

## AN APOSTOLATE WITH A DIFFERENCE

During my days in Bisheshe, the community I lived in the longest during my time as a DMJ, I worked as a Catechist and a Pastoral Worker. The year 2000 became a special year when all that I am going to write about happened and my involvement in it not forgetting the role of the community in trying to save lives.

Most of you will remember or will recall reading about **The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God**. I would say that this was a breakaway religious movement from the Roman Catholic Church founded by Credonia Mwerinde, Joseph Kibwetere and possibly with some others. Kibwetere was from my home Parish – Kagamba. I remember attending mass at my home Parish and



the Parish Priest warning people not to join Kibwetere's cult. It was formed in the late 1980s after Mwerinde and Kibwetere claimed that they had visions of the Virgin Mary. The five primary leaders were Joseph Kibwetere, Fr. Joseph Kasapurari, John Kamagara, Fr. Dominic Kataribabo, Fr. Paul Ikazire (later left them) and Credonia Mwerinde. It was believed that the cult grew in importance when the priests joined them especially Fr. Dominic Kataribabo, a respected and popular priest with a PHD from a University in the United States.

While in Bisheshe, I encountered followers for Kibwetere who would come to stay at one of our good Catholic's home. The reason of their stay was to recruit members to their cult and indeed some followed them. The Catechist I was working with told me about the story of those women and men that were seriously recruiting members to their cult. I decided I would visit with them and know what they were up to. I am sure someone told them I was to go there and they disappeared so, I never met with them. However, people came asking me about the legitimacy of that cult as they claimed to still be Catholics. I did discourage many but some did not heed to my voice.

On a certain weekend, they sent me a message that they were coming to the Service on Sunday and they would throw me out of the Church. I went to the Parish and briefed the Parish Priest who was aware of those people's activities in that part of his Parish. The Parish Priest, there and then decided he would come there for Mass that very Sunday they had planned to throw me out of the church. In his homily that lasted more than an hour, he let the Christians know that the Kibwetere people who were with us at Mass all dressed in white were following a false sect that does not have anything to do

with the Catholic Church. I remember him telling them that the Bishop received my vows and many people even from Bisheshe witnessed my vows' ceremony. He asked the Kibwetere ladies who were calling themselves sisters who witnessed them making vows? One by one, they left the church but sent me threatening words. Adeo and I were actually scared and did not know what to do. We told our watchmen to be on the alert and make sure no stranger was allowed on our compound. Amidst the fear, I made sure I visited all the families in that out station warning them about the dangers of Kibwetere Cult.

Their doctrine revolved around a belief that some people were talking to God through visions and had received warnings from the Blessed Virgin Mary about the end of the world by the year 2000. The followers were not supposed to go to hell if they strictly followed the cult. For the devout Christians the whole concept of getting heavenly visions was very appealing. The cult talked of doomsday and preached of three days of consecutive darkness that will engulf the whole world and how only their camps were supposed to be safe havens, something reminiscent of the Noah's Arc. They promised their followers that when all this happened, everybody would perish except their followers and whatever remained on earth would be theirs alone and that they would then start communicating directly with Jesus. Apart from the leaders, other members of the cult were not allowed to talk. They used signs to communicate among themselves and their cult leaders. The leaders created detachment between their followers and the society around them. They had a tight day's schedule that kept the followers extremely busy so that there was virtually no time to discuss, not even in signs. A lot of fear was instilled among the members to the extent that who ever joined the cult would never talk about what was happening there. They always traveled in the night. No one ever saw those who came to Bisheshe except when they would come to the Service on Sunday.

Members of that cult were to sell all their property and give the proceeds to the cult leaders. Their children were not supposed to go to school and the whole family would have to go to Kanungu or other places in the country where they had centres. The year 2000 came and as many people were warned, every one knew that the world was coming to an end. Well, some people from our neighbourhood went to Kanungu as they were summoned by the cult leaders that the world was

coming to an end and they would have to die together. At least 6 people came to consult with me if they should go and I told them not to go and they survived while those who went perished in the Kanungu inferno. From what we heard, followers of that cult perished in a devastating fire and a series of poisonings and killings that were either a group suicide or an orchestrated mass murder by group leaders after their predictions of the apocalypse failed to come about. At least five from our



neighbourhood were among them.

Of course 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2000 came and the world did not come to an end so, March 17 was set as the "new" doomsday and people arrived to pray. They were locked in a church and burned to death on the pretext that the Virgin Mary would deliver them from the end of the world clothed in flames. About 1000 people perished in that fire. In addition to the bodies in the church, investigators found bodies of followers buried all over the country. However, none were found in our neighborhood where recruitment was taking place.

In all this, I remember praying as I never prayed before. Adeo and I prayed morning and evening for the return of the people whom we knew and had joined the Kibwetere cult. After the inferno of Kanungu, many people in our neighbourhood came to our house and all they could say was, 'Sister, you told them and they did not listen to you.' At one stage I felt I did not do much. May be I could have saved our neighbours that perished but I remember Adeo telling me, "Passy you did what you could." And Indeed, I did what I could.



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