

Laurence Nana BREW

A Comment on Principality and Power

As I think about the subject of the present *Student World*, I wonder if there could be a common understanding of the phrase *principality and power*, or perhaps a shared perspective on the two separate words, *principality* and *power*, internally within the Federation, and externally in relation to our campuses, churches, and communities. Are there agreed points of view about our understanding of nation and race, about the authority of the state, or the meaning of our history? Would the interpretation of events in relation to principality and power within and outside of the Federation be similar?

I am also reminded of the two versions of the history of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in print: *Seeking and Serving the Truth*¹, and *Story of a Storm*². Following the lines of these two published interpretations, I wonder how the concept of principality and power has been understood and practiced in the period between Yamoussoukro³ and now, and if these months could have been spent more productively.

The prospective view is even more daunting. It raises questions about the future of the Federation and indeed the wider ecumenical movement. What are our priorities? Are the issues of power and authority, local, regional and global relations, and community and witness, necessarily the same, or could it be that we are drifting farther from each other? Are we ready to engage in radical thinking beyond the present: thinking that should take us into unexplored notions about territory and authority? And, are we able to do it?

Returning to the subject, the words *principality* and *power* could very simply refer to a designated territory⁴ and an authority⁵, respectively. The phrase, “principality and power”, invokes images of title, influence, control, administration and government.

The words used to describe these images and concepts, and others such as “justice”, “peace”, and “freedom”, have been so often used and become so secularized that they are emptied of any real Biblical meaning. They have become slogans, tools of propaganda and party politics. A thorough study of these words as

Laurence Nana BREW is finishing his thesis on spatial patterns of HIV/AIDS spread in Ghana. His background is Protestant and Pentecostal. He is currently Co-Secretary General of WSCF.

¹ The first and so far the only official history of the first hundred years of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) was written by Philip POTTER and Thomas WIESER (1997).

² LEHTONEN Risto, *Story of a Storm: The Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution*. Geneva, 1998.

³ The WSCF Centennial Celebration was held in Cote d'Ivoire in 1995

⁴ Territory ruled by a prince (*Collins English Dictionary*, 1986 Edition)

⁵ Authority, control, influence or government (*The Oxford Thesaurus*, 1997 Edition)

used in the Bible will prove extremely fruitful and enriching, keeping in mind that material things are used as images or parables of the spiritual world.

God makes the claim that *all* the earth is God's⁶ and Jesus repeats that claim that, *all* authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him⁷. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to Him, and there exist no realm of life (principality or power) outside the Lordship of Christ. All things were created through Him and for Him⁸, and He has entrusted power to women and men who will be required to account for the way in which they have exercised stewardship.

Men and women belong to God for we are God's handiwork. God "wrought" our being, and no biological or sociological theories can blind the fact that in God we live and move and have our being⁹. It is this total claim of Christ as Lord, Savior and Judge of this world that inspired our founding men and women and provided the foundation for our understanding and approach to matters of this world.

It is often argued that the Bible is not meant to be a code of ethics, but a guide to personal salvation. It tells of God's holiness and mercy, and calls men and women to repentance and to new life. This is true, but if we limit the power of the gospel to the individual, we escape from the stern realities of this world, and run away from its problems to seek refuge in the 'inner life' and leave the principality of the world to the power of the devil.

Of course, we know that the devil, whom Jesus describes as 'the prince of this world' and who rules in the affairs of this world with a heavy hand, now stands condemned¹⁰. So we await the promised new heaven and the new earth where righteousness shall prevail¹¹, knowing that the new city into which 'the kings of the earth shall bring their glory' is yet to come.

However, we also know that Christ has already conquered, and the days of the prince of this world are numbered and that the power of the devil can neither be accepted nor taken for granted. It must continually be challenged in the name¹² and authority of the legitimate King of all created things.

As Christian students, we stand in the midst of worldly life and conflict, and we must continually reflect on what it means to be citizens of two worlds: the kingdom of God, and of this earth. How far should we adapt ourselves to the way of life of the surrounding post-modern civilization and culture?⁹ How relevant is it to the World Student Christian Federation today what Paul advised to the Colossian Church: to guard against hollow and deceptive philosophy, based on tradition and worldly principles rather than on Christ, who is the head of all power and authority¹³?

In expressing ideas relating to constituency and authority both in words and in function it is imperative for all Student Christian Movements (SCMs) to study the Bible, to understand God's perspective, and to correctly handle the word of truth¹⁴ in order not to fall prey to worldly ideologies, which use and misuse words to express notions of power.

⁶ Exodus 19:5 / ⁷ Matthew 28:19 / ⁸ Colossians 1:16 / ⁹ Acts 17:28 / ¹⁰ John 16:11 / ¹¹ 2Peter 3:13

¹² Philippians 2:9-10 / ¹³ Colossians 2:8-10

The Federation as a whole, should want to explore the Bible together and to know what it has to say about issues such as: regionalization and the pursuit of particular interests and limited agendas; pluralism and diffusion within the Federation; inclusive community and the concerns of women, men, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people; partnership and ecumenical relations; ownership, distribution and use of money and resources; leadership and stewardship.

To live with the Bible is to learn to know the mind of Christ, be guided by His Spirit, and to grow in knowledge. When we have so learnt Christ would we avoid the danger of projecting our concerns into the Bible instead of projecting the light of the Bible on to our concerns?

While the Bible may not give us straightforward and ready-made answers on the way forward, it does present us with a host of witnesses to whom God has spoken to at different times and places, and leave the responsibility with us to make choices for which we will give account. The need for a critical review of our beliefs and expressions relating to power is already apparent knowing that we would be held accountable for our use or misuse of it.

Those who no longer see our spirituality and relevance as a viable project are of the opinion that we are demonstrating a life-style, which is inconsistent with the power and authority vested in us and written down in our stated beliefs. As sinners tied up in the intricacies of a sinful world, a constant falling back on God's mercy and forgiveness is needful.