

Fearing God and Evil Spirits: The Preaching of Malagasy Shepherds

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Abstract: *This article investigates how so-called “shepherds” (mpiandry) in the Malagasy revival movement (Fifohazana) recognize, identify, and address fears through their preaching in what here are called healing services. The services follow a strict liturgy and allow for homiletical spaces where fears are expressed and addressed. This essay presents a few detailed stories from field material produced from qualitative research interviews and observation of preaching in these services. The specific emphasis in the material reveals how in their preaching the shepherds interpret the problems of life in terms of a fight with evil spirits and the devil. Preaching in the movement transforms and empowers vulnerable and excluded people, it reconciles them with God, and it gives meaning and direction to their day-to-day struggles. The preaching, however, is mainly occupied with individual salvation. The author challenges the movement to find contextually and culturally coherent ways to advocate for justice for the vulnerable and excluded.*

Introduction

Madagascar is a beautiful country with natural riches and endemic species of plants, birds, and animals. In spite of this, its inhabitants are poor and caught up in a struggle for life on a daily basis.¹ The reasons for this are many. The period from 2001 has been marked by political instability, economic losses, and climatic shocks, coupled with unemployment in the non-agricultural and urban sectors.² In such a situation, it is fair to say that fears run rampant in the lives of the people.

The Christian churches are vibrant in Madagascar. In the Malagasy Lutheran Church (*Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy*), where I served from 1983-1994, there are now 8,110 congregations all over the island.³ How do the churches face the different kinds of fear among the people? How do they address the fears through their preaching? How do the churches reach out to people with the biblical promise, “Do not fear”?

In this article, I delimit the investigation to the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC), and show how a group of consecrated workers in this church, so-called shepherds (*mpiandry*), recognize and address fear through their preaching at what I call healing services. My research question can be framed as follows: how in their preaching do the shepherds interpret people’s problems in life in terms of a fight with evil spirits, and what are the effects of such preaching?

¹ According to World Bank statistics 77.6 percent of Madagascar’s 25.6 million inhabitants live at a poverty headcount ratio of \$1.90 a day (2011). See <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/MDG>, accessed May 31, 2018.

² http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_MDG.pdf, accessed May 31, 2018.

³ Cornelius Munkvik, *Madagaskar: Mennesker Og Menigheter Etter 150 År Med Norsk Misjon* (Suldalsosen: Mosaikk forlag, 2017), 9.

The Malagasy Revival Movement and Preaching in Healing Services

The Malagasy revival movement (*Fifohazana*) started in the Soatanana-area in 1894, and consists of four major branches, each with their founder. It is a revival movement but it is also institutionalized as departments within the Protestant churches, and is organized with committees at each level of the church, from the parish to the national level.⁴ The consecrated workers in the movement are called shepherds, and are laypeople not salaried by the church. A two-year, part-time training program for novices leads to a consecration ceremony at a revival center, called camp (*toby*).⁵ Shepherds are spread all over Madagascar in large numbers, and they organize healing services in these camps or in ordinary parish churches.⁶ The camp may be called a healing center, where shepherds welcome all sorts of ostracized people: mentally ill, poor, and persons they believe to be “assaulted by demons.” The treatment is singing, preaching, free prayer, compassion, expulsion of demons, prayer with intercession, social training, and work in the fields when their health allows them to do so. So-called healing services in the camp are organized several times a week, and in parish churches normally once a week but sometimes more often. The first part of these mid-week services consists of free prayer, singing of hymns, and preaching. The second part is expulsion of demons and prayer with intercession.⁷

Preaching the word of God is vital in the shepherds’ theological understanding, and is a mandatory part of every healing service. It is the preached word of God that acts, liberates, and saves people, and signs and wonders following the preaching are seen as only effects, according to Kevin A. Ogilvie.⁸ Attending shepherds and novices have a standing invitation to share their testimonies, and it is common that three to six persons do so in each service. In addition, there are one or two sermons by appointed shepherds. The testimonies and sermons are oral, without written manuscripts.⁹

The founder of the oldest branch of the revival movement, Rainisoalambo, commissioned his followers not to do like the present preachers (foreign missionaries and Malagasy pastors), saying, “They preach but do not heal the sick and they do not cast out demons. But you will do all these things.”¹⁰ Rakotojoelinandrasana Daniel shows how holistic thinking has shaped the revival movement from the beginning, and how this view of life corresponds to Malagasy expectations. He asserts that the Malagasy “sought a religion that understood a loving and powerful God who was able to deal with all of the problems of daily life.”¹¹ Preaching in healing services thus stands in the context of care, and a main characteristic of preaching in this setting is its close context of exorcism and prayer with the laying on of hands. It must be taken into account that the preaching in the first part of the healing service is accompanied by concrete actions of exorcism and prayer, done by the same persons.

