

"ENEMIES OF MY FATHER'S HOUSE DIE BY FIRE":

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESPONSE OF THE MOUNTAIN OF FIRE AND MIRACLES MINISTRIES TO AFRICAN COSMOLOGY OF EVIL

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Introduction

This paper is a reflection on the response of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) to African Cosmology of evil. It is the argument of this paper that a major feature which continues to give credence and prominence to the MFM is her array of deliverance prayers which is largely a religio-cultural response to the African worldview of evil. Since her founding in 1989, the MFM has continued to attract large audiences, not only at the monthly "Power Must Change Hands" programme at the Prayer City of the group, but also in several of their Churches. Based on participant observations, interactions and interviews with some of the leaders and members, it is obvious that African Cosmology, and in particular Yoruba cosmology on evil coupled with the claims of divine inspiration by the leadership, have largely structured the group's spiritual response to the African worldview of evil.

Issues of interest to this writer include, among others, a discussion on the MFM and her activities, the African worldview or cosmology on evil, the response of the MFM to the African worldview of evil, and some reflection on MFM's response. In discussing the African worldview on evil, this paper focused on the Yoruba tribe of Southwestern Nigeria.

Daniel Olukoya, the founder of the MFM, is a Yoruba man, and invariably, this worldview has had on him its own 'influence' in the evolution of the several warfare prayers deliberately formulated in

combating perceived evils. Theological and missiological issues constitute

the areas of interest in the reflection on the response of the MFM to Yoruba cosmology of evil.

Daniel Olukoya and his Mountain of Fire And Miracles Ministries

Daniel Kolawole Olukoya, the founder and General Overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, was born in 1956 to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Olukoya a retired police officer and petty trader. He started his primary education at St. John's Christ Apostolic Church primary school in Akure, Ondo state, the hometown of his mother and later moved to Lagos to complete his primary education at the St. Jude's Primary School, Ebutte-Meta. Thereafter, he proceeded to Methodist Boys, High School Lagos for his post-primary education. From there, he went to the University of Lagos, where he studied Micro-Biology, and came out with a first class honours degree.¹

After his graduation, he taught as a Research Assistant in the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), Yaba, Lagos. From there, he proceeded to the University of Reading, United Kingdom, under the commonwealth scholarship, where he studied Molecular Genetics and obtained a Ph.D degree. He later returned to Nigeria in 1984 to continue his appointment with NIMR. He equally served as a lecturer and external examiner to two Nigerian Universities, the University of Lagos and the University of Benin. By 1993, Olukoya had risen to the post of the head of Genetic department. In 1998, due to ministerial pressure, he had to resign his appointment, having risen to the post of the Deputy Director General of the Institute. In his field of specialisation, he had an indigenous laboratory of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology. He has many scientific publications to his credit.²

Olukoya claimed that he became converted in 1974 and began pastoring what he referred to as his first Church in 1981.³ Olukoya, who was a member of the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C), left the Church in 1988, as a result of a conflict in the Church.

The MFM started in 1989 with a prayer group of seven already meeting in Olukoya's house in Yaba, Lagos shortly before that time. The prayer group then transformed into a deliverance ministry. In that same year, when the membership increased to 24, the group moved to the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), and organised a School of prayers on Wednesdays and a Mid-week service held on Thursdays. Still in 1989, due to further space constraints, the group moved from NIMR to a bigger hall at 60, Old Yaba Road, Adekunle, Ebutte Meta, Lagos State. Soon again, the number soared higher and the Church constituted a source of traffic hold-up for motorists in the Old Yaba area where she was located. This development made the Church to relocate again to a plot of land at 13, Olasimbo Street, Onike, Yaba, in 1994. It was in this year that the full Sunday services began, and the name Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries was taken as the name of the group.⁴

