

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN JOB

by

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in
has not been submitted for academic credit to
any other institution: all sources have been
cited in full.

Signed J. Lamont PLAT.....

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5

CHAPTER ONE

EXTRA BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE BOOK OF JOB	6
1 Introduction	
2 Egypt	
3 Mesopotamia	
4 Conclusion	

CHAPTER TWO

PART ONE

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR JOB'S PROBLEM	10
1 Introduction	
2 Developments	
3 The Book of Job	

PART TWO

THE SUFFERING OF THE INNOCENT	13
1 Introduction	
2 Why does Job suffer?	
3 Job's friends	

PART THREE

JOB AND GOD	16
1 Introduction	
2 Human integrity	
3 Remoteness of God	

PART FOUR

GOD'S CHALLENGES TO JOB	18
1 Introduction	
2 God's challenges	
3 Job understands God	

PART FIVE

JOB'S REPLY	19
1 Introduction	
2 Job learns a lesson	
CONCLUSION.....	20

CHAPTER THREE

SUFFERING AMONG THE BATAGWENDA.....	21
1 Introduction	
2 Who are the Batagwenda?	
3 Suffering and death among the Batagwenda	
4 Traditional understanding and Causes of suffering	
5. Traditional protection from the supernatural and all forces that brought suffering	
6 Analysis of today's situation	
7 Modern causes of suffering	
8 Conclusion	36

CHAPTER FOUR

JOB AND THE BATAGWENDA	37
1 Introduction	
2 The Book of Job	
3 The Batagwenda	
4 Conclusion.	42

CHAPTER FIVE

AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN JOB	43
1. Introduction	
2 Understanding God	
3. Meaning of suffering	
4 Understanding of Life	

<u>CONCLUSION</u>	53
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<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	55
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

When one wants to do something, one has to consider it first, bearing in mind that one is not the only person with knowledge of the subject and so it becomes necessary to seek more information and knowledge from others. In other words, one can begin with one's own knowledge and then add to it. As our proverb suggest: "Engaro Ibiri N'okunaabisana" (One hand washes the other).

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INTRODUCTION

Since the third phase of Africa's systematic evangelization begun in the nineteenth century, a lot of work has been done by missionaries and promoters of the African mission. However we must point out that much emphasis was put on Sacramentalization other than in depth evangelization. And so we have ended up with masses of nominal Christians baptised but not efficiently evangelised.

On the other hand, Africa is experiencing many and diverse problems, famine, drought, ethnic conflicts, economic dependence, political turmoil, disease and solutions do not appear on the horizon. Many of the Baptised Christians, having failed to find answers of their struggle and suffering, slide back to their traditional beliefs which apparently seem to offer some help and consolation.

As a missionary, having grown up among my people, the Batagwenda, I have shared in their struggles of life in situations of suffering. In my theological training, I was amazed to discover that Job of the Old Testament was as well struggling with his own suffering but does not seem to offer us a meaningful answer. It is clear to me that many people in Africa can identify themselves with Job of the Old Testament. As Job needed Christ to give him a meaningful answer to his sufferings, my people also and indeed many Africans should look up to Jesus to give them meaningful consolation in their sufferings.

As Missionaries, I started asking myself during my theological training what we could offer to the majority of the people suffering in Africa. Which consolation do we give and how do we preach to them? Many have been confused by the traditional beliefs and now how do we correct them and how do we bring them back to the faith?

This paper is a long reflection on the whole question of suffering. My conviction is that even amidst suffering, we are able to remain faithful to our faith. However this does not mean that we passively suffer, but where possible we should denounce situations that bring suffering and always actively promote life.

CHAPTER ONE

EXTRA BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE BOOK OF JOB.

I. INTRODUCTION.

The book of Job is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. However, Wisdom is not a speciality of Israel as a nation but is associated with foreign influence and with Israelite royalty. In this regard, wisdom was an International affair and Israel herself was a late comer on the scene, compared to the Mesopotamians and Egyptians.

We read in 1Sam. 8:5,20 that Kingship was adopted in Israel in imitation of the surrounding nations. The same thing applies to wisdom in Israel for Wisdom concerned very much the general program of courtly training to train worthy leaders and court servants in Egypt.¹

We come to understand that wisdom was not limited to Israel as a nation but was rather International in nature. That is why the story of Job is put in Edom which is outside Israel and among the enemies of Israel. So here the author is not addressing a certain specific historical crisis but rather those recurrent dilemmas and situations in life that plague all human beings.

If the Insights and reflection of the author of Job are true, they will be as welcome in Egypt as they are in Israel. Job, therefore most probably does not represent Israel as such but any man or community who suffers without apparent reason and who searches for meaning and integrity in the face of meaninglessness. For sure the masses in Africa and in particular the Batagwenda people of Uganda to whom I belong and with whom I am particularly concerned in this paper, would identify themselves with the figure of Job who is asking a number of questions. My main concern with Job and my people, the Batagwenda, is whether their approach to questions of suffering are Christian at all.

¹ Roland E. Murphy, Introduction to Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.

The Liturgical press, Collegeville, 1965, p. 11.

The purpose of the book of Job is more didactic than historical. The story is a real wisdom teaching Job is in a sense the type of any man who experiences the mystery of seemingly senseless and undeserved sufferings and who longs to meet God.

The Problem with which the book of Job is concerned is also the topic of quite a number of some other literatures besides the Scriptures. The problem of the innocent sufferer could not be limited to Israel. It was also reflected upon in other nations and also personally, I have been reflecting upon the same problem of suffering especially In Africa.

2. EGYPT

We have an Egyptian text called the "**Dispute over suicide**" or "the man who was tired of life". In this story, the hero falls sick and endures ill treatment at the hands of his family and friends to such an extent that he decides to put an end to his life but his soul opposes the decision. Yet eventually he returns to his original resolve and welcomes death as a release from his miseries.²

In this story, life is not worth living since there is no justice and love in the World so it ends in despair. Death is the only way out. However the final argument which wins the debate is that life here after will be somehow transformed and the dead will become living gods and share in the divine prerogatives.

This final argument was not available nor acceptable to the author of the poetic section of Job. It is interesting to note that this Egyptian author had hope in a life after death in some form. Such a hope is not present in the book of Job nor does the author of this Biblical book ever present suicide as the solution to Job's problems.

As a believing Jew, this wisdom author was firmly convinced that all life belongs to God and as a result, the suggestion of suicide as a solution would have been a direct attack on God's unique prerogative as the only master of life and death.

² Anet. Vol. I, Edit. 1955, p. 405-407.

3 MESOPOTAMIA

In Mesopotamia, we find the "Babylonian Job" or "the Poem Of the righteous Sufferer".³ It is a thanksgiving hymn for deliverance from distress. Like Job he protested his innocence and he insisted that the will of the gods was beyond human understanding. He is prepared to admit that perhaps he has sinned without knowing it. This is the possibility which the Biblical Job rejects at least as a justification or explanation of his suffering.

The climax comes with his description of how Marduk intervened to save him. With the story of Job, there is broad similarity in so far as in both there is the question of one who suffers apparently mysteriously and is eventually restored. The sufferer complains that his prayers are not answered. Although he has always been faithful to his god, he is not treated well.

However this desperate conclusion is wiped out by the convenient intervention of Marduk to save him. It is not that this is the answer to the problem: that the suffering of the just is merely temporary to be followed by restoration. The writer had no answer, he simply ascribed to Marduk the divine intervention that saves the righteous sufferer.

Another dialogue about "human misery" also called the "Babylonian Theodicy" which dates from about 1000 B.C. The book of Job has been compared to this Babylonian theodicy. The thought in this Babylonian poem progresses by means of a dialogue between the sufferer and his friend. Unlike Job, there is only one friend and he is completely sympathetic to the one who is suffering. The main thrust of the argument are the evils of society which are ultimately of course in conflict with the justice of the gods.

The first complaint is that he was born when his parents were already old and was left an orphan by them with none to defend him. The gentle reply is that all must die, even one's parents and that protection comes from piety towards one's god. However in the end the sufferer asks nevertheless the gods for protection.⁴

³ . The Ancient Near East, Vol 2 Edit JB.Pritchard
Princeton University Press
1975, p 148.

⁴ . W Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, Oxford,
Clarendon Press, 1960, p 267

From these extra biblical texts,we are able to understand that the author of Job was concerned with a common problem,a human problem,the problem of suffering. We can also rightly say that this is a common problem in Africa. Indeed the majority of the human race can Identify with the figure of Job

CONCLUSION

As we have just seen the problem of suffering was reflected upon in different cultures. In Uganda,Mubangizi reflects about the same problem of suffering in the story of "**Rwakyekoreire Buhano**"⁵ In this story,the author narrates the story of a man who was bad towards his children and neighbours. He later underwent a lot of suffering. All his children died and was left alone.

This experience of suffering purified him as an old man and he changed completely from a bad man to a good man loved by all his neighbours. In this story,suffering is presented as positive and very effective in transforming persons.

In Africa,life is seen as the highest form of reality. The nearer a being comes to or possesses life,the more real it becomes. Suffering attacks and diminish life and therefore become the highest form of evil. The task of theology would be seen as the emancipation of the people from the oppressive factors which are inimical to human spiritual and bodily life and its consequent forces. We have seen how the problem of suffering in general is a human problem and now in the following chapter we shall see how the scriptures also struggle with the same problem.

Nevertheless,we must say that suffering remains a mystery that torments human beings. We have to deepen our reflection on this mystery of suffering.

