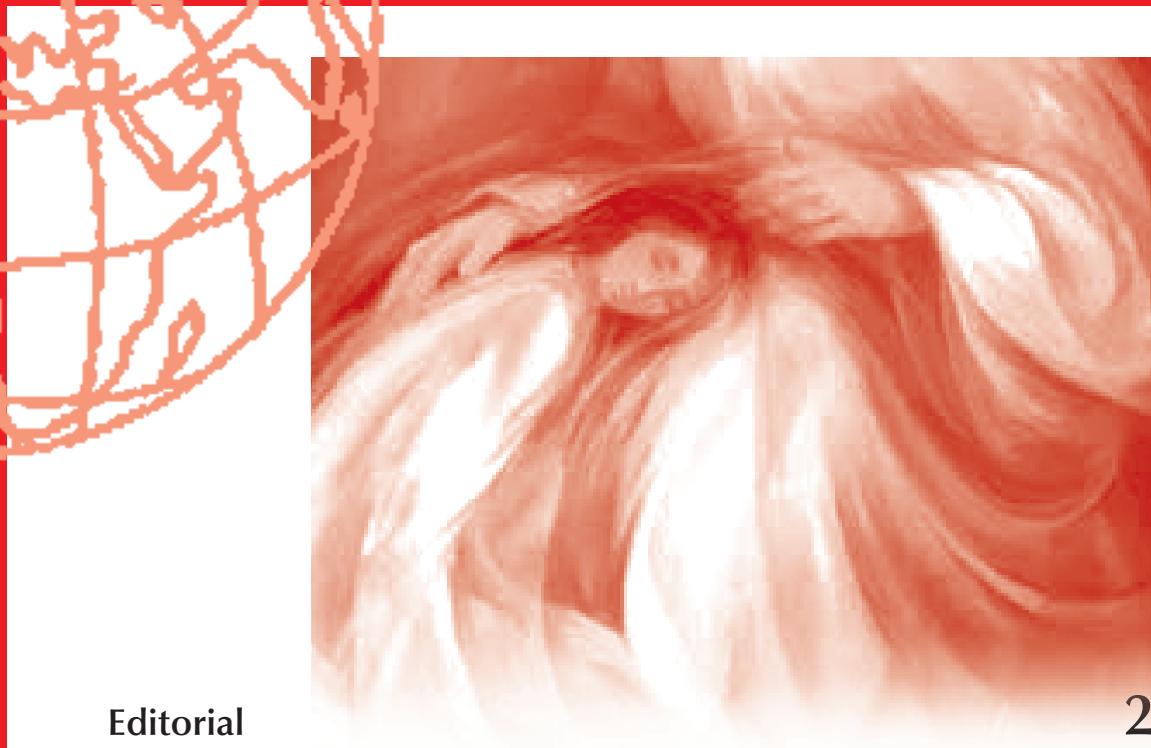


# Bulletin 2014

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SEDOS



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# Editorial

I see clearly", the Pope continues, "that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. [...] Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up" (Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ. *Interview with Pope Francis*, Monday 19 August 2013).

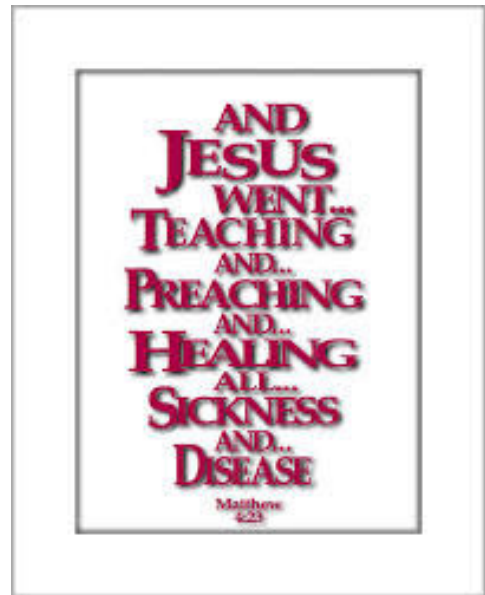
Jesus said: "I came that they may have life and, have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The Apostle Peter sums up the life and mission of Jesus in these words: "... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with the power; [and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him]" (Acts 10:38). Thomas **Malipurathu**, SVD, describes "all the constitutive elements of the saving mission of Jesus: proclamation, teaching, compassionate deeds, passion, death and Resurrection, all had one unique finality and that was the promotion of life at all levels". **"Mission as Mediating God's Healing Touch: The Polyvalent Symbolism of a Cure Miracle"**. Jesus performed miracles as works of love and mercy to show his compassion for the hapless people who flocked to listen to him.

The two subsequent articles are an attempt to create an awareness of the importance of life/health and the healing process as contextualized in Nigeria; and also the effort to articulate an appropriate Missiological praxis to support the process.

Fr. Daniel O. **Ihunnia**, MSP, from Nigeria, is preparing his doctoral degree in Missiology at the Pontifical Urban University. In linking SEDOS' Readers with the Second Vatican Council's teaching; he has courteously offered an abstract of his article: **"Breaking the Evil Yoke: a Challenge for Mission Theology in Africa"**. "The Second Vatican Council recognized and welcomed the beauty in the diversity of cultures that constitute the universal Church. As a result, various contextual theologies now reveal the inner wisdom behind local beliefs and practices which are finding their way into Christian worship. The African religious worldview is never devoid of Spirit forces that influence the general wellbeing of humans. Aimed at creating a new awareness, this article calls for informed missionary concern over the rising interest in casting out devils in African Christianity".

Fr. Frederic Chima **Mbiere** is also a Nigerian priest and he is also writing his doctoral thesis at the Pontifical Urban University. His work aims at making known the significance and the Missiological implications inherent in the sense of life/health and healing according to the IGBO world view. What is amazing in this all-inclusive study is that Fr. Frederic is underscoring the fact that for the IGBO people "sound, integral health goes beyond the physical level to embrace the supernatural, or rather a harmonious relationship between the physical and metaphysical worlds". The practice of health care takes time and it requires in a deep attitude of compassionate love.

**Dr. Pierre Ménard**, a member of the Fraternity of Lay Missionaries, in France, and an Associate of the Society of African Missions (SMA), shares their experience at St. Gregorio Clinic. Cardinal TURKSON, then Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, invited him to reopen San Gregorio clinic at BUDUBURAM Refugee Camp. The Lay Missionaries arrived as volunteers, they were nurses. Then they took the decision to remain there for some years to establish personal ties with the refugees and to live with them in a true spirit of brotherhood. This experience allowed them to overcome certain differences and engage in this community far beyond their professional duties. Indeed, this brief episode of their life has proved to be an essential time, a stage fully "dedicated" to the other, "to one of the least, to my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

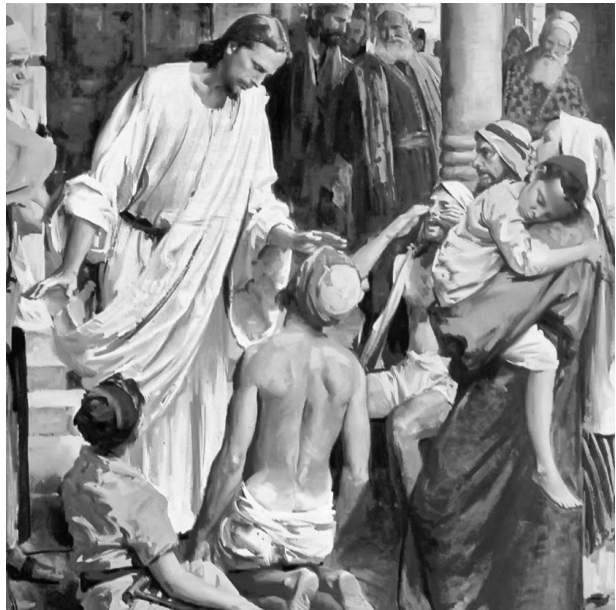


Nzenzili Lucie MBOMA, FMM  
SEDOS Executive Director

**Thomas Malipurathu, SVD**  
**Mission as Mediating God's Healing Touch:**  
**The Polyvalent Symbolism of a Cure Miracle**

**I. Jesus' Life-enhancing Mission**

When considered as a succinct summary, the Apostle Peter's portrayal of the life and mission of Jesus in Acts 10:38 ("... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [how] he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him") arguably remains unsurpassed for its depth and comprehensiveness. Peter offered this description, the author of Acts informs us, during a brief discourse that he delivered at the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea. The occasion marked an important turning point in the story of the fledgling Church. Leaving its Jewish moorings, the Church was about to set sail for uncharted waters, and at the prompting of the Spirit of God, was opening its doors to all those who were favourably disposed — never mind their ethnic or national identity — to receive the Gospel message. The context undoubtedly heightens the relevance of Peter's description of Jesus' mission. It was a divinely ordained mission, Peter averred, and Jesus carried it out to advance the liberation and well-being of all people. In the Gospel of John Jesus himself uses a different metaphor to drive home the same point. Identifying himself as the good shepherd willing to go to any extent to ensure the protection of the flock, he declares with unerring precision: "I came that they may have life and, have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). All the constitutive elements of his saving mission: proclamation, teaching, compassionate deeds, passion, death and resurrection, all had one unique finality and that was the promotion of life at all levels.



**a) Miracles in Jesus' Ministry**

As a literary genre miracle stories are commonly found in the sacred literature of most religions. Understood as "an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency",<sup>1</sup> a miracle always has an attention-grabbing quality about it. One's curiosity is roused or one's senses are alerted while reading a narrative of a miracle or while listening to an oral account of it. This might explain at least in part the frequent occurrence of miracle stories in canonical religious texts. In a religious context the decisive component of a miracle is the presumed divine intervention in human affairs or the sudden irruption of the supernatural into the natural realm. Its purpose is to authenticate a message or to establish the credentials of the messenger who brings a message.

The canonical Gospels attribute a number of miracles to Jesus, presenting them as wondrous deeds he performed during his public ministry. These are in addition to supernatural events such as the Annunciation, the extraordinary happenings accompanying the birth of Jesus (events recounted in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke), the resurrection itself of Jesus and the events following it.<sup>2</sup> Besides the many concrete narrations of individual events, the Gospels imply that miraculous deeds, especially healing the sick, were regular occurrences during the ministry of Jesus (cf. Mt 4:23-25; Mk 1:32-34; 3:10-12; Lk 4:40-41; 6:17-19, etc.). In fact, the evangelist John gives a hyperbolic

expression to this idea when he remarks summing up his Gospel narrative: "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:24-25).

Indeed in the milieu in which the Gospels were written miracle stories enjoyed wide credence. In those days Judaism attributed marvelous deeds to Palestinian Rabbis and the Hellenistic society credited professional wonderworkers with such feats. For instance, Apollonius of Tyana, a Greek Neo-Pythagorean philosopher, roughly a contemporary of Jesus, is credited to have performed many miracles similar to the ones attributed to Jesus in the Gospels<sup>3</sup>. The understanding prevailing in those days in Jewish and Hellenistic circles was that miracles and other wondrous acts were signs validating the credentials of divine wise men.

Christians in general believe that the miracles narrated in the Gospels are actual historical events, which prove Jesus' divinity<sup>4</sup>. They consider the Gospel miracles as irrefutable proofs of Jesus' status as the Son of God. The contention is that whereas the other details of Jesus' life and ministry provide concrete evidence of his human nature, the miracles establish his divine nature. Nevertheless, from the Christian point of view Jesus did not flaunt his omnipotence to impress his listeners or to awe into silence his adversaries, but performed miracles as works of love and mercy to show his compassion for the hapless people who flocked to listen to him. The sort of vocabulary that the Gospels use to refer to Jesus' miraculous deeds is particularly striking. The Synoptics use the word *dynamis* (= act of power) and John uses *σημεion* (= sign) or *ergon* (= work). What this suggests is that the element of the marvelous is not highlighted. The evangelists in their turn seem to imply that the miracles were as much a vehicle for Jesus' message as were his proclamation and teaching. We notice that each miracle occasions specific teachings. The need to have faith is frequently emphasized (cf. Mt 14: 34-36; Lk 7:1-10; 8:43-48; 17:19, etc.).

### **b) Healing Miracles of Jesus**

The highest number of Gospel miracles are cure miracles. They speak about Jesus' healing activity, elaborating the incidents in which Jesus cured people suffering from various physical and psychological ailments. There are of course different ways of categorizing the miracle stories in the Gospels. Some say there are only two main categories: those that affected people (cures, exorcisms and resuscitations) and those that demonstrated Jesus' power over the forces of nature (calming of the sea, walking on water, huge catch of fish, feeding the crowd, etc.). Others speak of four kinds of miracles: cure miracles, nature miracles, exorcisms and resuscitations. In a certain sense exorcisms also are cure miracles because in Jesus' time people generally



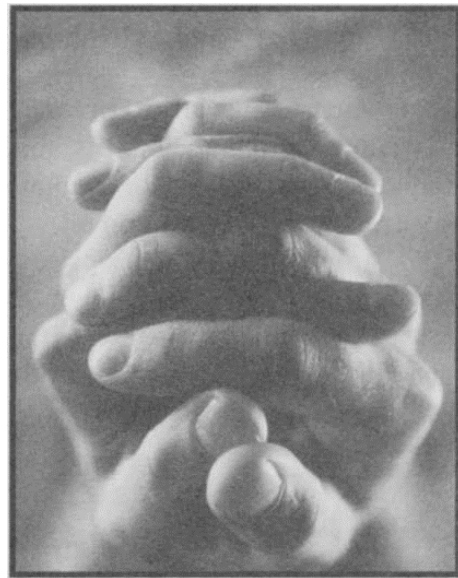
believed that the evil spirits (possession by them) caused illnesses and infirmities.

The Gospel accounts dealing with the cure miracles of Jesus are not uniform in character. Varying amounts of detail are attached to each episode. Sometimes Jesus cures by a simple pronouncement or a command like in the incident of curing the man afflicted by leprosy in the early days of his Galilean ministry (Mt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16). At other times he employs materials such as spit and mud (Mk 7:31-37; 8:22-26; Jn 9:1-12). Often Jesus is moved by the suffering person's pitiable condition or by the supplicant's spontaneous expression of faith in him. On one particular occasion, however, he gets into an uncharacteristically acerbic argument with a distraught mother who beseeched him to intervene on behalf of her long-suffering daughter. The point of contention was her ethnic identity as a Canaanite. But the steely determination of the stricken mother finally

had the better of the verbal duel and her daughter is healed of her ailment (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Jesus ended up praising her for her extraordinary faith.

The evangelists often portray Jesus as being moved by the pain and suffering of the people he encountered on his mission forays. His miracles were spontaneous reactions to alleviate their suffering or pain. The story of the raising of Lazarus may immediately spring to our mind. When encountering the bitterly grieving sisters Martha and Mary, Jesus himself was moved to tears. His action of bringing Lazarus back to life seems like an immediate response to the orphaned sisters' visible distress (cf. Jn 11; 17-44). The scene of the raising of the Nain Widow's son conveys much the same message (cf. Lk 11-17). A very similar message we can draw from examining other miracle stories such as the cleansing of the leper (Mt 8:1-4 and par.), healing of the woman with a flow of blood (Mt 9:20-22 and par.), curing of the crippled woman (Lk 13:10-17), cure of the paralytic at Bethesda (Jn 5:1-9), etc. There are indeed very many instances in the Gospels that leave us with the impression that Jesus' was "a ministry that integrated word and deed or proclamation and the compassionate meeting of people's physical needs".<sup>5</sup> This explains also, why the cure miracles are the dominant category among the miracle stories.

