

# Missionary Methods for Addressing Animism: Roland Allen's Missionary Methods as Dialogical Centerpiece for Conversations on Pneumatology

by  
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## 1. Introduction

Beginning long before the publication of David Hume's *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), miracles have steadily fallen out of favor in Western Christianity. Cessationist tendencies among Christians go back at least as far as Augustine, but became especially common following the Enlightenment among Western Christians. However, in the majority world, where Christianity—especially its Pentecostal form—is growing at a faster rate than at any time in the Church's two thousand year history, miracles, especially healing and exorcisms feature prominently. This situation mirrors the early Church, where miracles were a central means of contextualizing the Gospel among animistic peoples.

The dual thesis of this study is that first, miracles function in an apologetic role by preparing the way for the proclamation of the Gospel in an animistic culture, much the way described by Roland Allen in his *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours*. Second, Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods* is a helpful starting point for dialogue between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Christians, precisely because Allen's approach to miracles avoids weaknesses and excesses in traditional Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal approaches. The author's contention is that Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals with an interest in missions have much to gain from dialogue with each other on the subject.

To demonstrate continuity between the early church and contemporary Africa—a point that is crucial to understanding the enduring apologetic value of miracles—this paper will briefly unpack the nature of animism in Africa and in the Roman Empire during Christianity's formative years. The point here will be to show how miracles functioned among animists in early Christianity and how they do so today. Then, we will consider various missionary approaches to miracles, with a focus on non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal practices and beliefs. In this, a few missionary efforts in Zambia will serve as a case study. Finally, we will turn to Allen's *Missionary Methods* as a helpful guideline for understanding the role and importance of miracles for contextualizing the Gospel. Specifically, we will look at how Allen's text can serve as a corrective to both non-Pentecostal as well as Pentecostal forms of Christianity in their approach to miracles.

## 2. Animism: A Supernatural Worldview

In order to understand better how miracles are relevant to animists, a brief discussion is in order about the general nature of an animistic worldview. Specifically, it is vital to understand that animism is through and through a worldview in which the physical world is under the constant influence of the spiritual world. This is crucial because if Christianity is going to address animism, it must respond not by denying the reality of this interaction, but by directly confronting it. And that is possible only by first acknowledging the supernatural characteristics inherent in animism.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is best understood as the overarching system within

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which animistic practices are contained in the African worldview.<sup>2</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu offers a five-fold structure for African Traditional Religion in general that contains the following elements: “belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in spirits, belief in the ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine, each with its own consequent, attendant cult.”<sup>3</sup> E. G. Parrinder describes an emphasis in African Traditional Religion on acquiring “vital-force,” which others have described as “energy” or “dynamism.”<sup>4</sup> John Mbiti offers a similar definition, with greater elucidation on the nature of the force suggested by Parrinder. Mbiti says: “It is held in all African societies that there is power in the universe, and that it comes from God. It is a mystical power, in the sense that it is hidden and mysterious. This power is available to spirits and certain human beings.”<sup>5</sup> He adds, “It is the knowledge of this mystical power which is used to help other people (especially in healing, rain-making, finding the cause of misfortunes and troubles, detecting thieves, and so on) or to harm them.”<sup>6</sup> Also, Raymond Hickey notes that “belief in and fear of witchcraft is strong all over Black Africa and people turn to religion for protection and deliverance.” Importantly, Hickey points out that “if this is not provided by Christian priests and Muslim imams, people know where to find the old gods and the traditional practitioners.”<sup>7</sup> This is a key feature regarding the need for Christian miracles as a response to animism.

Laurenti Magesa describes the African worldview as one in which all of life centers on an individual's propagation of positive life-force, and therefore “witchcraft is perceived by African Religion to be the greatest wrong or destructiveness on earth.”<sup>8</sup> The objective therefore of witch-doctors, is to restore the life-force that has been adversely affected, and to “discover the reason for disharmony in the universe.”<sup>9</sup> This is accomplished by employing a variety of instruments and methods, that may include prayer to God—most often through the ancestors as mediators, as well as animal sacrifice, herbal remedies, and protective charms and amulets.<sup>10</sup> Most of these involve some form of divination.

