



THE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
 South Congo – Zambia
 Episcopal Area



Kasap' Owan Tshibang
 Resident Bishop
 ☎ : + 243 99 11 83 267
 bishopowansouthcongo@gmail.com

Second Statement by Bishop KASAP OWAN on the worrying situation of the United Methodist Church:

Africa in the void of theological originality

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Beloved in the Lord,

May the peace and grace of the Lord be with you.

We return once again to express our perspective on the troubling situation of the United Methodist Church, however this time speaking only of a void, of an absence of African theological originality.

The leaders of The United Methodist Church in Africa are now on a train that cannot see the end of the tunnel, for lack of theological originality. They are swept away by the wave of several theological currents of Western origin, thus causing confusion in Africa.

Formerly, we were all united by the only Bible, the word of God, having the power to orient and guide us, today, several languages expressing human philosophies are presented: "Traditional", "Centrists", "Progressives", "One Church plan", "Protocol of reconciliation & grace through separation", so "the Christmas covenant". (Christmas Covenantes).

These languages are exactly what the apostle Paul warns us in Colossians 2: 8, "Beware that no one wins you by philosophy, and by vain reasoning according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world and not point to the doctrine of Christ. "

In this crisis of the United Methodist Church, or concretely "The Divided Methodist Church", it is important to remember the origin of the Protestant reform begun in the 16th Century, which is a desire for a return to the roots of Christianity. The reference to the

Bible as a standard is nevertheless one of the main motivations of reformers. This famous principle, "sola scriptura", only the scripture (bible) will guide them.

What is our benchmark for Methodism in Africa? a crisis of theological originality caused by differences of origin from lack of consensus.

The unity of the instituted Church is the body of Christ. The Church is a unity in the union of each and every one with Christ and in the consequent union with one another.

The Church is the communion of Saints (1 John 1: 6-7). If we say we are in fellowship with him, and we walk in darkness, we are lying, and we are not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, we are in fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The image of the Church as the Body of Christ, (Σώμα του Χριστού) notes the following observations:

- Christ has his own: he is the head of the body and his own are intimately united to him in order to receive everything from him. It is he who gives life to his whole body.
- It is true that Christ calls us to be "ONE" in him and with one another. All Christians form the body of which he is and the whole is the Unit.

But what unit is it? Spiritual and doctrinal unity.

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The Church is a unity in the union of all and each of Christ and in the consequent union of one another. The Church is the communion of Saints. So he must obey the HEAD. Otherwise, it is no longer the Church but becomes a "Friends Club" without a logical theological basis. We regret and refuse that the once united Methodist Church is now converted, in this confusion, into a club of friends.

Let us remember, the tradition resounds with everyone, it is only reform: Sola scriptura, only writing, sola fide, only faith, sola

gracia, only grace. It is a big tradition (Dumas, A. Protestants, Paris 1987, p. 13-18).

This tradition of reform, followed by John Wesley, is the means of transmitting the deposit of faith and therefore the Methodists, men and women through whom it has passed, this tradition of the Church, is also and simultaneously its very content. : what was believed everywhere, according to the criterion of Vincent Legions, which distinguished and which are: "the originality, the authenticity and the general consent" (cf. the progress in the time of the Church according to Vincent page 23- 25)

It is here where the unity of the Church is solidified, that is, the Church takes her place in the living tradition by following the legacy bequeathed by the reformers of the Church.

What about the Protocol of reconciliation & grace through separation.

This protocol, which has drawn a lot of ink and saliva and which is presented as the solution to separate one from the other, catches our attention.

- Separation is the absence of communion and unity between two groups that no longer practice the same ideology or the same doctrine.
- Grace is common and also particular faith.

Common grace serves to prevent the total corruption which destroys man separated from God. Special grace serves to direct him to heaven. Common grace maintains the natural gifts while the particular or singular grace allows the supernatural to be recovered. (CA Lecerf: Sin and grace, the reform review, number 43, 1960 p. 11-18)

For us, God offers this grace to the world for universal salvation. The human living this grace must love God and his neighbor, how can we love God if we disobey his word? John said: for the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17

Moses' law was not a manifestation of grace, it ordered men to obey and condemned them if it did not favor it. This law was incapable of saving men. Grace and truth came from Christ.

Here the mission of Jesus Christ is to save those who were unworthy and incapable of saving themselves and who remained his enemies, this is grace (Χάρη): what heaven has better for what the earth has worse.

Not only grace came through Jesus, but the truth as well. He has said of himself: "I am ... the truth" he shows absolute honesty and fidelity both in his words and in his actions. He never made grace pass at the expense of truth. True, he loved sinners, but not their sins.

