

# Associated Baptist Press

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## PART I

### 'Power evangelism' making converts of some missionaries, strategists

By Greg Warner and Bob Allen

(ABP) -- From the African coast and the Himalayan foothills to the jungles of the Philippines, Christian missionaries report a new openness to the gospel message, particularly when that message includes miraculous demonstrations of divine power.

"Power evangelism," as advocates call it, is gaining popularity, even among mainstream Christian groups that traditionally have discounted or avoided the miraculous.

While more familiar mission methods -- such as those based on western-style persuasion and quiet conversionism -- have struggled for a foothold in some parts of the world, a renewed focus on "spiritual warfare" -- with healings, exorcisms, visions and the like -- is winning converts in cultures once thought impervious to the gospel.

Missionaries, including Southern Baptists, say miracles on the mission field are nothing new. Rather than an infrequent and spontaneous occurrence, however, such "signs and wonders" are now sought as a ready tool in the hands of some missionaries called upon to prove the power of God.

In some parts of the world, such as Nepal and northern India, "the situation will demand that you engage in a power encounter," explained Thomas Wang, international chairman of "AD 2000 and Beyond," a coalition of Christian groups and denominations committed to world evangelization, including Southern Baptists. "Many of the Christians in the area will tell you that the Christian faith delivered them from the power domination of the evil spirits."

Wang, a native of China who moved to the United States in 1958, said many westerners are uncomfortable talking about the existence of spiritual evil. "We are very sophisticated and don't want to talk about this and don't want to face these ugly realities," he said. "But in some places of the world, we do face them. We cannot escape this."

Animistic cultures -- where indigenous religions place a strong emphasis on good and evil spirits -- are a "seedbed" for power evangelism, said Jerry Rankin, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"It just seems to be an environment that God works in miraculous ways that would not be normative to our western culture," said Rankin, a former missionary in Indonesia.

Islamic cultures also are responsive to demonstrations of God's power, agree Rankin and Keith Parks, his predecessor at the FMB. Visions are a recurring feature in conversions from Islam, and many of those visions include a Christ-like figure "in white clothing with piercing eyes and a brown beard," said Parks, now coordinator of global missions for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Neither Parks nor Rankin are vocal advocates of power evangelism. But many missiologists, including Parks and Thomas Wang, agree a Christian witness that involves miraculous "manifestations" is more effective than western-style evangelism in "World A," the one-third of the world untouched by the gospel or resistant to a traditional Christian witness.

"That's what the record shows," said Parks, a Southern Baptist missionary to Indonesia for 14 years. Parks said he is rethinking his own position on charismatic practices on the mission field and is more tolerant than he once was.

"I'm convinced the people in these areas, under Satan's power for these many generations, will not be changed without a remarkable demonstration of the Lord's power," Parks said. "It has to be a supernatural intervention -- it is anytime a person is saved. But sometimes God will manifest himself in ways not known here."

At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where 53 percent of Southern Baptist missionaries are trained, a course is being added on spiritual warfare and power evangelism.

The term "power evangelism," coined in the late 1980s at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., describes manifestations such as healings, speaking in tongues and deliverance from demons as tools to attract unbelievers to Christianity by persuading them of the power of Jesus.

Those practices, traditionally limited to fringe Pentecostal and charismatic sects, have gained a new hearing among a growing number of mainstream groups hoping to evangelize World A, also called "the 10-40 window," referring to the unevangelized region of the world roughly between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude.

Power evangelism, or at least charismatic methods, have gained a foothold in places like India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Israel, and Ivory Coast and other parts of Africa.

Proponents say power evangelism is the long-sought breakthrough for the gospel in the unevangelized world.

The gospel message accompanied by acts of power "is what is really going to push back the veil of darkness so the lost people can hear the gospel," said missions pioneer Peter Wagner of Fuller, whose 1988 book, "The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit," popularized power evangelism.

Like Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18), power evangelism welcomes a showdown of "deities" as a means of proving the reality and power of the Christian God.

