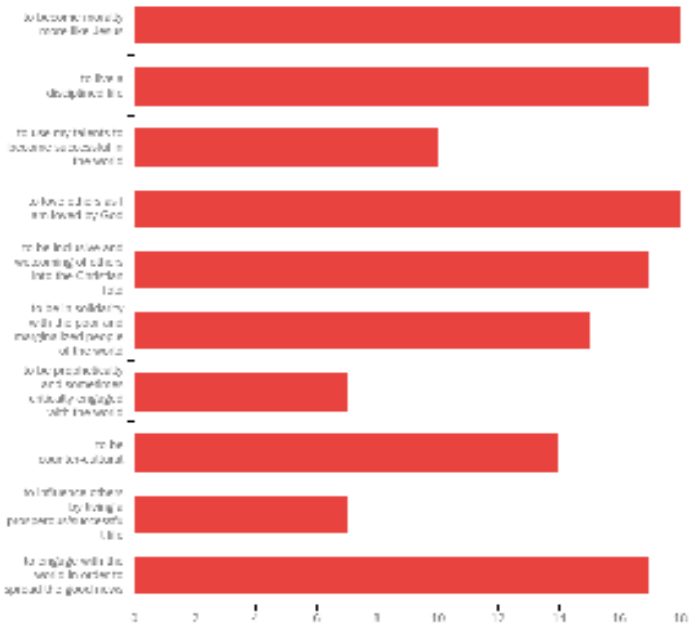
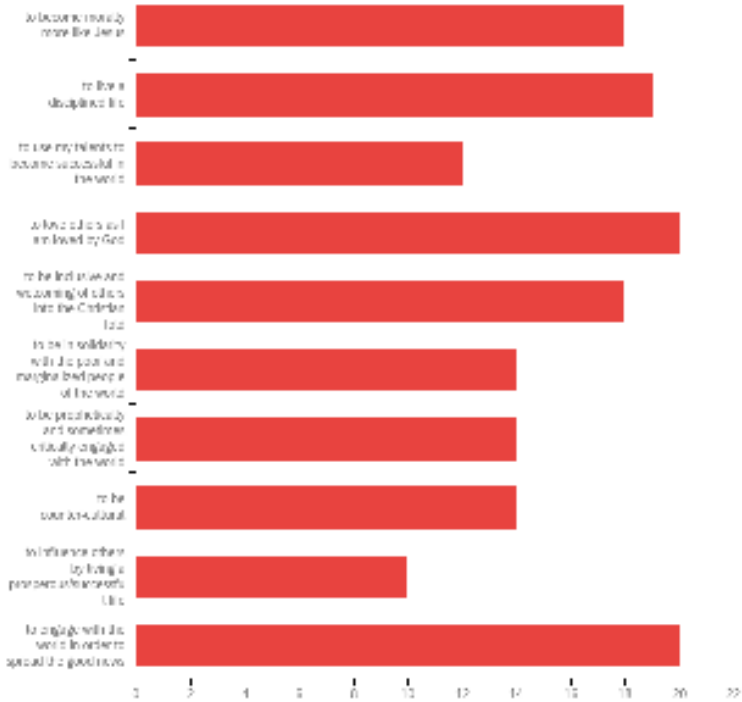


Table 6: VCF Leaders' Perspective on Living As Disciples of Christ
Source 6: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022



Among VCF pastors, twenty (100%) said that living as a disciple of Christ today means loving others as God loves them and engaging with the Word to spread the good news of Jesus. Nineteen (95%) said that becoming a disciple of Jesus means living a disciplined life. Eighteen (90%) say that living as disciples of Christ means becoming morally like Christ, being inclusive, and welcoming others into the Christian fold. Fourteen (70%) said that becoming a disciple means being in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in the world, being prophetically and critically engaged in the world, and being a counter culture in society. Twelve (60%) think that to live as a disciple of Christ is to use their talents and become successful in the world. Finally, ten (50%) said Christian discipleship means influencing others by living a prosperous life.

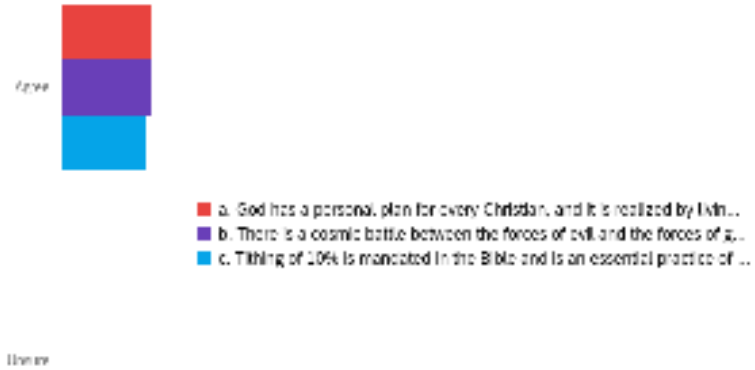
Christian Life and God's Plan

Regarding God's plan for the Christian life, survey results show that all CCF leadership believes God has a personal plan for every Christian. That plan is realized by living a life of faith and constantly praying for the knowledge of God's will. They agreed that there is a cosmic battle between evil forces and good in which Christians can and should participate through spiritual warfare. Finally, all leaders agree that tithing of 10 percent is mandated in the Bible and is an essential practice of the Christian life.

Megachurches Believe that Even if There Is a Cosmic Battle Between Forces of God and Evil in the World, God Has a Plan for Each Individual, and It Can Be Realized by Living by Faith. Megachurch Pastors Believe That Tithing Is Biblical and Should Be Practiced by All Christians

Table 7: CCF Perspective on Christian Life
Source 8: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

Table 8: VCF Perspective on Christian Life
Source 10: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022



When asked about the Christian life, all VCF pastors said that God has a personal plan for every Christian, and it is realized by living a life of faith and constantly praying for the knowledge of God's will. Equally, all said that there is a cosmic battle between the forces of evil and the forces of good in which Christians can and should participate through spiritual warfare. Finally, when it comes to giving tithes, all affirm that tithing of 10 percent is mandated in the Bible and is an essential practice of the Christian life.

Miracles and the Role of the Holy Spirit

The role of the Holy Spirit and belief in miracles are considered essential factors for the life of the megachurch, and it is also the power and the driving force that fuels its growth. There are apparent patterns and observations regarding the perspective of CCF leaders about miracles, the Holy Spirit, and charism. Thirteen (61.90%) rrespondents believe that Christians can be filled with the Holy Spirit and receive spiritual gifts and charisms, but none believe that speaking in tongues is the necessary evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thirteen (61.90%) respondents think Christians ought to expect miracles like in the Bible stories. No respondents believe that the age of miracles ended with the apostles' death. Five (23.80%) believe Christians ought to receive physical healing from the Holy Spirit, and twelve said healing is received through faith. Six (28.57%) believe that the Holy Spirit heals and answers prayer through anointed people with special gifts regarding

how healing can occur. Three (14.28%) agreed that laying on hands can impart spiritual gifts.

Nevertheless, none consider that the Spirit heals and answers prayer through sanctified objects like stones, water, oil, honey, blessed clothes, etc. Regarding health and prosperity, fifteen (71.43%) believe that God wants Christians to be prosperous, but only three (14.28) believe that God wants Christians to be wealthy. Seventeen (80.95%) said the prosperity gospel is idolatry, yet sixteen (76.19%) noted that God could heal our financial problems and make us prosperous. Six (28.57%) also believe prosperity and financial success can be received through faith.

Megachurch Leaders Advocate the Continuity of the Work of the Holy Spirit and Charisms Today

Table 9: CCF Perspective on Miracles, the Holy Spirit, and Charisms
Source 7: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

Table 10: VCF Perspective of Miracles, the Holy Spirit, and Charisms
Source 8: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Regarding the Holy Spirit, twenty (100%) of VCF pastors say that Christians can be filled with or baptized in the Holy Spirit and receive any number of charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophetic dreams, dancing or singing in the Spirit, healing, etc. Nineteen (95%) say that laying on hands imparts spiritual gifts. Five (25%) said that what some see as charismatic gifts is often Satan tempting believers away from salvation. Only three (15%) leaders said speaking in tongues is the necessary evidence of Spirit-baptism.

Regarding their view on healing, twenty (100%) said that healing is received through faith, and seventeen (85%) said Christians should expect physical healing from the Holy Spirit. Although ten (50%) respondents agree that the Spirit heals and answers prayers through anointed people with special gifts, only three (15%) said that the Spirit heals and answers prayer through sanctified objects like stones, water, oil, honey, blessed clothes, etc.

Regarding miracles, all twenty (100%) VCF respondents said that Christians should expect miracles like those in the Bible stories. Eighteen (90%) said that exorcism and deliverance ministries are biblical. However, none said that the age of miracles ended with the apostles' death. In other words, the work and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue today. When it comes to prosperity, nineteen (95%) believe that God wants Christians to be prosperous, and eighteen (90%) said that God can heal our complex financial problems and make

us successful and prosperous in the world. Sixteen (80%) also said that economic prosperity is received through faith, and eight (40%) leaders said that God wants Christians to be wealthy. However, thirteen (65%) said that prosperity is a form of idolatry.

Weapons of Spiritual Warfare

Megachurches Highly Support Spiritual Disciplines Such as Prayer, Fasting, Exorcism, and the Practice of Charism as Important Weapons of Spiritual Warfare

Table 11: CCF Perspective on Weapons of Spiritual Warfare
Source 14: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

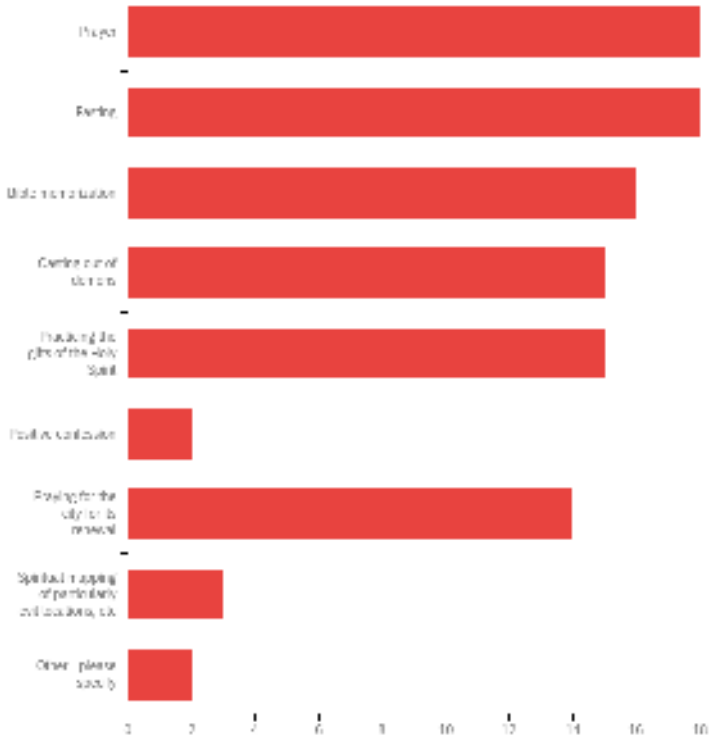
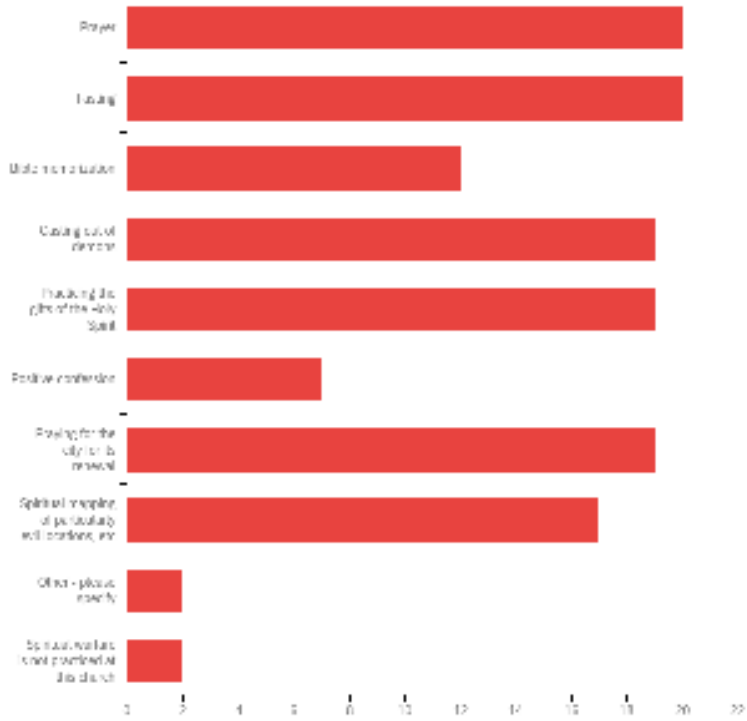


Table 12: VCF Perspective on Spiritual Warfare
Source 16: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022



Spiritual warfare is part of Christian spirituality and discipleship. The churches believe they are waging war against the spiritual forces in the heavenly realm, so they develop spiritual weaponry that aid them in waging war against evil. When asked which aspect of spiritual warfare is practiced in the church, twenty (100%) of the pastors said that the power of fasting as well as prayer received the most important weapons. Nineteen (90.47%) said that practicing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and prayer for the renewal of a city are essential aspects of spiritual warfare as practiced in the church. Nineteen (90.47%) said Bible memorization is important. Eighteen (85.71%) thinks that Christian exorcism and exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit are essential. Seventeen (80.95%) think that praying for the city's renewal has an important impact in the city. Other aspects like spiritual mapping of particularly evil locations (14.28%), positive confession (9.52%), and other practices (9.52%)

are the least of the weapons as observed by the CCF leadership. Some leaders also mention praying for the nation and a deliverance ministry as prescribed by Neil Anderson.

