

# Supernatural Activism

## Spiritual Gifts as Tools for Peace and Justice

Micael Grenholm

(Bible quotations are from the New International Version, unless noted.)

### Frozen Soldiers

Helen Roseveare, a missionary specialized in tropical medicine, was at one point the only doctor for two and a half million people in what is now eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>1</sup> Even during the rebellion in the early 1960's, she continued to serve the poor and dying instead of going back to the UK. One night in 1964, three rebel soldiers came to her house. They demanded money from her, and when she refused to give them anything, the commander got furious and told one of the other soldiers to strike her down with a spear. Helen was terrified as she saw how the soldier immediately raised his arm to kill her.

But nothing happened. Helen recalled: "The man's arm was raised and he was standing there a yard away from me with real hatred in his eyes - I've never seen such hatred, wanting to kill me. But he was rooted to the ground and couldn't move! The three were 'fixed' to the spot."

Shocked, Helen told them that God in her is greater than the god in them, and ran back into the house and locked the door, crumpling in a heap. But then the most amazing thing happened. She pulled herself together and opened the door. The soldiers were still there, confused about what had happened to them. Helen said "Would you like some coffee?" and invited them in, gave them coffee and booklets of the Gospel of John, and talked with them about Jesus. Confused but grateful, the rebels listened, thanked her and left.<sup>2</sup>

### Supernatural Activism

Helen Roseveare's experience is an example of what I call *supernatural activism*, when signs and wonders are used as tools to promote peace and justice. In her case, a "fixation" miracle saved her life in a nonviolent way and, together with her courageous enemy love, promoted peace and reconciliation. It is an event similar to the Biblical miracles recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-23 and Luke 4:29-30.

In this article, I will argue that Christian activists who want to promote peace and justice

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<sup>1</sup> Urbana, "Courageous Doctor in the Congo (Part 1)",

<https://urbana.org/go-and-do/missionary-biographies/courageous-doctor-congo-part-1> (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Jesus Fellowship, "Revival in the Congo", 2007 Available at

[http://www.pinpointevangelism.com/libraryoftheologycom/writings/revival/Revival\\_In\\_Congo.pdf](http://www.pinpointevangelism.com/libraryoftheologycom/writings/revival/Revival_In_Congo.pdf) (accessed December 16 2013).

should “eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit” (1 Cor 14:1) and use these as tools in their activism. This is first and foremost because the Bible teaches that these can and should be combined, but also because supernatural power obviously will make our activism more efficient. If Helen Roseveare had not experienced a miracle in a situation like that, the soldiers would most likely not have been pushed into a more peaceful direction, and Helen would have been killed. Thus, activism through our own strength and power is great, but with the power of the Holy Spirit it becomes even greater.

After giving some definitions of key concepts, I will shortly share how I became interested in combining charismatic and activist theology, and then we will briefly discuss how this combination is evident in the Scriptures. Not all charismatics are very involved in peace and justice, and we will shortly discuss why this could be the case and give some positive examples of how several charismatics actually are. After this, we will proceed to look at the concept of Spiritual gifts with an emphasis on how it was understood by charismatic leader John Wimber, and by using his framework of “power evangelism” we will try to develop a theology of “supernatural activism”. Finally, we will look at how prophecy, healing, food miracles and resurrections can be used as tools for peace and justice, providing both Biblical and contemporary examples.

## Definitions

It should be noted that the term supernatural is criticized by some Christians for being based on a modernist paradigm where nature is divided from divine actions. I think this criticism has some problems (the term supernatural is definitely older than modernism) but unfortunately I won't have space to discuss that here. My definition of the concept is an event beyond scientific explanation that is caused by a spiritual being, as well as the very nature of such being. Or, to put it in a less technical way, what a charismatic Christian believes can happen and exist that an atheist doesn't.

I will define activism as actions which seek to promote political, social or economic change. Even though this can be applied to numerous fields, I will limit myself to peace and social justice. I define peace as a state of absence of violent conflict and presence of harmony; and for social justice<sup>3</sup> I will simply use the Oxford definition: “justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society”.<sup>4</sup>

## Personal Pilgrimage

Let me begin by shortly sharing my spiritual journey. Although raised in a Swedish Lutheran family, religion never meant very much to me until April 2006, when I was radically born again at a mass in the giant Uppsala Cathedral. I started to pray and read the Bible, and I was fascinated by how the liturgy of my church – that previously was nothing but a bunch of pointless, boring rituals for me – had ancient roots filled with holy meaning. But I also started to spot differences between church and Scripture. I was surprised that Jesus commanded His disciples to heal the sick and raise the dead (Matt. 10:8) – something I had thought were things only Jesus Himself did to prove that He was the Son of God – and I was even more surprised to realize that I was a disciple (Matt. 28:19)! “Disciples” was a term that I had thought only referred

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<sup>3</sup> In this article, “social justice” and “justice” will be used synonymously.

<sup>4</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, “social justice”.

to the twelve men closest to Jesus, not people today. Now I realized that I was actually supposed to do the things Jesus commanded the apostles to do (Matt. 28:20a).

