The Wheel of Life:
Applying contextual missionary principles to New Spirituality

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Synopsis:
This paper explores the ways in which the contextual missionary principles of incarnation and dialogue, widely embraced in overseas and cross-cultural mission, can be applied locally. The paper looks particularly at the ways in which these methods have been adopted in outreach to alternative spiritual seekers and New Spirituality adherents by the Community of Hope.

Outline:
During 10 years of outreach to people involved in New Spirituality (often referred to as the New Age movement), the Community of Hope has developed a model of critically contextualized mission which is similar to that outlined by Paul Hiebert\(^1\). While Hiebert is concerned with the use of critical contextualization as a tool for discipleship, the Community of Hope has applied the same principles to the development of missiological resources. This process has involved three key steps:
1. Developing an understanding of the missiological context of New Spirituality
2. Allowing scripture to inform our understanding of the context
3. Discovering ways of articulating the gospel using the language and experience of the New Spirituality

Developing an understanding of the New Spirituality has involved intensive research into the various elements which shape this movement, and extensive dialogue with proponents of New Spirituality. It has required an awareness that New Spirituality, as an inherently post-modern movement, will often appropriate and reinterpret elements of older spiritual systems, including Eastern religions, nature religions, Wicca, Paganism and Christianity.

Our engagement of scripture begins in an engagement with Creation theology. We note that the creation is intended to worship God, and take assurance that the various elements of the creation are not enemies of the Gospel, but servants of it. The Gospels demonstrate Jesus’ repeated practice of investing the natural realm with supernatural significance, through his parables particularly. We note Jesus repeated practice of giving theological or Christological meaning to ordinary things, sayings and stories. We note also the example of Paul in Acts 17, and take this as a model for our own practice.

Out of this engagement with the context of New Spirituality and with Scripture, the Community of Hope has developed a number of tools that use the forms and language familiar to New Spirituality practitioners in order to present the Gospel. One such tool is the Wheel of Life, in which gemstones are set within the framework of a mandala in order to invite exploration of the spiritual journey. The presentation of this paper will include a discussion of the elements of the Wheel of Life, and a demonstration of its use as a missiological resource.

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1. New Spiritualities: mapping the territory.

We live in a time of extraordinary change, in which the social, cultural and intellectual maps are being radically redrawn. Most Western societies have shared in this upheaval, but its spiritual consequences are perhaps nowhere so clearly seen as they are in Australia.

The intellectual or philosophical shift is epitomised by the term ‘post-modernity’. This term points us firstly to that which has preceded it - ‘modernity’. This term is used to describe an intellectual milieu in which truth and reason hold sway. From the time of Newton, if not from Copernicus, scientific method stood as the supposedly objective arbiter of truth. Belief was couched in rational and propositional language, and had as it’s object those doctrines whose truth was objectively demonstrable. This rationalism was overtaken in the mid 20th Century by a new ethos; one that seeks to engage the whole person, not only the intellect. This ‘post-modern’ approach seeks to affirm and celebrate the whole array of emotional and physical needs, not only the intellect.

At the same time, the social map has been dramatically redrawn. During the ‘modern’ period, marriage was the social norm, and most marriages were contracted relatively early in adulthood, and tended to endure in most cases. The past few decades have seen major upheaval in the area of social organization. People are entering into marriage at a later age, and deferring child-bearing still later. At the same time, there has been an apparent shift in the expectations of marriage, with greatly increased numbers giving vent to their dissatisfaction by walking away from the marriage. Serial monogamy is becoming a commonplace, and marriage itself has lost the privileged status it once enjoyed, giving way to a complex web of largely interest-based relationships.

All this has occurred against a background of cultural change. Technological advances and economic prosperity have created a cultural context in which we are dazzled by a hitherto unimaginable array of choices. Western culture is profoundly consumerist, and delights in the vast smörgåsbord of possibilities offered in almost every area of life, including the realm of spirituality.

