

## REPENTANCE AND HOLINESS MINISTRY: OUR PERSPECTIVE AND RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE

### Beginnings

Dr. Owuor started his prophecies and meetings in Kenya around 2005. There were reports that he had prophesied (predicted) the tremors that hit parts of East Africa. He came preaching repentance, warning the church about sin, especially sexual immorality and the greed and 'conmanship masquerading as prosperity 'gospel'.

At the beginning, he was embraced, by and large, by Christians and church leaders in Kenya. This was occasioned by two factors:

1. Sin remains a reality in the church, and the need for repentance resonates with many: In the recent past, casual sex has gained much prominence in the world, and this has affected the church, so that sexual sin is real and prevalent among Christians. Many Christians actually struggle with different forms of sexual sin. Any call to repentance and change in this area would be welcomed by most believers. Similarly, the health and wealth teaching is a serious blot to Christianity in our context today, and most sober Christians would agree. Dr. Owuor, therefore, came with a timely message for individual Christians and the church in Kenya.
2. Repentance is a noble, biblical theme: There is nothing heretic about preaching repentance; we live by it. In fact, anyone who preaches and invites people to repentance would appeal to all serious Christians.

However, as time went by, a number of emerging factors made church leaders and individual Christians uncomfortable with the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness. This discomfort developed slowly, over time, into rejection and active opposition by some. Why has this been so?

### Our Concerns about this Group

1. ***Relationship with the Local Church:*** Though he first worked with local churches, the message of Dr. Owuor changed over time to a criticism of the very idea of local churches. He condemned all local churches and their leaders. The manifestation of this was when his followers everywhere became rebellious; dissenters who could no longer submit to any other leadership apart from that of the 'prophet'. This happened in CUs as well. The crusades held by Owuor lost their interdenominational outlook when his followers started forming other places of worship called 'altars'. These altars quickly became local churches by themselves, even as they criticized the idea of local church. The church of Jesus, through history, has had challenges and has sometimes been mired deep in sin. However, God has always upheld the church. God does not provide an alternative to the church, but will continue to purify it as a bride for Christ.

The rejection of church leadership, in local churches and CUs, has characterized the group. They either take over and turn it into one of the altars, or they move out. This is not the Christian way of doing things. They have a Holier than thou attitude which disregards other Christians as 'not serious' or compromising based on how they sing, dress or relate with non-Christians or people of opposite

gender. Though some of their claims could be true, the problem is their attitude towards such other Christians is not that of love but judgmental and condemning.

They do not promote responsible CU and Church membership. In all CUs (Egerton, Moi, Kabianga, Maseno, Baraton, KU Main Campus among others), they separate from the CU and form a parallel fellowship. This has caused divisions and confusion among the Christian students in those Universities especially the first years. They will often disregard CU or church leadership and membership and the members are only keen on following the prophet's word and are not subject to the CU's or institutions authority. They do not appreciate diverse gifting of other people and their ministries, because they demand worship in certain ways only, e.g. no celebration and dancing when worshipping God in Music and song which means singing certain genre of songs only. Such straight jacketed approach to ministry and worship does not work for a University context which is full of young people exploring their potential and discovering themselves. Such approach is also contrary to the CU nature/composition and constitutions which states that the CU is interdenominational.

2. ***Understanding of Repentance:*** It started emerging that the repentance that Owuor was calling for was attached to his famous repentance rallies. People would follow him from one town to another. His prophecies of doom were attached to the need for the Nation and its leadership to repent, but this repentance meant attending his meetings. You could not just repent in your local church or CU, but had to go to his rallies and altars. By this time, the biblical idea of repentance had already been adulterated.

One of the reasons why people who have doubts about this group have been reluctant to oppose it is because it teaches repentance. Opposing it would therefore look like we are opposing repentance. However, a number of things need to be stated clearly:

- a. Repentance is a biblical theme that has existed since the days of the Old Testament. It did not begin with Owuor. The group does not own repentance. So, whereas we appreciate that there are issues we need to repent about, as would be normal for all Christians, we neither have to do it in the presence of this 'prophet', nor in any of his altars. The fact that we do not belong to the group does not mean we do not appreciate repentance and don't repent, and it does not mean we are not and cannot be holy.
- b. Repentance is not the only thing in Christian life, and definitely not the only way to be holy. Quick fixes in discipleship always appeal but never work. Just like the idea of deliverance as the only sure way to Christian victory has not worked, so will repentance alone not work. Discipleship is a wholesome, long term, lifelong process of growth towards Christ-likeness. People seek repentance, but the scriptures exhort us to grow into maturity as we hear from God through his word, in worship and prayer, in Christian fellowship and mutual accountability. There is a lot of evidence of sin in these altars. Rebellion and dissent are identified in scripture as sinful acts, but the group thrives on it. Sexual immorality has found its way into some of the altars. An incomplete understanding of repentance focuses on confession of sin, but ignores the need to constantly work on character, putting off the old self and putting on the new, which takes effort, time and other interventions such as accountability, counseling, study

& meditation on the scriptures, etc. Repentance is actually not “the only thing” as the group claims.

When asked in an interview in 2006 as to what God was saying about the national prayer day and repentance by individuals and churches in 2005, Dr. Owuor replied, “It’s not over yet. God is not yet done with Kenya. God is serious about that. God definitely appreciates last year’s prayers and repentance, but it’s not over yet. We are in judgment. . . The Lord is asking for repentance...”<sup>i</sup> One is left to wonder what exactly is meant by this. What does it mean that God ‘appreciates’ but that it’s not yet over? What is not over, the repentance? What is it that God appreciates and what is it that still remains? When will we know that we have repented enough and the Lord has relented? When the ‘prophet’ tells us?

It can be stated, and we do state here, that highlighting one area of Christian doctrine and teaching, to the exclusion of others, is one of the marks of cultic groups. That is how most cults begin.

- c. The idea of National repentance needs to be looked at critically.

In calling the Nation of Kenya to repentance, Dr. Owuor says, “The LORD of the Hosts is still demanding from the Nation of Kenya, total NATIONAL REPENTANCE in which a sacred assembly is observed in honor unto his holy and mighty name.”<sup>ii</sup> But what do we mean by ‘national repentance’? The Old Testament concept of National repentance was closely connected to the covenant relationship that existed between God and His people, Israel. The only New Testament reference to Gods’ chosen people as a nation that is parallel to Israel is the reference to the Church (1 Peter 2:9 C.f. Exodus 19:6). If there is any group of people that is to be considered God’s nation under the New Covenant, it is the Church. The Church is the true Israel, the true descendants of Abraham. If a nation is called to repent today in the Old Testament fashion, it could only apply to the Church. For what is the point of calling the heathen back to a covenant that does not previously exist? When non-believers are called to repent it is not in the context of a nation (God’s chosen people-for Kenya is not), but as to individuals.

While the distinguishing mark of the Old Covenant was the collective accountability as God’s chosen nation, the key distinguishing feature of the New was individual responsibility. Christ is returning for one holy bride, the Church; not the Church and Kenya!

3. **Views on Family:** Dr. Owuor’s views and practice in this area are unbiblical. First of all, his own family history is vague, at the very least. The following excerpts from an interview with the Standard Newspaper dated 11<sup>th</sup> April 2009 reflects this:

He says before he heeded to God’s calling, he almost converted to Judaism while in Israel. He says he had a son in Israel and almost married the mother but he moved to the US and the girl’s family refused to let her go with him.

While in the US, he also cohabited but the woman left after he started seeing visions. “I reflect back and I see this as the work of the devil so that I do not follow the calling by God,” he concludes.<sup>iii</sup>

Please note that from his own biography, as published in his ministry website as well as in the interview referred to above, he was already born again by the time he went to Israel. The following excerpts from the ministry's blog further highlight the complications around Owuor's family life. Please note that these were written by the mentioned people, who say they are his former in laws, on the ministry's website, but we have no way of independently confirming their veracity:

🔗 **86.** Paul | January 2, 2008 at 1:38 am

Dr. Owuor is a hypocrite, a liar and a criminal. While in the U.S. he was briefly married and then divorced. He was physically abusive to his wife & left her with a mound of debt. He should be afraid of God's wrath on his UN-REPENTANT soul. He should come clean and apologize to those he has hurt. He is a con artist and a pathological liar. His words are not of God but of his master Satan.