Yet, people weren't prophesying or casting out demons very much in my Lutheran church, so I started to attend some charismatic and Pentecostal churches. As I grew deeper into the charismatic movement, I saw some differences between church and Scripture here as well, specifically when it came to peace and justice. Again, my simple understanding of the Bible was that we should do the things that Jesus commanded the first disciples to do, and thus I never questioned His commandments about turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39) or selling everything one has to give the money to the poor (Mark 10:21). I didn't become a Christian pacifist and activist through the teachings by John Howard Yoder, Shane Claiborne or Heidi Baker, but through the teachings of Jesus.

Within the charismatic movement, people were not as active for peace and justice as I had expected Spirit-filled Christians to be. On the contrary, some (but far from all) advocated for patriotism, just wars, economic inequality and environmental passivity. Especially charismatic church leaders from the United States, whom European Christians get a lot of inspiration from, were characterized by this. Disillusioned and disappointed, I started to find theological allies inspired by Anabaptism and Sojourners that believed in pacifism and activism (and I started to read John Howard Yoder and Shane Claiborne).

Yet, I was disturbed when I realized that not all (but definitely some!) of my Christian activist friends valued the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some Swedish Christians (especially in the Lutheran church) have a non-supernatural theology as developed by Rudolf Bultmann and John Shelby Spong, that both denies miracles in the Bible as well as of today. I found this in some parts of the Christian activist movement, and even if the majority believed in miracles, many did not find them as important as I did. On the contrary, they often argued that peace and justice was far more important than supernatural phenomena and that good deeds are more valuable in a Christian's life than Spiritual gifts.

Because of this, I started to blog, preach and think about how to combine signs and wonders with peace and justice. I started a website called Hela Pingsten (All of Pentecost) in 2009, and then an English version in 2012 called Holy Spirit Activism<sup>5</sup> where I could channel this message. I also connected with many others who shared the vision and who were putting it into practice. What I have found is that the division between non-activist charismaticism and non-charismatic activism is totally artificial, meaning that there is nothing in charismatic theology in itself that would prevent it from accepting a progressive view on peace and justice, and vice versa. On the contrary, miracles are combined with peace and justice in the Bible, in church history, as well as today.

## **Biblical Basis**

Luke 6 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. A "great number of people" from all over Israel gather around Jesus, for two reasons: to hear Him preach, and to get healed from their diseases (vv. 17-19). And healed they are, all of them. Demons are cast out. Power is flowing out from Jesus. In other words, there's full-scale revival. Then He starts to preach: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God!" (v. 20).

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<sup>5</sup> [holyspiritactivism.wordpress.com](http://holyspiritactivism.wordpress.com)

In this charismatic revival scenario, Jesus starts to talk about the poor. He goes on with blessing the hungry, the weeping and the hated. They are blessed. They are loved. The needy, broken and oppressed are healed physically and spiritually by their compassionate Savior. Then the faith healer continues: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort!” (v.24).

Jesus warns and criticizes the rich, the well-fed and the comfortable. They have to repent from their greed and egoism. Furthermore, Jesus moves on to preach pacifism: “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. (vv. 27-29). This radical sermon, that has inspired so many Christian activists, has a revival context, where the sick get healed and the demonized are delivered. Jesus loved to promote peace and justice, and He loved miracles.

This was evident already when He started His ministry and proclaimed: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19). When explaining how one could see that He was the Messiah, He said: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Matt. 11:5). He told a rich man to sell everything he had and give the money to the poor, and rightly after that He healed a blind beggar so that he didn’t have to beg again (Luke 18:18-42). After rebuking His disciple for cutting off a man’s ear with a sword, He miraculously put the ear back (Luke 22:49-51).

Jesus’ disciples followed the way of their Master. When they were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2), not only did they experience amazing signs and wonders but they also started to practice community of goods. Luke marks the co-existence of miracles and social justice very clearly: “Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” (Acts 2:43-45).

Unfortunately, the people that administrated the social ministry of the church started to discriminate Greek widows, refusing to help them. To solve this, the apostles agreed to elect seven people who were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). One of them was Stephen, whom Luke describes as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 5), and when he started helping the widows as he had been assigned to do, he “performed great wonders and signs among the people” (v. 8).

Not only was Stephen a charismatic social worker, but he also loved to preach the Gospel and debate theology. The latter got him into some serious trouble when he was sent to the Sanhedrin, accused of blaspheming Moses and God. After sharing a prophetic vision about Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father, Stephen was put to death, his last words being “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:60). He loved his enemies until the end.

One of those whom Stephen wanted God to forgive was Paul, who overlooked the execution (7:58). He hated Christians and persecuted them violently, but God transformed him nonviolently through the miracle on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). After having a vision where Jesus tells him to stop persecuting Him, Paul is blind for three days until a man who knows his name, place of birth, address and what he has gone through comes and heals him, saying “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has

sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17).

