

IF YOU THINK FAITH IS SO HARD, TRY EXPERTISE!

“For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not. But ye said, no, for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee; and we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.” [Is. 30:15-16]

*Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian novelist of international renown who currently teaches English literature in an American university. In one of his famous novels, **Things Fall Apart**, he tells the story of a widow whose only surviving child had just drowned in the village pond (a kind of community water/swimming pool). Her grief was uncontrollable and she wanted to also drown herself in the same pond. However, the strong young men in the village restrained her each time she tried to jump, until they themselves got tired and decided to leave her to do as she pleased. She ran towards the pond again but nobody tried to stop her this time. She didn't jump! Thereafter, it became easy for the community to comfort her.*

Since the creation of man over 6,000 years ago, faith has been preached. God has made it quite clear that if we don't trust Him, then, we cannot please Him [Heb. 11:6]. That is why we are supposed to walk by faith every second of our lives on earth [2 Cor. 5:7]. In most cases, we don't. We want to be in control of our lives, of ourselves, to be self-made, to be self-reliant. For that purpose, we would prefer to rely more on our expertise (book learning/ professional skills) or that of others. The weather forecaster is more trusted than the prophet, the medical doctor more than the faith healer. The “arrogance” has become worse now that man is building an international space station (a modern day Tower of Babel) and research is ongoing to clone humans. Intellectual property is the latest idol and he/she who has it commands the most price/prize.

Church leaders are falling into this new trap. Holders of high school diplomas are rushing to Bible colleges to acquire doctorate degrees so as to also become experts (of religion, of course, for no school can confer the power of the Holy Spirit!). Sermons are becoming like public lectures that the preachers' praise singers would hypocritically dub “full of profound wisdom”!

In today's lesson, I am going to give two testimonies of situations when faith and expertise clashed. In the end, I want you to decide for yourself which road you want to take. Let's read on.

1. Testimony Number 1: The Missing Day

This story was carried in a newsletter published by an American Pentecostal ministry. The photocopy that I have does not include the name of the newsletter and publication date. However, that does not detract at all from the message because it can be verified.

Sir Lionel Luckoo was an ambassador-at-large for Jesus Christ when he went on a speaking engagement to NASA, America's space research center. Before giving his life to Christ in 1978, he had been the mayor of Georgetown, Guyana. He had also been an ambassador for both Guyana and Barbados (both Caribbean countries formerly under British colonial rule). He was knighted twice by the Queen of England and listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's "most successful criminal lawyer", having collected over 240 charge acquittals in succession.

While at NASA, he was told the story of a group of astronomers at the Observatory in Green Belt, Maryland, U.S.A. The scientists had been asked to determine the future positions of the stars and planets 100 to 1,000 years from now. To be able to do that, they needed to first plot the path of these objects backwards through the centuries. This is because you need existing data to draw a trend line. In other words, you cannot determine where something is going until you know where it has been.

By using computer animation to "rewind" history, the scientists set the planets off on their backward journey through time. They went past the 2nd World War, past the days of Alexander the Great, and kept going. But, as they were approaching the time of *Moses*, all the functions of the computerized model suddenly stopped and started flashing a discrepancy: one day is missing in space and time! They checked their hardware (the equipment) and software (the model) but there was nothing wrong with them. They became confused and didn't know what to do.

Just then, one of the scientists came forward *timidly* and told his colleagues that in his childhood Sunday school, he had been taught the "tale" of how Joshua stopped the sun. They ordered a copy of the Bible and found the following story in **Joshua 10:12-14**:

Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still and the moon stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.

