

"Ministry in the Context of Suffering and Trauma in Southern Sudan"

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I. Introduction

A. Background

The country of Sudan is at the crossroads where North and South Africa meet. It is also the center of the conflict between those who seek to impose and promote Islam, and the Christians and animists who have resisted this pressure. Thus, it is a strategic field of ministry with global implications.

Southern Sudan has experienced incredible devastation during the past 21 years of civil war, instability and oppression. Millions of men, women and children have been traumatized. Children under the age of 20 have grown up only knowing the context of war. With the recent signing of the Peace Agreement in Nairobi in January of 2005, a tentative peace has been achieved between the Islamic government of the North and the Sudan People's Liberation Army of the South. This peace allows the opportunity for missionaries to have access to people and locations in Southern Sudan that were virtually isolated during the war.

In light of this opportunity, it is vital for missiologists to discern with wisdom which approaches will be most effective for their ministry in an area that has experienced suffering and trauma of immense proportions.

B. Purpose and Presuppositions

The purpose of this study is to report and describe the situation in Southern Sudan, where people have experienced long-term instability and traumatic events, and derive missiological implications for Christian ministry. This paper is based upon three presuppositions:

1. Those who have experienced long-term trauma have unique needs that would require understanding and sensitivity when ministering in such a context.
2. A primary role of missionaries will be to prepare local church and ministry leaders to address these concerns.

3. Addressing the core issues will be a key factor in establishing the health and vitality of the church in the next generation.

C. Methodological Approach

The data for this study were collected by means of archival research and ethnographic interview. The fieldwork was conducted in trips to Southern Sudan on three occasions, interviewing traumatized individuals concerning their experiences.

D. Definition of Key Terms

For the sake of clarity several key terms are defined below:

1. Suffering:

In this paper “suffering” will refer to “pain and discomfort as a result of violence, unjust treatment, extreme economic hardship, physical maladies including illness and injuries, loss of and separation from loved ones, and lack of basic resources necessary to sustain life. Extreme suffering can result in trauma.”

2. War-related trauma:

War related trauma is the emotional shock that is experienced as a result of war including the experience of (and fear of) bombings, attacks, rapes, capture and other acts of violence. War related trauma can also result from a sustained sense of uncertainty or helplessness to due to economic disruption, displacement, hunger, death of loved ones or uncertainty as to their location or well-being, or disruption of social structures such as jobs and schools. In a war, the trauma can be multifaceted and sustained over a long period of time. Thus, war related trauma is a unique phenomenon.

3. Holistic Ministry:

“Ministry” is “the work of the church of Jesus Christ, through His followers who demonstrate the love and truth of God” and “holistic ministry” is “an approach in which those ministering would embrace the truth that human beings are fully integrated beings, with physical, spiritual and emotional/intellectual dimensions thus Christian ministry should address human needs of various dimensions at personal and social levels.” The underlying assumption is that the church must be engaged in ministering to the practical and temporal needs of people while teaching the theological truths presented in the Word of God.

4. Spiritual and Emotional Healing:

Healing may be defined at both the spiritual and psychological levels. . Spiritually, healing refers to the restoration of relationship with God; thus, being able to trust Him beyond the situation that one is experiencing.

Psychologically, healing means a return to the level of functioning in daily tasks and relationships that is on par with or stronger than before experiencing the traumatic event. In both of these definitions, healing does not imply the absence of pain, memories and trials in daily life. It is the ability to cope with the pain and trials in a way that allows one to continue to follow his/her convictions and to have relationships which allow them to invest in the lives of others and in their communities.

5. Missiological Implications:

Missiological implications are the thoughtful responses within the context of missionary service that may impact or alter the way in which the missionary endeavor is undertaken.

II. Contemporary History and Socio-Cultural Profile

A. Civil War

The country of Sudan presents a paradox that highlights the extreme realities of our fallen world. The atrocities of war, slavery, oppression, hunger, sickness and despair are evidences of the utter devastation of sin upon a world that is groaning for restoration. At the same time, the hope of God who strengthens us to persevere in truth, to love when it is costly, and to be His hands and feet bringing healing and restoration to a dying world. The current situation in Sudan is presented with the goal of bringing this paradoxical situation and the unique challenges that it poses into clearer view.