For Jesus mercy or compassion was the most divine of all virtues and the one which a human being could put readily into practice through concrete deeds. It is revealing to observe that in a context in which he lists a whole series of ethical prescriptions his punch line is: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36)<sup>6</sup>. In the biblical scheme of things the ultimate inspiration for all efforts at being righteous should be the vision of a covenant community that moves on the axis of the twin principles of God's parenthood and human brotherhood/sisterhood. Compassion is the oil that ensures the smooth movement of this axis, which thereby becomes the hallmark virtue of the covenant community. By relentlessly practicing it wherever he went during his ministry Jesus was providing an instance of leading from the front. "Jesus' integrity is demonstrated by the fact he was never content merely to proclaim and teach a message of love and mercy", argues one scholar. "His words and what he does are one. The herald of God's love and mercy becomes the healer of sickness and disease. The compassion that led him to seek out the poor and the afflicted drove him to cure them and relieve their burden".<sup>7</sup>



### **c) *Jesus' Healing Activity in the Context of His Ministry to the Marginalized***

What is said above thus leads us to the position that Jesus' ministry of healing has to be evaluated against the background of the stirring manifesto of his saving mission. This he presented at the launching of his ministry at the Nazareth synagogue. The evangelist Luke has captured that moment in all its evident poignancy in a symbolically rich passage that is meticulously constructed (Lk 4:16-30).<sup>8</sup> Before an enthusiastic gathering of his own townspeople Jesus presented his programme of action in all its striking earthiness. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor", is his opening submission and it obviously sets the distinguishing tone for his life's mission. What he proposed to do, he asserted in no uncertain terms, had the poor as its preferred addressees. The poor in this context has a nuanced significance. It stood for an emblematic group, for those people who found themselves in a situation of dire need — physically, psychologically, socially. They were the ones who existed in the periphery of society, beyond the pale of social and religious respectability. Right at the beginning of his prophetic ministry Jesus declares that he understood his mission as rushing to the side of those needy people, in addressing their need in whatever way he could. Every step of his mission — and very particularly his healing activities — was a concrete realization of that initial promise.

In fact it would seem that Jesus always measured the authenticity of his mission with the yardstick fashioned out of his starting manifesto. On one occasion, when the emissaries

from John the Baptist came to make sure that Jesus was truly the Messiah, and they questioned him as to how authentic were his claims to that lofty title, Jesus simply invited them to take a look at the frenetic activity taking place around him rather than breaking into a theological discourse (cf. Lk 7:18-23; Mt 11:2-6). Luke observes with evident conviction that "Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind" (v. 21). For Jesus, the many miraculous cures happening during the course of his mission, the instances of the dead being raised to life, and above all the auspicious development of the good news really reaching the poor were indisputable signs that the messianic era foretold by the prophets had indeed dawned.<sup>9</sup>

Today's enhanced knowledge of the socio-economic and political conditions prevailing in Palestine at the time of Jesus helps us to understand better why his message and his ministry in general were truly good news to the poor.<sup>10</sup> In fact, we have scholars maintaining that "... the Jesus movement in this particular form — that of a religious movement of the poor — could only have originated within Palestinian Judaism at the beginning of the Common Era", and moreover, that "... the movement within Judaism in Palestine associated with the name of Jesus was a movement of the poor for the poor".<sup>11</sup>

Jewish society of the time was in the throes of a deep, multi-faceted crisis; a crisis brought on mainly by almost five centuries of political domination by foreign powers, first by the Persians, then by the Greeks and lastly by the Romans. Economic exploitation by these colonial forces had resulted in the gross impoverishment of vast sections of its population. The Roman taxation was notoriously oppressive<sup>12</sup>. The middle men whose services the imperial network hired to collect the tax took their hefty commission in addition. Added to this was the heavy burden of religious taxes such as tithes on the harvest, stole fees for various rituals and sacrifices and the annual temple tax meant for the support of the large number of priests and for the maintenance of the staggeringly elaborate temple liturgy<sup>13</sup>. The final outcome of such excessive taxation was the gradual destruction of the economy of rural Palestine. "From the large crowds of the beggars, the sick, the crippled, the lame, and the 'possessed' that meet us in the Gospels it is clear that the poor made up a large part of the population of Palestine at the time of Jesus..."<sup>14</sup> Jesus' compassionate way of reaching out to the disinherited poor in itself was good news for them because they never received a fair deal from any quarter. W.E. Pilgrim notes that "Socially and religiously, the tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars and various kinds of sick constituted the class of outcasts, who were the specific objects of Jesus' ministry. The Jesus movement found its following among such people was both its shame to the outsiders and critics and its glory to the insiders and believers (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18). Its root in this social environment can scarcely be denied".<sup>15</sup>

Groups of people such as tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars, the poor and cripples had an important role in the Jesus movement.<sup>16</sup> Clearly Jesus could easily connect with the impoverished masses who were victims of a system that simply ignored them because he spoke their language and had their interests close to his heart. Every aspect of Jesus' life-enhancing mission had its focus trained on those who were most in need. This truth is particularly borne out by his cure miracles.

## **II. The Church's Effort to Continue the Mission of Jesus**

Testimonies that the New Testament witnesses provide are nearly unanimous about one thing: the Christian community's preoccupation from the time of its inception was to carry on in the footsteps of Jesus, to complete his unfinished agenda, as it were. Jesus' own parting directive to the Apostles and the tiny band of other disciples who were with them was couched in simple terms yet had a profound resonance: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Book of Acts, which its author clearly planned as a sequel to the story of Jesus' earthly life and mission (the Gospel of Luke), brings alive to us selected moments of the early Church's enthusiastic and unrelenting effort to continue the mission of Jesus fighting against heavy odds. Renewed reflection on these stories can still stimulate us today as it will help us to reconnect with the early normative days of the Christian mission.

### **a) *Healing of the Crippled Beggar at the Temple Gate (Acts 3:1-10)***

The Author of Acts wants to show the readers that just as miracles formed a vital part of the mission of Jesus, they were part, too, of the mission that the Apostles carried out. Thus early in the story of the Christian community we have this fascinating episode of the cure of a crippled beggar, brought about through the agency of the Apostles Peter and John. Although recounted as a normal event taking place as part of the ongoing life of the Church, it has landmark significance for the unfolding drama. For the confrontation between the Christians and the Jewish authorities, which is what keeps the book's plot moving, starts with this dramatic incident and what ensues from it. With every subsequent happening the tension grows until it reaches flashpoints such as the brutal stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and the ruthless persecution unleashed on the believers (Acts 8:1-3).

## **1. The Story in Its Narrative Context**

The episode of the cure of the crippled beggar follows on the summary which describes the life of the early Christian community (Acts 2:42-47). This is the first of the three major summaries that we find in the early part of the book. The other two are found in 4:32-35 and 5:12-16. These summaries are a literary device which the author uses to avoid spelling out the details because such details are either judged as unimportant or they are not known to the author. They help the author to describe the general atmosphere and to indicate the progress of time in a story that takes place over a long period of time. They serve the literary purpose of filling the gaps in the narrative, because the author is only presenting a series of selected events. They have a theological purpose, too. Not concerned about presenting very precise details, the author proposes certain ideals such as fellowship, spiritual and emotional unity in the community, care of the needy and loyalty to the teaching of the Apostles. These points get repeated mention in all these summaries.

In fact the summary in 2:42-47 sets the stage for the present episode. "Every day the believers spent much time in the temple", 2:46 informs us, and 3:1-10 begins with the notice of the Apostles Peter and John going to the temple for the afternoon prayer. In 2:43 we find the mention of "many wonders and signs" done by the Apostles and this episode then presents a specific one.<sup>17</sup> Peter's admission that he had no gold or silver to give to the beseeching beggar is to be seen in continuation with the disposal of property by the believers mentioned in 2:42-43.<sup>18</sup> "Praising God" is depicted as a habitual activity of the community of believers in 2:47. The crippled man healed of his infirmity is twice described "praising God" in two subsequent verses (3:8-9). The public esteem that the members of the community enjoyed (cf. 2:46) probably finds an echo in the favourable reaction of the crowd that actually witnessed the cure of the lame man wrought by Peter and John.

What is particularly striking is the fairly obvious parallelism that exists between the healing story at this point of the Acts narrative and the story of the cure of the paralytic that we find in Lk 5:17-26.<sup>19</sup> Each of these two stories obviously has uniqueness appropriate to its time and place, but there are notable similarities as well. The similarity between the two healings, however, lies less in the healing itself than in the function that these passages serve in the larger narrative. The Gospel story is set at the beginning of Jesus' mission and the story in Acts at the beginning of the Apostles' mission. A prayer and the coming of the Spirit mark the beginning of both Jesus' mission and the mission of the Apostles. In each case there is an inaugural speech linking the mission to the coming of the Spirit through a scripture quotation (cf. Lk 4:18-19; Acts 2:17-18). Both the cure of the paralytic and the lame man become an occasion for a fundamental disclosure concerning Jesus' saving significance. In addition, these cures become the first occasion in each case for the expression of opposition to the new mission from religious leaders.

These similarities highlight the simple fact that the author of Acts wants to project the Apostles as prophetic successors of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the implied comparison with an event in the ministry of Jesus is indicative of the great significance that the author of Acts attaches to this episode. The fact that it is the first instance of a miracle performed by Peter and that it occasions two speeches by him (Acts 3:12-26 and 4:8-12, 19-20) also underlines its importance.

## 2. Successive Moments of the Story's Unfolding

The cure of the crippled beggar has all the standard elements of a typical miracle story in the synoptic tradition. They include: a) situation of the beneficiary (a man lame from birth, w. 2-3,5); b) the cure command (w. 4,6); c) the restorative action (v. 7a); d) cure effected (w. 7b-8); e) reaction of the onlookers (w. 10-11). At the heart of the miraculous cure is the healing power of the name of Jesus. The remarkable role that the faith in Jesus plays is another highlight of the narrative (cf. 3:16).<sup>21</sup>

Peter and John were on their way to the temple for the afternoon prayer when they met the crippled man. The reference is to the customary Jewish afternoon prayer. The man who was being carried in is described as "lame from birth", literally "crippled from his mother's womb". Although he is described casually as being "lame", his deformity in reality was much more debilitating and was congenital. He was unable to move around by himself and so had to be carried from one place to another by others. What we normally understand by "lameness" is that a person is maimed in such a way that he or she moves around clumsily or with considerable difficulty. But this man's condition was absolutely hopeless. He could make it to the temple gate to seek alms only by relying on the kindness of others. Apparently some people were on hand regularly who were kind enough to do that favour for him. Despite his acute disability, therefore, he probably was a good-natured person able to elicit the kindness of others on such a regular basis.

The place where the Apostles meet the man is called the "Beautiful Gate" (*he thyra hôraia*). This name is not attested anywhere in the Jewish sources describing the temple such as Josephus' *Jewish Wars* or *Antiquities of the Jewish People*. Therefore scholars have not been able to determine its precise location and it continues to be a matter of debate. Fitzmyer surmises that Luke may be employing the description in a symbolic sense considering what happens to the lame man through the power of Jesus' name.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis placed on the word "looking" or "fixing one's attention" is remarkable in the context. Peter "looked intently" at the man, the author tells us. As if on cue, so did John. Then Peter instructed the beggar to "look" at them. In response the lame man "fixed his attention" on the two Apostles. He readily complies with Peter's demand probably assuming that all this fuss was because an extra generous largesse was coming to him! This emphasis on "looking" can be interpreted as a gesture of genuine concern. The Apostles were concerned about the unfortunate man's long-term well-being and were not merely interested in tossing just another little coin or two into his begging bowl. They stopped their walk and paid attention to the beggar, instead of just passing by as if they did not hear his appeal for help. Many of the worshippers rushing to the temple to be in time for the service there may have been just ignoring man's cry for help, ignoring it as something that happened every day. But notably Peter also insisted that such concern should be reciprocal and that is probably why the man was ordered to fix his gaze on them.

Peter's candid admission that he too was very much like the beggar when it came to material possessions is another touching detail. "Silver and gold I have none", he declared simply and directly. Yet he knew he could give something to the needy man in front of him. Peter like everyone else in his day would meet countless people in dire need as they moved around in the towns and villages of Palestine. He would not be able to take care of all their needs because he himself was penniless. For him the only possession he could boast of at that time was his unwavering faith in Jesus and his steadfast loyalty to him. Nevertheless, he knew that it was an invaluable possession with which he could work wonders; and in this instance literally! His command was direct and unequivocal: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!" Clearly the implication is that the healing was accomplished by invoking the power of the name of Jesus. Against that backdrop it becomes clear that commercial value of silver and gold is contrasted with a force that goes beyond the wealth and power of human establishments. If this "name" can cause the lame man to be healed instantaneously, it is a power to be reckoned with.<sup>23</sup> "Importantly, the use of the name of Jesus was not simply to evoke the memory of Jesus' past ministry. It was rather the symbol of his continued presence as the ascended Jesus channeling God's life-giving energy to the poor and the lame just as he did before his departure".<sup>24</sup> The special significance that Luke attaches to the "name of Jesus" in Acts is at play here. For him it connotes the real and effective representation of Jesus himself (cf. 3:6,16; 4:10,17,18,30; 5:40; 8:12,16; 9:14-16, etc.).<sup>25</sup>



The result of Peter's intervention by invoking the name of Jesus was truly amazing. The lame man's feet and ankles were instantly strengthened, we are told. He leaps to his feet and starts running around and dancing in sheer joy. What he bargained for was perhaps an extra generous amount as alms, but what he received was beyond even his wildest imagination. Think of the incredible happiness a person feels when a congenital deformity suddenly disappears and he or she is able to stand on his or her own two feet for the first time in life! The beggar's joy turned itself into a dance of gratitude as he enters the temple with the Apostles and the accompanying crowd, walking and leaping and praising God. The effect it had on the bystanders also was remarkable. Witnessing such a spectacular miracle happening right in front of their eyes, the people's amazement knew no bounds.

The author of Acts tells us that the cure of the lame man created quite furor in the temple surroundings. Everyone who heard of it was truly impressed. There seems to have been a general approval of the cure of the cripple. It is possible that most of the temple-goers who had seen him slumped down at the gate day after day had felt a deep sympathy for his condition and were now happy that he of all people was the beneficiary of Peter's newly acquired power of healing. It would seem that despite his unenviable physical condition, the crippled man had a good rapport with the crowd who came to the temple. If he had friends who were willing to carry him to the temple gate and back every day, there would have been something congenial about him. The people were probably genuinely touched by the concern of the Apostles for such an insignificant person. Surely there could have been hundreds of others in Jerusalem at that time, chronically ill or miserably maimed, who deserved such a life-changing cure. Among them there could have been people of better social or economic status. But the Apostles turned their attention to this poor beggar. It is the consistent teaching of the Bible that God's face is especially turned to the lowly and powerless, those who exist in the periphery of society. Through his first miracle, Peter proved that fact one more time and the bystanders gave it a roaring approval.

The cure of the lame man occasions two speeches by Peter. The first (3:12-26) is given in front of the crowd of worshippers who gathered around him and John at the Portico of Solomon, a gathering place for believers just outside the temple. The word about the miracle had quickly spread and those who heard of it wanted to have a look at the healers and the healed person. Addressing them Peter breaks into a typical kerygmatic speech.<sup>26</sup> All the key elements of the kerygma are present in it: the age of fulfillment has dawned (v. 18); ministry and the death of Jesus (vv. 13,15); the fact of Jesus' resurrection (v. 15); he is the appointed Messiah (v.20); call for repentance (vv. 19,25-26).<sup>27</sup> The second speech (4:8-12, 19-20) is delivered in front of the Sanhedrin and this has the purpose of defending the miracle and proclaiming the Christian message to the Jewish authorities.

### **3. The Cure of the Crippled Beggar as Affirmative Action**

If we take a second look at some of the details of this rather straightforward cure miracle, we become further aware of certain special resonances present in it. Essentially it speaks of healing a deserving person's physical deformity. But some facets of it go beyond the realm of mere physical healing. The fact that it is used by the author to introduce a new stage of the early Church's story must be kept in mind. Similarly, important to remember is also its location in the narrative continuum and the thematic link it shares with the cure of the paralytic recounted in the Gospel of Luke (5:17-26).

