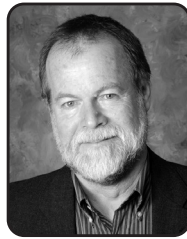


“They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’”

Mark 1:27

Unclean Spirits

Here in Timor, we believe in unclean spirits. If a child is often ill, if crops and cattle fail to thrive, if nothing seems to go right in a household, bad spirits are always a possible explanation. Years ago, our church acquired the land on which the seminary now stands because it was said to be haunted, the site of “black waters” harboring dangerous spirits. It was a triple bargain: the land was cheap, it included a spring to supply water to the school, and the church could give witness that we believe Christ is stronger than the unclean spirits. “Unclean” is a good word, because most people see these spirits as forces of nature that are not necessarily evil but will do harm when they are out of place. Dirt on your carpet is “unclean,” but dirt in your garden is “fertile”— even if it’s the same dirt.



JOHN
CAMPBELL-NELSON

This understanding proved helpful when the church faced questions about the coronavirus: “Is the virus a punishment from God?” No, the church answered, it is part of God’s creation. But it belongs in the forest from which it came, not among humans. GMIT, the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor, has worked hard to educate and to give aid and comfort to people during this trying time, neither demonizing the virus nor offering a false sense of security. The hardest hit have been the urban poor who rely on daily income for food and shelter. Ministry behind a mask and from a distance has challenged us all to be more creative but never once doubting that Jesus “commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

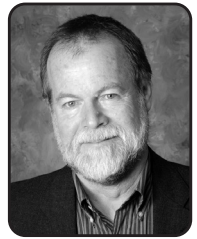
John Campbell-Nelson serves the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor. His appointment is made possible by your gifts to Disciples Mission Fund, Our Church’s Wider Mission, and your special gifts.

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