When asked about aspects of spiritual warfare practices of VCF, twenty (100%) of respondents placed prayer as the prime element of spiritual warfare along with fasting. These two critical elements of spirituality are sometimes inseparably practiced. Nineteen (90.47%) said that exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit, casting out evil spirits, and praying for the renewal of the city were the second most important form of spiritual warfare at VCF. Seventeen (85%) also believe that there are spiritual strongholds to be demolished in a city, so spiritual mapping of particular locations is essential among VCF pastors. Twelve (60%) think that Bible memorization is essential and seven (35%) said positive confession are necessary but the least valued among the weapons of spiritual warfare. Only two individuals (10%) said spiritual warfare is not practiced in the church. VCF pastors also added that praise and worship and gospel proclamation are other practices of spiritual warfare at their church.

Satan, Evil, and Suffering

There are three responses to the perspective of CCF leadership about Satan, his demons, and the suffering in this world. First, eighteen (90%) agreed that the devil influences human life and the world. The devil and his demons can possess people, yet people can be delivered from the power of darkness and his demons. Sixteen (80%) agreed that people can be harmed or cursed by witches or sorcerers. Thirteen (65%) said that people can be possessed by ancestors, evil spirits, or non-Christian divinities.

Regarding widespread suffering, only six (28.57%) agreed that widespread suffering is associated with God's punishment in the world. However, fourteen (66.66%) agreed that sometimes it is a sign of God's punishment for sin. Eight (38.09%) said that HIV/AIDS is a sign of God's punishment for evildoers. Sixteen (76.19%) said that evil can reside in social structures and political systems, and seventeen (80.95%) agreed that the presence of evil can be seen in the struggle against principalities and powers. Finally, pastors are doubtful and ambivalent whether sickness such as HIV/AIDs or COVID-19 are God's punishment for evil in the world.

Megachurches Agree that Satan and his Demons Are Real and Have the Power To Influence, Harm, and Cause Evil in Persons and Social Structures. However, Megachurches Are Ambivalent about Whether Human Suffering, such as AIDS/HIV and COVID-19 Are God's Punishment for Sin

Table 13: CCF Perspective about Satan, Evil, and Suffering
Source 9: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Table 14: VCF Perspective on Satan, Evil, and Suffering
Source 10: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

When it comes to the VCF perspective of evil in our world today, eighteen (90%) said that witches and sorcerers can harm or curse people. The same is true of demons and becoming possessed by ancestors. Sixteen (80%) said that people can be possessed by ancestors, evil spirits, or non-Christian divinities, nine (45%) believed widespread suffering is often God's punishment. Seventeen (85%) agreed that human suffering is sometimes a sign of God's punishment for sin. Eight (40%) said that AIDS/HIV is a sign of God's punishment for evildoers. Only six (30%) said that widespread suffering such as COVID-19 is God's punishment globally.

Ancestral Worship and Deities

Filipinos are deeply religious and engaged spiritually because of their close associations with the spirit world. They believe that the spirit and natural world commune with each other. Therefore, how megachurch pastors perceive ancestors and deities is a point of interest. Regarding belief in ancestors and deities, twenty-one (100%) agreed that Christians

should not believe in the presence of, pray to, or venerate ancestors. Only one rejected the belief that ancestors are spiritual beings who are always present and communicate with us. Nineteen (94.12%) said that ancestors have no spiritual power in our lives. Sixteen (77.78%) agreed that ancestors who are not Christians cannot be saved and will suffer eternal torment in hell. Sixteen (78.57%) said that gods, goddesses, and divinities are real and demonic forces. However, seventeen (80%) said that these gods, goddesses, and deities that non-Christians believe in do not exist.

Megachurch Leaders Think that Ancestors Have No Power Over Our Lives and that Ancestral Worship Should Be Rejected

Table 15: CCF Leaders' Perspective about Ancestors and Deities
Source 11: Templeton Megachurch Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Table 16: VCF Perspective about Ancestors and Deities
Source 12: Templeton Megachurch Project Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Regarding VCF pastors, nineteen (93.75%) said Christians should not believe in the presence of, pray to, or venerate ancestors. All leaders rejected the belief that ancestors are spiritual beings who are always present and communicate with us. Nineteen (93.75%) said that while people recognize and venerate ancestors, they have no spiritual power in our lives. Furthermore, nineteen (93.75%) said that ancestors who are not Christians cannot be saved and will suffer eternal damnation in hell, sixteen (83.33%) also believe that gods, ancestors, and divinities believed in by non-Christians are real but demonic forces. However, thirteen (66.67%) of the leaders said that the gods, goddesses, and divinities in which non-Christians believe do not exist.

Gender and Sexuality

Differing attitudes about women, sexual orientation, and birth control exist within churches across the globe. Megachurches in the Global South have not dealt with these issues. Some consider that women should be treated equally to men in their role in society. However, others argue that they must be submissive and observe ancient cultural decorum inside the church. When it comes to CCF leaders regarding issues of gender and sexuality, the survey shows that while all of the leaders reject and disagree with the idea that women must wear veils in the church and that women and men should sit separately in church, twelve (65%) agreed that women are to be submissive to men. Regarding women's

leadership, fourteen (66.67%) do feel that women should remain silent in the church. Nineteen (94.44%) of them disagreed that women cannot be teachers in the church, fifteen (72.22%) of them agreed that women cannot be ordained as pastors or elders.

When it comes to sexual orientation, fifteen (72.22%) agreed that homosexuality is a sin and practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to become church members or church leaders. Regarding abortion, seventeen (83.33%) agreed that abortion is always sinful and that Christians should work to preserve human life. Regarding contraception, fifteen (72.22%) disagreed that contraception or artificial birth control is sinful so Christians should accept as many children as God sends.

Megachurches Support the Equality of Genders but Mostly Reject Homosexual Orientations and Abortion. The Issue of Contraception and Birth Control Is Still Debatable Within Megachurches

Table 17: CCF Leaders' Perspective on Gender and Sexuality
Source 13: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

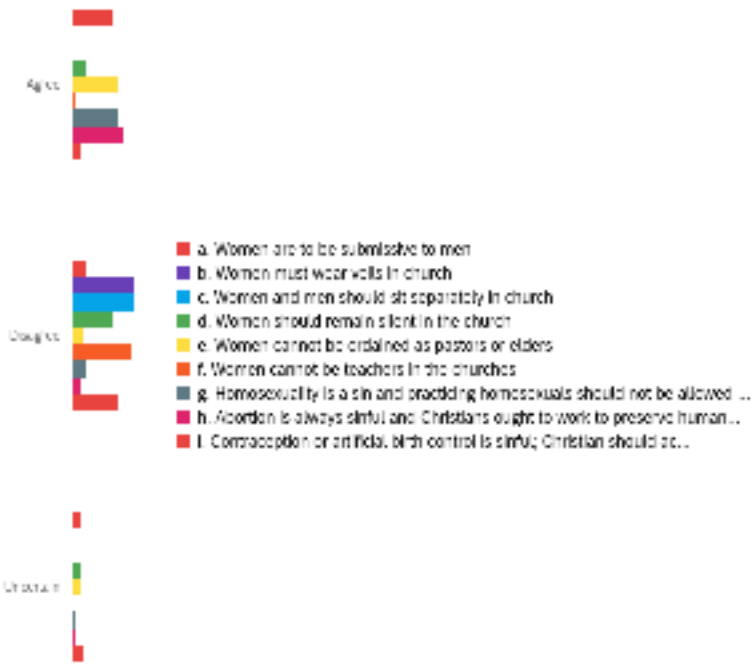
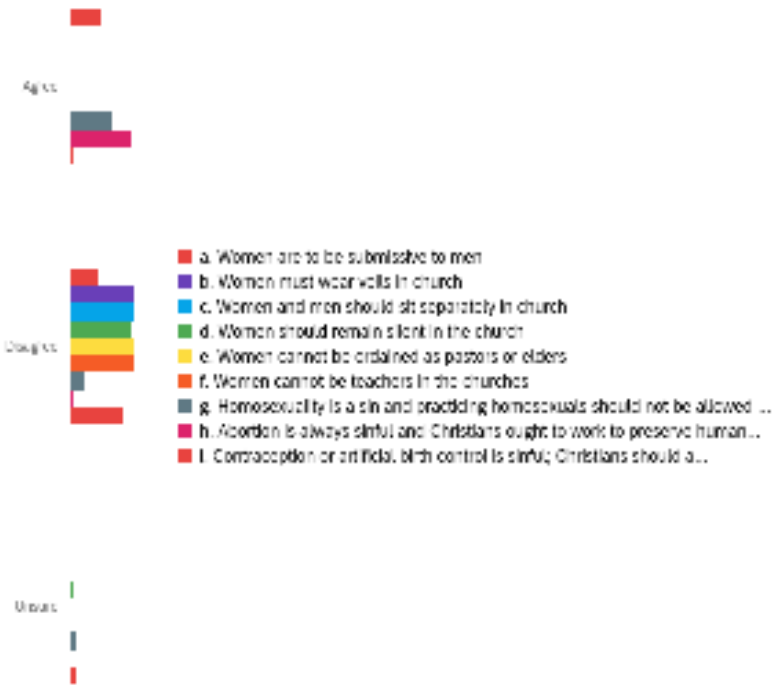


Table 18: VCF Leaders' Perspective on Gender and Sexuality
Source 14: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022



Regarding gender and sexuality, twenty (100%) rejected the idea that women must wear veils in the church and that women and men should sit separately. However, regarding women's submission, VCF pastors differ in their opinion. Ten (53.63%) said women are to be submissive to men, while eight (47.37%) disagreed with the idea. Meanwhile, nineteen (95%) of the pastors disagreed that women should remain silent in the church. All of them disagreed that women cannot be ordained as pastors or elders. All rejected the idea that women cannot be teachers in the church.

When it comes to homosexual orientation, thirteen (68.42%) said that homosexuality is a sin and practicing homosexuals should not be allowed to become church members or leaders of the church. Regarding abortion, nineteen (95%) of pastors said it is sinful, and Christians should work to preserve human life. Seventeen (85%) said contraception and artificial birth control is sinful, and Christians should accept as many children as God sends.

Church Financial Health Condition Five Years Ago and Today

When it comes to describing the CCF church's financial condition five years ago, two (12.5%) said their churches are in serious difficulty, one (6.3%) said the church is in some difficulty, one (6.3%) said finances are tight. However, four (25.0%) claimed that their financial state is good, and ten (50%) said that it is excellent. Describing the financial situation today, ten (45.5%) said the church's financial condition is good, while eleven (54.5 %) said it is excellent.