Especially noteworthy is the fact that a "lame" person is cured and that this sensational event takes place at the temple gate. In Jewish thinking lameness was a cultic impediment. A lame lamb is marked by Torah as "blemished" and could not be used for sacrifice (cf. Deut. 15:21; Mal. 1:8, 13). A lame person could not "approach to oiler the food of his God" (i.e., barred from temple service), or in effect, he was excluded from priesthood (cf. Lev. 21:16-18). Following Jesus' lead during his ministry, the Apostles were here restoring a person to full participation in the life of the people. He was raised to a new dignity and so the cure was more than just physical. The broad lesson here is that in the Christian dispensation no one would really be excluded from the community of God's people.<sup>28</sup> By locating the miraculous cure of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, particular emphasis is made to fall on the removal of the "cultic impediment". Such an episode placed at the beginning of the book assumes crucial significance.

Peter was accompanied by John on that occasion. Although they are portrayed as doing or saying things in unison, actually John was a silent companion to Peter.<sup>29</sup> Peter was the

one in command. The two speeches are ascribed to Peter alone (cf. 3:12; 4:8). Yet their appearance as a pair is a significant detail for the author. Community-witnessing is of paramount importance in the emerging milieu. This idea of joint-action or the communal dimension constitutes the essence of Christian witnessing. It is not something that you do alone. It is a corporate affair done in solidarity with others. The crippled beggar received the favour of perfect health not from Peter as an individual; it was the result of their corporate effort. It had a community dimension. While addressing the crowd Peter made it especially clear: "Why do you stare at 'us', as though by 'our' own power or piety 'we' had made him walk". In his kerygmatic discourse Peter had to draw attention to this essential aspect of the Christian mission.

When the beggar extended his hand to the Apostles and asked them for alms, their first response was to "look at him intently" (*atenizó*). In the next moment Peter asked the man to focus his eyes on them. He did as ordered. This made the whole scene become very personal. The poor beggar would have been surely used to being ignored by the majority of the temple-goers who saw him on a daily basis and heard his plaintive cry for alms. Even the ones, who would drop a coin into his bowl, would do it in a hurry and walk away. Here with Peter and John, he had a new experience. They were paying attention to him and at the same time asking him to reciprocate the gesture. The poor and the disinherited, like everyone else, deserve respect and recognition, which is in everyone's power to give. By extending their personal attention to the beggar, Peter and John were doing precisely that. By affirming the poor man's right to dignity, Peter was taking the first step towards restoring the former to "perfect health" (*holoklçria* — cf. 3:16). The completeness of his healing depended on his learning a new lesson of acknowledging the favours he received and according due recognition to the donors. Peter is then portrayed as bending down to take the man by the hand to make him stand on his feet. This is another potent gesture. Peter's concern for the crippled beggar did not stop with just talking nicely to him and then just standing aside watching him straighten up and shuffle to his feet. The touch of Peter's hand, that physical contact, had a therapeutic effect it would seem. By that physical contact he was mediating God's healing touch to the lame man. Peter goes that extra mile to show his active concern for the man who had been through much in his life. Sometimes we can show that we care for someone by speaking a few kind words to that person. But if we waive the opportunity of doing a little kind deed and just stop with our kind words, we are falling short of the Christian ideal. Kind words, when accompanied by kind deeds — even small and insignificant ones — can work wonders in the life of people. It is by combining the two that one can ensure that one's charity passes from a passive benevolence to an active concern.

Once on his feet the man ran and leaped around with irrepressible joy and excitement. This is surely understandable as he was experiencing the joy of using his feet and legs for the first time in life. The author wants to show the completeness of the cure. The miracle is irrefutable. To establish that fact he devotes extraordinary attention to the healed man's reaction. He uses the rare word *hallomai* (= to leap) and its compound form *exallomai* in the same verse (3:8) to describe the magnitude of the man's immense thrill. Commentators see in it an allusion to Prophet Isaiah's ecstatic portrayal of the restoration of the people in Mount Zion (prefiguring the messianic age) which would be manifested in, among other things, "the lame leaping like the deer" (cf. Isa 35:6).<sup>30</sup> The healed man's regaining of full dignity is surely part of the integral cure that happened to him. Now that he was no more a lame person, he could enter the temple and participate in its liturgy. "The end-point of Jesus' healings was the restoration of the sick person to full participation in the life of the people", argues Johnson, "the same point is surely being made in this healing of the lame man by the apostles, and the point is carried by the symbolism associated with the temple cult."<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Jesus' mission quintessentially was an effort to bring good news to the poor. Indeed, the defining characteristic of that mission was making the interests of the disempowered and the marginalized its central concern. When he in his day healed the sick, made the blind see, the deaf hear and the dumb speak, when he associated freely with the outcasts such as the tax-collectors, the sinners and the prostitutes, when he went to eat

in the homes of the publicans, he was truly attempting to restore the neglected human dignity of Palestine's ubiquitous poor. They in turn recognized in him a champion of their cause and flocked to him wherever he went. Every aspect of his prophetic ministry was designed to address the needs of those in the periphery of society. His proclamation, his teaching, his healings, and his symbolic gestures of placing values above laws and regulations were all readily seen as good news by the poor.

It was this mission that the early Church felt convinced that Jesus bequeathed to it as his legacy. When we look closely at the history of its early normative period as presented by the author of the Acts of the Apostles and other primary witnesses, the picture that emerges is of a community that attempted to carry on with the unfinished agenda of Jesus. Down the ages Jesus' disciples have continued on this path with unflinching zeal and exemplary commitment. Health care activities spearheaded by Church-based organizations, for instance, draw their basic inspiration from the example of Jesus vividly portrayed in the pages of the Gospels. Indeed, the prototype of holistic ministry is indelibly etched in those timeless narratives. It is the sparkling imprint of that prototype — which they carry as a priceless treasure in their hearts — that keeps imparting spiritual motivation and emotional energy to innumerable women and men as they go about carrying out their often onerous task of helping mothers to safely deliver their babies, patiently accompanying substance-abusers in their stubbornly slow process of de-addiction, tenaciously guiding the physically and mentally challenged children trying hard to improve their few intact skills, bravely attending to the victims of menacingly spreading epidemics, bandaging the festering wounds of leprosy patients, being by the side of the moribund victims of AIDS and HIV infection, keeping alive the constantly flagging spirit of the terminally ill, and so on and so forth. They strive to continue Jesus' mission by mediating God's healing touch to the distressed in need of relief from pain and courage to face suffering, the afflicted and the abandoned who long for accompaniment and guidance, care and empowerment.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The primary definition of a "miracle" proposed by the Oxford English Dictionary. The word also is used figuratively to mean a remarkable event or development that brings very pleasant consequences or an exceptional product or achievement or even an outstanding example of something agreeable (cf. [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)).

<sup>2</sup> Miracles are particularly abundant in the Christian writings of the post-New Testament period, called collectively as apocryphal literature. Many of the early stories about Jesus, his parents, and his disciples were supplemented and expanded as the Church developed. This second and third-century literature may be judged as especially sensational, magical or even superstitious. The restrained spirituality of the canonical books is notably absent in the later literature. Cf. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> The precise years of his birth and death are unknown. His first biographer, Philostratus the Elder, says that he lived from 3 to 97 CE. His work, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, contains several miracle stories similar to the ones in the Gospels.

<sup>4</sup> That does not mean, however, that we can ignore the modern criticism of the Gospel miracles. Radical scholars such as Rudolph Bultmann, for instance, proceed from the starting point that miracles are impossible. For a brief yet illuminating discussion on the question, cf. Donald Senior, "The Miracles of Jesus", ["Aspects of New Testament Thought"] in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995) 1369-73.

<sup>5</sup> Evvy Hay Campbell, "Holistic Ministry and the Incident at the Gate Beautiful: Acts 3:1-26", in Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (eds.), *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> Lk 6:36 seems to function as a bridge verse in the context in that its content has application as much to the series that has preceded and as to what follows. It seems to work as a hinge between the two parts of the hortatory sequence in 6:27-49. One cannot fail to notice the different wording in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"). There is a notable contrast between Luke's *gínesthe oiktirmones* and Matthew's *esesthe teleioi*.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992) 106.

<sup>8</sup> This is a key passage as far as the Lucan two-volume work is concerned. It specifically Lucan cast as well as the programmatic character the author accords to it is, by and large, part of the *opinio communis* with regard to it. The reading of the Isaian text (vv. 18-19) along with the

authoritative declaration in v. 21 that "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing", have the effect of making Jesus' mission almost an exclusive privilege of the poor.

<sup>9</sup> Jesus' response in Lk 7:22 (and Mt 11:4-5) evidently echoes the words pronounced at the inaugural sermon (Lk 4:18-19) which of course is a quotation from the book of prophet Isaiah (Isa 61:1-2a+58:6c).

<sup>10</sup> The picture of the social world of the Jesus movement sketched by the protagonists of the sociohistorical-redactional approach has had the effect of placing many of the Gospel narratives in an entirely new light. Gerd Theissen, a German scholar of considerable repute, has been in many ways a trend-setter in this branch of research. Some of his works that merit special attention in this context are: *Sociology of the Early Palestinian Christianity*, English trans., J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in a Narrative Form*, English trans., J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987); *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, English trans., L.M. Maloney (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992); "Wanderradikalismus: Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum", in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 70(1973) 245-271.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Gospel and the Poor*, English trans., D. Elliott (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 19.

<sup>12</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, third edition (London: SCM Press, 1998) 24, observes that in Galilee under Julius Caesar, as much as a quarter of a year's harvest could go as taxes to Rome. In addition to it was what local rulers like Herod skimmed and what went as commission to the tax-collectors!

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into the Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, English trans., F.H. and C.H. Cave (London: SCM Press, 1969, seventh impression 1991) 205-206.

<sup>14</sup> George M. Soares Prabhu, "Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church", in Francis X. D' Sa (ed.), *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective, Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu*, Vol. IV (Pune: Inana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 2001) 139.

<sup>15</sup> *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981) 55.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, English trans., Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) 6-17.

<sup>17</sup> According to Richard J. Dillon, "Acts of the Apostles", in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995) 734, the phrase "many signs and wonders" best helps the effective transition to the story of the miraculous cure.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 48.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Acts*, 64-66, has demonstrated that a number of literary details link the two stories. Tannehill's two-volume work, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, establishes the literary link between passages in Luke and Acts on the basis of detailed explorations in each case. In *Narrative Unity*, vol. II, 50-52, he gives a detailed analysis of the literary and thematic links that bind together Acts 3:1-10 and Lk. 5:17-26.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Acts*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, (New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1998) 276; also Campbell, "Holistic Ministry", 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Acts*, 72; further Dillon, "Acts", 734, observes that "name" and "power" are parallel concepts. By invoking the name of Jesus Peter received empowerment from the Lord to heal the lame man.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, "Holistic Ministry", 40, quoting F.S. Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 266.

<sup>26</sup> Dillon, "Acts", 735, notes that this sermon and the Peter's Pentecost discourse (Acts 2:14-41) are continuous and complementary.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 282.

<sup>28</sup> This is a point that gets particular emphasis in the Gospel of Luke. We note that in the response that Jesus gives to the emissaries from John the Baptist, the authenticity of his mission is established on the basis of the blessings that the normally disregarded or sidelined people such as the blind and the lame received (Lk 7:21-22). This is a passage he shares with Matthew (cf. Mt 11:4-5). The idea is further reiterated in the imagery of the privileged invitees to the (Messianic) banquet in Lk 14:12-14 and 14:15-24.

<sup>29</sup> Dillon, "Acts", 735, avers that John's presence on the scene is not original to the story. He quotes Ernst Haenchen who suggests that Luke may have added John's name to ensure the presence of a second witness to the healing before the Sanhedrin.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 279; Johnson, *Acts*, 66; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity II*, 52,

<sup>31</sup> *Acts*, 72.

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**Daniel O. Ihunnia, MSP**  
**Breaking the Evil Yoke:**  
**A Challenge for Mission Theology in Africa**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The African continent is currently witnessing significant evolutions in its religious consciousness. Recently, Christianity has been promoting the principles of *Contextualization* and religious liberty and this has launched African religious sensibility on the world stage.<sup>1</sup> This is a crucial moment for Africa. The continent has to demonstrate its uniqueness and maturity in relation to universal religious interrogatives. In emergence however are tendencies based on a new-awakening of a continental experience where Africa goes beyond the awareness of Jesus Christ as they were told, to an awareness of Jesus Christ as they know him; a *continental Encounter*. The components of this encounter are multifaceted and defy any singular streamlining. While Latin Americans view Jesus as liberator and Asians study his uniqueness, Africa seems to be more interested in a functional *yoke-breaking, miracle-Saviour*. This notion obviously arises from the background of a belief that humanity is in warfare with unseen spiritual forces, ubiquitous devils. In place of the African divinities quasi overrun by technology, Jesus becomes the answer. Though the notion could be reminiscent of medieval religious conceptions, there are so many reasons that warrant its confident revival in contemporary Africa.

As the African God experience reaches global levels, could this idea represent adequately the rising spiritual fount of the human race? This article begins a series aimed at highlighting the trendy currents and attitudes in African Christianity today. In this first issue we will begin with what is popularly seen as 'exorcism' in 'church' groups. The contexts of operation, the theological questions and some missionary considerations will be looked at. The aim of the work is to provoke scholarly discussions that could lead to important conclusions helpful for mission in Africa.

## **NEW-'EXORCISMS'**

In many religious circles around the continent, 'casting out demons' is a common practice. The *finger of the devils* must be fished out. Many would know about the controversial healing and deliverance ministry of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, the former Bishop of Lusaka, Zambia. Healing and deliverance are known to have been part of the function of religion in Africa. Hence, in a land of disintegration, danger, disease and poverty independent religious groups act as places of refuge and wholeness.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising then that when people feel something is wrong in their life, they quickly blame it on the bad spirits and the next step is to seek 'deliverance' from those Christian groups who claim they can do it. It is obvious that popularized exorcisms betray dualistic tendencies replacing God's healing love with the terror of demons. It is such that every misfortune is seen as initiated by the devils that inhabit communities in the African traditional imagination.<sup>3</sup>



The consequence is the proliferation of forms of *new-exorcisms* or deliverance services. These are characterized by a show of power and intensive television broadcasting. Whereas human cultures tend to evolve, beliefs and practices could take the form of ambiguous expressions. The *new-exorcism industry* comes with pomp and pageantry furnished by technology. In situations where people lack proper information and direction, such occurrences are to be expected. African missionary theology has a crucial responsibility for a much needed clarification. It will do much harm if it remains

silent. Tendentious modern miracle sensationalism obviously obscures an authentic Christian spirituality. When the name of Jesus is used in these practices of 'deliverance', it apparently reveals some level of faith in God's omnipotence but it also betrays ambivalences in the understanding of the person of Christ.

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"The early Christians, while acknowledging the humanity of Jesus, regarded him as a unique figure in human history — the son of God. Nevertheless, Jesus' miracles are not so much displays of power or even proofs of his divinity as they are signs of the presence of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus".<sup>4</sup>

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## CONTEXT OF ENCOUNTER

The biblical Christ remains enigmatic and mysterious. But he was also indubitably human and particularly belonged to the Jewish culture in a given historical epoch. All peoples need to worship God and think of Christ within their own imaginative, linguistic and experiential categories.<sup>5</sup> Africa meets Christ today in a very new way, and this time from a cultural perspective, under the painful weight of a plundered history. But this new encounter is neither lacking in fascination nor in obscurity. A common African proverb says that *the rain beats the Leopard's skin but it does not wash out the spots*. The cultural discovery of the man Jesus like this rain is unable to completely obliterate *Africa's trado-cultural-psyche*. What emerges is a new reality; a "particular phenomenon of hybridization between primal cultures with their cosmic religiosity on the one hand and universal meta-cosmic faiths including biblical faith on the other hand".<sup>6</sup>

In Africa, it will be unwise to judge such a new reality with predetermined categories. The conviction is that malevolent spiritual beings exist and that they can invade, control and observably impair the wholeness and progress of people<sup>7</sup> but Jesus can undo the devil. This is rooted in the African primal view of the universe. Spirit phantom issues are central and literally determine African religious attitudes.

