

BOUBAKAR SANOU

---

## Social Dynamics and Occultic Practices

### Introduction

The English word occultism comes from the Latin root *occulere* meaning to cover over, hide, conceal. Thus the basic meaning of *occult* is that which is hidden, concealed, and secret (Kyle 1993:27). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *occult* was first used in 1545, meaning that which is “not apprehended, or not apprehensible, by the mind; beyond the range of understanding or of ordinary knowledge.” According to Richard Kyle, the occult has three main characteristics: it is mysterious, thus beyond the range of ordinary knowledge; it is secret and disclosed or communicated only to the initiated; and it pertains to magic, astrology, and other alleged sciences claiming use or knowledge of the secret, mysterious or supernatural (1993:27). Occultism therefore refers to secret or hidden knowledge supernaturally received through the means of divination (cartomancy, crystal-gazing, palmistry, Ouija boards, prophetic dreams and visions, psychometry, numerology, etc.).

Occultism is frequently warned against in the Bible. In many ways the Ten Commandments are God’s instructions against occultic practices because the first three commandments (Exod 20:1–7) charge the Israelites “to distinctively stand before God without reliance on any other gods” (Van Rhee 1997:173). Just as the Israelites were warned against rejecting Yahweh and serving other gods (Deut 11:16; 2 Kgs 10:23), so too were New Testament Christians warned against dual allegiance (Matt 6:24; 1 Cor 10:14; Rev 22:15).

This paper briefly discusses factors that contribute to the practice of occultism and suggests a biblical response to the threat it poses to Christians.

## Factors Contributing to Occultic Practices among Christians

Scholars agree that occultism is a worldwide religious phenomenon. It is believed that people of every cultural, religious, ethnic, and socio-economic background are involved in a wide variety of occultic practices (Kraft 2005a:377). For example, the Chief of Staff of President Reagan reports that “virtually every major move or decision the Reagans made during my time as White House chief of staff was cleared in advance with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment for the enterprise” (Regan, 1988:26).

There are several factors known to contribute to occultic practices. Seven of these factors are briefly discussed here: the growing acceptance of religious pluralism, the failure of orthodox religions to meet their adherents’ existential needs, the pressure to conform to socio-cultural norms, the influence of the media and music industry, the attraction of occultism, biblical illiteracy among Christians, and the inadequate discipling of new converts.

### Growing Acceptance of Religious Pluralism

That the world has become a religiously plural place cannot be denied. People of diverse ethnic origins and many dissimilar religious commitments live and share public life together. This globalization has put major world religions, some of which promote an occultic worldview, within the reach of almost everyone today. Worldwide migration patterns, international travel and trade, progress in communications technology, and international media activities have introduced people to nearly all religious traditions. Mission is no longer a Christian activity alone; Islam and Eastern religions are also dynamically engaged in missionary work (Hedlund 1992:13). This has resulted in the option of cafeteria-style choices in the area of religion with many people picking and choosing from among various religious traditions and practices to meet their personal needs (Frykholm 2011:20). If all religions are equally valid ways to salvation as some argue (Thomas 1992:28), then a cocktail of religious beliefs and practices is even better. As a result of this religious globalization, religious traditions outside of Christianity and Judaism are no longer treated as “the work of the devil.” Modern scholarship not only promotes many positive features of other religions, it also claims that “all religions, including Christianity, are relative. . . . [and that] every religion is considered equally valid” (Thomas 1992:28).

Religious pluralism is thus built on the assumption that the different religious traditions are complementary rather than contradictory. As a direct result of this call for cooperation among various religious cultures,

there is a growing positive public attitude toward other religious practices. Religious pluralism, especially in the West, seems to have become a spiritual adventure (Halevi 2002:9) to the extent that Claude Geffré even affirms that “the religiosity of the Western person of our times is spontaneously syncretistic” (2002:94). In the same line of argument, Richard Kyle also points out that “the hallmark of American religion is diversity” (1993:17). Pressure toward dual allegiance comes from two directions: from non-Christian religions and from within Christianity itself. When Christian thinkers also advocate a pluralistic theology of religions, thus asserting the subjectivity of Christian belief statements, the church cannot but be under the threat of religious syncretism (Thomas 1992:28).

