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Issues in context

Spiritual warfare takes place wherever humanity is found. No society or culture is exempt, and Satan is able to contextualize his strategies in the light of culture. As a result of the different cultural perspectives Christians bring to the task, it is not surprising that there are areas of significant tension in regard to spiritual warfare. Following the lead of the 2000 Lausanne consultation statement, we will briefly mention three.

First, the language used in spiritual warfare literature has tended to be excessive and triumphalistic. If our ultimate goal is not to boast in victories over Satan but to draw people to Christ, then Christians must beware of polemic language that demeans or belittles. We cannot use Satan's tactics to defeat him. There is a critical need to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches in our spiritual warfare methods. Reducing human experience exclusively either to demonic encounters or to psychological or social dimensions does not do justice to the full-orbed presentation of humanity in the Bible.

Then there are the twin problems of *syncretism and secularization. Those who tend to reduce life to spiritual warfare imagery accuse those who downplay the reality of the demonic of being secularists, while the latter accuse the former of being Christian animists. Both need to listen carefully to each other if discussion is to move forward; neither side accurately represents the full biblical picture. This tension is especially evident in the discussion on territorial spirits and spiritual mapping, in which one side trumpets identification and binding of territorial spirits as the key to world evangelization while the other condemns such practices as Christian magic. As the Majority World church continues to grow and gain a stronger voice in the global faith, all of these issues will be part of the ongoing discussion that will characterize the future of spiritual warfare thinking and practice.

See also CULTURE, KINGDOM OF GOD.

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A. S. MOREAU

Spirituality

Spirituality describes the God-human relationship and how it is mediated as an experiential relationship of the believer and *God. This experience of God, made real in the believer's life in Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit, is the manifestation of the mystery of the Holy *Trinity. It is viewed as a transforming process of deepening intimacy, which at the same time renews relationships with others as a reflection of this mystery. Its connection with mission begins with the God of mission, who draws us into relationship with himself in order to engage us in participation with him in that mission. This is the source of a 'spirituality of mission' as an expression of that relationship with God which initiates and empowers mission commitment.

Spirituality as a transforming experience therefore has two causally related aspects: the relationship with God (theology), and the relationship with human beings (mission and ethics). The first explores the possibility of establishing a transforming relationship with a personal yet transcendent God. It is a biblical spirituality which, according to Sandra Schneiders, is 'a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text' (in *Interpretation* vol. 56:2, p. 136). Because spirituality is related closely to the biblical text it has a theological dimension, which expounds the biblical witness to the ways in which God relates to humanity. This transforming relationship between humanity and God is actualized in human relationships, which, regardless of gender, social status or ethnic group, are deepened dynamically through reading the biblical text communally and contextually.

Relationship with God is integrated with, and reflected in, the relationship with other human beings and *creation. In other words, the vertical relationship determines the nature of the horizontal relationship. Spirituality therefore fuses theology, mission and ethics as a dynamic integrative language. The progressive movement of theology runs dynamically in line with the movement of mission and ethics. Spirituality attempts to transform words into contextual deeds. In short, being precedes doing, and both are bound together in any meaningful relationship with God. To know God is therefore characterized by acting justly and loving mercy (Mic. 6:8), and prayer is only of value when combined with defending the cause of the fatherless and the widow (Isa. 1:15-17).

The importance of an integrated spirituality of mission is also seen in the way in which the heart and the mind are often polarized. Christians in different contexts have all understood spirituality as nurturing the heart rather than the mind, primarily because the word is associated merely with the 'spiritual' dimension of the human being. Theological and historical exposition of the Bible is regarded as less 'spiritual' than spiritual practice because it touches the mind and not the heart. This, however, reduces the biblical messages to merely spiritual concepts. Spirituality is developed based on, for example, the concepts of love or church tradition, which are

viewed as the quintessence of the Bible. These reduced spiritual concepts have tended to ignore the plurality and diversity of the Bible's messages and have viewed Christian spirituality as a branch of systematic theology, thereby divorcing it from mission and ethics. Spirituality should engage heart, mind and will in a dynamic exchange which results in an integration of action and reflection.