⁴ Hans Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons: A Study of Exorcism as Practised and Understood by Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 42-45.

⁵ Persons in the training program to become shepherds are called *mpiomana* (those who are preparing).

⁶ According to the latest available statistics (2016), there are 144 camps and 42,216 shepherds in the MLC. Munkvik, *Madagaskar: Mennesker Og Menigheter*, 9.

⁷ For a detailed presentation of these services, see Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 97-143.

⁸ Kevin A. Ogilvie, “Breaking Words: Towards an Oral Theology of Homiletics” (University of KwaZulu-Natal: School of Religion and Theology, 2010), 145.

⁹ Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 106-109.

¹⁰ Cited in English in Daniel Rakotojoelinandrasana, “Holistic and Integrated Care of Spirit, Mind, and Body as Practiced by the Fifohazana,” *The Fifohazana. Madagascar’s Indigenous Christian Movement*, ed. Cynthia Holder Rich (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

Fieldwork Material and Analysis

My material stems from qualitative fieldwork in Madagascar in November 2009, with observation of preaching in healing services and qualitative research interviews as the main data acquiring methods.¹² The year 2009 was an especially fearful time in Madagascar because of what some called a *coup d'état* that resulted in political tumult. From my experience with the revival movement from 1983 onwards, the material presented below is characteristic of preaching in healing services. As a piece of qualitative research, I hope this will also find resonance in other, similar contexts in Madagascar and internationally. The material consists of eighteen testimonies/sermons at three different services—one healing service in a camp and two healing services in ordinary congregations, all of them in the Antsirabe-region. The testimonies/sermons are from one and a half to seventeen minutes in length.¹³ None of the preachers were pastors.¹⁴ After each service, my research assistant and I interviewed eight persons. The twenty-four interviewees varied with regard to age, gender, and relation to the revival movement. Fifteen of them turned out to be consecrated workers in the movement (shepherds) or were in the training program to become such, while the rest were ordinary attendants in the service. The material was taped and a native Malagasy speaker transcribed it. Afterwards I checked the accuracy of the transcription.¹⁵

With regard to the present article, I have delimited the analysis of the material to how the shepherds' preaching addresses the fears of people. I have arranged the material thematically, giving examples of peoples' fears when lacking the most basic needs, in illness, and in the middle of political tumults. Within each section, I add contextual information about the Malagasy Revival Movement, explaining what is implicit in the informants' sayings. However, I still consider this to be an emic perspective,¹⁶ and my main aim with the article is to give an empirical contribution about how shepherds address fear in their preaching. In a concluding section, I take an etic perspective discussing some possible effects of this preaching.¹⁷

Empirical Material

Fears in Hardships of Life

Many of the sermons in my material refer to the harsh living conditions. A woman, around forty years of age, says:

¹² Steinar Kvale, *Interviews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA, London, New Delhi: SAGE, 1996); John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2016).

¹³ As you may imagine, there is a lot of preaching in every service. Each service may last for two to three hours.

¹⁴ I have elsewhere shown differences in preaching between shepherds in the revival movement and ordained pastors in the church. See Hans Austnaberg, "Ordained Pastors and Lay Preachers in Madagascar: Listeners' Experiences of Differences in Preaching," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 156 (November 2016).

¹⁵ Having worked in Madagascar for several years, I speak the language fluently.

¹⁶ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 194.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* A brief overview of homiletical literature on preaching in Madagascar can be found in Hans Austnaberg, *Improving Preaching by Listening to Listeners: Sunday Service Preaching in the Malagasy Lutheran Church*, vol. 15, *Bible and Theology in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 31-35. There is a pressing need for more research on preaching in this context and the present paper contributes to this.

