

MISSION AND POWER ENCOUNTER

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“ Because God’s children are human beings, made of blood and flesh, Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Learning from African cross-cultural settings

In June 2001 I traveled in the Democratic Republic of Congo to participate in mission training consultation including Evangelical Mennonites, Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren leaders from Angola, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, and France. Many delegates asked me to pass their greetings to Christian sisters and brothers in North America. May the Lord give you His peace!

I thank the conference for granting me this opportunity to address the issue of spiritual power conflict from a Mennonite Brethren Congolese mission perspective. It will shed light on the experiential understanding of deliverance on the African mission field. It will Highlight the African worldview as one of the key factors in the interpretation of daily spiritual power confrontation in the central region of Africa. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, power confrontation is relational. It is incarnated in very concrete forms: people driven by evil, institutions, and discriminatory societal patterns. The recent war that has killed more than two million five hundred thousand people illustrates the influence of spiritual demonic powers on the Congo. Evangelism helps the new converts to follow Christ and make a difference in caring for one another across ethnic lines. The three following cases will help us become aware of ways through which some local Christians are dealing with demonic confrontation and healing.

First confrontation

In 1969, a Congolese Mennonite Brethren family from Kikwit struggled desperately with a sick son named Gidilu. He was seized by powers that threw him on the ground and shook him violently until the boy became unconscious. His family brought him to local medical practitioners. Unfortunately, health specialists were unable to help Gidilu. They sent him home with no hope. In their despair, Gidilu’s parents invited Tata Mushima, one of their local pastors to come and pray for deliverance.

Once at the site, Tata Mushima made his way through a large crowd surrounding Gidilu. The pastor was told that Gidilu was under the attack of “bafokolu, bandoki and banganga”, meaning spiritual powers, ancestors, and with doctors. Gidilu was left speechless and foaming at the mouth. His mother and relatives were crying. They were begging the Lord to heal their son.

The pastor calmed the crowd. He read the scriptures, explaining that Christ came to free sinners from spiritual oppression. At the cross, Christ defeated Satan and his work. In today’s struggle, faith in Christ brings deliverance. The pastor broke into praises to

Christ. He was joined by a number of Christians present among the crowd. After a while, the pastor prayed for healing. He praised the Lord for bringing to Himself many unbelievers through both the spiritual and physical deliverance of Gidilu, if so was the Father's will. At the end of this prayer, Tata Mushila exorcised Gidilu and asked him to be free in the name of Jesus Christ. He called Gidilu by his name and ordered him to stand up free from all agitation. Gidilu obeyed. The pastor asked him to pronounce the name of Jesus Christ. Gidilu responded positively and was given back to his parents. The power of Christ seen through His faithful servants convinced them to trust in Christ.

Second confrontation

There are more than 7 000 Beka Christians in the tropical forest of Central African Republic. In conversation with some of their leaders, one learns that Christ needs to be presented with all His power. It is through power encounter that the Lord is enlarging His kingdom among pygmies. New converts tell a common story from pygmy background. The Bekas need security in the forest. When evangelists tell them about Christ, they believe that the good news protects them from local spiritual satanic powers: "kindoki" or witchcraft. They testify that the spoken divine word transforms their spiritual life and takes away their fear of evil powers in the forest. Christ frees and protects them against cosmic powers. Power confrontation is one of the ways by which some Beka of the Central African Republic are coming to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Third confrontation

Munedu is a young lady in her twenties. She likes spending her days in bars and her nights at funerals. She is single but has two children that she abandoned to her relatives. Everybody within her extended family believes that she is driven bay demonic powers. For the last ten years parental advice, exorcism, fasting, and prayers have not yet helped Munedu to surrender completely her life to Christ and enjoy a Christian lifestyle. Her local church is still praying for deliverance.

Missiological implications: conversion, community, and commission

Because of His crucifixion and resurrection, Christ our King helps sinners trust in Him alone, to join the extended family of God's children and to be sent among the nations.

Conversion in Christ

Cross-cultural evangelism on the African soil must proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with all its implications in overthrowing the Evil one. Christ's mission is to destroy the works of Satan. Christ proclaimed the coming of His kingdom by words and deeds. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ marks both spiritual confrontation and reconciliation. At the cross, Jesus confronted Satan. Since death is Satan's greatest weapon, that weapon must be taken from him if he and his works are to be overcome. Christ crushed the head of the ancient snake. At the cross, the last and obedient Adam disarmed the strong men, powers, and authorities. He won and released prisoners. The

public victory over Satan at Golgotha echoes the spiritual conflict started in the garden of Eden. In the beginning, the Devil defeated Adam. At the cross, the last Adam liberated men and women in triumphing over Satan.