### *Animism In the Greco-Roman World*

There are numerous similarities between animism in modern Africa and that of the ancient world. Particularly, healing and exorcisms were two of the chief aspects of animism in antiquity.<sup>11</sup> These two were inherently related to one another, as healings were sought to remedy physical ailments and exorcisms to remedy mental ones. Thus, “the chief business of religion... was to make the sick well.”<sup>12</sup> Evidence for this comes primarily from ancient inscriptions to local gods, such as Asclepius, Isis, and Serapis, which attribute titles such as “healer” to the various deities.<sup>13</sup> Also, Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79), who disdained the practice of magic, described it as having originated in Persia and consisting of a desire for good health,

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<sup>2</sup> John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 18.

<sup>3</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 139

<sup>4</sup> E. G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, third ed. (London: Sheldon Press, 1975), 21.

<sup>5</sup> John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 41-42.

<sup>6</sup> Mbiti, 1991, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Hickey, “Authentic African Religion” *AFER* 27, no. 4: (1985), 216-224.

<sup>8</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 69.

<sup>9</sup> Magesa, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Magesa, 177-203.

<sup>11</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 49.

<sup>12</sup> MacMullen, *Paganism*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> MacMullen, *Paganism*, 49.

control of the gods and seeking after knowledge of future events.<sup>14</sup>

Understanding animism in ancient times requires some understanding of worldviews within antiquity. The world according to the ancients resembles something of a pyramid, with a supreme god residing alone at the top. The lower portions of the pyramid were inhabited by lesser entities, demons, possessing the ability to affect the contours of every day human life. These demons “were less good (or they might be positively baneful) and less powerful than gods—hence manipulable through magic.”<sup>15</sup> Every evil thus resulted from demons, “for no deity could inflict wrong on another.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, magic and demons were intimately connected because demons were the agents most accessible and thus able to affect a desired outcome. In light of this, it becomes understandable why participation in animistic practices and thus in manipulation of these malevolent forces took center stage in people’s lives. If the supreme god is too distant and perhaps too disinterested in human affairs, then one must appeal to those spiritual forces that are within reach, so to speak.

### *Animism and Christianity in the Roman Empire*

Christianity was viewed somewhat differently by Romans than by Greeks. For instance, “whereas Greek writers accused the Christians of being atheoi, ‘godless’, Romans did not trouble with the existence of the Christian God, but classified the worship as *superstitio*, rather than *religio*.”<sup>17</sup> We see this in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus (AD 55-117), who described Christians saying, “the deadly *superstitio* was checked for a time [by the execution of Christ], but broke out again, not only in Judea, the origin of the evil, but even in the capital.”<sup>18</sup> Also, Pliny the Younger (AD 61-112) came to a similar conclusion, calling Christianity “a degenerate *superstitio*.”<sup>19</sup> Later though, as Christianity moved to the center among Roman religions it reversed some of these attitudes, becoming itself the *religio*, while pagan rites and religions became increasingly known as *superstitio*.<sup>20</sup> As a result, by the fourth century, it was Christianity that enjoyed favored status while magic and pagan rituals came under heavy persecution.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that paganism ceased, or even that Christians always understood the boundaries between the two.<sup>22</sup> However, we are left to ponder precisely what it was that caused the conversion from participation in the pagan rituals, and animism in particular, to participation in Christ. Or, as Ramsay MacMullen has asked, “What *did* Christianity present to

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 219.

<sup>15</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100-400)*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Beard, et. al., *Religions of Rome*, 225.

<sup>18</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* XV.44.5; cited in Beard et. al., 225.

<sup>19</sup> Beard, et. al., 225; Pliny, *Letters* X.96.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. Beard et. al. write, for instance that “By the late republic, magic was brought under an earlier general law on murder and poisoning, the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* of 81 B.C. The category of *venenum*, which included both poisoning and magic, caught the magician who was, in the words of Apuleius, ‘popularly believed to hold discourse with the immortal gods and thus to have the power to do everything he wanted by the mysterious forces of certain incantations.’ The precise wording of the law does not survive, but we have a late third or early fourth century A.D. commentary on it: impious and nocturnal rites indicated magical practices; rites involving human sacrifice were illegal, as were rites that enchanted, bewitched or bound anyone,” 233.