The life we are facing these days is difficult. And, the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. However, this is our confidence: all these things are enemies that Christ has conquered. Let this be our confidence! Even the low number of people present today shows that our battle as believers for the fight of living is hard indeed. None of us will say, I believe, that we are not in a severe battle these days (Mifi3).¹⁸

Another woman preacher says, “People really have worries in these difficult times... People do worry indeed. They are worrying, saying, ‘What are we to eat?’ ‘What are we to drink?’” (Mifi4).

In the face of caring for the most basic needs in life, the first informant above uses the metaphor of a battle. Part of this battle is with the devil, whose work is to ruin people, possibly also considered as partly responsible for the misfortunes and shortages in life. The paradox is that, in spite of “the fight of living,” there is confidence in being a Christian. The reason is that Christ has won victory. He has conquered all kinds of enemies.

Another preacher, an old woman, takes John 15:7 as her point of departure in her testimony (“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”). She starts by describing how Jesus loves all of us and calls us to himself. He stands by the door knocking. He knocks on the door of the heart, so just let him reign in your life, she says. Then you will not be disappointed when burning issues hit your life. Do not leave Jesus, for he loves you. Then she goes on to tell a story about herself in which she went to visit one of the centers in the revival movement. When she arrived there, she got the message that there had been burglars in her home. The people were almost afraid to tell her about it.

However, I was not distressed by hearing this. I felt lucky. I smile whatever may happen during the night, even if all the belongings were gone. I was not discouraged, my friends, because Jesus does not leave me. Jesus does not abandon me. He gives peace. He has surrendered his life and I have put my life in his custody. I do not have anything to hope for, my friends, except Jesus who takes care of my life (Amfi1).

She uses her own story to give strength to the listeners who may experience similar problems in their lives. She does not here mention evil spirits, but burglary is a wicked action and it may be implied that this stems from the devil’s work. Repeatedly, she points to Jesus and his caring in the middle of all the hardships of life. Certainly she had no insurance that would cover her lost belongings, and most probably she did not have enough money to buy what had been taken away from her.

These stories show that when encountering burglaries, shortage of food, and poverty, my informants bring all this to God through prayer and worship. They find peace and confidence in their Christian faith in spite of all the pressing needs in their lives. They preach, “Do not fear,” and this gives them courage to keep on, and confidence in God who will not forsake them.

Fears in Illness

It is important to keep in mind that the Malagasy words translated ill/illness in English (*marary, aretina*) cover a wide range of meanings. Hilde Nielszen, having worked among the ethnic group of Betsimisaraka, says that the term may “refer to almost any unwanted condition

¹⁸ I use the acronym to retrieve the original place of the citation. “fi” in the middle of the name means testimony/sermon, “i” means interview.

that threatens the general wellbeing.”¹⁹ It may be physical or psychological. One of the textbooks in the revival movement talks about bodily, mental, and spiritual sicknesses,²⁰ but the border between these labels is permeable. Rakotojoelinandrasana Daniel, who emphasizes the holistic understanding of illness in the revival movement, holds that the movement has a particular role in treating mental illnesses but that the procedure has also shown to be effective for most diseases and symptoms.²¹

This being said, I do not try to classify the healing stories in my material. Neither do I specify what may be the causes of illness. Rather, I retell a couple of characteristic stories that refer to evil spirits. One interviewee tells me that he has belonged to this church for ten years but he became a sincere Christian only three years before the interview. I asked him to explain how this change happened, and he told me about his former life of playing for money, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes. Suddenly, his wife turned ill and he began reflecting deeply on death. As these thoughts did not leave him, he also turned ill. By then they had consulted traditional healers, and afterwards his heart and his whole body turned ill, he told me, and his blood pressure went up and down. He started to reflect deeply on his own death, and he tried to envision how his future could be. Then, the couple went to the pastor and he advised them to throw away all the charms and other remedies given by traditional healers. Soon afterwards, his wife decided to follow the advice. However, he returned to what he calls idol worship, and many things happened during his time of illness. He consulted a medical doctor who told him that he could not find anything wrong with him. The doctor advised him to see if he could find a cure elsewhere. He was still in the middle of sickness, but when he attended the treatment at the healing services, especially expulsion of demons and prayer, he recovered and his strength returned. “This healed me,” he said, “and this is why I became a Christian” (Mii6).