This belief has been there and has been functional in various traditional expressions. But the renewed interest comes on the platform of a 'Christian' version. Numerous Western evangelical and Pentecostal preachers promoted it. But it is not surprising because history shows that the reformers of the sixteenth century saw devils everywhere and the trend continues in their contemporary versions. However it is not unconnected with the socio-economic and political problems of Africa. The scourges of poverty, disease, underdevelopment, unemployment and insecurity have left many in total frustration. People live in suspicion of the devil. They are compelled to fall back on former traditional imaginations since the socio-economic dispensation initiated by colonial imperialists and managed by dishonest leaders offers neither hope nor solutions. Two approaches suffice: People either dedicate themselves to demons in return for wealth and social status or they fight the demons by way of faith in Jesus. The younger mostly bewildered Africans are easily trapped. As Emmanuel Milingo suggests, the devil offers fake solutions of prosperity, healing and wholeness and people are deceived into accepting them. In the process they make an alliance with demons through prayers and self-dedication. These demons invariably possess and torture their clients for they never intend the wellbeing of humanity.<sup>8</sup>

Curiously, people also easily surrender to all kinds of spiritual gurus who manipulate and subject them to the perpetual bondage of fear and panic. The reason behind this is that many Africans fear curses more than they trust blessings. Consequently, they trace their problems by affiliation to past *intergenerational curses*. The self-anointed spiritualists seize on these scenarios to establish their popularity and prowess. As such one might argue that the question of *breaking the evil yoke* to gain a prosperous livelihood is one of the fundamental reasons for the flourishing of strange religiosities in Africa. The charismatic preachers understand this connectedness in the African soul and quickly exploit it. Hence they champion new exorcisms. But as Benedict XVI points out, it is hard to discern whether such new spiritualities are truly Christian or not.

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"Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, and they lead people in good faith astray. These many sects take advantage of an incomplete social infrastructure, the erosion of traditional family solidarity and inadequate catechesis in order to exploit people's credulity, and they offer religious veneer to a variety of heterodox, non-Christian beliefs. They shatter the peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions. They even seduce political leaders.... Once again, this points to the need for a profound evangelization of the African soul".<sup>9</sup>

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## THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMATIC

There is no gainsaying that missionary theology has focused so much on a "triumphalist Christology" that proclaims the divinity of Christ in Africa, ignoring contextual realities.<sup>10</sup> But challenged by life's questions and misfortunes, Africans are longing for answers. A more direct encounter with Jesus, the man from Galilee, becomes imperative since he is proclaimed as the most powerful. For many young Africans, *Jesus is the new fashion*. One Igbo expression is that *Jesus is ebeano* (Jesus is the in-thing). This could however be the *Kairos* for a necessary interpretation where mission in Africa responds to Jesus' question: *But who do you say that I am?*<sup>11</sup> It could be a way to understand the uniqueness of Christ in the midst of the many African divinities and spirit beings. There are scholarly indications to the uniqueness of Christ not as an assertion or *datum* to be swallowed by all means. They see the *Uniqueness* in this sense as an invitation to other faiths, cultures and peoples to discover and recognize Christ as the true Lord, the universal Saviour.

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"It is not often recognized in Christian circles that theological affirmations about Christ are meaningful ultimately, not in terms of what Christians say, but in terms of what persons of other faiths understand those affirmations to imply for them. In other words, our Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Christ achieve their real impact when they are subjected to the test to establish their credentials and validity not only in terms of the religious and spiritual universe in which Christians habitually operate, but also and indeed especially in terms of the religious and spiritual worlds which persons of other faiths inhabit".<sup>12</sup>

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Christ is therefore better understood as unique in the context of the plurality of religions and of cultures. The African continent is apparently opening up to this wider reality. The massive re-awakening on the influence of the spirits has led to a deeper exploration of this basic theological question. Africa is therefore in the process of fully accepting Jesus as the true Lord, the ultimate Saviour. But this apparently needs to follow the right theological track. The interest in the powers of the unique Saviour in relation to the 'malevolent spirits' tends to be effectively facilitating a re-definition of what it means to be a Christian community, hence what foundational Christology is operative.

The argument here is essentially Christological and ecclesiological. But it focuses less on theorems. The orientation is more on the functional, existential, practical significance of the incarnation of Christ in terms of integral wholeness. Africa has arrived at the cross-roads between Jesus Christ and the principalities and powers in the high places. This must be understood in the perspective of their worldview. It is purely a natural resurgence of a *trado-cultural* principle buried under the carpet of foreign theological paradigms and assumptions. Jesus must thus prove that he is the most powerful in the concrete life of the worshipping community. He must be confirmed as stronger than the cosmological, spiritual elements in African tradition. Hence, the question also touches on God's omnipotence over evil in the world. But above all, it provokes greater interest in the encounter of the Gospel with African culture, underscoring the active spirit in the economy of salvation. In Africa, this economy does not end with *salus animarum*. It enters hugely into the integral liberation of the human being. It is a generic socio-cultural interrogative.



## MISSIONARY CONSIDERATIONS

How then should Jesus respond to the existential vicissitudes of Africans? What hold has he on the cosmic imagination of a people disorientated by a long history of oppression and subjugation? In other words, how should mission be done in Africa? Although some Scholars might frown at or even dismiss demonic questions as superstitious beliefs in serpents and dragons<sup>13</sup> and so unnecessary, mission must contend with it in the context of Africa where many people are theologically bankrupt. Questions of divine dominion will obviously interest Africans having suffered under oppressive imperial dominions. The desire to quit slavery in all its forms has never left the psyche of Africans. If the devils dominate life, then everything should be done for freedom, in order not to be in their bondage. Any form of servitude, spiritual or natural is abhorred even at the sub-conscious level. Missionary theology needs to know this and study the tendency in the light of the Gospel.

In other words, the orientations that heavily influence popular views and habitual manifestations are the narrow tracks leading to the sacred abode of the African soul. The major missionary theological interrogative should be based on an interpretation of the person and role of "Jesus" in the background of a *historico-traditional* re-awakening. It is an emerging mission aimed at highlighting the value of traditions wrongly condemned. Jesus himself is found hidden at the center of the traditions. The purpose is to recognize God's Kingdom inaugurated by Christ in the diversity of cultures and traditions. When mission realizes that although God's Word is distinct from human cultures, it is not separate from them, it will not attempt to substitute non-biblical cultures with biblical ones but seek the seeds of authentic gospel incarnation.<sup>14</sup>

As Aylward Shorter suggests, contemporary Christology is 'from below' focusing on the human existence of Jesus, the fullness and completeness of his humanity. It is a process that leads us to discover God through our own human existence. Africa does not want to remain in 'perpetual adoration of a shadowy, historical figure whose life seems to have little or nothing in common with their day to day experience.'<sup>15</sup> If mission must be relevant, it must not only study and understand the African story and troubles, but must see existence through the eye of the African. As Pope Benedict XVI rightly puts it, only 'Africans know better than anyone else how difficult, disturbing and even tragic their living situations have been.'<sup>16</sup> Mission needs to avoid transplanting religious categories. Such categories end up as strange and abstract. Mission therefore needs to encounter, understand and open up to Africa as it is. It needs humility. It is then that it will see the bleeding heart of Africa and offer it the Gospel healing. With this approach mission becomes integral Good News otherwise it remains externally *groomed news*.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF BAD FORCES

A number of African traditional convictions have gone out of fashion. And that is only a natural phenomenon. Previously in ancient Igbo<sup>17</sup> traditions, the birth of twins or triplets was seen as evil. Humans they believed were not supposed to be prolific in child bearing. Animals could. Such twins and probably their mothers were left to die in the dark forest. Beliefs and consequent practices of this sort could lend credence to assertions that traditional religious beliefs are not *Supernatural* in themselves; "they belong naturally to the level of cosmogonies and world views"<sup>18</sup> and thus do not qualify in genuine transcendence with the *Supernatural*. In that case, they are principally erroneous and misleading.



If however, recurrence and longevity could be considered, some cultural principles may belong properly to the higher levels. One of these is the fundamental, primal African conception of the cosmos in terms of spiritual powers and forces. Here we are limiting

ourselves to the forces that influence life negatively. It touches also on African notions about the dead, the ancestors, divinities, witches and wizards, etc. Some questions of justice may be involved where the 'supernatural' powers spell out justice on forms of human conduct. That the affairs of the human world are controlled by the more superior supernatural forces is indelibly engraved on the bottom of the African religious mentality. Could such beliefs not have something of the seed of the pure *Supernatural*? As Mbiti states, "we should remind ourselves that the belief in the existence of spirits provides people with the explanation of many mysteries which they find in the universe".<sup>19</sup>

An analysis of the African primal worldview indicates that the universe is a personalized universe. People therefore live with the awareness of the presence of transcendent powers which, however, could be ambivalent and could involve intergenerational affinities. Not only is there the hierarchy of benevolent ancestors, and of spirits, divinities and high gods, there is also the range of evil spirits, of demons and malevolent divinities, plus the lesser, more earth-born occult powers of wizards and witches.<sup>20</sup> The point here is that every culture has its history of encounter with *Transcendence*. Their uniqueness may equally pertain to an eternally designed diversity. Nonetheless, as Francis Oborji warns,

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"it serves a good purpose to note that the people's worldview and cosmological elements have their limits in the way they can inform us about the Supernatural. This means that cosmological realities should not be confused with the *Supernatural*. Though one can speak of the nature of the interaction that exists between the two, and it is the supernatural that impacts or can impinge on the creaturely reality, both realities are not intermixed as the traditional religions appear to portray them".<sup>21</sup>

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For him, a genuine understanding of the supernatural must be in view of "God's full, definitive, self-communication in Jesus Christ".<sup>22</sup> Although "we do not have any grounds for denying the objective personal reality of devils or even that Satan is the 'king' of devils",<sup>23</sup> Christian faith objectively points rather to Christ. And it is this Christological basis that challenges African mission theology.

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"By establishing its link with its African world in terms of the One Supreme, ultimate God of Africa, African theology has answered to only part of the total spiritual universe of African primal religions. What goes on in daily religious life and practice, in the company of divinities, ubiquitous spirits, ancestors, is left virtually untouched. Thus, African theology has failed to wrestle with the multiplicity of the Transcendent, undercutting the contribution that it can make towards a fresh Christian account of the Transcendent, drawing on its background in the primal imagination of African religions".<sup>24</sup>

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## **BETWEEN TRADITIONALISTS AND 'CHRISTIAN' EXORCISTS**

In traditional practices, the chief priests, the diviners and witchdoctors would control the spirits with ritual sacrifices, appeasement, incantations and compensation. Sometimes they order them to quit, sending them to the forests, oceans or faraway territories. Sometimes it is conducted by the eldest man in the extended family or clan. If need be, superior and benevolent deities may be invoked for assistance. In any case, the person requires much more than a moral authority. Experience and disposition for justice are prerequisites to manage the bad spirits. The blood of animals, food stuff, money and personal belongings could be required for effective deliverance. These personal effects like clothing or ornaments are useful because spirits are believed to be connected to them. At times, those possessed may be beaten in order to expel the bad spirits. Hence, there are frequent ritualistic practices indulged in to ensure liberation in the traditional setting.<sup>25</sup>

In the 'Christian' versions, dissimilarities are negligible. This gives a ground for some theological questions that may interest dialogue. Sometimes the 'Christian exorcists' get really vehement in a sheer exhibition of power and charismatic gifts. But the traditionalists

mostly dialogue with the spirits.<sup>26</sup> The preachers or pastors literally fight the spirits enunciating the name of Jesus. Those who go for such sessions hope that the malevolent forces will be banished forever. Interestingly, the power displayed by the ministers tend to convince if not hypnotize the clients. There is no gainsaying it, the devil is seen as the foundation of every negative thing in the world.<sup>27</sup> As Charles Nyamiti underscores, most Africans are still leading a traditional way of life and there is no guarantee that this state of affairs will undergo any revolutionary changes in the years to come. And he poses this question to theologians: "Are we going to base our theology exclusively on the mentality of a minority and neglect the masses?"<sup>28</sup>

## POWER IN THE NAME OF JESUS

In the Bible, *personal names* appear to buttress particular attributes regarding particular places and unique events. In the New Testament, the name 'Peter' indicates the stability of



the Church built on solid apostolic faith. St Paul writes about the exaltation of Christ's name: *And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Phil 2:9-11).

The Lord himself told his disciples, "... the father will give you anything you ask him in my name" (Jn. 15:16). Armed with his name he assured them that they could cast out demons (Mk. 16:17), because there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Consequently, it is easy to understand the cultural influence of biblical names in Africa where names are highly significant. Names are so important that they are not only used as tags for differentiation and identification, they are connected to the complex network of individual destinies.<sup>29</sup> Such explicit scriptural indications naturally end in indigenous assimilation. The Ghanaian scholar Kwame Bediako opines,

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"While biblical affirmations have the character of convictions, they are not given as fixed data. Rather, being an integral part of the total biblical revelation, they share in the character and purpose of that revelation. That is, they are given to provide the conditions for humans to make an identical response of faith in Jesus Christ who is revealed in the Scriptures, and to whom those affirmations bear witness.... The truth of biblical revelation, therefore, is not just truth to be believed in as by mere intellectual or mental assent; it is truth to be participated in".<sup>30</sup>

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In deliverance sessions, the name of Jesus is always the point of reference, and this could become a certain mantra. If *Jesus Christ, the Son of David* is the Saviour of the world, the logic is simple in the African ritualistic imagination of names: He can solve problems, he can deliver and he can heal. Mission theology needs to decipher this interpretative principle and save the faithful from the dualistic manoeuvres of Charlatans who frame issues only in terms of *simplistic alternatives*, either this world or next, either God or Satan.<sup>31</sup> Again mission reveals God's eschatological kingdom on the African continent. Healing and deliverance "can rapidly degenerate into a power-phenomenon rather than a prayer-phenomenon and the healers' feats of strength, their humbling of demons and their 'magic tricks' with cameras.... It is doubtful whether such 'shows' really lead people to Christ and to a change of heart".<sup>32</sup>

It is therefore essential for African scholars to engage in defining the proper identity of the historical Jesus while not over-focusing on the Mythical Christ. *"We have to go back to*

*the historical Jesus to understand who he really was and to be intellectually convinced that he is not a myth.... (And) we have to go back to Jesus because his specific reality is a more effective underpinning of a questioned meaning of life than an abstract Christ".*<sup>33</sup>

## EXISTENCE OF MALEVOLENT FORCES

According to C.S. Lewis,

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"there are two equal opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight".<sup>34</sup>

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An important question to ask is whether the traditional African view of the cosmos holds water when it comes to the spirits. But here, caution is a prerequisite. Social anthropologists and ethnographers have opened our eyes concerning matters surrounding cultural relativism and diversities. The Church itself acknowledges in its culture of truth the existence of evil forces and commissions exorcists to drive them away. It has never denied that some invisible principalities are operative. But it categorically states that Christ has achieved the comprehensive defeat of them on the Cross (Col. 2:14-15).

The Scriptures present Jesus as casting out demons, healing and restoring those who were possessed and tormented by evil spirits (Lk. 4:31-37, 8:26-39, 11:14-20; Mk. 9:14-29). At some point Jesus was questioned by his disciples about whose fault it was that a man was born blind (Jn. 9:1), echoing the same African conceptualization of intergenerational curses. Africans tend to make a literary reading of the Bible. But how right is it to remain at that level?

Noteworthy is that the development of the Christian faith itself was against the background of Israel's experience of *Transcendence*. The Jewish people had a certain attitude towards the dead, and to the Spirit world. But they believed that Yahweh the omnipotent God would sometime conclusively eliminate evil. Scholars assert that their belief was apparently ambivalent and paradoxical. "The dead were regarded simultaneously as poor creatures, dependent on the mercy of the living, and as beings endowed with superior knowledge and superhuman power, who were to be feared and conciliated".<sup>35</sup> Despite such contradictions, it was their worldview that defined them as a religious people. Some might argue that this has little or nothing to do with the African categories of the spirit world. But we take the stand that every religious experience has its connectedness to the big *Supernatural*.