Even critics acknowledge power evangelism techniques seem to be working in World A. But they are concerned about possible excesses associated with Pentecostal and charismatic influences.

The Foreign Mission Board fired missionaries Charles and Sharon Carroll of Singapore Dec. 12 because they allowed certain charismatic practices in Community of Praise Baptist Church, where Charles Carroll is pastor. Some view the firing as a test case on power evangelism for Southern Baptists, renowned for their missionary zeal but traditionally opposed to Pentecostal tendencies.

At issue in the Carroll firing is the phenomenon of "falling," also known as being "slain in the spirit," which FMB trustees said is "outside of generally accepted practices of Southern Baptists."

Charles Carroll said the "falling" -- when a worshiper falls to the floor apparently in an unconscious or semi-conscious state -- and other manifestations are being used by God to convince and convert non-Christians. The 400-member Singapore church has established 63 churches and preaching points in northern India as mission teams preach, pray for healing and cast out evil spirits, Carroll said.

"You can't do evangelism and church planting in India without deliverance," Carroll said.

"Not everybody who sees a miracle is going to believe, but it is a formidable tool -- a sign -- that authenticates a person's witness," Carroll said.

"We believe the unreached peoples of the 10-40 window and elsewhere will never be reached without God's miraculous intervention in their lives, which may include signs and wonders that have not been a normal part of Southern Baptist church life in the United States," the Carrolls wrote in a formal appeal to FMB trustees.

"This is the 'power evangelism' that the Apostle Paul referred to when he said, 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power,' the statement continued, quoting I Corinthians 2:4-5 from the Bible (NIV).

But Rankin and FMB trustees insist the practice of "falling" is not attested in the Bible and therefore not appropriate for Southern Baptist missionaries.

Although charismatic practices, such as speaking in tongues, prayer for healing and exorcism, are part of worship in a few Southern Baptist churches, most shun such practices. So do most missionaries, who are screened for charismatic leanings during the appointment process.

"We don't need to borrow from ... the charismatics," said Bob Garrett, a missionary to Argentina until last summer, when he began teaching missions at Southwestern Seminary. Veteran missionaries are not surprised to see occasional miracles on the field, Garrett said. But most missionaries focus on relational evangelism, not power encounters, he said.

Power evangelism is "not mainstream" among the 4,000 Southern Baptist missionaries, Carroll agreed, but he noted FMB insiders concede "hundreds" of them pray in tongues.

Carroll insists Southern Baptists run the risk of missing out on the movement of God by closing the door to power evangelism and charismatic gifts. But, Rankin counters, God is blessing Southern Baptist missions without an emphasis on manifestations.

Rankin said many Southern Baptist missionaries are "open" to power evangelism, that is they recognize that some of the "signs and wonders" associated with power evangelism are biblical and used by God.

But for the most part, he said, Southern Baptists lean toward a more traditional approach. "Our folks are part of the total missions picture" and would not typically employ the methods of power evangelism, Rankin said.

Rankin himself was almost fired while serving in Southeast Asia, and later faced opposition to his election as president, because of his openness to charismatic practices on the mission field.

Other FMB leaders, such as overseas vice president Avery Willis, use the language of "spiritual warfare" popular with the power evangelism movement.

"Obviously we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the gospel and the cross, and we believe Jesus has power over all spirits," acknowledged Willis. But he said the FMB is not taking a position "for or against" the power evangelism movement.

While some Southern Baptist missionaries expected the FMB to be more open to charismatic gifts and manifestations under Rankin and Willis, other observers say the Carrolls' firing will warn missionaries to steer clear of charismatic practices.

Peter Wagner said he is not surprised to see some groups respond to power evangelism by "drawing boundaries and firing missionaries and excluding churches." "That's sort of a normal response to the early stages of an innovation like this," he told Associated Baptist Press.

Wagner and other proponents insist power evangelism and charismatic practices are biblical.

"What we're talking about in power evangelism is doing the kind of things Jesus and the apostles did, that is, preach the gospel in both word and deed," said Wagner, whose books on indigenous missions and church growth helped shape the methodology for a generation of Baptist and evangelical missionaries.