Conversion is possible because of Christ's victory.

Christ took upon Himself our disobedience, curse, and guilt. He became sin and curse. He was punished on our behalf.

To His Father, Christ paid the price of our sins. Because of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, His Father forgives those who repent and accept to be reconciled with Him.

Through the cross, the descent into hell and the resurrection, Christ decimated Satan's weaponry. Death and guilt are defeated in Christ. He came to destroy satanic work (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8). Christ's resurrection is one of the biggest victories over Satan, his powers, and authorities. The risen Christ conquered conflictual spiritual powers; therefore, world evangelization is possible. Many unreached people groups in Africa are being transformed and liberated by the Spirit of Christ.

Community of new life

Mennonite Brethren in Africa are called to be a sign of the new covenant by reflecting, in their private and public life, Christ's victory over the powers. Our personal commitment to obey God's word and commitment to prayer undercut whatever the evil spirits want to do to slow down the advance of God's kingdom (Eph. 3:10). His Spirit reorients our will, intelligence, and emotion around Christ. He enables us to trust in the whole work of Christ. Because the Master came to deliver us from Satan, sin, and death, God's children are called to reflect kingdom values (love, justice, and service) in the world.

On the corporate level, confrontation against spiritual powers means to accept that powers that produce war, violence, injustice, greediness, oppression, indifference and discrimination have been defeated at the cross. They can not enslave the true body of Christ (Matthew 16:16-19). Liberated by Christ, the local church is called to use the keys to open God's kingdom and let the nations believe in Christ and prepare his second coming. World evangelism is one of the main eschatological conditions (Matthew 24:14).

Commission

All the people have been created in God's image. But billions of men and women living on earth in this third millenium have never heard that the Savior came to free them from eternal death. They are alienated by Satan and have missed the point. They live in sin and need to be rescued by the One who is stronger than demons and Satan. In Matthew 28, the mandate of making all the people disciples of Christ is preceded and followed by Christ kingship. The task of changing allegiance, crossing the boundary of unbelief and obeying Christ alone requires God's power.

The growing Mennonite Brethren missionary movement in Congo needs to send cross-cultural workers able to present the whole Good News: words and deeds (1 Corinthians 4:20). In an African context where the world view is dealing with fear of ancestors spirits, demonic and witch activities, evangelization should let God deal with the felt

needs of African audience. The general cultural African understanding of the universe is to divide the world into two parts : unseen and seen. Ancestor spirits and their spiritual agents bridge the spiritual and physical world. Women and men are influenced by the unseen or the Supernatural. Congolese culture is based on the relationships. People in a given village are related to other living , ancestors, ghosts, demons, spiritual beings and “Nzambi” or the Maker. Diseases are relational. One becomes sick not because of virus but because of beings that are causing sickness. The question is not what is causing sickness but who is behind the sickness in a given patient. Demons possess individuals. In this African setting where spirit powers are the key to unlock existential events, Congolese Mennonite brethren could let the Holy Spirit decide to win new converts through power demonstration (Luke 10:1-19). Theologians are called to listen to both the Scriptures and the community of faith. The former will enlighten the corporate hermeneutic of the later. Our world view needs to be transformed by God’s word. Paul describes God’s kingdom in terms of power. It consists in power (1 Corinthians 2:4). Christ has authority over the seen and unseen world. His Spirit is able to enlighten the inner life of demon possessed women and men and free them to serve God.

Congolese world view does not draw a sharp division between spirits and nature. The church is called to have discernment in its evangelism in Africa. Belief in powers is widespread in Congo. A pastoral dialogue with those who are oppressed by powers must include the corporate prayer of a local church. The prayer of Christ and the community of faith will sustain evangelists in dealing with spiritual confrontation. Christian prayer does not prepare us to spiritual war, it is the arm par excellence to win the battle against Satan (Ephesians 6:18). In Gethsemane, Christ prayed in order to resist Satan (Matthew 26 : 36- 46). The prayer of Christ and his Spirit gives hope in world evangelism (John 17; Romans 8:26, 34; Colossians 4:2. Prayer to God, our warrior is essential power encounter.

Conclusion

I draw this study to a close by reiterating the centrality of Christ in cross-cultural evangelism. He affirmed His victory over powers in stating : “I will build my church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).