Sudan is the largest country geographically in Africa. It has experienced civil war since it gained independence in 1956. The latest phase of the conflict began in 1983. A comprehensive peace agreement was signed in Nairobi Kenya in January of 2005, bringing the civil war official to an end. However, the peace is fragile and there are still outbreaks of violence and instability. The International Rescue Committee described the conflict that fueled the war in this way:

The conflict . . . is primarily between the government in Khartoum, dominated by an Arab, Islamic identity, and the peoples of the South and periphery, largely of African origin. However, the war has also involved internecine conflict among myriad rebel faction, government-aligned militias and tribal groups. The complex cultural factors fueling the conflict - religion, ethnicity, political ambitions, and colonial history - are further complicated by the struggle for control over the

country's vast natural resources - oil, fertile land and water-located primarily in the south.¹

One result of this conflict is that a *generation* of young people in Southern Sudan has grown up only knowing the context of instability and violence. During the war, the Northern government was supplied with helicopter, gun-ships and advanced weaponry that was used against both the Sudan People's Liberation Army and civilians in the South. Villages have been ravaged and looted, cattle stolen or killed, crops burned, women raped and mutilated, men massacred, and women and children have been taken into slavery. Many bombing raids have targeted civilian populations, including schools, churches and hospitals. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million people have been killed in Sudan between 1955 and 1973, and an additional two million were killed and over four million displaced from 1983 to 2005.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees provides some of the following statistics:

- At least one out of every five Southern Sudanese has died during the civil war.
- Sudan's civil war is the longest ongoing civil war in the world.
- More than 80 percent of Southern Sudan's population has been displaced at least once and often repeatedly since 1983.
- Nearly 500,000 Southern Sudanese have fled Sudan and are now refugees in other countries.²

Francis Deng differentiates between the two phases of civil war. The first phase of civil war erupted in 1955 and continued until 1972. According to Deng, this was a battle for separatism, and in the end the South was granted limited autonomy. In 1983 the government formally broke that agreement. This time the goal of the South in fighting against the North seemed not necessarily cessation, but rather equal rights. Francis Deng states,

“While the first was separatist, the declared objective of the second, championed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLA/M), was and continues to be the restructuring of the country to be free from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or culture.” (Ix War and Faith in Sudan)³.

¹ International Rescue Committee. (<<http://www.irc.org/>>. Dec. 2003)

² U.S. Committee for Refugees (<http://www.uscr.org/>). April, 2001

³ Meyer, Gabriel, War and Faith in Sudan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005.

Thus, the South is seeking to be a catalyst of change in the very structure of the government and society. This war of ideologies will continue long after the last gun is laid down.

B. Instability Caused by Internal Factors

According to Deng, the focus on restructuring and equal rights and protections gained support from some in the North, especially in the non-Arab regions. The Nuba of Southern Kordofan and the Ingassana of Southern Blue Nile were some of the first to join the SPLA/M in the struggle. In 1991 a group of Darfurians staged a rebellion. They were ruthlessly defeated by the Sudan government armed forces. Twelve years later, two non-Arab groups in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement and Army (SLM/ A) began another rebellion. The current conflict and suffering in the Darfur region are the consequence of this rebellion. The Sudan government reacted with a strong show of force and support for the Janjaweed, who have burned, and pillaged villages and killed and raped civilians.* Since 2003, the ongoing genocide in Western Sudan (Darfur) has resulted in the slaughter of more than 300,000 in just the past 3 years. Over 10,000 people each week continue to die as a result of this crisis.

Ministry in the South is further challenged by tribal and denominational divisions. Many tribes still have enmity and distrust of one another, and violent attacks erupted on occasions. In addition, there is division among Christian denominations. After the English left, certain regions were designated to specific religious orders (Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, etc.) It can be seen as a challenge to the domain of another if a ministry from one denomination enters an area without the blessing of those already there. The many challenges to work in unity add to the tension in ministry in Southern Sudan.

C. Instability Caused by External Factors

The instability in Southern Sudan has been augmented by the terrorism of the Lord's Resistance Army that has come in from Uganda and goes through Sudan and into the Congo.

*The LRA has terrorized and mutilated civilians and kidnapped children to be forced into being child soldiers.