🔗 **87.** Renee Vogel | January 2, 2008 at 5:14 am

You know what Eddie? I'm at peace with what you did to my sister because MY God knows what YOU did and you will be judged appropriately when you meet your Maker. My only advice to you I believe your familiar with, repent.

Renee Vogel

Eddie's Ex Sister-in-Law

🔗 **88.** Terry | January 2, 2008 at 7:05 am

It is very sad when one proclaims to be "of God" and has done what this man has done to a member of our family. He is to be pitied for how God will deal with him. The people who listen to him are to be pitied for being duped by his act. The hurting and needy people of Kenya deserve so much better and more than this shameful disgrace. Ask this "man of God" if he supported his wife. Ask this "man of God" if he is in trouble with legal authorities because of his activities in the U.S. Ask this "man of God" if he was indeed godly example to his wife. God ask for husbands to lay down their lives for their wives as Christ did for the church. Ask this "prophet of the Lord" how he did? If you people listen to anything he says then you are to blame and may God have mercy on him.

Regardless of the veracity of the above allegations, it is a fact that Owuor was once married but is no longer married because, as he says, his wife could not accommodate his ministry. The same thing has happened to people close to him with amazing consistency. The ministry holds that spouses ought to abstain from sexual relations, and be holy, as they prepare to come before the Lord (in the many repentance meetings). Since the followers keep travelling from one place to another for the meetings, family break-ups are inevitable. One may ask: Does Dr. Owuor know that people are leaving their spouses whom they consider defiled so that they may follow him around the country, repenting? Surely this thing has been highlighted so much that it is inconceivable that he does not know. If he knows, and him being the rebuker of sin and preacher of repentance, why has he not preached about it? Why doesn't he say anything? Does it bother him that the people doing this are doing it because they (either in their minds only or in fact) are following his example?

Scripture is very clear about marriage and family. While Christ calls us to put him before family, he does not expect us to put ministry before family. It is clearly stated that one of the conditions of leadership in ministry is that one must be a responsible family person, for “*If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church*” (1 Timothy 3:15)? As evangelical Christians, we believe that if God calls you to a particular ministry engagement, breaking up with family (spouse and children), is not an option. We cannot condemn Dr. Owuor for failed marriages. That is for God to deal with, for He alone knows the facts. But what we must condemn is the idea of sanitizing these and justifying them as being a result of the spouses’ rejection of his ministry, for that teaches other ministers to put ministry before family. The Apostle Paul actually appreciated the challenge of marriage in ministry, but did not in any way suggest or imply that family breakup is an option (1 Corinthians 7:32 – 35). If anyone thinks otherwise on this matter, a clear, biblical argument is yet to be placed forth.

4. ***How Do We Watch and Wait for the Lord?***: The concern here is that with the idea that “repentance is the only thing”, productive engagement as we wait for the coming of the Lord gets challenged. People leave their jobs so as to go and repent, and a number of students have left campus because of this, including CU leaders. Those who stay are so preoccupied that reports have been there of dismal academic performance. We believe that the Lord has called us to productive labour as we await his return. Theirs is a wrong view that needs to be challenged.

This is the problem Paul dealt with when writing to the Thessalonians. Their view of the rapture had made some to be idle, believing either that the rapture had already taken place, or was so imminent the only thing was to wait. Paul admonishes them to fruitful living, as they prepare to meet the Lord. He tells them:

*Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thessalonians 4:11 – 12).*

Using his own example, Paul urges them to hard work, to caution the idle and honour those who work hard. And all this in a letter that resounds with the theme of the rapture! Certainly, not all members of the group are like this, but the frequency of these reports makes it worthy of concern.

5. ***Idolizing the Prophet***: The prophet’s followers seem to have placed him on a pedestal where “The man of God”, is considered superior over every other minister. His Word is law to his followers. In their fellowships, they would rather listen to or watch his recorded sermons than have another speaker. If they have another speaker, in most cases he/she will be one of them speaking a message the prophet has once spoken. Attending the prophets meetings is highly valued; students will even miss classes and save a lot of money to attend his ‘Mega crusades’. The followers fear him, and anyone who dares question the prophet is seen as courting God’s wrath and judgment. When asked by a journalist concerning why he dons his trademark beard, he said: “My daughter you are very young, there are some things you do not question. Do not joke with the Lord.”<sup>iv</sup>

This unquestioning reverence of a man can never be healthy, because it flows into doctrinal matters. This is the material that cults are made of. The Lord Jesus Christ himself entertained questions about him and his ministry, even though he knew most of those questions were asked with malicious intent. He answered them with wit, but he answered them all the same. We do not see him or the apostles condemning criticism. In fact, scripture says that *“the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will”* (2 Timothy 2:24 – 26).