By faith the sinner is saved. Jesus confirms this in John 3:16: That everyone who believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The verb to believe (πιστεύω) means to have total confidence in the merciful love of God. Here the term faith (πίστη) faith, is a response to divine grace.

This grace is not to be paired with any separation that is human work.

What about reconciliation?

We find in the New Testament some texts on reconciliation “συμφιλίωση” Romain 5:10, 1 Cor 7:11, 2 Cor 5:18, 19, 20 etc.

So reconciliation follows the event of FORGIVENESS. It is a process of restoring the relationship broken by evil and marked by enmity.

The term "kataloge" preserves just as much the relationship of men with God and that of men among themselves. Katallage expresses the restoration of the relationship broken by evil.

The Bible highlights the link that unites forgiveness and reconciliation. Paul emphasizes the connection between forgiveness and reconciliation in Romans 5: 9-10 by means of a progressive parallelism.

Then the relationship of reconciliation implies the disappearance of the enmity that marks the broken relationship.

Thus, the breakdown of the relationship between God and men is due to the sin of the son of Adam, and reconciliation is always the fruit of the grace of God.

During the revolt of the golden calf, it is above all his grace that God proclaims before returning his relationship with the people (Exodus 34: 5-7).

What is the scope of reconciliation?

As forgiveness requires the repentance of the guilty, reconciliation requires a humble and real return to God: it involves our being. This is how Paul writes: be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:23).

Paul considers this message so characteristic of the new covenant as his ministry of reconciliation. 2 Cor. 5: 19-19.

This message addressed to individuals, also a broader scope, which arises from the division of mankind, into two spiritual groups during the preparatory time of the old covenant: Israel and the Nations, the Jews or the pagans (Mat. 10 : 4-7). But, through his death, Jesus made possible the reconciliation between God and men, and thereby that of Jews and pagans (Ephesians 2: 11-22). By breaking the wall of separation (Eph 2:14). Man is finally reconciled to God whom he has offended.

What about reconciliation between Humans?

The Greek terms be reconciled Mat 5: 2 and 1 Cor 7:11 also refer to reconciliation between Humans. As in the context of reconciliation with God, reconciliation between humans involves appeasing the offended.

Let us return to the Protocol of reconciliation, through separation. We believe that the inappropriate theming lacks a theological logic. It is an outright theological derailment.

We do not understand the outcome of this reconciliation. Who must be reconciled? God or Human. Who offended whom for having a call for reconciliation?

As for grace, it is a term which falls under divine competence. Who wants to pardon whom? In this Protocol who represents God or Jesus to become the initiator of grace? These two terms, reconciliation and grace are used arbitrarily in the context of famous protocol: it is a big aberration. The end in the protocol is schism or separation, there is nothing reconciliation or grace.

The protocol could have focused only on separation, which is not only a secular term but also better suited in this context, rather than speaking with two misplaced theological terms.

For the record, yesterday we heard about the "one church plan", yesterday we talked about the protocol of reconciliation and separation and today it changes its name to become "the Christmas Alliance"; we expect to see a Pentecostal Covenant tomorrow as well! What kind of church do we want to form? One goes from groping to another. We need a Church like Christ and John Wesley would want it.

Thus, two questions deserve to be asked:

- What is the theological basis of all these denominations or movements?
- What is the doctrinal basis of this alliance? Divine Alliance or Men?

Here is my response to the latter Methodist currents.

Noel's alliance advocates the Regional Conference! What is the theological basis of this regional conference? can we be shown the ecclesiology of this conference or organization? If each continent becomes a Regional Conference, is this doctrinal autonomy?

We hear about contextualization! What is it concretely? What needs to be contextualized? Is it the same sex marriage that needs to be contextualized? or is there something else?

The crux of the problem that divides the church is same-sex marriage. So the contextualization concerns this marriage? Should we really talk about contextualization or inculturation. What does this contextualization hide for Regional Conference supporters in the church?

Inculturation a process by which African culture is recognized, accepted and affirmed in the light of the gospel. How can we welcome and carry the gospel like other Christian cultures? The proclamation of the gospel took this culture seriously with its languages, its songs, its symbols, its dances, its rites and its vision of the world in order to allow the reception and the adoption of the gospel of salvation in Jesus. Christ.

There is no question of using contextualization to justify a cohabitation with other contextualizations having its non-biblical appetites.

Let us know that any biblical contextualization must be compatible with the gospel. The ultimate goal of the historian of religions is to understand and clarify for others the behavior of homo religiosus (religious man and his mental universe).