Megachurch Leaders Claim They Had an Excellent or Good Financial Condition Five Years Ago and Even in Today's Situation

Table 19: Description of CCF Financial Situation Five Years Ago and Today's Situation
Source 15: Templeton Megachurch Project of Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rd Quarter, 2022

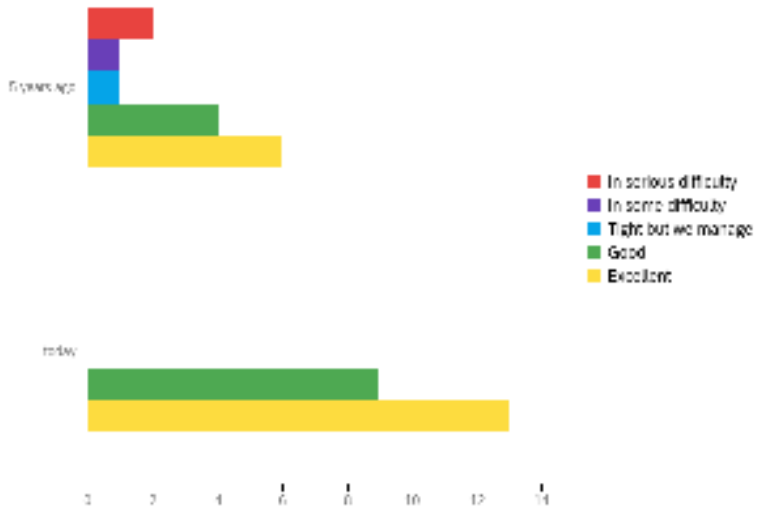
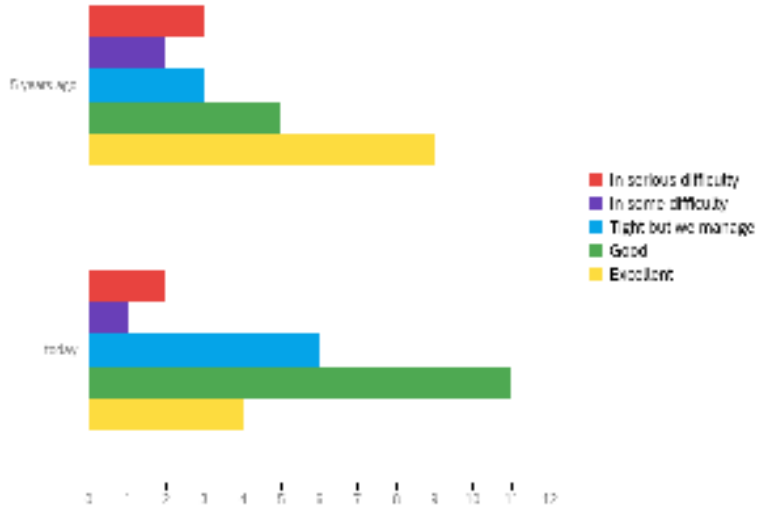


Table 20: Description of VCF Financial Conditions Five Years Ago and Today's Situation
Source 16: Templeton Megachurch Project of Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rd Quarter, 2022



About VCF's financial situation five years ago, three (13.64%) said they were in serious difficulty, two (9.09%) said in some difficulty, three (13.64%) said that finances were tight, but they managed, five (22.73) said the financial situation was good, and nine (40.91%) said it was excellent. In today's financial situation, two (8.33%) said that they are in serious difficulty, one (4.17%) said the church is in some difficulty, and six (25%) said have tight finances. However, nine (45.83%) said their finances are good, and four (16.67%) said they are excellent. Seven said, they do not know.

Christian Engagement in the World

Christian engagement in the world is an integral part of the Christian mission, rooted in the ministry of Christ and the early church. Christian churches are called to bring their witness to the public sphere, whether political, economic, or social issues challenge the church. CCF leaders are divided whether the ills of the world will only be healed when everyone comes to know Christ. Twenty-one (100%) interviewed agreed

that since Christ will return to judge the sin of the world, it is imperative of their calling as a church to do everything they can to win people for Jesus Christ. In addition, nineteen (94.44%) agreed that evangelism is the most essential social engagement, and eighteen (88.89%) agreed that Christians ought to be engaged in making the world a better place to live. Consequently, alongside evangelism, economic, political, ecological, and social engagement should be major priorities for the church.

Megachurches Admit They Cannot Heal the Ills of This World but Believe that Winning People through Evangelism and Social Engagement Before Christ Returns is imperative for Christians

Table 21: CCF Perspective on Christian Engagement in the World
Source 17: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

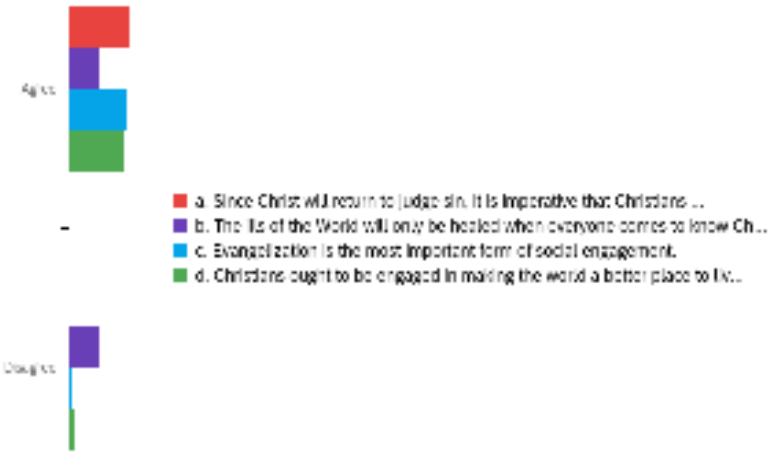


Table 22: VCF Perspective on Christian Engagement in the World
Source 18: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

Regarding Christian engagement in the world, all twenty (100%) said that since Christ will return to judge sin, Christians must do everything they can to bring people to Christ. All respondents also said that evangelization is the most important form of social engagement. However, thirteen (65%) said that the world's ills will only be healed when everyone comes to know Christ. Regarding making the world a better place, thirteen (65%) say that economic, political, ecological, and social engagement should be a major priority alongside evangelism.

Church Relationship with the National Government and Leaders

Regarding CCF's civic and political participation in the national government and its leaders, seven (33.33%) respondents said that they actively and unconditionally support the government and its policies. Eight (38.10%) said that they support specific religious policies but are critical regarding some issues. Six (28.57%) indicated that they maintain a position of neutrality in politics and government leaders. The survey results show no indications that they have encouraged congregants to vote for or against specific candidates or proposals in an election, publicly rebuked a government leader or policy, or publicly supported opposition parties or leaders through mass media, social media, or in the pulpit.

While Megachurch Leaders Strive to Remain Neutral in Terms of Politics, they Are Actively Supportive of Government Specific Policies Yet Critical to Some Issues

Table 23: CCF Relationship with the National Government Leaders
Source 19: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rdQ, 2022

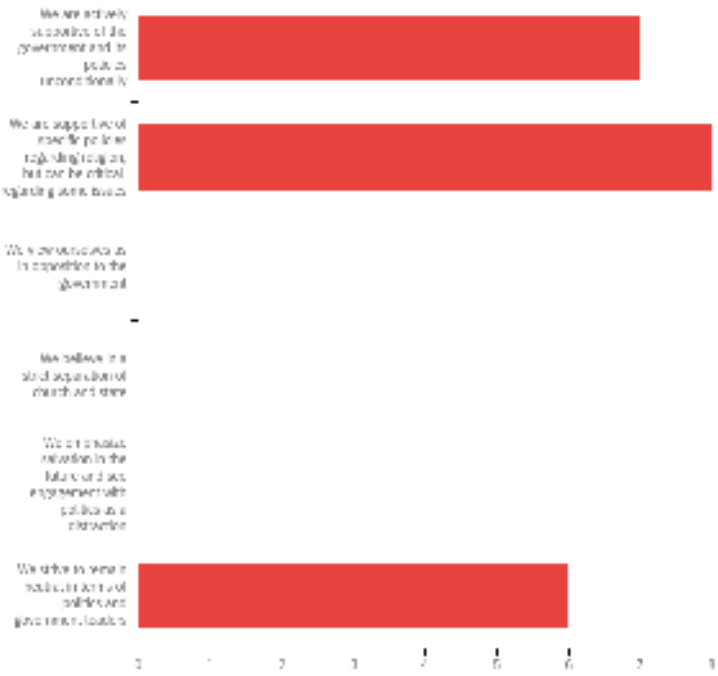
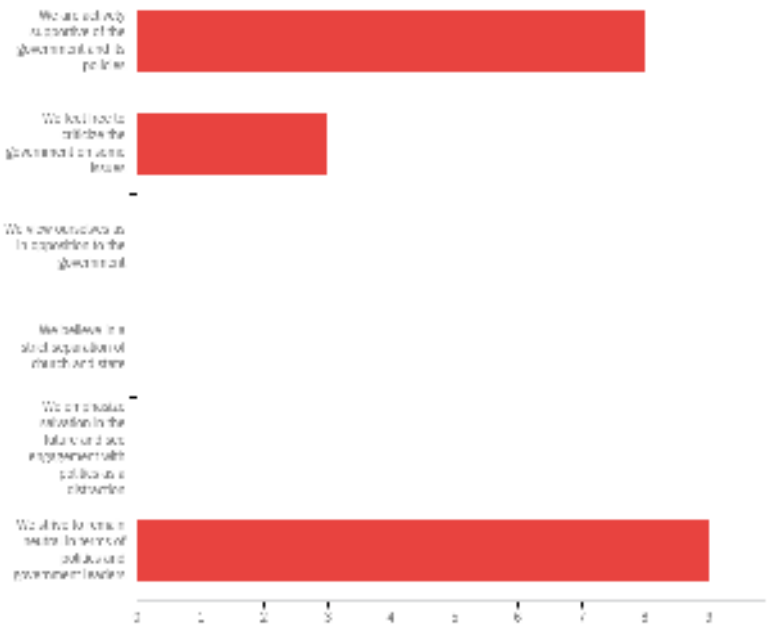


Table 24: VCF Relationship with the National Government Leaders
Source 20: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analysis, 3rd Quarter 2022



VCF leaders are unlikely to criticize the government and its policies. They primarily strive to actively support the government while remaining neutral toward politics and government leaders. Nine (45%) said that they seek to remain neutral with regard to politics and government leaders, and eight (40%) said that they actively support the government and its policies. Only three (15%) felt free to criticize the government on some issues. No leaders oppose the government nor adhere to the belief that there is a strict separation of church and state. Neither do they see political engagement as a distraction in their missiological and evangelistic emphasis on society.

Israel and the End-times

While All or Most of the Megachurch Leaders Regard Israel as a Chosen People of God, they Differ in their Understanding of the Role of the Nation of Israel in the End-Times

Table 25: CCF Leaders' Perspective on Israel and End-Times
Source 21: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

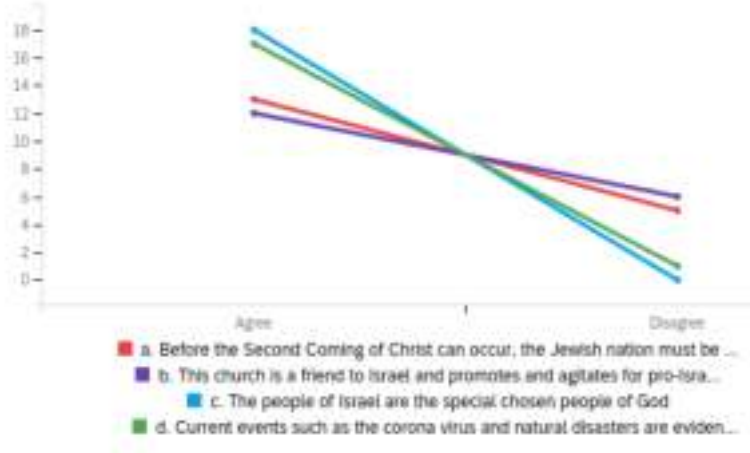
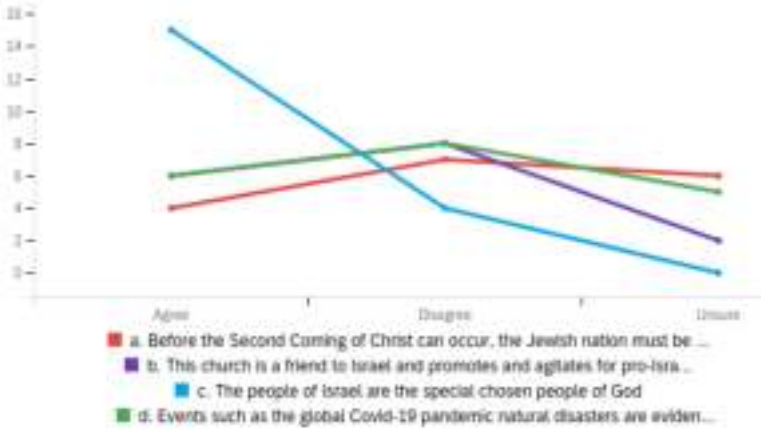


Table 26: VCF Leaders' Perspective on Israel and End-Times
Source 31: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022



Many Christian churches believe that the role of Israel in the end-times acts as a divine 'clock' to usher in the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Some expect the restoration and reunification of Israel as a nation is a pivotal and important event that signals the immanent eschatological reign of Jesus on earth. How do megachurches in the Global South view the Jewish people? What do they believe in, and what are these megachurches' attitudes toward the people of Israel? When asked about the people of Israel, thirteen (61%) said that before the Second Coming of Christ, the people of Israel will be fully restored as a nation. Twelve (57%) said that CCF is a friend of Israel and advocate for pro-Israel political policies. Eighteen (85%) agreed that the people of Israel are God's chosen people, and seventeen (80%) agreed that current events like the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters are evidence of the coming of the end times.