Soon, Paul became one of the greatest evangelists and apostles the church has ever known. He experienced amazing miracles, and called them the “marks of a true apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12) – he healed the sick, raised the dead and had prophetic visions and dreams. He also was an advocate for peace and justice, telling his fellow Christians not to repay evil with evil but holding peace with everyone (Rom. 12:17-21), not waging war (2 Cor. 10:3), despising love for money and being content with food and clothing (1 Tim. 6:8-10) and giving generously to the poor “that there might be equality.” (2 Cor 8:13).

## Modern Developments

There are many more examples (we have not even looked at the Old Testament) but I think it is already quite evident that signs and wonders are combined with peace and justice in the Bible. However, as I described in my “personal pilgrimage”, I have encountered several Pentecostals and charismatics that are not very active for peace and justice, but instead promote war and inequality.

John Hagee, Kenneth Copeland and Pat Robertson are three televangelists that embody the face of American charismatic Republicanism. Hagee is the founder and chairman of Christians United for Israel, an organization that supports occupation and war in order to speed up the apocalypse. Kenneth Copeland is a famous “health and wealth” prosperity preacher who not only owns several private jets and a giant mansion, but also his own Kenneth Copeland Airport to store his private jets close to his giant mansion. And Pat Robertson both supports Christian Zionism as well as the prosperity gospel and has tried to become the GOP's candidate for President.

These men are very influential, and you will probably find hundreds of thousands of Pentecostals and charismatics who agree with them. It is therefore not uncommon for people to think that most Pentecostals are not very progressive when it comes to peace and justice, and that there is something within charismatic theology that makes you prone to become a Republican. However, I will argue that both of these theories are inaccurate.

First of all, the same zeal for religious republicanism can be found among evangelicals that believe in cessationism, the idea that miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles. In fact, Christian Zionism originated within dispensationalism which in its original form is fundamentally cessationist. Thus, charismatic theology did not birth Zionist theology, nor are they dependent upon each other, even if there indeed are many charismatics today that “stand for Israel”.<sup>6</sup>

The prosperity gospel, on the other hand, clearly has charismatic origins and a charismatic nature. Financial blessings as a response to generous offerings and faith are seen as something supernatural: a money miracle that will make you rich if you make the prosperity preacher rich, commonly labeled “the law of sowing and reaping”. However, while some early Pentecostals did believe that healing always could be guaranteed if you had strong faith, this was not applied to finances until the 1950’s. Until that point, the prosperity gospel as we know it basically did not exist.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A really interesting article on the topic is Tony Richie’s “Is Pentecostalism Dispensationalist? An Honest Answer to a Tough Question”, available at <http://www.christianzionism.org/Article/RichieT01.pdf> (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 40.

Interestingly enough, the patriotism and warmongering that many connect with Western Pentecostalism was also absent in its beginning; as Jay Beaman and Brian Pipkin have shown, principally all early Pentecostal denominations in the US were pacifist at some point in their history.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, many early Pentecostals were radical when it comes to equality and justice, opposing racism and criticizing the capitalist system.<sup>9</sup>

This radical heritage is being rediscovered by Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice (PCPJ), who are publishing this journal. And we are not alone. According to *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* by Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, Pentecostalism is one of the biggest social justice movements on the planet. When researching which churches in developing nations that were committed to local development and poverty reduction, they found that the vast majority of them were Pentecostal and charismatic.<sup>10</sup>

There is a lot charismatic activists need to learn from other Christians as well as non-Christians that are promoting peace and justice, but we should also ask ourselves what we can contribute with. What is it that PCPJ can give to other activists that these perhaps are lacking to a large extent? I would say that it is *the theology and experience of supernatural Spiritual gifts*. Secular readers may find this disturbing but I am actually assuming – in fact I am quite convinced – that miracles, signs and wonders are existing phenomena that can and should accompany a believer in Christ. I have experienced some of them myself and I believe that they withhold a power that are suitable and needed for activism.

But what are these Spiritual gifts and how can they be used for such ends? This is what we will focus on in the rest of this article.

## Spiritual Gifts

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are very central to charismatic theology, which is evident from its name; “charismatic” coming from the Greek *charismata*, gifts of grace, which is a Pauline synonym to the gifts of the Spirit. The most important Biblical texts concerning these gifts are Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Here, Paul lists gifts like prophecy, teaching, healing, helping, miracles, aid-giving, and speaking in tongues.

It is thus evident that even if all gifts are given by the Spirit, far from all of them are what we usually label supernatural. Yet, “charismatic” almost always refers to the belief in supernatural phenomena like healing, prophecy and miracles. How come? In my opinion, it can ultimately be traced back to the theology of cessationism, the teaching that supernatural gifts ceased with the apostles. When the 16th century Protestants who founded this theology needed to explain why they weren't experiencing healing and prophecy very much, they could not argue that Spiritual gifts *per se* had ceased, because then they would have to advocate for the absurd statement that teaching or helping have ceased. Thus, they made a distinction between natural and supernatural gifts, claiming that the former are eternal but the latter are no longer necessary since we have the Bible nowadays.

