



# Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

*Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship*

8-13 March 2018 – Arusha, Tanzania

Document No. **PLEN 03.3**

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## For a contextual and prophetic approach to evangelism in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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I come from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is based on the current reality in my country that I would like to speak to you and suggest appropriate corrective actions of an evangelism that can offer the Christian faith the strength to be a silt of profound and positive change in fragile socio-political context, as is the case of the Congolese society.

I see this evangelism as a dynamic founded on a clear analysis of the hopes and expectations of the people in their understanding of the word of God, to broaden the horizons of a new way of recognizing their specific problems and solve them before God.

In view of the above, I dare to believe that the people of my country await fulfillment of two requirements by the Christian communities:

- continued attention to the meaning of their cries to God for their current political, economic and sociocultural situation;
- and a prophetic act to make people stand up for the changes according to the project that God has for his people in the Congo.

### 1. **The misery of a whole people and its spiritual significance**

In my humble opinion, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently under a **political deadlock**. Indeed, its ruling class and the political powers that seem to oppose it are unable to speak a language of truth and to trust each other in order to, not only determine the higher interests of the state, but also to find a credible way to curb the other's institutional crisis. This will allow the creation and/or recreation of the conditions for a normal political life, along with credible elections able to help the people choose responsible leaders who will promote stable institutions that are committed to safeguard their citizens and guarantee lasting peace. The majority of my country's politicians (including not only those in power but those in the opposition as well) seem to me to be "short-sighted" and the people agree with that vision.

Therefore, the political spectrum seems obstructed and there is nothing to suggest that things will change in the short term. Shielded in themselves and by their capacity for violence, my political leaders of yesterday and of today only listen to themselves and those who worship them. However, they seem to dismiss any possibility of listening to the cries of the people who languish in indescribable misery. They are probably deaf. As for the opposition, it is diverse and no longer believes in peaceful change. This is how it steadily calls the people to take charge in order to change things. Simply put, it invites people to fall into a logic of popular insurgency for which some youth movements are already preparing.

Even civil society (at least one fringe of it), which is supposed to be working towards reconciliation of the operating powers for political and social peace, has strongly denounced the popular protest and the revolutionary action for change lead by the people itself. Despite incessant calls by certain personalities

and certain peace-promoting social groups that defend true dialogue between political forces and call for respecting for the electoral calendar in which no one seems to truly wholeheartedly believe, we feel that the country is in a political politically deadlock.

At the economic level, the **reign of misery, suffering and desperation** today spreads its leaden cloak over the minds, hearts and lives of the people. In the countryside as well as in the outskirts of big cities of the Congo, misery befalls the country before our very eyes with the devastation of innumerable diseases, of visible signs of malnutrition in children and adults, unbounded desolation of women who no longer know which saint to turn to feed their children, and despair of men before a country where the prospect of paid work seems truly available. The violence of armed groups, of official military forces and of rebels on all sides dictates their laws over large parts of the Congolese land. A great deal of men and women feel helpless, without real prospects for a better life.

In this backdrop of death, the economy has become an economy of predation, of corruption and of constant extortion of public funds by faithless and lawless individuals across the board. The determination and ambition of getting the country organized to benefit the community have gradually dissipated. In my opinion, there is almost no State, in the true sense of the word, to regulate economic life. The gap between the rich, who accumulate the wealth of the country for their own benefit, and the poor, who are condemned to live in dire circumstances and unending misery, creates conditions for social turmoil that is brewing and which in some circles is being planned. The DR Congo has its life hanging over a volcano and several country analysts await the great sinking of the Congolese nation into the bottom of a true volcanic abyss. It is this anticipation which portrays the biggest economic reality of the country: the fatal ending that would allow us to start from scratch.

This situation prompted a Congolese senator to write a book with an eloquent title: *La République des Inconscients* [The Republic of the Oblivious]. It speaks for itself. For those oblivious Congolese, music production serves as catharsis to forget the misery and to give an appearance of permanent happiness. In the Congo music provides collective therapy, with great artists who offer great dance opportunities and unlimited pleasures to the public. The country has thus become the country of drunken dance parties and booming brothels where everything is drowned in alcohol and carnal glories. Everything: the worries, the miseries, the desperations and death itself. Indeed, many of my fellow countrymen and women have found another way of false redemption through binge drinking. The DR Congo could, without a doubt, be one of the African nations where bistros, bars, dancing clubs and nightclubs that swarm every square kilometer. My country is framed, controlled and appallingly regulated by breweries that design and create multiple brands of beers intent on making people drunk and drown in unconsciousness.