III. Ministry Considerations in the Context of Suffering and Trauma

When ministering in Southern Sudan, the impact of trauma must be addressed. It is

important to examine several areas, which can be greatly influenced by traumatic events in order to assess the needs of those whom we serve.

A. Theological Understandings

Our theological constructs are impacted by our life experiences. Therefore, we should seek to determine how individuals that we minister may have been impacted by trauma, and how this has influenced their theological understandings. For example, for an orphan of war, how may his experiences help to formulate his understanding of the character of God? Is God seen as distant, caring, powerless, unmerciful, angry, just, etc.? It is also valuable to examine how individuals impacted by trauma understand their personal worth to God.

Another theological concept that would be important to address is justice. How do God's justice and mercy work together? Implied in this context is also the concept of hope. What can a Christian place his/her hope in? What are the promises that God has made to us?

B. Social Dimensions

Trauma takes place within a social context, and families and communities are impacted. Individuals from Southern Sudan being interviewed for this study have been impacted by trauma often mentioned the social implications of their traumatic experience.

While in Yei, Sudan in December of 2004, a number of women were interviewed and their concerns were heard and prayers offered. The impact of husbands gone for years, and perhaps not knowing if they were dead or alive, resulted in the victims' poverty, uncertainty, grief and fear. Some felt abandoned, and wondered if their husband would ever return. One woman, whose husband was a soldier, shared that their infant child died while her husband was off fighting. Since the death of the child, he had not come home or contacted her. The trauma of death and uncertainty was compounded by relational difficulties in the midst of war. Other women shared that many of the young people had little sense of hope and purpose, and thus were often getting drunk or "messing" around. This meant that they were being sexually promiscuous, even though they knew about the danger of AIDS.

Others shared skewed understandings of forgiveness. Violence in the context of families is a great concern. One woman told the story of her drunken brother attacking her with sticks. She was seriously wounded and hospitalized for some time. However, since she was a Christian, she had been taught that she needed to forgive, and thus did not take action against her brother or report him to the police. Yet, he still was stalking her and threatening her with

violence. This story indicated the potential trauma and/or despair of the brother as well as the helplessness of the sister.

The story of one young woman, Mary, illustrates the severity of the concerns taking place within the societal structure. Mary came to our leadership training conference. When she arrived she told us the story of losing her parents and being given to a man as his wife when she was 14 years old. The man beat her and mistreated her. She became pregnant and had a baby. For a while she focused all of her attention on the child, and that brought her joy. However, while still an infant, her baby died. Mary suffered what sounded like an emotional breakdown, and ran into the bush wanting to commit suicide. She was found by relatives who shielded her from her cruel husband. On the way to the conference, her husband saw her, beat her and stripped her naked, leaving her in the street. A western woman found her, gave her clothing and brought her to the church compound. The multiple traumas of losing parents, being abused, death of a child, and living in fear of her husband are a huge burden for a young 16-year-old woman to bear.

C. Psychological Dimensions

Trauma always has a psychological impact, which is often manifested physiologically as well. This may be seen in depression, social isolation, anger outbursts, hyper vigilance, irrational behavior, nightmares, agitation, difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts, emotional numbness, flashbacks, etc. Symptoms may be manifested physiologically in increased fatigue, sleep difficulty, reduced or increased appetite, severe headaches and muscle ache, etc. As indicated above, social relationships may become unstable as a result.

Child victims of trauma often have more difficulty forming healthy attachments to others, and have a lowered sense of personal worth or self-esteem. There can be a learned helplessness that results, and a compulsion to take risks. Others may dissociate from the trauma, and avoid anything that may remind them of that event.

Obviously, these responses hinder normal social relationships and proper functioning as a member of a community.

D. Cultural Dimensions

Culture impacts how we perceive, experience and process trauma, and consequently, how we understand God. As missionaries, we must not assume that we understand what is traumatic to an individual, or the best way for him or her to process the trauma. We must understand

culturally appropriate forms of expression, such as knowing if there is shame associated with crying in a public setting, or if it is culturally appropriate to talk about traumatic events in certain social contexts. Rites and rituals must be understood, both of celebrations and of mourning. We must understand what is shameful or unacceptable within the culture, as social ostracism is also traumatic. For example, being displaced and forced to live among members of another tribe whose language one does not speak well, can add to the intensity of the trauma. What may invoke a crisis of faith or loss of sense of personal security to a person from the West may seem insignificant to someone from Southern Sudan, and vice-a-versa.