"The whole theme of the book of Acts is missions and power," said Wagner. In Acts, he said, "the gospel is spread through that part of the world in the first century by healing the sick, by casting out demons, by miracles, by dealing with spiritual forces, by intercessory prayer."

Themes developed by the apostle Paul in his epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians -- that the lost world is controlled by the "power of darkness" -- have become the basis for the power evangelism movement, Wagner said.

"Previous to 1990 these themes were mostly prominent among Pentecostals and charismatics," Wagner said. "About the last six years, the rest of the body of Christ is beginning to pick this up."

The three "waves" of the Holy Spirit, as defined by Wagner in his 1988 book, began with the so-called Azusa Street revival in 1906 Los Angeles, from which emerged the major Pentecostal denominations in the United States. The second wave was the Jesus movement and charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The third wave, Wagner says, is happening worldwide, as the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by "signs and wonders" reminiscent of the days of Pentecost.

"Yes, some miraculous things are happening, but why are we surprised?" asked Garrett of Southwestern. Miracles are expressions of God's grace and power, he said, "but no more."

"We must be wary of anyone who prescribes one panacea" for success in missions, Garrett said. "To assume that power evangelism will do it -- no, it won't. What will always work is Christian love applied in industrial quantities."

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## **PART II**

### **What's biblical? What's excessive?**

#### **Baptists and the charismatic question**

By Greg Warner and Bob Allen

(ABP) -- Whether in pristine American suburbs or on farflung mission fields, the charismatic question confronts Baptists with a dilemma: Where do you draw the line?

With their deep commitment to the authority of the Bible, most Baptists are reluctant to dismiss "speaking in tongues," healing and other charismatic practices outright. The New Testament calls such "manifestations" a witness to the power of God.

But Baptists are highly suspicious of mystical or esoteric spiritual experiences which frequently polarize believers and divide churches. "I think it is wrong to simply write it all off and say it never happens," said Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "I think it is equally wrong to be gullible about it."

If the charismatic issue is divisive in the States, it's even tougher on the mission field.

Southern Baptists are committed to an "indigenous" missions philosophy, which means missionaries are encouraged to present the gospel message as free as possible from the cultural trappings of the western world. As a result, Christians overseas often adopt practices or traditions that might seem unusual, or even troublesome, to the average Baptist in America.

Occasionally -- as is happening now in Argentina and Southeast Asia -- Baptists overseas have taken on charismatic tendencies, a development that can cause tension not only within their own churches but between the national Christians and the Baptist missionaries.

Most Southern Baptist missionaries, like their stateside brethren, avoid charismatic practices. "We don't need to borrow from ... the charismatics," said Bob Garrett, a missionary to Argentina until last summer, when he began teaching missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Our tradition as Baptists is one of spiritual fervor, intimate communion with God and white-hot experience, but it has always been balanced by testing all religious experience by the Scripture," said Garrett.

Drawing the line between the biblical and the excessive can be tricky, whether at home or abroad.

The Foreign Mission Board, which oversees Southern Baptists' missionary force of 4,000, was forced to draw that line recently when trustees fired a missionary couple in Singapore who advocated "falling in the Spirit," a somewhat obscure phenomenon often associated with modern charismatics and Pentecostals but which plays a debatable role in New Testament practice.

The firing of veteran missionaries Charles and Sharon Carroll -- only the second known firing in FMB history for doctrinal reasons -- brought to the fore the issue of charismatic practices and what Baptists believe.

There is no clear-cut policy against charismatic practices at the Foreign Mission Board. The agency's termination policy spells out 11 causes for firing, including "a persistent emphasis on any gift of the Spirit as normative for all or to the extent such emphasis becomes disruptive to the Baptist fellowship."

Jerry Rankin, FMB president, explained the board allows charismatic practices in a missionary's private experience. But a missionary can be fired if he or she practices or teaches those experiences publicly, or advocates experiences that Southern Baptists view as lacking "sound biblical justification," he said.