### The Failure of Orthodox Religions to Meet Existential Needs

The world is experiencing a thirst for spirituality, both among Christians and non-Christians. The dissatisfaction with materialism, consumerism, and formal institutional religions, economic crises, ecological calamities, and worldwide crises has intensified the search for ultimate reality, meaning, and security. The spiritual hunger both in the church (lay people, seminarians, and clergy) and the world had led to a plethora of options for spiritual seekers. Religion has thus become a huge marketplace, and many people are drawn to “what delivers.”

Sometimes, orthodox religions do not address existential needs and the spiritual thirst of their adherents. As a result many Christians “go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle” (Tozer 1980:98). As such, “well-intentioned believers drift and find themselves nearly comatose spiritually, numbed by years of religious activity without transformation” (Hull 2004:28). It is estimated that only 52% of Christians are making some effort to grow spiritually, and many of these are inconsistent and therefore they achieve only limited result (Barna 2001:43).

The exclusive focus on doctrinal and rational arguments of orthodox religions in contexts where existential issues rather than clarity and orthodoxy are the most important considerations leads their adherents to search for alternative means of meeting their felt needs (Nürnberg 2007:66). It is believed that interest in the occult grows significantly whenever religious establishments fail to provide adequate answers to their adherents’ quests for survival. Whenever this is the case, people turn elsewhere for assurance (Russell 1980:173). John Grayston remarks that

many churchgoers find little connection between the preaching that they hear and the world in which they live. Sermons have been dry and academic and lacking in application or human interest or they have become a collection of anecdotes which fail to engage with the text of the Bible. No bridges are built between the world of the Bible and the world of the

reader, the horizons are as far apart as ever and no windows of the imagination are opened to enable the hearer to see new possibilities or explore the transforming power of the Word. If the Bible is not seen to touch on the questions which are raised in everyday life, it is not surprising that many have turned away from it. (Grayston 2002:101)

The above may be why “there are more registered witches in France than there are Catholic priests” (Halverson 1996:38). In times of desperation even believers are tempted to grab for something that works, that is anything that will give them the power to get them out of their suffering or to fix what is wrong. Occultism readily promises such power (Halverson 1998:60).

Because the majority of converts to Christianity are from an animistic background (Partridge 2005:100), Charles Kraft argues that when these converts “find within Christianity little or none of the spiritual power they crave for the meeting of their needs for healing, blessing, guidance, even deliverance from demons, they continue their preChristian practice of going to shamans, priests, diviners, temples, shrines, and the like for spiritual power” (2005c:361). Other people also delve into occultism to satisfy their spiritual longings. Richard Kyles believes that the major reason behind the modern resurgence of the occult is because it seems to meet seekers’ deep spiritual thirst (2000:91).

#### Societal Pressure

Sometimes social structures place emphasis on community centeredness rather than individual freedom. A sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values in many traditional contexts. With this attitude toward life, it is “the community [that] makes and produces the individual. The individual has no existence of his own apart from the community’s” (Nthamburi 1983:163). The following saying best describes this social structure, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1990:106). Full membership in this type of community is synonymous with participating in its beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals; and “to be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture” (1990:2). Because identification with the community is a primary virtue, individuals generally find fulfillment in the degree that they belong. Eugene Hillman captures more vividly this sense of communal life in the following way:

In societies that are held together by strong kin relationships, individuality is rarely, if ever asserted as an explicit value in itself. The person is not generally seen in isolation from the community. Rather, his personal individuality is affirmed and fulfilled only in relation to the good of others, and

this is explicitly recognized as normative, to the extent that the individual is expected to follow the socially established patterns. In this sense, each man lives for others, and his personal development is always community-oriented. (Hillman 1975:112)

At other times, societal pressure comes in the form of peer pressure among teenagers. In search for identity and belonging, some young people are easily attracted to what gives them significance: feelings of importance and acceptance, as well as personal empowerment. They find their longing fulfilled in occultism which promises to satisfy their search to “be somebody” or “worth something.”

