Columns
Ministry



(Unsplash/Anton Darius)



by Nancy Watenga

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

July 19, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I remember it very well. I was attending primary school, when I learned that my neighbor was dealing in witchcraft.

He would rise very early before anyone else in the village and he would sit strategically at the crossroads junction. This was because if any other person was there before him, his "medicine" would turn powerless! He would cause a lot of conflict among relatives in the neighborhood when he accused some of being the cause of suffering for the rest of their family.

I look back and imagine the kind of life this man lived — he suffered from poverty and desperation. I considered him a healer, yet I do not think even his children admired him. What a life! My parents moved to the farms so I do not know whether he ever got converted!

In the '90s I worked as a pastoral coordinator in the Mombasa Archdiocese in Kenya. One of my major roles was to train the various groups in the church in doctrine and leadership. One of the groups was the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This exposed me to plenty of "deliverance cases" for those attacked by evil spirits. I recall my experiences with much gratitude to God for His protection. I vividly recall a lady that shared about how her own mother "consecrated" her to the devil in exchange for wealth. The mother ran a fleet of public vehicles known as "matatus" in Kenya — at the price of her first-born daughter.

My colleague — a priest — and I came into the picture when this grown daughter and her husband wanted to renew their marriage, after going through Life in the Spirit, Catholic Charismatic Renewal program. The mother would not hear of it: That meant her deal would be off.

Advertisement

To make a long story short, the couple — after surrendering everything to God as a result of our prayers and dialogue with them — the couple was delivered and had a spectacular wedding in the church. They were among hundreds of couples who had their marriages renewed in the year 2000; thus, the evil one was defeated. The mother, too, discovering that nothing is impossible with God when her daughter was delivered, and realizing that the devil has nothing to offer —gave up her belief in the evil one and was converted. By this time some of her vehicles were off the road. Thank God for His Spirit that renews all things in Christ Jesus!

Due to several factors including laziness, poverty and unemployment, theft has become the norm in many Kenyan towns. The criminals use intimidation and all levels of force to get in, such as drilling holes in the stone houses and removing the iron sheet roofs. The worst aspect is that when the thieves are caught, the police can be compromised and for small bribes will release the culprits.

This has heightened the citizens' anger to the extent that some have been resorting to the witchcraft of the day. If caught, the thieves are subjected to all manner of punishment. They are made to eat grass like animals until the property owner decides to set them free. It's an awful sight to witness. Others are exposed to a swarm of bees that rest on their hands and every body part that touched the stolen property.

Stealing is not right, but neither is the use of such scary devilish practices. The person who does that is not a "nonbeliever." Even if supposedly a Christian, wouldn't they be a follower of another religion? My question is: Where does this person place the creator?

After my introspection, I have come to conclude that witchcraft is deadlier than the coronavirus because, the latter kills only the physical body, while witchcraft destroys both the physical and the soul. The Scripture is clear: Those who practice witchcraft, idolatry and adultery will never see God. This must be the depth of pain of a soul that is meant for salvation yet loses it.

According to the African Bible's translation of Exodus 20:1-6, we read how God spoke these words:

> I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you lived as slaves. You shall have no other god to rival me. You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish a parent's fault in the children, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren among those who hate me; but I act with faithful love towards thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

In the passage above God began by reminding the Israelites of His merciful love, how He brought them from Egypt where they were slaves. God said the Israelites

should be careful lest they forget those great wonders performed by God, not because they deserved them but because God loved them so much.

After reminding the Israelites of His great power, God went on to warn them what would hurt His "feelings." God would be hurt if they gave Him competition with another god. Not only was it bad to give Him a rival, but equally evil would be to make a carved image or likeness — regardless of the part of the creation it would come from.

God was very categorical that His beloved people should not bow down to any god nor serve it. At this point God provides the reason why worshiping other gods is prohibited. He is jealous of sharing worship with these man-made gods. He proceeds to describe the consequences of obeying or not obeying; these consequences and their extent are clearly delineated.

To practice idolatry is to demonstrate hatred for God. Why would a creature hate his/her creator, I ask myself? The last verse gives hope to any believer that endeavors to honor the Exodus mandate. God promises to "show love down to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Today, this is our message. It is also the message of all who pay homage to very "subtle" gods including power, fame, sex, money, beauty and wealth, to mention a few. I think there is nothing wrong with all those things in themselves. The problem comes when power, fame, sex, money, beauty and wealth take the place of God in our lives. In the absence of God, even the most profitable thing can turn out to be evil.

So as believers we join the psalmist and declare, “Though I walk in the midst of dangers, you guard my life when my enemies rage. You stretch out your hand; your right hand saves me. The Lord is with me to the end. Lord, your mercy endures forever. Never forsake the work of your hands!" (Psalm 138: 7-8).