In the context of these changes, Christian churches have noticed a marked decline in membership, and have perceived an increasing resistance to their evangelistic endeavours. It is tempting to conclude from this that contemporary Australians are less spiritually aware or attuned than their forbears. Such an assumption is not, however, supported by the facts. Rather, we find that here, as elsewhere, things are in a state of flux. There is certainly less interest in organized and institutional religion, as represented by the church. But there is, at the same time, a growing interest in spirituality, particularly what is broadly known as ‘New Spirituality’.

Browsing the Spiritual Smörgåsbord

Defining New Spiritualities is inherently difficulty. It is of the essence of New Spirituality that it is open-ended, eclectic, and flexible. There are no ‘boundaries’ to be defined. All we can hope to do, particularly within the scope of a paper such as this, is identify some of the key sources and describe some of the practices associated with these new spiritualities. But this is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and any attempt to define it must necessarily be provisional and tentative.

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2 This term includes, but is not exhausted by, what has traditionally been known as the ‘New Age’. In Religious and non-religious spirituality in the Western world ("New Age") Sydney: Morling Theological College, 2004 (Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 45) 21 the editors note that the label ‘New Age’ is eschewed by most who engage in the practices we associate with the term. They propose the term ‘New spiritualities’ as a more acceptable alternative, a proposal which will be adopted throughout this paper.
with New Spirituality. Such a description cannot be exhaustive, but it can hope to be suggestive of the nature and dynamic of the movement.

New Spirituality draws on a variety of religious traditions and other sources. In some cases, ideas and practices are adopted fully formed. In others, the language of the tradition attaches to a representation which is in some way at variance to the received tradition. For this reason, apparently familiar language, adopted for use by New Spiritualities, must be approached with caution. This is particularly true for concepts derived from the Christian tradition, where Christological language, and the Christ figure to which it refers, are often freely appropriated, but with a weak or non-existent understanding of the incarnation.

The Jewish tradition is represented through the mystic tradition of the Kabala, and there is often engagement with the spiritual teachings and practice of Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam.

Eastern religions are very strongly represented. Hindu concepts of Karma and Reincarnation are freely appropriated, but most often ‘renovated’ in the light of either consumerist demands or the optimism inherent in secular humanism. The study of the Chakras, energy sources deep within the body, is also widely practiced. Buddhism is another well from which New Spirituality draws deeply, particularly in the area of meditation. Other disciplines draw on the Chinese tradition. These include Feng Shui, which has to do with the optimising of energy flows throughout the environment, acupuncture, the use of Chinese herbal medicines, the use of the I Ching in predicting the future, and various forms of massage.

New Spirituality is often identified with the Occult, and it is true that some occult practices can be identified in the mix. The use of psychics or clairvoyants is common, and many would use various aids to clairvoyance including crystals, Tarot cards, palmistry, face reading, foot reading and numerology. Alongside these there is also the practice of astrology.

The emphasis on health and well-being in New Spiritualities is manifest in an array of healing therapies. These include aura soma, the practice of physical and emotional healing through colour therapy; various forms of massage, and herbal remedies.

Nature based religions also make a substantial contribution to New Spirituality. The use of crystals for their reputed physiological, emotional or spiritual effects is widespread. For some, exploration of Pagan worship practices or Goddess worship are part of the journey.

Other elements of New Spiritualities may include exploration of past lives, psychic surgery, and tools from the Human Potential movement, such as the use of affirmations and creative visualisation.

In the face of such extraordinary diversity, the observer might wonder if there was any unifying thread in New Spirituality. In reality, it is the practitioners themselves who form that thread, united by a common commitment to health and well-being, to spiritual understanding and to living well. Beyond these generalities, we dare not assume. Understanding can only come by engaging in conversation with the seeker in New Spirituality, allowing them to define the parameters of their own spirituality.
2. Christian Responses to the Context of New Spirituality in the West

There have been a variety of responses to the changing context of western Spirituality. ‘New Age’, ‘Alternate Spirituality’, ‘New Spirituality’ and now ‘Occulture’ have been some of the phrases used to described re-emerging spiritual vitality undergirding many western contexts. The experience of changing terminology highlights the difficulty and the flexibility of what is happening.