E. Implications for Ministry

Having a grasp of the social, psychological and cultural dimensions impacted by trauma is essential to the formulation of a ministry strategy bringing hope and healing to victims. We must listen much before we teach, so that we may address the primary concerns of those whom we serve. If we present theological concepts outside of the social, psychological and cultural frame of reference of the individual, false concepts of God may result. For example, while victims have no foundational knowledge of God's holiness and justice yet we insist that victims should pray for those who persecute them and forgive; we easily would allow the enemy to create confusion in the victims. If we teach on loving one's neighbor and having self-control to someone who has flashbacks and at times outbursts of anger, the person can feel defeat or condemned unless the Holy Spirit brings in comfort and the truth of His word brings in proper understanding.

IV. Christian Understanding of Suffering and Trauma

A. Scriptural Examples of Suffering and Trauma

In order to consider how to respond to those who have experienced trauma, it is important to look at some of the biblical passages that provide a healthy understanding of trauma and a Christian response to suffering. This paper does not allow for an exhaustive study; only few passages and selected principles will be presented.

The first thing that we must acknowledge is that there are many different reasons why people suffer and illustrative examples in Scripture are summarized below.

Firstly, we shall examine Job. The Book of Job reminds us that our faith is not dependant upon our circumstances; but upon the knowledge and character of God. It also clearly

demonstrates that the righteous will suffer in this world as well as the unjust – contrary to the myth that all suffering God’s way of punishing misbehavior. It also teaches us that there are purposes beyond our human understanding of his friends for the cause stemmed from the exchange between Jehovah and the accuser. Human suffering might have a divine cause (from God’s testing) and of spiritual cause (from temptation of Satan). Job was a just man who was being tested and tempted. (Job 1:8)

The second example is King Nebuchadnezzar who suffered (seemed to be delusions and insanity) due to his pride. (Daniel 4:25-26)

Third, the example of Christ -- suffering because of His obedience to the Father’s will and His priestly role for our sake. (Heb 8-10) The character of Christ is also evidenced in His suffering. As we remain faithful, humble and demonstrating the love of Christ in our suffering, we become more like Christ and demonstrate His truth to the world. (Luke 24:46)

The final example is the apostle Paul who suffered for the sake of the Gospel and his apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 11; Philippians 3:10)

The emphasis in Scripture has never been to avoid pain or to remove all discomfort. Rather, it is always that God be made known and glorified in our suffering, and that we could hold on to the hope of eternity.

B. Theological Foundations

Following are a few key theological concepts and verses which are helpful for ministering to those in the midst of suffering and trauma.

1. God is attentive to our circumstances and to our cries to him for help. He has not forgotten us, and will execute his perfect judgment against the unjust. (Psalm 92:12)
2. Affliction can be a tool of God to remind us of our need for him, and to encourage us to turn from sin and to follow Him. (Psalm 119:67).
3. God is true to His word and righteous.(Ps. 119:75).
4. God allows affliction, but he is also the one who blesses and restores. (Ps. 107:41)
5. The book of Lamentations speaks of suffering and trauma, and mentions over and over again to wait for and hope in the Lord. God does not delight in our suffering, and does not desire to see us endure it. However, he does allow it for a greater purpose. La. 3:31-33 says, “For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unending love, for He does not

willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”

C. Christian Response

Christians in the West have often been shielded from experiencing suffering and trauma on a regular basis, and thus often have a difficult time ministering to others in those situations. Thus, we must have a strong biblical understanding of suffering and be ready to provide a Christian response. A few foundational principles are outlined below.