.Benedikito Kyatuuka Mubangizi, *Rwakyekoreire Buhano*,
Nyamitanga Press,Mbarara,1983,p.3.

CHAPTER TWO

PART ONE

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR JOB'S PROBLEM

I INTRODUCTION

The theme which the whole book of Job revolves is the mystery inherent in the unmerited suffering of the just man. How can a just God permit an innocent man to suffer? Since nothing can happen independent of the will and knowledge of God, how can it be that a man who has committed no sin should nevertheless be compelled to undergo severe and prolonged suffering.

In the early days of Israel's history, men were satisfied with the simple assurance of God's justice and goodness. The explanation taken for granted by the Deuteronomist and by most ancient writers, that God punished the wicked by means of physical ailments and an early death and rewarded the good by means of a long and happy life on earth was accepted generally and rarely questioned (Gen 15: 15, Exod. 20: 12, Deut 7: 12-15).

The logical consequence of this thinking is that rewards and punishments have to come in this world and not in the next. Good behaviour will be rewarded and evil will be punished by God not after death but during this life. Over and over again in the Wisdom Literature, the Hebrew Scripture promised that the upright will prosper and the wicked will suffer the consequences of the evil ways.

All was well and good as long as things went relatively well for the Israelites. They could get along fine with this fairly simple moral theology. But then their kingdom was destroyed and the whole nation was led away into exile. Suddenly the system was not working any more! Something seemed terribly wrong with this simple theology of good and evil. Not only the guilty but also the innocent were suffering. Not only were the wealthy idol worshippers defeated but the righteous poor were also being persecuted.

2 DEVELOPMENTS

With time, the whole understanding of God and life among the Israelites begins to change. Prophet Jeremiah noticed that the wicked sometimes prospered while the Innocent suffered. (Jer. 12:1-6)

The same question is raised by Habakuk 1:13 and the same complaint is raised in Prophet Ezekiel's time (Ezek. 18). However, Ezekiel emphasized the individual responsibility and consequently the personal reward and punishment belief still remains and so now the problem becomes acute.

According to Ezekiel's teaching, when an Individual suffers, it must be because he is personally guilty or at least God must put matters right during his or her life. So now each case can be verified whether practical life is in harmony with this theory

In the face of this unexplainable suffering, the Jews had to rethink their moral theology. The author of the book of Job was wrestling with the mystery of evil, wondering how bad things can happen to good people, wondering if God truly loves the just and hates the wicked. Unlike modern theologians, the ancient author of the book of Job composed his theology in Poetry and wrote it in the form of a story or drama

Towards the end of the exile, Deutero-Isaiah gave a partial answer to the problem of innocent suffering (Isaiah 53:4-9). The suffering servant was sinless and still God punished him. He suffered and how can we explain why he suffered? The answer of Deutero-Isaiah is vicarious suffering. In other words, he suffered for the benefit of others. We shall see if this understanding will help Job as he struggles with the same question

3 THE BOOK OF JOB

In the opening scene Job is presented as an Innocent and faithful servant of the Lord. He has led an upright life treating others justly and he has enjoyed good health and prosperity (1:1-5). At the beginning therefore the traditional theory that good behaviour is rewarded and bad behaviour is punished seems to be working and we can easily find an explanation for suffering using this theory

Now Satan being the devil's advocate goes before the throne of God and argues to the fact that Job is being good not because he loves God but only because of the reward he gets from being so law-abiding. Job has been just and honest because God blessed him but if everything was taken away from him, Job's virtue would take a different direction.

Yahweh accepts the challenge and permits the test to be made. The withholding of his gifts from Job will demonstrate whether Job's affections centre on them or the giver. God lets Satan take away everything that Job had, his wealth, his children and even his health but still Job refused to curse God.

"Naked I came from my Mother's womb,
Naked Shall I go back again
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away,
Blessed be the name of the Lord!"(1:21)

With these words of deep faith in God, the stage unfolds for the rest of the book. Job confronts the mystery of evil and suffering. He bewails his misfortunes. He is tempted to give in to easy explanations for them. But he resists the temptations and so he struggles with the apparent absurdity and meaninglessness of life.

It is somewhat surprising that the explanation of "vicarious suffering" is not mentioned in the story of Job as it would have offered a satisfactory response to the book's central question. Possibly, the wisdom author was not familiar with second Isaiah or perhaps he did not consider this solution to be an adequate one.

We must also recall here that the author of the book of Job was not familiar with the doctrine concerning life after death. This was a belief which would become common faith only later; "**the retribution beyond the grave**". This understanding will begin to develop only during the Maccabean period (Dan. 12:2-3, 2Macc 6-7, Wis. 1-5).

PART TWO

THE SUFFERING OF THE INNOCENT

1. INTRODUCTION.

According to the Book of Job, Job though sinless and Innocent is suffering. Our problem is how we can reconcile this situation of the suffering Innocent with divine justice and God's benevolent providence? Job could not give a clear and definitive answer because of his limited view on retribution but also because the problem of suffering cannot be easily solved by human reasoning

2 WHY DOES JOB SUFFER?

The prologue of the book of Job shows that Job is Innocent in the eyes of God. We are told that after all the misfortunes which had befallen Job,

"Job got up and tore his clothes in grief

He shaved his head and threw himself downwards on the ground. He said, I was born with nothing and I will die with nothing

The Lord gave and now he has taken away, may his name be praised" (Job. 1:20 -22)

Job was not aware that God reckoned him as Innocent. If Job had known that he was merely being tried there would have been meaning in his suffering however that would not have been a test of faith

In the Poetic dialogue, the question is treated differently. Job must have sinned. God is just for sure and there is no exception to this but Job denies it. According to him, Justice is not being done and God is responsible for all that is happening. Job in this calamity searches for a radical friend, compassionate friend. Here the ministry of friendship is not judged by our capacity to explain

God's ways or defend God's teachings but by an ability to stand with an alienated human being against the insidious forces of our world and to believe at all cost in that person. Radical friendship means transcending accepted norms and taking another's case to a higher court, perhaps even to the heavenly council

3 THE FRIENDS OF JOB

The wife of Job and not Job reacts as the Adversary had expected(2:9). She interprets the situation somewhat as the friends will do; but she takes her husband's side. God has now shown himself to be Job's enemy, the latter should express that fact before he dies.

Job has time to reflect on his condition before the arrival of his friends. The friends are professional wisemen from different localities. Their friendship is genuine and their intention is truly charitable. Their sympathy with him in his deplorable state is expressed in the ritual gestures of mourning for the dead and in a week-long silence

The function of the friends is to console, by joining in the lamentation and the petition. But, because of their doctrine on retribution, they come prepared to take part in a psalm of penitence, where as Job is uttering a psalm of innocence. The clash of views means that to Job they become enemies, unjustly oppressing him and increasing his suffering. Worse than that, the friends persist in claiming that they are pronouncing God's judgement, that what they profess is divinely guaranteed wisdom.

In exposing the three friends of Job, the poet was speaking to professional "friends". He spoke in uncomfortable terms that are difficult to internalise. Even his wisdom is tantamount to heresy. It is better to suffer with a friend than to defend his God as the friends of Job were trying to do. Job wishes to argue his case with God, but he cannot find God and so Job asks for an Umpire or witness.(9:33)

In the famous passage of Job(19:25-27), we get the idea of a vindicator. Job expects to be vindicated because of his innocence but it is not certain whether he expects his vindication to come in the flesh or in the after life. However in 14:12 he dismisses the idea of an after life. Job apparently expects vindication in the flesh (13:15-16)

In spite of all protests, Job never completely gives up his conviction that justice must somehow triumph. As last resort, Job appeals to the ancient test of the oath. The taking of an oath was the last word in the assertion of one's innocence since it was assumed that the terror of the sanctions of the self-imprecations would deter anyone from swearing falsely. After the oath, there is no more the friends can say. At this moment man faces God. It is now up to God to strike down the blasphemer or acquit him. Surely Mankind has to first get involved in getting rid of the sufferings that unnecessarily enslave it. Humanity should not just sit down and appeal to God.

In all these protests of Job, the traditional orthodox doctrine, righteousness is rewarded and wickedness is punished, is being challenged. The author of Job gives arguments of both stands. Those who defend orthodoxy are symbolised by the friends of Job, whereas Job challenges that stand. But surely, the author's sympathy lies with Job.

The highlight of Job is given in Yahweh's speeches (38-41). But no explanation or excuse is offered for Job's suffering. God refuses to submit to questioning, however, God does not crush Job or brush him away. Nothing is said that would imply that Job deserved all the suffering that he endured and no explanation is given except God's presence.

PART THREE

JOB AND GOD

1 INTRODUCTION

The problem of the suffering of the Innocent and so the question of the divine justice provide us also the occasion to probe a much deeper question The nature of man's relationship with God. In the prologue, Satan suggests that Job's relationship to God is not one of unqualified trust but a utilitarian service of God to obtain blessings and health. What would we have to say about the majority of the people suffering innocently?