Generally Christianity has offered four broad responses to New Spiritualities:

i) Ignore
ii) Rejection
iii) Uncritical Acceptance
iv) Missional Engagement

The stance which has had the most influential impact upon the church has been rejection. But there are some fundamental flaws in continuing to maintain a stance which is built upon rejection and after outlining the four perspectives, reasons will be given as to why it is inadequate.

i) Ignore

For a long period the church simply ignored New Religious movements and New Spiritualities. For the most part this highlights the sociological influence that the church has had on mainstream Western culture. While the church has been the major spiritual player, it has had no need to ‘worry’ about other small insignificant groups. There was an exception in Van Baalen’s Chaos of the Cults. His comment that “cults are the unpaid bills of the church” still has much to teach Christians about the cultural critique of New Religious Movements and New Spirituality. The church has not always behaved according to the good news community of Jesus Christ and people who are hurt or damaged by, or critical of, the church have valid complaints that need hearing and forgiveness. They are not always wrong or anti-Christian criticisms.

Melton has highlighted how ignorance has contributed to the challenge facing Christians in this New Religious context. He argues that Christians must take this challenge seriously in our theological discussion and the way we train people for ministry. Likewise Hexham and Poewe-Hexham have shown that New Religious Movements are now a part of global cultures and are by no means insignificant. With the changing context of Western Christianity, ignorance is no longer an option if it ever was, as a response to New Spiritualities.

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8 This phrase has been brought to attention by Philip Johnson and quoted in Lausanne Occasional Paper 45, 28.
ii) Rejection

Again there are two broad approaches of Christians whose response to New Spirituality is rejection:
(a) Uncritical Rejection and (b) Critical Rejection.
Johnson has outlined 7 apologetic responses by evangelicals to New Spirituality with one response as missional. The other six could be broken into the two categories above.11

(a) Uncritical Rejection

Uncritical rejection responses are those which are based upon inaccurate understanding or information about New Spirituality. An example would be those who would argue for New Spirituality belonging to a part of an end-time conspiracy to take control of the world. Another example would be those who argue for spiritual warfare as the model of engagement. The Behavioralist approach is based on brain washing theory and again the evidence in support for this is highly controversial and could be used to point the finger at legitimate Christian movements. Johnson highlights the strengths of accepting the authority of the Bible on the one hand, and accepting the reality of spiritual warfare on the other, but shows the serious flaws of trying to follow these models for engaging people in New Spirituality. They tend to make generalisations about the nature of New Spirituality like the suggestion that all those who are involved in it are immoral.

(b) Critical Rejection

Critical Rejection would be those approaches that evaluate New Spirituality from the dominant Christian perspective. Johnson calls this the heresy-rationalist approach but also Apostate Testimonies and Cultural Apologetics could also be placed within this category. Critical rejection attempts to highlight the differences between Christianity and New Spirituality. This is often done by comparison between orthodox Christian beliefs and deviant beliefs and the conversation is usually one way. Equally, it could be the approach that simply outlines why Christianity is a better worldview than the New Spirituality.12 Former members or adherents in New Spirituality also highlight the differences and the dangers of belonging to such a community. Critical rejection is a serious attempt to engage with the phenomenon of New Spirituality as a movement but this is usually through the critiquing of ideas.13 The strength of the approach is that it highlights the different belief patterns of Christians and people involved in New Spirituality.14 The weaknesses of this approach are many, with numerous Christians acknowledging its limitations and calling for a change.15 Some of the main points raised showing the limitations of critical rejection approaches are that it can treat

12 For an example see James W. Sire, The Universe Next Door (Illinois: IVP, 1988).
people as ideas that can be dismissed without any relationship; and it often does not take into account the critique that New Spirituality brings upon the church. A serious challenge and critique to Christian responses is the accusation that it is based solely on rationality. A critical response usually accepts this as recognition of truth versus error or rationality versus irrationality. But again numerous commentators recognise the futility of this argument.

