

The mission of the Church in the face of socio-political challenges in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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Abstract

The Church has a plural mission for the holistic transformation of man and his society. However, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a multi-crisis country, churches are not participating in socio-political mission, owing to a limited understanding of this holistic concept. What are the many dimensions of the *missio Dei*? What are the various sorts of churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo in terms of social engagement? How can the Church play a sociopolitical role in the Democratic Republic of Congo? These are the main ideas of this post, which tries to motivate the Church to take action and bring about comprehensive change because that is its mission.

Keywords: church, holistic transformation, mission, socio-political challenges, DR Congo

Let's begin by the notion of *missio Dei*.

1. Understanding the *missio Dei*

The first world missionary conference was held in Edinburgh in 1910. This summit served as a watershed moment in the establishment of a new global Christian community. From that point forward, there was a renewed desire to respect and acknowledge differences while also cooperating with one another. This sparked a renewed interest in the Church, its nature, ministry, and unity. However, this proclivity for activism over reflection has resulted in a fresh and unparalleled understanding of the Church's character and function, particularly in connection to mission. Both younger and older churches have highlighted the centrality of the church to the global community of the faithful, with the mission of the church seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, therefore a divine initiative and not just zeal Christians. In the midst of the chaos following the world wars and the destruction of so many Western civilizations, the Church began to rethink its identity and purpose. She sought to revise her conception of the mission so that she could engage a broken world. During the period from 1938 to 1952, a missionary ecclesiology began to develop. At Whitby in 1947, considered to be the first true post-war meeting of the worldwide Protestant Christian community, the phrase "partnership in

obedience" to further dismantle the differentiation between the churches and to recall the vision of a universal mission as the common task of all churches was used. As distinctions emerging from the colonial past were seriously challenged, Whitby emphasized Christ's lordship over the Church and all life, and anticipated positive developments in ecumenical mission thought and policy. At Willingen in 1952 an important step in the development of mission theology was marked. The *missio Dei* became the key concept that enabled the coordination of various theological and ecclesiological developments in a seemingly harmonized way. Over the next few years, the strength of Hoekendijk's argument had emerged more strongly, and as a result his school of "shalom theology" had become dominant among ecumenical circles by the 1960s. existence of the Church is to establish the Shalom of God for the world. And Shalom is not an abstract soteriological concept but a concrete social event, an event in interhuman relations, an enterprise of co-humanity. This radical change redefined the nature of the Church, not in its institutional character, but only in action, in its missionary witness to the world. Under Hoekendijk's influence, everything became a mission in Uppsala: health and social care services, youth projects, work with political interest groups, the constructive use of violence and the protection of human rights. Despite favorable signs, such as the achievements of the second World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly, in Evanston in 1954, the church-centered understanding shifted to a Trinitarian understanding. What became prevalent in Uppsala was a horizontal view of Christian mission that embraced revolutionary movements in society as the activity of the Spirit of God and allied with social betterment in the name of humanization. The *missio Dei* has been replaced by a secularized theory of the transformation of the world by means of an immanent historical process, until their full humanity in the new man, Jesus Christ, just as Jesus is the new man for mankind, just as the church on mission is for the betterment of the world. Because of concern for the secular world, Uppsala favored a Christological statement of mission mandate that took humanization in Jesus Christ as its theological keyword. In the aftermath of Uppsala, the Bangkok conference in 1973 had the main objective of exploring the requirements of salvation today without evading or minimizing the theological debates around the person of Jesus Christ. Liberation was another word for salvation, and it is Jesus Christ the Liberator who frees all human reality from all that holds it in bondage. The Nairobi conference in 1975 was an assembly of consolidation, renewal and reconciliation. The 1980 CWME Melbourne conference was about the coming of the kingdom. From the eschatological perspective of the kingdom of God, the church attains its rightful place as the servant and herald of the kingdom, not its final expression. In 1982, the WCC Central Committee adopted the document Mission

and Evangelism with an ecclesiological vision grounded in God's revelation through Christ, that the church is sent into the world for witness (Chung Cheng, 2012).

For the missiologist Atido (2009), the three main missions of the Church in the world are: the prophetic mission, the priestly mission and the pastoral mission.

-The prophetic mission of the Church: Just as a prophet has knowledge of divine designs and instructs the people to guide them, warn them of danger, and bring them back to God in the event of sin or deviance, so does the church as a body, concerned with the holistic well-being of the society in which it is situated, for it is salt and light of the world. The Church serves as God's eye and hand in this area, with members who are God's workers. At this level, the Church develops visions, methods, and sodalities to address societal issues. (Atido, 2009).