The expansion of MFM continues to be a subject of interest, not only within Nigerian and African Pentecostalism, but within global Pentecostalism at large. Since her founding in 1989, MFM has continued to record significant expansion not only within Nigeria, but Africa and other continents of the world. In Nigeria, MFM has her presence in nearly all the states, with an average of 15 to 20 or more branches per State. As at 2009, Lagos alone was said to have had over seventy branches of the Church.⁵ In Africa, MFM claims to have her presence in twenty countries, including Nigeria. These include Uganda, Kenya, Togo, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Malawi, Liberia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Cote D'voire, Congo Brazzaville, Central Africa, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic and Tanzania. °Other branches of the Church are located in three other continents of the

world:Europe,Asia and North America.7

Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries is a full gospel ministry which is "devoted to the Revival of Apostolic Signs, Holy Ghost fireworks, and the unlimited-demonstration of the power of God to deliver to the uttermost".8 The official logo of the group is that of a mountain burning with fire, and enclosed within two concentric circles. The mountain, which symbolises MFM is believed to be higher than any problems individuals may have, while the fire is symbolic of God's presence and also a representation of the power of God which,when called upon, would consume Satan and his cohorts.9

The group lays emphasis on absolute holiness within and outside of individuals. This is viewed as the greatest spiritual "insecticide" and requirement for making heaven. MFM is a do-it-yourself Gospel ministry,where individual members are trained to wage war and fight spiritual battles to dislodge the plots of enemies and that of Satan.The beliefs of the MFM are conspicuously printed in their magazines and other documents.Likewise,their various websites glaringly contain these beliefs.Theyinclude the following:

1. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God,the only basis for our faith and fellowship.
2. The one true God,eternal existence in three Persons.God The Father, God The Son,and The Holy Spirit.
- 3.. The fall and deprivation of mankind, necessitating redemption through the Blood of Jesus Christ.

The Salvation of Mankind is through the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ and the Regenerative Work of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is seen as an act of separation from that which is evil.

5. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:4, 10:44 and 19:1-6.
6. We believe in Restitution for past wrongs where possible.
7. The Ordinance of the Church, the Lord's Supper and Water Baptism.

8. The Church Universal, both visible and invisible.

9. The Ministry, divinely called and scripturally ordained as that approved of Almighty God.

10. Divine healing as provided by the Lord Jesus Christ.

11. The Rapture, ushering all believers into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ when He will physically land on the earth.

12. The Millennial Reign of Christ.

13. The Fire Judgment.¹⁰

Like many other Pentecostal groups, the MFM also believes in the issue of baptism of the Holy Spirit (see statement 5). The scripture used in support of this claim is Acts 2:4, 10:44 and 19:1-6. It is interesting to note that these are the same texts a lot of Pentecostals worldwide allude to in their biblical defence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Similarly, the other beliefs in divine healing, judgement, etc, as indicated above are observable in almost all Pentecostal groups.¹²

It is significant to add to the discussion on the MFM the fact that the group is essentially a deliverance ministry. Deji Ayegboyin informed that in terms of functions, the New Pentecostal groups in Nigeria can be grouped under three main categories—the Holiness Movements, such as the Deeper Life Bible Church founded by William F. Kumuyi, the Prosperity Organisations, such as the Living Faith Winners' Church, founded by David Oyedepo and the Deliverances Ministries.¹³ The MFM in her functions and activities belongs to the third category: While it can be argued that the other categories also involve in deliverance activities, it is however arguable that none of these other groups practice the acts of deliverance in an identical form or in a similar frequency as the MFM does. The group is popularly known as 'MFM', or Fire! Fire!! or 'Die by Fire!'. It is indeed a deliverance ministry par excellence.¹⁴

Yoruba Cosmology of Evil

The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria are located primarily in six States-

Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. It had been noted earlier that, Olukoya is a Yoruba man from the Southwestern part of Nigeria.

In that part of the country, there is an emphatic stress on the concept of evil and its associated activities in the society.