1. As Christians we are called to patient endurance, waiting upon God until his time of deliverance. “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Rom. 12:12
2. We are called to rejoice if we suffer for the sake of Christ. (1 Peter 4:12-14, 16)
3. We are called to be conformed to the image of Christ and to be used for His glory. (Rom. 5:3).
4. We are called to keep an eternal perspective. (Romans 8:18).
5. We are called to speak out against injustice and on behalf of the helpless. (Jer. 22:16)
6. We are called to pray for our persecutors. (Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14)

V. Missiological Implications

A. Identifying Common Missionary Presuppositions

The first task of the missionary working in a context of suffering and trauma should be to ask, what presuppositions do I bring to this ministry? Our presuppositions will affect our theology and the way that we respond to the suffering of others. The challenge is to step out of our cultural framework and heart of compassion, and ask, what is the biblical model? Some potential presuppositions are listed below.

Some believers in Southern Sudan have been persecuted for their faith. At times soldiers from the Northern Army have tried to force people to deny their faith in Christ and convert to Islam. Those who refuse are sometimes tortured or killed. How do we as Christians respond to the reality of such persecution?

The first presupposition is: *Something is very wrong if the church is facing persecution.* Actually, the opposite is true. Persecution usually takes place when there is a vital Christian witness in a primarily non-Christian context. Persecution is biblically and historically normal in the emerging church. Although it is at times horrific, we should never desire for anyone to have to face persecution yet we should not be surprised when it happens as Christ has

forewarned us (Mt 24). Dr. Gupta interviewed over 600 believers who had faced some kind of persecution for their faith, in over 40 countries. The results of his study are published in his article, “Servants in the Crucible” where he states:

Organizations have arisen globally that report, measure and intercede on behalf of the persecuted, often with the intent of eliminating persecution and punishing the persecutors. A biblically sound missiology and theology of suffering might lead to a different focus. Persecution is biblically and historically normative for the emerging Church; it cannot be avoided or eliminated. The task is to reduce persecution for secondary reasons. Believers in the midst of persecution, victorious in their walk with Christ, share many commonalities. Two of the most important issues are that they have claimed their freedom and they have lost their fear, as was noted earlier. Such components of faith are foundational to incarnating Christ within environments of persecution.⁴ (Gupta pg. 58)

Gupta challenged believers to be wise, but not walk in fear. He also shared the concern that many believers are not persecuted for their faith in Christ and Christian testimony; but rather for secondary reasons such as associating with foreigners or receiving financial benefits from an outside source. He challenged missionaries that these secondary reasons for persecution must be eliminated. Southern Sudan is still very politically unstable and insecure. Many missionary organizations do not yet want to send missionaries into Southern Sudan, as they cannot assure their safety.

The second presupposition is: *We shouldn't send people in until it is safe.* Although caution and wisdom are traits to be lauded, especially when we are responsible for the well-being of others, we must always be convinced that our first goal is eternal, and that it is worth taking risks for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Missionaries must be willing to face the risks that they are asking others to take for the sake of the Gospel. Gupta states:

The nature of witness among the persecuted has the missionary asking seekers and new believers to place themselves and their families at risk for the sake of the gospel. Shared suffering validates both the message and the messenger. Asking others to place their lives at risk while the witness resides in relative safety undermines the validity of the testimony and calls into question the missionary's moral right to witness.

Sending bodies need to be clear. They are sending their representatives out as “sheep among wolves.” Missionary safety is

⁴ Gupta, Servants in the Crucible, 2004.

important. Yet the interviews show that missionary safety should become secondary to the goal that all peoples hear and have the opportunity to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Churches must recapture the biblical truth that positive responses to the gospel and persecution have always been biblical and historical partners. For millions of believers in the world, persecution is the norm. Persecution is neither sought nor avoided. Persecution just is.⁵ (Gupta pg. 56)

Many people in Southern Sudan have suffered at the hands of the Northern army, which represents a fundamentalist Muslim regime. Churches and schools have been burned, women raped and children captured as slaves.

The third potential presupposition is: *They must be heroes of the faith if they have suffered at the hands of the Northern army.* Several strands of this presupposition are listed below: One implicit belief underlying this statement is that all Southerners are Christians. Another belief would be that all who claim to be Christians truly are followers of Christ. The third belief would be that they suffered because of these beliefs.