Since full membership and fulfillment in such contexts come for individuals as they participate in group, family, or community relationships (beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals) (Partridge 2005:127), some converts to Christianity succumb to dual allegiance and syncretism as they continue to practice elements of other religions. In many instances, an individual’s failure to participate in some group or cultural practices amounts to self-excommunication from the entire life of that group or community. Because the penalty for refusing to participate in some group or communal rituals could be stiff, many people, out of fear of the penalty prefer to follow the traditional customs (Kraft 2008:33).

#### Influence of Media and Music Industry

The production, sales, and distribution of reading material, music, and movies that promote occult themes is extremely profitable. The popularity of books and movies on Harry Potter and movies such as *The Angel of Light* are some examples of how the entertainment industry acts as an ambassador for occultism. The occult symbolism in the music industry has become very overt. What used to be hidden is now displayed publicly. Many album covers and videos have occult symbolism. Musicians such as Beyoncé admit that they are possessed by other beings during their performances.

#### The Attraction of Occultism

Animism and its diverse forms of expression (e.g., occultism, spiritism, magic, astrology, etc.) hold a tremendous attraction for people. The majority of the world, including most of the adherents of the major world religions, is involved in animistic practices (Kraft 2005a:377). Occultism often provides feelings of power and control and promises followers the ability to experience power over oneself, others, and the external environment. Occult practices are perceived as having the capacity to satisfy daily needs. Catherine Albanese remarks that

astrology gave people a sense of identity and assisted them in establishing secure relationships with others. Self-help literature helped people to take steps toward improved prosperity, health, and happiness in their daily situations. Psychics offered physical healing and spiritual advice on how to deal with everyday problems. People thought that by knowing the future they could change it, take the steps necessary to avoid harm, or restore balance to life. Communicating with a dead mother could assist a person with a current problem. Abiding by Theosophical rules could enable someone to gain confidence in self and the universe. Renewed health and good fortune could come from the practice of New Thought. To Americans, the practicality of the occult was important. People believed that engaging in occult and metaphysical activities was a way to stimulate images that would bring useful results. (1981:183–184).

What generally makes occultism attractive to people is that it addresses existential needs rather than stressing doctrinal purity. The desire to know and be able to master what hinders our wellbeing is a powerful one, especially in times of crises. Occultism promises people a “quick fix” regarding everyday needs and problems, such as “the need to be healed of an illness, to be successful in business, to find a job, to excel in school, to restore a soured relationship, to find a mate, and to gain guidance for the future” (Halverson 1996:39).

### Biblical Illiteracy

Many Christians are biblically illiterate (Watson 2014:1). The decline in familiarity with Scripture is another reason why some believers fall into occultism. Many churchgoers have major gaps in their biblical knowledge. The knowledge of biblical truth plays an important role in Christian discipleship. Knowing biblical truth helps counter ignorance or error in order to bring people to a correct understanding about and relationship with Jesus Christ. Before surrendering their lives to Christ, people need a certain level of understanding of scriptural truth. Jesus spent an important part of his ministry in the teaching of truth (the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5–7 and the parables: Luke 15; 18.1–14; 19:11–26; Matt 11:1; Luke 4:31–32; John 15:1–17). His intention was for his hearers to grow in their understanding of the person and will of God in order for them to have a better relationship with him. He focused more on knowledge grounded in relationship and experience with God rather than on head knowledge alone (John 8:32; 15:1–10).

### Inadequate Discipling of New Converts

Some converts to Christianity revert to their previous religious practices

*2015, vol. 11 no. 2*

or reach out to new non-Christian practices in times of crises. This reversion sometimes comes as the result of an inadequate discipling process before and after their acceptance into church membership. Because of this faulty discipleship process, converts do not experience completeness in Christ that is both culturally appropriate and biblically faithful. As such, it becomes difficult for them to continue to stand firm on Christian principles especially if some of their pressing needs are not yet met.

The use of a baptismal model of mission rather than a discipleship model is one cause of religious syncretism. In the baptismal model, success is seen to have been achieved upon baptism. In the discipleship model, baptism is an early part of a long and continuing process. In a baptismal model of mission, much discipleship is hasty and incomplete. Many of those who show interest in becoming Christians are taught and then baptized; the event of baptism often marks the end of the discipleship process for many. Once in full church membership, some converts are no longer shown the same degree of personal attention the church gave them prior to their baptism. It is implicitly assumed that the rest of the process will be taken care of by weekly sermons and prayer meetings. Unfortunately the sharing of Christian principles in Sabbath sermons or during the mid-week prayer meetings usually does not effectively address the deep issues some of the converts are struggling with.