Essentially, Yoruba cosmology is that which lays emphasis on this aspect of 'reality'.¹⁵ In Yoruba cosmology, Wande Abimbola asserted that there are eight agents of evil. In a collective sense, they are known as ajagun (warriors against human beings). These include: iku (death), arun (disease), ofo (loss), egba (paralysis), oran (trouble), epe (curse), ewon (bondage or imprisonment) and ese (accident or any other evil which affects human beings).¹ It is these agents of evil that are largely perceived as being responsible for human predicaments. Furthermore, for the Yoruba, the cosmos is believed to be saturated with wicked spirits: demons, witches, wizards, sorcerers and other evil influences people wield against each other through heartless magicians and other such spiteful persons in the community. These malevolent spirits are believed among the Yoruba to be the origin or agents of evil in human lives.

Another concept among the Yoruba worth discussing on the subject of evil is Esu (devil). According to Bolaji Idowu, in Yoruba theological worldview, Esu is a dreadful character. It is believed that even the divinities dread Esu. This is because he is believed to hold the power of life and death over them as their prosperity or calamity depends upon the reports he takes to Olodumare about them. The Yoruba have several myths which depict Esu as a trickster or mischief-maker. There are undoubtedly elements of evil in Esu and for that reason he has been predominantly associated with things evil. As a matter of fact, the Yoruba believe that the primary function of Esu is to spoil things. Several Yoruba oral traditions reveal that Esu makes mischief his hobby. This is why when someone does an evil thing, it is thus said, Esu lo tii (meaning it

was Esu who prompted the action in the individual).¹⁷

It is significant to note that, with the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, the Yoruba Christian theological understanding was that which equated the Yoruba concept of Esu with the biblical understanding of the devil.¹⁸ For the Yoruba Christians, Esu is regarded as the grand enemy; the sum and source of all other enemies. He is seen as the principle present in all immoral and disorderly acts.¹⁹ In Yoruba cosmology of evil, sacrifices and appeasement are ways by which the calamities of Esu are sometimes avoided. However, the Christian response since the religion's arrival in Nigeria has been the offering of prayers unto God against the activities of Esu.²⁰

The Response of the MFM to Yoruba Cosmology of Evil.

Among the Yoruba, ancestral lineages are held as of great importance in the destiny formation of individuals. In other words, it is believed that the family from which an individual hails can determine his success or otherwise in life. Several Yoruba families have household gods or orisa and divinities. According to Idowu, the element of evil in Esu can also be found to a reasonable degree in other divinities.²¹

Thus, the MFM believes the group has been divinely called and strategically located by God to wage spiritual warfare against ancestral and inherited household evil in people's lives, particularly among Africans. Africa's paganistic and idolatrous backgrounds are believed to have opened the door for satanic operations in people's lives, hence, the need for deliverance. "Enemies of my father's house, die by fire" is simply an expression of the fact that, in the average African family history, the activities of the devil and his supposed cohorts, the idols and divinities are operative must "die". Death here simply means a destruction of such powers at work in the lineage of the individual.²² Moreover, Olukoya asserted that through his several counselling with people and through the help of the Holy Spirit, 95% of people's problems have roots in their family backgrounds.²³

The MFM holds that several of the challenges people face are inherited problems, evil covenants, ancestral curses, foundational problems, etc,

_____ which all relate to the family background of the individual.²⁴ Thus, as a

result of this claim, the group makes much of setting at liberty those who are oppressed by these malevolent spirits and powers. The MFM has a myriad of teachings on demonism in relation to deliverance.

Arguably, no Pentecostal denomination in Nigeria links family background with the necessity for deliverance like the MFM.

Olukoya in his many teachings insists that evil originates from the devil or Satan. Satan is pictured as the arch-enemy having control over principalities and powers. Olukoya teaches that a powerful satanic network exists which is composed of demons through which Satan operates. Demons are held by the MFM to be the causative agents of assorted misfortunes, calamities and moral evils.²⁵ This is why Olukoya has a series of copious and repetitive prayers which must be said vigorously against these demons. Some of these include:

Ancient demons controlling my father's house, die by fire.

Let the head of every marine power fashioned against me be broken in the name of Jesus.

