



Igreja Reformada em Moçambique Sínodo de Mphatso

Report to the Reformed Family Forum in Johannesburg, 3-5 August 2018

The present report is divided in 5 sections; the first section is an introduction that gives a brief overview of the Reformed Church in Mozambique-Mphatso Synod (its establishment, current number of congregations/departments, ministers serving in the Synod and the number of Christians); the introduction is followed by three sections dealing with the themes proposed for this forum (1. Being a missional church – impacting our societies? 2. Peacebuilding: Reconciliation and Justice – what should be the churches’ role? 3. Prosperity theology and credible Reformed response); the report closes with a conclusion.

1. Introduction

The Reformed Church in Mozambique, in Portuguese “Igreja Reformada em Moçambique”, thus hereafter abbreviated IRM, was founded as a mission of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1908; in 1911 the first congregation was established, named Mphatso; in 1977 the first synod was established, named Mphatso Synod; interestingly, the delegates to the first synodical meeting were elders and deacons, i.e., at that time, no pastor had been ordained in the IRM (Synod Minutes, 1977); the word “Mphatso” is translated “Gift” in English, and the term carries a controversial story involving the dispute between the Roman Catholic Church (backed by the Portuguese colonial regime) and the first missionaries regarding their early work in Mozambique; for the purpose of this forum however, it suffices to explain that the name Mphatso was given in honour to the first congregation of the IRM, founded by the missionaries; conversely, in the course of time, two more synods emerged in the IRM, namely “Sínodo Novo” in the southern region and “Sínodo de Thumbine” in the northern region. The three synods meet every 5 years at General Synod Assembly.

Mphatso Synod covers the central region of Mozambique and presently, it is composed of 34 congregations and 9 mission areas divided into 8 presbyteries; the Synod is also composed of the following 3 departments: TEE, Chiyembekezo and Mphatso Farm; there are 42 pastors and 2 evangelists serving 30.000 Christians in the different congregations, departments and mission areas of Mphatso Synod.

1.1 Being a missional church – impacting our societies

a) What is happening?

One cannot discuss this question without observing that in order for a church to increase the capacity for understanding and joining God’s mission in the world, it requires honest and constructive conversation regarding the church’s desired future and the steps needed to realize that future. This approach is important because it gives the church the perspective to speak the truth about “where we are and what pathways we could take” (Johnsrud, 2013:31).

The abovementioned awareness has driven the IRM Mphatso Synod, into a missional space where it began to see how to be connected into the larger community; in fact, as observed by Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011:68), being a missional church involves the church’s capacity to transform the communities around, through either the work of evangelism or church plantation.

Going back and directly into the question above, at Mphatso Synod of the IRM we believe that we are impacting our society through the evangelism work and church plantation that are being done in different mission areas of the Synod; as mentioned in the introduction of this report, there are 9 mission areas, namely: Nkondedzi, Manje, Songo, Changara, Macossa, Guro, Moatize, Mbwedzi and Fíngoè. From this perspective, being a missional church carries the meaning of expanding the domain of the IRM to new areas, so that the *missio Dei* becomes realized through the lens of a reformed identity in such areas.

At Nkondedzi mission area the transformation of the community can be explained in the following way: the Word of God and the praise to the Lord were done in uncomfortable conditions; firstly the believers were gathering under a tree and at a later stage, in a small church roofed with grass, with the capacity to take around 20 people; as from 15 July 2018, a big

conventional church with the capacity to take approximately 500 believers was inaugurated; likewise, at Manje mission area, a big conventional church with the capacity to take 500 believers will be finished soon. It is worthy to explain that in these two mission areas, Mphatso Synod is doing the work in straight collaboration with Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP Malawi.

Apart from the work of evangelism and church plantation mentioned above, the IRM Mphatso Synod is actively involved in the relief of vulnerable populations, affected by drought; in the region of Mphatso Synod and in Mozambique in general, more than 50% of the populations have the subsistence agriculture as their main way of living; the basic crop produced at Mphatso Synod region is maize, heavily dependent on the rainfall; the normal rainfall season occurs from November each year up to April the following year.

In some areas of Mphatso Synod however, the last raining season (2017) started well by November but suddenly it stopped by January, i.e., 3 months before the normal time. Areas like Changara, Mutarara, Doa, Luia, and Moatize, all under Tete Presbytery of the Synod, have been heavily affected and the populations are facing an acute drought; as a result, the populations are crossing long distances looking for grains like maize or rice to sustain the families.

At this stage, the IRM Mphatso Synod, through *Chiyembekezo* (*Hope* in English) Department, has decided to address the material needs of the abovementioned vulnerable populations in a process composed of the following three phases:

Phase 1 – August: identification of the most vulnerable families

Phase 2 – September: Distribution of maize to the most vulnerable families

Phase 3 – October: Preparation of 2018 agricultural season (distribution of seeds for the season)

b) Why is it happening?