Regarding the perspective of VCF about Israel and the end times, four (20%) out of twenty agreed that the Jewish nation will be fully restored before the Second Coming of Christ. VCF are divided about their perspective on this issue. Six (30%) agreed that VCF is a friend of Israel and advocate for pro-Israel political policies. However, fifteen (75%) agreed that the people of Israel are God's chosen people. Six (30%) agreed that the current events like COVID-19 and the natural disasters happening in our world today are evidence of the end times.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

The global health pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus disrupted everyday lives and sent millions of individuals to their graves. People suffered equally and life became more at risk than ever. However, Pew Research Center studies on the impact of religion in the Global North concluded that the pandemic strengthened and bolstered the faith of individuals and their compatriots. However, is this also true for religious communities in less developed countries like the Global South?

Regarding how COVID-19 has impacted CCF during the pandemic, twenty-one (100%) said that they offered pre-recorded services online that can be watched at any time. Twenty (95%) said that worship services are conducted live and remotely via internet streaming such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp. However, fourteen (66%) of them acknowledged that they closed down the church out of caution and concern due to government regulations and protocols. Thus, they conducted services live and remotely via television. As to how CCF creatively finds ways to connect with members, twenty one (100%) said that they offered virtual prayer meetings, twenty (95%) said they offered

live Bible Study over a streaming service such as Zoom, eleven (52%) said through podcasts, and seven (33%) said that CCF created other ways to connect with the members like discipleship group meetings, online leadership, family retreats, in-house foundational studies, various seminars and webinars for singles and couples, and children's ministries through zoom meetings. Small groups and Dgroups, GoViral, and Chatgroups were all done online.

Regarding the giving practices of CCF during the pandemic, twenty (95%) of leaders said that people continued to tithe and support the church at a reasonably average level because the church set up an online giving. Only one (5%) reported that giving practices declined significantly due to the difficulty of members to pay their bills. One said that their pastors visited the members' houses to collect their tithes. CCF does not depend on collection from the cell groups that make up their church.

Regarding the perceptions about the COVID-19 pandemic, twenty (95%) said that COVID-19 was an opportunity for them to be close to God. Seventeen (85%) said that the coronavirus was a wake-up call from God to change their ways. Twelve (60%) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was an example of a foretold biblical prophecy. Only five (25%) agreed that the coronavirus was a punishment from God to humanity for her sins.

As to how CCF leadership approached the coronavirus pandemic, twenty one (100%) said that it was through prayer and fasting, twenty of them (95%) recognized the contributions of medical sciences. Eighteen (85%) said that the role of faith was also essential. Six (28%) said other practical options like the strengthening the immune system, proper diet, exercise, supplemental medication, social distancing, and vaccination. On the other hand, to remain healthy and manage stress caused by the virus, it was recommended that the leaders find support groups and continuous education.

As to how CCF responded to the coronavirus pandemic, seventeen (80%) said that they provided food for the church members and wider community. Sixteen (76%) said they distributed relief goods and fed the wider community. Four (19%) said that the church was instrumental in providing virus testing sites and clinical assistance for people affected by the virus. Eleven (52%) said that they opened church facilities as housing accommodations for health and medical front-liners to rest and stay overnight. In addition, the churches donated COVID-19 prevention kits, medicines, PPEs, oxygen tanks, financial assistance, and medical gadgets like pulse oximeters for people with mild cases.

Megachurches Integrate Faith and Facts in Dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 27: CCF Leaders' Perspective on Dealing with COVID-19 Pandemic
Source 22: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022

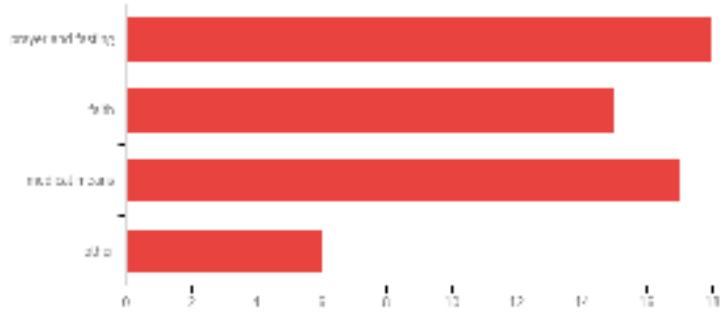
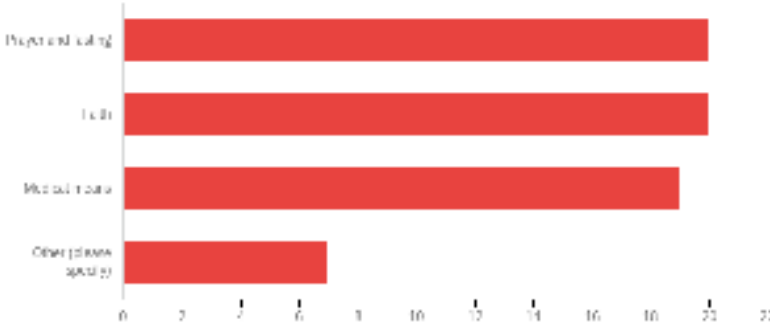


Table 28: VCF Leaders' Perspective on Dealing with COVID-19 Pandemic
Source 23: Templeton Megachurch Project Leadership Survey Analyses, 3rdQ, 2022



Regarding the perceptions and attitudes of VCF pastors about the COVID-19 pandemic, although all of the twenty pastors (100%) acknowledged the role of medical and scientific discoveries and that they received the COVID-19 vaccinations, nine (45%) said that they were infected with the virus, while eleven (55%) were not infected. Fourteen (70%) personally knew more than ten people in their sphere of influence who were infected with the virus while five (25%) knew six to ten people who died because of COVID-19. Only one (5%) knew from one to five people who got ill because of the virus. However, when asked about

the church position regarding vaccination, eleven (55%) said that VCF recommended their members to get vaccinated. Nine (45%) said that they did not make a recommendation either way. When it comes to how they were affected personally by the pandemic, eighteen (90%) said that they became closer with God, sixteen (80%) said they grew closer to their immediate family, and eleven (55%) said they were locked down at their homes. Five (25%) lost a family member, and another five (25%) became ill. Four (20%) said that they separated from family and friends. Two (10%) said that they lost family income and experienced anxiety, depression, and mental fatique. Only one (5%) said he/she was not impacted in any way by the pandemic.

Although studies around the globe showed that organized religion was instrumental in spreading the virus to the public, only a few studies have measured how churches have responded to the pandemic (Pew Research Center 2020). When it comes to VCF, twenty (100%) said that their churches had distributed food and other supplies to needy people. Nineteen (95%) said that they moved their worship services online and collected the tithes and offerings through online banking/financial outlets. Sixteen (80%) said that they contributed to the rule of law by urging everyone through media outlets to comply with safety protocols such as wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. While eleven (55%) said that they shut down all in-person services and activities and opened their church buildings to people who were sick or to healthcare providers, two (10%) said that they ministered to members affected and infected by COVID-19 through prayers and encouraging words, and organized a synchronized and online devotions 24/7.

Sociologically speaking, many competing theories and opinions about the COVID-19 pandemic exist. We listed these theories and asked the megachurch pastors for their views about COVID-19. Eighteen (90%) think of COVID-19 as a test of humanity's faith while thirteen (65%) said that it is a natural event not directly caused by God. Six (30%) said that this is an indicator of the end of times. Also, three (15%) said this it is a God-induced plague as in biblical times and therefore it is the punishment for humanity's sins. Only two individuals (10%) think that this is a man-made biological weapon. The unanimous response of VCF pastors regarding the impact of COVID-19 is that it bolstered and strengthened their faith in times of global pandemic. No VCF pastors responded that it weakened or affected their faith negatively.

Regarding the important lessons that the pandemic has taught the pastors, VCF pastor gave varying responses. Eighteen (90%) said that the church community is vital during times of crisis. Seventeen (85%) said that God is in control, not humanity, and that we must change our

priorities to focus on family. Thirteen (65%) think that modern life remains very fragile despite advancements in science and technology and therefore we have to be better stewards of the earth. Eleven (55%) said that they should live life more responsibly and not take anything for granted. Seven (35%) said that God's judgment over human sin is real and that government is ineffective in providing medical, economic, and social assistance in a crisis. Only three individual (15%) felt the church does not have to meet in person; it can also be effective online.

When it comes to the best way of dealing with the pandemic, twenty (100%) said that it is through prayer and fasting strong faith in God is important in times of crisis. Nineteen (95%) said that it is through medical science while seven (35%) suggested other ways of dealing with COVID-19, including compliance with government ordinances, social concern, and outreach to those affected much about the crisis. In addition, offering lodging in the facility for front-line medical practitioners, providing the medical institutions with food, and supporting government interventions to underprivileged people will strengthen solidarity and peace in the community.

Summary and Conclusion

At the outset of this study, we pointed out that megachurches are the new urban faces of Christianity. Because of the "mega-ness" of these churches, they are disconnecting themselves from traditional churches and creating a new kind of denomination that meets the needs of urbanized and digitalized societies. These denominations continue to embrace and celebrate transfer growth. Their innovative Christian witness attracts religious consumers from other religious organizations. Despite many scandals, misconceptions, and misinterpretations of their religious vocation, megachurch leaders lead ongoing innovation and the transformation of pastoral leadership. Megachurch leaders in CCF and VCF represent religious leaders who contextualize modernization to bring Christian spirituality to an age of secularization. Their ability and creativity to interject the Christian message in highly urbanized centers cannot be overlooked but offer important lessons. The crucial observations from this study corroborate this thesis.

While it is true that megachurches in Metro Manila, Philippines, offer diverse religious branding, styles, affiliations, and a certain degree of autonomy and independence, the same is true when it comes to the leaders' demographics at CCF and VCF. The survey shows that megachurch pastors are dominantly male and come from varied social and

professional backgrounds. They have diverse ages, social statuses, and theological orientations. Many are linguists with a high-level education and up-to-date training for ministry. They combine personal skills and talents in their religious vocation and calling. This demography signifies the diversity of giftings and the broad characteristics of intellectual and social capital that megachurch leaders can offer in the religious landscape.

In their attitude toward the Bible and doctrinal beliefs, most megachurch leaders place a high value on the Holy Scriptures. They recognize its authority, infallibility, and inspiration, and believe that the Bible can change and transform lives. The centrality of the Scripture in these two megachurches is seen by their adherence to the doctrine of salvation and deliverance prescribed by Scripture, and their expectations that Christians will exercise the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. This conviction is associated with their doctrine of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, the reality of miracles, and the continuing operations of charisms and pneumatic gifts in the lives of Christians. Both megachurches associate the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the power of prayer with spiritual warfare and exorcism.

In highly urbanized cities, megachurches in the Philippines have the characteristics of spiritual centers: they form and shape beliefs, values, and practices. CCF and VCF subscribe to an Evangelical theology of salvation and deliverance, and they successfully use technology to teach theology. Both churches believe that heaven and hell exist and only faith in Christ and his redemptive work can spare human beings from eternal damnation. While salvation is instantaneous and progressive, active faith is crucial to the growth and maturity of new Christians. Both megachurches see deliverance as holistic in scope, including deliverance from spiritual/demonic oppression, physical conditions, and economic poverty. Though there is a slight difference in the view of positive confession among pastors, most megachurch leaders see the importance of positive confession of faith in prayer and petition.