I command all demonic serpents directed against my life to be paralysed in the name of Jesus.

Powers sent to hijack my destiny from my father's house, die by fire!²⁶

The response of the MFM to the problem of evil as perceived in African cosmology is that of offering deliverance prayers. This brings to the fore, the question, Who needs prayers of deliverance? It is believed in the MFM that no individual person, family, society or community is immune or spared from demonic assaults. The MFM holds that the degree to which each individuals

need deliverance vary. Certain misfortunes in an individual's life are seen as things which necessitate deliverance. Some of these, according to Olukoya, include joblessness, barrenness, unstable marital relationships, drug addiction,

mental problems, etc.²⁷

It is significant to note that, other than the MFM, many deliverance Pentecostal ministries have asserted that it is not only persons that need deliverance in Africa, the very land also needs deliverance. This is largely due to the economic woe which the continent suffers, which is seen as a result of the effects of pollutions of the land as a result of involving in idolatry, ritual killings, curses and the indiscriminate shedding of blood through wars and the genocides.²⁸

In the practice of deliverance in the MFM, certain techniques are discernible. For Olukoya, deliverance largely relates to expelling unwanted spirits from a person or thing as the case may be. The key elements of MFM's deliverances are clearly discernible in the books of Olukoya and from some of his associates. An underlining principle among the group is that, no problem, whether spiritual or physical, should be left to chance; they all require spiritual panacea which can be realised through fervent prayers.²⁹ Olukoya identifies eight steps through which individuals can obtain self deliverance. These are, praise and worship, confessing scriptures which promise deliverance, breaking covenants, binding all the spirits at work, lay hands on the head and stomach, saturate oneself with the blood of Jesus, demanding in the name of Jesus that every strange spirit should leave, and ask for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit into one's life.³⁰ These steps as propounded by Olukoya are highly commendable. However, the assumption of such a model is that all deliverance cases of individuals are the same. Perhaps this is an over generalisation of the matter.

Whether it is a general or special deliverance sessions, the major elements include vigorous prayers, confessional and repetitive prayers which are said after the leader. In a motion-like manner of the swinging of arms, militant languages such as 'die by fire', 'I am not your candidate', etc are said repeatedly. More often than not, in such meetings, many of the participants begin to spit out saliva into thrash bags which they have been given for that purpose of tissue papers. In

other instances, some persons scream violently and fall to the ground
as the leader commands the malevolent spirits to come out of the people.

It is believed that, in the course of such deliverance prayers, such unwanted spirits leave the people. In many of the meetings, opportunities are given to the members with claims of testimonies to share such with the people.

In certain cases, the deliverance of some individuals require sessions of post deliverance counselling. In addition, the MFM has a series of model prayers which are prescribed in her books for persons in need of deliverance. One interesting feature on deliverance in the MFM is the emphasis on personal deliverance. Olukoya teaches his members to be able to perform self deliverance on their own without having to depend on anybody. The ministry believes to a very large extent in 'do it yourself'. The members are taught to pray deliverance prayers on their own and not depend on any fake prophet or apostle. They do this as they repeat the deliverance prayers in the books on deliverance written by Olukoya.

Thus, from the above, it is clear that the response of the MFM to African (Yoruba) cosmology is that of leading persons confronted with misfortunes to experience respite through energetic warfare deliverance prayers. In many of the group's meetings, many of the participants share testimonies of the claims of deliverance through the prayers of the MFM.

Reflections

Since the founding of the MFM in 1989, the group has continued to provide her version of warfare deliverance prayers for her members and other participants in her weekly and periodic programmes. Interestingly, in a series of visits to some Pentecostal and mainline Churches, this writer observed the influence of the MFM's prayers in the prayer patterns and contents of many of these Churches. These warfare prayers-by the MFM

primarily constitute the response of the MFM to the African worldview of evil.