<sup>22</sup> Beard, et. al., 388.

its audience [that inspired them to convert in such great numbers]?”<sup>23</sup> When the evidence is considered, it seems that miracles played a major part. This is because persons in this period, unlike people in our own, “took miracles for granted. That was the general starting point. Not to believe in them would have made you seem more odd, simply irrational, as it would have seemed irrational seriously to suppose that babies are brought by storks.”<sup>24</sup> The point MacMullen is making here is an important one. Belief in miracles during this era cannot be attributed to a pre-scientific era in some chrono-centric fashion. Rather, theirs was a world wrought with supernatural phenomena, and so Christian miracles served as an apologetic of the first order. Miracles and exorcisms were the *lingua franca* of the Greco-Roman world. Thus, Craig Keener rightly observes that “in the 300’s, exorcisms and miracles are the most explicit cause of conversion to Christianity mentioned in early Christian sources.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Zambia: A Case Study in Non-Pentecostal Responses to Animism

What happens when missionaries deny some or all of these key elements within an animistic worldview? A few studies have shown that it simply will not do for missionaries to ignore or attempt to discard belief in miracles and magic. Some contemporary (often non-Pentecostal) missions efforts have relegated animism and miracles to the realm of superstition, and neither sought after nor expected God’s dynamic intervention in human affairs. For instance, Ulrich Luig conducting a study of Methodist missionaries working among the Tonga in southern Zambia at the start of twentieth century has shown how detrimental it can be when missionaries fail to take into account the place and importance of animistic beliefs within the local culture.<sup>26</sup> When missions workers arrived in the area in 1910, they immediately set about teaching the local people Bible stories. This they accomplished by using lanterns to “throw” pictures onto a wall to help illustrate their message. The meetings were seemingly well received and highly attended by the Tonga.<sup>27</sup> However, Luig notes in his analysis a degree of irony at work in how the Valley Tonga viewed the British missionaries and vice versa. For the missionaries, the Tonga were heathens in desperate need of the advancements of western civilization. For the Tonga, the missionaries were “people in possession of extraordinary powers,” clearly demonstrated in their telling of Bible stories. Thus, the missionaries were seen to possess in great abundance the very same magic arts they sought to eradicate.<sup>28</sup>

The Methodist missionaries working in the Gwembe Valley area of Zambia are a prime example of a situation in which a *strong confrontational approach* led to less than desirable results. The Methodist approach with the Tonga was to insist that catechumens forsake anything that resembled prayer to *mizimu*, or ancestral spirits, and *basangu*, or nature spirits. They were to pray only to Christ, as *Leza*, Creator God. Agricultural misfortunes such as lack of rain or destruction of crops by insects were not considered religious matters and the Methodist missionaries advised natural means of dealing with these set backs. The same was true of illness and the convert was instructed that sickness and disease had nothing to do with ancestral spirits, and was given European style treatment. In short, the missionaries demanded a complete break

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<sup>23</sup> MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 362.

<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Luig, *Conversation As a Social Process: A History of Missionary Christianity Among the Valley Tongy, Zambia. Beiträge Zur Missionswissenschaft Und Interkulturellen Theologie, Bd. 9.* (Hamburg: Lit, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Luig, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Luig, 93.

with all that was considered “traditional” in favor of embracing “a better way.” However, what was taking place, was not in fact a breaking with old ways and an embracing of the new, but rather an embracing of what was deemed exactly the same. The religion of the missionaries was not viewed as diametrically different from that of the Valley Tonga. “It appears that most people interpreted the missionaries’ preoccupation with talking about God and His will, their constant references to the Bible as the only source of truth, and their European way of life as a coherent system of magic.”<sup>29</sup> The point here is that worldviews are seldom eradicated, but instead are often applied over other systems that try to offer a different way of viewing reality.

In another example, Fr. Bernard Udelhoven, a missionary and cultural anthropologist with the White Fathers in Lusaka, Zambia, has conducted an extensive study of Catholic missionary work in the Luangwa Valley, which consists primarily of Chewa, Bisa, Senga, Kunda and Timbuka peoples.<sup>30</sup> The motive for Udelhoven’s research was to look into why the Catholic church had met with such little success in the region, despite over one hundred years of missionary effort. Udelhoven’s findings center precisely on conflicts and inadequacies perceived between Christianity and the needs of the people, needs that had long been met through traditional religion, in particular its animistic components. He reports, “My impression formed that people in the valley have strong notions about the spiritual world and are attuned to it, but that our concepts and conditions as an organised [*sic*] church and people’s own experiences and expectations rarely meet.”<sup>31</sup>

In the end, Catholic missions in the Luangwa Valley failed to be relevant to the people they were trying to convert. Not surprisingly, at the center of the church’s perceived shortcoming was the issue of ancestors. Udelhoven points out that the people of the valley have a long history as hunters and fishermen. The ancestors play a vital role in the success or failure of hunting and fishing expeditions. God was perceived by those in Udelhoven’s study as having little to do with these activities. In an animistic culture, it is primarily lower-level spiritual entities—ancestors, demons, jin, etc., that are the causative forces of both affliction and success. Therefore, Christianity was perceived to cut people off from the source of their livelihood, from their “life-force”, without providing any pragmatic alternative.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, as Udelhoven has noted, his faith tradition had little room for traditional perceptions of reality.