When a man either seeks and/or receives unquestioning submission from fellow men, then there is grave danger. It becomes impossible for them to *“not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good”* (1 Thessalonians 5:20 – 21). This, again, is what cults are made of. The biblical position, exemplified in this scripture and in others, is that all men are fallible and susceptible to error, whoever they are and whatever their gifting/ministry is. On this, Owuor and his followers fail the test of scripture.

6. **Views on Scripture:** Some members of this group do not view scripture as the ultimate source of their instruction. They believe in extra biblical revelations that come from the ‘prophet’. In one of their altars, the leader has been recorded having said that they “walk in revelation” and therefore do not necessarily need to read the bible. This view has been brought to the attention of the ministry, but to the best of our knowledge, they did not respond. In one of the CUs, a student and a leader of one of their 'altars', lived right in the sexual sin they call people to repent about. When he started straying and making evil advances at sisters, and the issue was brought to the attention of the leadership who then engaged him, his response was that everything he does he does under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In other words, he moves as God leads him, scriptures be damned! It just took a few months and he had messed up a dear sister in the Lord whom the CU had to work hard to nurture back to faith and wholeness in Christ. It should be noted that these examples could be isolated ones that do not necessarily reflect the conduct of most of the members, just as any church cannot be judged by the conduct of a few members. However, what is of concern is the view that nurtures them, that of disregard for the scriptures. If not addressed, this view definitely endangers the faith of Christians.

The evangelical Christian position is that scripture, as divinely inspired, is sufficient for our instruction, rebuke, correction and training in righteousness, so that we might be FULLY equipped for every good work. Scripture is sufficient. There is all manner of error and falsehoods around us, and God has given us a sure standard of proof and test: scripture. And there is a simple reason in this: When you go beyond the Word of God you cannot contain error. This was greatly evidenced in the Reformation, a key pillar of which was the declaration that scripture alone should be the source of our authority. Anyone who does not agree with the sufficiency of scripture and its sole standing as the source of the Christian’s authority is definitely exhibiting cultic tendencies.

7. **Views on Salvation:** Of concern here is the practice of re-baptizing Christians whom the ‘prophet’ says were baptized in ‘defiled waters’ by defiled ministers. This raises a number of questions: Does my salvation depend on the personal holiness of the person who preached to, prayed for, or baptized me? Is baptism at the swimming pool in Merica Hotel in Nakuru, or Kisumu Hotel, a better assurance of my salvation than baptism in Sondu-Miriu River or the Indian Ocean? Is it not that by these actions, the group is giving a new definition of what complete salvation is? Furthermore, the group tends to teach some form of salvation by works. The followers adopt a specific mode of dressing with emphasis on white long dresses, official clothes for men. Worship is only true worship at their Alter, other worship places will more often than not considered defiled. Forgiveness, which Christ has offered for free, seems to come to them depending on how much they pray in certain places, certain styles, dressed in certain manner etc.

Salvation, as Christ has given us, is by grace alone through faith alone. Any additions are heretic. Yes, there is much that believers need to do as the redeemed of the Lord. But when one disqualifies people from the faith based on their baptism, place of worship, manner of dressing etc, then that is heresy.

8. **Taking Responsibility:** Many have put forth the argument that though there are problems with the group, the ‘prophet’ is not responsible but rather, his overenthusiastic followers are. Well, that could be considered if it were possible that he does not know what his followers do. But it is inconceivable that he is not aware of the pride, arrogance and dissention exhibited by his followers. He knows they have split churches, and probably supports it. He knows about family break-ups among his followers. He knows that they follow him fanatically, and does not rebuke them. In his website and facebook page, he is referred to as “The mighty prophet of the most high”. The issue that some claim that they walk in revelation and do not have to use scripture has been brought to the attention of the ministry. It would only be fair to excuse the leader if he had responded to what we know he knows about his followers. Furthermore, scripture exhorts us to evaluate people, not by what they say, but by the fruit they bear. That which naturally comes out of their lives and conduct. Even though the ‘prophet’ preaches a noble theme, this preaching is bearing some fruit which should be a cause for concern.
9. **The Prophecies:** The jury is still out on the prophecies that have been given. Some believe prophecies from Dr. Owuor have been fulfilled, while some do not agree. The challenge is that many of these are highlighted after the ‘fulfilment’. One only needs to go to the webpage and listen to the various prophecies, from the Haiti one to the latest one about the Westgate Mall terror attack, and make their own opinions. What should be stated here, however, is the concern that the prophet and his followers seem to anticipate and even rejoice in the fulfilment of these ‘prophecies’.