The reflections centre on the issues of theology and missiology. The first is on MFM's theology of evil. The MFM in a related sense with Yoruba cosmology locates the epicentre of evil in Satan with demons as his agents. It has been noted by J.S Mbiti that evil in Africa is an independent and external object which cannot act on its own, but must be employed either by spiritual or human agents.³¹ The issue is, When a man does evil, can Satan still be held responsible? In a related sense, can a human being serve as an evil agent without the influence of Satan? It is generally held that there is no evil in God. However, is there evil in man? And is Satan always responsible for the evil in man? Moreover, at what point can wilful evil in man be delineated from Satan induced evil? In Ps.51:11, David requested of God to create in him a clean heart (to take away his evil heart). Thus, in David's understanding, the wickedness he was referring to was not an external influence or agent acting on his life. Therefore, in her response to the issue of African world view on evil, the MFM would do well to adequately address the issue of evil both in Satan and man.

In a related sense, the MFM's theology of evil appears to be conceding much more ground to Satan and demons than the gospel seems to depict. While it is true that Jesus cast out demons, nevertheless, his teachings centred more on the issues of the kingdom of God, servanthood, love and salvation. However, for the MFM, the focus whether in preaching or teaching, is Satan. It does seem therefore that the group, in seeking to wage warfare against Satan, appear to focus on him more than Jesus Christ. The Bible admonishes in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus", not "focusing on Satan, your arch enemy". The writer is not advocating naivety on the activities of Satan; rather, the writer argues here that, too much emphasis should not be placed on him. If the MFM does not check the state of her overemphasis on Satan and demons, the group may fall into the error described by Abamfo Atiemo as "dualism". This, according to him, is a teaching which creates a Devil who seems to be equal in power and majesty

with God himself.³²

Furthermore, another area of theological reflection on the prayer

response of the MFM is related to the kinds of prayer rituals which the MFM follows. In a way, it lends itself to a mechanical ritual and quasi-magical concept of faith. Some critics of these kinds of mass, repetitive and responsive prayers of the MFM claim that they are simply equivalent to *ofo* and *ogede* (incantations which are believed to possess power of giving instant relief to pains in Yoruba religion).³³ The concern here is that God is not a mechanical God, and hence, desires man's loving, honest and fresh living and loving relationship with Him which is not mechanical, but truly from the heart.

In the area of missiology (the science of missions), to claim that the evil in man primarily originates in Satan who at will uses man to accomplish his purpose may be detrimental to the purpose of missions. Some individuals may feel that the change of character in man is not possible; hence, there is no need to preach the gospel again. From the inspirational writings of Paul the Apostle, it is clear that Paul places on man the responsibility of a change (Rom. 12:1). This change comes from a decision in man as he responds to the invitation of Christ for salvation. If the wrong actions in man are continually and entirely located in a source outside of man, then the several mission efforts of different agencies are in futility. Man is a moral agent who is capable of making choices and moral decisions and this must be recognised.

Similarly on the issue of missiology is the question which relates to or suddenly? The view of the MFM on the need for repeated deliverances by an

individual:creates the picture of a God who is weak to save from satanic
the power of God to save. Can God truly save from sin? Can He truly
claws. The side effect of this is that, people may come to a point that they see
save from satanic bondage? Does God save from bondages gradually
themselves as helpless victims of supernatural forces, whose only spiritual
need in life is to go through repeated deliverances.³⁴ Indeed, this contrasts
deeply with the scriptural

claim that, 'if the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed'.³⁵

Conclusion

The study was a reflection on the deliverance warfare prayers of the MFM in the African worldview of evil. There is no doubt that the MFM has keenly negotiated religious space in Nigeria and beyond through her repeated emphasis on the need for deliverance from malevolent spirits which their ground claims have ancestral linkages to individuals as they foment evil and misfortunes. Through MFM's vigorous, energetic and repeated prayers, many lay claim to one form of deliverance or the other. However, based on some theological and missiological reflections, it is obvious that the MFM needs to have a rethink on some of her assertions and practices on deliverance. In whatever way the group wishes to stress the need for deliverance in response to African world views, the power of God to completely deliver and His ability to completely save from sin and satanic claws must not be trivialised.