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<sup>8</sup> Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism: The Origin, Development, and Rejection of Pacifistic Belief among the Pentecostals*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2009); Jay Beaman & Brian Pipkin, *Pentecostal and Holiness Statements on War and Peace* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2013)

<sup>9</sup> Scott Smalridge, “Early American Pentecostalism and the issues of race, gender, war, and poverty” (Master Thesis, McGill University, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

The problems with this teaching are quite evident. Firstly, there is absolutely no distinction between natural and supernatural gifts in the Scriptures. Secondly, even if it were, the Bible never says that supernatural gifts would cease with the death of the apostles and/or the completion of the New Testament. Thirdly, the early post-biblical church did not believe in cessationism but claimed to possess supernatural gifts for centuries, as is evident from the writings of the church fathers.<sup>11</sup>

Despite being unbiblical, cessationism became very popular within Protestantism until the 20th century when it was challenged by Pentecostal and charismatic theology. Even though Pentecostals and charismatics believed that supernatural gifts should be as normal as the natural ones, and thus dismissing the distinction of gifts that cessationists had created, they often argued for the existence and necessity for supernatural gifts to the extent of letting the term “Spiritual gifts” only refer to these.

Pentecostals traditionally view Spiritual gifts slightly differently from charismatics. Traditional Pentecostalism believes that Spiritual gifts are connected to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a once-in-a-lifetime event. Since the gift of speaking in tongues has a prevalent role when this Spiritual baptism occurs in Acts 2:1-4, 10:45-46 and 19:6, tongues was seen as the primary gift, or the “evidence” of true baptism in the Spirit. Charismatic theology on the other hand (which arose a couple of decades later when other denominations than the Pentecostal ones started to believe in the continuation of supernatural gifts) usually doesn't see tongues as the primary gift that one must possess to be Spiritually baptized. Also, for many charismatic theologians, the baptism in the Spirit is equated - at least when it comes to emphasis - with *being filled* with the Spirit, which the Scriptures say we should be continuously (Eph 5:18).

### **John Wimber and the Kingdom of God**

One of the most influential Western charismatic theologians, and the one who has impacted me the most, was John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement. For him, Spiritual gifts are situational, meaning given as the Spirit wishes at different times.<sup>12</sup> When Paul hints that all people do not have the gifts of healing (1 Cor. 12:30), Wimber argued that this does not mean that some people are doomed to fail every time they pray that someone would be healed, but that all Corinthians were not using this gift at a given church meeting (which was the context 1 Cor. 12-14 was addressing). The Spirit distributes the gifts at any time just as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11).

Another thing Wimber emphasized was the multiple purposes of Spiritual gifts. The gift of prophecy, for example, has a clear intrinsic purpose - to hear God speak. But it also has an instrumental value, such as when people give their lives to Jesus after experiencing that a stranger knows “the secrets of their hearts” prophetically (1 Cor. 14:25). Wimber especially emphasized this evangelistic utilization of supernatural gifts, calling it *power evangelism*, and he used it himself to lead many to the Lord as he prophesied over them and prayed for their healing.

One example of this, that Wimber often shared in his sermons and lectures, was when he was sitting on an airplane and saw with his spiritual eyes that the man across the aisle had the

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<sup>11</sup> For more arguments against cessationism, check out Jack Deere's excellent apology *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). For more information about Spiritual gifts in the early church, see Jeff Doles, *Miracles And Manifestations Of The Holy Spirit In The History Of The Church* (Seffner: Walking Barefoot Ministries, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> John Wimber, “Releasing Gifts in Us.” *Equipping the Saints*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Fall 1993.

word adultery written on his forehead, and below it a woman's name. Wimber went to talk with him and explained that he needed to end this adulterous relationship with the woman. Long story short, the man was shocked that Wimber knew about it, he repented, gave his life to the Lord, confessed his sin for his wife and then led her to the Lord as well!<sup>13</sup>

For Wimber, both miracles and evangelism were crucial aspects of the Kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup> Being the most central concept in the teachings of Jesus, Wimber was careful to let the Kingdom of God be at the core of his theology as well. The Kingdom of God is the immanent rule of God in this present age, Wimber argued, and thus it is expressed and expanded both when God as King is doing signs and wonders, and when we as citizens of the Kingdom are doing His will, like sharing the Gospel and promoting social justice.

Indeed, social justice was as important for Wimber as miracles and evangelism were. He wrote:

I love to teach on social justice! It really is one of my passions. Justice always go hand in hand with true revival and renewal of the Spirit. Justice – setting things right for the poor and marginalized – is one of the primary purposes for God sending His Son into the world. He came in order to set things right. Great leaders in the history of the church have always understood the relationship between faith and justice. There has never been a movement of God started on fire that did not have a ministry to the poor.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, Wimber did not have the time and strength to emphasize social justice as much as he liked to before he went home to the Lord in 1997, and so most people only remember him for his teaching on Spiritual gifts and power evangelism. Specifically, he never had the opportunity to develop a similar framework as that of power evangelism to the areas of peace and justice. This is however what I aim to briefly sketch in this article.

