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MISSION REPORT: AFRICA 2010

Once again this summer I have had the privilege of ministering in Uganda and Kenya for Church Planting International and Christian life Teachings International (CLTI), the indigenous training ministry founded by Rev. John Robert Opiyo, one of the students on my first trip, which now invites me back. I conducted a modular course in theology for two groups of rural pastors, one in Kitale, Kenya, and the other in Mbarara, Uganda. These are men in ministry who have had no opportunity to receive formal theological training. In these countries, the church is growing faster than it can train leaders. Since these men cannot go to Bible school, I take a little Bible school to them. With men of such zeal and dedication, a little goes a long way.

Thurs., 6/12-Sat. 6/14, 2010: Travel: Atlanta to Paris to Nairobi to Kitale, Kenya.

Sun., 6/20: AM, Preached at God's Family Restoration Church, Kitale; PM, spoke to Kamukuya Pastor's Fellowship, 21 pastors and elders representing seven village ministries from Pentecostal to Baptist.



God's Family Church Meets in a Borrowed Classroom

Mon., 6/21-Thurs., 6/24: Modular course in Survey of Christian Doctrine taught to 34 pastors and church leaders. For seven of them it was their last course with CLTI leading to a certificate in Christian ministry.



Nazareth Church, Kitale, Hosted the Class

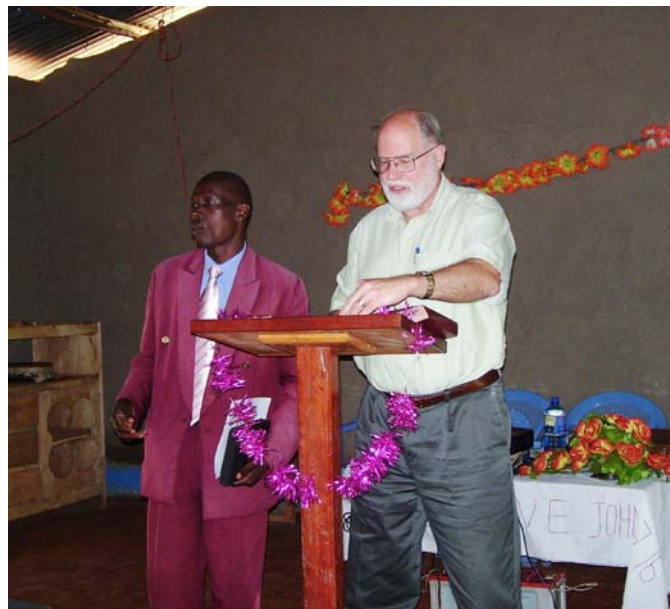
On the second day of the Kenya seminar, we covered the doctrine of the Trinity, with special reference to Islam. Why do Muslims think Christians are polytheists? How can we get past that impasse? What does the doctrine of the Trinity actually affirm? Not that we simultaneously believe that there is one God and that there are three Gods--that would be a contradiction. Rather, there is one God who contains three Persons. This is merely incomprehensible, not contradictory. We went over a lot of Scripture that affirms as true the following propositions: there is only one God, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, and Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons, not just three different names for God. The doctrine of the Trinity is simply the only way to affirm the simultaneous truth of all these biblical statements.



There are four reasons to believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is true. 1. The bible teaches it. 2. Allah is just too simple. Any God I could understand without difficulty must by that fact be a false God. 3. If God were a simple monotheistic deity like Allah, the incarnation would be impossible—for how should God abandon Heaven for existence as a Man and still rule the world? Only a Trinitarian God could become incarnate without abdicating the throne of the universe. Therefore, only the Trinity can save; Allah cannot. 4. Only if the Trinity is a true account of God could the affirmation that "God is love" be meaningful. Before creation, there would be no one for Allah to love; but the Father, the Son, and the Spirit loved each other in the unity of the Godhead from all eternity, and now through faith in Christ invite us to share that love with them for all of future eternity. Now, that's a God worth believing in!

In sum, the incomprehensibility of the Trinity is in the light of the above facts actually an asset to Christian faith, not a liability. The Muslims cry, "Allah U' Akbar!" "Allah is great!" But we have already discovered two very important things that the God of the Bible can do and which Allah cannot do: save and love. How great can Allah be?

There was a lot of intense attention to the apologetic points against Islam, because these people have Muslim neighbors. One man said, "I thought I was coming to a seminar, and I find myself in college!" Not quite--he doesn't have to write a paper or read a systematic theology textbook (and a couple of C. S. Lewis books!) in addition to the biblical texts. But his unintentional hyperbole has a point--that is exactly what I was invited to bring these men.