I believe that there are also questions about justice, peace, and the protection of creation in the Church's prophetic mandate or mission, which refers to the biblical concept of Shalom, which implies fighting injustice, marginalization (social and spatial), and discrimination based on sex, social rank, tribe... and working for people's harmony. Then there's human advancement.

-The Church's priestly mission: this is the activity of prayer in all of its manifestations (request, petition, intercession...), in which the Church discerns the spiritual core of the Congolese issue by combating the evil powers at work. (Atido, 2009).

- The Church's pastoral mission: a ministry to provide spiritual, psychological, and material assistance to those who are in need, such as orphans, widows, the poor, and prisoners, by cultivating a culture of solidarity and mutual aid to relieve people living in a crisis, such as in eastern DRC, where the war has raged for a long time (Atido, 2009).

Tshilenga (1999) adds the reformation and transformation missions. - The reform mission is linked to the transformation of structures and systems.

-The transformational mission: transformation is linked to a shift in culture and situation. A new kind of schooling, a new dimension of science, and a new form of artistic expression are all examples of cultural transformation. The Church becomes a creator of jobs and richness through this mission: a wealth of inventiveness, innovation, and creativity. Ibengi (2021) claims that this is about cultural conversion rather than individual conversion. Faith modifies components of culture that are viewed as harmful. The eschatological future thus becomes the eschatological present for conversionists, and the not yet becomes the already. Social

transformation, according to Idara (2017), responds directly to all societal layers (social, cultural, political, and economic) through which the structures of sin are built, starting with ideas in people's heads, feelings in their hearts, actions and behaviors based on their skills and abilities, relationships they form, and the social structures and institutions that make up their society. This principle is expressed in Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*, which emphasizes the importance of faith in changing the world, transmitting values, and leaving the world in a better state than we found it. Given its social transformation mission, the Church is only interested in one thing: continuing Christ's work under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, who has come into the world to bear witness to the truth, to rescue rather than to judge, to serve rather than to be served. Evangelist Luke emphasized Christ's *diakonia* (service to others) by emphasizing his fondness for the impoverished and marginalized: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim deliverance to captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the Lord's year of grace" (Luke 4, 18-19). However, the Church's role in social reform does not just entail the leadership or the laity participating in charitable activities. In its social context, the word service emphasizes ministry to others and is hence the characteristic of the Church as a Family. The practice of service expresses the Church in Africa's prophetic commitment to social transformation in the context of Christ's global mission and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The social mission of the Church as God's Family is that of all God's People as main evangelizers and witnesses to God's unfailing love (Idara, 2017).

2. Typology of Congolese churches according to their involvement in socio-political life

Kabuaya (2013) is inspired by Bafinamene who talks about African churches according to various external and internal influences, and applies this typology for churches in DR Congo, according to the behaviors and attitudes of the missionaries who planted them, their denomination, the specific location of these churches which have a profound influence on membership and subsequent leadership development. He speaks of a "missionary" church, an "ethnic" church; "apolitical" church and "contested" church. This is not based on the denominations to which these churches belong, but rather on socio-political behaviors and attitudes, or simply on their praxis in society. We can add the political church or the socio-political and proactive church as the ideal church for the development of the necessary African leadership (Kabuaya, 2013).

-The "missionary" church: A "missionary" church in this case does not mean a church involved in the "missio Dei" but a work of Western Catholic or Protestant missionaries who entered the continent from the 15th century until the 19th century with the consequence: thousands or millions of Africans became members of their churches and denominations which began to compete and struggle in tribal Christianity. With such leadership of a church focused on tribalism or ethnocentrism, it is truly difficult to develop unifying and effectively transformational political leadership. Central to the debate on the "missionary" church have been the problems of ineffective presentation of the gospel and its transmission by missionaries and its reception among Africans. As a result, a large number of Africans have left these traditional churches to join separate African churches. Several factors may account for this, including the fact that some autonomous churches, such as the one founded by John Chilembwe, who led an armed nationalist revolt in Nyasaland (Malawi) in 1917, are strongly nationalistic. Others arose in response to the discrimination perpetrated by white missionaries against these Africans desiring to be priests or pastors. Disgust at the way Europeans compelled Africans to identify with Europeans was a constant factor. In the areas of worship, liturgy, theology, and social issues, there is also a need for indigenization, Africanization, or contextualization of Christianity. Being superficial in their evangelism and contextualization, "missionary" churches may therefore end up developing a Christianity that cannot serve the kingdom of God either spiritually or socio-politically. This non-contextual Western Christianity is qualified by Van der Walt as secular, in the sense that African Christians are sincere in their personal and ecclesial life, but compromise themselves as Christians in politics, in economics... The absence of a Bible-inspired worldview, anthropology, and philosophy among Christians distinguishes this "missionary" Christianity. Many "missionary" churches struggle to establish effective socio-political leadership for the transformation of the community as a whole due to weak spiritual, cultural, social, and even political preparation (Kabuaya, 2013).