Discipleship is not synonymous with simply presenting biblical truth no matter how crucial that truth is. The process of discipleship involves more than just an information transfer about doctrinal correctness. It requires a personal relational investment in the learner by one or more mature Christians that allows for molding, mentoring, counsel, and conversational instruction over a significant period of time.

## **A Biblical Response to the Threat of Occultism**

### **Long-Term Discipleship**

The threat posed by syncretism and dual allegiance is not so much with the converts' old religious beliefs and practices as it is with the underlying assumptions on which these old beliefs are built. People will not give up on their old beliefs so long as those old beliefs remain the only working alternatives they have (Van Velsor and Drath 2004:390). The only solution is for the gospel to not only change former beliefs but also to transform the converts' worldviews. If this does not happen the new beliefs will continue to be reinterpreted in terms of the old worldviews (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno 2000:177). A biblical model of discipleship is key to worldview transformation.

A good biblical model of discipleship is portrayed in 1 Thess 2:7–13.

This text presents discipleship as a process of spiritual parenting. In that passage Paul uses the parent-child metaphor to describe principles of discipleship by referring to familiar things of life, which both the direct recipients and the wider readership of the epistle were conversant with. This parent-child metaphor is still a powerful means of impressing on people's minds important spiritual principles about Christian discipleship. A brief analysis of this passage reveals the following four components of biblical discipleship.

### **Long-Term Commitment to the Spiritual Welfare and Growth of Believers**

"Just as a *nursing mother cares for her children* (italics mine), so we cared for you" (vv. 7 and 8). Paul and his missionary team cared for the believers in the congregations they established as a mother cares for her children. This involved tenderly and patiently teaching the Thessalonians to walk with God. They demonstrated intentional commitment to the spiritual growth and welfare of believers.

### **Modeling a Spiritual Walk with God**

"Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of *how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed*" (italics mine, vv. 9 and 10). The missionary team strove to be role models to the new believers. If Hampton Keathley's perspective on discipleship is correct, about 90 percent of what a disciple learns or applies is caught from the discipler's life rather than from his/her teaching. As a result, he argues that "we should place our emphasis on being a friend and let people see how we deal with things, how we study, how we pray, how we love, etc. We don't want to just give him all the facts. We need to allow him to see how we work through various issues and help him work through the issues himself" (2004). Without doubt this was what happened in Jesus' discipling ministry of the Twelve and his other early followers who so faithfully imitated him that when those who had observed them found no other way to call them but Christians (Acts 11:26).

### **Personal Attention to Believers' Spiritual Needs**

"For you know that *we dealt with each of you* (italics mine) as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (vv. 11 and 12). They gave believers individual attention and instruction

as a father would do to his children with the intention to help each of them with unique needs. They understood that each believer's uniqueness meant individual attention. Hampton Keathley illustrates this need for personal attention:

When we bring a newborn home from the hospital, we don't just put down the infant and say, "Welcome to the family, Johnny. Make yourself at home. The towels are in the hall closet upstairs, the pantry is right here, the can opener is in this drawer. No crying after 10 p.m. If you have any questions there are lots of people in the family who would love to help you so don't be afraid to ask." You laugh and say that is ridiculous, but that is what usually happens to new Christians. Someone gets saved and starts going to church but never gets much personal attention. We devote 18 years to raising our children, but don't even spend six months helping a new Christian get started in understanding the spiritual world. As a result, many people have been Christians for many years, but have not grown very much. Hebrew 5:12 refers to this phenomenon. So, new believers need someone to give them guidance and help them grow. Like a newborn, they need some personal attention. (2004)

Another important insight highlighted in Keathley's illustration is that discipling converts requires a significant investment of time. It is not an event limited to a two to three week evangelistic series or something that is taken care of in a formal teaching setting (e.g., baptismal class). This makes mentorship inseparable from discipleship. Beside the formal teaching settings, spiritual mentors should be available to share their spiritual journey and experiences (both positive and negative) with new converts.

