



Transformation Through Identificational Repentance

Notes from Mityana, Uganda 2003. William Mather

Mission and ministry cannot build on a shaky foundation. A veneer of respectability or success or Christian activity is not enough. The roots of sin and Satan's activity in the world need to be dealt with.

The situation may look clean and neat, but if under the surface there are unreconciled differences, arguments, conflicts or demonic oppression these need to be addressed, confessed, repented of and forgiven – even on behalf of others.

The prophets Nehemiah (chapter 1) and Daniel (chapter 9) did this and began to see God at work. In Nehemiah's case God used the king to open the way for the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah repented on behalf of Israel – not just for his own sins – but the sins of the nation.

As a SOMA team we invited the bishop to come and publicly repent of some of the infighting there had been over the setting up of the diocese some 25 years ago, long before he himself was in office.

This was preceded by public repentance by members of the SOMA team and by some of the diocesan clergy present. There was a desire for a deep spiritual cleansing.

By way of a symbolic and prophetic action a large number of cheap brooms were purchased and all the delegates were invited to share in a physical sweeping out of the cathedral premises. These were covered with red dust and bat droppings and what carpet there was smelled of animal urine.

This became a symbolic cleansing for the diocese and a prophetic action heralding a new freedom for the Spirit of God to be moving in the diocese for the glory of Jesus.

By identifying with the sins of the land we were standing together with our brothers and sisters in Mityana and as fellow human beings repenting of sins committed by other human beings. We were able to stand with them, to identify with them and together say to our heavenly Father, we are sorry for these things which we as members of the human race have done.

The principle here is that we were in effect saying, "Please forgive us, please have mercy on us, please release your favour and blessing on us." By so doing we were coming to Jesus, our advocate in heaven so that he could plead on our behalf with the Father – the ultimate judge – to stay his hand, to open the gates of heaven, so that mercy could be extended to the people and the situations concerned.

By such prayer the spiritual atmosphere is softened as the powers of evil are confronted and kept at bay, making possible a greater Christian witness and effectiveness and a greater openness for personal repentance by any individuals concerned.

Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. His death on the cross was atonement once and for all time; it was a repentance for everybody so that anybody who came to him and believed in him would experience the full benefit of his sacrifice. In this case he was identifying with each and every one of us so the way lies open for us to be saved. He therefore is the ultimate pioneer of "identificational repentance".

As Jesus was dying on the cross he said: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". His impalement and death on the cross was itself an act of repenting on our behalf – of giving himself ultimately and excruciatingly for our sins. He was saying "Father forgive them..." or "Father, make this work – I've done as much as I can; I'm giving my life for all people everywhere to be forgiven and saved from their sin. Father, I love you – please do what you promised."

In this way he is not just saying forgive the obvious perpetrators of this crime. There is also a much wider dimension. By "them" he is also meaning each one of us – whatever nationality, colour or creed. It is identificational repentance on a global scale with universal implications.

It follows that through prayer we can do the same. We can pour out our hearts to the Father, pleading for the blood of Jesus to be effective in every situation for which we are concerned. We can repent for the sins of the nation or the people in that situation. We are identifying; we are repenting; we are helping bring the power of the blood of Jesus as an instrument of cleansing, healing and forgiveness into even the deepest and most wretched areas of sin and suffering.

For this there needs to be an appreciation of the spiritual warfare in the heavenly places which can only be overcome by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Such warfare is waged through intercessory prayer, opening up the way for true transformation of individuals, churches and communities in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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