To consult traditional healers means to seek guidance from the spiritual world, but it may be mediated through charms or different kinds of medical plants. Traditional medicine is often tried out before coming to the church. The traditional healer’s sanctification always adds supernatural qualities to the medicine.²² This kind of cure did not bring the man health but instead aggravated the illness. The revival movement vehemently opposes traditional healing practices and attributes the power behind them as stemming from the devil.²³ This opinion may somehow count for my informant’s dark picture of traditional healing practices. He also consulted Western medicine, but it is not clear what kind of medication the doctor prescribed. The medical doctor did not find any symptoms that fit into his scientific categories of illness. It is interesting that it was the medical doctor who proposed to the informant to try a cure elsewhere. This may point to a possible spiritual cause of the sickness, which ought to be cured by spiritual means, according to the doctor. Since the informant had tried traditional healers, now he turned to the church healers, i.e. the shepherds in the revival movement. The healing part of the story is too short to get a clear picture, but the main point is clear. What could not be cured by traditional

¹⁹ Hilde Nielsens, *Ritual Imagination: A Study of Tromba Possession among the Betsimisaraka in Eastern Madagascar*, vol. 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 57.

²⁰ Tobilehibe, Ankaramalaza. *Ny Fifohazana, Ny Toby, Ny Mpiandry, Ny Asa Sy Fampaherezana. Foto-Pampianarana Momba Ny Asan’ny Mpiandry*, (Edisiona faharoa: Fifohazana Tobilehibe Ankaramalaza, 1997), 125.

²¹ Rakotojoelinandrasana, “Holistic and Integrated Care,” *The Fifohazana*, 90.

²² Lesley A. Sharp, “The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town” (Doctoral diss., University of California Press, 1993), 205-206.

²³ Rakotojoelinandrasana explains this trait historically by saying that all the great revival leaders had experiences and contacts with “religious animistic practices,” and they came to see these practices as deceptive (Rakotojoelinandrasana, “Holistic and Integrated Care,” *The Fifohazana*, 87).

or Western medicine can be healed by Jesus' intervention through the church. The informant especially points to the expulsion of demons and the prayer with laying on of hands, but this is never separated from the preaching. His body, mind, and spirit were healed, but his Christian faith was also strengthened.

One of the questions to the interviewees was to tell about experiences of change. Several of the informants told stories about sickness, the search for a cure, and how they eventually found healing in the revival movement. Often the stories were detailed in regard to date, time, and place.

Let me give one example of the preaching these people experience in the services. The woman referred to above chose the biblical text from Rev 12:7-11. She started by saying that Revelation was written in order to give hope to Christians in severe persecution. She applied this to the present hardships of life, and her aim was to strengthen hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. She went on to cite Eph 6:12, saying that we were not fighting against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Both biblical texts talk about a battle, and she described some of the devil's purposes to accuse people and prove them guilty of punishment, especially those who are willing to serve God. This accusation leads to a deep sense of disappointment and heartbrokenness.²⁴ "But," she said, "there is one thing that can oppose this satanic strategy." This is confidence and faith in Jesus, who poured out his blood at the cross and rose from the dead. She talked about forgiveness and new strength. She cited part of 1 John 1:9, that Jesus "will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness," and asserted that if we live by these words, they will become flesh and live together with us. She ended the preaching by spelling out in more detail the present fight for living, saying, "We have confidence because Jesus, our king, has won victory over the enemy accusing us" (Mifi3).

From the beginning of her preaching, this woman's aim was to strengthen listeners not to lose hope in spite of the many fears of life. She posited a battle between the devil and Jesus and attributed the listeners' disappointment and heartbrokenness to the devil. Jesus has already won the victory, however, and those who trust and believe in him will not be disappointed. It is worth noting that the battle moves on two levels. The fight of everyday living is clearly acknowledged but there is also a spiritual fight going on between the devil and Jesus. Human beings are in the midst of this fight, and it is only through belief in Jesus that people are able to win victory. Jesus is the center of promise. It is only through confidence in Jesus that she can say, "Do not fear."