Megachurches like CCF and VCF offer many expressions of Christian life and discipleship in a polarized society. Both megachurches have no significant differences in what they believe about disciples and discipleship. They fundamentally agree that Christians are placed in the world to become the practical expressions of Jesus' love and called to serve the world, especially poor and marginalized people. Both churches accept their role as a prophetic voice and moral conscience within the society, with acknowledgement that living a prosperous life impacts and influences the larger sector of society. These churches see the world as a battlefield between good and evil yet believe that God has a plan for

his people to become a channel of blessing through the generosity of material resources by giving the tenth percent of their income.

In connection to the observation above, megachurch worship services, fellowship meetings such as D-groups and discipleship classes, operationally emphasize weapons of spiritual warfare. The churches consider prayer, fasting, exorcism, bible memorization, etc. as necessary spiritual weapons in waging war against Satan and his demons. In addition, these churches were known for their 24/7 continuous prayer meetings during the pandemic. Though these churches are undecided if human suffering such as AIDS/HIV and the coronavirus is God's punishment for sin, both believe Satan and his demons are real, with the power to influence, harm, and cause evil in persons and social structures. The study also shows that CCF and VCF leaders think that ancestors have no control over our lives and reject ancestral worship.

The enormous financial and social capital of CCF and VCF is seen in the number of their adherents and followers attending their fellowship meetings and online worship services. Though these megachurches were severely affected by the global pandemic, they survived and thrived through the economic onslaught it brought. While this was not universally true among other megachurches in the Philippines or other countries in the Global South, these two were models of megachurches that remained strong, vibrant, and innovative in handling their financial resources amid the global pandemic.

Generally, these megachurches are apolitical in socio-political attitudes and engagement with the government. Their leaders strive to remain neutral in politics, but actively support some government-specific policies while being critical of others. They are neither restricted nor afraid to support, criticize, or modify their political responses to government policies and programs as they see fit. They engage their beliefs and values in the public sphere. For example, megachurches support the equality of genders but mostly reject homosexual orientations and abortion. The issues of contraception and birth control still need to be debated among megachurch leaders, though they are not afraid to express their opinions. When addressing society's social ills and structural problems, megachurches admit they cannot heal this world's ills. However, they believe that Christians must win people through evangelism and social engagement before Christ returns. Therefore, we conclude that megachurches will not only outnumber the traditional denominations but will also become a political force that could be used as political capital to influence national figures or impact societal change.

Most megachurch leaders regard Israel as a chosen people of God, but they differ in their understanding of the role of the nation of Israel in the end times. For example, CCF leaders believe that Israel as a nation is part of God's clock for the end times, while VCF leaders do not subscribe to that idea. In addition, both megachurch leaders differ in their opinions about COVID-19. The global pandemic signals the end of days for CCF, while most VCF pastors think it is not a sign of the end. However, the responses of both megachurches to the health crisis in the Philippines are worthy of emulation. Integrating faith and facts in their intervention programs, they educated, distributed goods, comforted, and empowered their congregants and members of their communities to thrive in times of crisis.

These megachurches were shrewd in using technology as a neutral instrument to advance the Christian mission during the pandemic as well as using it for the common good of others. Furthermore, their continuous technologization of theology and the digitalization of church services demonstrated that they viewed digital technology as an amoral and powerful tool to spread their Christian message and to fuel and maintain church growth.

Finally, this seminal research has limitations. Therefore, I call future scholars in the Global South to continue to explore and research uncharted topics of the megachurch phenomenon. Among these topics are the ongoing reality of the metaverse and meta-church; megachurches and transnationalism; megachurches and supernaturalism; megachurches and medical sciences; megachurch and the education of leaders; megachurches and politics; megachurches and economic development; megachurches and ecumenism; megachurches and enculturation; and megachurches and the divide between sacred and secular. I fervently pray that those following in our footsteps as academic researchers will venture into these issues in the near future.

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Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj. *1 & 2 Kings: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*. In *Asia Bible Commentary Series*, edited by Andrew B. Spurgeon. Cambria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022. 326 pages. $29.99 paperback. ISBN. 978-1839730696.

1 & 2 Kings: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary by Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj (Ph.D. University of Sheffield) is an expository contribution written with Asian Christians in mind, particularly in India. It is part of the Asia Bible Commentary series, now with twenty-one volumes across the Old and New Testaments. The series has endeavored to fill a void in Christian teaching concerning an Asian worldview and culture. Asian Christianity is a growing demographic, mainly in the Global South, and has become a foothold for the church. With that in mind, each author in the series is of Asian descent or has made considerable investment serving within the region. The intention is for each author and publication to be rooted in the Asian context and equipped to engage culturally with issues unique to the region.

Jeyaraj previously served as associate editor of the South Asia Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 2015). He is a professor of biblical studies, a published scholarly author, an ordained clergyman in the Church of South India, and currently honorary director of the Madurai Jubilee Institute, which teaches and trains Indian Christian leaders. To accommodate Indian pastors and teachers with no other access to theological library resources, he aims to simplify technical aspects of this work, including transliterations of Hebrew terminology and citations relegated to sporadic endnotes. He intends to clearly explain the material in an easily readable and narrative format that may be used devotionally, pastorally, or as a beginning text for students.

Jeyaraj's introduction is relatively brief, especially considering the character of the two volumes of Scripture it describes. Meanwhile, aligned with the above-mentioned intention, engagement with scholarship is sparse. It moves quickly through sources, authorship, dating, the message and mission, and the relationship of 1 and 2 Kings to the canonical counterparts, including 1 and 2 Chronicles and the prophetic writings. Rather than supplying a methodology, Jeyaraj identifies the relationship between governing institutions and religious institutions as a theological focus. He draws out simple but meaningful application of the principles of worship, prayer, faith, striving to understand God, and considering other faiths. A portion entitled "South Asia: Parallels and Implications" includes a portion in which Jeyaraj connects familiar aspects of Indian history with the text.

The commentary flows according to the chapters of 1 and 2 Kings. The commentator paraphrases and explains the narrative, providing comprehensive language that is accessible even to those who may be unfamiliar with the subject or who have English as a second language. There is no consistent treatment of each passage; instead, the author highlights what he deems relevant for each portion, but he does interweave details from scholarship into his narrative. Endnotes are infrequent but, at times, yield comments of interest. However, exegetical considerations are limited in terms of linguistics, grammar, and historical background.

This book's focus on an Asian perspective does not extend to including uniquely Asian interpretive ideas. Instead, interspersed throughout the text, the author contrasts aspects of the biblical story with similarities to Indian history and cultural practices. For example, transporting the Ark in 1 Kings 8 is compared with Indian temple dedication processions (111). Similarly, the pagan God Molech and Ahaz's child sacrifice in 2 Kings 16 is compared with the Indian practice of child sacrifice to the goddess Kali in the West Bengal region. This custom was stopped by Christian missionaries when India was under British rule (324). The author does not make further connections, merely noting the approximate cultural similarity. This style is consistent with the application throughout this commentary. Jeyaraj identifies parallels from a cultural, social, and political purview between the biblical text and the Asian (primarily Indian) context. However, he does not offer deep insight regarding how the text uniquely speaks to the continent.

Applications are exhortative and devotional. For example, the author closes the chapter on 2 Kings 18, saying, "In time of threat, fear, and persecution, Christians should not lose faith and hope. We should not argue or fight with neighbors who ridicule God or mock our faith in Jesus Christ; rather, we should trust that God is powerful and sovereign over all authorities, idols, and evil spirits of the world and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ can be trusted in all circumstances" (343).

In addition, Jeyaraj encourages his readers to study 1 and 2 Kings in conjunction with other Old Testament texts to observe how the prophets speak against oppressive and exploitive policies in the hope that Asians and Christians everywhere will be able to "fight against injustices in our societies and cultures" (28). This idea is a virtuous approach and exercise; however, the commentary fails to draw this out further.

The bibliography recalls thirty-five references from thirty distinct contributors, most of which originate from the West. Outside of the author's six contributions, he utilized three uniquely Asian resources, two of which are not theological, and the third comprises a chapter on child sacrifice in a volume edited by the author. The author could have

served the purpose of the publication by engaging a more comprehensive range of Asian authors, especially ones who offer a theological perspective. Nevertheless, the commentary meets the need for more Asian publications. Langham Partnership is commendable for supporting endeavors to increase the quantity and value of writings from an Asian perspective, including this commentary, which adds to that dynamic.

The author's focus on the Indian context, as opposed to including other regions in Asia, is a limitation of this work. However, the vast spectrum of nations and cultures across the Asian region presents an understandable and unavoidable challenge, and each author naturally contributes from their viewpoint; therefore, Jeyaraj focuses primarily on cultural relevance to his native country. Having said this, the general editor of the series, Andrew Spurgeon, also serves in the Indian context, and this series tends to favor Indian authors. Many countries within the region remain untreated, and the series would benefit from a broader representation. Accordingly, this book would not represent a stand-alone resource in Asia, as pastors and teachers in other Asian regions must adapt applications and illustrations to fit their circumstances and culture.

This commentary meets its goals with some caveats. For instance, the current reviewer is Western in terms of culture and ethnicity (albeit a researcher in the Global South), having benefited from the socio-economic advantage of having access to multiple scholarly resources to compare and judge this commentary. In light of that, the author's goal of providing a "detailed explanation" (13) of 1 and 2 Kings will vary based on perspectives, access to resources, and familiarity with the Scripture. Jeyaraj provides a handsome summary of texts but is hardly "detailed" compared to more academic exegetical offerings.

The context of this review is restrictive in many ways. The nuance is that, in large part, this commentary targets those without competing study materials. For this purpose, it is eminently practical and comes from a credible source. However, while the commentary remarks on occasional loose parallels between the ancient setting and the Indian context, it is far from exhaustive when tying in the scriptural teaching with the Indian or Asian socio-political conditions. However, to a reader without competing resources, Jeyaraj's contribution may be pretty formative.

Students, pastors, and evangelists looking to engage in postcolonial criticism or socio-economic and political perspectives bridged from Scripture can build upon portions of this reference work as a foundation. This commentary is recommended with the reservations mentioned, as it does give the reader a communicated summary of the texts of 1 and 2

Kings, and it makes inroads in communicating the biblical text in a way that is culturally relevant to the Asian context.

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Emmanuel Kwasi Amoafo. *Stand Up for the Gospel: Getting the Church Back on Track*. George, South Africa: Oasis International Publishing, 2022. xiii + 1205 pp. $ 14.99. Paperback. ISBN: 13: 978-1-59452-851-4.

This popularized version of Emmanuel Kwasi Amoafo's PhD dissertation is an exposition of Jude applied to Evangelical and especially Pentecostal churches in Africa. With unambiguous language, skillful exegesis, and vivid illustrations, Amoafo applies the message of Jude to his readers in contemporary Africa and beyond. Although Amoafo's application is rooted in his extensive research of African Pentecostal churches, this book is immensely valuable for the global Christian community. His insights into the biblical text and his analysis of its relevance for African churches will be beneficial to Christians everywhere and serve as a model for similar contextually based projects in Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere.

One of the great strengths of this book is its sensitivity to the African and Pentecostal contexts. Amoafo writes as an insider. He grew up in Ghana and has lived and ministered for many years in Kenya. Additionally, Amoafo spent considerable time interviewing key leaders of Pentecostal churches in Africa. He has also ministered widely in Anglican and Assemblies of God circles and completed his Ph.D. studies at the Pan-African Theological Seminary, an Assemblies of God institution. From this rich background, Amoafo describes with clarity the worldview reflected in African Traditional Religions (ATRs), which sees "the natural world of rocks, trees, mountains, rivers" as being "inhabited by spirit beings that control every aspect of human life" (33). This worldview produces tremendous fear: "People are afraid because they are subject to the whims of spirit beings, which can do them good or harm" (33).

Amoafo goes on to explain how an over-emphasis on fear of evil spirits has pushed many African churches to adopt unhealthy practices. These extremes coalesce in a fixation on the prosperity doctrine, the most prevalent false teaching found in contemporary African churches. The

prosperity gospel tends to feature Old Testament promises of material blessings for God's people; and then, on this basis, it claims that "God's mission today is to 'make [his] people rich'" (68). In response, Amoafo challenges the hermeneutical foundation of this false teaching, rooted as it is in the literal application of OT promises. Amoafo asserts, "we are no longer living in the times of Solomon, where God dwells in a Temple and brings the nations to one central location to worship him." Rather, we live "in the times of the apostles, where God sends us out to the nations without even an extra shirt so that we depend on the generosity of others" (Matt 10:9-10) (69). "In the NT, Jesus changes the mission strategy from 'come-see' to 'go-tell'" (68).