#### **4. Pentecostalism, Healing, and Animism**

In the analysis above we have seen that there are striking similarities between modern animistic beliefs in sub-Saharan Africa, and the ancient world into which Christianity was born. Those similarities include strong belief in the spiritual world, the concepts of blessings, healing and revelation.<sup>33</sup> Plus, in both contemporary African and in the ancient world there was a general

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<sup>29</sup> Luig, 98-99.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Bernard Udelhoven, “Christianity in the Luangwa Valley,” *FENZA*. (2006) <http://www.fenza.org/documents.html> (accessed April 18, 2009). In this study, tribal affiliation proved to be less important than one might have hypothesized, as some residents of the valley were not even sure as to which tribe they belonged. This would indicate, at the least, that local people here saw fewer differences among themselves than did their former colonial administrators.

<sup>31</sup> Udelhoven, 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* Udelhoven’s study also notes that few missions efforts in the Luangwa Valley have had much success. A notable exceptions was the Anglican church, that in the early nineteen hundreds installed an African priest from Malawi over the parish. However, after his death, he was replaced by a white priest, and the work went into rapid decline; Udelhoven, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Julie C. Ma, “Animism and Pentecostalism: A Case Study,” in Stanley Burgess and Eduard M. Van der Maas, *International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 317.

belief that these forces could be manipulated by a greater power. Thus, as we shall see below, there are significant overlaps between the beliefs of animists and that of Pentecostals.

*Modern Pentecostalism* usually refers to those churches and denominations that originated out of the Los Angeles revivals that took place from 1906–1908, led by William Seymour.<sup>34</sup> However, Pentecostals trace the origins of their movement further, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the first century A.D., as recorded in Acts 2. Modern Pentecostals also point to a continuity of Pentecostal beliefs and practices throughout the history of the Church.<sup>35</sup> Also, Pentecostal revivals took place around the world prior to the outpourings at Azusa Street. Thus, the origins of modern Pentecostalism is rightly seen to be more complex, more ancient, and more universal than simply the outflow of a twentieth century American revival.

Pentecostal practice has since its inception been defined by an expectation of healing and miracles, of signs and wonders.<sup>36</sup> Healing especially has been endemic to Pentecostalism and was a central component in the teaching of one of the movement’s founding fathers, Charles Fox Parham. Parham’s Beth-el Healing Home in Topeka was modeled after those of John Alexander Dowie. Parham spent his life teaching that healing was inherent in the atonement and modern Pentecostals have largely followed suit in this.<sup>37</sup> Parham and Dowie both believed medicine to be antithetical to trust in God and shunned contemporary medical practices. This, though, is where these early healing advocates departed from the practices of the early church, which by-and-large preserved and practiced medical cures.<sup>38</sup> Most modern Pentecostals have moved away from this form of excess and have criticized contemporary healing evangelists for the establishment of “personal kingdoms” and for their placing the burden of healing on the “faith” of the patient.<sup>39</sup>

Another important characteristic of Pentecostalism relevant to this study has been its unprecedented, world-wide growth. Citing statistics from the *World Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Miller and Yamamori point out that as late as 1970, less than ten percent of Christians around the world could be classified as Pentecostal. In sharp contrast, today that number has dramatically increased and twenty-five percent of all Christians world-wide consider themselves to be Pentecostals.<sup>40</sup> This growth demands thoughtful consideration. Relevant to this study, Miller and Yamamori, neither of whom are Pentecostal, point out that one possible explanation is the Pentecostal’s acknowledgment of the spirit world; Pentecostalism offers a worldview not far removed from that of animists.<sup>41</sup> This is especially true as concerning miracles, or signs and wonders. Regarding the expectation of miracles, healing is of particular relevance to this study because healing is a central component of the worldview of animists. As Philip Jenkins writes:

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<sup>34</sup> Burgess 2002, *xvii*; Loder 2002, 73; Synan 2001, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Burgess, *xvii*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 218; 228.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Charles F. Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (Baxter Springs, KS: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1910), 39ff.