2 HUMAN INTEGRITY

When misfortune befalls Job, his first and spontaneous reaction is one of acceptance and trust in God. (1:21) He is searching for human integrity in the face of numerous traditional answers to life offered by the religion of his days as voiced by the friends. Job is the threat to the security of the orthodoxy of his friends. They were so confident that God was bound by their human logic. Job accuses God of appearing as an enemy (19:18-19). He wishes that God would leave him alone. He virtually sets himself up as the judge of God. So ultimately Job's conflict is with God himself. God is the real enemy and the friends are but spokesmen in his defence. Job would like to meet God so as to vindicate his integrity (31:37)

3 REMOTENESS OF GOD

The majority of the people suffering,complain of a distant God. They look for a God to whom they can address all the horrors,a God who is always ready to listen,a God who can restore people's integrity. People complain of having been abandoned by God. Job himself is constantly tortured by the remoteness and hiddenness of God(13:24,23-3)

Job vents his anger against God as an honest expression of his faith. He realises more and more that there is a gulf fixed between the creator and the creature.(9:32-33) However Job hopes that one day,a reconciliation with God will take place,the gap will be bridged,the vindicator will restore him to fellowship with God (9:25-27). However God reminds Job that he is a creature who cannot judge the creator(38:2-11)

Silenced Job admits that he has no ground for arguing with God (40:1-5). He retracts and repents humbly before God and in this he finds a new fellowship with God,not the traditional God but the living God. Man was created to be in good relationship with the creator. But suffering drives mankind to despair.

PART FOUR

GOD'S CHALLENGES TO JOB

1. INTRODUCTION

Job had challenged God to answer him and God does so in a theophany. He seems to ignore Job's suffering, accusations and confession but allows him the experience of a God that breaks down and builds up. Job is judged by God but his judgement brings salvation.

2. GOD'S CHALLENGES

Job's wish to meet God has been fulfilled but on terms different from those he imagined. The Lord challenges Job to understand the truth of creation. The natural world is beyond man's understanding. Who then is Job to reprove God and dispute with him.

God appears not to discuss Job's suffering but to show him the limits of his knowledge. Job is neither condemned nor cleared. God enters the dispute as a final spokesman. He challenges Job's insights going back to the origins of creation.

Job is called to an examination of wisdom. It is Man's fault and pride if Yahweh's plan and reign are obscured. God is directing everything towards a goal but man must trust him. God governs everything with power and wisdom and no matter how perfect is Job's life, that gives him no claim upon God. When face to face with God, he must leave behind all self-justification and pride and put himself into the mercy of God.

3 JOB UNDERSTANDS GOD

Man is very tiny compared to the universe. In all directions, he encounters mysteries and secrets. Job is made to understand God's cosmic design in the universe. Job becomes conscious that God's actions are an impenetrable mystery guided by his providence. His cry for divine justice was nothing else than self-righteousness and pride. Job is called to a new examination of Wisdom (38:2-3). Is Job able to take the place of God and run the world better? If Job is able to do that, then God will acknowledge him as an equal (38:14).

PART FIVE

JOB'S REPLY

1 INTRODUCTION

Having experienced God, Job becomes silent. He recognises his smallness. However, he does not yet come to a positive act of faith. His silence is not so much an absence of ideas but the awareness that he has no right to complain. Job has no answer to God's questions about the origins and structures of the universe. Job confesses his smallness. The impatient Job has been humbled.

2. JOB LEARNS A LESSON

The Lord taught Job to recognise both the mystery and the harmony of the world. Job declares that his deepest wish has been granted (42:1-6). Though Job is somehow vindicated, something deeper has taken place. Job is far wiser than he was before. He now knows that not man is the centre of the world but God in his wisdom. Since man cannot fully grasp God's wisdom in the world, he is in no position to judge the creator. The harmony of the world offers a

basis of faith in the righteousness of God. In a way Job's problems have been solved. It was not so much about the attributes of God like his Justice but about fellowship and relationship with God.

Job has not learned the cause of his suffering or the explanation of the apparent injustices in the world but he has found God again. Now he understands that he can have fellowship with God also in the midst of suffering which is not a sign that God has rejected him.

So Job declares that he has found a new understanding of God. Job acknowledges that God's power and purposes are limitless.

CONCLUSION

In this second Chapter, Job gives us some insights as he struggles with the same problem of suffering. However we must acknowledge that Job's reflection is not complete since it lacks the New Testament Revelation. At the time of Job, there is no belief in life after death. God will reward good behaviour during this life and will punish evil during this life as well. The New Testament Revelation with Jesus Christ will bring a new understanding of life.

Secondly, the God of Job is a distant God but with the Incarnation, God becomes man. He moved on the roads, ate with man, healed many sick people and he promised that he will live with us forever (Mt 28:20).

Thirdly, there seems to be a utilitarian attitude in Job towards God. The relationship is described in terms of receiving blessings from God and Job in his sufferings only sits down and appeals to God. The God of Jesus Christ seems to have been radically different. He did not like passive sufferers but wanted action to be taken so as to reduce and bring to an end many of the physical, psychological and moral ills and sufferings of humanity.

However Job positively understands that he can have fellowship with God also in the midst of suffering and he acknowledges his smallness in comparison to God. All in all, the experience of Job needs Jesus Christ. The New Testament Revelation answers many of the questions that Job raises. Jesus Christ, through his life, death, resurrection and ministry completes the book of Job.

CHAPTER THREE

SUFFERING AMONG THE BATAGWENDA OF UGANDA

1. INTRODUCTION

I believe very much that one of the major tasks of the Church lies in its role to educate, guide and liberate the people of God. In this task, the church is able to recognise its obligation to educate the people to criticise their own situations. In this way, the people are helped to become more aware of their potential for improving their own lives.

Many parts of Africa share somehow the same problems. We meet problems of dislocations in African life, economic hardships, political instability, military expenditures, increased unemployment, poverty and misery.

In this paper, I am particularly concerned with the "Batagwenda Group", a tribe to whom I belong. My people, though they have been in contact with the outside world and Christianity for more than a century, still interpret reality in traditional terms. Their mind set is still in a different framework. The African spirit world is still alive and this influences very much the way people will interpret reality. In this paper, I would like to see how the Batagwenda people react to suffering.

2 WHO ARE THE BATAGWENDA?

The Batagwenda people to whom I belong, are a Bantu group who live in Kitagwenda county, Kabarole district of Uganda. Kitagwenda county is inhabited by several groups of people who trace the lineage from different ancestors that lived outside Kitagwenda. Of these groups, only four are accepted as true Batagwenda.

The first group of people is thought to have come from Buhweju(Ankole) and settled in the area by the 17th Cent ⁶ These include the Balisa clan now living in Kigoto area The second group is thought to have come from Karagwe in Tanzania through Mpororo in south west of Ankole and settled in the area in the 18th Cent ⁷ These today include the Basambo,Banyambeira,and Bashaba clans who today live in and around Kagazi and Kyeganvwa and the Barende of Nyakasenyi. The third group of people came from Bunyoro Kitara and settled in Kitagwenda around the middle of the 18th Cent They include the Babito,Basiita and Bahondo Clans who live in Ntara area and the Baitira who live in Ruhiga area ⁸

The fourth major group came from Buganda towards the end of the 18th Century According to both oral tradition and written records,this group is known as the Bakuuta who fled westwards from Buganda due to the vengeance of the ungrateful Ssemakokiro after the murder of Kabaka Junju his twin brother When they were still on the way fleeing to present Bunyaruguru area in Ankole District,some of them became tired,unable to walk any longer,so they decided to settle down This group,because of failing to continue the journey were called"**abatagyenda**"(those who cannot walk)by their brothers who continued and managed to make it to Bunyaruguru ⁹

All these groups together,make up the present day Batagwenda. All the four groups of people mentioned above,with passage of time and through internarrriages have come to be united into one society with almost one culture and one language

My reflection about suffering is based on this group of people to whom I belong Growing up among my people,I have come in touch with their sufferings and their attitudes towards suffering.

⁶ G S Were See "The Western Bantu People from A D 1300- 1800" In
B A Ogot and Kieran edit Zamani
A survey of East Africa History,Nairobi
1969,pp 178-186

⁷ H F Moris,A history of Ankole,part of Rwanda and most of Kigezi, Uganda Literature of
Bureau,Kampala,1962,pp 17-29

⁸ J W Nyakatura, Anatomy of an African Kingdom A history Bunyoro,Kitara, Achor Press,
New York,1973,pp 18-19

⁹ Interview with Fabiano Bvaruhanga on 2 8 1994, at
Kabujogera,Kitagwenda(Uganda)

3 SUFFERING AND DEATH AMONG THE BATAGWENDA

The Batagwenda are greatly concerned with human frailty and helplessness in the face of death and suffering. Suffering disrupts the whole person. There is loss of activity and independence and this breaks most persons in their vigour and self confidence. Families and generally all people stand helpless at the constant factor of suffering and death in their lives. It is already more than a century since the Batagwenda embraced Christianity but it is amazing that the majority of the people still interpret causes of death and suffering in terms of magic, sorcery, curses and evil spirits. It is believed that these forces are manipulated to cause death and suffering and to destroy human relationships. They are blamed for causing accidents, illness, misfortunes and above all death. The Batagwenda have several myths to explain the origin of death. One of the Myth according to one of our great elders Fabiano Byaruhanga¹⁰ is that once upon a time, the land of Bunyoro Kítara was sparsely populated. There were no farmers and so people lived as hunters and root gatherers. There were two big families in the area, that of Miti and Kaahwa. They lived in villages separated by hills. For many seasons, these two friends had failed to exchange visits until Kaahwa sent a message that he would be visiting Miti. On the scheduled day however Kaahwa fell sick and sent his three sons instead. The boys were warmly welcomed and entertained with meat, delicacies and drinks. In the morning, the three sons decided to repair Miti's hut which was dilapidated. On completion of the work, they prepared to return home.

