

A new Reformation in Tanzania!

This report comes from Revd Isaiah Chambala, who oversees the Rooted in Jesus groups in Arusha deanery, in the diocese of Mt Kilimanjaro. In 2009 Isaiah became the Bishop of the Diocese of Kiteto.



1. Introduction

The following report is humbly presented to you from an experience that comes beyond human's ability. There has been an eruption of spiritual growth and strong faith amongst many Christians in the parishes I visited which have been practicing the RJC. My visits to the parishes which do the course I was moved to see much improvement in many groups in many parishes where the course is being practiced. I was very much impressed to see some of those Christians who meet together in these groups have started to ask questions they have never asked. I noted so many things that showed me there is a spiritual improvement amongst them.

I will just mention few examples as an illustration. I noted debates and serious discussions, spiritual confidence and the boldness to share their witness amongst themselves about what they see as a result of their prayers, and above all they enjoy their meetings. Church growth in some parishes is a good sign that there have been fruits from the course. I will try to say about these points in details in this report, as they are very good for encouragement. I discovered that the bible has started to be sweet to some of the members of these groups. The fear that it is a supernatural book that has to be dealt carefully by those who are only skilled as to how to deal with such kind of supernatural powers is now getting to be eliminated. And those who thought it was just a simple book to understand they find it vice versa.

2. Debate and discussion

Debates and discussions I noted raised from the bible out of the course material were very much impressive to me because our church members in many ways tend to see the bible in a superstitious way. And biblical matters are left to church leaders who in African context they play nearly the same role of a medicine man or a witch doctor. Because the bible is taken in that kind of perspective, the only people who know better how to tease the spirits and the gods they are the ones who are left with the mandate to read it, and to give out their witness read and discuss what is in it. They are the priests and the evangelists and few those who profess to be saved.

You will see why this point to me is very important to mention to you and how much encouraged am I to see these small groups are becoming real 'the people of the book'. The Bible the book they can read and beside is the RJC materials with them. They read the Bible not only as a book but they have discovered that this book teaches them the way of 'how to live' and the way of 'how to be right with God'. The verses they have put in their hearts have started to speak to them, such that now, "we hear the voice of God talking to us", one of them commended.

I also noted that they have started to discuss and raise some theological and doctrinal questions such as the person and the godhood of Jesus and the doctrine of Trinity. Ethical matters like what does it real mean to love your neighbour as yourself were raised in. A group in Mererani in Makiba parish has been very active in asking such difficult questions.

3. Spiritual confidence and bold to witness

Not only the bible had been regarded as a superstitious book dealt with specialists in teasing supernatural powers, many Christians have been ignorant of what the Bible says about what they have rightly

believed. Lack of confidence in the bible has led them to lose their opportunity to use their gifts. The spiritual gifts that could be exercised would have been in practice if the tradition notion that the only skilled people to tapping the spirits and maneuvering them are the church leaders could not have controlled them ignorantly. They say that the Bible has transformed their lives. They confess that the word of God contains powers that give them confidence in the Holy Spirit to share with others about their new experience in the Lord. They have the courage to say verses from the bible to prove what they believe. "I hated to meet Christians from the Pentecostal churches. Because I saw them as people who were pretending they know the truth than I do, because they were proving what they believed from the bible of which I had no confidence at all to prove what I believed from it if they asked me to do that. I knew the bible says something of the kind that I believed, but I couldn't prove it in the bible. Today I am not afraid of them, because I can also show them what I believe from the bible", said one of them. I decided to buy my own bible and I really read it. He added.

4. Equipped for ministry

In some parishes some Christians had already had a habit of meeting for bible fellowships and some kind of prayer meetings. And actually they say they read the bible and prayed together to the point that some of them had the confidence to preach. But the difference they can tell now is that in their many bible studies they were in many ways getting confused because they did not have a good system of learning the bible such as this one. Many groups confess that they can now measure their level of their understanding of the bible that increases them an interest in the bible to higher up their bible knowledge. And they acknowledge that this way does not prevent them to practice their spiritual gifts as they thought it to be before. It allows them to make comment and to discuss, the opportunity they did not have it enough in many of their gatherings.