They calculated the event to have occurred between 1400 and 1405 BC and reprogrammed the computer. You know what they found? 23 hours and 20 minutes, just “about a whole day” as the Bible had recorded! But what of the remaining 40 minutes? They again turned to the Bible “kid”, not the “experts” to help them to find the missing 40 minutes. He remembered another “tale” from the Bible when King Hezekiah was sick and at the point of death. He prayed for extension and God sent prophet Isaiah to tell him that he had received a 15-year extension. Hezekiah asked for a sign that the Lord would in deed do as He had promised. They again turned to the Bible and found the following story in **2 Kings 20:9-11**:

And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that He had spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord; and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

There are 360 degrees in a circle. The earth’s circle rotates round the sun once every 24 hours, or one degree every 4 minutes $\{(24 \times 60)/360\}$. Therefore, by moving the earth backward 10 degrees, the time of 40 minutes $\{10 \times 4\}$ was lost! Add this to 23 hours and 20 minutes from Joshua’s time and you will have the 24 hours or one full day missing in history! It took faith in the word of God, not of the scientists, to prove this.

2. Testimony Number 2: Hurricane José

The warning signs were already there on Sunday, 17 October 1999. “A hurricane watch may be required for portions of the Windward Islands [of the Caribbean] *as early as tonight*” so warned the National Weather Service, Miami, Florida, U.S.A. [***Tropical Depression Fourteen Discussion Number 1, 5pm EDT Sun Oct 17 1999***]. By 8 am the next morning, hurricane alert had been given in Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago. Schools were closed and it was raining heavily with floods already building up.

I came to the office (in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago) that Monday morning very worried. I was coordinating a major international workshop on global competitiveness from Wednesday, 20 to Friday, 22 October 1999. Participants were expected from all over the Caribbean, Latin America, U.S.A. and Europe. A great deal of time and money had been invested. My mailbox confirmed my fears. The chief of my office had already sent a circular by e-mail to warn the staff about *Hurricane José*, and he had hinted therein, “Chris may have to cancel his meeting.” In fixing the date for this workshop, I had been conscious of the fact that it was hurricane season. So, I had put it to prayer and the period, 20-22 October 1999, had

been confirmed by the Lord as suitable. How then could the devil of a hurricane now come to try to rob me of success? I decided that this was going to be a spiritual war!

Just then, my chief entered my office. He felt bad that we had no choice but to have to postpone the meeting because there was no way that the participants could fly in. All of a sudden, I was overwhelmed by an inner peace that gave me unusual confidence. I looked straight into his eyes and said, “W_, do you know that there is nothing impossible before God?” He chuckled but I understood what he meant! In our organization, it is official policy not to bring such an issue into official discussions. Anyhow, I continued, “I can assure you that *we are going to have dry weather for tomorrow [Tuesday, 19 October] until the end of the workshop. Moreover, the hurricane will turn northeast and participants will fly in as scheduled.*”

He might have thought that I had gone crazy because he didn’t say anything. He simply left and shut my door behind him. Then, reality descended on me. What had I just done? What if my boasting were empty? I became afraid! Immediately, I telephoned my Secretary, M_, who is also in the Lord and she came over right away. I told her what I had just done. She smiled and reminded me of how Jesus had stilled the storm [Matt. 8:23-27], and assured me that He was going to do it for us. I was revived! We joined hands and prayed that *God should make things happen according to my words in Jesus’ name.* After that prayer, I again felt an inner peace, and continued our preparations for the workshop as planned. My Secretary told anxious callers that the meeting was on. To God’s glory, things started to happen fast!

- At 4.40 p.m., my chief sent the following e-mail to staff, “The storm is *swerving slightly more to the north* as a reconnaissance aircraft has spotted. This should diminish the direct impact on TT [Trinidad & Tobago], *but not necessarily on airtraffic in the Caribbean. So, Chris’ meeting is still at high risk.* Next report around 5 p.m.” There was no other report. He didn’t need to!
- The ***Tropical Storm José Discussion Number 5*** issued at 5 p.m., EDT. Mon Oct 18 1999, by the National Weather Services, Miami, said, among others: “The aircraft found *the center of José to be north of previous satellite estimates. Much of the northward displacement is believed to be a reorganization of the circulation... a bit to the right of the previous motion.*” In the layman’s language, the hurricane was turning northeast! The same report also confirmed that the hurricane watch over Trinidad & Tobago had been discontinued.
- *Bulletin Number 7*, issued at 5 am, EDT, Tuesday, 19 October, stated, among others: “*The center [of the hurricane] seems to have jumped around somewhat during the night!*” Is that an expert’s language?
- *Bulletin No. 20*, 11 am, AST, Fri Oct 22 said: “*José [is] nearly stationary... expect to be more northward later today... José has been meandering for the past few hours but a great northward track should begin today.*” The hurricane “died” before reaching Puerto Rico and it

was the only hurricane in 1999 that did not reach the American mainland!

