

We promised on Facebook to write some things about what we're seeing of neocolonialism—that is, the continuing effects of how Tanzania was subjugated first to the German Empire and then to the British Empire. We've got a couple stories to share with you, and we'll discuss those as we tell them.

The first story comes from Mark's Old Testament course for undergraduates. I (Mark) was going through the Garden of Eden story from Genesis 2 and 3. I showed them from the story itself that the concept of original sin is simply not there. I also explained that this story has played a quite out-sized role in Western Christian thinking because of the (mistaken) belief that Genesis 3 is talking about original sin; the idea that all sin, suffering, and death in the world is happening because Adam and Eve ate the wrong fruit. I went on to teach them about Augustine, the 4th century theologian who invented that concept of original sin. It is because of him that we teach that concept in the church (to the extent we do). Augustine took this idea so far as to say *non posse non peccare*: it is not possible not to sin, which is a rather extreme thing to say.

I had learned these things back in the 80s in seminary, and I didn't think I was teaching anything extraordinary, but I suspected it might be extraordinary to my students, and it was. A few of them were quite insistent that, no, this is just what the story says, and that basically we don't have Christian theology and the Christian church without it. (They were rather upset with me that I was teaching them something besides original sin!) I learned that their baptismal liturgy mentions the first sin of Adam and Eve, which is washed away—*partially*—by baptism—a new learning for me! Cynthia and I also know that a lot of the preaching that happens in the Lutheran church in Tanzania is focused on preaching against sin – rather than preaching how Jesus is overcoming and conquering sin through the gospel.

Here's the first problem with the idea of original sin: the belief that we are *essentially* sinful people, who are only partly healed and cleansed by Christ, makes people believe that they are unable to be responsible for their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Put another way, it says that we are all essentially children; that we are too weak to be fully responsible, mature, and adult; and that we can therefore never really change ourselves and our lives. We should notice that Jesus Christ never says these things about us. Rather, he tells us “Be mature as your heavenly Father is mature” (Mt 5:48 – usually mistranslated as “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”). When he teaches us to forgive each other (including our enemies!), to believe and not to fear, to love God and one another, to share our material blessings with each other and with the poor, to refuse to do evil in any circumstances – he is teaching us those things with the full expectation and belief that we can and will *actually do them!* However, the original sin interpretation of Genesis 3 encourages us to believe that we can never really do what Jesus teaches.

And here's the second problem: there is a political dimension to the belief in original sin. That belief is exactly what the European imperialists (and some African leaders since then) have *wanted* and *needed* African people to believe: that they are essentially irresponsible children who cannot rule themselves. To believe that it is not possible for me not to sin is to believe that I am a

child incapable of governing myself, rather than an adult who is responsible for myself, my family, my community, my country, and yes even my sins. Again, Jesus did *not* teach this childishness because he was trying to empower people who were themselves under the imperial boots of Rome. But to the European imperialists and some leaders since then, this original sin belief has been extremely useful. The political meaning of the idea of original sin is that democracy is impossible and authoritarian rule is necessary because people can never really grow up – they are basically just small children who need adults to govern them.

Please understand: I'm definitely *not* saying that there is no such thing as sin – far from it! There's all too much of it, in so many places and ways, including the church! It's just that I'm entirely convinced that the gospel is way more powerful than sin, and through the Holy Spirit God empowers us to become mature, gospel-led adults instead of weak sinful children. We don't become *perfect* (short of the resurrection), but we can and should become *mature*. All of us, Africans and Americans, can maturely participate in our own lives, cultures, societies, and the world, and we can do so for good rather than for evil. Jesus is leading us in doing just that.

Our second story is about science labs at the university. First, some background. The imperial colonial powers that ruled Africa never intended nor attempted to establish universal education. They and the Christian churches did establish some schools of varying quality, but there were never enough of them to educate all children – not even close – and they weren't trying to do so. They only meant to establish enough schools to provide enough workers and bureaucrats and clergy for their own businesses and governments and churches. The point of colonialism was never simply to improve the lives of their subjects: it was first and always to produce profits for and to strengthen the European imperial powers. (By the way, this is exactly why the American colonists revolted against the British Empire, so that their own investments and labor could go toward improving their own lives and communities rather than the British Crown.)

So after colonialism ended in the 1960s, these new and still-poor countries faced massive deficits in education. It was only in the early 2000s that Tanzania was able to make the commitment to achieve universal education through high school. That has meant a huge investment in hundreds of buildings and many thousands of teachers, with equipment coming in a distant third in priorities. That is also why Tumaini University Makumira has a huge education program, graduating hundreds of new teachers each year.

There is an especially crucial need for science teachers, as they tend to get hired away from schools to work in industry as scientists. We recently built a set of science labs here at the university, but again the problem is to afford the equipment for them. The university is working on that problem because, obviously, they can't train science teachers without stocked and equipped labs.

So these are a couple of instances of the ongoing effects of colonialism, even now in 2021. Tanzanians are working hard at overcoming these, and it's a real joy for us that we get to be part of that growth, strengthening, and maturing!

Thank you all for your support in this gospel work that it is our honor to do!! Christ has risen,
friends—Eastertide blessings to you all

Mark and Cynthia