How will the Regional Conference be able to apprehend the religious man in a doctrinal unit on the doctrine of marriage in the world of several regional conferences? Oh! it will be unity in the doctrinal diversity of marriage. The big question is to know with which ecclesiology?

Let us go back to the source rather than continuing to sink into a hole with no theological outcome.

In the New Testament, a variety of terms are used to describe the church: Family of God (1 Peter 4:17); the vine and the branch (John 15: 1-8); the body of Christ (1 Cor 12)... these phrases are used to teach Christians how to understand their sanctification as members of the body of Christ. They have to be built as a temple of God (1 Peter 2, 4, 5) and that they work in the field of the Lord (1 Cor 3: 9). These varied expressions all emphasize the communion of life with others.

This communion is given to us in Christ and we are called to deepen and broaden it. How can we develop this fellowship in various marriage contextualizations? With what doctrine?

A doctrine as defined in Rom 15: 4, it says: "Everything we find in the scriptures was written in the past for our instruction." In Titus 2: 1, the true doctrine is that which is sound which brings about

holy spirituality. We should at all costs avoid speculations that serve rather for pride and not for sham. Paul exhorted Titus to teach (διδάσκω) what befits sound doctrine.

Doctrine can mean lesson, exhortation, teaching, counsel, and rule, and is about thought and feeling.

What is sound doctrine today? she is the one who builds up the church, she is a priceless treasure (1 Tim 1:19).

Our conscience must pass on good doctrine. Now, faith is the foundation of a good conscience, it is the very goodness of conscience.

Methodist news recently wrote that: African bishops are divided over the future of the church. What is at the root of these divisions?

In 2018 at Africa University, we signed a document that we are all traditional. In 2019, two camps are emerging, some remain traditional, others adopt "one church plan" Then was born the separation protocol, some adopt it, today we are witnessing the birth of the Christmas alliance, also adopted by some African bishops.

It is a shame that we have double talk on this issue. We remain convinced that members of the African United Methodist Church are unanimous on this issue. It will therefore be necessary to make a distinction between the position of the leaders and that of those directed.

Of course, the socio - economic life of Africans remains precarious and uncertain. But it does not allow us to sell our authenticity. Nothing can be traded for our faith in God.

What kind of face of leaders do we present in Africa? It is a shame for Africa which lacks biblical theological and ecclesiological originality.

We African bishops seem to be groping our way. It is time to let the grassroots or our Conferences have their say.

The Regional Conference is another form of church unity in the diversity of marriage doctrines. Here, what is the definition of the family?

What would be the definition of the family according to the logic of the Regional Conferences? Will it be made up of a man and a woman "in one Regional conference and a man with a man in another Regional conference? or "a woman with a woman" in another regional conference? according to the cultural context?

However, each Regional Conference could choose a definition according to its culture. This Regional conference does not solve the problem, because we must not contextualize sexuality, it is a theological aberration in a Church that claims to be pious.

In the foundations of a Christian sexual ethics, I no longer belong to myself (1 Cor 6: 19-20), it simply means that man no longer makes independent decisions even in the area of his abilities. sexual. He is dependent on God (Bockmunes R. Foundations of a Christian Sexual Ethics p. 25)

"You are no longer your own", this term yourself (*ο ιδιος*) means that the Christian is no longer self-centered. Why do we sometimes feel that God has fallen asleep? And that we can do whatever we see fit, regardless of the scriptures?

Our church is divided in two for the question of marriage. As Bishop of Southern Congo and Zambia, I reiterate the affirmation of our five Annual Conferences: We wish to affirm our understanding of the divine cultural mandate for men and women within the framework of biblical marriage. As a result, Southern Congo and Zambia are not considering marriage blessings for same-sex couples.

Currently the choice is clear, any Methodist must freely make their choice for either traditionally supported heterosexual marriage or homosexuality with all denominations that line up behind this current of biblical deviation.

Congolese Methodists should remember that we are members of the Church of Christ in Congo ECC, an organization of churches that profess the same faith in Christ. This corporation is sharp on

the issue of same-sex marriage. She threatens to remove us from this corporation the moment we join same-sex marriage.

In conclusion, the United Methodist Church wasted a great deal of time on this issue as if there were no other matters to deal with. We have been practicing the traditional wedding plan for centuries, now choose other plans, such as "One church plan"; "Separation protocol"; "Christmas suiting" ... to choose another plan is to deviate from God's view of marriage. All of these other plans have no doctrine or theological foundation. We will have to stop this speculation and turn to God.

May the Lord bless you!

Lubumbashi, April, 25th, 2021

Bishop KASAP OWAN TSHIBANG ALEX

Ordinary Professor