

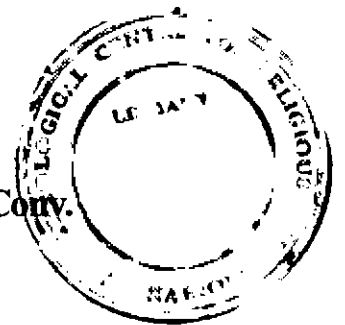
TANGAZA COLLEGE
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**JESUS CHRIST: EMPOWERMENT OF THE OPPRESSED
IN SEARCH FOR LIBERATION
Southern Sudan Perspective**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents **Habakuk Gbefe** and **Celina Misa** my first educators; and to **David Habakuk** and **Alice Sadoka** my source of encouragement.

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I thank God Almighty — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — for the love, grace and protection he bestowed on me during the preparation of this work.

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My sincere gratitude and prayers go to my communities (Congo and Kenya) for their spiritual, moral, and material support. I thank my Kenyan confreres for their linguistic support. I acknowledge the depth of the knowledge that Tangaza college offers.

I thank my brothers Richard, James, and Awadi for their advices and support; and my sisters Mary, Terezina, and Agnes for their love. I thank all those whose prayers sustains me. Your rewards will be great.

STUDENT DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this Long Essay is my original work achieved through my personal readings, scientific research method and critical reflection. It has never been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit. All sources have been quoted in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

Name of Student: *Dominic Juna Habatak, OSA*

Date: *11 February 2003*

This Long Essay has been Submitted for Examination with approval as the College Supervisor.

Name of Supervisor: 

Date: *11 Feb 2003*

ABBREVIATIONS

AMECEA:	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa
Cf.:	confer; compare
GS:	Gaudium et Spes
NIF:	National Islamic Front
RSV:	Revised Standard Version
SCDF:	Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith
SPLA:	Sudan People's Liberation Army

EPIGRAPH

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19) RSV.

General Introduction

The words "oppression-struggle-liberation-freedom" have become some of the much spoken words in our world, particularly in Sudan. They echo cries of despair of a people who yearn for freedom, justice and peace. However, God's promises of liberation — the exodus and the liberating acts of Yahweh which achieve their full meaning in Jesus Christ — are foundations of hope from which victims of oppression get their courage and strength to determinedly and efficiently work for liberation as the building of God's Kingdom.

Liberation, in this context, is a biblical language, that is, Yahweh who heard the groaning of his oppressed people in Egypt always hears and takes side with the oppressed of every age, space and race. He is a liberator, redeemer and savior who, with his mighty hand and in great love, brought his people Israel out of the house of bondage to prepare them for himself. Whenever they strayed from him and fell victim to oppression, Yahweh always freed them. Finally, Yahweh sent his only Son — the Messiah, liberator par excellence — to free humanity from all forms of evil. In these events dwells all hope for liberation. The Old and the New Testament are an account of God's liberating acts of love on behalf of the poor and the oppressed.

Liberation, as we approach it in this paper, treats the situation of a people oppressed because of religious affiliation, race and culture. It is a people for whom Jesus is the empowerment who inspires them to resist against evil, oppression and subjugation. The object of this paper is to treat the struggle for liberation of the

oppressed in Sudan. The choice of this topic is the fruit of a lived experience inspired by the Scripture and lectures of contemporary liberation theologians. Living in a racial, religious and socio-political context characterized by segregation, violence, oppression and exploitation, it comes automatically to reflect on God's intervention in the history of his oppressed people, and ask the question: why not us.

The first chapter treats the dignity of the human person as presented in Christian tradition and God's liberating acts in favor of the oppressed in the history of salvation which reaches its climax Jesus Christ's liberating activities and through the Church. We shall discuss how the powerful of this world distorted the Good News of liberation to justify, intensify, and support oppression, exploitation, greed, power, and various forms of evil.

The second chapter discusses briefly the dignity of human beings, together with the concepts of freedom, human rights, justice and equality according to the Islamic tradition. We shall also present — in bare facts — the relationship that the Holy Scriptures of Islam establish between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this context, we will stay in Sudan. The third chapter will briefly account the manner in which oppression and persecution is carried out. We shall, by opinions, suggestions and insights aim at facilitating and pacifying Muslim-Christian and non-Muslim relationships, that is, peaceful coexistence, tolerance and understanding between various religions in the Sudan.