For those parishes in which the groups had newly formed I find some moving and encouraging stories. They say that their prayer meetings in and after their course session ended. Not only have encouraged them to pray together for one another and for others, it has also helped individuals to pray for others and for themselves in their private prayers, the habit some of them did not have. They can now testify what the Lord has done for them. They form team for preaching purposes. Apart from prayer uniting them, prayers lead them to see God to be very close to them working with them communally as a group and personally as an individual.

There has been a very moving and exciting story that I have been telling people every parish I went. A lady asked me in Mererani in Makiba parish. She said, why did you delay to bring this course to us? Does it help you? I asked her. She answered by telling me a story of her own experience about a sick person who was brought to her as a Christian to be prayed for. One night a very sick girl was brought to her so that she could pray for her. Some People had told the family of that girl that if she was brought to Christians she could be easily cured this kind of sickness. The girl belonged to a family that believed in local beliefs. "It was unfortunately that I was the only Christian in that area", She said. As an Anglican lady everyone knew her travelling every Sunday to church far distant from there.

She was asked to pray for her. With a shock! She started to tremble! Me! To pray for a sick person? She asked her self. Inside herself she felt she had to prove that she believes in Jesus who is powerful. But the worst is that she had never had never never prayed in public or in private even for herself, how could it be possible now to pray for a sick person! How can it be to do to someone else? Her heartbeats went fast and she had to make a quick decision. They were there waiting for her to tell them anything they could do that their girl should be cured. What she knew all about is that although Jesus is powerful this was not her duty. It was the job of the priest and the authorised people to do that.

What she told me is that she didn't want to give up. What came quickly in her mind was the catechism she had learned during the days before her confirmation service. She took courage and started to pray the Lord's prayer. After finishing the prayer she looked to the sick girl the situation didn't give any sign of hope. "No, I have not said the Ten Commandments and I have not confessed the apostle's creed", she told her self. Having finished saying all that she looked at the girl. She was more serious now than before. She made up her mind. She started to recall some of the common prayer book prayers. What came in her mind was the confession of her sins and the grace. Nothing happened. She cried and cried and rivers of tears flourished but this time

without words, just crying. "I cried not for the sick person but for myself that I didn't know how to pray. And why the Lord had not heard her prayers, which could have proved her Christian faith", She said.

In short she said after joining the R.J.C she has learned so many things that has helped her to pray for her self and for others. She started to visit that family and the whole family has been converted to Jesus. She is now responsible to care of them. She told me that what she has learned is that it is not the order of words rhetorically prayed that make our prayers effective. No, but the name of Jesus prayed in faith is that what does and proves itself to be powerful. "I didn't know how to pray but the girl got healed and the Lord didn't want to answer my prayers immediately because He wanted to teach me to serve him through no one else. I didn't know bible verses or reading it. I knew it was for the authorised job to do that not me" she kindly told me.

From these and many stories I am made rich in the Lord. And that's why to me this coordination has been a way to serving the lord that much I am myself get blessed and encouraged as well as my spiritual life is challenged and made strong. I can say that through this I am balanced between my theological education and my spiritual practical life.

Revd Isaiah Chambala, Arusha, Tanzania , December 2006

Personal testimony

In May 2007 Isaiah travelled to Mozambique and Malawi as part of the *Rooted in Jesus* team. This is the testimony he gave to those attending the seminars:

"So through this book I challenge you. If you want to know the value of this book, start yourself, with your family. I can tell you I also have followed this book with my family. We are now in book 3 in my family. So I have seen how this book has helped me myself and my family. When we were starting to pray in my family, my children, who are happy to sing and dance, when we come to the Word of God, all of them go to sleep. But this is the devil! My wife and myself we pray for our children and rebuke the evil spirits. We were sitting there, and one of our sons who is very funny, when he starts to sleep, he puts his hand on his head to keep his eyes open, but he sleeps! When he started to use this book, we discovered we had few bibles in the house for the number of people, and they were all competing to be first to get the bible and read the verses. I am always hiding my bible, because they can even tear the page out! We have been thinking of having some more bibles, now they like to read it themselves. We are no longer forcing them. They still like to praise and to sing, but now they have started to be ambitious to read the bible. This would be my challenge; that you start with yourselves. You may not have an interest in this book. But give yourself time. Take it home. Thank you very much."