Endnotes

- 1- John Olayiwola (ed.) "An exclusive interview with Dr. Daniel Olukoya", in *Maintaining the Fire on the Altar 1* (MFM Press, 2008), 17.
- 2 Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, 'About the General Overseer', http://www.mountainoffire.org/about_go.html (Accessed on January 25, 2012).
- 3 Daniel Olukoya, 'Dangers at the gate of death', in *Maintaining the Fire on the altar*, 18
- 4 Deji Ayegboyan, "...But Deliver us from Evil..." The Riposte of the MFM and its Implications for the Reverse in Mission, *ORITA Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. XXXVII(1&2), June & December (2005):37.
- 5 This list was obtained from the MFM headquarters in Lagos, but also available on her website, 'MFM World branches', <http://www.mfm-ireland.org/fire/mfm-branches> (Accessed on January 30, 2012).
- 6 This list was obtained from the headquarters of the MFM, on January 29, 2008. The list is also available online, MFM Network Africa, <http://www.mountainoffire.org/network.html> (Accessed on January 30, 2012).
- 7 MFM Network Africa, <http://www.mountainoffire.org/network.html> (Accessed on January 30, 2012).

8 About MFM.http://www.mountainoffire.org/about_us.html (Accessed on Jan 28,2012)___

9 Ayegboyin. "...But deliver us frøm evil..." ORITA,37.

10 Statements of Beliefs. http://www.mountainoffire.org/about_us.html(Access January 30,2012).

11 See William and Robert P. Menzics Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentec Experience, Chad Owen (ed.), Perspectives on Spirit Baptism, Allan Ande Spreading Fires,Harold D.Hunter and Cecil M. Robeek, The Azusa Street Re and its Legacy, and others.

12 See Guy P.Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave.Foundations of Pentec Theology.(Los Angeles, CA: Four Square Media,2008),15.

13 Ayegboyin, "...But Deliver us from Evil..." ORITA,36.

14 Ayegboyin,36.

15 The writer is a Yoruba man from Oyo State of Nigeria,the major home of the Yi people of Western Nigeria. The world view on evil is that which consider reality, not a fiction. This is largely based on the day-to-day mysterious happe among the Yoruba. For-instance, it is a common thing to hear about the tradi destinies, where someone mysteriously steals, the 'wealthy destiny'of anot

16 Wande Abimbola, Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun (Ibadan:University 2004),xix.

17 Bolaji Idowu,Olodumare:God in Yoruba Beltef(Lagos: C&A Prints, 1996),

18 J.D.Y Peei,Religious Encounter and the The Making of the Yoruba (In University Press),263.

19 Peel,264.

20 Peel,263.

21 Idowu,Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief, 81.

22 D.K Olukoya,Dealing with the Evil Powers of Your Father's House(Lagos: Cry Christian Ministries, 2004),4-6.

23 D.K Olukoya,Dealing with Unprofitable Roots (Lagos:TBCCM,1999),7.

24 D.K Olukoya,How to Obtain Personal Deliverance (Lagos: TBCCM, 1996),

25 D.K Olukoya,Prayer Rains (Lagos: Battle Axe Publication,2000),204.

26 Olukoya,Message,Dealing with the Strongman of your Father's House,VCD,

27 Olukoya,Dealing wih Unprofitable Roots,7

28 Ayegboyin, "...But deliver us from evil..." , 44.

29 Olukoya,Prayer Rains,280.

30 D.K Olukoya,How to obtain personal Deliverance (Lagos: Tracts and Publication, 1996),28-36.

31 *J.S Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 77

32 Abamfo Atiemo,"Deliverance in Charismatic Churches in Ghana", Trinity Journal of Church and Theology, Volume IV (2),December & January(1994):47.

33 Ayegboyin,...But Deliver us from evil...The Riposte of the MFM, ORITA, 56.

34 Atiemo.

35 John 8:36