



AFRICA/ANGOLA - Bishop of Caxito tells Fides: "Greater efforts in evangelization are needed in order to combat witchcraft."

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – The situation eight years since the war's end, the spread of beliefs like witchcraft, the abyss between rich and poor, the need to re-evangelize part of the country after 20 years of Marxism, are all among the topics addressed by Bishop Antonio Jaca of Caxito in this interview with Agenzia Fides.

Your Excellency, can you present us your diocese and, more specifically, the challenges in evangelization?

Caxito is a diocese founded by the division of the Archdiocese of Luanda, from which arose two new dioceses. Caxito has just under one million inhabitants, of which 400,000 are Catholic. There are different sects, mainly of Congolese origin, and some are Muslims, but most of the inhabitants are Christians, particularly Catholics. Angola, in 1991, celebrated 500 years of evangelization. We are, therefore, not a new community and we have a very long history of evangelization behind us. We have suffered over 20 years of Marxism which has left extensive damage, especially among the younger generations. We have begun to re-evangelize the country. It is not an easy task because we have seen that although the churches are full on Sundays, the population is not sufficiently Christianized. The faith is not strong enough to combat threats such as the sects and the old beliefs like witchcraft. We need to focus on formation, so as to ensure that the newly baptized are well-informed, emphasizing the biblical formation of our people. For these tasks, we rely on catechists. The challenge is in training them to be of valuable assistance to the priests.

The Holy Father, during his visit to Angola, warned the faithful against witchcraft. Can you tell us a little about this phenomenon?

Beliefs related to witchcraft are a very serious problem, especially because there are children and elderly people accused of being witches. It is a problem that worries the Church, but the state is also beginning to take note of the danger posed by these beliefs. From the Church's perspective, someone who believes in witchcraft is a person who has not been sufficiently evangelized, whose faith is not strong enough to make Christ the only answer in his life. We try to form these people, telling them that evil exists, the devil is at work, but that Christ has overcome evil with the Resurrection. Thus, faith tells us that there is nothing more powerful than Jesus. So, there is no reason to believe in evil spirits that can make us evil, because faith is our greatest security against evil. These beliefs are rooted in popular culture. We must work especially with the new generations to overcome these superstitions, and increase their faith. Because the stronger their faith, the more they will be able to overcome these kinds of beliefs.

Is witchcraft a symptom of the spread of a materialistic culture in Angola?

No, it has more to do with poverty, misery, the difficulties of life, and local culture. Bantu culture wants to have answers for everything: if someone dies you need to know why he died ... This means understanding how he died, who killed him. This comes in addition to the poverty, inadequate sanitation, malnutrition, and the still high infant mortality. People facing these difficulties look for a way out through witchcraft or participating in sects that reinforce such beliefs.

Did the civil war that ended in 2002 have certain consequences in your diocese?

Most of my diocese has been affected by the war. Populations originating from southern Angola have come into

the area. There is the question of trying to get them to return to their area of origin, but it is not easy, as the war has caused very serious injuries. It is true that as Angolan people, we have chosen to forget the past, but the wounds have not yet been healed and people find it hard to forgive. Therefore, we must continue the work of reconciliation. We created the Commission for Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation that works to help people not only forget, but forgive.

The war has caused very serious social harm, but it is worsened by the fact that there is insufficient political attention to these problems. We must invest in education and a health care system. During my tour of the diocese, I saw missions that had been destroyed and that are waiting to be rebuilt. I noticed that the roads are inadequate and I met displaced people without papers, who have trouble registering their children.

Has there been progress in the redistribution of Angolan oil revenues?

There has been progress in economic terms. In particular, major roads linking the major cities have been rebuilt. Hospitals and schools have been built, foreign investment has increased in the country. The problem is that these economic gains are difficult to translate into an improvement in people's lives. There is a lot of money moving around in the country, but it is not distributed. The gap between rich and poor is growing and this can lead to social tensions. Greater efforts are needed to improve people's lives. As part of the Bishops' Commission for Justice and Peace, I participate in a program of supervision of the state budget, to see how public money is spent. There is a growing awareness in the country of the need to hold politicians accountable for their responsibilities towards the welfare of the population. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 23/09/2010)