In Europe there is much talk about scientific rationalism, New Age pragmatism and Evangelical, Pentecostal Biblicism. People are equally being drawn to different levels of a transcendent cosmology reflecting some *Holistic monism with a Pan-spiritual character*. These new attractions present the universe as a single whole, good or evil. Some argue that due to decades of scientific materialism in Europe, many people are deprived of an awareness of the spiritual dimension of human life, and so they possess an inchoate hunger for the supernatural.<sup>36</sup> An English cleric reported cases of belief in spiritual attacks thus;

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"I have also been asked on six occasions to deal with people who felt that there were ghosts or poltergeist activity bothering them. The majority were Catholics. I need not bother you with details of the manifestations. In each case I listened to their story to try to discern if we were dealing with spiritual forces or psychological ones.... I blessed the house as in the ritual, prayed with the people for protection, healing and deliverance.... In every case the nuisance stopped".<sup>37</sup>

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We can also turn our attention to the limitation of human language in expressing the experience of mystery. Language fails to deal with mystery accurately. The great

Catholic theologian Walter Kasper identified this linguistic problem when he analyses the banality of logical positivism in attending to the experience of the mystery of God.

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"Logical positivism took as its point of departure the ideal of an exact unified science, the proposition of which can be expressed in a symbolic language that reflects the world and follows a logical syntax. For this reason only those propositions are to be regarded as scientific and meaningful, which are demonstrable and repeatable and to this extent are susceptible of inter-subjective proof".<sup>38</sup>

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Although he focused on the experience of God in Christianity, his words are insightful with regard to supernatural experiences: as soon as we attempt to describe mystery, our language proves useless.<sup>39</sup> Hence the existence of these forces could be elusive but mission should not turn a blind eye to it.

## EMERGENT VISIONS

In the past, African traditional religious rites were judged to be chaotic gesticulations, furnished with aimless rituals. But it is also true, that "if a sense of transcendence remains indispensable to any belief, a belief always finds its expression in relation to one or the other areas of reality so that it will actually appear as either *vitalism* or *materialism* or *deism* or *pantheism* or *theism* or whatever else".<sup>40</sup> Mission theology in Africa today therefore requires a new lens to enable it see these expressions through the eyes of God; mission as properly *missio Dei*.

- A. There is need for a fresh pedagogy where mission allows itself to be first educated in Africa and by Africa. This is an important *method*. It calls for a mission of humility. This time, mission begins by placing the African worldview in its rightful position especially about the spirit world. It is mission seeking culture. This is the way to convince people about the Kingdom of Christ, when this kingdom becomes people's culture through mutual enrichment.
- B. Mission theology has the essential role to define the victory of God's loving justice over all forms of injustice and oppression. Hence there is need for advocacy in the field of social justice. Christ offers God's love to humanity by first understanding the human predicament. Although the heightened awareness of the otherworldly tends to be riddled with fear and tension, theology needs to recognize in the *spirit quests* the prophetic spirit of Christ for a people oppressed on all sides. African bishops should also be willing to appoint clerics to whom the concerns about spiritual torments could be referred in every diocese.
- C. Actually in matters regarding the malevolent spirits, the African has only one desire; to get rid of them. They might find it absurd to dialogue about the evil spirits, but mission theology should not relent in dialoging with the African existential experience. Africans are unable to suffocate their belief because their very existence essentially depends on, and is enmeshed, in its adherence. The African has no difficulty in praying over a computer invaded by a virus or for a football victory. While it is unwise to condemn peoples' faith, such orientations reveal a certain level of ignorance which Pope Benedict XVI says contributes to an anthropological marginalization.<sup>41</sup> The dialogue of life is educative and highlights the dignity and beauty of diverse experiences, creating a space for a conversion, for understanding which banishes blind beliefs.
- D. Education and catechesis are important keys for a positive mission in Africa. Embarking on intensive school and health care programs in the areas that are most disadvantaged extends Christ's love. Mission theology needs to review the background to religious education in Africa, given that most educational institutions of the Church today are money-making investments, profit oriented. It is also under this point that local Bishops need to recall that *ab-initio*, mission flourished in Africa through education. New converts never feared spirits. It requires that local Ordinaries set up consolidated educational programs not only aimed at earning money. True education is also catechetical.

- E. Missionaries need to update their theology of ministry to include both religious and social affairs. They can liaise with governments and stakeholders on socio-cultural and religious issues. It is possible to create public awareness through the social media and through other popular means like drama and the arts where youth get involved. The Church is one of the most effective channels of civic awareness and advocacy. For this to be effective, efforts should begin at the grass-roots. Most of those trapped in the endless chase of evil spirits are the people who immigrated to the urban areas from the poor villages. They feel very lost in teeming urban areas. Mission theology needs to promote small Christian communities as a pastoral approach because the basic doctrines of faith are learned easily.
- F. The conviction about the spirits could be based on finger-pointing. It is a false premise that creates fear, suspicion and mistrust. People tend to blame the wicked forces, their ancestors or the witches and wizards instead of being personally or collectively responsible for their destiny. It is a kind of *nature against me* mentality. Mission theology can act here by arguing for a spirituality of self-empowerment. Here people may discover the tremendous potential lying fallow inside them. This will encourage them to be more actively involved in their own development. People need to see the Kingdom of God right within them. Needless to say, mission theology has been lacking in this dimension leaving it in the hands of secularized freelance psychologists and self-appointed speakers.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we are to look critically and non-prejudicially at the root of this new awakening about spiritual *yoke-breaking* in the African religious consciousness, it might be that what people are searching for is actually liberation from the unjust structures which debilitate and impoverish their daily existence. Following the Latin Americans, African mission theology can dedicate more of its efforts to the Church's Social Doctrine. Because for people with an improved standard of living, the wings of the devils are truncated. The focus should also bear on Jesus triumphant and victorious as the deliverer. Over emphasis on the theology of the Cross and suffering does not help matters in the African situation.

This is a call for a prophetic missionary witnessing in context. Africans want to feel Christianity as part of their own flesh and blood, their own soul and love. In a sense an *Incarnated* Gospel notwithstanding its singularity and the complexities involved.<sup>42</sup> By the natural ordinance of social evolutions, Africans are playing a pivotal role in the global revitalization of the Christian faith. They need to desist spontaneously from seeing the devil everywhere. Instead of a fear-ridden world of spirits, the genius of our traditional heritage is strong African humanism and communality. That is an important contribution Africa can offer the world, crippled by hedonism and selfishness.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., Effa, L. A., *Releasing the Trigger: The Nigerian Factor in Global Christianity*, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 37, No. 4, October 2013, 214-218.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., MILINGO, E., *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*, C. Hurst and Company, London 1984, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf., SHORTER, A., *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and wholeness*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1985, 196.

<sup>4</sup> HARRINGTON, D.J., *Jesus: A Historical Portrait*, St Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, Ohio 2007, 39. In reference to Jesus' statement "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20).

<sup>5</sup> LUMBALA KABASELE, F., *Celebrating Jesus in Africa: Liturgy and Inculturation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1998, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> WOODHALL, R., *Movements from Primal Culture: Rivals or Friends*, in *Rethinking New Religious Movements*, Michael A. Fuss, (ed.), Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1998, 310.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., TWELFTREE, G.H., *In the name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians*, Baker Academic, Michigan 2007, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., MILINGO, E., *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*, C. Hurst and Company, London 1984, 37 (Milingo gives an account of a boy who prays to Dragon for success).

<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI., Post-Synodal Apostolic exhortation, *Africae Munus*, n. 91. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2001.

- <sup>10</sup> Cf., BONGMBA, E.K., *Witchcraft and the Christian Church: Ethical Implications*, in *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, GERRIE TER HAAR (ed.), Africa World Press, Inc. 2007, 118.
- <sup>11</sup> Luke's Gospel, 9: 18 -20 (See also, Mt 16:13-17, Mk 8:27-30), *New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition*. (Note that in the accounts of Mark and Matthew, Jesus had just come into a territory, the district of Caesarea Philippi, before posing this question. This could symbolize his entrance in the African territory).
- <sup>12</sup> BEDIAKO, K., *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2004, 37.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf., TWELFTREE, G.H., *In The Name of Jesus: Exorcism Among Early Christians*, Baker Academic, Michigan 2007, 25.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf., KALILOMBE, P.A., *Mission and Cultures: Reflections of an African Missionary in Britain*, in *Proceedings of the Mission Symposium: Celebrating Seventy-Five Years in Mission*, Maryknoll New York, 12-14 September 1986, 104-105.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf., SHORTER, A., *Man and His Integral Development*, in *African Christian Spirituality*, Aylward Shorter, (ed.), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1980, 15-20.
- <sup>16</sup> BENEDICT XVI., *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Africae Munus*, n. 4, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011.
- <sup>17</sup> The Igbo/Ibo is one of the 3 major tribes in Nigeria. They inhabit the South-East of Nigeria.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf., OBORJI, F.A., *Christianity and Traditional Religions: Orientations for a Pastoral Approach*, LEBERIT SRL Press, Rome, Italy 2009, 28.
- <sup>19</sup> MBITI, J.S., *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford 1991, 81.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf., TURNER, H.W., *The primal religions of the world and their study*, see Bediako Kwame, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, 87.
- <sup>21</sup> OBORJI, F.A., *Christianity and Traditional Religions: Orientations for a Pastoral Approach*, 29.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf., OBORJI, F.A., *Christianity and Traditional Religions: Orientations for a Pastoral Approach*, 32.
- <sup>23</sup> SHORTER, A., *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1985, 197.
- <sup>24</sup> BEDIAKO, K., *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004, 90.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf., FISHER, R.B., *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1998, 101.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf., MBITI, J.S., *The Prayers of African Religion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1975, 106. (In prayer 158, the medicine man only talks to the evil spirit and says: "Come; I will take you to your own body. Come with me").
- <sup>27</sup> Cf., UKPONG, D.P., *Nigerian Pentecostalism: Case, Diagnosis and Prescription*, Fruities Publications, Uyo, Nigeria 2008, 123.
- <sup>28</sup> NYAMITI, C., *The Theological Value of African Tradition*, in *African Christian Spirituality*, Aylward Shorter, (ed.) Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1980, 105.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf., MBITI, J.S., *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford 1991, 92-93.
- <sup>30</sup> BEDIAKO, K., *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2004, 38.
- <sup>31</sup> This argument is taken from AMACEA DOCUMENTATION SERIES, *New Christian Movements in Africa and Madagascar*, 22/1993, No. 402 (October 15<sup>th</sup> 1993) *Statement by the meeting for African Collaboration (MAC), in Ghana, 1992*.
- <sup>32</sup> SHORTER, A., *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*, 199.
- <sup>33</sup> SOBRINO, J., *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1993, 49.
- <sup>34</sup> LEWIS, C.S., *The Screwtape Letters*, quoted in TWELFTREE, G.H., *In The Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians*, Baker Academic, Michigan 2007, 294.
- <sup>35</sup> GÉLIN, A., *The Religion of Israel: A Faith and Fact Book*, Hawthorn Books Inc., London 1959, 90-91.
- <sup>36</sup> Cf., STRIJARDS, L. and SCHREUDER, O., *New Age Religion in The Netherlands: Some Preliminary Findings in Rethinking New Religious Movements*, Michael A. Fuss (ed.) 549.
- <sup>37</sup> LANCE, D., *Report on New Religious Movements and Cults*, Northampton Diocese, 12 August 1991, in *Rethinking New Religious Movements*, Michael A. Fuss, (ed.), 542-547 (Northampton is one of the 22 Dioceses in England and Wales).
- <sup>38</sup> KASPER, W., *The God of Jesus Christ*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1984, 87.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf., KASPER, W., *The God of Jesus Christ*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1984, 87.
- <sup>40</sup> KANAKAPPALLY, B., *Phenomenology of Belief and the Possibility of Inter-faith Dialogue in Karl Jaspers*, Urbaniana University Press, Città Del Vaticano, Rome 2008, 103.
- <sup>41</sup> BENEDICT XVI., *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Africae Munus*, n. 76, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf., COLZANI, G., *La Dimensione Missionaria Della Verbum Domini: Dalla Parola di Dio Alla Maturità Missionaria Della Chiesa*, In *Euntes Decete*, Nova Series, LXIV/2, 2011, Urbaniana University Press, Città Del Vaticano, Rome, 71-96 (*The 3<sup>rd</sup> segment of this article expounded on the difficulties in this incarnational model*).

Ref.: Text given by the author for the SEDOS Bulletin. January 2014.

Fr. Chima Fredrick Mbiere

# Health and Healing in Igbo Worldview: Significance and Missiological Implications

## Introduction

One can always tell the spirit of a people by the qualities they admire. This is true of the Igbo people of Nigeria, West Africa, who are under study. These qualities and attributes the Okigbo hold, among others, include: **caring for the sick and the aged, the safeguarding and protection of life, health care**, (others are: hard work, courage, integrity, community living and sharing, etc.). These are the attributes that define the line between success and failure.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this work intends first, to explore the very notion of health and healing in Igbo cosmology, and it will clarify the Igbo concepts of **Ndu** (life) and **Ogwugwo** (healing/health care) because a better understanding of the Igbo sense of health and healing must flow from the concepts of *Ndu* and *Ogwugwo*. Secondly, the work proposes to focus on the heart of the investigation: how *healthcare* and *healing* are practiced in the Igbo cultural milieu. Thirdly, from the missiological implications these practices outline, some theological-pastoral insights will be drawn and indicate **a fruitful integration of these cultural values and identity with the Church's mission of evangelization** in Igbo land, especially in her healing ministry. The conclusion will summarize the major points of the discussion and try to indicate any negative approaches or abuse of these cultural practices that represent a danger to, or challenge, the pastoral ministry, which have to be taken up by catechesis.

## 1. Clarification of Concepts

### 1.1 Geographical Location and Worldview of the Igbo People of Nigeria

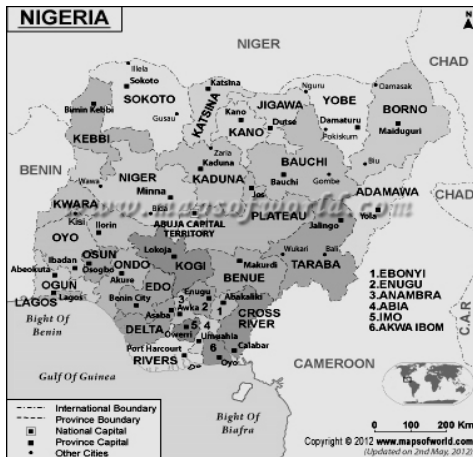


Figure 1: The Original Igbo States include: Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and even Rivers.

The Igbo people is located in south-eastern Nigeria, with a population of over 50 million, and at present it constitutes probably the second largest major ethnic group in the country. The Igbo people of Nigeria are actually those whose natural home is in Igbo land; their language and culture are called Igbo — thus Igbo language and Igbo culture. Indeed the word “Igbo” is usually used in three senses: to refer to the territory (Igbo land), to the speakers of the language (the Igbo people) and to the language itself (Igbo language).

### ***Njiko Igbo: The True Story of the Igbo***

The Igbo worldview, following from the insights given by W. Abraham on the world view,<sup>2</sup> refers to the *complex of beliefs, habits, laws, customs, and traditions of the Igbo people*, which implies among other things, their overall view of reality, the universe, life and existence, *their attitude to life and to things in general*; whether or not life has a meaning and purpose, what is worth striving to attain; what is man's place in the scheme of things; whether or not man has an immortal soul, etc.<sup>3</sup> Like every African's world view, *the Igbo man employs the myths to express and explain his vision of the world and the universe in general*, for example the existence of the first man, the **sense of good health, the reasons for sickness, suffering and even for death**.<sup>4</sup> It depicts also in a special way the **people's quest for survival**. This *quest for survival is embodied in the search for good health, and presupposes an awareness of the sources of trouble, which can also be taken to be both terrestrial (human) and supra-terrestrial (spiritual)*. This will be elaborated further in the course of our discussion on the aspects of health and healing as conceived and practiced among the Igbo.



### 1.2 The Igbo Sense of Health and the Concept of Ndu (Life)

The Igbo sense of health and healing can be perceived in two Igbo words: *Ndu* (life/health) and *Ogwugwo* (healing/health care). To these two terms (*Ndu* and *Ogwugwo*) we shall now briefly turn our attention.