- The "ethnic" church: An "ethnic" church is where traditional worldviews influence the church that bears the ethnic color or characteristic of society as a whole. Even in the church, traditional African nations' communalist perspective and kinship structure are crucial to understanding individuals and their behaviors. Ethnicity continues to be one of the greatest issues facing the African church; the Rwandan genocide, for example, was essentially an ethnic war. From April to June 1994, more than half a million people were murdered in a country where Christians account for more than 80% of the population. Faith that confines the

church's multinational character and mission to the bounds of their own ethnic group or denomination, or even to the confines of their own internal church activities, cannot serve the surrounding community effectively. Van der Walt characterizes this type of Christianity as "pietist" because of their spirituality which seems to be limited to their ethnocentrism. In his efforts to explain this type of Christianity, he states that pietism views the Christian faith as individual piety. He does not necessarily seek to escape the harsh realities of life, but engages in them in the wrong direction. A Christian president, for example, will read his Bible and pray for God's leadership, but his daily political duties will reveal nothing of what God requires of political leadership. This kind of dualistic Christian life is really a serious spiritual and sociopolitical problem. Such a church and especially its leadership which is armed with a spirit of discrimination can hardly be, think and work for loving, compassionate, united and serving leadership.

-The "apolitical" church: In general, churches are officially registered as apolitical organizations. But the use of the term apolitical is related to attitudes of indifference and irresponsibility that the said churches adopt in the face of problems involving the lives of people in their communities in distress and danger. Assmann feels that the churches that have these apolitical pretensions leave the field open for the principalities and powers of social demonology to continue without interference and it is also a recklessness or a feeling of helplessness in the face of social injustice, even worse to justify or conceal tacit support for power. Churches rooted in premillennial eschatological beliefs are strictly private and limit their activities to worship, biblical teaching, evangelism, and pastoral care. There, politics can be seen as "taboo" or dirty work. These indifferent churches and their leaders easily side with the exploiting powers; therefore, they can hardly develop transformational political leadership.

-The "contested" church: A "contested" church is a church that faces the various challenges of the 21st century in a defeated way, never prepared, but always caught off guard, always overwhelmed, such as the challenges of poverty, HIV/AIDS, repeated senseless wars, natural and man-made disasters. Many of the Christians in these churches have become totally dualistic, with life being divided into a sacred and a secular sphere. They lack a holistic view of service in the kingdom of God in all areas of life. The exception is a group of Christians who often do not know exactly how to put their reforming beliefs into practice, having a holistic and transformative worldview. Such a broader perspective is slowly developing among different denominations, including Reform, Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist

groups. These churches do not know that "You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world..." (Matthew 5,13-14) and the supreme order of Matthew 28 is also a sociopolitical mandate, they have difficulty to plan and work for transformational political or socio-political leadership. Many of these churches have attitudes of indifference and irresponsibility towards the socio-political challenges faced by the population (Kabuaya, 2013).

3. Missiological tracks

-Train a new generation of church and society leaders: political leadership in the Democratic Republic of Congo is characterized by neo-patrimonialism, chaosocracy, corruptionocracy, terrorismocracy, thanatopolitics or political nihilism with a praetorian army at its disposal, and kakistocracy. We saw Zairian wickedness during Mobutu's reign, and his image, movements and gestures, phrases, and way of dressing à la Mao Tsé-tung became the norm for Zairians, now Congolese. (1965-1997), and its consequences can still be felt in Congolese society and among Congolese males today. Successor presidents hold him up as a model while rejecting him, for example, *La Libre Afrique* wrote an article talking about how Kabila reproduces Mobutu's policy with differences (2017). Mukoko Samba has just written a book to try to give ways and means to cure the country of this social pathology called "mal Zairois" (Zairian evil) (2021).