## **Power Evangelism and Power Activism**

Wimber argued that when the power of the Holy Spirit is added to the presentation of the Gospel, “the potential for salvation for any individual at any time is greatly heightened”.<sup>16</sup> Miracles make it easier for a non-believer to believe. They can also help the evangelist practically, such as when the gift of prophecy reveals who s/he should talk with, or when the gift of tongues let her/him share the Gospel in another language.

Wimber contrasted this with “programmed evangelism”, which he claimed was the dominant form of evangelism in the evangelical world. This is characterized by being content-oriented and based on human action. Here, miracles or prophetic guidance is not expected, but instead the duty of the evangelist is to present a specific set of information, often according to standardized templates, and give intellectual reasons for the faith. While Wimber argued that all of this is good and that we should not reject any of it, he said that the added

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<sup>13</sup> John Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, pp. 21-32.

<sup>15</sup> John Wimber, *The Way In is the Way On* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2006), p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> John Wimber, “Power Evangelism”, lecture at the Signs, Wonders and Church Growth Conference in Anaheim 1985. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mx16hkqpw1M> (accessed December 16 2013).



dimension of power evangelism would make our efforts to share the Gospel much more dynamic, effective and biblical.

Let us then turn to the area of activism. I have been an activist for many years. I have dressed like a banana to promote Fairtrade, I have sung a song to the Swedish minister of finance to ask him stop capital flight from developing nations, I have physically blocked deportations of immigrants to Iraq and Afghanistan and I have spent hours collecting money for food relief.

As I have been doing this, I have noticed that there is a big risk that I am struggling in my own strength and power. And I am very limited as such. However, the Bible says that through the power of God, we are able to do more than in our own strength (Phil. 4:13). God, who is almighty, is able “to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20).

Whenever I have been doing these activities with other Christians, our prayers, if we have prayed at all, have thus been that God will give us “strength” to do this for the poor and oppressed. In practice, that has meant something like “give us a little vitamin boost so that we won’t be as tired as usual.” But is this really what “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” means?

Definitely not! When Jesus, Stephen and Paul promoted peace and justice in the power of the Spirit, they were not merely relying on some invisible divine adrenaline, they were doing miracles. They healed the beggars and provided the hungry with food miracles. This is supernatural activism: to pray for and expect the impossible and use it to create a better world.

The “usual” way of doing activism could, in the spirit of Wimber, be described as “programmed activism”, and is characterized by human action according to a specific human-constructed plan. Power activism, or supernatural activism, could of course use these pre-structured plans as a base, but it should always seek and expect the interruption and empowerment of the Holy Spirit which might very well change these plans completely. One cannot plan or decide what the Spirit is going to do. Referring to his experience on the airplane, Wimber jokingly said “Now, how in the world do I write a diagram to explain how you do that? ‘Whenever you get on an airplane, look for the guy that says adultery across his face.’”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, what I present below is not a model, but an inspiration for you to “use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10). We have different gifts and different callings to use them in, but it is my conviction that all Christians that are passionate for peace and justice can and should use Spiritual gifts in that calling, since this is the Biblical model. It will increase efficiency and, I can tell you, it’s a lot more fun than just programmed activism.

But what about when miracles are absent? What about when you pray for something that doesn’t come true? Wimber said that this is the consequence of the Kingdom of God being “already but not yet”.<sup>18</sup> Jesus proclaimed that His Kingdom is already here (Luke 11:20), but He also said that it will come in its full glory with the advent of the new world (Mark 14:25). In Heaven there is no sickness, death, hunger or war. What we experience on earth is how the Kingdom of Heaven penetrates the darkness of the World, but it has not totally overcome it yet. Until the second coming of Christ, we will both experience suffering and glory, both the cross and the Mount of Transfiguration.

According to Kingdom theology, we should thus recognize the brokenness of this world

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<sup>17</sup> Wimber, “Power Evangelism” lecture.

<sup>18</sup> Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, pp. 23f.

while we still pray that God's Kingdom may come and that His will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven (Matt. 6:10). We should be "eager for gifts of the Spirit" and "try to excel" in them (1 Cor. 14:12), we should pray with faith for one another and expect miracles (Jam. 5:13-16). Thus, even if miracles are not always happening, we should not be discouraged but continue to seek the power of God even more. I am convinced that we then will see amazing things, such as described below.

## Prophecy

Paul says that we "especially" should seek the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1). To hear God's voice is thus the most important ability the Holy Spirit offers us. Prophecy has multiple purposes: it can reveal truths about God and His Kingdom (something that always should be tested against Scripture, 1 Thess. 5:19-21); it can reveal God's plans for an individual's life; or it can simply reveal practical circumstances here on earth, either to manifest God's omniscience or to simply help people practically.

This is very useful in activism. In Genesis 41, we read about how Joseph uses prophetic discernment to reveal that there will first be seven years of abundance, and then seven years of famine. He suggests that Pharaoh should put a wise man in charge of Egypt to collect a fifth of the harvest during the seven good years and then distribute this during the famine. Pharaoh elects Joseph to have this responsibility, and as "aid worker in chief" he saves many lives. A similar event is recorded in Acts 11:27-30. Agabus, a prophet, foresees a coming famine and the church in Antioch then could prepare disaster relief for the church in Judea, which they send with Paul and Barnabas.