Fears in Political Tumult

Madagascar witnessed tremendous political turmoil during the year 2009. It started with strikes and protests in the capital Antananarivo in January. The fight between the sitting president and the mayor of the capital became uncontrollable, including looting of shops and businesses, and confrontations that resulted in high numbers of deaths and injuries. At the end of March, the new president was sworn in but demonstrations continued. There were several efforts to solve the crisis through negotiations led by the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar and by international mediators, but without results. By the end of the year, the situation was as chaotic as in the beginning, with bad conditions for democracy and freedom of speech, and

²⁴ The wording in Malagasy (*mamoy fo*) is composite and includes the heart, the center of the person. The root of the *mamohy* is *foy*, which literally points to the chicken breaking out of the egg. It is a strong sense of being down (Abinal and Malzac, *Dictionnaire Malgache - Français*, 4th ed., Tananarive: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1930, 180).

growing corruption. International reactions to what was called a *coup d'état* were strong, and resulted in sanctions, suspension of aid, job losses, and damage to businesses.²⁵

I was struck by the almost total silence about this situation in the testimonies/sermons and in the interviews.²⁶ There are many references to problems, hardships, lack of the most necessary means for living, illness, and misfortunes, but this is not explicitly related to the political situation. Only a couple of informants mention it directly, one in a sermon on Amos 4:2 about the punishment of people not repenting from their sins: “Why has our country come into this deep hole? Isn’t it because of our sins that these things happen to our country now? Therefore, God calls us to conversion” (Mafi3). Another informant mentions the political situation in prayer, saying:

Today, the Malagasy nation will reason together with you [God]. All the Christians who seek you will reason with you. We repent, O God. We convert. We ask you for forgiveness. Do not let the politics destroy our country, especially our faith and the church, O God.

There still have to be things keeping us in constraint, O Jesus, since our prayers are not yet answered. Where are you, beloved Jesus? Hurry to save our country! We are so poor. Take care of the orphans, those who have nothing to eat. There is no longer anything to eat. There is nothing left in their houses because of this fight going on in our country now. We are so poor. Where are you, Jesus? Where are you? Save our country, O God! (shouting) Save the Christians, O God, who listen to all kinds of preaching. Where are you, O Jesus? (Amfi7).

The first citation relates the misery in the country directly to sin. The inclusive “we” does not only point to the hearers but probably more generally to the sinfulness of the Malagasy people. She interprets the political crisis as a call to conversion. If people convert to God, this will bring about peaceful existence again. The second citation also focuses on the peoples’ repentance and conversion, but what they should repent from is not named. The informant implores God to intervene. His testimony has taken its point of departure from Isa 1:18a (“Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord”). In the original context God accuses his people of all their wrongdoings (Isa 1:10-17). The turning point comes in verse 18, when God offers the people forgiveness in spite of their sins. It is similar to criminal proceedings, where God one-sidedly offers the people forgiveness if they are “willing and obedient” (1:19). I interpret the reference to “things keeping us in constraints” to be a search for the reasons for misery, with an undertone of the people themselves being responsible for what has happened. If this is right, it seems as my informant understands the political turmoil as a punishment from God for the sinfulness of the nation. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of evil forces.²⁷

²⁵ Austnaberg, *Improving Preaching by Listening to Listeners*, 37-41.

²⁶ The topic was not raised directly in the interviews, but I would have expected that the political instability would have surfaced related to conversations about problems and hardships.

²⁷ Cf. the discussion about how other shepherds see a relation between political turmoil and evil spirits.

Concluding Discussion

The listeners come to the healing services because they have trouble in their lives and are looking for a solution. The shepherds' preaching in these services stands in the context of care, and the services consist of both preaching and exorcism with personal intercession. I have shown in the previous section how the shepherds' preaching in this context addresses the fears of the listeners, especially fears of the devil and evil spirits. Repeatedly, the shepherds exhort the listeners to trust in Christ's victory over all enemies, won by his death and resurrection. To be a Christian gives confidence in spite of worries about not being able to secure the most basic needs in life. This confidence in Jesus, who does not ever abandon his people, is what I have labelled "fearing God" in the heading of this article. The metaphor of a battle is especially apparent in the illness stories, and it seems that illness is to a large degree connected to the work of evil spirits, causing people to lose hope. The shepherds' preaching points people to Jesus, who is able to perform change in the actual situation by securing healing, and to strengthen their faith. The way shepherds address fears in political tumults indirectly exhorts people to trust Jesus. The main point is to call people to repentance and conversion to God, to fear God.