A spirituality of mission will also seek to integrate the Christian's relationship with God with his or her relationship with the world. For example, in the pluralistic *postmodern world, the understanding of spirituality must take into account this cultural reality. Many postmoderns are searching for a 'spirituality' through which they can connect with reality beyond the purely material. The church in its mission must be able to offer a way of relating to God which is multidimensional enough to engage both the postmodern context and the biblical text, without necessarily rejecting the richness of Christian traditions.

The plurality of the postmodern world and its understanding of human experience cannot be used as a norm when defining spirituality, since this would render spirituality as purely subjective. However, the possibility of exploring a multidimensional spirituality is underscored by the plurality and diversity of the contexts and experiences of God in the Bible. Furthermore, the contexts where the Bible is being interpreted today are not only diverse but also changing dynamically, necessitating varied responses to the text. In short, when the Bible is read contextually, the interpreted text shapes the personal and communal life and mission of the Christian in a postmodern world, and out of this process comes a multidimensional approach to spirituality which contemporary postmoderns can connect with.

Spirituality as the experience of divine and human relationships has other missiological implications. We have said that the Bible portrays who God is and what his works are, which in turn transforms who we are and what we do. The dominant colours of God's portrait in the Bible are *love and justice, which find clear expression in his work of *reconciliation. Reconciliation derives from and fuses love and justice; and the *cross as the final expression of God's love and justice

points to a reconciling God. In other words, the word reconciliation captures God's essential nature as a missionary God. God in his mission forms a universal community which demonstrates to the fallen world what it means to live as reconciled persons, as God's new people, a demonstration which draws diverse people to the reconciling God.

This reconciled community also demonstrates to the broken world a new relationship to creation. Reconciliation is the central and eternal mission of God and must therefore be at the heart of a spirituality of mission, worked out as a ministry of reconciliation that reflects the love and justice of God. These qualities are expressed in a reconciling life, which infuses a reconciled person's words and deeds and gives shape to a spirituality of mission for a post-modern world.

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Syncretism

Historical overview

The term 'syncretism' derives etymologically from the Greek *syn* (with) and *krasis* (mixture). Plutarch (45–125 BC) used it to reference the behaviour of Cretans who united over their differences in self-defence against attacking enemies. Much later, Erasmus (1466–1536) used the term to refer to the collaboration among scholars united by the classical tradition to overcome the emerging Catholic-Protestant divide. Similarly, in 1645 George Calixtus Helmstadt called for the syncretism or reconciliation of theological and ritual differences among Protestant denominations (against Rome). This came to be known as the 'syncretistic controversy' because of the political and ideological situation of mid-seventeenth century Christian Europe: on the one hand, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) both signalled the end of the Catholic Church's universally accepted authority and established the concept of toleration (which alone makes mixture possible); on the other hand, the rise of the nation-state and the emergence of denominationalism emphasized the distinctiveness of political and religious identities.

By the early twentieth century, anthropologists and other scholars in the humanities had come to define syncretism as the reinterpretation that takes place in any acculturating process involving an established people group that comes into prolonged contact with another (often expanding) culture. In this framework, the history of religions school advocated the thesis that all religions were the result of syncretistic processes. Manicheism and Roman religion were prime examples, with the former fusing together various traditions, and the latter adopting the foreign cults of conquered peoples as a means of assimilation. Similarly, Israelite religion was understood to be a syncretism of Ancient Near Eastern cultures, and Christianity was seen as a syncretism of Jewish and Hellenistic traditions during the Patristic period. The fact that religious traditions arose out of cross-cultural processes suggested the possibility of a new, universal religious horizon emanating from the modern encounter of East and West facilitated by the colonial enterprise.