The work of evangelism and church plantation at IRM Mphatso Synod are happening as an opportunity of the church to participate in the *missio Dei* by making new disciples for Christ. In this regard, IRM Mphatso Synod is looking towards an evangelism which is more than people making a decision for Jesus; it must involve a commitment to follow and become kingdom

people. Bosch (2011:378) makes a distinction with the help of Howard Snyder, between church people and kingdom people, as discussed below.

While church people think about how to get people into the church, kingdom people will think on how to get the church into the world; while church people are worried that the world might change the church, kingdom people are working to see the church changing the world.

We believe that in increasing the missional capacity of the IRM Mphatso Synod, through a commitment to engage in life with the communities, opportunities to serve will arise and they are present to come alongside in the name of Christ. As suggested by Bosch (2001:376), the church is at its most effective not when it is seeking to be joined but when it is inviting others to join in following Jesus; for it is in following Jesus that the church is invited into participation in the trinitarian life of God in the midst of the world.

In integrating evangelism and material relief, the IRM Mphatso Synod will be transforming communities through active compassion and mercy and thus move into a missional territory; as stated by Bosch (2011:375), “the church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving”. Love and active responsibility towards others were the heart of the ministry of Jesus (Matt 22:37-40).

At IRM Mphatso Synod we believe that the work of a missional church is the work of the Trinity and that we participate in it through the power of the Spirit; for “the missional implications become clearer if the church sees its own life not as an imitation of the Trinity but as a participation in the life and mission of the Trinity (Bosch, 2011:109).

The ultimate goal to be reached by IRM Mphatso Synod is to make new and better disciples and to spread the Gospel; in addressing both material and spiritual needs of the communities, the IRM Mphatso Synod will be participating in the *missio Dei*, as it is believed that people will be coming to faith.

At this point, I believe that the responses to the two questions above (what is happening and why is it happening?) have brought a light to the proceeding questions (What should happen and what is being planned to make it happen?), making it unnecessary to answer them any longer; therefore, the next section seeks to discuss the theme on the role of the churches towards peacebuilding.

1.2 Peacebuilding: Reconciliation and Justice – what should be the churches’ role?

a) What is happening?

Before dealing deeper with the role of the IRM regarding reconciliation and justice, it is of paramount importance to have a background of peace and justice in Mozambique; from 1964 to 1974, Mozambique was involved in an anti colonial war between the Portuguese colonial army and the guerilla movement Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique).

In 1975, Mozambique became an independent nation and it adopted socialism as a way of development and government; like many other African countries at that time, there was only one party, namely Frelimo; a year after independence (1976), Renamo (Resistência Nacional de Moçambique) started a civil war (or the war for democracy) against the government of Frelimo; on 4 October 1992, Frelimo and Renamo signed the General Peace Agreement in Rome, ending the 16-year civil war; in 1994 the country held its first democratic elections won by Frelimo and from then onwards, Renamo became the main opposition party (Pereira, 2008).

But according to Armon and Vines (1998:38), Mozambique’s 30 years of conflict and attempts to bring about a lasting peace are best understood within a broad historical and international framework. From the initial stirrings of nationalist sentiment under Portuguese colonial rule, through the immense developmental challenges facing the newly-independent state, to the subsequent war of destabilization waged by Renamo, efforts to find peace have remained largely out of the hands of Mozambicans themselves.

In 1984, an Agreement on Non-Aggression and Good Neighborliness between the Government of the(n) People’s Republic of Mozambique and the Government of the Republic of South Africa

was signed, known as the Nkomati Accord; in 1987, the churches, working either locally or through the ecumenical fora such as the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) were encouraged by the government of Frelimo led by President Chissano (after the death of President Machel in 1986), to contact the “other side” (Renamo).

In this report, I have deliberately turned the question “what is happening?” into “what has happened?”, given that in the past, the church in Mozambique has strongly influenced the end of the war in 1992 and building a considerable period of peace; from 1989, the church played an important role in serving as a mediator between the two conflicting sides in the civil war; as explained by late Rev Father Gonçalves (2010:15-16), this began with the church leadership approaching each conflicting side in separate; then, the church “convinced” the conflicting sides to have a round table to negotiate the end of the war, like “Nairobi Talks” in 1989. From 1990, Peace Talks continued in Rome, under the mediation of the church, having culminated with the General Peace Agreement in 1992.

From 1992 onwards and probably because of the visible role played towards the end of the war, the church occupied a visible place within Mozambican society; as a consequence, it is now common to have a prayer and a blessing before an important political rally; this state of affairs never happened before 1992.

The questions “why is it happening?” and “what should happen?” will be considered simultaneously, because in the perception of the presenter, they are closely related; from 1992 up to the present date, the country has been witnessing post-electoral conflicts with Renamo accusing the government of Frelimo of electoral fraud.

The violent face-off between the Mozambican government and the main opposition party, reached a new peak on 21 October 2013, when Renamo called an end to a 21-year peace deal with the long-standing ruling party (Frelimo), after the national army stormed Renamo's headquarters in Sofala province, itself in retaliation for Renamo's alleged killing of seven government soldiers (Mediafax, 2013).