In general, if it is necessary to make a classification of political leadership in Africa, we can refer to the Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui who speaks of the charismatic leaders who are for the most part fathers of African independence; mobilizing leaders such as Nasser, Nyerere or Nkrumah; reconciling leaders of which Mandela is the prototype, guardian leaders of the temple; disciplinary leaders (who have military-like leadership); patriarchal leaders; monarchical leaders like Bokassa of Central Africa who was crowned emperor, cases of dynastic succession from father to son as was the case in the DRC between Laurent Désiré Kabila and Joseph Kabila. Rotberg talks to him about kleptocratic leadership and predatory, military-autocratic leadership, which uses power as an end in itself instead of doing it for the common good. For him, the African crisis is caused essentially by a deficiency in leadership (Swart, Van Wyk and Botha, 2014).

Mobutu seized power in a coup in 1965, and the country's political structure has shifted from presidentialism to a quasi-absolute monarchy since 1966, with only the all-powerful leader, Mobutu, serving as goldsteward of the country's assets. The concept of an all-powerful leader has its roots in colonial thinking. He renamed the presidential palace Mount Ngaliema to

attract the invincible and mystical power of the city's former territorial chiefs before the arrival of the whites (Gondola, 2016), as well as the gangs of Kinshasa's young people (Bills, Kulunas) who use this customary power by taking the Kamo to become invincible. (Gondola, 2016). Feltz Gaetan notes that the instruments of power of this regime such as the party-state called Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR), the intelligence services, the armed forces as well as the public service reproduce the colonial system characterized by arbitrariness and unpredictability (Moleka, 2021).

The second feature is the fact that his leadership was the antipode of post-independence leadership characterized by the vision of emancipation of the country. Pauline Deydier (2017) paints a picture with seven characteristic words of Mobutu's power, in particular his bedside book who was Machiavelli's Prince and the source of inspiration for his political praxis, where like a fox wanting to stay in power forever at all costs, he shed blood, and even invented pseudo conspiracies against him with the complicity of show justice to get rid of political adversaries. But we should also note the place of black magic because its restricted circle always had experts in occult sciences and marabouts. A leadership borrowed from kakistocracy, corruptocracy, chaosocracy, terrorocracy, thanatopolitics or necropolitics with a praetorian army dedicated to its cause. His style is authoritarian to the point that he was called "king of Zaire" (M'Boukou, 2007), inspired by Thierry Michel's film with the same title. One of the things that shaped Mobutu was his enrollment from the age of 15 in the Force Publique, a private army, better still, a private militia of Leopold II, commanded by mercenaries from several European countries and characterized by acts of repression, summary executions, violence and other expeditious methods. His ambition was to resemble as much as possible the "bwana kitoko", the handsome monarch of the Belgians to the point where he would have the same glasses and the same uniform cuts as the latter (M'Boukou, 2007). From a psychological and psychoanalytical point of view, Mobutu's leadership can be placed within the framework of narcissistic leaders according to the Freudian model who believe themselves to be at the center of the world and possess a feeling of invulnerability, megalomania, omnipotence and immortality. Mobutu also has a very high level of "self-reference" (Rosenthal, 2010) with nicknames, titles and names like "papa marshal", "leopard", "Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa Zabanga" meaning the all-powerful warrior and victorious who goes from victory to victory without anything being able to stop him". "Sese Seko" also means "the Eternal", the one who lasts forever, in other words god. On national television, he was shown coming out of the clouds, therefore an envoy from heaven or the promised messiah (Deydier,

2017). The presidents who worked after him adopted for the most part his mode of leadership: Mzee Kabila with dirigisme but Kabila the son did it in a camouflaged way, without rhetoric, a kind of "leading from behind" if one has to refer to Emmanuel Banywesize (2015).