A great number of people in the South are animists or nominal Christians. Some Muslims reside in the South as well. All who suffer for their faith are not “heroes” who would want attention called to themselves, but rather are individuals who were mistreated and often had no choice in the matter. Some who refuse to deny Christ, even under extreme pressure and maintain a faithful witness truly are heroes of the faith. Many who say they are Christians do not understand the implications of the Gospel, but rather have made the decision that they do not want to be Muslims. As Southerners they often associate themselves with Christianity. Finally, Gupta challenges Christians to be very careful when reporting persecution for the Christian faith. For example, in Southern Sudan many people are persecuted for racial, economic or political reasons. Gupta asserts that when we over-report persecution, we lose credibility and minimize the impact of those who truly suffer for their Christian faith.

B. Socio-Cultural Context of Ministry

In the midst of incredible suffering, there is also reason for hope. Southern Sudan is comprised mostly of people of black African descent. A large number of the tribal people in Southern Sudan are animists and practice the tribal religions of their ancestors. However, there is a strong Christian influence in the South. It is estimated that approximately five percent of the

⁵ Gupta, *Servants in the Crucible*, 2004.

population of Sudan are Christians, and the majority of those live in Southern Sudan. Some missiologists believe that the church in Southern Sudan is one of the fastest growing churches in the world. In the midst of the turmoil, numerous people are professing faith in Christ daily. Some do so as a cultural alliance and a reaction against the fundamentalist Muslim government of the North, without truly understanding the Lordship of Christ. Others sincerely submit their lives to Christ in faith and trust Him as their Savior.

The challenge for these believers is the lack of items for their Christian growth and maturity: training, Bibles and resources. When traveling in Sudan, one of the authors of this study had the privilege of meeting some outstanding Christian men and women who preached the Gospel wherever they went. These men and women are to be equipped to meet the needs of their communities and to apply biblical truths to the present realities. It is the authors' firm conviction that the church is uniquely positioned and should be equipped to be the agent of healing and hope to those who have been traumatized.

The socio-cultural factors mentioned previously also have implications for ministry. Missionaries must be prepared to address issues that are indicative of the daily experiences of those whom they serve. They must show that the Word of God is relevant to our lives in all circumstances. They must address issues such as grief, comfort, prayer, repentance, and forgiveness in the context of families in crisis: a father has been gone for three years, a daughter was taken as a slave, a son is drinking and "messaging around", or the husband is having an affair with a woman who has AIDS. Violence in the context of the homes should be addressed. This would be most effective if the missionaries could help share biblical teaching addressing these issues, and then let the community of believers determine how they will be applied. Tribal and denominational divisions must also be addressed, so that the church can truly be the vehicle for healing. Since so many people in Southern Sudan have lost their primary support system or sense of community, the church body needs to step up to fulfill this role.

In Southern Sudan, there is a strong influence of animism and folk religion. Paul Heibert differentiates formal religion from folk religion in the following manner. Formal religion deals with the questions of ultimate origin, purpose and destiny of the universe, society and self. Folk religion deals with meaning in this life and the problem of death, well being in this life and the problem of misfortunes, knowledge to decide and the problem of the unknown, and

righteousness and justice and the problem of evil and injustice.⁶ (Heibert p.74) Heibert contends that Christian missionaries often present the answers to questions of origin and ultimate destiny, while adherents to folk religion are left with little or no answers to the problems of daily life and misfortune. Thus, they often maintain the practices of their folk religion under the umbrella of Christianity.

The challenge for missionaries working with individuals who practice animism or come from animistic backgrounds will be how to discern what aspects of African culture can be expressed in genuine Christian worship and which elements do not. At the same time, missionaries must develop strategies to answer the questions posed by practitioners of African traditional religion, and to show that Yahweh is involved in our day-to-day struggles and activities. Discernment in contextualization will require careful study of the subtleties of symbol and ritual and the meanings they convey.

Thus, the Christian missionary must show that Christian faith is not just relevant for eternal truth, but gives us principles by which we can cope with the difficulties of life, especially in the midst of trauma. Failing to address these issues could leave the door wide open for syncretism.

It is imperative that local believers be a part of the process in determining how biblical truths will be applied in the homes and communities. They should be given the task to process application of biblical truths, such as how they should respond to Northern soldiers who come into their villages now that the war is over. As the Scriptures are presented and explained, they should be invited to take up the task of theologizing for themselves in their own context.