### **The Teaching of Biblical Truth**

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe" (v. 13). Conforming themselves to the command of Matt 28:19–20, Paul and his companions made the Word of God an essential element of the Thessalonians' discipleship process.

The passage in 1 Thess 2:7–13 clearly shows that although the teaching of biblical truth was essential, it was not the sole component of Paul's missionary team's discipleship model. While the teaching of biblical truth is an essential component of discipleship because a convert cannot fully mature spiritually without understanding biblical principles, it must also be acknowledged that a convert may have considerable biblical knowledge and yet remain spiritually immature. For this reason the teaching of biblical truth must always be balanced with other components of biblical

discipleship such as an intentional commitment to the spiritual growth and welfare of new believers, a modeling of a spiritual walk with God, and personal attention to each believer's spiritual welfare and growth needs. Congregational and small group teaching and personal attention of the believers are needed to encourage them along the road to their Christian maturity. Just as a baby needs an additional amount of attention, new converts also need someone to provide them with attention and guidance in the maturation process.

### Need for a Balanced Approach to Ministry and Mission

Christian witness and discipleship are associated with truth, allegiance, and power dimensions. Each of these three dimensions has its specific concern. The concern of the truth dimension is to counter ignorance or error in order to bring people to a correct understanding about Jesus Christ. The concern of the allegiance dimension is to bring people to undivided commitment and growing obedience to God. The power dimension, sometimes referred to as spiritual warfare or the Great Controversy, is concerned with releasing people from Satan's captivity and bringing them to freedom in Jesus Christ (Kraft 2009:446). God not only uses his power to hinder Satan, but also to help people understand his love better. Although each of these three dimensions has its specific concern, all three need to be interrelated for wholistic spiritual growth. Discipleship is a lifelong process but for the fact that these dimensions are also punctiliar events in the course of Christian maturity, they will be sometimes referred to as encounters.

The truth and allegiance dimensions have generally been emphasized more than the power dimension in Christian witness. This approach to spiritual growth thus seems to show preference to these two dimensions instead of stressing that all three are necessary for holistic Christian maturity. Too often little if any attention is paid to the power dimension as if Christian discipleship rests only on the truth and allegiance one confesses. Such a strategy does great damage by neglecting an essential pillar—power—on which Christian discipleship must also rest. By neglecting the power dimension, the focus is on cognitive knowledge about God and some aspects of the Christian life without any tangible experience of these aspects in everyday life (Kraft 2005b:102). Because of this faulty discipleship process, converts do not experience the type of completeness in Christ that enables them to continue to stand firm on Christian principles even in times of crises. There is need for a move from an unbalanced emphasis on cognitive belief to a balanced use of all three dimensions in Christian witness and discipleship.

The truth dimension focuses on understanding biblical truth.

Before surrendering their lives to Christ, people need a certain level of understanding of scriptural truth. Jesus spent an important part of his ministry in the teaching of truth (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5–7; the parables: Luke 15; 18:1–14; 19:11–26; Matt 11:1; Luke 4:31–32; John 15:1–17). His intention was for his hearers to grow in their understanding of the person and will of God in order for them to have a better relationship with him. He focused more on knowledge grounded in relationship and experience with God than on head knowledge alone (John 8:32; 15:1–10).

The allegiance dimension is concerned with believers' relationship to God. Throughout the Scriptures, God constantly calls people to commit themselves to him as their primary allegiance. The allegiance dimension is thus focused on growing in an intimate relationship with God. Hearing and accepting cognitively the truth as it is in the Bible is not the end of the Christian experience. After consenting to the truth that the Bible teaches, converts need to constantly pay close attention to their experiential growth in Christ (2 Pet 3:18). One of the dangers in spiritual development is making truth and faith something that is merely discussed rather than something that moves us into allegiance to Christ. Although the goal of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) is to make disciples by teaching them to obey the truth as it is presented in the Scripture, disciples are made only when converts pledge full allegiance (commitment and obedience) to Christ and continue to do so every day of their lives. In contrast, members too often are people who have made an intellectual assent to a body of truth and who have been baptized without any further follow up toward full commitment to the lordship of Christ. Ellen White insists that unless believers choose only the disposition of Christ—where Christ's interests are identified with theirs—they are not fit to be called disciples (1958:110). For that reason, the allegiance dimension is a vital piece of Christian experience; for without this continual commitment and obedience to Christ, there is no spiritual life.