Carroll was initially accused of teaching "falling" as normative and of causing disruption among Singapore churches. Those charges were later dropped, however, and trustees focused instead on the practice of "falling," which they said is not biblical and is "outside of generally accepted practices of Southern Baptists."

As a denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention has not taken a position on charismatic practices. "The Baptist Faith and Message," the denomination's confession of faith, is silent on the issue. The handful of Southern Baptist churches that practice charismatic gifts are either shunned by their fellow Baptists or quietly tolerated.

"Baptists have never adequately dealt with this issue," said Charles Carroll in an interview after his firing. "There has only been one place for a Southern Baptist with charismatic leanings, and that's out the door."

Bill O'Brien, director of the global center at Samford University, agreed Southern Baptists, enveloped in their Deep South culture, have been isolated from the charismatic movement worldwide. Although Southern Baptists "brushed up against" the movement during the 1970s, they have yet to deal with it comprehensively, said O'Brien, a former FMB missionary in Southeast Asia.

Despite that isolation, Southern Baptists allow "a great deal of flexibility" on spiritual gifts and other issues, said the FMB's Rankin. That flexibility has been adopted to some degree by the Foreign Mission Board. But the bottom line, Rankin said, is the Bible. "Where we would come down representing Southern Baptists is on the basis of sound biblical justification."

FMB trustees who fired Carroll said there is little or no biblical evidence for "falling down," also called being "slain in the Spirit," in which a worshiper falls to the ground in a trance-like state that is attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some Baptist theologians agree.

"Falling down" has "no precedent in the Word of God," said Patterson of Southeastern. "The only place I can find where someone was slain in the spirit, both were buried soon after," he said, referring to the New Testament story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), who fell down dead -- apparently at the hand of God -- for lying.

But other charismatic practices are harder to exclude on biblical grounds. Tongues-speaking, prayer for healing, casting out demons and other phenomena are attested in Scripture. And Jesus, when he sends out his disciples in Matthew 10, instructs them to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy [and] drive out demons."

The Matthew passage, as well as others in the gospels and Acts, are used by Carroll and others to justify "power evangelism," a missions strategy that employs healings, tongues and exorcisms as tools to attract unbelievers to Christianity by persuading them of the power of God.

Those practices, traditionally limited to fringe Pentecostal and charismatic sects, have gained a new hearing among a growing number of mainstream mission groups who have found "power evangelism" effective in areas of the world resistant to the gospel message. The "power" approach, which sometimes incorporates "falling," has met some success in parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, India and elsewhere.

Carroll argues that even "falling" has biblical and historical precedent, and he cites King Saul (I Samuel 19), the apostles John (Revelation 1) and Paul (Acts 26), and 18th century reformer John Wesley as Christians who experienced "falling."

Such evidence is too weak to support the practice, counter Rankin and FMB trustees. But Southern Baptists should allow what the Bible does not expressly prohibit, Carroll says.

While the Foreign Mission Board says the Bible is the bottom line, Carroll and others warn that won't solve the dilemma.

"What are they going to do when missionaries begin praying over handkerchiefs and handling snakes, because there is biblical precedence for those?" Carroll asked.

Keith Parks, Jerry Rankin's predecessor as FMB president, predicted the mission board will continue to struggle with where to draw the line. "If Jerry is the ultimate interpreter of what is biblical, that's a slippery slope," said Parks, now coordinator of global missions for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "An agency has to have more to stand on."

Yet Parks would not fault the FMB for firing Carroll. "I'm not critical of what Jerry and the board have done. In their circumstance, they probably did what they had to do," said Parks, who said the CBF has not yet confronted the issue.

Parks said FMB policy on charismatic practices, written under his administration, is purposefully ambiguous. "I tried to avoid having an exact policy in order to have some flexibility with the missionaries," said Parks, FMB president from 1980 to 1992.