Amoafo acknowledges that Africans are susceptible to the prosperity message due to the lingering influences of the ATR worldview. As a result, prosperity-oriented churches often feature "loud and lengthy prayers" (167) and the use of "objects one might call talismans to get their healing or deliverance or breakthrough" (149). This leads to an unhealthy focus on the authority of church leaders. By over-emphasizing "the fearful power of demons and overcomplicating the deliverance process, leaders keep people dependent on them for protection and security" (147).

According to Amoafo, the antidote for this unhealthy syncretism is a renewed emphasis on the gospel. "When we put our faith in what [Jesus] did for us on the cross, we can stand before God, free" from fear, shame, and guilt (39). Rather than focusing on the power of malignant spiritual forces, we need to reassure people that Christ is more powerful. "Our churches need to proclaim that we have been redeemed, forgiven, born again, and delivered from Satan's power by God's work through Christ" (36). The result will be life changing. As Amoafo notes, "Many Christians in Africa testify that when they submitted their lives to Christ, they moved from their earlier fear of evil spirits to the peace that comes from a relationship with God through Christ" (88).

Amoafo helpfully points out how Western presentations of the gospel that focused on "sin in terms of…individual guilt" (36) did not address the intensely felt needs of many Africans. Nevertheless, Amoafo argues for sound biblical perspective. Sin has "damaged our relationships with God, others, and ourselves" and thus sin causes us "to feel fear, shame, and guilt" (37). So, Amoafo suggests that "the church in Africa needs a balanced view of the gospel," one that addresses fear and shame as well as guilt. Amoafo correctly emphasizes that the gospel deals with all three of these problems that plague humanity: fear, shame, and guilt (36-39).

Amoafo insists that a return to the gospel, by definition, will redirect our focus toward repentance and the Lordship of Christ. Amoafo sees contemporary relevance in Jude's rebuke of false teachers in his day,

who "wanted Christ to meet their needs without telling them what to do" (71). Amoafo draws apt parallels between these false teachers and those in African churches who "recite the name of Jesus as a kind of talisman that we should expect to bring us good fortune." By misusing Jesus' name in this way, "we ask him to submit to us and our will. But Christ is our Lord…. It is we who must submit to him and his Word" (73).

Finally, a return to the gospel will help us view our lives considering eternity and God's redemptive plan. Although Amoafo speaks of the African context, here he illuminates a problem that characterizes most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches around the globe: "Many of our churches today rarely teach about the Second Coming of Christ." The reason for this lacuna is not hard to find: our "focus is on church members pursuing a perfect life of health and wealth in the here and now in this fallen world" (172). Sadly, the prosperity doctrine "encourages churchgoers to happily settle for the best this world can give them" (172). While there is a certain truth to the notion that God delights to bless our lives in every way (Gen 1:27-31; Rev 21:3-4; 22:1-5), it is important to recognize that he blesses us so that we might engage in his great mission (not simply for our personal well-being) and, when we do, in this age persecution is the inevitable result (2 Tim 3:12). Indeed, any theology that fails to recognize that spiritual growth comes, in part, through suffering is seriously deficient (Rom 5:1-5). Our experience of persecution and pain more broadly is the natural consequence of our location in redemptive history: we live in between the first and second coming of Christ. Thus, Amoafo wisely affirms that presently we only experience in part the impact of God's blessing and reign. Yet, this African brother's fine exposition of Jude also reminds us that "by building [ourselves] up in [our] most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit," we can remain "in God's love as [we] wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring [us] to eternal life" (Jude 20-21). Indeed, our Lord can keep us from "stumbling and to present [us] before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24 NIV 2011).

Pentecostals may be disappointed with Amoafo's analysis of Jude 20. He fails to note that the language Jude uses here, "pray in the Holy Spirit," parallels closely Paul's usage in 1 Corinthians 14:15-16 and Ephesians 6:18. Thus, as Towner and Harvey observe, "there is a strong consensus that here Jude means prayer in a Spirit-given tongue (glossolalia)" (Harvey and Towner, *Jude*, 225). Additionally, some may point to the powerful presence of the kingdom of God in Jesus and wonder if the NT approach is better summarized with the phrase, "show and tell" rather than "go and tell" (many thanks to Bob Stefan, who suggested this phrase). Nevertheless, Amoafo, with good reason,

chooses to focus on the urgency of our mission and the central issue: the need for the church to get back on track by faithfully proclaiming the "good news"—a message that has been handed down to us through the ages. Amoafo's intentions are clear, and, like the epistle of Jude, I am confident that this book can encourage readers to stand up for the gospel.

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Frank D. Macchia. *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, Word & Spirit: Pentecostal Investigations in Theology and History*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023. 458 pp. + xx pp. $52 paperback. ISBN. 978-1-6667-3022-7.

Through this summation of his life's work (ix), Assemblies of God theologian Frank Macchia argues throughout his 2023 *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* precisely what its title infers. Namely, that Christian theology is, always was and will always be—the combustible effect of Pentecost (xvii-xix, 31)! Especially insofar as it derives from the infinite diversities of global cultural-linguistic phenomena of Pentecost (xviii, 63, 227) our primal purpose through Christian theologizing, is to understand the saving meaning that the "tongues of fire at Pentecost" signifies (xviiii-xix, 4, 227, 247, 342, 407).

Thus, particularly in its formal scholarly forms, our purpose through the labor of theology, is to understand and answer the primal question that Pentecost evokes: "'What does this mean?' (Acts 2:12)" (xviii). Macchia therefore argues throughout this one-volume systematic theology of Christian faith, that from the horizon of Christ's outpouring of the Holy Spirit from the Father (xix, 5, 14-15, 31, 145, 284), our purpose in systematic theology is to construct as a faithful, coherent, and relevant discourse for church life and mission (9-10)—the saving "wonders of God" (3-4, 197, 227, 257) that Christianity historically confesses (xviii-xix, 3-4, 13-16). Macchia thus vitally exemplifies how we can construct systematic theologies in ways fully emerging from and reflecting Pentecostal tradition (xix, 9, 14-16, 24-25), while ecumenically engaged and serviceable to the broader Christian tradition (24-25). Yet just as the tongues of fire signify an inexhaustible "overload of prophetic communication" that human language(s) can never fully conceptualize (xvii-xviii, 3-4), so also Macchia stresses—theology as

a human discourse on God's free self-disclosure always functions as an "impossible possibility" (3, 6) we gratefully yet dutifully speak as God's people in Christ elected for the saving cosmic aims of divine disclosure (7-9, 29, 321-322, 340).

To the best of my knowledge, other than his 2023 briefer version titled, *Introduction to Theology: Declaring the Wonders of God* (Baker Academic), Macchia's Tongues of Fire is the second contemporary-era, single-volume systematic theology reputably published from a Classical Pentecostal perspective. Apart from Amos Yong's 2014 book, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Baylor University Press), *Tongues of Fire* signifies a watershed threshold in Pentecostal studies that throughout the first two and a half decades of the 21st century has been publishing a widening corpus of constructive theologies. But notwithstanding this work and Yong's 2014 work, predominately comprising these publications are monographs or edited volumes devoted to either a main theological topic/doctrine of Christian faith or topics more specifically associated with Pentecostal spirituality such as pneumatology, Spirit baptism and glossolalia. This is coupled with more specific theological areas such as theological methods, worship/liturgical theology, and political/public theologies.

Macchia has meanwhile well positioned himself at this era's forefront via his earlier monographs in the areas of pneumatology (*Baptized in the Spirit*, 2006 [through which he explicated his long-sustained proffering of the Pentecostal Spirit baptism metaphor as a guiding lens for Pentecostal theologizing]), justification (*Justified in the Spirit*, 2010), Christology (*Jesus the Spirit Baptizer*, 2018) and ecclesiology (*The Spirit-Baptized Church*, 2020) (31). As his magnum opus, this book thus summarily climaxes his published life's work while including substantially new reflections, particularly in the areas of defining theology while surveying its contemporary developments, God (theology proper) and eschatology (ix, xix). Let me thus stress that in view of both my preceding and foregoing reflections, this erudite exposition of Christian belief presently functions as the definitive ground-breaking exemplar for all ongoing forays in Pentecostal systematic theology. This I argue is its most vital contribution to the broader field of systematic/constructive theology across Christian tradition and more specifically, Pentecostal theological studies.

As a systematic theology, the flow of Macchia's book naturally explicates its main arguments. Thus, closely mirroring the structure of his briefer *Introduction to Theology* text, he explicates the main topics of Christian theology (God [theology proper], Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology) through the trinitarian narrative

that structures the patristic-formulated creeds of Christian faith (xix-xx, 15, 31). Hence, the book's fifteen chapters fall within its six parts: 1. "Tasks of Theology" (chs. 1-3); 2. "God" (chs. 4-7); 3. "Christ" (chs. 8-9); 4. "Holy Spirit" (chs. 10-11); 5. "Church" (chs. 12-13); and 6. "Final Purpose" (chs. 14-15). Aptly describing a vital argument running throughout his book is the title of its second chapter, "Towards a Theology of the Third Article." For as the preceding analysis already implies, Macchia is indeed proffering throughout significant examples on how a Pentecostal systematic theology can and should methodically foster the broader 20th-early 21st century historically corrective, ecumenical shift towards "third article" theology (14-15, 31-32, 61-62).

Now let us recall that the phrase "first article" refers to the Father's role within the confession of faith that the Apostle and Nicene Creeds first narrate, then the Son and thirdly the Holy Spirit (31). Yet as Macchia well clarifies, catalysts within this movement have not at all sought to undermine this narrative structure, but rather to justifiably correct the pneumatological deficit that Western Christianity (in contrast to Eastern Orthodoxy) has historically suffered consequential to the patristic churches' grappling with its encountered Christological controversies and heresies (31-32). Macchia thus thematically explicates his doctrine of God as, "The God of Pentecost who abundantly loves and overflows in freedom" (xix). He then expounds Christology as the story of the Son who through incarnation bore the Holy Spirit for overcoming our baptism in fire that he consequently may pour out this promised Spirit on all creation. Thus, his pneumatology stresses the Spirit's role in the Son's redemptive mission toward righting humanity and creation. He follows this with an ecclesiology focusing on the mission of the Spirit-baptized church for expanding the boundaries of election in Christ (322-332), coupled with an exposition on its defining marks and practices. As the final creedal article, eschatology thus climaxes the book, stressing through Christ's return, the eschatological transformation of creation into the dwelling place of God's Spirit as the hope of Christian faith (xix-xx, 378, 423). Thus, the whole book points back to Macchia's thesis regarding the triune being of God (ch. 6 "The Trinity"): that the Spirit outpouring at Pentecost is God's "climatic act" towards creation ensuring its eventual transformation into the new creation (145).

Following the same sequential structure of Macchia's briefer Introduction to Theology book, this work's main strength lies in how Macchia has again squarely grounded this exposition directly onto the Apostle's Creed, thus effectively showing how a Pentecostal systematic theology squarely fits on historic Christian confession and trinitarian spirituality. Four other notable strengths are firstly, how

Macchia explores the major theological methods and issues foremost characterizing the contextual challenges of Christian theologizing within the modern era and thus especially pertinent towards "third article" and hence Pentecostal theologizing (chs. 1-3). Second, how he surveys the past half-centuries' ecumenical debates and forays towards the meaning of Spirit baptism (chs. 9-11).

Third, how in ways richly drawing from his Barthian-rooted theological formation, Macchia constructs an ecclesiologically-framed theology of election I find insightfully resonant with Pentecostal theistic experience. Namely, not as "timeless decree" (322) but as "divine self-determination" (327) that issues forth the Father's inclusive embrace and Spirit impartation to responsive humanity through his election of Christ for our reconciliation (326-327; thus, defining the "mission of the Spirit" as "the expanding boundary of election in the direction of eschatological fullness;" 328, 332). Finally, a fourth other vital strength of this work lies in how Macchia empathically discusses and critically advises ongoing theological construction responsive to typical Pentecostal "end-time" beliefs (e.g., "rapture," "millennium," etc.; 377-381, 402-413). He does this by stressing eschatology (eschatological hope) not as singularly about present history's end or life after death but as far more broadly, "this-worldly" oriented towards the therapeutic remaking of creation (377-379) according to God's original aim for its destiny as the temple of his Spirit (377-378, 390-391, 401, 423) and our missional role towards this aim (399-400).