At the same time, Frelimo has continued to appear reluctant to negotiate on any of Renamo's demands for greater political inclusiveness and a larger share of the economic dividends from peace since the end of the civil war in 1992. From 2013 up to December 2016, Mozambique witnessed a period of uncertainty and instability, marred by localized military tension, especially in central Mozambique, on and around the country's main north-south road, the N1; a temporary cease fire was signed by the conflicting parties.

Presently, the country cries for a genuine reconciliation process, 26 years after the Peace Agreement signed in Rome; at this stage, the two parties are still discussing how to disarm the soldiers from Renamo or how to reintegrate them in social and economic activities. The opportunity to bring a true reconciliation in the country is the first role that the church should seek to pursue.

Secondly, the role of the church in general and that of the IRM in particular should be to contribute on building strong institutions; in the current context, there is a general perception that institutions like the judiciary, the army and the police services are there to serve the interests of the ruling party.

For instance, of many people detained by the police during the electoral processes, there is no record of Frelimo members in the group; only political headquarters of the opposition parties have been destroyed throughout the country; army officials that came from Renamo, have all been forcefully retired. Conversely, people's disillusionment with Frelimo, which is widely seen as having failed to transform high rates of economic growth into wider benefits for the population, has grown amid a sense that the party's leaders have been the major beneficiaries of two decades of peace but have stubbornly refused to make any concessions to Renamo.

In helping to build a strong citizenship, the church in general and the IRM in particular, should emphasize the fact that the God of the Bible is a God of justice; being the Bible our standard, for Christians justice is one of our most notions. By implication, we believe that strong citizenship produces strong leaders with the potential to influence towards strong institutions; where people will have strong confidence on the army, the police services and the courts, since they will be in the service of the entire community, regardless of political affiliation, social status or race.

Commenting on the generalized lack of confidence on the institutions of the state, Nhambe (STV, 17 July), indicated one of the legacies of Nelson Mandela as a model of leadership that helps to build strong institutions; once in the presidency, Mandela's security was not composed only of ANC (Umkhonto we Sizwe) soldiers, but also of personnel from the previous regime; as a leader, Mandela even acted against his comrades in the party in this regard; Mandela's attitude conveyed a confident message according to which, anyone, regardless of party affiliation or social status, would be protected by the state; protection is one of the basic rights of any human right, attached to the right of life.

1.3 Prosperity theology and credible Reformed response

This section has been dealt with by first defining the expression "prosperity theology" and secondly by giving an alternative response to it.

Kroesbergen (2014:9) defines prosperity as a prosperous condition, material wellbeing and success. He affirms that prosperity gospel is very influential in Africa, in Pentecostal churches, and in Reformed churches as well. The challenge of this phenomenon is that people are attracted to this message of wealth and health and do not recognize that the message is not biblical.

Prosperity theology is the belief that financial and physical well-being is God's will for his followers has become prevalent in modern-day Christianity. For Christians looking to better understand how it is affecting the life and growth of the church around the world, (Salinas, 2017:20).

He emphasis that there is a need of Evaluating the prosperity theology movement from a biblical and evangelical perspective, the church should think critically about the ways in which the theology we follow can lead toward or away from the kingdom of God.

1.3.1 Credible Reformed response to the prosperity gospel

Adeleve (2015:4) rightly asserts that it is important to recognize and take seriously the fact that the prosperity gospel is primarily about money and that it contradicts both the life of Christ and the purpose for which He died on the Cross. The gospel elevates money to compete for a space in our lives that only God deserves. If the love of money is the root of all evil, the love of material property, mansions, and other accumulations in the dragnet of money must follow closely after. We are increasingly defined, not by who or what we are but by what we have or own. In very easy ways- more subtle than we often think- any of these can become idols that dim our view of God and diminish our passion for Him.

Therefore, continues Adeleve (2015), we need to take the plight of the poor seriously enough to reject this gospel and work at better ways of meeting their needs than offering false shortcuts. We all should be concerned enough to feel a sense of pain to see a part of the church drifting away from sound doctrine in this way. Instead of working to alleviate the plight of the poor, this part not only consents to their marginalization but also manipulates scriptures to do so. In this way some have turned the sacred space of the pulpit into a shrine of mammon worship. It is the injustice and idolatry of greed that made our Lord use such strong words against the rich. And it is certainly when sacred territory was profaned by the same idolatry that we see the only record of the Lord expressing his anger physically in the temple.

1.3 Final Remarks

I believe that the themes discussed above are very relevant, contextual and present in the daily life of our individual churches; whatever approach addressing them, as a family we would always affirm and re-affirm our Reformed identity based on the new life in Christ, the authority of Scripture and dependence on the Holy Spirit. And knowing that participation in the *missio Dei*, was not our choice but a divine appointment, as recorded in John 15:16-17 “you didn’t choose me, I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit”. With these final words, let me thank you all for your attention and patience in listening to me. May God bless the Reformed Family, from now until the second coming of the Lord Jesus!

Presented by Rev Miguel Nobre

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