Rankin himself benefitted from that flexible policy in the early 1990s. While serving as area director -- and Carroll's supervisor -- in Southern Asia and the Pacific, Rankin was confronted by FMB administrators about his own private charismatic experiences and his alleged endorsement of charismatic mission methods. Rankin had invited Lawrence Kong, a charismatic pastor from Singapore who later became Carroll's mentor, to address a conference for FMB missionaries. He also encouraged missionaries to attend another conference featuring charismatic leader John Wimber, founder of the controversial Vineyard movement.

Rankin insists those events were intended to inform missionaries about the charismatic movement and its mission methods, not to endorse the movement. Yet he was almost fired over the issue in a confrontation with FMB administrator Bill Wakefield, according to FMB administrators and missionaries involved. The charismatic question also surfaced during Rankin's election as FMB president in 1993.

Some missionaries and administrators expected the FMB under Rankin to show an openness to charismatic practices on the mission field. The opposite may be true, if the Carroll firing is an indication.

Rankin downplayed the firing, which he said is an isolated incident and not a test case for the FMB or power evangelism.

Missions professor Justice Anderson served with Carroll's parents as missionaries in Argentina -- "I helped raise that boy" -- but Anderson predicted most missionaries will accept the firing as warranted. "When they see what these [charismatic] practices do in the national conventions, I think they are going to understand," he said. Now director of the World Missions Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Anderson taught Charles Carroll. "He was one of our prized students. ... He just went too far."

Keith Parks said the firing has a down side. "It will create more fear among most missionaries. They will tend to be quiet about what they are doing."

Carroll predicted the results will be mixed. "Some of them will feel safe, more comfortable, now that the line has been drawn and they know how far they can go. Others will be afraid because they have crossed the line. Some will be disturbed. Some will be mad. I had one who is currently serving say, 'That must mean I'm next.'"

## **PART III**

### **Most missionaries cautious about 'signs and wonders'**

By Greg Warner and Bob Allen

(ABP) -- When worshipers in his Singapore church began falling to the floor as he laid hands on them and prayed, Pastor Charles Carroll said he resisted.

"I was holding people up, because I didn't want them to fall," recalled Carroll, a Southern Baptist missionary in Singapore for 13 years. Taught to distrust such charismatic expressions in worship, Carroll was skeptical. "And then I said, if God is doing this, I'd better get out of the way."

Carroll, pastor of Community of Praise Baptist Church, and his wife, Sharon, were fired as missionaries Dec. 12 by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Trustees of the FMB said "falling down" -- in which a worshiper falls to the ground in a trance-like state attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit -- is not biblical and is "outside the generally accepted practices of Southern Baptists."

It is believed to be only the second time an FMB missionary has been fired for doctrinal reasons.

The Foreign Mission Board allows charismatic practices in a missionary's private experience, but a missionary can be fired if he or she practices or teaches those experiences publicly, or advocates experiences that Southern Baptists view as lacking "sound biblical justification," said FMB President Jerry Rankin.

Missionaries of the FMB are screened for charismatic tendencies during their appointment. But some adopt those practices, at least in private, while on the mission field.

How many? No one knows.

Carroll said FMB administrators concede "hundreds" of missionaries pray in tongues.

No one suggests that charismatic practices -- speaking in tongues, prayer for healing, exorcisms and the like -- are rampant among FMB missionaries. Most missionaries reportedly are opposed to those practices, and even fewer endorse "falling."

But, Carroll insists, "There are missionaries getting away with the same things I got fired for."

Like most Southern Baptists, Carroll said, he was closed to charismatic practices for most of his life. "If you had told me I'd be fired for this, I never would have believed you," he said. Then he experienced a spiritual renewal in 1989. When he started the Singapore church the next year, some charismatic practices were introduced, and later, due in part to the influence of visiting U.S. preachers, the "falling" became a more frequent occurrence.

The practice of "falling" on the mission field is rare but not unheard of. It came to the attention of many Southern Baptists in 1994, when the FMB's Commission magazine published a picture of a woman "slain in the Spirit" during a Baptist worship service in Argentina. The accompanying story talked about "la uncion" or "the anointing" -- the charismatic phenomenon that is becoming prevalent among Argentine Baptists.