Power encounters generally refer to the warfare between God and Satan. The Bible contains a series of such encounters. Some prominent Old Testament power encounters are found in Exod 5–12 (Moses and Pharaoh), 1 Kgs 18 (Elijah and the prophets of Baal), and Daniel 4. In each of these contexts, God saved those who put their hope in him and caused their opponents to recognize his sovereign power. In each of these cases, like many others, God demonstrated his power over that of pagan gods through signs and wonders. These signs and wonders became the symbols not only of God's supreme power but also of his presence, protection, and provision. They also became a source of motivation for eye-witnesses to either renew their relationship with God or to acknowledge his supreme authority (Wimber and Springer 1985:30).

Jesus' ministry included power encounters in order to challenge and

defeat the powers of Satan. In fact, his whole ministry was a power encounter because he was at the center of the Great Controversy (White 1940:257). For him, the power of God was not only for living a holy life or for salvation into eternal life. It was also the power for physical and spiritual healing, and for restoring every area of people's life (Wagner 1988:46; Wimber and Springer 1986:75). When John the Baptist sent his disciples to inquire from Christ, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 5:20), Jesus did not answer them with rational arguments. He rather used a demonstration of power in healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and giving sight to the blind (Luke 5:21).

Spiritual warfare was a natural part of Christ's ministry (Hiebert 2009:407). According to Luke, it was Jesus' usual practice to heal the sick and deliver people from demon possession soon after entering a new territory (Luke 4:33–35, 39; 5:13–15; 6:6–10, 18–19). Because these people were very concerned about spiritual power, he approached them at the point of their concern. He even instructed his disciples to use the same method whenever he sent them to prepare the way for him (Luke 9:1–6; 10:19).

Several accounts in Acts show that power encounters were also a natural part of the apostles' ministry. These power demonstrations either gave credibility to the content of their preaching or at least drew attention to their ministry. In Acts 3:1–9 Peter and John healed a lame beggar and verses 11–26 show how this event gave Peter an audience and how he capitalized on the opportunity to share Jesus Christ. Acts 5:12–16 records that one of the things that attracted people to the Early Church was the expressions of the power of God at work in the apostles' ministry. Acts 8:4–8 gives a vivid account of the result of power encounters in Philip's ministry in Samaria:

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and *saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said*. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. (emphasis mine)

Just like biblical peoples, the world today is also influenced by an occultic worldview (Kraft 2005c:362). As such, the use of power encounters is still necessary for initial conversion. It is also a vital part of the building up of the church (Love 1996:194). According to Kraft, "A Christianity that includes the spiritual dimension is the only one that is truly Biblical" (2008:364). According to Ellen G. White, no one "can doubt that satanic agencies are at work among men with increasing activity to distract and corrupt the mind, and defile and destroy the body" (1909:143). But unfortunately,

while the world is filled with these evils, the gospel is too often presented in so indifferent a manner as to make but little impression upon the consciences or the lives of men. Everywhere there are hearts crying out for something which they have not. *They long for a power that will give them mastery over sin, a power that will deliver them from the bondage of evil, a power that will give health and life and peace. . . .* The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation [of the power] of Christ. (White 1909:143, emphasis mine)