### **How Should We Respond?**

1. First of all, this ministry should not be viewed differently from the many other groups that have emerged in the body of Christ. Nothing is really so special about this group. Today, they are just another denomination, emphasizing one aspect of the Christian faith as a core part of their identity. As such, we appreciate and question them as the case may deserve. There is no need of fear to engage. The moment that fear rears its head, then we know that something unbiblical is going on, either in us or in whoever tries to inspire fear. For the Spirit of God is not a Spirit of fear, but of power, love and self discipline.
2. We need to appreciate the good in the group, which is a call to repentance and holy living. This is a noble message.
3. We need to appreciate that Repentance and Holiness Ministry does not own the two themes in its name. They do not hold a copyright to it. You can repent and be holy anywhere in any church, as saints have done through the years and will continue to do until the Lord comes. Criticizing the group does not, therefore, mean criticizing repentance/holiness.
4. We need to identify certain cultic tendencies (danger signs) in the group. These are chiefly:
  - a. Dissentions and rebellious attitude
  - b. Reverence for a man who takes the place of Christ in the lives of the followers. They never question him; whatever he says is gospel truth; they only listen to God through him
  - c. The prevalence of extra biblical revelation. Scripture as given is sufficient for our instruction, for "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (1 Timothy 3:16 – 17). God does send prophets among his people, but most of the time to affirm and call them back to his word. Only scripture can truly transform, because it is God's word. A group that thrives on extra biblical revelation is on a danger path. The fact that it has been verbalized by some that these revelations can replace the Bible is a clear danger sign.
  - d. Emphasis on one doctrine at the expense of others: Surely this is how most cults start! There is no doubt about that.
  - e. Twisting the doctrine of salvation: their views on baptism and salvation that seems to depend on some prescribed things we do is another danger line.
5. Having appreciated the above, we must take a stand. There are three categories of Christians in as far as this group is concerned: the enthusiasts, the opponents, and the undecided. The group is made up of people who are persuaded, enthusiastic and aggressive. If we do not take a stand, then there are many undecided who will be hearing only one voice. Sometimes the silence is motivated by the fear this paper has already addressed. It is also often motivated by the desire not to offend some among us who already believe. But we must remember that as shepherds of God's people, we must be willing to bite the bullet and make decisions which may sometimes be unpopular, but necessary. In 2008, the RSEC in North Rift Region was evenly divided between the three categories mentioned. When the staff decided to provide leadership and take a stand, some students were unhappy. But ultimately, that is how the wave which was threatening to sweep away all CUs was stopped. In taking a stand, the following should be crucial:
  - a. Explain the thing and help people understand what the group actually is. Demystify it! Let the long beards not scare you, for besides that, there is not much else that is different with any other preacher around; nor any other church around

- b. Point out what we consider to be wrong and dangerous about joining the group
- c. Communicate the stand that the CU does not advise people to join it.
- d. Seek to help/redeem those who are already inside. There are people who are caught up in this innocently and do not know the danger they have placed themselves in. They're brands that need to be snatched from the burning (Jude 23). Our aim is to expose the error in the group and to help those who have submitted to these errors.
- e. Provide avenues for further engagement either with the CU leadership, or with the staff if need be.

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<sup>i</sup> Jesse Maasai, *Dr. Owuor* Interview. <http://kenyananalyst.blogspot.com/2006/03/big-interview-dr-owuor-on-his-life.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Owuor, David. *Repentance and Holiness Magazine*. Special edition. Revised vol.2

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1144011274&story\\_title=life-and-times-of-dr-david-owuor&pageNo=7](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1144011274&story_title=life-and-times-of-dr-david-owuor&pageNo=7)

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid