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Transcript of an Audio-Recorded Conversation in Post-Conflict Rwanda

Participants:

- Nsengimana Jean Paul
- Hitimana Jean de Dieu

Relation: Elder

Relation: Youth

Facilitator:

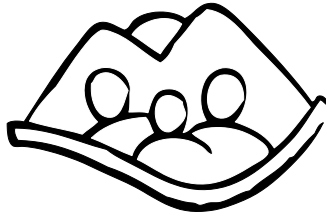
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Nsengimana Jean Paul & Hitimana Jean de Dieu

SFH0116

My name is **Hitimana Jean de Dieu**

My name is **Nsengimana Jean Paul**

Facilitator: Are you the father of Jean de Dieu?

Jean de Dieu: No, he is a wise man and my adviser too. Then I have a question, as an old person how do you relate the ways of praying and believing in the past to the modern ones. Could you explain how they prayed in their daily life?

Jean Paul: In the past we prayed and believed in a god called Gahu or Nyabingi. We believed in this god. There was a Witch named Umugirwa. We used to go to him for divining. We wanted to live peacefully and learn the way of praying. He would explain the procedure and giving orientation about praying to our god. He too looked like our god. He obliged us to pay a sacrifice for consultation for praying to our god.

Jean de Dieu: By the way, you prayed but I am wondering, when did you know your prayers were answered? What was the proof? Which kind of sacrifice did you pay? How much did you pay? Can you explain the process that was used, and tell me signs which really showed you that your god was listening to your prayer?

Jean Paul: This is how we used to pray, we would go to the fetish, and reaching him you would explain your concern. For example if you were barren, he asked you for a goat and local beer from bananas as a sacrifice. These were like gifts to him for a job well done; it also proved whether you would live in peace. Then he would tell you how would you would live and have kids. Sometimes your request would be accomplished or not. If not, you had to come back and obliged to pay another goat because your god had not listened to your prayers, he would also tell you that your parents were not happy with your sacrifice and had to give him another goat.

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Jean de Dieu: Another question, were there signs that those gods were performing some miracles? When one was sick and went to the fetish, were there signs which showed that you would recover? Or perhaps it was a problem, would it be solved? If it was for example poverty, when you prayed would you get rid of poverty and get rich? If it was illness, was one recovered? I am wondering if really that god had power to solve all your problems totally.

Jean Paul: About problems of sickness, there are times that healing took place and sometimes not. A proverb in Kinyarwanda says “properties of idiots are eaten by fetishist”. It has been confirmed that, that god did not exist but sometimes we were answered. This practice was of devils. Now this we know and understood. We left that and now we are fine, there is no problem. At that time we were blind people, because they lied to us. If you wanted to prove that the goat was accepted by the god, you would bring a pumpkin and you put them into a witch craft bowl, then you would begin divining by using witch craft beads, when half of them turned up wards your prayers were accepted and answered. You would go happily. But these days, we know and understand. Nobody can go to fetish any more. That cannot happen again.

Jean de Dieu: Presently, we know that a person must pray, every day, every evening before sleeping. Are there any rituals that you should do every day, respect to let your gods listen to you, or how you did to let your god listen to you?

Jean Paul: The god we used to pray to in the past, is not the God we pray to presently after understanding. This was the procedure; we took “umukenke” [tall grass], then laid it down in a witch’s small house named “indaro” [small hut], a calabash of tasty beer was placed there too. We would start “guterekera” a way of praying to traditional gods. It was our manner of praying, we believed that our parent and grandparents were talked too. Hands were clapped, knelt down before the calabash placed on top of hay. This was said “Receive this parent”. We actually did not know these parents, we were ignorant that time. We knew we were praying. The beer stayed there for one week. Then sometimes we would slaughter cows, goats, and mingle some posho, elders and children were invited, then the ceremony began. When these sacrifices were accepted, then you would go home peacefully. Presently, we are literate; we no longer follow those ways.

Jean de Dieu: You said you would go in indaro, but I remember in Kinyarwanda indaro was a girl being pregnant unmarried. Where did she take it, what happened?

Jean Paul: Pregnancy from indaro, was when the girl was pregnant unmarried. They called it indaro because they knew not the man responsible. She was taken and thrown into a river or a lake. Today it does not exist.

Jean de Dieu: That was a punishment taking her to the river or lake.

Jean Paul: That was a punishment for other girls to learn

Jean de Dieu: How was done taking her to the river or lake?

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Jean Paul: Taking her to the river? She was taken while everyone witnessing so that no one would do the same mistake.

Facilitator: Ok let me add something, "guterekera", about "kubandwa" and "kuraguza" [divining], as you said was included in the past praying. There is a saying in Kinyarwanda that God is in other places during day time and comes back to Rwanda during the night. Was this God different from other gods? Can you explain? Was he a god apart? Did other countries have their own God? How was it, Why was it said the God of Rwanda?

Jean Paul: God of Rwanda! Is it because your God, you prayed did to you a miracle directly?

Facilitator: Is that Gahu and Nyabingi?

Jean Paul: Yes

Jean de Dieu: Why is it that when people went to sleep left water near the door? Saying no home should sleep without water. Believing that God would come back tired in need of water, in order to enter that house and when this was in vain, god would pass by that home and go to a home which had prepared water for him. Was it a kind of divining or a kind of praying, what did it mean in that time?

Jean Paul: During that time, we were required to do it, it was the right way. God would become happy and answer what you asked for.

Jean de Dieu: The girl taken to the lake, did she die? Did they leave her at the lake? Was she killed totally? or it was to make her afraid? Was the punishment just to show how hard it was? Was she put at the lake with other people to leave with her? Was it a ritual?

Jean Paul: No, they would take her at the lake; she died there to let others never become pregnant when un married. That is how it happened.

Jean de Dieu: In the past culture, when people fell sick, we suspect there were no hospitals, what was the procedure of treatment as it is today? Was it to go to the fetish all the time or there was any other method?

Jean Paul: About how we were recovered from sickness without hospitals, we took medicine and children as well. When there was no healing, we made beer and we went divining to our ancestors. We believed our children would be healed. These people were dead though we called them our God. Then we were ignorant by that time, our eyes were closed.

Jean de Dieu: Banyarwanda also believe this proverb; "Like Father like Son", children inherit characters from their parents, it was passed on from one generation to another.

Jean Paul: We say that "A character inherited can be passed to all generations." This proverb means that the parents could give the heritage to their first born; they would dedicate them to the devils as

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first born to Gahu and Nyabingi the gods we prayed to, for replacement after his father's death. He was made responsible for the whole family.

Facilitator: So sometime Nyabingi and Gahu would kill you? Because I was taught that they killed some people? What did they do in order to be killed?

Jean Paul: Were there any commandments at that time just like God's commandments today? At that time there were commandments; you couldn't go there while offering poison, prostitute, theft you had to be free from sins. Otherwise the gods would kill you.

Jean de Dieu: While talking to ancient people, there are other things still believed in villages' like; night dancing. Who are the night dancers? Night dancers are demon possessed people they do witchcraft and they believe in the dead. There is a belief that when a night dancer calls you at night while sleeping and dreaming and you respond, your heart is taken at his place used for his own rituals. Nowadays, we don't believe it much as it could be there.

Thank you and please explain very well about taking someone by air and then; when he asked about night dancing or divining for the dead, in someone's place at night like you explained it to him ,it will be good to explain to us about taking someone by air? And how was it done? Therefore you told us about taking away someone's heart, how was it done?

Was it poisoning someone while sleeping with no understanding? Was someone's heart picked unconscious? I am still asking about that capacity of taking someone's heart away while inside the house without reaching them. What was that capacity?

Jean Paul: I have never seen them, but some people caught him once, with tools of the gods. He had some squelettes from dead people. It is believed that when he comes with them, and brings them together they work as detection that someone is coming near. When he senses danger he takes off. This report was given by people who saw him in the house where he practiced rituals. I was told but I really didn't see them .But that time he jumped and he asked for help from his friends and they came "Save" And at that time he had a fire in his hand which helped them in that action of witchcraft at night when people are sleeping. People asked him what happened and he said that he was looking for medicament. But really it was not true.

Jean de Dieu: So someone can ask if witch doctors and night dancers are the same or each group is different from the other.

Jean Paul: Yes, They are different because a witch doctor was doing witchcraft. He would receive many things from many people he helped, when they found that he was right and they brought others but when he was proved wrong, they left him. For the Night dancer he would get powers from witch doctor to perform his rituals. It means that night dancer also was dangerous, because his solution was to kill the one he wants.

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Jean de Dieu: There is another question that I would like to ask about witchdoctors which are animal skin and immunization what are those things?

Jean Paul: Those things about animal skin, at that time when for example someone from your family got sick, you would have to go to look for a witchdoctor for divining and you would have to give him a goat of a single color, the witchdoctor started divining; looked around for some bones, some vegetables or trees and gave them to you for protection; this one will help you to talk to this one and when putting on clothes or on your belt of the trouser and when you are going to meet that one who disliked you, after touching that belt at that time you just feel bad and they said that he met god. The animal skin was believed in as god. So you asked me again about immunization; at that time a witchdoctor after receiving what he asked you before as payment should also ask to sleep down and put some signs in your back and change again the position and put some trace again and finally on the legs those are what they called cuttings and that was Immunization. Those things were what they called protection for victory. Whenever someone was given poison in food while with protection for victory, it would really fall down and was saved. Even if it was a beer it would fall down, it means that you were protected because you really knew before the danger that you will get. That was protection for victory; that was local immunization that was how we were doing it before.

Jean de Dieu: It's really known that all those things that you are talking about happened, and I would like you to tell us the truth about those things of immunization and protection for victory; really it means that when someone gave you poison in beer or food had to fall down. Would it happen? In order to show people that you are really praying God who makes miracles?

Jean Paul: Yes, it is really true that Immunization/protection for victory existed because when they reached somewhere when they are going to take poison, that plate or cup will fall down. The people who do those things are there even today but really when you believe in God today he can protect us and the Holy Spirit can tell you to leave and everything is revealed. Until today those people are still there and still can't drink or eat empoisoned food or drinks. But, the God, for those who believe in him is protected. Till today, even those who got local immunization, on the leg, can't cross the bad things, and on the arm, that mean he could not take in hand bad food or drinks, also, his behind, could detect those who are following him,

If it was like that, we can say that witchdoctors were strong because they could protect you. Now, we believe that witchdoctors work with Satan, but in the past we used to say that they are our parents, our superiors, but, now we know the truth.

Jean de Dieu: I would like to ask the difference between prayer of today and the prayer in the past, can you clarify the difference or the similarity.

Jean Paul: Past times' prayers are quite different to the present ones. In the past we brought traditional beer, in calabash, "Inkangaza" which was a beer from bananas, in which honey was added, then "Inturire" which was a beer from sorghum in which honey was also added. Both would make people drank, but actually, the prayer after the last time of ignorance, people go to prayer after preaching, after

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bible education. We realize that it is good than in the past. You pray to the God you know, you understand, and in good order. It is clear that if you ask you will receive, if you knock the door they will open for you, if you look for you will get. In the past there were no churches in known places. Now we go to church, pray, listen to the gospel, and know about the future.

Jean de Dieu: In the past there were miracles and those miracles were seen, actually what kinds of miracles do you see which are opposite to the past miracle. For example when you were protected by local immunization, and when you were receiving food with poison, your hands were shaken and it was seen, can you give me a example actually which can be seen? Give me the miracles.

Jean Paul: Actually there are God's servants who are taking time of prayer, fasting and are receiving the message from God and explain to people about the sins that people are committing and bring prophesies about what is going to happen. Those people are advised and told what to do other than being poisoned. The born-again do not ask any other person but God, and He approaches people and talks to them, and not other peoples or witchdoctors.

Jean de Dieu: I would like to ask, you personally, what you have seen or your parent what they did in your presence. I need to lessen that testimony.

Jean Paul: My testimony is, at one time I was sleeping in the past, my grandfather, in the past was a leader in spiritualism, and people were going for the ceremony at night, wear animal skin, having in hand the traditional music instruments, with calabash in wish was some small stones, and those calabash had small holes, they were shaking them, crying loudly. Me personally, I went to sleep, as I disobeyed my grandfather for not accepting to be part of that idolatry, I was not involved in those ceremony and practices, so he sent me those devils at night, they came to me and squeezed my neck. One kept my neck, others on legs, and they pouched hard my body down, stopped my respiration, I was about to die. The following day, I went to ask my uncle what happed to me. I was the youngest in the family, and he explained to me that I was married when I was too young. He said that I occupied the plot where I build the house without asking our ancestors. For that reason, the ancestral spirits who are demons are not happy because you did not offer to them a goat. I had to slaughter a goat in my house, then the ancestors called parents ate it and became happy then I was not harassed any more. It is known that the devils are bad spirits according to the Bible, and when I was a born again, along with others, I went to ask my Uncle whether I had protection, of the entrance to my house door. Also, there was someone from king of demons. He came, sprit some product for my protection in the house. When I went to church, the preacher said that it is impossible to serve two masters, leave the small god and be clean. so, I decided to follow only the God, then I went back in my house, I removed all charms, at the door, from the foundation, and inside the house, I removed everything for my traditional protection. I was sure that if I pray with the faith, I will have peace where my neighbors, were saying that I will die the same day. I went to pray and other believers joined me for prayer and told me that if I go back in sins, I will suffer but, If I believe I will not have any problem from devils . Since then, I did not get any harassment; I am living in peace of God and love of the gospel. That is the end of my testimony.

Jean de Dieu: Thank you for explaining to me the past traditional beliefs

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Jean Paul: Thank you so much my son, it is good to pray, it is not like what was done in the past. The gospel is good, I read in the Bible.

Facilitator: It was good to meet you, what you have not explained to me will be explained next time.