<sup>38</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Miracles, vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 43.

<sup>39</sup> The idea that if one is not healed it is because they lacked faith can be traced back to Parham; see James R. Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 41. Cf. Hollenweger, 229-233. Hollenweger, for instance, cites Pentecostal scholar Roger Stronstadt, who criticized these faith healers for their “individualistic, self-centered, and, even, narcissistic” activities.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Miller and Testunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Faces of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 2007, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Miller and Yamamori, 2007, 25.

Healing is the key element that has allowed Christianity to compete so successfully with its rivals outside the Christian tradition, with traditional religion in Africa, with various animist and spiritist movements of African origin in Brazil, with shamanism in Korea.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Roland Allen and the Value of Miracles

Both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike have found value in the writings of Roland Allen.<sup>43</sup> Even though his work was not much appreciated in his own day—and indeed, Allen predicted as much—there has been since the 1970’s somewhat of a renaissance regarding Allen’s work. For instance, he greatly influenced Donald McGavrin’s Church Growth Movement, and his ideas have been implemented and advocated by Catholics and Protestants alike.<sup>44</sup> For this reasons, Allen can serve as a helpful dialogue partner for all those interested in better understanding what the NT says about miracles, and thereby, about pneumatology.

Roland Allen describes the role of miracles in the apostle Paul’s ministry in chapter five of his *Missionary Methods*. Allen carefully notes that for Paul miracles were no means of propaganda for attracting hearers. That is, Paul refrained from cheapening both the Word of God and miracles themselves by allowing miracles to become a billboard for either his ministry or his person. Rather, as Allen shows, miracles served the apostle Paul’s ministry in four distinct ways. First, miracles attracted hearers; that is, they aroused the curiosity of onlookers and prepared the way for preaching. The implication of this is that preaching must accompany miracles or else the meaning of the event is lost. Also, Allen notes that regarding this sense of attracting hearers that what is not in view is an individualistic attraction, but rather a drawing of the multitudes. Second, miracles were evidence of God’s approval of the apostolic message and of the apostle himself. This is evident in miracles Paul performed at Iconium, it was the conclusion of Nicodemus regarding Christ, and it was that to which Paul appealed to with the Galatians in arguing for the superiority of the Gospel over the Law. Third, miracles enacted the overall character of the faith by fostering the general notions of love or “charity.” That is, they were “sermons in act.” Finally, miracles also underscored the specific doctrines of the faith, especially that “of release, of salvation.” This was directly related to the common awareness in that day of the need for salvation. As Allen says, “men were prepared to welcome a doctrine of salvation.” These last two functions are so similar that they might almost be seen as one. However, Allen is correct to distinguish them, because in doing so he notices a vital nuance regarding the nature of NT miracles. Not only were miracles a display of God’s compassion and love for the sick and needy (the third function of miracles), but miracles also defined Christianity uniquely as a religion of salvation and deliverance for the least of society—thereby setting it apart and above all other religions of the day. As Allen points out, “In the world to which the apostles preached their new message, religion had not been the solace of the weary, the medicine of the sick, the

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<sup>42</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, the Assemblies of God’s missiology has been directly affected by Allen through a series of articles in the Pentecostal Evangel written by Alice Luce in 1921. Luce directly built on Allen’s *Missionary Methods*, but added to it the importance of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Later, AG missions leaders like Melvin Hodges would carefully study Allen’s writings. Hodges’s book *The Indigenous Church* found wide acceptance among many evangelicals; see Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 167-173.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Henry Long and Ann Rowthorn, “The Legacy of Roland Allen” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (April 1989): 66.

strength of the sin-laden, the enlightenment of the ignorant: it was the privilege of the healthy and the instructed.”<sup>45</sup>