I have a friend who also has used the prophetic gift to help the poor; Simon Ådahl, a Swedish musician and evangelist, who was impacted by the charismatic Jesus movement in the 70's while also being a conscientious objector along with many other Swedish Pentecostals. I've met him several times to hear testimonies about when he has experienced the power of God in amazing ways. "I went pass a man", he told me, "it was somewhere in southern Sweden a couple of years back. Then I said to him 'The answer is Estonia.' He almost passed out! He revealed to me that just a minute earlier he had been praying to God something like 'Where should I send my aid relief? Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania?' And then I came: 'The answer is Estonia!'"<sup>19</sup>

In 2012, Christians from Indonesia contacted Simon and invited him and Frank to come to the World Prayer Assembly – the biggest prayer meeting in world history – to play their peace song "Pray for Korea" as well as to write the theme song for the whole event. Simon said yes. And suddenly they were leading worship in front of thousands of people on a stadium in Jakarta, as well as millions that watched it through God TV.

When Simon was backstage, a European man passed by. The Holy Spirit filled Simon right away, he ran to the man and prophesied: "You are not going home! You are not going home! Those who tried to silent you aren't my servants, but you are my servant, and you're not going home!"

The man was stunned. He explained that he was from the Netherlands and that he wanted to hold a seminar at the Assembly about the horrible gold trade between the Netherlands and Indonesia, that destroys the environment and exploit poor workers. However, some Indonesian

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Simon Ådahl, Gävle, November 27 2012.

pastors, that he knew benefited from the gold trade, took him aside in a room and forbade him to speak about this.

When he went out of the room he felt so discouraged and thought to himself that he probably should go home. But right then a Swedish guy jumped in front of him and started to prophesy...

Another person who has used the prophetic gift in activism is Bob Ekblad.<sup>20</sup> He had been a Christian activist for 30 years, eagerly working for peace and justice – especially among poor immigrants, prisoners and Guatemalan and Honduran farmers. But in the early 2000's, he realized that something was missing in his ministry for the poor and oppressed. Somehow nationalism and egoism seemed to be stronger than the Gospel he preached.

At this time, Bob's younger brother got saved in the Charismatic movement, and simply told him: "You do miss something, you miss the power of the Holy Spirit!" Bob was very sceptical since republican agendas dominated among charismatics, but eventually he went with his brother to a church in Toronto called Catch the Fire.

At first he was very uncomfortable with the emotional worship and especially some people's strange behavior when they were praying. But during a prayer session Bob went to a British minister who was prophesying over people. When Bob came to him, the minister said:

I see you sitting in a circle with men in red uniforms on blue plastic chairs, and I hear the Father saying: 'I love how you love my prisoners.' I feel like He wants to give you new revelation to make the hearts of these men to burn.

Bob was stunned. He was sitting six times a week in a circle of blue plastic chairs, leading Bible studies with prisoners in red uniforms. His favorite Scripture is when the hearts of the two disciples are burning when they meet Jesus (Luke 24:13-34). He was convinced, the Holy Spirit is for real, and he needs Him - still he was afraid that the Spirit would turn a Republican out of him!

Instead, he started to experience supernatural activism. An immigrant lady he was working with had been arrested for drug and gun possession, and was most likely going to be deported because of this. Bob knew that this wouldn't solve her problems a bit and agreed to be a character witness in her trial, trying to convince the judge (who was famous for often sentencing people to deportation) that she really was a good person. Problem was, she wasn't. Her three sons were gangsters and she refused to admit that she had done something wrong possessing those drugs and weapons.

As Bob and a friend of his were going to the trial, they prayed that God would intervene. They prayed that God would send His angel into that courtroom and make the lady confess who she is in front of the judge, that the judge would feel compassion for her, that her chains would be dropped off her hands and that the prosecutor would be silent in Jesus' name.

As they got to the court, the trial was already over. Bob was confused, since he hadn't had the opportunity to witness yet, but then he met the lady's lawyer who joyfully shouted "We

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<sup>20</sup> This section is based upon Ekblad's testimony given at a seminar Ekblad was holding at a New Wine conference in Vänersborg, Sweden, June 2012, as well as his book *A New Christian Manifesto* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). The seminar can be seen online, search for "Bob Ekblad Social justice in the power of the Spirit" on youtube.com.

won!” The lady had confessed everything, how she sold drugs to pay for her sons’ schooling that they refused anyway, how her former husband had destroyed her life, and the judge amazingly decided to use his discretion to release her. He asked if the prosecutor had any problems with this but the prosecutor was silent. “And then something happened that I had never seen in my career”, the lawyer said. Even when the suspect wins a case his or her handcuffs are removed outside of the courtroom, but now the judge ordered that she would be released immediately. Furthermore, it turned out that all this had happened around 10:45, precisely when Bob and his friend had been praying about all this in the car.