Because truth, allegiance, and power encounters are present in God's activities in the human sphere, and because spiritual warfare is a lifelong battle in every person's life (White 1980:313), it is vital that all three dimensions be taken into consideration together, not separately. It is also important for all of these dimensions to be contextualized, that is, they need to be appropriate to the socio-cultural setting in which Christian witness takes place. Since the Bible teaches that demonic activities will increase in the last days (1 Tim 4:1; Rev 16:13–14), Christian witness and discipleship will not be fully "biblical or relevant to most of the peoples of the world without a solid approach to spiritual power" (Kraft 2005c:362). Because most of the peoples of the world are power oriented, it is essential that the power encounter dimension "be part and parcel of fulfilling the Great Commission" (Wagner 1988:45). Jesus commands his disciples to make other disciples by teaching them to obey everything he commanded (Matt 28:19, 20). What he commanded includes both what he said and what he did. Nevertheless, the power encounter dimension of the gospel must never be presented or used at the expense of a proper emphasis on the truth and allegiance dimensions. Nor should an emphasis on truth and allegiance dimensions be made while neglecting power encounters. Though prominent in Scripture, truth is never an end in and of itself. It is always balanced by concern for an intimate relationship with God and his power (Mark 10:17–27). The same is true when it comes to spiritual power; it is always balanced by a concern for a relationship with God and his truth (Luke 10:15–20). Any evangelistic strategy that promotes a power encounter without giving sufficient consideration to truth and allegiance encounters is not biblically balanced. Not everyone who saw or even experienced power events in Jesus's ministry turned to him in faith (Luke 17:11–19). Therefore, there must be balance and interdependence between the three dimensions.

There is no shortcut in wholistic Christian witness and discipleship. In order to be effective, we cannot take the luxury of deviating from Jesus' ministry example, for it is

Christ's method alone [that] will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed

His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs [he did not discriminate the needs to minister to], and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (White 1909:143)

### Conclusion

Spiritual warfare is an undeniable reality of our world. The majority of the world, including most of the adherents of the major world religions, is involved in animistic practices (Kraft 2005a:377). Involvement in occultic practices can be motivated by several factors. Many people are trapped by Satan and need freedom. Spiritual warfare is a reality that Jesus did not ignore in his ministry. He did not see Satan and demonic forces as myths and superstition. He saw these forces as real enemies from which people needed to be set free. Things are different only when converts from an animistic background experience the Christian God as a God of power able to control the enemy spirits and how they interfere in their lives. The worldview of animistic converts to Christianity does not get transformed just by hearing about God's power but by experiencing it personally, for it is "spiritual power to heal, bless and to overcome the power of demonic spirits that have held animists captive for generations, that really speaks to them" (Kraft 2008:486). According to Alan Tippett, in a power-oriented society, change of faith must be power-demonstrated because many animists need a visible demonstration of the superior power of God to become Christians (1971:81).

Many converts from animism feel that some of their former practices, though clearly unbiblical, are still important in their struggle for human existence both spiritually and materially (Amanze 2003:43). As such, the Adventist Church cannot afford to just condemn these practices as a denial of the Christian faith. With animism becoming a worldwide phenomenon, if the church continues the same approach, Christianity will be speaking to the majority of its converts in alien tones. While the Church is right in decrying the unbiblical beliefs and practices associated with dual allegiance and syncretism, it also needs to find effective and biblically appropriate ways to demonstrate that the God of the Bible is more powerful than other gods and spirits. "For people like the Hebrews and most of today's peoples, for whom spiritual power is a primary concern, power encounters are often the clearest way to demonstrate the superiority of God over their spirits and gods" (Kraft 1996:452).

While firmly maintaining biblical integrity, the church in its mission must also be resourceful and flexible in adjusting its methods and procedures to the different contexts of the world in which it finds itself. The Church needs to realize and accept that "a Christianity that [merely] talks about and promises spiritual power but leaves out the experiencing in this area . . . leaves itself open to the problem of dual allegiance" (Kraft and

Kraft 1993:350). Unless converts from animistic backgrounds experience a powerful Christianity, many of them will “continue to seek out the old power sources to satisfy their fears and needs” (Bauer 2008:342).

