

This is the authentic experience of Antonio Gonga, a Christian Science practitioner from Luanda, Angola. The event described below took place during the civil war in Angola. These are his own words:

« Total civil war had started in my country. I had no food supplies at home apart from some sugar and some water. The rebels had surrounded the (capital) city Luanda, and had occupied it, cutting off water and electricity. The city was in the dark and bullets sped through the sky like as many phosphorescent rain drops. For four days, I fed myself solely with water and sugar, till none was left.

The shells were so close to the roof of my house that I was obliged to lay on the ground. At one moment, despair and fear invaded my mind. So I opened my Bible to find inspiration, and fell on this passage from Isaiah :

« For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying ... neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid, Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread »

Isaiah 8: 11-18

This passage meant to me: « Do not walk with the collective thought, do not fear the arrogance of evil which world thought fears, for all evil, being the opposite of good, God, is nothing because God is one and all. It is the Lord of Hosts, the only Mind, that you must adore and in front of which you must bow in

thought ».

I also saw clearly that I was to fear neither the rebels, nor the missiles or the rockets, but rather fear to disobey the first commandment and to have another God than good, the only One and All, in my thought.

In Science and Health, I found the following:

« Truth has no beginning. The divine Mind is the Soul of man, and gives man dominion over all things. ...his province is in spiritual statutes, in the higher law of Mind » (307: 25- ...30)

Filled with this understanding, I decided to leave for the neighbouring country – the Democratic Republic of Congo, – at the time called Zaire. I left my home and the streets were filled with numerous dead bodies. I was able to find a lorry that was leaving the city. As we arrived at a forest, our lorry was stopped by the rebels. They made us descend. After having checked our identity, their chief gave his men the order to take the eight men from the truck to station 2 in the shooting range, where all those who came from the capital were put to death. They left the women and children aside.

On the way to what was supposed to be the place of my final demise, I refused to have another God than the only God. My thought was clear. and I immediately remembered a passage from the textbook which states:



»Can a leaden bullet deprive a man of Life, – that is, of God, who is man's Life?» S&H 358:2

I understood that my imperative duty at that moment was to stay faithful to the First Commandment. « Thou shalt have no other gods before me ». I understood that God, the Only Life, is One and All. He was my one and only Life. He was the Life of the rebels, even the Life of the tommy guns. This Life which was One could not menace itself. Therefore no life could be lost, and I had no life to lose because God was my only Life.

I also understood that because God is One and All, there were not rebels on one side and we on the other, but there was only one side, God's side, the side of Love.

There was only one being, one man, who was incapable of hating himself. And that is how I should see him in Christian Science.

I understood that to obey anything else in my thought was to disobey this fundamental rule « to have only one God ». This would open a breach in my thought through which evil could base itself to influence my present experience. Let us be clear about this. Evil could have no basis of operation anywhere because God is All-in-all and good fills all space. It is only because of our ignorance of the truth that we manage, and that only in belief, to give evil a fictional basis of operation to influence our experience.

While I was meditating on these truths, we faced our supposed

killers, their weapons aimed at us, on the shooting range. They were given the order to shoot. But not a single bullet came out of the guns, they were stuck in the barrel. They repeated the operation for 15 minutes, but nothing happened.

At that moment I understood that God was in control. One of the rebels said in Portuguese « Deus esta com vosco » which means God is with you. They released us all and communicated to their base that we were all innocent. Our lorry was able to continue on its way and to leave the country.

As for me, I unceasingly sang hymns of praise to the only God. »

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In May of this year, this dear man gave a talk about his experiences in a Christian Science Church in Switzerland. These are extracts from what he said ;

« I would like to share with you the testimony of my own life, and how, as a practitioner, I was able to start and establish the Christian Science Church in Angola. Maybe this testimony can help you revitalize your churches here in Europe.

But first, let me say that I am surprised about what I see happening here in Europe. Either churches are sold for lack of members, or they are transformed into offices. Whereas today in Africa, it is the offices which are turned into churches ! We should be challenged by

this fact. Why is this happening ?

For 26 years I lived as a refugee in the Democratic Republic of Congo. When my country Angola became independant, I had barely started my study of Christian Science.

I received a message from God that I should return to my home country to organize the Christian Science church there. From a human standpoint it simply seemed like pure folly because at that time my country was in the throes of one of the worst wars in Central Africa where millions died in recent decades. It was during the cold war, and there were Russian and Cuban military in the country. It was a time of radical communism. Religious practices and meetings were strictly forbidden and even repressed.

