

CONFRONTING FALSE TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES IN THE WESLEYAN CHURCHES

By Alfred M. Kalembo

Presented at the Africa Leaders Summit – Panama City, Panama,
January 30-31, 2012.

A. Introduction:

The Wesleyan Church globally, perhaps more specifically – in Africa today, wrestles a huge battle challenge to remain ‘Wesleyan’ amidst surging pressures of false teachings and practices presented from both within and outside her confines. Suffice to say such vices have always existed and confronted the Church universal, although it appears that at this stage, with the progression of life, these pressures have also emerged more complex and challenging.

This paper will only attempt to create ‘food for thought’ and discussion as most issues raised present different challenges in various cultural contexts. Issues such as the new wind of ‘prophetic’ and ‘healing’ ministries, prosperity gospel, homo-sexuality, traditions and culture, etc- all in a context where people wrestle with high levels of illiteracy, poverty, sickness, and deaths, To these, it is imperative for the Wesleyan church to clearly define, determine, defend and guide in the biblical standards and take an aggressive pro- active approach in her response.

B. Overview of Three Major forms of False Teachings & Practices:

1. **The Prosperity gospel movement:** – teaching that any calamity such as poverty, sickness, death etc is all from the devil. Demons are cause of any misfortune hence children of God when affected should only seek deliverance. This has a lot of dangers and many of our people have been trapped. Some people abandon responsibilities to work in search of spiritual prayers to be delivered. Many are deceived and become even more hopeless in the process.
2. **The Prophetic/Healing Ministries:** This is probably the fastest growing spiritual industry in Africa today and a real challenge to most ‘traditional’ churches like the Wesleyan Church.. Almost every day – new prophetic/healing ministry open up and thousands of our people in need, flock there to receive -prophetic messages, deliverance, and healing. These have become more famous than any known hospital especially in light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other life concerns. Again, many people have been blown away from truth in the delusion.

3. **Traditional /Cultural practices:** Syncretism has continued among members of our church despite the exposure to the gospel. Many of our people consult traditional healers and fortune tellers when they are sick or in search of solutions for their problems, and perform rituals like sexual cleansing, etc.

C. Suggestions for Some Response:

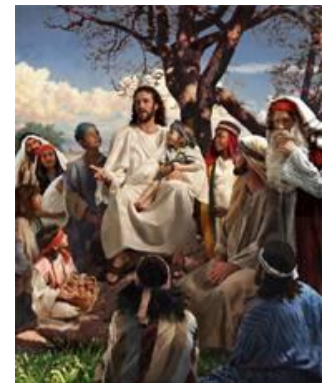
1. **Discipleship training:** The church needs to provide adequate and comprehensive membership training programs in order to prepare believers for maturity (Ephesians 4: 9-14) . Most often, we have a problem of immature believers who are easily blown off by any wind of false teaching and practices. Evangelism produces a believer, in other words a baby Christian. I believe, we have many evangelists who do a good job of producing new believers. However, we sadly lack discipleship training that moves these new believers from just being new believers to being disciples of Christ.

When we fail to disciple new believers and move on to evangelize other non-believers, we are doing what may be considered “spiritual baby damping”. In the world we live in, when a mother damps her baby, that is a criminal offense. Related to this situation is where a new believer is given a leadership role in the church without being disciple because they are leaders in a corporate world. This is not good both for the new believer and for the church.

Definition of a Disciple

“A disciple is one who knows Christ inwardly and is committed to living outwardly in love and obedience to Him.

Discipleship is helping other disciples grow to spiritual maturity by building the principles of God’s Word into a person’s life so he or she is equipped to understand and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit in knowing how to respond to any situation with Christ-like attitudes and actions.” Source: International Leadership



Institute National Conference Notebook 2006

We are commanded us to make disciples.

2. **Coaching.** There is need to coach new believers so that they turn into leaders.

Definition of a coach:

“**Coaching** is a relational process in which a mentor (a coach) who knows how to do something well, imparts those skills to a disciple who wants to learn, and motivates and

empowers him or her to stretch beyond what they have already achieved.” Resource: Stanley and Clinton. *Connecting*

3. **Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS and Poverty:** In Africa, HIV AIDS is a real threat to livelihood and people will attempt to find solutions wherever they can. The Church therefore needs to awaken to this reality and take a more proactive role in teaching and creating church education programs that target the issue of HIV/AIDS.
4. **Ministries of Compassion:** The Church must also create compassion ministries that respond to the issues of orphans, widows, widowers, the sick and the dying. These people constitute a large number of our membership and because our Wesleyan churches have not taken up the challenge to create these ministries, there are a number of our members flocking to other churches seeking help.
5. **Reclaim Power of the Gospel:** The booming age of prophets/prophecy, healing and miracles in Africa today, should perhaps be indication to the Church of the power of the gospel. People seek healing through the so called – prophets/miracle workers because they observe that such people have ‘some power from God’. Jesus declared his mission in Luke 4:18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.....
 - (a) To preach the gospel to the poor
 - (b) To heal the broken hearted
 - (c) To preach deliverance to the captives
 - (d) And recovering the sight to the blind
 - (e) To set at liberty them that are bruised.The Wesleyan Church is no doubt in a good position to exercise this practical demonstration of the power of the gospel and pray for people’s needs.

D. Conclusion:

The Wesleyan Church has a rich historical heritage, profound and sound theological doctrines which have stood the test of times but perhaps falls short when it comes to the practical demonstration and application in response to devastating needs among our people. Evangelism today must not only lead people to Christ but also response to issues of HIV/AIDS and other illnesses, issues of poverty, protection, caring for widows and orphans etc. We need to adopt a more holistic approach to ministry that does not fail to response to people’s real questions of life. This remain one of our major challenges as we respond to issues of false teachings and practices in the Wesleyan Church