## Healing

There is a strong link between health and poverty. The World Health Organization writes: “The poor are exposed to greater personal and environmental health risks, are less well nourished, have less information and are less able to access health care; they thus have a higher risk of illness and disability. Conversely, illness can reduce household savings, lower learning ability, reduce productivity, and lead to a diminished quality of life, thereby perpetuating or even increasing poverty.”<sup>21</sup>

The gifts of healing have a very important intrinsic value: to alleviate suffering. In the Gospels, Jesus heals people not only to show that the power of God is with Him but also out of pure compassion for His fellow human beings (Matt. 14:14). But because of this link between lack of health and poverty, healing can also be used as a means of poverty reduction.

Acts 3 is a good example of this. When Peter and John went up to the temple to pray, they passed a lame man who was begging for money. Peter said to him: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (v. 6).

The man, who had been lame from birth, got completely healed and started jumping and dancing. People wondered what was going on, Peter preached the Gospel and explained that God did this miracle in order to give glory to His Son, and many of the listeners got saved. This single healing both rescued a man from the bondage of poverty and made it very easy for Peter to evangelize.

A good friend of mine, Andreas Cucca, claims to have seen the same thing. He is a missionary for a Swedish organization called Go Out Mission and has been preaching the Gospel in several developing countries. Once, he was in Kissidougou, Guinea, preaching for around 15,000 people. He ended his sermon by proclaiming “In the name of Jesus – crippled, begin to walk, deaf ears open, blind eyes open!” From the very back a man started walking through the crowds towards the platform. He had been a lame beggar that most people in Kissidougou knew. People started to shout and praise God as he testified that he could walk again.<sup>22</sup>

A couple of years back, I met a man called David Owour who is arranging big campaigns in Kenya. In 2010, a 20-year-old woman named Teresa Jebiwot participated in such a revival meeting in Kisumu. She was born without a cornea, which made her totally blind, not knowing if it was day or night unless someone told her. But at the revival meeting, she got completely healed when David Owour prayed for her, and she started to see perfectly. This was verified by

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<sup>21</sup> World Health Organization, “Poverty”. <http://www.who.int/topics/poverty/en/> (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Andreas Cucca, Nyhem, July 2013. The interview can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qreVAruOPJs> (accessed December 16 2013).

an eye specialist, Dr. Agnes Maiyo, at the Iten District Hospital. After her healing, she could leave the blind school she had attended, and her living condition got highly improved.<sup>23</sup>

Heidi Baker, a missionary in Mozambique, shares a similar event in her book *Always Enough*. A woman asked her to pray for her husband, named Carlos, who had been lame in his legs for two years. Heidi came home to their mud hut where the man was sitting on a reed mat with a pair of scissors in his hand, cutting up little pieces of paper. He sold this to the local mattress vendors, earning just a couple of cents a day.

When Heidi saw this desperate poverty, she put her hands on his head and said: “In the name of Jesus, get up. Get up, Carlos, and walk. In the name of Jesus I break the evil curse over you and your family. I break your paralysis, and I pray for Jesus to come, for the Holy Spirit to come and cause you to walk, in Jesus’ name.” She took his hand and said “Now, stand up and walk.”

Then Carlos stood up and walked. His family started singing and rejoicing. People started gathering around as they saw Carlos walking for the first time in two years. Heidi ends the story saying:

He’s walking on his own today, completely healed. The Kingdom is coming in the garbage dump. The Kingdom is coming for the poor. Jesus is healing them and pouring His love into them. Jesus cares for them.<sup>24</sup>

## Food Miracles

Hunger is the world’s greatest solvable problem. Over 800 million people are suffering from hunger,<sup>25</sup> not because there isn’t enough food in the world but because it is unevenly distributed. Hunger and malnutrition kills and damages millions of people, especially children.<sup>26</sup>

In the book of Exodus, the Israelites supernaturally receives manna from heaven every day throughout their journey (Ex. 16). To prevent the greedy from storing it all up before the sick and old can gather any, the heavenly bread turns really bad the day after people picked it, except on the sabbath. Paul uses this as an argument to promote economic equality (2 Cor. 8:13-15). Other Biblical food miracles are when God saves the lives of a widow and her son through miraculously making her amount of flour and oil endless (1 Kings 17:12-16) and when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:29-39).

Heidi Baker whom I mentioned above claims to have witnessed a food miracle in Maputo in the mid-90’s. Due to some serious problems with the government her organization Iris Ministries suddenly had no food for the 80 children that they were taking care of. Fortunately, a lady from the U.S. embassy who knew Heidi, Nelda Lawrence, showed up with some food. But when Heidi saw that it was rice for maximum eight people, she said “We have a big family” and

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<sup>23</sup> *Repentance and Holiness Magazine*, “Teresa Jebiwot” Vol. 8, pp. 19-21. Available at [http://www.repentandpreparetheway.org/crbst\\_7.html](http://www.repentandpreparetheway.org/crbst_7.html) (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Heidi and Rolland Baker, *Always Enough* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2003) pp. 167-169.