Teaching on grief should also take place within the cultural context. Only biblical principles should be shared, allowing the community to apply them as appropriate. Children should not only be provided with food, clothing and opportunities to learn, but the church should seek to provide opportunities for children of war to form healthy attachments with other members of the church body and community. Core issues such as fear, anger, hopelessness and worthlessness must be addressed.

A balanced understanding of a temporal and fallen world, and an emphasis on eternal hope

⁶ Heibert, Paul G., Shaw, Daniel and Tienou, Tite, Understanding Folk Religion, A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

in Christ should be presented. Many believers in Southern Sudan have much more of an eternal perspective than Christians in the West. In one church service in Southern Sudan the congregation was singing “obi-obi-la” we are going to our heavenly home.

The context of war and its spiritual applications must be addressed. A unique ministry concern is to help believers separating the political concerns from that of spiritual. Although they may greatly impact one another, it is important to keep them distinct. Many in the SPLA stated that they were fighting for the freedom to practice the Christian faith, and numerous Southern soldiers became Christians. The South has fought for religious freedom and to opt out from being under the Sharia law. Thus, although the Lord is actively working in and through governments and authorities, His kingdom is not of this world and our hope is not based upon these structures. Christians must be taught to focus primarily on building the eternal Kingdom of God, and to truly pray for those who persecute them.

VI. Holistic Approach to Ministry

As we have examined some of the social, psychological, physiological, and spiritual aspects of suffering and trauma, it seems clear that ministry in this context must be holistic. As biblical truths are being presented in word and story, tangible expressions of care must be shown to those who have experienced suffering and trauma. Physical needs must be attended to as much as possible, and consistent support structures should be put in place, such as Sunday school meetings, schools, prayer groups, etc. Practical skills such as conflict resolution and trade skills should be taught to help people function in society.

A. Social Concerns

The church should be the agent of reconciliation first to God, and then to others. Meetings to bring tribal reconciliation and healing to families should be scheduled and strategies should be developed. Homes for children of war could be established, with supportive and healing relationships. Some social concerns are not due to the war, but rather to tribal traditions. In many tribes beating and mistreating one's wife is a common practice. These issues will need to be addressed by male church leaders with sensitivity and wisdom, allowing the church to once again study the Scriptures and establish guidelines for Christian family life. Church leaders will also need to seek how to provide support for widows and orphans.

B. Emotional Concerns

The church must be able to provide supportive relationships for those who are experiencing trauma. There are few trained counselors or resources for people experiencing trauma in Southern Sudan. However, consistent and supportive relationships can be healing and helpful. Churches must teach about the impact of trauma, so that people aren't ostracized or judged as "crazy." Safe relationships in which to share, cry as appropriate, draw or just learn to reconnect are vital. Small prayer groups and committed lay people can make a significant difference. Teaching on the character of God, on justice, grief, comfort, forgiveness and hope will be important as well.

C. Physical Concerns

There are many physical needs for medication, food, clean water and health care in Southern Sudan. The lack of infrastructure has prevented development of community resources. Tangible resources such as seeds to plant crops or micro-finance loans to help people reestablish their lives after all of the cattle have died or being stolen will not only save lives, but help the church to be seen as relevant. With the coming peace, these should begin to take place on a large scale.

People who are having physiological trauma symptoms, such as racing mind or heart, sleep difficulty, etc. can be taught ways to relax and relief stress without prolonging their suffer of anxiety.

D. Spiritual Concerns

Discipleship in this context should help people to know God in the midst of difficult circumstances. Systematic teaching of spiritual truths should allow people to respond to God and deal with anger, bitterness and despair. Many people have been further hurt by being asked to forgive an atrocity when they do not yet understand the love of God or his justice and mercy. Purpose for life can be found in being helpful to others and will bring hope and healing to individuals and communities.

VII. Conclusion

God is opening new doors for Christian ministry in Southern Sudan. The church is at a new stage in its development. Western missionaries must be wise to ascertain when to step in,

and when to draw back. We must be holistic when ministering in the context of suffering and trauma and we are to allow Sudanese believers to contextualize spiritual truths. We must address the core concerns of those who have experienced suffering and trauma, and we must do so by first setting aside our own cultural presuppositions. May the Lord give us wisdom, and may he continue to build His church in Sudan.

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