Saliba’s evaluation of Christian responses to New Spirituality notes that the most influential response is rejection but there are also more balanced responses. Saliba evaluates approaches to New Spirituality from what he calls Evangelical/Fundamentalist; Mainline & Orthodox and Catholic Traditions. Under the category of Evangelical/Fundamentalist he suggests three broad approaches (i) Confrontational; (ii) Apologetic; and (iii) pastoral. His evaluation of confrontational and apologetic responses is that they often show poor scholarship, are far too generalised, too one sided towards the negative, and often erroneous. There is little to be gained by simply restating Christian orthodoxy over and over again and continual confrontation is self defeating and increases hostility to the good news. His challenge is whether a theology of religions will be broadened to incorporate New Spiritualities, but the biggest failure is that they have not been witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ.

iii) Uncritical Acceptance

Drane and Saliba are quite critical of those who willingly incorporate New Spirituality with Christianity as though they are compatible. Saliba contends that this approach does not do justice to either people in New Spirituality or to the Christian faith. The strength of acceptance is that it recognises deficiencies within Christian experiences of spirituality, as well as attempts of New Spirituality to correct those deficiencies. Christian experience has been separated from social justice or ecological responsibility or sexuality or feminism. There has been a valid challenge from New Spirituality about the weakness of Christianity to bring about the social and personal transformation that it claims. Many adherents in New Spirituality actually see the church as part of the problem contributing to the world’s problems.

iv) Missional Engagement

Missional Engagement is the attempt to explore the possibilities of an encounter between New Spirituality and Christianity that is mutually beneficial. Again, there seems to be two different approaches that could be categorised as Missional engagement. Firstly are those Christians who agree with some of the themes found in New Spirituality and their compatibility with Christian faith. Rob Frost explores a missional engagement in two ways. Firstly, in his book, A Closer look at New Age Spirituality, he attempts to show how his experience of being a Christian answers the challenges as well as facing the critique from those interested in New Spirituality. Another example is essence, a six week exploration for those interested in New Spirituality to begin to experience the holistic nature of Christian faith through Jesus.

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16 See Michael Raiter, Stirrings of the Soul.
17 An example of recent work which interacts with the challenging critique from New Spirituality is Rob Frost, A Closer look at New Age Spirituality (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2001).
18 Pastoral seems closely related to missional responses.
and Christian mystics. This kind of missional engagement explores links between the wider search for spirituality and Christian experience.

Secondly, another type of missional engagement is what might be called incarnational mission approaches. The Community of Hope is an example of this kind of approach. Incarnational mission is the attempt to develop mission based on the model of Jesus as God incarnate, the method of entering into a culture and world view and the message of good news through Jesus. A key component is that of building bridges between the gospel and people in New Spirituality. That is not only those who are exploring spirituality but also those who have become practitioners of New Spirituality. The best example of following the principles of incarnational mission are be to seen in the publication using Tarot. This book is written to encourage those for whom this is an integral part of their spirituality as an encounter of the message of the gospel. Other attempts used at Mind Body Spirit Festivals are an exploration of spirituality through Soma Aura and the Wheel of Life. The wheel of Life will now be presented as an example of incarnational mission.

3. The Wheel of life.

“Discover the message of gemstones on your pathway to spiritual wholeness.”

In this presentation, we use two elements of contemporary spirituality to provide a context for introducing the Christian message. The two elements are distinct, and each plays a complementary role.