In light of the above, I find that my country's sociocultural situation has now become that of being accustomed to misfortune on the part of the population and of being confined to idiotic religiosities that expect that heaven will provide the solution for the problems of the Congo. We pray, we pray, we pray, night and day, and nothing changes. We fast, we organize endless invocation sessions to God without the country moving a single inch towards profound and positive change.

## **2. The way out of a fatal despair**

I have just described my country's political, economic and sociocultural context. On that subject, I have said nothing new. Everyone knows these realities, and everyone talks about them extensively, often excessively, and without the needed counterweight over the powers of resistance and resilience which abound in the country. This depreciative way of speaking about the Congo will not pave the way for a new evangelism of the country, such as the one I would like to speak to you about today. I will now take a positive and hopeful perspective and tell you what is left to say about my country from a prophetic evangelism perspective.

When we want to announce the word of God in a politically fragile context such as the one I described, there is no point in dwelling on its at once striking dark side and feel overly scared. The Congolese people do not need an evangelism that tells them all day long what is wrong with them across the board. They know better than anyone else all the dark forces that plunge them into desperation. They know in their flesh and soul what they endure day after day: the way of the cross for their fate and their misfortunes. What they need is to be shown **specifically how the Gospel gives them the physical strength, creates an imaginary of resilience and full life, opens up paths of hope, and makes them stand up to create an alternate destiny.**

This is the evangelism that should truly be called prophetic evangelism.

It is prophetic in that it sees in a context of death a need for resurrection, where and when *sin increased, grace abounded all the more* (Romans 5:20). It does not focus on a catastrophic situation to imprison people to tombs of calamities. Its perspective is to show how Christ came to free the Congo out of his tomb and create a new Congolese man, a new Congolese woman. Through this perspective, faith in Christ empties the Congolese political, economic and sociocultural tombs of their essence of death, it empties them of their dead bodies so that the Congo and the Congolese come out alive, truly alive, into the plentiful life force.

With such message, above all we aim for the creation and construction of the new imaginaries within the Congolese being: the imaginaries of faith in the Congolese humanity renewed in Christ for a standing Congo. Everyone knows the remarkable scene in the Gospel of the paralyzed man who waited for thirty-eight years to step into the miraculous water that the angel occasionally visited. The first sick person who stepped into this water was healed. The paralytic was not able to. There was always a more agile sick person to step into the pool before him. Worse, there was no one to help put him into the pool. Jesus arrives, looks at him and speaks to him as a human being endowed with humanity. He asks the question, "Do you want to be healed?". These words unleash in the paralyzed man the strength of faith and he finds in himself the healing energy. He rises, takes up his bed and walks.

This passage defines all the strength of prophetic evangelism in a country like the DR Congo. What such evangelism aims to do is to awaken in the Congolese man and the Congolese woman the power and energy of their imaginary of faith in Jesus Christ. With this strength, with this energy, all the paralysis that the nation suffered shall be destroyed, defeated by the strength to stand up inspired by Christ, so that the Congo takes up the bed of desperation and walks on the road of hope and creativity. The purpose of prophetic evangelism is **to create and promote an imaginary of faith.** This, the country needs. All its citizens need it. The new evangelism of the Congo must focus on this task.

But creating and promoting an imaginary of faith is not the only requirement. There is another requirement. We find it in another passage of the Gospel: that of Lazarus being brought back to life. The story is well known. Jesus learns of the death of his friend Lazarus, brother of Martha and Mary, in a family he knows well and where everyone expects him to manifest the might of his power. Three days have passed, and Lazarus has already been buried. Lazarus' sister even believes that everything has already ended and that there is nothing left to do: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died", she said (John 11:21). But Jesus has another reading of the events: the death of his friend purports to be the manifestation of God's mighty power. He goes to the tomb and calls his friend: "Lazarus, come out". The dead man follows, and Jesus tells those standing around: "Unbind him" (John 11:44). This is accomplished, and Lazarus regains his life force and his power of action among his own.

What strikes me in this passage of the Gospel is this command by Lord Jesus: "Unbind him". It is in this command that I see the meaning of the liberating evangelism for my country. Like Lazarus, my country is to a certain extent dead. Hope seems to be lost in the face of this death and it is in this context of death that Jesus himself gives meaning to what happens to this nation: his death is intent on being a manifestation of the God's mighty power. His strong word must be heard by all: the DR Congo must

come out of the tomb. But this release is accompanied by the Lord's watchword: "Unbind him". It is this watchword that is at the heart of the prophetic evangelism project. It defines evangelism as an act of liberation. It is an act that must be carried out by liberation forces composed of men and women of faith in Jesus.