If I must address one weakness to this ground-breaking work, I would frame it as rather naturally limited coverage of its topics that Macchia has far more extensively explicated throughout his preceding works. Notwithstanding its length at 458 pages, I would thus stress this book's role as a survey into a far broader and I feel more compelling discourse within Pentecostal theological studies I would therefore describe as, Macchian theology. Most positively then, this book provides us an imperative initiation within Pentecostal scholarship into the theological vision of seemingly, our era's front-running systematic theologian. Second to note is that whereas Macchia's *Introduction to Theology* functions as an entry-level, concise resource into systematic theology from a Pentecostal perspective, this book foundationally complements it, as again— the first comprehensively constructed, one-volume systematic theology specifically written for and within Pentecostal tradition. Yet in manners that correspondingly adds its value as an ecumenically reaching discourse for the broader Christian church. Thus, Macchia has well-crafted a Pentecostal exposition of Christian faith that wonderfully helps

us join the greater chorus sung throughout the Christian church as one more, yet vital voice, among its manifold "tongues of Pentecost!"

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Joshua Iyadurai. *Social Research Methods: For Students and Scholars of Theology and Religious Studies*. Chennai, India: Marina Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion, 2023. 268 pp. $33 paperback; $29.99 kindle. ISBN. 978-93-5620-482-9.

Joshua Iyadurai, founder, and director of the Marina Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion (Chennai, India), offers scholars of theology and religion a valuable resource for research through the textbook, *Social Research Methods*. As a social scientist and theological educator, Iyadurai recognized the need for a pedagogical textbook containing tools, components, and qualities needed to properly utilize social scientific methods in theological or religious studies research (xxvii). Recognizing the turn to developing contextual theologies, and the increasing appreciation for interdisciplinarity, the author, not only advocates for the proper use of social scientific research methods, but also provides a comprehensive textbook for both students and educators.

Iyadurai presents his textbook in nine parts; the first two of which focus on the basic components of scholarly research. Chapters three to six elaborate social research from its different philosophies and designs to the specific methodologies involved in each design. Chapters seven to eight provides guidance in research writing whether for a report, dissertation, or thesis. The last chapter discusses the role of supervisors and dissertation/thesis examiners. Iyadurai also includes a glossary, a comprehensive bibliography, and indexes for the entire textbook.

The turn to contextual theologies is a global phenomenon that started in the late 1960s. As globalization progressed, scholars, especially those from the Majority World, have increasingly recognized the need for lived theologies. With this shift comes the need for scholars to properly study grounded realities and social worlds. The tools, however, for this complex task involve the use of social sciences, a field in which many theological and religious scholars are untrained. Iyadurai contends that theologians must learn the rigors of social research to properly incorporate contextual realities, experiences, and the like into the theological undertaking (xxvi).

The author begins with the basics: determining the research topic and doing a literature review. Chapter one begins with choosing the right topic. He emphasizes not just the interest one has in a topic but also its relevance to the production of relevant knowledge (4, 6). Iyadurai contends that research, especially theological research, must not be confined in the discourse of knowledge per se, but in the articulation of knowledge that enhances human lives and religious faith (6). With this he connects the important contribution of social research methods to theological/religious research since it offers tools needed to address the social context and to enlighten academic and lay readers (5, 6).

Chapter two focuses on conducting literature reviews. If the topic and its attendant questions direct research paths, literature reviews situate the study in the academic field, provide data for warrants, and help build up arguments (21). Iyadurai emphasizes the vital importance of literature reviews as it effectively sets the stage for the research (23). A method the author suggests in conducting literature reviews is the SQ4R method (survey, question, read, recall, review) (27). The SQ4R method is attributed to educational psychologist, Francis P. Robinson, who developed said method to improve students' reading comprehension (27). Iyadurai, however, does not stop with reading comprehension. He also pushes for the analysis and synthesis of reviewed data for researchers to develop a "holistic understanding of current knowledge" (34).

The middle chapters of the textbook, chapters three to six, discuss strategies, paradigms, and designs of social research methods. These chapters are full of content from various textbooks written on the field of social research. The author approaches the discussion in a clear and organized manner. First, he discusses the interdisciplinary nature of social research, and carefully details the philosophies behind each design. He then discusses the three main social research methods: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods research. Iyadurai presents most of the pertinent information in plain language, one that beginner students can easily understand. He also critically organizes information and steps based on his experience as both researcher and educator. His desire to educate and guide reverberates clearly in these chapters.

Moreover, the last two chapters, chapters eight and nine, reflect his meticulousness in research writing and educating. Chapter nine discusses the actual writing of the research; he includes all the elements needed in a good research paper or thesis. Perhaps this is where Iyadurai's book differs from other books. He offers a discussion on how theological frameworks or religious perspectives work in conjunction with social research. Not many textbooks delve into this topic. Iyadurai's discussion clarifies confusions for beginner and intermediate level researchers

foraying into interdisciplinary theological/religious research. He has included all the possible areas that can cause confusion for socio-theological and socio-religious researchers.

Finally, Iyadurai offers a chapter on how educators and advanced level researchers can supervise other students or scholars. Again, not many textbooks consider adding a chapter on supervising research. The author is unique in his attempt to include all pertinent discussions that can improve the field of socio-theological and socio-religious research from conducting the research, to writing the report, and to supervising others. Most considerate are the rubrics the author provides in assessing quality research outputs both in general terms and according to the research design. One can see the author's desire to educate comprehensively and clarify areas of confusion in the field of social research, especially for students, scholars, and educators of theology and/or religious studies.

Overall, the textbook is a fine contribution to the field of socio-theological and socio-religious research. In recent times, there has been a strong move for the development of theologies and religious studies relevant to socio-cultural contexts. These studies should not be mere copies of Western studies, but ones that are cognizant of lived realities in the milieu of its target audience. Since social contexts and living realities matter in the development of such research, theologians and religious researchers in locations like Asia are encouraged to utilize social scientific research methods and be more interdisciplinary in their approach. Iyadurai, an Asian theologian and educator himself, offers this textbook as an excellent contribution for this undertaking.

Some may comment that the textbook is overly comprehensive. However, as an Asian theologian and educator myself, I have seen the same issues that spurred Iyadurai to write such a book. Asian researchers and educators are not trained in social research. The idea of interdisciplinarity is also quite new. There is much ignorance, confusion, and helplessness amongst researchers in integrating theology or religious studies and social research. This book, written in a student-friendly manner and offering a one-stop monograph for pertinent information on this field is a much-needed textbook.

I highly recommend this textbook to students, scholars, and educators in theological seminaries, Christian colleges, and research institutes. Iyadurai's *Social Research* is an appropriate primary textbook for graduate and postgraduate level courses on research methods. It contains pertinent information needed to train scholars of theology and religion in one comprehensive and unambiguous textbook. It also offers guidance for educators, scholars, and doctoral supervisors on how to tutor, supervise and examine academic research; something that

most research textbooks do not offer. Finally, a textbook that integrates theological and/or religious studies research methods with social scientific research methods supports the development of dialectical and contextual theologies worldwide.

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Stephen Félix-Jäger. *Renewal Worship: A Theology of Pentecostal Doxology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022). 234 pp. $22.64 paperback; $21.51 Kindle. ISBN. 9781514000154.

In his recent monograph *Renewal Worship: A Theology of Pentecostal Doxology*, Steven Félix-Jäger delves into the various aspects of Spirit-centered worship biblically, theologically, and practically. Felix-Jäger is the Chair of Worship Arts & Media at Life Pacific University, a Foursquare university in Southern California. As a Pentecostal theologian, he often traverses current conversations regarding worship, the arts, aesthetics, Pentecostal faith, and culture. This recent work portrays his desire to expand the Pentecostal academic groundwork regarding worship. To accomplish this task, he takes the reader on a journey through the basics of Pentecostal underpinnings as he sorts through the why, what, who, and how of Renewal Worship.

This book overviews the Pentecostal theology of worship with a biblical, cultural, and community focus. It is divided into two sections: Profiling Renewal Worship and Renewal Worship in Context. His first section defines Renewal Worship as a practical "theology of abundance" (14) which is pneumatic in nature, reciprocally relational with God (15), and musically expressed (15). The second section delves into the theological understanding of practicing communities within Renewal Worship, especially globally (17). The book is capped by a small Subject Index and a Scripture Index, always useful tools for the searching scholar.

Felix-Jäger sets out by narrowing the term "Renewal Worship" to represent a "direct, experiential encounter of the Spirit" (31). In his first chapter, he creates a space for Pentecostal worship arts theologically as he analyzes the Pentecostal view of pouring out presence, eschatological focus, sacraments, and healing. He describes a biblically based theological method which he uses to portray the "method" in which Pentecostals view, portray, and practice their beliefs. This is not the standard methodology in which a book or paper may be structured,

but rather an outline describing how Pentecostals read and interpret Scripture. Here, he relays the Pentecostal perspective of the biblical interpretation (24) and he "clarif[ies] how theological claims are made" (35), both of which greatly influence worship in the Pentecostal church. Here, he sets the scene for the importance of his study.

In chapter two, he jumps full force into explaining what he terms as a theology of abundance, which he compares to the prosperity gospel. He demonstrates the depth of this concept, which "allows believers to see God's blessings in all things . . . [and in turn] reciprocate this blessing to God and others through action and proclamation" (91). In essence, God is the object of worship, while the Spirit is the abundant overflow of God's gift in worship, and in all things. Chapter three focuses on the human response within worship. He addresses the aesthetic aspect of this relational encounter, stating that, "When musical worship also engages other art forms (visual art, drama, spoken word, video, etc.), it creates an even more potent space for aesthetic spiritual formation … that encourages solidarity as worshipers sing, pray, sway, clap, dance, and shout together" (99-100). He describes this response in worship as a holistic and whole-body experience (114-5). Within this chapter, he portrays the arts as a part of worship, engaging the divine through reciprocal and relational expressions of praise. This subject of the arts is a much-needed discussion regarding Pentecostal worship, and could be developed further.

Chapter four begins the second part of the book in which he reconciles the push and pull of victory and suffering (120), structure and spontaneity (126), triumph and lament (130), and most crucially the "formational power of the Word and the deconstructive power of the sanctifying Spirit" (120). These tensions create a "flow" of unity within "the elements of worship for a cohesive experience" (141). This particular chapter beautifully depicts the dynamic tensions within *Renewal Worship* and the passion they can create in a worship setting. Chapter five addresses the prophetic function within the Bible and the church, as a spiritual gift and as a social function. Within worship, this prophetic, or presence, aspect of worship is essentially "God's response to our response" (168). The words and the worship are God-directed, often bringing edification, blessing (156), and transformation for the individual and the community (162). His insight in portraying the prophetic to worship is insightful and not always broached by theologians. This chapter is a welcomed addition to the discourse on Pentecostal worship.

Chapter six extends *Renewal Worship* globally through reconciliation. He portrays a link in the formative unity that came about

through Pentecost (179) as well as the unity that took place during the Azusa Street Revival (184). Both of these instances reflect a "universal outpour, which is the very substance of renewal worship" (187). Within this engagement of local and global, he discusses three key models regarding worship: reproduction, contextualization, and indigenization. With no one model standing as better or worse, each of these methods portray one or a combination of possible adaptions which, he observes, cultures use in their worship as they interact with the global community of worship. These models feel a bit limited in their approach, yet he is moving into the missiological aspects of worship at this point, and this area may not be his strong suit.

Felix-Jäger concludes his monograph with what he refers to as a "postlude," in which he encourages the dialogue to continue, just as the closing music of a service follows the attendee out of the church and into the streets (210). In the final pages, he sums up his discourse and ends with restating his doxologies from the end of each chapter as he summarizes each section. These combined doxologies have been fittingly made into a song, referenced at the end of the book.