In applying an etic perspective on the fieldwork material, I want to put three concepts from the Lutheran World Federation publication *Diakonia in Context* into conversation with the material, namely transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment.²⁸ These concepts may be said to summarize the terms and images used by my informants themselves, and they enable me to shed light on the field material, but also to voice some critique of the shepherds' preaching.²⁹ The special focus in the following is to discuss the effects of the shepherds' preaching. Since I do not have any comprehensive material from the preaching's listeners, these concepts may yield at least a preliminary answer to the question about the effects of the preaching.

Reconciliation is a gift from God, reconciling the world in Jesus, and the church is called to participate in God's promise for a broken world, furthering peace and reconciliation. The church follows the example of Jesus in its mission of reconciliation, in his presence among the poor and defense for the excluded, in his healings and announcements of forgiveness, and in his work for justice.³⁰ Reconciliation with God is a significant issue in the shepherds' preaching. The Christian faith gives confidence, and the shepherds' main obligation is to preach the gospel. One informant exhorts the listeners to give to the poor and take care of them, but emphasizes that to tell them about Jesus is the most important. If they do not know Jesus, they will be lost (Amfi2). The preaching aims at individual salvation, but the shepherds are present among the poor and excluded, not only by announcing forgiveness but also with healing and caring. They give voice to the vulnerable and silenced. The shepherds' preaching reorients the lives of those seeking their healing, especially by identifying dehumanizing forces as the devil and evil spirits. They redefine traditional medicine and point to Jesus as the conqueror.

Transformation reorients the lives of people; it rejects what dehumanizes and affirms what gives sanctity of life, and peace and justice in society. Transformation is a process involving change; it respects human dignity and it is closely related to social development. It is a

²⁸ Kjell Nordstokke, ed., *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 43-47.

²⁹ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 194.

³⁰ Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, 44-45.

gift from God, revealed in Jesus Christ, leading to mutual care for one another.³¹ The shepherds' preaching effects transformation and a restoration of human dignity. This takes place through exhorting people to trust and have confidence in Jesus. People regain their strength through healing, understood holistically. People become subjects and are included within the fellowship in the church setting, but also in the wider social setting as they recover from their illness.

Empowerment takes its point of departure in creation theology. All human beings are created in the image of God, and their apparent social situation does not influence this. As the first apostles were empowered at Pentecost (Acts 1:8), so God continues to empower people, especially those who have not been given opportunity to speak. Included in empowerment is both the denunciation of injustice and work for a more just and sustainable society.³² By accepting vulnerable and excluded people into the healing centers, the shepherds show that all people are created in the image of God, regardless of their present situation. Empowerment is realized through the victory Jesus has won over the demonic forces. When people are freed from their fear of evil spirits through faith in Jesus, they regain confidence and new strength. The second part of exorcism, the prayer with the laying on of hands, is in Malagasy actually called empowerment/strengthening (*fampaherezana*), and informants witness about feeling relieved after the shepherds' treatment (Mii7). Nielssen and Skeie emphasize the empowerment aspect of the revival movement, saying that the shepherds "empower people in ways that few if any other movements are able to do."³³

The three concepts from *Diakonia in Context* all include societal aspects: justice in society, defense for the excluded, and work for social development. However, the shepherds seem to neglect the social realm and tend to keep social issues at a distance. In their continuous efforts for healing of the body and the mind, the shepherds seem to see people's individual spiritual needs as most significant to meet.³⁴ Other researchers also have observed this trait. Ogilvie asserts that the revival founder Nenilava was not interested in changing the greater society, and that her battle was purely spiritual. He says, "Her calls were for individual repentance, and her 'chapters and verse' given to supplicants were for individual salvation."³⁵ Holder Rich observed that the consciousness of being advocates in public society is missing in the movement. Her fieldwork revealed that this task never seemed to have occurred to the shepherds, or that they considered it to be not spiritual and therefore to be avoided.³⁶ Nielssen and Skeie build on fieldwork done in the immediate aftermath of the *coup d'état* in 2009. They assert that the revival movement as a whole has been involved in the political sphere from the

³¹ Ibid., 43-44.