This means that their power of liberating evangelism is precisely the constitution and men's and women's affirmation as dissociation energies. That is precisely what **prophetic evangelism is: the emergence, rise, affirmation and act of liberation of the men and women of faith as dissociation powers**. We need to awaken such forces in the country, we must bring them together, we must set them in motion so that the Congo can regain its life energy and its power of movement, of change and of creativity. We can now see in the communities of faith this dynamic of dissociation and liberation, through a burning faith in the word of Christ to break the stillness of death and affirm the God's project for the Congo: the return to life, and to abundant life, in the words of the Gospel of John (John 10:10). I cannot look my country today without reading its fate in light of Lazarus' return to life.

This leads me to see in prophetic evangelism an act of resurrection and of holistic healing. In the words of a great Congolese theologian, it is the energy of the resurrection of Christ himself that I perceive as the energy of a new life, of a new destiny. Through resurrection, Jesus advances to a new life and completely sets humans down the path of this new life. This means that in him everything changes reality, direction and horizon: politics, economy, culture and society as a whole. This is the new life that prophetic evangelism announces and promotes. This is its true essence: having a whole society under the sign of the spirit of God, for the radical change that the Gospel manifests: **entering a new heaven and a new earth perspective, the premises of which are clear throughout Jesus' destiny**.

Here we are at the heart of **the Gospel of life, of true life evangelism**, with perspectives that overcome the confinement of men and women to pathologies of desperation and despair. With the resurrection of Jesus, I realize what prophet Ezekiel truly meant when he tells the astounding episode of the dry bones. I realize that I must read the fate of the DR Congo today through the signs of this wonderful and filled with hope text: the hope in the breath of God who gathers the dry bones, breathes into them the strength of God and achieves what is impossible for man, but possible for God. Prophetic Evangelism is **the acceptance of that which is possible for God into our human impossibilities in today's Congo**, this country where the great vision of Ezekiel 37, 1-10 will be achieved.

In this country, the politics where the bones have been dried by a power which has no desire for change and an opposition that is stagnant in its incantatory demands, the breath of God is called upon to manifest itself in acts of cooperation, collaboration and of envisioning a different possible future. This means coming out of the politics of dry bones with a new energy that inspires people to stand up for peace, and which opens up horizons of prosperity and security; this is called good governance. Similarly, in the economy of dry bones which is present everywhere through the disorganization, impunity, predation, corruption, misery and death, the breath of God is called upon to transform society into a development society, thanks to an economy of sharing and happiness, into a new production force of wealth for all, of a life in abundance at the heart of the Congolese people.

We will build in the country a happy peace order, and it will be up to the citizens of Congo themselves to ensure this economic peace through the strength of the spirit of God, beyond the wars, conflicts, divisions and rifts. This is where the work of an evangelism for acts of kindness, in view of an economy of good, away from the sterile prayers and moans that have made the Congo the land of an infertile and delusional Christianity, will focus. As for the spirit of the country, it will have to emerge from the culture of dry bones, where pessimism, fatalism and defeatism reign. Its true culture shall be, under the spirit of God, the culture of unity of the country, of strength of the people and of generosity of the peoples bound by the faith in God. This will be the work of prophetic evangelism, which sees reality through the eyes of God and changes it according to God's project. In this evangelism the fruits of the spirit will blossom for a

people under God's guidance: the union of hearts and consciences for a new world. We will then be before the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy for our country:

"And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 37:6)".

"And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my People (Ezekiel 37:13)".

Prophetic evangelism is the triumph of this promise, which will awaken the great energy for change, for new hopes, for new horizons in the Congo.

I believe in this approach for my country, and for all the people to whom Evangelism opens the Spirit of God.

Amen

*Isis Kabrobaie Mana was born in Brussels in 1985. She has lived in several countries as followed her father for his work. She completed her studies in theology in Cameroon. After graduation, she decided to return to her country of origin, the DRC, where she had the opportunity to work in the World Council of Churches' HIV/AIDS program (EHALA) and to complete a practical training in dialogue of religions before attending the Al Mowafaqa Institute in Morocco. She is now responsible for a Muslim-Christian intercultural circle in the alternative university of the Intercultural Institute in The Great Lakes region (Pole Institute).*