Miti put a mystery gift in a well covered basket and gave it to the boys to take to their father. On the way home, the boys were overcome by curiosity and wanted to know what Miti was sending to his friend. They therefore, set the basket down, opened it and behold it was a beautiful pigeon inside. They all admired its beauty and wanted to fondle it. The second son got it out and when he was trying to give it to his eldest brother, it flew away. They followed its flight direction hoping that it would perch and rest but it never did. They were afraid because Miti had especially entreated them not to open the basket. Alas! now they could not get their father's present.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The eldest son got angry and struck the second son and killed him. He then killed himself too. The third son was struck with fear but could do nothing. He therefore, ran home weeping and gasping to explain what had happened. His story was however unintelligible since nothing of this nature had ever happened. So the Son led the father to the scene where his two sons lay dead. The old man was so shaken with grief that he saw no reason in living. He drove his spear-head into his heart and died there too. At dawn the wife and neighbours joined in the search for Kaahwa. They found him dead with his two sons. His wife wanted to kill herself too, but she was restrained by those present. The neighbours then buried Kaahwa and the two sons in the hills and went home. After mourning their deaths for four days, the eldest surviving son was installed as heir. Since then, people have continued dying and death has become a constant factor in human existence.

This is one of the myths among the Batagwenda to explain how death found entry into the rhythm of life. However, the myth only helps us to understand the mythological origins of death. According to this myth, it is clear that death did not come from God but from man himself.

4 TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND CAUSES OF SUFFERING

I cannot talk about suffering among my people without addressing the subject of witchcraft and sorcery which is a matter of great importance but also a matter of great misunderstanding especially by foreign missionaries. Many European missionaries even without understanding beliefs in witches and sorcerers, do regard them as superstitions, products of ignorance and error. However, I would look at this approach as very unfortunate if at all we are to bring the liberating message of Christ to the hearts of these people.

These beliefs are still very alive in the life of our people and we cannot just discard them but we should try to understand the precise nature of these beliefs and their significance and role in the lives of those who hold them.

SORCERY

Sorcery is a common practice among the Batagwenda, but the topic is one which people are very unwilling to discuss. There are good reasons for this. Sorcery is bad; it is associated with fear, hatred, illness, suffering and death and the less it is spoken of the better.

A sorcerer is one who is thought to practice evil magic against others.¹¹ The acts themselves are usually of such a nature that they can be performed by anyone. They are termed magical from the point of view of the anthropologist because there are no grounds in terms of western science for believing them able to accomplish the ends claimed by them.

Among the Batagwenda, the most common belief is that sorcerers use "medicines" to harm those against whom they bear ill will. Acts of sorcery, although theoretically observable, are rarely seen due to the secrecy which surrounds them. Sorcery stands for anti-social behaviour and so are feared and hated in the community.¹²

The sorcerers use spells, charms and even poison to harm or kill. Among the Banyoro and Batagwenda of Uganda, the sorcerer may place a potion in a person's drink or a destructive charm where the victim was sure to walk and thus realising its power by eventually killing the victim.¹³

In the local language, the sorcerer is known as a "murogo". A murogo is a person who wants to kill others. He may kill them by blowing medicine towards them or by putting poison in his victim's food or drink, or by concealing it in a path where he will pass. In most cases kuroga is brought about by envy, hatred and quarrelling. Below I will give a case in which sorcery was proved or alleged but in this case personal names changed.

Birungi and Nyamusana were both wives of Muzahura. Birungi had two children but Nyamisana though she was the senior wife, had not had any child. Birungi became ill with an affliction of her private parts. She consulted a diviner to whom she paid a goat, and he confirmed that her co-wife

¹¹ Middleton John, *Witchcraft and Sorcery in E. Africa*
Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd
London, 1978, p. 3

¹² Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 200

¹³ Beattie, *Sorcery in Bunyoro*, p. 29

Nyamisana was practicing sorcery against her. The matter was discussed in a family council, and Nyamisana was warned to stop her sorcery activities towards her co-wife¹⁴

Another peculiar aspect of sorcery is what is called "bwohe". The root word "kwoha" means to push somebody and make him tumble without control. Bwohe, therefore, is a kind of sorcery that makes a person lose control and wander away from home until he dies away in the forest, in an accident, through suicide or killed by an animal. An example is told in my village about a man who carried a long sharp knife for about 75km to Virika mission in Fort Portal and killed a brother at the mission. Thereafter he walked to the police station and gave himself up. It was however discovered that he had developed a mental disorder before he did this act. But when the news reached our village, the people had no difficulty in explaining the man's behaviour as a typical manifestation of Bwohe at work. In this paper we cannot discuss everything about sorcery but this is just to show a glimpse of the situation of our people and as evangelisers this can help us to identify areas that really need the liberating message of Jesus Christ.

WITCHCRAFT

The power of witchcraft is a mystical and innate power, which can be used by its possessor to harm other people.¹⁵ Usually witches are thought able to do extraordinary things which are beyond the capabilities of ordinary human beings. They may be thought of travelling great distances instantaneously, or having the ability to turn themselves into leopards or lions, or going out as spirits and killing a victim while their bodies remain home in bed.

Such people are hated and detested by the community as the main cause of disruption of life. It is only the bad people who tap these powers to harm their fellow humans. This might be through casting spells of diseases and wicked manipulation of the spirits. It is important to note that these powers are not evil in themselves until they are in evil hands. Thus, they would remain harmless until they are invoked for malicious and destructive purposes.

¹⁴ Interview with Tereza Nyinabarongo of Bukurungo-Kitagwenda on 14. 6. 1995.

¹⁵ Op.Cit Middleton, p 3

There are people among the Batagwenda who are believed to be intrinsically evil and capable of causing harm and death due to the inherent evil power in their being. We cannot say that this phenomenon belongs to the past but it is still alive among the Batagwenda and brings suffering among the people. The fear of witches is great and is associated with the general fear of the dark and its denizens.

Witchcraft is associated with evil. People generally believe that evil comes from people's ambitions and jealousies. The people who bring this evil into the local communities are many, but the most important are the witches. So they disrupt the peace of people and create in communities situations of suspicion and accusations.

I happened to ask an old Man in one of the communities among the Batagwenda what he thought about witchcraft and he said that "God the creator made the world. He made men also. He kills men when they are old. He has that right and it is good but many of us are evil. We hate others in our hearts because we are envious and we do them harm and destroy them and their wives and their children".¹⁶

These practices have become a hindrance in the area in building up small Christian communities because of the mistrust that exists among the people. So people do not interact freely and they are always suspicious of one another.

SPIRITS

Another strong belief among the Batagwenda is the belief in the spirits. The Batagwenda believe that God has the ultimate power and is at the head of the spiritual hierarchy. He is the source of all authority and vital power which he can extend to the spirits.

Below God, in descending order are the spirits. The spirits have power and importance in Kitagwenda beliefs and are regarded with awe and fear. They are said to be capable of causing death if the shrines are neglected, their sacrifices and offerings are not given or if the animals dedicated to them are diverted to other purposes.

¹⁶ Interviewed elder Byakurama at Kainja- Kitagwenda, 28 1993

One of the main categories of spirits that have much to do with human beings are the ancestral spirits. Because they are human spirits, they are believed to hover around the homesteads of their families and are said to be active in human affairs.

These spirits are often thought to bring or to be the source of medical problems in the community. They are able to bring diseases like insanity, malaria, small pox, dysentery, tuberculosis, epilepsy, barrenness, miscarriage and sometimes death of the living members of the family.

Besides, spirits are thought to be one of the causes of social problems such as loss of employment, social status, stress and even poverty. In Kitagwenda, spirits can be heard or seen in the hills, beside the rivers and in the forests. At night people are able to hear the sound of the spirits. In the evenings the spirits are said to be driving their cattle home and they are heard with the accompanying whistling and singing.¹⁷

Spirits are sometimes associated with objects and are seen as the power source behind magical devices such as the "mahembe".¹⁸ The mahembe are usually animal horns which are empowered by magic and could be used to summon spirits for divination, protection from magic attack or even love magic.¹⁹

The most destructive of the spirits are called the "enfanakihika" (those who died unsatisfied). The spirit of a child who died before he could speak, a young person who died before marriage or a relative who was never given a decent burial. The spirits of such persons are therefore believed to become furious and malevolent because they were denied a life that they were eager to enjoy. They attack living relatives out of envy, jealousy and grudge.

There are also spirits of persons who died with some complaints because of some mistreatment at the hands of relatives. A spirit of this nature is known as "akaraako". A parent who died feeling that he had not been accorded deserved attention and respect by his children may avenge himself on the young generation. Then "akimiira" on the other hand, are human spirits who have sunk into the remote past and whose names cannot even be remembered. These are referred to

¹⁷ Gehman, *Ancestral Relations*, p 59

¹⁸ Beattie, *Sorcery in Bunyoro*, p 389

¹⁹ Mbiti, *Concepts*, p 266.

as "abakuru" (respected ones). Usually a special shrine is built for them. It is in this shrine that sacrifices and offerings are made to the ancestral spirits. The most dangerous spirit remains that of the child who died before he could speak (ekibumbe). According to one of the elders Binshobire²⁰, the spirit is difficult to identify because it does not speak and is known to be notorious in causing dumbness and crippling young children. And so when a child takes long before he can walk or talk, it is this type of spirit who is held responsible. It has therefore to be placated to loosen the tongue and legs of the child.

The other types of human spirits worth mentioning are "omutoole and omuranga". The omutoole is the spirit of the stranger who dies in one home, far away from the dead person's residence. It could be a distant relative, a porter or some visitor. Whichever person it may be, the body is likely to be buried without following what would have been the correct ritual and formalities. It is believed that if there is any omission in the burial ritual, the spirit of such a person wanders around because it has no proper repose, and could therefore harass members of the family where he died.