1. The Mandala, or Wheel of Life

The presentation uses a cloth marked out as a mandala, or wheel of life. There are two circular bands, one at the outer perimeter, and a second defining an ‘inner circle’ about 15 centimetres in diameter. Between the two circles there are eight ‘spokes’ dividing the wheel into equally sized wedges.

Use of this background provides opportunities for discussion about the nature of the spiritual journey. For those familiar with Tibetan Buddhism, the mandala is an intricate 2-dimensional picture of an ideal world, the various elements of which are used as foci for meditation. The mandala can also be a symbol of the interior life, and in particular of the path of spiritual development. In Celtic and Cherokee spiritualities, the wheel of life represents the constant movement and change of life, within the context of which the individual is called to find their place and grow spiritually. In the medieval period, the wheel of life, depicting the changing fortunes

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22 Rob Frost, essence (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002).
28 http://www.paganspath.com/magik/wheel.htm
of human life and experience, was often depicted on the walls of Cathedrals. Brief discussion of the wheel as presented will both illicit some indication of the spiritual context from which our conversation partner comes, and allow us to begin to elucidate our own understanding of the wheel as a symbol of the journey.

2. Crystals / Gemstones

On this background a number of gemstones, are arranged. It is common for practitioners of contemporary spirituality to attribute particular meanings or clusters of meanings to different crystals and gemstones. The stones used in this presentation have been chosen specifically because these meanings can be used to explore the spiritual journey, and to introduce a Christian element into that exploration. It needs to be noted that the clusters of meaning attaching to various stones may share significant areas of commonality. It is relatively rare for only one stone to participate in a particular realm of meaning. The selection of stones has been governed not only by the meanings associated with them, but also by pragmatic factors such as cost and availability. We also note that the range of meanings (spiritual, emotional and physical) associated with a particular stone is often much broader than the particular attributes emphasized in our presentations.

The presentation uses 11 different gemstones. Two, Amethyst and the variety of Obsidian known as Apache Tears, provide an overall context. The others are arranged in the eight ‘wedges’ of the wheel, and in the centre circle.

Amethyst
Amethyst has been described as “one of the most spiritual stones, promoting love of the divine, giving insights into its true nature, and encouraging selflessness and spiritual wisdom.” It is “customarily associated with … spiritual awareness, meditative and psychic abilities and inner peace.” In our presentation, Amethyst represents the sincerity of intention essential for spiritual growth. This sincerity symbolically surrounds the journey, with amethysts forming a rim around the whole wheel, and also an inner circle around the centre or hub of the wheel.

Obsidian Apache Tears
The Apache Tear is a variety of Obsidian. As such, it shares in the general symbolic realm of Black Obsidian, which is said to develop “practicality and pragmatism, teaching us to get in touch with reality, to strip ourselves of illusions and to deal with the earth plane effectively. … Black obsidian encourages us to face our faults in order to correct them.” Apache Tears point us to humility, an essential quality for spiritual growth. It reminds us of our imperfections, and of our need to acknowledge and address them. Obsidian Apache Tears form the ‘ribs’ or ‘spokes’ of the wheel.

As we move from the general qualities of sincerity and humility to the particular dimensions of the spiritual journey, we consider eight different stones in turn. In using the ‘wheel of life’, the process is one of conversation. The meaning of the stone, and its implications, are explained. The conversation partner is invited to reflect on his or her the ways in which these elements have been at play in their own life experience.

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Moonstone (the inner self)
Grounded in sincerity and humility, the spiritual journey must begin with a turning inward, an honest appraisal of the inner self. Moonstone symbolises that inner journey. It is said that this stone “makes conscious the unconscious and promotes intuition and empathy,” and that “… Moonstone reflects our feelings back to us, so we can get in touch with our emotions in order to use wisely our innermost feelings.” On the Wheel of life, it represents the invitation to acknowledge what we are, our strengths and weaknesses, and the potential we have.