The supporters of President Tshisekedi's actions appear to have the makings of a leadership romance. The romance of leadership, as defined by James Meindl, is the tendency for people to attribute performance, achievement, and success in a small or large organization (company, country...) solely to the exploits of the leader, while ignoring other factors that could have a significant impact on this success. The leader's personal flaws are downplayed, while his qualities and talents are exaggerated. The romanticism of leadership is a follower-centered strategy that explains the followers' or followers' conduct rather than the leader's. A socially constructivist approach that refers to the way people explain complex processes by cognitively using less complex explanations, thus a kind of heuristic. The leader is seen as *Übermensch*, the one who is beyond human, the superman, the hero or great man. Some call the leader in this case a noumenon, someone elusive by reason or thought in the Platonic and Kantian sense of the term, being beyond the phenomenon (Armengaud, 2021). A man who is both "the player and the game", if we have to borrow an expression used to describe the high sense of strategy of Joseph Kābila in a short video of his party the PPRD (Parti Pour la Réconstruction et le Développement) shared on social networks in 2019. It is enough to examine the nickname of concrete (the strong, the powerful, the one who is very resistant implying the invincible) to be convinced of this. The issue with leadership romance is recklessness. All victories will be credited to the hero, and all failures will be assigned to him, beginning with the smallest failures that are the responsibility of each or lower authorities. If a couple gets into a fight, it's because of the concrete; if a youngster refuses to go to school, it's because of Fatshi concrete (Fatshi is the abbreviation for Felix Antoine Tshisekedi); if a mayor accomplishes nothing, it's because of the concrete. For this, the leader's task is to educate or empower people so that everyone takes responsibility and there is a convergence of energy for progress. This is the essence of transformational leadership.

Kakistocracy is another common aspect of leadership in this country. It is an organizational system in which promotion via ineptitude is the rule, derived from the Greek *kakistos* (worse, mediocre). Idiocy also refers to a culture in which people are revered and rewarded for their lack of intelligence.

The kakistocracy can be explained in several ways:

-Assign power to those who are bad or mediocre in order to establish a debt. Indeed, when someone competent is promoted or rewarded, he will believe that it is simply a matter of acknowledging his abilities and talents, and he will not feel obligated to do so or to demonstrate a specific level of loyalty to whoever promoted him. On the other hand, if he is mediocre, there is a debt that is created, and guarantees a long-term ascendancy to the author of the promotion, plus the "foals", the "djalelo" (those who in the morning in the evening praise the leader, even if he is mistaken" who are promoted in this country.

- Incompetence does not frighten. More "mpangi" (people from the same village or province who consider themselves brothers and sisters because they have the same blood), people we know or recommend, who have no job requirements, and thus will not scare managers, are selected during most ministerial recruitments or in public companies, rather than good people or people with an impressive curriculum.

- Promotion through incompetence demonstrates that nothing can be done without the system. We don't consider individual attributes in this scenario, but rather relationships, services rendered, and, most importantly, the services we have to render. The most important criterion is loyalty, not goodness. Kakistocracy denies individual qualities in favor of collective order devices (Barthes, 2021).

This would necessitate the training of new leaders who are at odds with those who were prepared according to the colonial model. Indeed, the educated Congolese elites, dubbed "civilized" by the conquerors in order to instill in them a false sense of superiority and distance them from their compatriots, assimilated themselves to the white colonizers. The elites were and are psychologically prepared to serve and exploit the colonizers with whom they were integrated, as well as the Congolese masses with whom they were emotionally and sociopolitically distanced. The key tools were the Congolese educated elites, the colonial administration, and the economy of alienation used to bring about negative changes in the community. Religious leaders in Congo are so corrupt themselves that they cannot positively impact their political leaders or bring about effective transformation in the country. Such is the case of many other church leaders who have played a role in the country's public life, but who have been corrupted to shirk their responsibility (Kabuaya, 2013). For Tshilenga (2005), there are three specific collective sins of the Church to fight: corruption, tribalism and compromise with dictators. The curricula of Christian universities must make an epistemological, ontological and philosophical break with the system inherited from

colonization to bring about an intellectual, axiological, economic and spiritual transformation and conversion of leaders (Madei and Moleka, 2021).

- Adopt a new hermeneutics and a new exegesis that take into account the socio-political context and not only be based on a spiritualist reading that does not allow the socio-political and economic liberation of man. Also make use of narrative identity by drawing inspiration from characters who are models of struggle and who have marked the history of this country to provide benchmarks for present and future generations (Moleka and Mujinga, 2021).

Conclusion

To bring the DR Congo to become a strong country such as the fathers of independence dreamed of, the Church has a great role to play. Thus it must engage in mission and this in a holistic way, by forming renewed ecclesial leaders and working for the holistic transformation and conversion of political and social leaders and working for the holistic transformation and conversion of political and social leaders. For this, it must also change its way of approaching the Holy Scriptures and adopt new readings that bring liberation and societal transformation.

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