**Ndu** (Life/health [*aru ike*]): There is no sharp distinction between life and health in the Igbo worldview. **Ndu** (life) as **Uzokuwu** would say *stands for the Igbo as a value around which other values find their meaning ... the centre of his prayer in the morning is life.*<sup>5</sup> And so, an in-depth comprehension of the Igbo sense of health must flow from the meaning they attach to life. **Okere** observes that the Igbo values life above all things since life is strength, power and dynamism.<sup>6</sup> To be healthy implies to be lively. The value he attaches to life is depicted even in such Igbo native names as *Ndukaku* or *Ndukuba* (life is more valuable than wealth), *Ndubuokwu* (life is quite estimable or deserving), *Ndumka* (my life is above every other thing), *Ndubuizu* (life begets communion), *Ifeakandu* (nothing is worth more than life), *Ndukwe* (if life permits), *Ndujekwu* (only life will determine), and *Ndubuisi* (life is the supreme good). In this vein, **Ilogu** affirms that *ndu (life) is, for the Igbo, the highest good, Summum Bonum,*<sup>7</sup> it belongs to God, thus *Chinwendu* (God is the source of life), and so he constantly combats any condition that might pose a danger to this life, such as *ill-health*. Therefore, in line with this explanation of health for the Igbo, **Ifeanyi** succinctly underlines:

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could be used restrictively to denote the physical state or condition of the body and mind. Phrases like: *aru-ike* or *ahu-ike* (strength of the body), *aru-idi-mma* (goodness of the body), *aru-izu-oke* (wholeness of the body), *idi-ndu* (being lively/active) are normally used in the expressions of health or being healthy.<sup>8</sup>

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In a wider sense, the desire for sound and integral health goes beyond a person's physical health, to a harmonious relationship between the *physical* and *metaphysical worlds*; it is all-encompassing. Being in good health does not imply solely bodily fitness but also perfect harmony with self, others, nature and spirits, thus, integral health.

**Oguejiofor** states that sound health for an Igbo involves among other things, the continuous presence of water, either in a spring or stream, rich harvest of the crop (absence of famine and other natural disasters such as: cyclone, flooding, and storm; the death of young people; successful conception or childbearing, abundance of male offspring, progress in business, ability to find a suitable husband or wife, absence of family quarrels), in more modern times. success in examinations, easily obtaining a good job and promotion in the same, etc.<sup>9</sup> **Health** includes the *well-being of the individual, the community and the natural environment*. The average Igbo believes that any *disruption of the normal harmony of this cosmic order could boomerang in the form of sickness, or ill health, which could take various forms ranging from the physical to the spiritual or from the psychological to the social*, etc. This explains the belief that sickness is what befalls one when one deviates from the law *omenani*, and by that act, the cordial and harmonious social relationship between the visible and the invisible world is broken. Thus, a solution is sought to this state of life or health by way of healing. Let us now turn our attention to the issue of healing in traditional Igbo society.

### 1.3 Igbo Sense of Healing and the Concept of Ogwugwo

The Igbo term *ogwugwo* means healing, and it is the totality of the process followed in order to cure any ailment or pain, be it physical, spiritual, emotional, social, etc. This understanding supports **Scalan's** view when he states that *healing means that process by which what is wounded or sick becomes whole and healthy. It is a naturally induced process to health.*<sup>10</sup> Hence, in traditional Igbo society, the idea of healing is based on the physical level although by extension it integrates the various elements of personality, and involves the reconciliation of a person in all relationships, both natural and supernatural. **Ugwu**, an Igbo author, presents the two categories of the healing process in Igbo culture, viz. *the folk or the self medication*, which is normally undertaken on a personal level. In the first instance, the sick person tries to treat the sickness at home. The second one, involves *the expert healing and consultation with the dibia*, the traditional medicine men or the medicine experts.<sup>11</sup> In whichever class, the common denominator applied is the use of medicine or **ogwu** (herbs/medicine). However, *the actual healing in traditional Igbo society is expressed well in the traditional health care of the sick and requires a personal intervention, family, community*

and the *dibia* to cure one of any sickness. For this purpose, we shall delve into the discussion of health care at once.

## 2. The Practice of Health Care and Healing in Igbo Culture

### 2.1 Basics of health care and healing among the Igbo (*Izo/Nlekota Ndu*)

2.2 The Igbo is basically sociable, and this is manifested in various facets of his life. **Arinze** holds that, *for Igbo as for many Africans, to exist is to belong to a family, live in the group or community, to see and do things with the group. Life (Ndu) is not an individual*

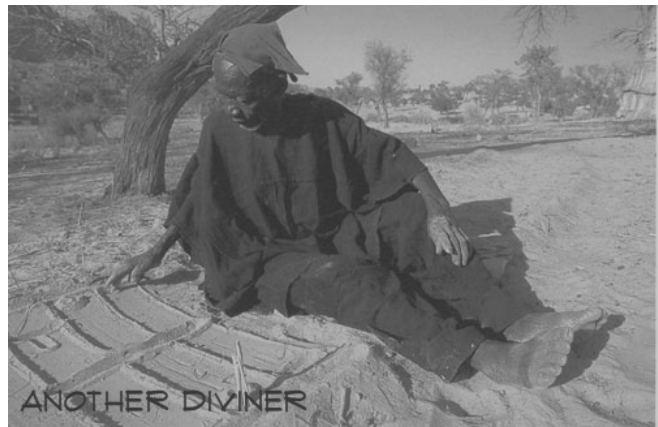


*scheme, each one for himself.* (This social instinct among the Igbo has contributed enormously to the realization of many community development projects. For example, the Igbo help one another to build houses, construct new roads, celebrate funerals, solemnize marriages, etc.).<sup>12</sup> This feature is even stronger in the case of care and security of life, especially in the area of health care (*Izo/Nlekota Ndu*). The Igbo devotes ample time to the care of his sick one and makes a strenuous effort to preserve, not only his own, health but that of his brothers and relatives. **Ifemesia** observes that: *compassion was deeply felt for the sick or wounded, the less fortunate and the physically or mentally*

*handicapped. And the family took responsibility for such people as a matter of course.*<sup>13</sup>

Little wonder then, that at the bedside of any sick person in traditional Igbo society there are always his family and relatives. It is abhorrent to them that a sick person be left alone, neither catered nor cared for, especially by his close relatives, his/her immediate family.

In terms of healing or the treatment of the sick: on falling sick *the initial step is to attempt to treat the patient at home. At times, a relative might go to fetch some medicine from an herbalist or someone who knows the cure. Often, sacrifices and prayers may be offered and the ancestors implored to come to their aid.* If the sickness should persist despite all these efforts, a suspicion might arise of a deeper and higher force behind the illness, especially when the illness is grave. In that case, a diviner may be consulted to ascertain the hidden cause in order to find a possible solution.<sup>14</sup>



*The diviner is considered as an agent able to unveil the mysteries of human life.*

Indeed, we must point out here that the causes of sickness in the Igbo world view could be *human agents*, through the *supernatural forces*, or the use of *mystical/occult powers*, and these are

reflected in the healing practices and the search for a remedy. This world-view is no doubt clouded by a strong belief in the existence and influence of spiritual forces, whereby all the events in the physical world are virtually traced and interpreted in connection with the spiritual one, including the diverse human conditions: *healthy and unhealthy*. This is quite evident in the situation of illness in traditional Igbo society. The collective name for all the medicine used in the treatment of the sick, as already mentioned, is regarded as *ogwu*. Illustrating the meaning of *ogwu*, **Metuh** states that:

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the Igbo word – *Ogwu* – stands for medicine, magic, sorcery, charm, talisman, etc. *Ogwu* may be used in a positive or a negative sense. It could be used positively for healing or protection and be used negatively for destructive purposes. Some use the term *iko Nsi* (sorcery) to denote the negative sense of *Ogwu*.<sup>15</sup>

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This implies that the Igbo meaning of Ogwu<sup>16</sup> as medicine has many connotations depending on the use attributed to it. Thus, it may be used as preventive, curative, protective medicine or as aggressive medicine [with which to harm others].<sup>17</sup> In terms of the **treatment:** here, the sick person is treated with some traditional medicines in the form of herbs and roots. It is usually the medicine men or herbalists who prepare the medicines from herbs and roots for the treatment of ailments. A further step of offering a sacrifice may sometimes be taken for the healing of the sick when the diviner has ascertained the cause.<sup>18</sup> The sacrifice could be made by the medicine men or the priests. The healing takes place gradually once all the necessary conditions have been met. However, it is pertinent to note that in health care and healing practices in Igbo society, some are designated as special people in the field. Briefly, let us at once see who these are.

### 2.3 Special figures in the care and healing of the sick in Igbo society

Definitely, as there are diverse medicines, there are diverse medical personnel in Igbo society called the *Dibia*. People go to consult various medicine men/women for different cases depending on what one is seeking.



In the light of the above we hereby distinguish the following classes of medicine men, *dibia* in Igbo culture. *Dibia afa/dibia ogba aja* (diviner or doctor of secrets) for divination diagnosis, *Dibia aja/nchu aja/anya odo*, (priest or doctor of sacrifice, ritual expert), *Dibia onye oha* (community healer) for community matters, such as propitiation for abominations and king making, *Dibia mgborogwu na Mkpa akwukwo*, (root and herb experts/doctor) for herbalism, *Dibia ara* (doctor for the insane, psychiatrist), *Dibia ogbaokpukpo* (orthopedic doctor) for bone-setting, *Dibia ogbanje/mami-wota* (exorcist) for healing and care of the spirit of children and water spirit crisis, *Dibia amosu* (witchdoctor) deals with witchcraft healing, *Dibia mmanwu*, for masquerade guarding, *Dibia mmiri/amadioha* (Rain-maker), for rain and thunder matters,

*Dibia afo-ime/omumu* (gynecologist, midwife) for fertility healing and pregnancy matters, *Dibia owa ahu/okwochi* (traditional surgeon) for surgery related ailments, *Dibia anya, nti, imi na eze* (oculist, dentist, etc.) cure of eye, ear, nose and dental problems, etc. A healer may combine various specializations. A *dibia* is both a restorer and transmitter of life, a healer, medicine man/woman and priest. The healer is one who blows away and binds the maleficent forces and crises that disturb the individual and society. Healers engage in a great number of ritual and healing activities to address ailments, illness, social and cosmological disorders. A healer's fame rests on his level of training and the form of expertise. A *dibia* is elected to this function by the great medicine deity, known as *agwu*. According to Arinze, a *dibia* offers sacrifices to his *Agwu*.<sup>19</sup> While **Adibe** posits that, through *Agwu* deity, they get dreams and premonitions of the power of herbs and animal parts that have the power to heal ailments and improve human life.<sup>20</sup> Every medicine man must have his *ofo*, a symbol of his bond with the ancestors and the *ani*, the earth; the abode of the present life and the after life. In any case, the medicine men, in the face of advanced Western medication and science still continue to be consulted by all and sundry in terms of ailments in Igbo land, especially the ones who have proved mysterious to the modern Western medical system. The greatest challenge to this traditional practice today is the proliferation of the Christian healing and deliverance ministries, which we shall deliberate on, in the next stage.

## 3. The Missiological Implications

### 3.1 Some Pastoral-Theological Insights: From Igbo Traditional Health Care and Healing to the Christian Healing Ministry

The study made so far on the practice of healing and health care in traditional Igbo society has paved the way to our understanding of the cultural background of the people in question; in the light of their attitude to the sick and the consequent healing/cure. Indeed before the advent of Christianity with its healing ministry in Igbo land in the nineteenth century, there had been certain

healing practices in vogue among the Igbo, some of which have endured until today. Hence, some theological-pastoral insights which could emanate from the practice include:

- The idea of the **Supreme Being/sense of the Sacred (God)** in the scheme of man's life/health and healing is quite evident from such Igbo expressions and names as **Chinwendu** (God is the source of life) and **Chukwukadibia** (God is more powerful than the *dibia* [the medicine man]).
- Other **deities** and the **ancestors** actually play some significant roles in the care and healing of the sick in Igbo society. Based on this Mbiti has shown that *the majority of prayers and invocations are addressed to God, and some to the living-dead or the spiritual beings many of whom serve as intermediaries.*<sup>21</sup>
- The notion of **sacrifices** and **prayers** to the spiritual being: The practice of sacrifice and prayers have obtained among the Igbo for the healing of the sick and the restoration of integral good health to the sick and the community at large.
- The place of **man** in the care and healing of the sick: Both the family, the community and some traditional medical experts have their various roles to perform in the health care and healing of the sick.
- The regard for the **law** (divine and human): An average Igbo person believes that any disruption in the normal harmony of the cosmic order i.e. the deviation from the law **omenani**, (and by that act, the cordial and harmonious social relationship between the visible and the invisible world is broken) could boomerang in the form of sickness, or ill health, which could appear in various forms ranging from the physical to the spiritual or psychological to the social, etc.
- **Restoration of harmony**: The aim of the healing process is the restoration of the original harmony with self, with the community of persons and with the spirit world - a harmony that was disturbed or disrupted culpably or non-culpably, by omission or commission. This process is essentially **religious** in character and in orientation. Healing indeed, in Igbo society is a process and not an instantaneous event.
- **Compassion** and **caring**: These are the main tenets of the attitude to the sick. Great compassion and caring characterize a typical Igbo person towards his sick one thus the Igbo expression: *nlekota onye oya ka ogwugwo ya* (concern/caring for the sick is greater than the cure).
- **Community spirit**: When a person falls sick in the community, the entire community is involved. The sick never lacks for visits from the community and its wishes for a quick-recovery. There is always joy and celebration (dancing) by the community to God and the gods upon the healing of any sick person.

### 3.1.1 Integrating the Traditional Values with Igbo Christianity



**Igbo traditional masquerades**



**A cross-section of Christians on a healing ground**

**At the arrival of Christianity** in the Igbo world, with its mission in various sectors, such as the healing ministry, in many cases there has been a significant change from the numerous *Igbo/African deities to Christ of Christianity*, although many of the characteristic features of the traditional African view of reality still persist. Therefore the values presented above exert a lot of influence on the Igbo Christian who is the direct product of the culture. Hence, it may be said that: *some of the above features are shared in common with the Christian religion.* Actually, in the Christian healing ministry, **God** is taken to be the force behind every healing.

Equally the **angels** and the **saints** play some significant roles as intermediaries in interceding for the healing, and such roles are performed by the **deities** and **ancestors** in the traditional Igbo healing process. Thus the **Christian healing ministers**; the priests, etc. act as human mediators, like the **dibia** and other **medicine men** who act as human healing agents. Of course, **Christ**, who is the Author and ultimate source of Christian healing, was always moved by compassion for the sick before any healing and was full of concern for the suffering (cf. Mk. 2:1-12, Mt 9:2-8, Lk. 6:6-11; 8:26-39, Mt. 9:18-26, Mk. 6:53-56, Acts 10:38). The instances abound in the Scriptures of Jesus' compassion towards the sick and the troubled. Mt. 8:7 in particular records that Jesus was moved with great compassion for the sick servant and that he healed him.

In line with this, **Oguejiofor** sustains that we can see in this understanding *a meeting point between this conception of the Gospel message and health care in the Igbo traditional world view that is replicated in the traditional practice.*<sup>22</sup> In effect, *Jesus' healing miracles have come to replace the acclaimed wonders worked by the deities.* Based on the injunction of the Second Vatican Council Fathers, who advocated deeper theological research in each cultural area in order to enable each particular Church to fulfill its identity better and make its proper contribution to the Universal Church,<sup>23</sup> an appropriate inculturation of these values is urgent in the healing ministry but not without taking cognizance of the negative aspects of this practice as *syncretism, sorcery, incredulity, charming, bewitching*, etc. Could the pastoral workers and the healing ministers be more aware of these for a better pastoral fruitfulness in terms of pastoral care and the healing of the sick in the Igbo Church?

### **3.2 Healing ministry as an effective means of evangelization today in Igbo land**

The Christian truth, as Pope Francis would say, is attractive and persuasive because it responds to the deep needs of human existence; convincingly proclaiming that Christ is the only Saviour of the whole person and of all people. This proclamation is as valid today as it was at the beginning of Christianity when there was a great missionary expansion of the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> Christ himself was aware of this when he emphatically stated, while sending his disciples on mission, the mandate upon which the healing ministry is founded:

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Then Jesus called the Twelve disciples and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. And he sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Lk 9:1-2).