Rutilated Quartz
Attributed with the power of “promoting spiritual growth,” Rutilated Quartz symbolises regeneration. To experience such regeneration or renewal we need to focus on intentionally growing to become the person we want to be, a process which continues throughout the journey as we reflect on the meaning of all the stones.

Blue Lace Agate
According to one writer, “Blue lace agate is associated with hope, unity, cleansing, harmony, protection, optimism, positive thinking, appreciation for nature, smooth energy flow, joy, truth, purification and promptness.” All this we sum up in one word: grace. Grace involves the unconditional acceptance of others. It comes from a heart of compassion, and is shown in attitudes of tolerance and forgiveness. It is part of the process of finding harmony and peace within ourselves as well as with others.

Clear Quartz
Renewal of our lives requires a purging of unburdening of all that makes us unattractive. These burdens could include such things as undesired personality traits, attitudes, pains and hurts from relationships and experiences in life. Through purifying oneself we become free to be transformed into the person we want to be and gain greater clarity in our search. The Clear Quartz symbolises the purity we seek.

Citrine
In the wheel of life, Citrine represents self sacrifice. We should give of ourselves to others in an attitude of selflessness. Self-sacrifice is a direct result of seeing the value of and respecting others, and being willing to put them before our own needs and desires.

Lapis Lazuli
Lapis Lazuli “bonds relationships in love and friendship and aids expressing feelings and emotions.” In the journey so far we have reached the point of deep and meaningful friendships and relationships. We all have a need to be loved as well as a need to give love. It is through our friendship with others that we come to know ourselves.

Peridot
This small green stone “[assists] one in the lessening of anger or jealousy, inspiring happiness within the self and delight in the nature of ones life.” Peridot represents inner peace. It is the search for inner peace and for meaning beyond which often

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starts people on a spiritual journey. We seek peace within ourselves, with those around us, and with the spiritual realm.

**Carnelian**
Carnelian “symbolizes benevolence and good will…. It alleviates hostilities, irritability and melancholy. It enhances generosity, responsiveness, and receptivity.”

This stone symbolizes joy. As we develop and progress through the journey, dealing with the issues and relationships within our lives, we begin to experience more joy. But this joy does not bring us to total fulfilment.

Because we do not find total fulfilment in the search for meaning, we lack completeness within ourselves. This lack of peace and understanding, leads many people to begin the journey again, bringing themselves back to the point of self reflection and contemplation, as represented in the moonstone. So they continue to search within themselves for completeness and satisfaction, but are disappointed because for ultimate fulfilment we need to look beyond ourselves.

**Rose Quartz** (unconditional, perfect love)
Ultimately the centre and focus of all the symbols come together in the Rose Quartz, which sits at the centre of the wheel. It “is the stone of unconditional love and infinite peace.”

Unconditional love gives total fulfilment, but we are unable to give it to ourselves, nor can we get it from any other person. However, we can experience the unconditional love and be empowered, when we attune ourselves with the spiritual realm. But this needs careful thought because there is much in the spiritual realm that will not provide fulfilment.

The way to find answers to the meaning and force behind life is to explore the life and claims of Jesus. Through Jesus we can experience perfect and unconditional love. Through him we find fulfilment, and the power to develop in the areas of our life symbolized by the gemstones. Through Jesus we can know peace, acceptance, meaning and joy. Jesus is the force behind life and he offers us fulfillment in our spiritual journey: anywhere, anytime. The Spirit of Jesus is also available to those who would call on him to provide the power to live a truly spiritual life. We can make a sacred place for us to call of the Spirit of Jesus to empower our life to seek personal transformation, to live for others.

**4. Questions, Challenges and Dangers**
The risks of Contextualization are many and varied with syncretism seen as a major problem. Syncretism has usually been understood negatively as the adaptation of new ideas and teachings of Christianity within the existing cultural framework which ends up in some kind of hybrid mix between Christianity and culture. However, syncretism is not only something that is negative or destructive. The difficulty is evaluating when syncretism becomes destructive. Shenk has helpfully distinguished between constructive and destructive syncretism.