³² Ibid., 45-47.

³³ Hilde Nielssen and Karina Hestad Skeie, "Christian Revivalism and Political Imagination in Madagascar," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 44, no. 2 (2014), 206.

³⁴ Jyotsna Melanchton, writing about the Dalit situation in India, asserts that many pastors preach a "salvation theology," which means an individualistic and personal approach to Christian faith. This orientation has neglected the social realm and does not include a social salvation, she holds. Pastors seem to keep the many pressing social issues at a distance. She criticizes the theological thinking of the Protestant churches that has been confined to a message about the new status of the heart before God, without paying sufficient attention to economic needs and development. She also accuses the early missionaries to mostly being interested in saving souls and not addressing the social issues of caste, which has led to a dichotomy of Christian life (Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Preaching the Word in the Context of Increasing Perplexity and Hopelessness," *Dialogue* 43, no. 4 (2004), 280-286). Melanchton's article is interesting because of the similarities between the Dalits as an oppressed ethnic group and the troubled people treated by the shepherds.

³⁵ Kevin A. Ogilvie, "The Conquest by the Spoken Word," *The Fifohazana*, 177.

³⁶ Cynthia Holder Rich and Mark H. Rich, "Prospects for Research and Renewal," *The Fifohazana*, 239.

beginning, but that the movement took an active and more visible role in national politics from the 1990s onwards.³⁷ The shepherds are occupied with healing individuals in their daily practices but the movement has extended their field of action through their involvement in the political sphere.³⁸ Both of the opposing parties in the conflict in 2009 called on shepherds for support and ritual services as religious experts.³⁹ If there were political wings among the shepherds, how could they possibly call attention to injustice in the society? During the crisis, there were rumors and accusations that powerful charms and magic were kept by both the former president and the newcomer.⁴⁰ This may be the reason why my informants talk about the political crisis as a punishment for sins and a call for conversion, since the shepherds vehemently oppose traditional medicine. In spite of shepherds taking part in national politics in the 2009 crisis through expulsion of demons in public, there is nothing in Nielssen and Skeie's article about them speaking against different kinds of injustice. The main battle fought by the shepherds was on a spiritual level against invisible forces seemingly active in the misery of the country. If the shepherds see the real actors of the crisis externalized to a spiritual level (the devil, evil forces, magic), then it is more understandable that they are silent about political issues of injustice and societal inequality. By moving the battle to a higher spiritual level, social conditions in daily life may be considered symptoms and not worthy of their engagement.

The shepherds' preaching in healing services addresses the fears of their listeners, often related to fear of evil spirits. Their preaching gives meaning and direction to peoples' day-to-day lives, and further reconciliation, transformation, and empowerment. Their emphasis is on individual salvation, holistically understood as comprising the whole human being, and their distinct focus of preaching in this setting is the preoccupation with Jesus' victory over the devil and all evil forces.

My findings affirm what other researchers have found, namely that the shepherds seem to neglect the social realm and seldom enter into social issues.⁴¹ In spite of Nielssen and Skeie's assertion that the shepherds have had an active role in the political sphere from the 1990s onwards, this does not seem to have resulted in more advocacy for justice in the society. This silence about injustice challenges the movement and is a calling to the leaders of the movement as to how this challenge can be met in a way that is contextually and culturally coherent.⁴²

³⁷ Nielssen and Skeie, "Christian Revivalism and Political Imagination," 198. Cf. Kjetil Aanowho asserts that "an expression of political protest and a demonstration of a spirit of independence" is intrinsic to the revival movement ("The Missions and the Fifohazana: Cultural Clashes and the Question of Power," *The Fifohazana*, 63).

³⁸ Nielssen and Skeie, "Christian Revivalism and Political Imagination," 217.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴¹ When presenting part of this paper in the Societas Homiletica meeting in Durham, NC, in August 2018, Rantoo Letšosa criticized my interpretation, claiming that African people see themselves in a holistic perspective. When the pastor addresses a person/an individual, their whole social and political context is included. Letšosa challenged me for having separated what in African thinking may be understood as unified.

⁴² Rich and Rich, "Prospects for Research and Renewal," *The Fifohazana*, 236.