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In another episode, Luke writes of the sending out of the other disciples as follows:

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After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, in pairs, to every town and place, where he himself intended to go. And he said to them ... cure the sick who are there.... (cf. Lk 10:1-12).

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The above expresses the mission to heal entrusted to the Church for all ages. Of course Christ demonstrated this ministry by his various miracles of healing which are recounted by the Evangelists of the Synoptic Gospels. The ministry was carried on strongly by the apostles and the early Christian communities, (cf. Acts 3:1-10, 5:12-16, 8:7, 9:32-35, etc.), as well as by the early missionaries.

The theological import of the above is that this practice is a mandate which Christ gave to his disciples. The Church therefore inherited this from her Founder. Christ came to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God and that God has visited his people and therefore demonstrated his power to forgive sins and to heal the sick, which he transferred to his disciples and which the Church inherited and has been carrying out ever since. Indeed, Jesus' ministry to the sick is continued by his Body the Church which received the charge to "heal the sick" (Mt 10:8), from him. She strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession.<sup>25</sup> **The Church has this mission** to be and become ever more visibly and effectively a sign of the Kingdom, a visible, efficacious sign of salvation in all its dimensions. **The salvation** which Christ has wrought through the sacrament of healing and the healing ministry continues to be made present to humanity. This means that the Church is carrying on the mission of salvation, and she embarks on this ministry through her ministers, pastoral agents, other missionaries and evangelizers. And,



since many have come to believe in the Gospel message at the sight of the many healing miracles and other wonders performed by Jesus and his disciples, extending it to the early Christian communities (the people being saved or liberated physically and spiritually), the work of evangelization in Igbo land could respond to the deeper needs of human existence today, which among others include the endless search for healing. *The pastoral care of the sick as part of evangelization touches the very life of man and integral human health* (spiritual and physical). By the pastoral care of the sick we think of the sacraments of healing, i.e. confession, the anointing of the sick, the communion of the sick and the healing prayer ministry, all these aspects of evangelization will go a long way to make the Gospel a lived and a liberating experience for the Igbo and thereby make the Christian faith flourish.

## Conclusion

Divulging the significance and the missiological implications of the sense of life/health and healing, *Ndu/Aru ike* and *Ogwugwo*, to the Igbo of Nigeria has been a great catalyst for a better knowledge of the people in question and for the success of the work of evangelization. Among other things we have come to realize that the Igbo cherish health and protect life above every other value and combat any condition of ill health at all costs. Their desire for **sound** and **integral health** goes beyond the physical level to embrace the supernatural, or rather to a harmonious relationship between the physical and metaphysical worlds; it is all-encompassing. A sound state of health and life, as we have learnt, is sought by way of healing, which implies that healing in Igbo society is a process and not an instantaneous event. Ample time is given to the care, the total health care (*Izo/Nlekota Ndu*), of the sick. The practice of health care among the Igbo is indeed pronounced owing to the social instincts of compassion and care which are in their blood stream, i.e., their basic feature. An Igbo's life therefore, finds its identity in the life of the community which influences every aspect of his/her life, including the understanding of health/healing and the integral care of the sick.

Indeed it is to be noted that the attitude of the Church to this world view, as **Achebe** observes, requires *a particular attitude of mind*.<sup>26</sup> A feature of this disposition is respect for what is good in the cultural identity of a people and proper integration. The Igbo people, and actually Africans, have always yearned for the fullness of God and have sought Him, not in abstractions but in their concrete identity and practices. Their attitude to the sick, the healing process, health care, etc., are a concrete manifestation of their regard for God and His Creation. The dangers posed by any negative practice of this cultural value, such as sorcery, syncretism, etc., are taken to be the pastoral challenges which this theological investigation seeks to point out, as well as the need to approach it through proper catechesis. *Christianity therefore, in its mission in Igbo land especially in its healing ministry has the inner strength to be like its Founder, to establish its universality precisely in the particularity of the people*, i.e. their cultural values. The Church, by this approach, can then root Jesus and His Gospel in the Igbo identity and thereby meet the challenges to, and any aberration of, the healing ministry and so further her mission of proclamation.

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> P.N.C. OKIGBO, "Towards a reconstruction of the political economy of Igbo civilization", in *1986 Ahiajoku Lecture*, Culture Division, Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, Owerri 1986, p. 18.
- <sup>2</sup> A worldview always designates the effort of a people, a community, to understand the world or the reality around them (cf. W. ABRAHAM, *Sources of African Identity*, in A. DIEMER (ed.), *African and the Problems of its Identity*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 1985, 19).
- <sup>3</sup> T.U. NWALA, *Igbo Philosophy, Litermed Publications*, Lagos 1985, 26.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London 1.979, 24.
- <sup>5</sup> E.E. UZUKWU, "Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning", in *Lucerna* (Bigard Theological Studies) 4/1, 1983, 9-14.
- <sup>6</sup> T.I. OKERE, "Chibundu: Ofufe Chukwu n'etiti Ndi Igbo", in *Odenigbo 1997*, Assumpta Press, Owerri 1997, 66-67.
- <sup>7</sup> E. ILOGU, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, New York 1974, 129.
- <sup>8</sup> V. IFEANYI, *The Catholic Church and the Challenges of the Traditional System of Health Care in Nigeria: A Moral Study of the Light of a Holistic Understanding of Health Care*, Rome 1989, 49.
- <sup>9</sup> J. OGUEJIOFOR, "African World view, Gospel Message and Technological Advancement", in *Bigard Theological Studies*, Jan.- June 2004, Vol. 24, Nos. 1, 31.
- <sup>10</sup> M. Scalan, *Inner Healing*, Dublin 1977, 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. M.C. UGWU, *Healing in the Nigerian Church: A Pastoral-Psychological Exploration*, Peter Lang, Bern 1998, 69.
- <sup>12</sup> F.A. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Igbo Traditional Religion*, St. Stephen's Press, Onitsha 2008, 6-7.
- <sup>13</sup> C. IFEMESIA, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, Enugu 1979, 64.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. M.C. UGWU, *Healing in the Nigerian Church: A Pastoral-psychological Exploration*, 69.
- <sup>15</sup> E.I. METUH, *God and Man in African Religion*, Snaap Press, Enugu 1999, 97.
- <sup>16</sup> The Igbo also see this medicine as being under the control of *Agwu Deity*, the deity that is usually invoked as a tutelary divinity in connection with both licit and illicit magic in Igbo land.
- <sup>17</sup> G.E. ADIBE, *Ogwu: Igbo Traditional Power Challenges the Igbo Christian*, GoodMark Prints Production, Onitsha 2006, 19.
- <sup>18</sup> The sacrifice must be made to the gods for the cure of the sick person if the cause, as ascertained by the diviner, is spiritual or the sacrifice of expiation is made when the cause is due to the deviation from, or the violation of, the law by the patient.
- <sup>19</sup> F.A. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Igbo Traditional Religion*, 129.
- <sup>20</sup> G.E. ADIBE, *Igbo Mysticism: Power of Igbo Traditional Religion and Society*, Imagine Realities Ltd., Onitsha 2008, 196.
- <sup>21</sup> J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Morrison & Gibb Ltd, London 1969, 61.
- <sup>22</sup> J. OGUEJIOFOR, "African World view, Gospel Message and Technological Advancement", 36.
- <sup>23</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (7 December 1965), n. 22.
- <sup>24</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *First Official Address to the Cardinals*, Vatican City, 15 March 2013.
- <sup>25</sup> *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* (Revised edition), Paulines Publication Africa, Nairobi 2002, 1509.
- <sup>26</sup> Chinua ACHEBE, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension, Enugu 1983, 19.

Pierre Ménard\*

## Un compromiso temporal, un resultado duradero

### *La clínica San Gregorio en Buduburam*

Hace un poco más de diez años, el cardenal Turkson, entonces arzobispo en Cape Coast en Ghana, hizo un llamado para una ayuda en la reapertura de la clínica San Gregorio del campo de refugiados en Buduburam. Se trata de un terreno de algunas decenas de hectáreas situado en lo que es hoy la gran periferia de la megápolis de Accra, a 40 km del centro de la ciudad. Este lugar cerca a la costa atlántica tiene una historia particular: en los años 1960-1980 fue un lugar de cuidados y, sobre todo, de aislamiento y reclusión para los enfermos psiquiátricos, llamados también los "perturbados", para no utilizar un término más peyorativo aún. Al comienzo de los años 90, la mala reputación que este lugar había conservado, facilitó la instalación, sin mucha resistencia de parte del Estado ghanés y de la población nativa, de refugiados originarios en su gran mayoría de Liberia. ¿Qué había pasado en este pequeño país de África?

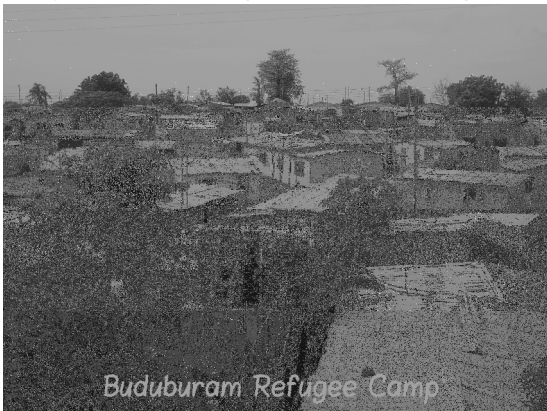
### Los horrores que empujan al exilio

En 1980, Samuel Kanyon Doe, un liberiano nativo, toma el poder por un sangriento golpe de *Estado* contra la minoría de origen americano que había gobernado el país por completo desde hace más de un siglo, y puso en su lugar una dictadura violenta. A su vez, es combatido por el *National Patriotic Front of Liberia*, un grupo de oposición bajo la dirección de Charles Taylor. La revuelta gana rápidamente en todo el país sin encontrar resistencia seria de parte de las fuerzas gubernamentales. La avanzada, sin embargo, encontró oposición en la entrada de Monrovia. Ningún señor de la guerra es un verdadero ganador; los enfrentamientos *continúan*, mus y más personas temen por su vida y huyen del infierno.

El envío de una fuerza de mediación por los miembros de la comunidad económica de los Estados de África del Oeste no cambia mucho la situación. Los horrores de la guerra civil continúan; hay múltiples secuelas; ya no se cuentan los muertos sin hablar de miles de mutilados.... Eso es lo que ha empujado al exilio a centenares de miles de liberianos. Algunos se dirigen directamente hacia Ghana, donde son acogidos en dos campos, el más grande siendo aquel de Buduburam. Otros hacen un alto en Guinea y, sobre todo, en Costa de Marfil, de donde parten nuevamente a comienzos de los años 2000, expulsados por la guerra civil que también ahí hace estragos. Finalmente, llegan al campo de Buduburam que conoce en esta época su mayor afluencia, sin duda mayor a 40.000 personas.

### Pobres, tanto de dignidad como de pan

En 2002, la densidad es extrema en el campo de Buduburam. Los refugiados viven en barracas de tablas de menos de 10 metros cuadrados para familias de 6 personas. No existe higiene colectiva y la basura es superficialmente incinerada en los accesos inmediatos del campo, lo que provoca enormes problemas de higiene. A pesar de los medios fuertemente limitados, el Estado ghanés, el Alto Comisionado para los Refugiados (ACR) y las Organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG), intentan llevar ayuda a los refugiados. Se esfuerzan en acondicionar el campo, pero las condiciones de vida se mantienen muy difíciles. La mortalidad infantil pero también la de los jóvenes adultos son muy elevadas.



Buduburam Refugee Camp

Para numerosos refugiados, el peso del pasado es más duro de cargar que el día a día siempre incierto. La mayoría de ellos ha sufrido directamente en su carne o en su corazón durante la guerra civil. Numerosas familias han sido diezmadas y separadas. El campo acoge también a antiguos niños soldados. Su



experiencia de guerreros les ha traumatizado profundamente, al punto que muchos de ellos se sienten derrotados. A esto se añade el temor que milicianos de cualquier bando podrían esconderse entre los habitantes del campo.

Algunos refugiados se esfuerzan por recrear una actividad para aprender de nuevo a llevar una vida normal, y para adquirir nuevamente la dignidad del adulto que gana su propio sustento y así atenuar un poco la dependencia financiera con respecto al ACR. Así, el campo se transforma poco a poco en un lugar de vida con comercios y artesanos. Este nuevo enraizamiento queda, sin embargo, frágil ya que el sueño alimentado por la mayoría es de poder instalarse en un país que consideran como "desarrollado", una especie de paraíso al que desean llegar a cualquier precio.... Menos del 10% lo logran y quizá un poco más, tomando en cuenta los reagrupamientos familiares. El sueño es poco realista, pero esta ilusión del paraíso tan ansiado perturba constantemente el retorno a una vida normal. "¿Para qué formarse y descubrir un nuevo oficio, concentrarme en el mejoramiento de la vida en el campo, si, por suerte, logro salir de aquí?".

### **Urgente necesidad de cuidados médicos**

A comienzos de los años 90, el ACR había creado una pequeña estructura de salud a la entrada del campo. La habían cerrado en 1999 cuando el conflicto en Liberia se había calmado un poco; muchos de los refugiados, habían regresado a su país. El edificio sin personal fue entregado a la diócesis de Cape Coast. Con la nueva afluencia de refugiados, diez años más tarde se hacía más urgente la cuestión de hacerse cargo de la salud.

Para hacer frente a la enorme demanda de asistencia médica, algunos profesionales de salud liberianos intentan asegurar una actividad desprendida pero no tienen local adaptado ni material ni muchas veces medicamentos. En aquella época, ningún profesional de salud ghanés y, en particular, ningún médico aceptaba ir a trabajar en el campo. Entonces el cardenal Turkson lanza su llamado....

### **La Fraternidad Laica Misionera**

Luego de una misión exploratoria llevada a cabo por un médico, miembro de la Fraternidad Laica Misionera (FLM), esta responde favorablemente al llamado del Cardenal. La FLM es una comunidad de laicos asociados a la Sociedad de las Misiones Africanas (SMA). Sus miembros tienen cierta experiencia en gestión de proyectos de salud y se sienten ligados por la oración, el compartir fraterno y el compromiso misionero. Entre ellos hay varios profesionales, enfermeras y médicos que han trabajado en diferentes países que buscan dotarse de una infraestructura médica al servicio de la población: Costa de Marfil, Benín, Nigeria y Laos.



Con la ayuda de la Delegación Católica para la Cooperación (DCC), la FML ha enviado regularmente voluntarios desde 2002 a 2012. En el transcurso de estos diez años se han sucedido por equipos de dos. Se trataba de nueve voluntarios en total: tres parejas y tres solteros. El contrato con la diócesis es bastante claro: la tarea de los voluntarios consiste en desarrollar la clínica y mejorar la toma de la salud curativa y preventiva, con el fin de transferir en un plazo razonable la responsabilidad de la clínica a profesionales locales.

Los miembros de la FLM, primeramente, han participado en la reiniciación de la clínica procurando asistencia a los refugiados. Luego se han esforzado en desarrollar la estructura médica, lo que ha llevado a una extensión en tres fases. Finalmente, y sobre todo, han tomado a pecho la constitución y la animación de un equipo de profesionales locales con alrededor de treinta personas en el momento de su partida. La formación de este personal es una prioridad: asegura asistencia médica de calidad y prepara la transferencia de responsabilidades. Hay que admitir que este último objetivo siempre ha sido un poco una

apuesta. Siendo refugiados, varios de estas personas esperan poder salir un día hacia un país económicamente más holgado, otros se enfocan en un retorno a su país de origen; otros aun desean instalarse en Ghana, pero fuera del campo, beneficiándose de mejores condiciones de trabajo y de alojamiento.

### **Profesionalización progresiva**

Los primeros años de esta nueva clínica. San Gregorio estuvieron marcados por la urgencia. Se tuvo que hacer frente a una demanda de cuidados curativos que no podían darse en lugares cercanos. Las patologías eran varias con muchos problemas concernientes a la madre y al niño, pero también en relación con las secuelas de la guerra civil: lesiones somáticas y traumatismos psicológicos. Gracias al financiamiento del AGR y de organizaciones caritativas, algunos pacientes han podido ser transferidos hacia establecimientos hospitalarios mejor equipados: los hospitales diocesanos o el Centro Hospitalario Universitario.

Progresivamente la clínica ha buscado organizar programas de prevención. Ha contribuido particularmente en el diagnóstico, en el tratamiento y, sobre todo, en la prevención del SIDA. La desnutrición constituye otro problema mayor. Felizmente uno de los voluntarios se ha comprometido particularmente en la creación de un centro destinado a la rehabilitación y a la educación nutricional.

### **Desarrollos importantes**

En el transcurso de estos mismos años, la organización de las estructuras sanitarias ha evolucionado en Ghana. La clínica, en acuerdo con la diócesis, decidió inscribirse plenamente en esta evolución. En efecto, desde 2006 y a partir de un análisis compartido con el Cardenal, el equipo decidió tomar en cuenta dos desarrollos importantes.

El primero concierne los programas de ayuda para el retorno, que no tienen sino un éxito mitigado a pesar de la estabilización de la situación política en Liberia. Ciertos refugiados, muchas veces los mejores calificados, regresan con la ayuda acordada conjuntamente con el ACR. Pero un buen número de los que han perdido todo en su país de origen no desean reinstalarse ahí, ya que también habían dejado su país hace más de diez años. Estos últimos son más de 15.000. Proyectos de instalación en otras regiones de Ghana son planeados, a veces, por iniciativa de comunidades cristianas, pero relativamente conciernen a pocas personas. Mientras tanto, la situación en el campo de refugiados ha mejorado un poco, miles prefieren quedarse y desarrollar actividades en el lugar.

El segundo desarrollo está ligado a la expansión de la aglomeración de Accra. Más y más ghaneses se instalan en la proximidad inmediata del campo de refugiados. Como no hay otro servicio de salud en los alrededores, comienzan a frecuentar la clínica San Gregorio. Los profesionales ghaneses de la salud también comienzan a aceptar por trabajar en el campo.

### **Acreditación**

Estos desarrollos crean una nueva situación, la cual la clínica debe enfrentar. La única vía que puede conducir a un éxito es la integración plena en los servicios ghaneses de salud, lo que supone que la clínica sea reconocida por el Estado como un establecimiento de salud. En otros términos, debe satisfacer a las exigencias para la acreditación. Es una etapa difícil y, al mismo tiempo, fructífera, ya que obliga a los responsables a mejorar la calidad de la asistencia médica, lo que imperativamente pasa por la profesionalización del personal. Gracias a esta nueva situación, los ghaneses aceptan cada vez más venir a trabajar en la clínica.

Esta acreditación por el Ministerio de Salud es primordial, puesto que da derecho al financiamiento de los salarios por el Estado. Obtenida en 2010, ha permitido a la dirección contratar nuevo personal con las calificaciones reconocidas en el plan nacional. Esta nueva contratación reemplaza gradualmente a los liberianos, lo que no siempre es fácil de manejar. Por otro lado, la puesta en marcha del seguro de salud para todo en Ghana permite programar un equilibrio financiero de la clínica y el fin de la dependencia de los subsidios exteriores.

## **Resultado duradero**

El desarrollo de la clínica San Gregorio puede ser calificada de espectacular. Un pequeño centro de cuidados médicos, equipado de manera rudimentaria, se convirtió en un hospital acreditado, que ofrece cuidados de calidad con una nueva maternidad, una unidad quirúrgica, cuarenta camas y un volumen de actividad en crecimiento en las urgencias y las consultas. Aporta así la asistencia a unos 20.000 habitantes del campo de refugiados. La mayoría de los liberianos siguen viviendo en el sitio. Poco a poco se han instalado en un marco que parece cada vez más a un pueblo con sus calles, sus barrios, sus escuelas y sus artesanos. La clínica ofrece igualmente cuidados a muy numerosos ghaneses, que han llegado a vivir en el sector, convertido progresivamente en un suburbio distante de Accra.

El personal de la clínica está compuesto hoy por profesionales competentes, mayoritariamente ghaneses. Algunos liberianos forman aún parte del equipo, pero la mayoría de los antiguos empleados han elegido regresar a su país o trabajar fuera del campo. En adelante la clínica cumple su misión bajo la dirección de un médico y de un administrador ghanés, a quienes el último voluntario enviado por la FLM ha podido transmitir sus responsabilidades a fines de 2011. La evaluación conjunta realizada en 2012 con un representante de la FLM ha permitido ciertas adaptaciones sin cuestionar las orientaciones y los modos de gestión de la clínica. Su desarrollo continuará en el futuro. Se espera que un día puedan asegurar plenamente el papel de un hospital de distrito. El equipo presente está capacitado para tomar a cargo los cuidados de salud de una población de casi 50.000 habitantes.

## **Una elección original**

Los miembros de la Fraternidad han escogido vivir en el campo mismo, en medio de la gente. La vida cotidiana en un sector periférico ha permitido a los voluntarios laicos descubrir los buenos y malos aspectos: la animación casi continua, la fuerte religiosidad, el calor de los encuentros, las solidaridades admirables entre personas que han sufrido tanto, la juventud con su despreocupación y su esperanza siempre renovada... pero también la muerte que puede golpear en todo momento, la falta de agua, un servicio eléctrico entrecortado.

Esta opción de los voluntarios de la Fraternidad era más bien original. En efecto, la gran mayoría de los otros interventores exteriores, pertenecientes al ACR o a otras ONG, han preferido vivir fuera del campo, en las ciudades vecinas. Muchos factores explican la elección de los miembros de la FLM. Para comenzar, se presentó una oportunidad: una casa ofrecida por la SMA. Luego hubo una necesidad: el trabajo en la clínica. Pero, sobre todo, hubo el deseo de los primeros voluntarios de compartir la vida cotidiana del campo. De esta manera, han podido establecer lazos personales con los refugiados y vivir con ellos una verdadera fraternidad que les ha permitido sobrepasar ciertas diferencias e implicarse en esta comunidad mucho más allá de sus obligaciones profesionales.

## **Motivaciones**

¿Cuáles han sido las motivaciones de estos voluntarios para comprometerse en tal proyecto? ¿Por qué enfermeras, un médico general, un pediatra, un fisioterapeuta, pero también un joven banquero y un ingeniero agrónomo, han dado el paso y han decidido pasar dos años al servicio de sus hermanos y hermanas en este rincón de la tierra del que no conocen a nadie? ¿Cómo ha sido percibido su compromiso?

Las motivaciones siempre son múltiples y complejas. Las ganas de descubrir África y de realizar un proyecto seguramente ha sido una razón. La naturaleza del trabajo, de una gran intensidad y complejidad, no dejaba ni la menor duda acerca de la utilidad de la misión por cumplir. Sin embargo, este mismo trabajo a veces era también fuente de aprehensión: las dificultades eran enormes y parecían insuperables. Pero, en la mayoría, aunque no lo hayan dicho jamás en voz alta, el deseo de un cierto compromiso misionero estaba presente. Deseaban encontrar al otro, sea paciente o colega, en vista de caminar con él. Todos, voluntarios y refugiados, han hecho un buen trecho de camino.... Personas que no se conocían del todo se volvieron hermanos y hermanas.

## **Tiempo breve ... tiempo fuerte**

La formación que ha precedido directamente la partida fue generosamente asegurada por la DCC. A ello hay que añadir los intercambios con los miembros de la FLM y el seguimiento periódico asegurado por las visitas al lugar. Todas estas formas de acompañamiento han ayudado a los voluntarios a hacerse una idea de lo esencial de la misión que les estaba confiada. Evidentemente, ni el mejor compartir puede llegar a hacer sentir cómo se vive realmente en el campo de refugiados; cada uno ha tenido que descubrir por sí mismo este mundo tan particular. El tiempo de presencia de los voluntarios en el campo ha sido breve: dos años para todos, salvo para uno de ellos que se quedó más tiempo. Han vivido este breve episodio de su vida como un tiempo esencial, una etapa plenamente "consagrada" al otro, "al más pequeño de entre los míos". Este tiempo les ha marcado para siempre. Uno de ellos sigue actualmente una formación para sacerdote, mientras que los otros asumen, en su mayoría, en familia y a través de compromisos diversos en el mundo secular, cierta forma de misión cristiana.

## **Constructores de puentes**

Los antiguos voluntarios de la clínica San Gregorio volvieron recientemente a encontrarse en Chaponost. Al compartir sus experiencias con otros miembros de la FLM, han recordado brevemente la complejidad de este proyecto difícil, para luego expresarse más extensamente sobre lo que más les había llamado la atención: el aprendizaje del compartir y de la amistad que permite construir puentes, los encuentros de una inestimable riqueza que han seguido. Para todos estos descubrimientos y también para las realizaciones quedan agradecidos con todos aquellos que facilitaron su compromiso.

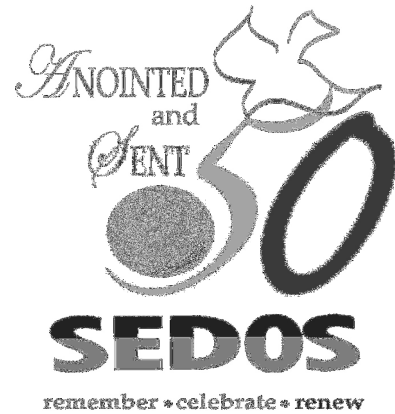
A los ojos de la FLM, este proyecto ha tenido éxito no solamente en el plano médico, sino también como testimonio misionero, lo que constituye la razón de ser de la Fraternidad. El apoyo financiero, el acompañamiento, el seguimiento regular, etc., han creado múltiples ocasiones de encuentro permitiendo hacer sentir a los más desposeídos cuánto Cristo les ama y que es Él quien nos libera a todos.

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Nota: \*El Dr. Pierre Ménard, miembro de la Fraternidad Laica Misionera (FLM), asociada a la Sociedad de las Misiones Africanas (SMA), es médico de urgencias. Ha trabajado cuatro años en Bohicon (Benín) con Tierra de Hombres, luego dos años en Laos en un proyecto de cuidados primarios de salud. Ha realizado varias misiones en África como consultor en organización sanitaria. Actualmente es médico de urgencias en el Hospital de Givors (Rhône) y alcalde del Municipio de Chaponost (Rhône).

Ref.: *SPIRITUS* — Edición hispanoamericana, Año 54/3, n. 212, Septiembre de 2013, pp. 51-59.

**THE SEDOS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, THE DIRECTOR AND THE STAFF  
WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU  
FOR SENDING YOUR CHRISTMAS WISHES BY POSTAL CARDS AND E-MAIL.  
WE HAVE RECEIVED MANY AND IT HAS BEEN REALLY APPRECIATED**



Fr. Walter von Holzen, SVD  
Former Executive Director of SEDOS  
C/O Via dei Verbiti, 1  
00154 ROMA  
on Mission in Paraguay

Rome, 29 December 2013

**RE: SEDOS Invitation to the Residential Seminar 2014**

Dear Fr. Walter,

In joyful anticipation of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SEDOS, we are reaching out to all of you who shaped the life of SEDOS at various stages of its history. Jointly, we thank God for all He has wrought in you and through you for the growth of the Church's universal mission since the Vatican II.

In keeping with the recommendations formulated by the Participants of Seminars 2012 and 2013, the Executive Committee wishes to enhance the quality of the inputs of the upcoming SEDOS Residential Seminar, 20 – 24 May 2014, on the theme, "*Sent by the God of Surprises. New Ways of being Missionary*". To this end, we plan to have a round table of Speakers composed of former SEDOS Presidents and Executive Directors/Directresses, on Wednesday, 21 May 2014. For this activity we aim:

- ☐ to re-read the HISTORY of SEDOS and
- ☐ to articulate a VISION for our future

The symbol of the "SANKOFA" shall inspire us as we look back to the past in order to move forward to the future.



**Symbol of "SANKOFA" (bird)**

The word "**SANKOFA**," from the Akan people in Ghana, loosely translates to "reaching back in order to move forward" ...  
(from the Internet)

West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings. **SANKOFA** "return and get it". Symbol of the importance of learning from the past. *Adinkra Symbol Index*

May we invite you to grace this seminar with your personal participation and we insist on this: we need you? Otherwise, we would deeply appreciate it if you could send us a write-up of your lived experience of mission with SEDOS. We shall publish your contribution in a special issue of the SEDOS Bulletin of September- October 2014. We will be having the Thanksgiving Mass on Saturday, 4 October 2014.

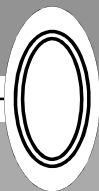
The following suggestions might help you:

- Looking back:
  - What was your vision (Including the vision of the Executive Committee of your time) of the SEDOS Mission?
  - Were there some key moments which shaped your life as Missionary or as a Missionary in the service of the Leadership in your own religious Family?
  - What challenges did you meet and how did you answer these?
- Looking forward:
  - What do you suggest as “food for the journey” of SEDOS in the years to come?
  - What would be meaningful for the growth of SEDOS towards a relevant and significant contribution to the future of Mission?
  - Yet feel free in writing your reflection, prepare what you find important for us.

We look forward to hearing from you as we greet you, one and all, a New Year of peace, hope and faith!

Gratefully yours,

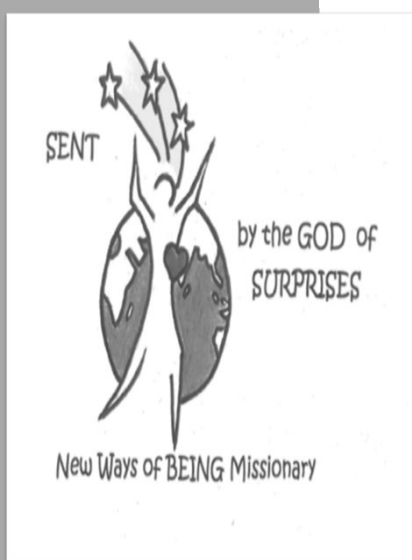
Sr Nzenzili Lucie MBOMA, FMM  
Executive Directress of SEDOS



## SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 2014

**Centro 'Ad Gentes', Nemi (RM)  
20-24 Maggio**

### **«SENT BY THE GOD OF SURPRISES: NEW WAYS OF BEING MISSIONARIES"»**



"We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?" (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n. 8)

**Start:**

at 17:00 hrs on Tuesday 20 May

**End:**

after lunch on Saturday 24 May

**Fee (board and lodging):**

Euro 380,00 single room

Euro 350,00 double room

Euro 450,00 no-members

**Registration:**

From 15.00 hrs. to 16.30 hrs. on Tuesday 20 May

Booking by fax, telephone or e-mail

**tel (+39) 06.57.41.350/Fax (+39) 06.57.55.787**

**email [redacsed@sedosmission.org](mailto:redacsed@sedosmission.org)**

**We need:**

- **Name and number of participants**
- **Your email address**
- **Preferred language**
- **Payment (with the registration)**

If for some reason you wish to be replaced by another person, please let us know as soon as possible. We inform you that no reimbursement is possible, but one participant can substitute another.

***It is possible to include young people or lay association***

## PRAYING WITH EVANGELII GAUDIUM

"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. .. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. ... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come." (Pope Francis. *Apostolic Exhortation EG*, no. 1)

**Together:** *Come, Holy Spirit, enflame our heart with the gospel joy!*

The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn. 4:1 ), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. (EG. No. 24)

**Together:** *Come, Holy Spirit rekindle in us the passion for God's mission.*

I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, ... (EG. No. 27)

**Together:** *Come, Holy Spirit rekindle in us the passion for God's mission.*

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory." (EG. No. )

**Together:** *Come, Holy Spirit, ignite in us that spirit of boldness and creativity so that we may open ourselves to your motions and so renew our Vision of the SEDOS mission for the years to come.*

**Together:** *Mary, Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,  
pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia! (EG. No 2 )*