Shenk applies these terms in the following way: “The church must always adapt to its culture in such a way that it lives and communicates the gospel credibly. That is constructive syncretism. The church must always adapt to its culture in such a way that it lives and communicates the gospel credibly. That is constructive syncretism.

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destructive syncretism.” All contextual theology is syncretistic if it is to be understood, accepted and allowed the possibility to transform people’s lives and cultures. The goal and purpose of mission is that of constructive syncretism (contextualization) where the gospel penetrates new cultural contexts and begins to move them towards God’s ideals for humanity. Constructive syncretism is also the goal of mission within existing cultures where the gospel continues to penetrate into deeper levels.

Any attempt at contextualization or incarnational mission is bound to raise questions. This is the very nature of the approach. For some Christians there is little doubt that the Community of Hope have compromised their beliefs and values in the gospel and syncretised with New Spirituality culture. The danger of syncretism is always before contextualized or Incarnational models of mission. Yet there is a certain tension with every attempt to contextualize- how far is too far? There is no alternative to being involved in contextualization without the risk of syncretism. Good incarnational approaches to culture are called ‘contextualization’ bad models are called ‘syncretism’. The gospel comes to us through culture and the risk of compromise is an ongoing challenge facing the church. There is little doubt that the Christianity has had a huge impact upon Western Culture and civilization. On the other hand, there is little doubt that we continually compromise the good news in our attempts to be missional communities. Hiebert has developed an approach which needs further exploration and development in the life of missional communities called metatheology.

Metatheology has four elements to it. Firstly, Hiebert suggests that the bible is the foundation for all theologies despite their cultural context. While there might be flexibility in the way theologies grow in their context they all find their source from the bible. Secondly, the differences are discussed and dealt with as they meet different needs and situations. Thirdly, an international discussion between Christians from different cultural contexts emerges as they challenge each other to move towards a fuller gospel. They will see each other weakness much clearer than can be seen within individual contexts. Hiebert calls these groups ‘hermeneutical communities’ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they listen and challenge each other. Fourthly, the voice of people at the cultural margins needs to be incorporated so that the gospel being presented may be examined and challenged if necessary. This is a kind of ‘prophetic critique’ seen through the ministry of Jesus to the culture of his day.

The questions and challenges facing the Community of Hope are the same as any attempt to develop a contextualized theology. One of the questions raised is whether we are being true to incarnational mission or whether we are simply using techniques or tools to build a bridge? Can we truly enter into the subculture of New Spirituality and become ‘Pagan Christians’, or ‘Wiccan Christians’? Can the crystals presented in the Wheel of Life be developed to become a spiritual exercise in discipleship?

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45 Hiebert, Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts, 113.


through meditation, scripture and prayer? Johnson has acknowledged the difficulty the Community of Hope has of forming community with those who would like to explore more the claims of Jesus but have no chance of ever going near a church. These are some of the questions we continue to struggle with as we share the gospel with people in New Spirituality. At the same time the Community of Hope often finds the church asking us to defend our methods. The Tarot has not been utilised as much in Melbourne as in Sydney because of the uncertainty of the church. Yet the same people find the Wheel of Life and Soma Aura stimulating and a wonderfully creative opportunity to share Jesus. What is the difference?

**Conclusion**

The challenge facing the church with the growth of New Spirituality is not new. Whenever the church has met new missional contexts it has choices to make as to how it should respond. The changes within Western culture call to be responded with all of the experience and knowledge from cross cultural missions. As Partridge concludes:

“To truly understand and to effectively communicate, one must be able to get under the skin of a culture, must feel drawn to people who belong to that culture, must be able to appreciate the attraction of that culture, and must be able to interpret the language of that culture. Detached head knowledge and half-digested facts are not enough.”

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