"Omuranga" on the other hand is the spirit of the person who dies away from home and is obviously not given a decent burial. Persons who die in war or in distant working places and are buried there often turn into "omuranga" spirits. Seven decades ago we are told that there was a devastating famine in the area and people went out in search of food and many died on the way. Their spirits could be classified into the "omuranga" group. It is easy to identify such spirits because of their cries for help such as "Hey! Hey! Hey!" It is said that such cries indicate that the owner died in a desolate place. Often the diviners have therefore to be consulted for a way to placate, appease and calm them through sacrifice and offerings.

We cannot satisfactorily present the whole understanding of the spirits among the Batagwenda in this short paper. My intention is just to look briefly to look at what surrounds the spiritual lives of our people including those who have embraced the faith in Jesus Christ. This will eventually help us in finding out the priorities and strategies in evangelising the people in a manner that will help the faith take root and persevere.

²⁰ Chief in the area for many years.

A CURSE

A curse "omukyeno" means to cause harm or death by a word of mouth. A curse is the very opposite of blessings. The Batagwenda believe that there are occasions when words pronounced by some people especially senior persons in terms of age, office or social status take on mystical significance and power. It is believed that Parent's words carry a special power of blessing or curse when pronounced upon their children with the special intention on invoking fortune, blessings, success and peace or to bring sorrow and suffering.

In respect of social and moral deviance, the parents can put a curse on their offspring. Take the example of a young girl who was infatuated with one of the teachers in the primary school. The young teacher proposed marriage to the girl and informed her parents. Henceforth, the young girl started making secret visits to the teacher and returning home late at night. When she came home one night, the father heard her and was annoyed. He spat on the ground to invoke the spirits of the ancestors and cursed her saying, "those who move a lot will die in strange places". His wife who knew the significance of the utterance, rebuked him but it was too late. A week later, the girl breached the warning and went to visit her fiancé, hoping to stay over a night in order not to provoke the father's anger a second time. Shortly after midnight, however, the girl was stiff and cold. The police the following morning suspected foul play and sought to convict the man on a murder charge. But the Father intervened and testified that his daughter had died at the will of the gods.²¹

Thus the Batagwenda respect their elders, both the living and the dead. To disregard them is to court a curse and eventually death. The people observe a rather strict code of conduct because if not the elders whose anger is provoked, might be the dead ancestors. The paternal aunts and uncles are held in highest regard because it is believed that once they are offended by their nephews and nieces, their curse is automatic. Yet another classical case of the power of the curse is that of Yonasani Bunogo, a dwarf aged about 70 years. Kamunyu²² the informant narrates that Bunogo is good at cursing and claims to have withheld his niece's conceiving and caused his sister's

²¹ A true tale confirmed by Kamunyu who is about 90 years old and is one of the respected elders in the area.

²² Ibid.

complications during child labour. This was because he had not been given his due portion of bride wealth. In these particular incidents, Bunogo did not speak a word but just willed it. It was only when the victims came to their senses and settled his claims that the sister delivered well and the niece conceived. Only then was he ready to let go his hold and withdraw his unspoken word. That there are people good at cursing is acknowledged and people pay them a fee to effect a curse on any person. Whether it is done by an elder or relative their effect is the same: harm, suffering and death. You can imagine how people are tormented by such occurrences and beliefs. These beliefs are still strong even among the baptised Christians.

5 TRADITIONAL PROTECTION FROM THE SUPERNATURAL AND ALL FORCES THAT BROUGHT SUFFERING.

The Batagwenda hold the social norms, rules and regulations as sacred order instituted by the creator. It is therefore, God who is the ultimate guardian of the moral order. He appointed the divinities and ancestral leaders to oversee this order as custodians. This conviction means that any breach of the moral code is considered evil because a gross misconduct is a disruption of harmony and peace. Anyone guilty of such an offence is thereby punished by the whole community, both the living and the dead. It is also believed that God himself, at times intervenes to inflict punishment and execute justice. In a way this understanding suggests that God uses evil to correct moral offenders. It is therefore, believed that whenever man deviates from the divine moral precepts, he is under the domain of evil and suffers evil. The Batagwenda express this belief by saying, "Ruhanga akamukyena" (God has cursed him). Evil, therefore, does not always mean a moral offence for it also refers to the supernatural power that inflicts pain and harm to the moral offenders.

Supernatural powers have several effects on the people, many of which result from fear of the sorcerers, witches and some spirits that are seen to hold the lives of others in their control. Therefore, there is at least three types of cultural specialists available for protection from these supernatural attacks and fears. These are the witchdoctor, the diviner and the herbalist.

WITCHDOCTOR

They are usually highly gifted men who use spells and spirits to discern who are the witches and expose them to the community. As a result, they are held in high regard as friends of the community. There are several methods by which a witch doctor would detect the guilty witch and confirm his findings. Some witch doctors through the right ritual request the ancestral spirits to expose the witch. There are also some tests that suspected witches would be required to pass so as to prove their innocence. One of the tests is the "poison ritual" in which poison is given to the accused. Survival proves innocence while death would prove guilt.

Finally, a witch might be trapped by the appropriate ritual. For example ash is sprinkled around the home and when the suspected witch crosses the "ash boundary" he or she will be trapped and unable to escape until morning, when he or she would be exposed to the community. Because of this role in the community, witchdoctors are very much respected.

DIVINERS

Diviners provide also protection from evil powers including witches, sorcerers and spirits. A diviner among the Batagwenda has the practical task of disclosing the causes of misfortune and death. The diviners always seek in their diagnosis to discover a taboo or moral violation, which would be seen as the root of a particular problem.²³ So the diviners would see any misfortune befalling an individual or community to be arising from violation of customs, moral laws, regulations and taboos that govern the conduct of society.

Some diviners consult or confront spirits directly and try to convince them to leave the afflicted person or group alone.²⁴ Other diviners make the possessed go through rituals or drink mixtures to expel the spirits. Diviners are indeed still very important among the Batagwenda community.

²³ Ray, African Religions, p 104

²⁴ Op Cit Beattie, pp 44-45

HERBALISTS

The work of herbalists is very important in the Batagwenda community. Their duty involves the mixing of various potions and powders usually made from plants. The herbalist's mixtures usually do help in all sorts of medical problems. Herbalists are even today able to provide curative herbs for modern diseases like cancer, malaria etc. Herbalists, together with witchdoctors and diviners, provide also protection by means of personal charms. However, the charms of witchdoctors and diviners are generally considered to be more powerful than those of herbalists.

6. ANALYSIS OF TODAY'S SITUATION

A question that can be asked is whether this traditional understanding has given way to Christianity and the western secular views. The Batagwenda community has had a lot of outside influence beginning with colonization, Christianity, formal education and mass media which have had a pervasive influence across sub-saharan Africa

In spite of all outside influence, the traditional world view has not simply disappeared in the course of a few years in the midst of an urban environment. For sure by understanding the traditional views, we are better prepared to understand the modern ones. The church has tried to preach against the fear of the supernatural including witchcraft, sorcery and the spirits but very little has changed. Many Christians especially in times of crisis still go back to the traditional beliefs for security and assurance. There seems to be several reasons why the traditional supernatural beliefs have not simply "died off" with the advent of Christianity, education and westernisation.

EXPLAINING EVENTS

The traditional supernatural beliefs continue to be utilised for explaining events. For example failure in exams, why my brother got malaria? why someone else got promotion in his job? who stole

my property?why someone died?and so on. The understanding is that most people die not of natural causes,but because of somebody,somewhere

It is not surprising that such explanations are also carried over in the so called"technological areas"like car accidents. To many the real question is not how the accident occurred but why it occurred. Why then should this taxi containing these passengers overturn and why among these passengers should some be killed and others not? These separate facts demand explanations. The traditional beliefs still serve this purpose.

PROTECTION

These beliefs have been and are still serving as protection against the harsh realities of life. It has not stopped being perceived as an effective means for protecting against personal failure,against family problems,against malicious neighbours,car problems and against the witchcraft of others.

It is a means to security,prosperity,power,glory,success and health. It is used to gain success in among other things,passing examinations,business,relationships with the opposite sex,sports(many soccer teams have their witchdoctors)

BINDING FORCE IN THE CULTURE

Occult beliefs and practices served and still serve as a binding force,giving stability to the Batagwenda culture. For example,such beliefs help in holding the family or clan together against a common enemy. Such binding relates not only to family,but to the social rules of the clan or tribe as a whole. The pervasiveness of witchcraft and sorcery provide a rationalization for discussion of recent events and give everyone the common base from which to communicate. It serves as some kind of a negative integrating force in the society by promoting"creative gossip"which centres on the events of the community and their possible explanations. While witchcraft beliefs were and are still a negative binding force,ancestral beliefs tend to form a positive"glue" which bond the society and ensure adherence to its precepts

In conclusion, the Batagwenda do share in the bondage of the spirit realm experienced by many Africans. Traditionally, they wanted protection from the maliciousness of the spirits and that is why these beliefs are still alive. But if we are to offer the Batagwenda true freedom in Christ, we cannot simply ignore these beliefs or condemn them wholesale.

7 MODERN CAUSES OF SUFFERING AMONG THE BATAGWENDA

It is not only the spiritual world and traditional beliefs which continue to bring suffering to the people of Kitagwenda. I would like now to look at the more recent aspects that bring a lot of suffering to the Batagwenda and indeed to the majority of Africans.

LACK OF BASIC NECESSITIES

There is a lack of basic necessities that brings a lot of suffering and sometimes death. There is hunger, famine, malnutrition, unclean water, lack of medicine and health care facilities. The majority of people live in unsatisfactory living conditions. Some are homeless, refugees, orphans and widows.

POVERTY

The majority of our people have been reduced to a condition not worthy to be lived by a human being. The unbalanced economic policies which favour the already rich and powerful, have continued to drive the majority of our people to the margins of society. With poverty of course people cannot afford education, medicine, food, clothing and there is little hope for them to improve their lives.

IGNORANCE AND SUFFERING

The Batagwenda people of Uganda generally share in the whole situation of Africa. As a result of Ignorance and other problems, most Africans cannot control their own environment and make it serve their needs and fulfil their aspirations.²⁵ From this ignorance spring sufferings of disease, inferiority complex and feelings of helplessness.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS SUFFERING

This is most felt in cultural oppression, racism and tribalism. Colonial and Missionary masters have done harm to the authentic African personality. The people who have become Christians find themselves in the middle of a conflict that brings psychological sufferings to them. They wish to be true to both their cultural values as well as to the Gospel value which are often presented as opposed to each other.

BAD GOVERNMENTS

Bad and dictatorial governments have created a lot of sufferings and even many deaths to the people. Political leaders after creating political instability spend all the little resources of the country on buying firearms which in turn will be used to kill and to force many into refugee life. These politicians are thieves and so encourage and promote corruption by taking the lead themselves. Many have squandered the staggering economies putting all the money in foreign accounts and leaving the rightful owners of all those resources to continue suffering in misery.

²⁵ Museveni K Yoweri, "The historical task of development in Uganda", A paper presented to the fourth National Theological Week, Katigondo, 9.1.1989 (Uganda).

CONCLUSION

This is a brief description of the main elements that bring suffering to the people. Some situations are temporary and can therefore be eradicated. The Batagwenda are asking the same questions raised by Job: What good and just God can allow us to suffer in this manner?

CHAPTER FOUR

JOB AND THE BATAGWENDA

1 INTRODUCTION

In the second and third chapters of this paper, we have seen the approach of both Job and the Batagwenda to the question of suffering. It is true that we have much to learn from Job as well as the Batagwenda but they do not seem to offer us a satisfactory approach to the question of suffering.

On the other hand, my people, the Batagwenda have been caught up in the traditional explanation of Satan and evil spirits seen as responsible for much suffering and this belief has been used to divert attention from ordinary causes of suffering. In this chapter, I will try to bring out the weaknesses of both understandings. This kind of evaluation will help us come out with a new understanding in the following chapter, an understanding that is truly Christian.

2 THE BOOK OF JOB

There are many lessons that we can learn from the book of Job. In the figure of Job, we meet a devout believer who dared to question, argue and even quarrel with God. Unless one is faithful, one has no reason to quarrel with God. We meet the portrait of a man in revolt against God and against the accepted religious ideas of his time. It was a traditionally accepted fact among the Hebrews that the good man would be rewarded here on Earth with many material benefits while the evil doer would be punished by being visited with all sorts of calamities.

Job does not accept this traditional belief. He is an Innocent man, not an evil doer, and yet he is suffering and he does not accept this state of affairs serenely. It seems to him that God is the cause of this injustice and for many Job is also an example of patience. However, there are some aspects that fall short of our Christian vision of life and reality in the book of Job. This means that in many aspects, Job needed Christ and the whole Christian revelation.

UTILITARIAN FAITH

It is very clear that Job and his contemporaries had a utilitarian faith in God. They believed in God so that they may receive blessings especially material blessings in this world. They expected to be blessed with riches, good health and many children. This is different from the Christian faith. We do not love God on condition that we shall receive material blessings but we love God after recognising what He is and what He has done for us.

REMOTE GOD

We get an impression that the God of Job is so far away from him, so distant that he even gets tired of calling upon him. The God of Job is not like our God, the father of Jesus Christ: the one who became man, lived with man, walked on the roads of Israel, ate with men becoming God with the people. A God who is far removed from the lives of people becomes irrelevant.

NO LIFE AFTER DEATH

Job and his contemporaries at that time did not believe in life after death. Life is earthly and there is no meaningful existence after death. This is the belief that we get in the book of Job. It is Jesus Christ who fully reveals to us the everlasting life which becomes the main hope of all who believe in Christ. In this respect Job also needs Christ.

RESPONSIBILITY

Reading the book of Job we get the impression that Job is very passive and is only sitting down and complaining to God. However we know that we have a role to play in this world and this is a great responsibility. Only complaining about suffering does not help us in any way but we have got on our part to help in fighting the sufferings that torment people. Our cooperation and responsibility are very important. We should stop complaining and appealing to God like Job while doing nothing about the suffering. In this respect Job needed Jesus who brought in a different approach to suffering.

3 THE BATAGWENDA

The traditional Batagwenda world which is still prevalent includes a complex interaction between God, mysterious powers, the spirit world and ancestors as we have already seen. The reaction of the majority of the people encounter sickness, death and other calamities that would bring suffering, is expressed in the in the word "Bandogire" which means "I have been bewitched" (cursed by a witch) or "I have displeased the ancestors." When someone gets sick, the two most frequently asked questions are, "who did it?" and "why?" When a person dies before reaching what is considered a full age, it is said "the person's death did not come from God, but he or she has been bewitched." When a person dies in old age, people say, "the person wasn't bewitched but was taken by God."

DUALISM

There is an ongoing dualism among the followers of Christ. They keep one foot in the beliefs of their traditional religion and one foot in Christianity. Most people tend to uphold two faiths, they maintain the Christian faith when life is joyful and happy, but hold to the indigenous faith when the fundamentals of life are at stake. This is a very crucial problem for evangelisation.

The Instrumentum Laboris of the 1994 African Synod puts it this way "Christianity remains for many Africans a stranger religion", there are some part of their very selves and lives that stays outside the Gospel. This is the source of a certain double quality of living their beliefs, holding them divided between their faith in Jesus Christ and customs, traditional practices and beliefs. This dualism is well spelled out during situations of suffering and uncertainty. Evangelization has to address itself to such phenomenon, if it is to be evangelization at all.

CONFUSION ABOUT GOD

Looking at the situation of the people and the manner in which they worship and react to situations of suffering, one would find it difficult to judge whether people see God as close to them or as remote and indifferent to the world. In some cases where God seems to be remote, some creation myths would narrate how God withdrew from the world and how the spirits or ancestors are intermediaries.

Whereas other people would look at it in a different way. Sarpong describes this confusion as follows "In traditional African Religion, God is kept too far away and out of the daily life of people." I believe that such a statement cannot be applied to every African society. The apparent distance of God, he argues, is only a consequence of the respect that the African has towards authority. And is there any one greater than God? Nobody can approach a chief directly and talk to him without intermediaries.²⁶ Our efforts of evangelization has to clarify and put more emphasis on the concept and understanding of the God and Father of our saviour Jesus Christ.

²⁶ Peter Sarpong, "Synod for Africa", World Mission (march 1994) p 25

WRONG APPROACH OF FIRST MISSIONARIES

It is said that the Batagwenda had heard of the presence of the missionaries in Buganda and the persecution and death of young converts in Buganda from the Baganda and other converts who accompanied Captain Lugard²⁷ But a chance came for Catholic evangelization in 1902 when Peré Achte of the White Fathers visited the area He arrived at King Bulemu's court then at kanyamburara and held discussion with him The king advised by his mother, became catholic and many people followed the example of their king Peré Achte begun catechising from his tent at Bulemu's court Later, other White Fathers like Bringuier and Dalu came to help in the evangelization of the Batagwenda

It was in the early 1960's that the Holy Cross Fathers came to the scene Based in Kahunge parish 35km away, Fathers Robert Hesse, Burton Smith and George MacInnes started also the task of evangelising the Batagwenda I am not going to evaluate the whole process of evangelization carried out by these missionaries but I will only point out their wrong theology about suffering which needs to be corrected

They taught the people that in conditions of suffering, they should see it as the will of God and accept it humbly They always preached to the people suffering, that their reward is waiting for them in heaven Even a prayer for persevering in poverty and suffering was formulated in the local language and was to be recited everyday by the Christians (eshara y'okugumisiriza omubworo). People were told that even if they suffered here on earth, they would enjoy happiness in heaven. According to me this kind of approach and even theology is totally wrong. The gospel as we have it from Jesus is a liberating message and as preachers, we have a great responsibility in passing on this message to the people in a relevant way

²⁷ A G Katate and Kamugungunu, Abagabe ba Ankole, East African Literature Bureau,

Kampala, 1967, pp 63-65

CONCLUSION

We have looked at both Job and the Batagwenda in their own concrete situations of suffering. The simple conclusion we can make, is that both need Jesus Christ with his liberating and saving message. Job falls short of the Good News of eternal life revealed through the mystery of Christ. On the other hand we can say that the Batagwenda after so many years of evangelization still have a long way to go if Christianity is to take root among them and become part of their daily lives.

The Challenge for inculturation of the Gospel in Africa is expressed in the ringing words of Pope Paul VI in Kampala, Uganda in 1969 "You may and you must have an African Christianity"²⁸ It is not a matter of taking the traditional customs of African culture and making the best ones fit into Christianity. It is not a matter of African cultural values being mediated through western thought patterns. Rather it is to start from the reality of the African context and see how the gospel message of Jesus Christ can become a leaven to it. The African should be able to understand Jesus as saviour in his own world view. In this regard, the priority becomes to be an African Christian rather than a Christian African. Jesus Christ is to speak to the people in their own situations of suffering.

Now our task in the next and final chapter is to come out with possible suggestions and an approach to suffering that would help our people remain Africans but become Christians.

²⁸ Paul VI, Discourse at the closing of the first plenary Assembly of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Kampala, Uganda, (31 July 1969)

CHAPTER FIVE

AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN JOB

I INTRODUCTION

I have a strong and dynamic vision by which I strongly believe that heaven starts here below and that it is here that the values of the kingdom have to be lived with others and enjoyed or foretasted. I'm very much against the spirit of fatalism and resignation that is sweeping in various parts of Africa. As individuals and as community, we have to be convinced that we have an important mission to transform the world and make it a better place for every person.

There is the so called "Vumilia culture" that is growing at a fast rate. This is the situation where people are advised to postpone solutions to their problems. People are told to persevere in their own sufferings. But when one reads the Book of Exodus one discovers that God saw the suffering of his people and he decided to come and liberate them. When one reads the Prophets, one finds that they confronted kings and leaders and reminded them of the sufferings they were causing to the people of God. The God of Jesus has revealed himself to us through Jesus himself as one who wants action to be taken to reduce and bring to an end many of the physical, psychological, moral ills and sufferings of humanity. However this does not mean that suffering is all evil for we have been saved through suffering.

My desire and task is to come up with the theology and approach to the sufferings encountered by my people and all the people that we meet in our ministry. Like any other human beings, the Batagwenda have a distinctive bodily and spiritual endowment which tends towards perfection. Rightly then, they require supernatural means as well as natural aid in order to elevate the whole personality and achieve the stature God has marked out for them in his salvific plan.

If we have to give the Batagwenda and indeed all the African peoples the true "Good News" in our task of evangelization, we have to take into account the reality existing in their thought and life. The Batagwenda have already a profound wisdom and an established code of behaviour and moral ideas. It is on what they already have, that we can build a true African Christianity.

Many of our predecessors in this ministry made mistakes especially by condemning all the traditional beliefs that they found with the people without making the effort to identify what was wrong and what was right. Now for our case, winning the response of the people will depend on preserving the good in them, healing the wrong and developing the awareness of God's presence among them within their culture.

In this last chapter, I will attempt to give a theological explanation and framework that would answer the aspirations of the people with regard to innocent suffering and the whole question of suffering.

2 UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

The understanding of the question of Suffering and the explanations given both in the book of Job and the Batagwenda are based on the basic understanding of God. If the understanding is faulty, the understanding of realities of life will also be faulty.

Positively Job shows a constant faith, deep trust and perseverance in his condition of suffering but not in the Christian God that we believe in. The God of Job is a just God governing with telling sanctions. These sanctions had to operate during a man's life since there was no meaningful existence after death.

Job represents a utilitarian faith towards God. A God who will love man conditionally. God rewards the good and punishes the evil. The whole picture of Job does not seem to present the God we know, the God of Jesus Christ. Therefore Job also needed the New Testament Revelation.

The Batagwenda on the other hand already have a clear understanding of God. They understand God as creator, as the wise man, the father of all people, as the one who gives powers to medicine men and diviners, he is ever living because he never dies. Unfortunately, one whom they call God is far away with little inclination for the concerns of men. He has left the affairs of man's daily life to His subordinates, the spirits of the departed. This is why the people refer to the spirits of their fathers more frequently than they do to God. Again this is not the understanding of a Christian God. We have to help the people to have a clear and simple understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the role that should be played by the spirits of the departed.

GOD OF LOVE AND PROVIDENCE

Considering the ways to elevate and perfect the fundamental religious heritage of the Batagwenda in order to help them eradicate that which is un-Christian in their understanding about God and suffering, it is necessary to give them a clear notion of God and his providence.

The Batagwenda are naturally aware of the presence of God. God is good but unfortunately distant. So it is the departed who give moral force to their everyday life and religion. This explains why they adhere more to the departed and the whole understanding of the supernatural powers that create and bring suffering to the people.

What happens in the case of many Christians, is that when they are pressed by some necessity, they pray for a while and if the result does not seem to be forthcoming within a limited length of time, they act on the well known traditional principle, that a man should co-operate with the departed to help him. For the Christians, it means leaving God for some time and seeking aid from the departed who seem more ready and willing to help.

This is a weakness in the understanding of God and his providence. Our catechesis in our task of evangelization should emphasize that even though God uses ancestors to communicate life, He is still the giver of life. Therefore suffering should not divert people's attention from the supreme God. Our preaching has to help people conform themselves to the will of God, submitting themselves to all providential events willed or allowed by God.

JESUS CHRIST AS GREAT HEALER AND GREAT SPIRIT

In our task of evangelization among the Batagwenda or any other group of people in Africa, we have got to portray Jesus as the "Supreme healer" and the "great spirit". Such an understanding speaks deeply to African cultural traditions and is a good way of explaining Christ to Africans.

The local medicine man or diviner has great power and influence and it is very difficult to explain Jesus Christ's role as "Saviour" but easier to see him as the chief medicine man who heals the whole man. Jesus is able to heal our physical ailments as well as our spiritual ailments. He heals our attitudes and above all he gives us hope of everlasting life.

The faith in Jesus Christ can free mankind from the bonds of witchcraft and superstition. This kind of Christology will help people in the different situations of suffering.

Since people believe strongly in the spirits, they need a spirit theology to be preached to them. Without denying their beliefs in the spirits, it would be good to identify Christ as one of the spirits as we read in Col.2:9 that in him lives the fullness of Divinity and is the head of every power. The mistake we have been making is to dismiss what people already believe in as pagan. Our approach should be to build from what people already believe in.

3. MEANING OF SUFFERING

How can the Paschal Mystery be lived out in our contemporary Africa? What does Christianity say to the reality of the struggle for survival and suffering in Africa. To be relevant, Christianity has to try to answer questions of suffering.

SIN AND SUFFERING

The most significant attitude towards suffering in the Old Testament was that it was God's punishment for Sin.²⁹ However, the ultimate cause of suffering is to be related somehow to original sin. According to Gen 1-2 man's first parents were created in the state of innocence and happiness but by the sin of disobedience, they brought on themselves suffering and death. Because of the solidarity of the human race, subsequent suffering in the world is essentially related to this first sin.

The Batagwenda's approach to suffering seems to push causes of suffering to the spiritual world, the world of the spirits and the living dead. However, I would like to challenge this stand by saying that much of the suffering we experience comes as a consequence of our own sin. Through sin we inflict pain and suffering on ourselves. A person who goes to steal and is put in prison, a person who misbehaves and contracts AIDS, a person who drives recklessly and is involved in an accident and loses some limbs. In this respect, we are the cause of our own suffering.

²⁹ Bukovsky J, "Suffering". In NCE, Vol XIII, 1967, p. 775

This understanding was also present at the time of Job We see the friends of Job accusing him of specific sins that would explain his suffering.³⁰ On the other hand,in the New Testament,we are told that some illness was caused by personal sin Jesus told the man cured at the pool of Bethzatha"now you are well again,be sure not to sin any more or something worse may happen to you(Jn.5 14)

In this regard,we do not need to blame God,the spirits or the neighbours but ourselves. Many of us forget that we are the causes of our own suffering and start looking for reasons causes elsewhere. In our task of evangelization,we have to correct this kind of understanding and make people conscious of their own sins A good example is the parable of the prodigal Son and in this case,we have to preach the a loving,forgiving and compassionate God However,not all suffering is brought by personal sin.

OTHER PEOPLE CAN BRING SUFFERING

Even in the area of sin,there is solidarity. My people sometimes instead of blaming other human beings for their sufferings,start saying that God has cursed them. In many African Countries,people starve because corrupt politicians take the rice supplies and sell them over the border for hard currency.³¹

When I make an evaluation of the socio-Economic and Political situation of my people,then it becomes clearer how suffering is inflicted on innocent people by a few selfish individuals or groups of people. This situation is evident in such aspects as:

- Migration from rural areas to the cities
- Non existent transport system
- Deforestation
- Political instability

³⁰ Gutiérrez Gustavo,On Job, Maryknoll, NewYork, 1988, p.35

³¹ Gifford. P, Christianity: To Save or Enslave. Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre of Eastern and Southern Africa(EDISESA) Harare, 1990,p 16.

- Military expenditures
- Wars
- Increased unemployment and poverty
- Bribery and Corruption etc.

In our preaching, we have to articulate the very essence of the Christian message, creating in us and in all God's people a deep awareness of its true meaning and of its urgent demands. The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of Man first even in his present existence in this World.³²

To my people and all the suffering people, Jesus the liberator is the master who brings about a new beginning, the acceptable time and the year of favour. In this respect, Jesus is to be preached assuring solidarity with all those who suffer. We should preach his commitment to follow the rule of God by refusing to accept as right sinful structures that bring suffering to other people. Ourselves, we should take up our prophetic role in society to challenge and denounce all the injustices that people impose on the innocent ones.

THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

Throughout History, the cross has been seen as a mystery, an embarrassment, a scandal, a big question mark and a sign of contradiction. A great paradox of human history is Jesus' "Innocent death". What is especially important in Jesus' death is not just that he died, but that he died as an innocent victim. An adapted African Christian name for Jesus Christ is "sufferer without fault". He was oppressed and was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

We read in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that the servant will be exalted after being crushed and having suffered in a way which is no longer human. Our sufferings and sorrows he carried. He was crushed for our faults and his wounds brought healing for us. We had gone astray like sheep and so Yahweh loaded on him our sins.