“The First Reason We Believe is the Bible Teaches It”

Tues., 6/20: After the class ended for the day, spoke to an assembly of St. Philip’s Secondary School, Kitale, and then addressed the faculty separately after the students were dismissed. I

spoke to the students on the adventure of reading. There is a poster one sees in Kenya that proclaims, “Literacy for Improved Food Production!” I don’t doubt that improved food production is a worthy goal and that literacy can help attain it, I said; but there is so much more to reading than that! It makes available to us the Word of God, the world of ideas, and the world of imagination—all of which can expand the mind in such a way as to facilitate things yet undreamt of (including better food production). It was Newman’s *Idea of a University* recycled impromptu for an African context. I encouraged the faculty to actively cultivate two things: love of their subject and love of their students. It is only when both are present that transformative teaching can emerge.

Fri., 6/25: CLTI Graduation. We had a graduation ceremony for seven students who had completed the whole pastoral training course from Christian Life Teachings International. After the service and before the recessional, an African graduate's family and friends will come up and drop garlands of tinsel over their mortar-boarded heads, so that during the photo session afterwards (which puts most weddings to shame) they look like walking Christmas trees with black trunks (the bottoms of their robes still showing beneath). During the next American graduation I have to endure, I will be sure to remember that it could be worse!

The Valedictorian, Peter Sisunga, included in his speech--really a fiery sermon--some things he learned from me two years ago. That made me think maybe I'm not wasting my time here after all! Some of my American students have difficulty remembering things I said two weeks--er, sometimes two days—ago.



Processional; Opio and Williams Bring up the Rear

Sat., 6/26: Travel to Mukono, Uganda.

Sun., 6/27: Preach at Campus Church of Uganda Christian University. The visit to Uganda Christian University in Mukono (Evangelical Anglican) was a great success. My sermons to campus church congregations of about 1,000 (first service) and 200 (second) were very well received. The Rev. Canon Frederick Baalwa, the campus chaplain, was astonished that I had actually presented the text and topic he had asked for ("The Place of Authority in Christian Leadership," Mark 10:42-5). "That was powerful," he said. Christian leadership is the theme for this term. When I saw the whole programme I was impressed with how he had broken it down. Perhaps the best thing that came of our short time there was making a connection between Rev. Baalwa and Rev. Opio. Baalwa was quite taken with the vision and ministry of CLTI and said that there were many rural Anglican (Church of Uganda) congregations led by lay preachers who desperately needed just what John Opio is doing. They soon had their heads together plotting blessings for the Kingdom--a wonderful ecumenical moment. Baalwa was astounded that I, a Muzungu (white man), was taking Public transport to Mbarara. "You really practice the servant leadership you preach!" he marveled. Apparently Muzungus on public are a great rarity. There is a reason why.

If God has put anything in the world to remind us of human weakness, it must be the African public transportation system. The journey from Kampala to Mbarara Sunday afternoon--about 280 kilometers to the West--took a full eight hours of being bumped and pounded half to death. But I survived to begin the second week of classes.

Mon., 6/28-Weds., 6/30: Second Modular Theology Course, at Mbarara, Uganda. I used the same material as in Kenya but covered less of it because many of the men (and women leaders too) are even less prepared academically than the CLTI students I had in Kenya. Sometimes here it takes a while just to explain something to the interpreter so he can render it. In Kenya, half of the students were confident enough in English to ask their questions in English. Here, almost no one is. So the interpreters are even more essential, but they too are less prepared. Nevertheless, we are accomplishing some good teaching. The Trinity explained as a positive response to Islam rather than a theological liability was a hit here too.



“Allah Cannot Love or Save; Who then is Great?”

One encouraging factor in Mbarara was that several of these students had already seen through the Prosperity Gospel on their own--unusual in Africa. They were asking for effective ways to combat it. Apparently "Name it and claim it" translates into Lyancole as "Take it! Take it!" So I said, just ask people to read the Gospels and ask them whether they are seeing a Jesus who says "Take it!" or one whose message is "Give it!" Was Paul in perfect health right after being stoned and left for dead? Where was his faith? Was Jesus lacking in faith because He had no place to lay his head? This theology is not just wrong, it is blasphemous! What of the Missionaries who first brought the Gospel to Uganda? They packed in their coffins because they expected to die from Malaria--yet they came anyway. Aren't we glad their preachers weren't saying, "Take it! Take it!" Makes you stop and think, doesn't it?

Thurs., 7/1: Preached to midweek service of Ruti Reformed Presbyterian Church in Mbale and addressed an assembly of Hillside Primary School in nearby Biharwe.



Fri.-Sat., 7/2-3: Journey home via Kampala, Entebbe, Amsterdam, Paris, and Atlanta.

Summary: Preached in five services at four churches, spoke to two Pastor's Fellowships and two school assemblies, held two training seminars for about seventy pastors and church leaders, and spoke at one graduation service in two weeks of intense ministry. Pray that the men who attended the seminars will commit what they heard to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. That way, the church will be strengthened and the mission will have been a success.



Nazareth Church Choir, Kitale



Ruti Reformed Presbyterian Congregation, Mbarara



Class Members in Mbarara



Pastor's Fellowship, Kitale