### Works Cited

- Albanese, Catherine. 1981. *America: Religions and Religion*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Amanze, James N. 2003. Christianity and Ancestors Veneration in Botswana. *Studies in World Christianity* 9, no. 1: 43–59.
- Barna, George. 2001. *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook.
- Bauer, Bruce L. 2008. A Response to Dual Allegiance. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44, (July): 340–347.
- Frykholm, Amy. 2011. One Person, Two Faiths: Double Belonging. *Christian Century*, January 25; 20–23.
- Geffré, Claude. 2002. Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion. In *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille, 93–105. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Grayston, John. 2002. The Bible and Spirituality: The Decline in Biblical Literacy among Evangelicals and the Future of the Quiet Time. *ANVIL* 19, no. 2: 99–106.
- Halevi, Yossi K. 2002. *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for Hope with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Halverson, Dean C. 1996. *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. Animism: The Religion of the Tribal World. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15, no. 2: 59–67.
- Hedlund, Roger E. 1992. Religious Pluralism: Fact and Issue. In *Many Other Ways? Questions of Religious Pluralism*, ed. M. Bage, R. Hedlund, P. B. Thomas, Martin Alphonse, and George David, 13–27. New Delhi, India: Printsman.
- Hiebert, Paul G. 2009. The Flaw of the Excluded Middle. In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 407–414. Pasadena, CA: Institute of International Studies.
- Hiebert, Paul G., R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou. 1999/2000. Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folk Religion. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 16, no. 4 (Winter): 173–182.
- Hillman, Eugene. 1975. *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Hull, Bill. 2004. *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Keathley, Hampton, IV. 2004. Discipleship Overview. *Bible.org*. Accessed 22 November 2014. [www.http://bible.org/article/discipleship-overview](http://bible.org/article/discipleship-overview).
- Kyle, Richard. 1993. *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. The Occult Roars Back: Its Modern Resurgence. *Direction* 29, no. 2 (Fall): 91–99.
- Kraft, Charles H. 1996. *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. New York: Orbis Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005a. Appropriate Contextualization of Spiritual Power. In *Appropriate Christianity*, 375–395. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005b. Contextualization in Three Crucial Dimensions. In *Appropriate Christianity*, 99–115. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005c. Spiritual Power: A Missiological Issue. In *Appropriate Christianity*, 361–374. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Worldview for Christian Witness*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. Three Encounters in Christian Witness. In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 445–450. Pasadena, CA: Institute of International Studies, 2009.
- Kraft, Charles H., and Marguerite G. Kraft. 1993. Communicating and Ministering the Power of the Gospel Cross-Culturally: The Power of God for Christians Who Ride Two Horses. In *The Kingdom and the Power*, ed. Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer, 345–356. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Love, Rick. 1996. Power Encounter Among Folk Muslims: An Essential Key of the Kingdom. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 4 (October–December): 193–195.
- Mbiti, John S. 1990. *African Religion & Philosophy*. Oxford, UK: Heinemann.
- Nthamburi, Zablon. 1983. Making the Gospel Relevant within the African Context and Culture. *African Ecclesial Review* 25, no. 3 (June): 162–171.
- Nürnbergger, Klaus. 2007. Ancestor Veneration in the Church of Christ? *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 129 (November): 54–69.
- Partridge, Christopher. 2005. *Introduction to World Religions*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Regan, Donald T. 1988. For the Record. *Time*, 16 May, 26–40.
- Russell, Jeffrey B. 1980. *A History of Witchcraft*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Thomas, P. B. 1992. Any Other Name? A Response to Dialogical Theology. In *Many Other Ways? Questions of Religious Pluralism*, ed. M. Bage, R. Hedlund, P. B. Thomas, Martin Alphonse, and George David, 28–43. New Delhi, India: Printstman.
- Tippett, Allan. 1971. *People Movements in Southern Polynesia: Studies in the Dynamics of Church-planting and Growth in Tahiti, New Zealand, Tonga, and Samoa*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.
- Tozer, A. W. 1980. *A Treasury of Tozer*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Van Rheenen, Gailyn. 1997. Modern and Postmodern Syncretism in Theology and Mission. In *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell, 164–207. Pasadena, CA: William Carey.
- Van Velsor, Ellen, and Wilfred H. Drath. 2004. A Lifelong Developmental Perspective on Leader Development. In *Handbook of Leadership Development*, ed. Cynthia D. McCauley and Ellen Van Velsor, 383–414. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wagner, Peter C. 1988. God Wasn't Pulling My Leg. In *Power Encounters Among Christians in the Western World*, ed. by Kevin Springer, 43–56. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.

- Watson, Navar. 2014. High Rate of Biblical Illiteracy “No surprise.” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 28–April 10, 1.
- White, Ellen G. 1909. *The Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1940. *The Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. *My Life Today*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.
- Wimber, John, and Kevin Springer. 1986. *Power Healing*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.



Boubakar Sanou is a PhD graduate of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University where he currently serves as an adjunct professor in the departments of World Mission and Christian Ministry.