At least 20 percent and perhaps 60 percent of the churches in the Argentine Evangelical Baptist Convention are charismatic. But critics say the movement, which emerged in Argentina in the early 1990s through the influence of American evangelist Benny Hinn, has actually hurt evangelism.

"I worked for 15 years in Argentina with a sense we were on the verge of a spiritual awakening," said former missionary Bob Garrett. "Unfortunately, I think it was derailed because of people who call themselves charismatics abusing people's confidence. ... Ever since it arrived, evangelicals have ceased to talk about God sending a great revival and bringing people to Christ. Instead they are talking about whether or not you have gotten the unction. What a tragedy."

Such misgivings have fueled Baptist opposition to charismatics over the years. Few Baptists deny the miraculous. But they bristle when certain miracles or spiritual gifts are prescribed as necessary for everyone or sought as ends in themselves, rather than means to an end.

The charismatic movement "misses the boat," said Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, "because it doesn't understand the most poignant exhibition of God's power, the greatest miracle of all, is still the new birth. When the emphasis gets on signs and wonders instead of the most powerful miracle, then the shoe is on the wrong foot."

Charismatic practices on the mission field have become an important issue because of "power evangelism," a trend in missions in which healings, speaking in tongues and deliverance from demons are used to attract unbelievers to Christianity by persuading them of the power of God. "Power" tactics have proven effective evangelistic tools in parts of the world historically resistant to the gospel, advocates say.

Power evangelism's chief proponents "are quite biblical" in their focus on spiritual warfare, said Thomas Wang, international chairman of "AD 2000 and Beyond," a coalition that unites Southern Baptists and other Christian groups committed to world evangelization. But not all who teach and practice spiritual manifestations are as helpful, he warned. "Some brothers are carrying this to the extreme," said Wang, a native of China now living in the United States. "That is something we want to avoid."

According to ex-missionary Bob Garrett, who now teaches missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the baseline for evaluating the miraculous is if the phenomenon has a precedent in the New Testament and if it brings people to faith in Christ or strengthens believers.

When "signs and wonders" emerge spontaneously and unexpectedly on the mission field, not even the critics reject them out of hand. The Shantung revival earlier this century, involving FMB missionaries to China, was such a case in which God reportedly used "manifestations" -- including "falling down" -- to inspire belief.

"I cannot dispute Shantung," Garrett said. "God knocked down some key people. But they didn't expect anyone to repeat it."

Some modern "manifestation" movements overseas may be little more than exported Pentecostalism, critics say. Such is the case in Argentina, said Garrett. And some observers, including FMB leaders, view the charismatic occurrences in Charles Carroll's church as heavily induced by visits from Wallace Henley, a charismatic Baptist pastor from Houston.

Carroll and Henley dispute that characterization.

But the similarities between the new "signs and wonders" trend on the mission field and the American charismatic movement have led some to ask if power evangelism, rather than being the long-sought key to evangelizing resistant regions of the world, is merely Pentecostalism in new garb.

Rankin of the FMB acknowledges power evangelism has its place, but he anticipates most Southern Baptist missionaries who work in resistant cultures will continue to rely on the more traditional "relational" approach to winning converts and avoid the "confrontational" style of power evangelism.

Avery Willis, the FMB's overseas vice president, is an advocate of "spiritual warfare," but he warns that a focus on manifestations, "if you take it too far, can be counterproductive."

Equally dangerous, however, is "throwing the baby out with the bath water," added Thomas Wang of A.D. 2000. "Because of overreaction, many people have stopped talking about the Holy Spirit because of fear of being labeled radicals. Many times we are caught in between. We need more spiritual power to deal with the principalities and powers, but we really hesitate to be caught up in an extreme."

Wang said proponents of power evangelism have a needed message. "I am happy that these brothers are reminding us that we are fighting primarily a spiritual battle," he said. "Those advocating spiritual warfare, if they are based on the Bible ... they will not be too wrong."