Important for our present study is that Allen also makes note of, without ever using the term, the animistic world in which the apostle Paul operated. For example, the healings associated with Vespasian as presented by Tacitus are evidence of not only the presence of non-Christian miracles during this era, but also of the common notion that miracles were widely conceived of as calling for the allegiance of whatever deity was deemed behind the miracle. As Allen has rightly observed, “for Christian, and Jew, and pagan alike the evidence from miracles was irresistible. Given the miracle, the approval of the god in whose name the miracle was done followed as a necessary consequence.”<sup>46</sup> Here we might recall the claims about African animism regarding the inherent belief among animists in a pervasive dynamic power capable of variously influencing one’s life. Allen understands Pauline miracles as an inherent and vital part of a pneumatology that, rife with healing and exorcisms, constitutes a powerful apologetic capable of not only speaking the native language of the animist, but of confronting her with a dynamic Spiritual power that is in everyway superior to that of witchcraft. As Allen has said of the early Church:

every Christian apologist appeals to [miracles] as a signal proof of the superiority of Christianity over heathen religions. The heathen appealed to miracles, to oracles, to portents, as proofs of the existence of the gods; Christians appealed to exorcism as proof of the divinity of Christ and of His superior authority over all the heathen gods and demons.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, Allen shows that miracles in the apostle Paul’s ministry always were intimately connected to the Gospel of salvation in Christ, and that this was highly efficacious among an animistic peoples. As such, the working of miracles and the message of salvation through Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection always stood in immediate proximity, should to shoulder as it were. Plus, miracles supremely attested to the compassion of God for the poor, the downtrodden, and sick. As it relates to contemporary practice, I believe two important lessons can be draw. First, miracles apart from message of the cross can never function as they did in the ministry of Paul. This should be a warning to those who would equate miracles with prosperity, worldly advancement, and self-aggrandizement. There never existed any such connection in the ministry of Paul. Second, there may be a connection between a people’s awareness of their need for salvation and the frequency with which miracles occur. Is it a coincidence, for instance, that following the Enlightenment when humankind increasingly came to trust in its own capacities and abilities to affect the future that the possibility of miracles was most severely doubted? Thus, an awareness of one’s need for salvation and miraculous activity seem to go hand in hand.

In closing his discussion in *Missionary Methods* on the value of Christian miracles, Allen makes an interesting and telling observation about the nature of Christianity in his own day. He says

If we no longer possess his power we still possess the Spirit which inspired him. We have powers enough whereby to let the Spirit shine forth. We have powers sufficient to gather

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods* (Unknown: Kindle Edition), Kindle location, 750-752

<sup>46</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, Kindle location, 733-734.

<sup>47</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, Kindle locations, 769-771.



hearers; we have powers sufficient to demonstrate the Divine Presence of the Spirit of God with us; we have powers sufficient to assure inquirers of the superiority of Christianity to all heathen religions; we have powers sufficient to illustrate in act the character of our religion, its salvation and its love, if only we will use our powers to reveal the Spirit. One day we shall perhaps recover the early faith in miracles.<sup>48</sup>

Allen here seems to be mourning his own participation in an ecclesial tradition that no longer operates with an expectation of miracles, and indeed has lost its faith in miracles. Allen, though, also seems to hope for the recovery of Christian miracles as a method of effective missions.

## **5. Conclusion: Moving Toward Dialogue on Pneumatology**

Walter Hollenweger once made the following observation:

If Pentecostals and Catholics, independents and Anglicans, Methodists and charismatics, Presbyterians and “non-white indigenous churches” dig deep enough into their own traditions, the might discover some considerable common ground (both of content and form) for a global system of cooperation and communication. This, it seems to me, is as necessary for the world and the church as is our daily bread.<sup>49</sup>

Taking Roland Allen as the dialogical center may be a way for Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals to embark on that described by Hollenweger. Pentecostals should look to Allen as a guideline for keeping central message of the Gospel—namely, salvation from sin through faith in Christ—when living out their expectant pneumatology. Where there exists an expectation of miracles, there must also exist a cruciform presentation of the Gospel. Similarly, Pentecostals should take note of Allen’s practical framework for understanding how miracles functioned in the NT, and through Allen, come to value dialogue with non-Pentecostals in hopes of mitigating some Pentecostal excesses.

Contemporary Christians though, who have, like some in Allen’s day, lost their faith in miracles, might look to Pentecostals to discover the contours of a vibrant expectation of God’s ongoing activity in and through His Church. By viewing Pentecostal pneumatology through the lens provided by Allen’s *Missionary Methods*, perhaps non-Pentecostals will see in Pentecostal pneumatology some value that had hitherto been hidden, and find within their own theological system, room for a miraculous expectancy as they work among animistic cultures.

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<sup>48</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, Kindle locations, 778-784.

<sup>49</sup> Hollenweger, 400.

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