Throughout this book, one apparent theme that he reiterates is his discussion from chapter one, that renewal worship is relational, reciprocal, and responsive. He uses this founding thought in each chapter to further develop his theological discussion. Overall, this book is very theologically focused, with a splattering of contemporary songs throughout. Within each chapter, he explains several theological aspects of the Pentecostal faith and then he reintroduces the main topic of worship, filling in and shaping the concept of worship with deeper and more constructive insight as he goes. In order to adequately accomplish this, he goes above and beyond in his explanations and reasonings, leading from a great many various theological foundations in order to mold a fully-fledged Pentecostal theology of worship. Some of his theological discourse feels excessive at times, yet this undergirds his main points, and the various attitudes and aspects of worship become clear through his multi-faceted approach. It actually reads as if he is slowly developing a 3-D depiction of renewal worship that the reader may visibly see and understand. It is fascinating that within each chapter, he uses published songs to illustrate his points. These songs are often well-known, and they make his points relevant and tangible. This addition is a great asset to the over-all relatability of the book.

In his discourse, he makes some bold assertions and strong criticisms. He seems quick to point out the flaws of pastors or ministries (78), yet also quick to instruct worship pastors regarding worship (146). In his explication of abundance theology, he compares it to the prosperity

message. Through this process, his specific example of Gloria Copeland's writings felt a bit singled-out, dated, and not necessary (78), especially since so many other current examples are available. In addition, at times it appears Jäger is not always ecumenical in his approach; nevertheless, he does not hide the Pentecostal position, and is clear when describing the reasoning behind his theological stances.

It is obvious that Felix-Jäger has a heart to see worship initiate unity within the church. This book is a good read for anyone who needs to get their footing on the basics of Pentecostal theology and worship. It sets a middle-of-the-ground tone for Pentecostal theology, allowing for clarity in the why, what, who, and how's of Pentecostal worship. Since its scope is such a broad field, including Charismatic/Pentecostal worshiping communities worldwide, he does a great job navigating through the diverse nature of this field of study. At one point, he also pinpoints the understanding that "the arts represent our highest forms of human expression" (107) and must be encouraged and protected. Here, he becomes an advocate for the artists of worshiping communities, in which liturgical arts are not a goal in and of themselves, yet rather "are acts of worship that glorify God and draw people into the presence of God" (108). His explicated support of worshiping artists is greatly appreciated. Overall, this was an excellent theological discourse, and a solid foundational study regarding Pentecostal worship.

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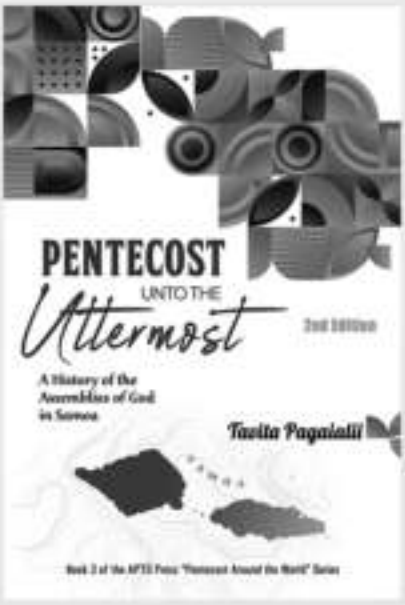

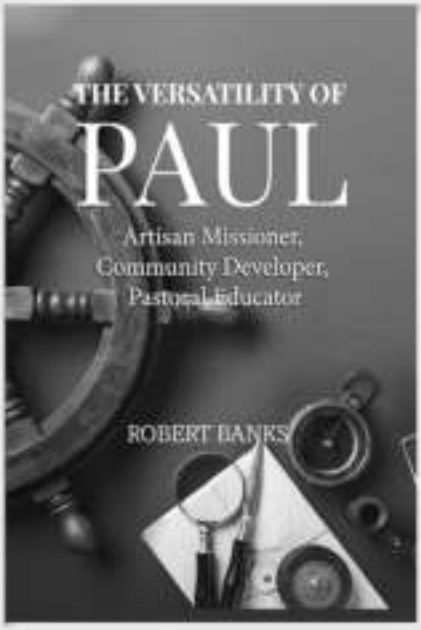

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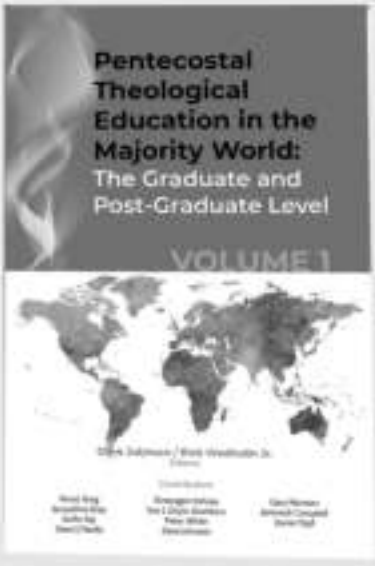

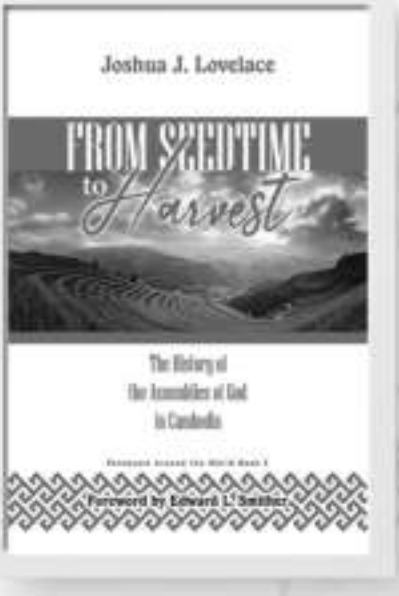

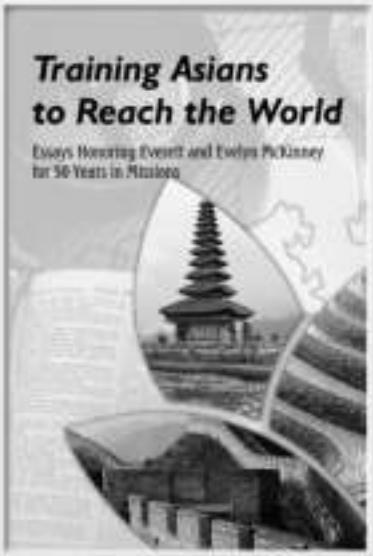

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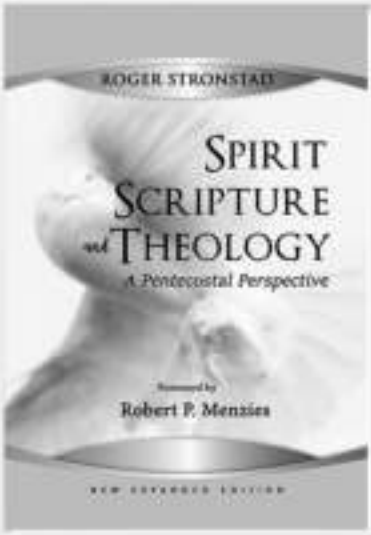

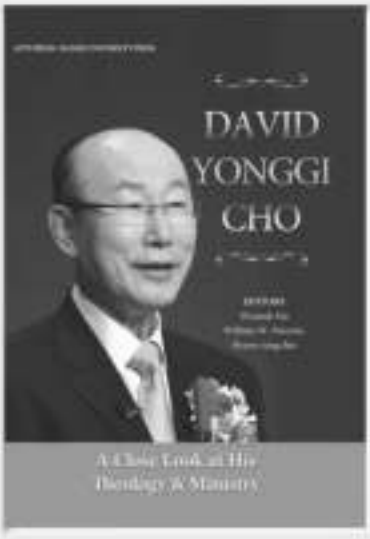

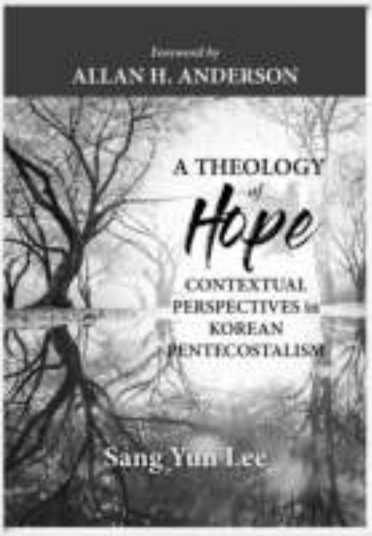

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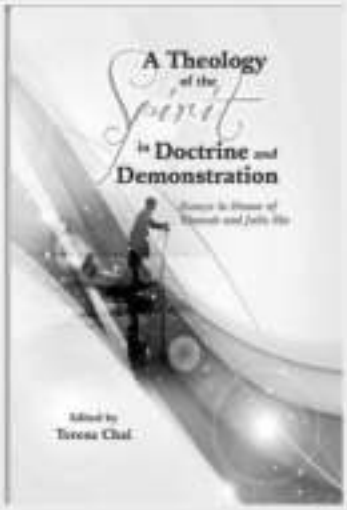

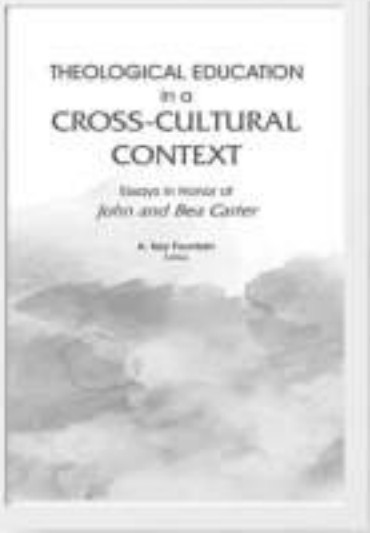

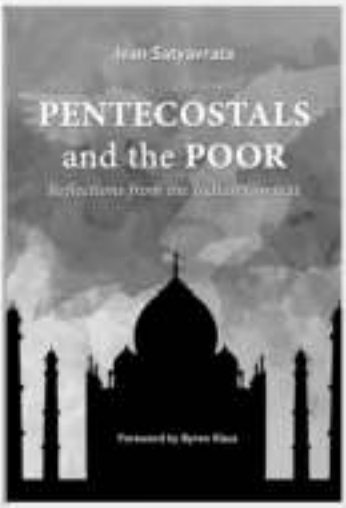

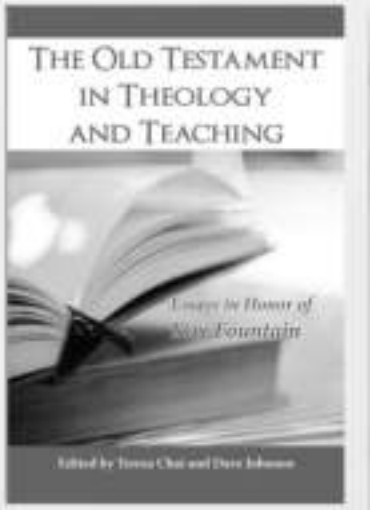

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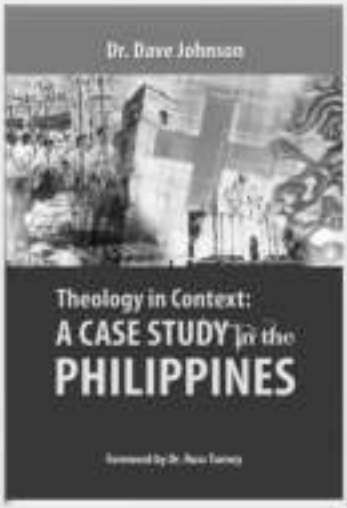

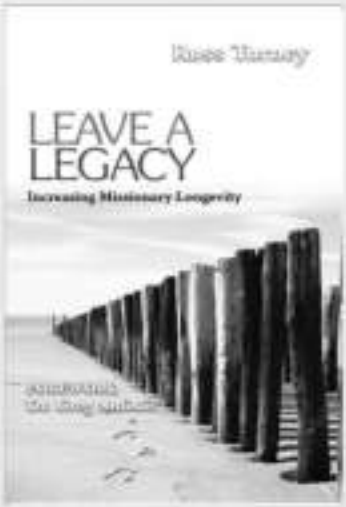

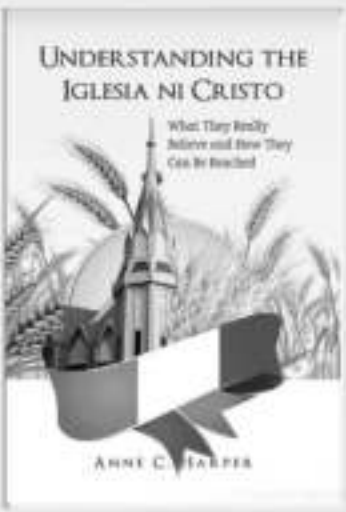

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