I arrived in 1987 and can say that the country was, from a human standpoint, the very incarnation of hell. But I knew that I was not outside the kingdom of heaven, but that I was in the very midst of that kingdom, despite the fact that all along the road leading to the capital, trucks were exploding on mines.

Once we arrived, the government lodged my family and I in a small room 16 x 12 feet. That was also where I started receiving my patients who came from everywhere. Very soon after, I was the first listed practitioner in Central Africa. And very soon after that, upon hearing that I was a spiritual healer, the government arrested me and threw me in jail for that very reason.



But even the insanitary environment of the prison cell could not prevent me from transforming it into my practitioners office, because what seemed to be a prison, for me, was not outside heaven, it was the very boundary of heaven. And the very security agents who had been sent to spy on me became my patients ! Some were healed of unbelievable diseases.

As a result, in 1992, the government authorized our church services alongside the other major Christian denominations for the first time in sub-saharan Africa. I was able to take part right till the end in the building of our church, working there from 5 in the morning till late at night. I know the placement of practically every brick in the building !

As a result of this experience, I have reached the conclusion that two ingredients are needed to build a living church that progresses :

1. Healing, and

2. Love

Many of us can repeat by heart innumerable passages from Science and Health and the Bible, but if our love for our neighbour is only on the tip of our lips, absolutely nothing will happen in our churches. It is love that attracts.

In the first tiny 16-12 foot room where I used to live and where we started our church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist. Luanda,

Angola

my wife had to prepare lunch every single day for the patients often deprived of the minimum sustenance. Sometimes we even had to find their means of transport and occasionally they even slept in our room.

The only income I had at the time was love, only love, and love again. The very foundation of our Church in Luanda, Angola, is love. Love between the members, the warmth between us, our availability one for the other, our mutual sharing and charity for those who lack it. It is this love that is the underpinning of healing in the church. Some might say, « O, but this quality of love is a cultural thing. » Personally, I believe the culture of love is universal.

Love must overflow in the Heart of the Church, between members, so that it may reach the Streets of Lausanne or Geneva (or we could add, London or New York). Otherwise you will remain like a small sect. You know, love is the lungs and the breath of Church. If the Church lacks breathing, it will be extinguished

Now I would like to share with you an essential issue concerning the attitude of churches in Europe. When someone gives a testimony of healing on a Wednesday evening the good received by the testifier is also ours also, and because good is infinite, we inevitably include the good experienced by the other person.

So I ask : what are you doing here in the Lausanne and Geneva

(and we could add London and New York) churches concerning the progress in the churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola ?

It seems to me you are in the position of simple spectators, as if you refused to include yourselves in the blessing, i.e. this progress we are experiencing in Africa. To give you just an inkling : First Church Kinshasa has 400 pupils in its Sunday school, Second Church 300... all the way to Fifth Church, not to mention numerous societies and informal groups. These churches are also components, parts of the one Church that we are all members of.

Of course, you occasionally send a few old Heralds and books, but that is not enough. If the Good Samaritan had simply given a book to the wounded man, without financial support, without a concrete gesture, the man would have died. Love demands concrete action.

Do you think of your churches as churches without walls, i.e. churches that include the whole world, including Africa ?

Get out of yourselves, embrace infinity concretely, then I promise you, you will fill the empty benches in your branch churches.

This modest experience of mine in starting the Luanda Church taught me that there is no room in Christian Science for spectators, only for actors! »

He concluded his talk with the message from our Leader in Misc



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« Love is not something put upon a shelf, to be taken down on rare occasions with sugar-tongs and laid on a rose-leaf. I make strong demands on love, call for active witnesses to prove it, and noble sacrifices and grand achievements as its results. Unless these appear, I cast aside the word as a sham and counterfeit, having no ring of the true metal.

Love cannot be a mere abstraction, or goodness without activity and power. As a human quality, the glorious significance of affection is more than words: it is the tender, unselfish deed done in secret; the silent, ceaseless prayer; the self-forgetful heart that overflows; the veiled form stealing on an errand of mercy, out of a side door; the little feet tripping along the sidewalk; the gentle hand opening the door that turns toward want and woe, sickness and sorrow, and thus lighting the dark places of earth. « Mis 250:14-29

An informal talk given by Antonio Gonga, CS, of Luanda, Angola, at First Church of Christ, Scientist, Geneva, Wednesday May 12, 2010