<sup>25</sup> World Food Programme, “Who are the hungry?”, <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/who-are> (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Save the Children, “No Child Born to Die: The Fight Against Hunger (animation)” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_SAtk6qOy8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_SAtk6qOy8) (accessed December 16 2013).

showed Nelda the eighty children at their office. Nelda was shocked, but Heidi got a small pot of corn meal that they had, asked her to bless the food, and then Heidi gave a big bowl to each and every one. “I was dazed and overwhelmed. I barely understood at the time what a wonderful thing was happening. But all the children ate, the staff ate, my friend [Nelda] ate and even our family of four ate. Everyone had enough.”<sup>27</sup>

I was in South Africa during the summer of 2013, where I met Surprise Sithole who is co-working with Heidi and her husband Rolland. When mentioning this food miracle in Maputo, he said “Oh, there has been three food multiplications in Maputo!” He told me about when Bulgarian evangelist Georgien Banov was visiting and brought some chicken for the kids there to eat. They got 500 pieces of chicken but fed 2000 people, one piece per person. Then Surprise told me about how he went to Malawi during the big drought in 2001 with a friend from Australia. They managed to feed 24 districts with 10 000 dollars. “God multiplied the money *and* the food!”

## Raising the Dead

The most obvious reason I find why we should passionately promote peace and justice is that the alternative kills people. This is very obvious for war, but poverty also kills; according to the United Nations Millennium Campaign, 50,000 people die because of poverty every day.<sup>28</sup> That equals 18 million people per year.

But God can raise the dead. In fact, this is the miracle that is mandatory for Christians to believe in according to Paul (1 Cor. 15:12-18). There are several examples of people coming back to life in the Bible, and some of them have clear socio-economic dimensions. The widow who survived thanks to the food miracle in 1 Kings 17 tragically loses her son shortly afterwards (v. 17), which besides being extremely painful for her also implies an economic disaster. Fortunately, God raises him from the dead (v. 22). A similar event is recorded in the New Testament, where Jesus raises another widow’s son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17).

Surprise Sithole claims to have prayed for eight dead people that have come back to life.<sup>29</sup> I actually got to meet one of them when I was in South Africa, Francis Shongwe – pastor for Iris Ministries in Clau-Clau. In September 2003, he was violently beaten by a gang, went to Heaven, woke up in the hospital where he had been pronounced dead, and even though his clothes were filled with blood his body was healed. He said that even though he initially was sad to leave Heaven, since there was no poverty or hunger there, he was glad that pastor Surprise prayed that he would come back. Directly after he left the hospital, he went to the police station and forgave his murderers, demanded their release and led them to Christ.<sup>30</sup>

In 1997, my friend Michael Liliequist did a field study to Ethiopia to study the Lutheran charismatic revival there. He met Ato Brehanu who is leading healing services for the Mekane Yesus church in Lalo. Brehanu said that his healing ministry began when he raised a young relative from the dead in 1986. The family was so poor that they could not give food to all the

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<sup>27</sup> Baker, *Always Enough*, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> Millennium Campaign, “Goal One”, <http://www.millenniumcampaign.org/about/goal-1-menu/> (accessed December 16 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Surprise Sithole, *Voice in the Night* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Heidi Baker also shares Francis’ testimony in *Compelled by Love* (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2008), and Francis is interviewed about this in the film *Finger of God* (Wanderlust Productions, 2007).

people that came to their house to mourn, something that was really shameful for them, so Ato Brehanu prayed that the boy would come back to life, which he did.<sup>31</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts and Implications

In this article, I have argued that supernatural Spiritual gifts should be used as tools to promote peace and justice, since activism becomes more efficient then and simply because it is Biblical. A lot more could be said on this topic - how does one actually gain access to such gifts, how prevalent has this been in church history, how does this relate to evangelism and other church ministries, are just some of the questions that I seek to address on my blog Holy Spirit Activism and in future works, but I hope that this has been a sufficient introduction to the idea of supernatural activism.

My invitation to non-charismatic Christian activists and even non-Christian activists is to be open to these phenomena and invite them through simply praying for them. There are a lot of prejudices and reluctance towards the supernatural, and some might honestly view many of the testimonies I just shared as utterly crazy, but fact is that this is what most people have believed for millennias and that most people believe in today, especially in developing nations. Activists often seek to have the perspective of the poor, and I think we then need to challenge the naturalist paradigm which most people who are living in poverty do not share.

Likewise, my invitation to my fellow Pentecostal and charismatic activists is not to lose our knowledge and experience of Spiritual gifts but to have the courage to use them and teach others to do the same as we promote peace and justice. Our contribution to the activist community is greater than that we have the potential to reach conservatives with a progressive message. Our contribution is literally more powerful than anything else. And that is precisely because it is not ours, but God's. When we let Him promote peace and justice through us He won't let us down, because He is the greatest activist.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Liliequist, "Catch the Fire! Holy Spirit Revival in Ethiopia", in *Amidst Crosses and Minarets: Reports from a Field Study in Ethiopia and Eritrea 1997*, Uppsala University.

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