In the New Testament, the suffering of Christ is presented in the same way as a vicarious suffering necessary for effecting man's redemption. A Christian in turn as a redeemed member of Christ's

³² Schrieter J Robert, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll New York, 1994, p. 161.

mystical body must share in his lord's suffering,if he wishes to participate in his Glory. As we shall see below,many have already understood this aspect of suffering. In the suffering of Jesus,suffering found its full meaning. Christ did not suffer for suffering's sake,indeed he was distressed at the thought of it(Jn12:27),he prayed that it may pass away(Lk.22:42)and felt it acutely on the cross(Mt 27:46). Yet he accepted it voluntarily out of love for his Father and Friends(Jn.14:31).

After reflecting on the Suffering of Christ,then we can somehow try to understand the question raised by the Biblical Job. How are we to acknowledge that God makes us a free gift of love and justice when we have before us the sufferings of the innocent. Which words are we to use in telling those who are not even regarded as persons because of misery and suffering that they are daughters and sons of God. Are we being sincere and realistic?

Jesus however sheds some further light on this question when asked in the case of the man born blind. Jesus explained that it was neither the man nor his parents who had sinned but that kind of suffering has a different origin and serves a different goal(Jn.9:11).Also another clear instance was the illness of Lazarus. Jesus foretold that this sickness will end not in death but in God's glory and through it the son of man will be glorified(Jn 11:4). Later on when Jesus found Lazarus dead,he demonstrated profound solidarity with the suffering,he was so touched,that the evangelist writes,"Jesus wept"(Jn 11:35). It is the mystery of Christ that sheds light on the sufferings of many people.

SUFFERING FOR OTHERS

Positively,suffering stimulates love and compassion in a deeper manner. I have witnessed many of my people sacrificing much and suffering much for those they love. These include mothers overworking and going hungry,liberation fighters,parent's for their children's school fees.

The best example was Raphael who according to me had understood the message of Christ's suffering. Raphael was in a motor boat that is used as transport means on Lake George near my home in Uganda. One morning Raphael and other passengers were on this boat when a strong wind made it capsize. Raphael Knowing how to swim,risked his life in saving the lives of people who were drowning at that moment. He managed to save the lives of three people and when he was

trying to save the fourth one, he also drowned and died. To me, Raphael is a great testimony for myself, for the Christians in my area and indeed for all people. Another example is the one of a headmaster of a school called Alex Barigye. This was in 1979 in Uganda during the war against dictator Amin Dada. The soldiers came to his school and wanted to rape the girls. He stood at the door and said that unless they first killed him, they would not touch the girls. They beat him up and tortured him but they did not manage to touch the girls. In this respect suffering has got a positive value for us Christians. Suffering becomes redemptive for oneself and for others. According to Frances Young, there could be no courage without suffering or the risk of it. Pain is a good thing since its fundamental purpose is to act as a warning sign so that preventive action can be taken before damage is done. Both pain and suffering have an important role to play in the overall purpose of life, he argues. The role is to produce free and mature persons. Overcoming obstacles is the only way to foster moral qualities of the highest order.³³ Suffering stimulates love on the personal level and compassion of a deeper quality. With this understanding, God is not the source of evil yet permits suffering as a factor in the learning process, for discipline. There is a good deal of wisdom in this understanding.

STRUGGLE AGAINST SUFFERING

Reading the Book of Job and getting in touch with the Batagwenda's understanding of suffering, one can come up with a picture of a God who takes pleasure in the sufferings of humanity. But this is not the God that Jesus has revealed to us. Jesus as he revealed the Father was never heard to say to the sick "offer your sufferings up as sacrifice" but he cured them and made them happy.

The God of Jesus seems to have been radically different. He wanted action to be taken to reduce and bring to an end many of the physical, psychological, moral ills and sufferings of humanity. He wants a relentless struggle against the dehumanising situations. Jesus worked himself to death for the liberation of his needy brothers and sisters. Our God wants us to be as happy as possible on our

³³ Young Frances, "Suffering" In *New Dictionary Of Christian Theology*, p.556.

earth's pilgrimage. Our God gave his only begotten son because he loved humanity and this gave us the chance to share the son's exaltation, which is eternal life. Jesus stands as the clear example of innocent suffering, however, we see Jesus ushering in a new revolutionary attitude towards suffering. He saw bodily illness as bondage (Lk. 13:16) and he cured so many people so as to set them free. He valued the excellence of a healthy body and the freedom of the person to the extent of teaching that the Sabbath was made for human beings and not vice-versa (Mk. 2:27). Like the Hebrews, Jesus knew that some bodily illnesses were caused by evil spirits. Such was the case of the epileptic demoniac boy (Lk. 9:42) or the crippled woman who was healed on a Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-13).

So efforts to fight suffering seem to be in line with God's redeeming purpose. In this case, Christ becomes the main liberating force of humanity in all aspects of life. We should help people to join in this struggle of fighting suffering. The suffering brought by evil spirits is also to be fought. Christ is superior to all spiritual beings and as Christians we do share in the divinity of Christ because of the union we have with what Christ is and does. Christ has triumphed over the spirits especially the evil spirits and paraded them as his captives.

4 UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE

Understanding how the Batagwenda look upon life can also help us in our mission of evangelization. According to them God is the supreme being and is the source of all vital force that he can extend to other spiritual beings. The people believe that both supernatural power and life do come from God. The Batagwenda consider life under a twofold aspect. The earthly life and life after death which is without end. Unlike Job, the Batagwenda and indeed many groups of people in Africa believe in a life hereafter.

The people want to live with their Ancestors and relatives who died before them. For in this consists fullness of life and man's happiness to be among his own folk even after death. However the earthly existence should be pleasing to God and the Ancestors. Since this is their understanding of life, we do not need to condemn any aspect of it for it is similar to the understanding we read in the New Testament. We have the natural life and the eternal life. (Jn. 8:51-53, 11:21-26). Since life is one of the main values of people so the main aspect of our preaching

should be in enhancing and promoting life. In that manner, we shall strengthen an African Christianity.

DENUNCIATION OF ALL THAT IS AGAINST LIFE

The Christians in Africa are searching for a Church that will rediscover its evangelical identity by fighting all that is against life. For sure, Religion should be more than going to church. The Church should present herself as having a prophetic mission. The church and indeed all Christians should have a great concern for justice. The church should be together with people and inspire them in their struggle for liberation from all forms of sufferings.

I strongly believe that people were created to be happy in this world but it is shocking to find the majority of people living in misery. It should be the duty of every Christian to contribute to the wellbeing of every person. Let us rediscover our prophetic role so that we can denounce all the injustices against the life of our fellow humans.

RECOVER THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING

Healing is central to the African world view. It includes restoration of the broken, physically, psychologically and spiritually. It means a return to wholeness. It includes inner healing and rebuilding broken relationships. The process incorporates also holistic ideas of God, the spiritual world and the ancestors.

A look at the Gospel clearly reveals that healing was often at the centre of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus Christ's mandate to the first disciples was very clear: "preach and heal" (Lk. 9:2). Yet many in the Catholic church have often been afraid of the second part of the mandate regarding healing and casting out devils. The healing ministry as exemplified in Jesus' ministry has been lost in many modern expressions of Christianity. Our efforts should concentrate on rediscovering this great gift. We can start by having regular masses of anointing, laying on of hands on suffering

people, sprinkling of holy water etc. The Sacrament of healing can become real to the people and they can surely experience Jesus healing them.

CONCLUSION

Through this our survey and reflection on the question of suffering in relationship to our mission of evangelization, we have gained insight into this question that continues to disturb the minds of many people.

In the preliminary part, we have confronted the question of suffering by Job. Job finds the doctrine of temporal retribution limited because it does not take into account his own experience or the experience of many others. However, although the Book of Job has helped us to reflect on the question of suffering, it does not give us a rational or definitive explanation of suffering. The Poet is quite aware that the subject is complex, and his faith prompts him to inquire into the possibility of finding an appropriate language about God that does justice to the situation of suffering. In the Book of Job, Sin does not seem to be the cause of suffering, therefore, there must be other causes of suffering as well as purposes and meanings.

In the third Chapter we find that the Batagwenda are also struggling with the same universal question of suffering. We discovered that the causes are sought outside, in other people and in the world of the spirits. This approach does not seem to do justice to the question of suffering. In the Fourth chapter, we made an evaluation of Job's approach and the Batagwenda's approach to the same question of suffering. We were able to identify some limitations and some positive aspects.

In the last chapter, we have attempted to give new understanding and a new approach: an approach that would help the Batagwenda and even other Africans to face the challenges brought by all kinds of suffering and would help them to remain good practising Christians. The problem is that when the people are involved in situations of suffering, they easily lose their faith in God. I am hopeful with this understanding. People should be able to suffer and yet remain Christians. However, this does not mean that suffering is totally positive. We have got to join Christ as our

great liberator and saviour in the struggle against evil and suffering. The mission of preaching dictates that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence. Unless the Christian message of Love and Justice shows its effectiveness through action in the cause of justice in the world, it will only gain credibility with men of our times with difficulty.

My main desire is that Christ can feel at home in Africa. So that we can have African Christians who are proud of their faith even amidst difficult situations, that we should be able to be true Africans as well as true Christians and that our God-given dignity may always be respected.

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