- Port of Spain had excellent weather from Tuesday, 18 October to Sunday 24 October [after the departure of the Suriname participants]. Participants came from all over the Caribbean, Latin America (Brazil, Costa Rica and Nicaragua), U.S.A. and Europe. It turned out to be one of the most successful meetings ever organized by our office.
- At the cocktails (held outdoors in our office premises) on the evening of Friday, 22 October 1999, the chief of my office said jokingly during his remarks, “I don’t know what Chris did to the hurricane!” I knew. God had stilled it!

3. Lessons from the testimonies for our daily walk

- (a) Expertise is important and very useful. In fact, it is a measure of how much dominion we exercise over our God-given environment [**Gen. 1:28**]. Faith, on the other hand, comes from our *absolute* submission to the will of God irrespective of our book learning. Spiritual power (which goes with faith in God) comes from the Holy Spirit, not from our own efforts. For example, Paul who had the equivalent of today’s Ph.D., having studied under Gamaliel, “a doctor of the law” [**Acts 5:34; Acts 22:3**], had this to say, “for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified ... and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” [**1 Cor. 2:2, 4**]. Peter and John were poorly educated fishermen but when the people saw their boldness “and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” [**Acts 4:13**].
- (b) Expertise is based on logical (scientific) thinking which relies heavily on facts, that is, what can be proved empirically (with concrete evidence). Faith, on the other hand, is based *mainly* on belief and trust in God, which you can only prove empirically after the event. Nevertheless, it is not everything that you can prove empirically that is truth. For example, I can prove that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, but that is not a truth because the sun does not move at all! It is the rotation of the earth round the sun that gives the optical illusion of the sun rising and setting. It is like when you sit in a moving truck. You see the trees flashing past you! When you are inside a plane flying at over 200 miles per hour, you don’t feel it is moving at all! Faith, on the other hand, is based on the absolute truth of God’s word [**Mal. 3:6; Mk 13:31**].
- (c) Facts can change over time but the truth of God remains constant. For example, writing over 700 years *before the birth of Christ*, prophet Isaiah, speaking of God said, “It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth...” [**Is. 40:22**]. Scientists didn’t know this true shape of the earth until about 2,500 years later, using sophisticated scientific equipment! Until recently, a person attempting the impossible was said to be “reaching for the moon.” Since man landed on the moon, that idiom has become obsolete!

(d) The superiority of faith over expertise becomes vivid when there is a crisis and all else has failed. An atheist facing instant death does not know when he cries, “Jesus!” or “oh my God!” The woman with an issue of blood for 12 years “had spent *all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any*” [Lk 8:43]. That is why Jesus became her last hope. It is the same experience with David and Goliath [1 Sam. 17:45-48]. The professional soldiers could not do it. But David, a shepherd boy not yet qualified to enter the army, relied on faith to kill the giant. Similarly, it took a prisoner in chains like Paul to “navigate” to safety the crew of a ship faced with a storm on their way to Rome, and Paul relied on what God told him to do [Acts 27:33-44]. It is instructive that most astronauts become more spiritual after being in space.

4. Conclusion

You don't need to reach a point of desperation before you allow God into every facet of your daily living. Ask the growing number of professionals and top business leaders who have found faith-based expertise the key to their success and peace of mind. Let me make you an offer that you can't refuse. If you don't believe me that trust in God is superior to reliance on your expertise or the world, go ahead and do what ever you like. However, you must also be ready to accept full responsibility for your choice because “to be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” [Rom. 8:6]. Let those who think that education is too hard try out ignorance for a change.