The goal of this work is firstly to create awareness in those whose dignity and rights are trodden unjustly that they are precious in the sight of God because they are

created in his own image and likeness. This paper, in the light of the Christian Holy Scriptures, calls the oppressed to value their dignity, identity and divine status. Our aim is to raise hope in the oppressed that God will never abandon them for ever into the hands of oppression, persecution and exploitation. Jesus is their empowerment in the search for freedom, justice, and peace. Secondly, we need to raise awareness in believers of their identity as followers of Jesus Christ — the Price of peace — to consider their mission: peacemaking, nonviolence, and artisans of forgiveness and reconciliation. In other words, the Christians' military hardware for liberation is the gospel, the mind of Jesus (1Cor 2:16), belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, preaching the gospel of peace and love. The Christian shield is faith, their sword is the Spirit (Eph 6:10-18).

We want to remind Christians that we have no physical enemies except Satan. Therefore we are not to engage in fighting physically, but to wrestle spiritually with Satan in order to liberate ourselves, our brothers and sisters in whom he (Satan) dwells and acts. We have to fight against rulers of darkness, against spiritual wickedness and not a physical fight against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12; 2Cor 10:4). The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation and, above all, Love. His Love is more powerful than any other weapon. If we dwell in him and in his Love, we shall overcome the power of evil. Halleluiah.

CHAPTER I

APPROACH TO LIBERATION FROM BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

In the Old Testament Yahweh is known as the liberator of the oppressed, a God close to his people (Exodus). In Jesus God becomes one of us. He shares and experiences our weakness, sufferings, misery, and emotions. Touched by the enslaving conditions of sinners, captives, the oppressed and the poor, Jesus declares:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19) RSV.

After the solemn declaration of liberation — proclaiming freedom for captives and liberty for the oppressed — Jesus concretises it (Lk 7:20-22), for the time had come for the kingdom *here and now*. John Paul II in his address on liberation theology to Latin American bishops at the conference in Puebla, 1979, has this to say:

Liberation is certainly a reality of faith, one of the fundamental biblical themes, which are a deep part of Christ's salvific mission, of the work of redemption, of his teaching. This subject has never ceased to constitute the content of the spiritual message of Christians.¹

¹As found in J.V. SCHALL *Liberation Theology*, 104.

The massive poverty and oppression that afflict humankind cannot leave the Christian conscience indifferent.² Thus, those who talk of liberation or engage in its process fall victim of oppression or at least witness pervasive human suffering. In the same way, as liberation theology was born out of the suffering of the poor and the oppressed, our liberation thought sprung as well from an experience of oppression, exploitation and injustice in the Sudan. An attempt to examine the situation will be made in the next chapter. In this chapter, we address God's plan for the salvation of humanity and his liberating activities in history in favour of the oppressed. In the light of the Christian Scriptures, we shall discuss the human being's divine status. We shall draw attention to the distortion of the message of liberation that once occurred in history.

Our aim is to make the oppressed aware that suffering and misery are not pre-established realities as claimed by traditional theology, but evils for which Jesus came to liberate humanity. We need to awaken those whose person-hood is unjustly denied and who are considered subhuman because of their race, culture and religion. We need to proclaim the *already* of the kingdom, though *not-yet* fulfilled. Liberation theology is one of the means for realising that project.

1. Liberation Theology

Liberation means freedom from that which oppresses, enslaves, dominates, and exploits spiritually and materially. Liberation implies freedom from bondage to build

²*Libertatis Conscientia*, n. 57.

the kingdom. In brief, "liberation is about freedom. It means freedom from dependence of many kinds. It means freedom for a new and more fulfilling way of life".²

Liberation theology is a social and theological movement responsive to massive oppression and poverty which are the result of subjugation, oppression and socio-economic repression. This theology is inspired by the exodus experience, the prophetic call for justice and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.³ Its aim is to attain integral liberation through struggle against unjust social structures in order to establish a new order. According to Gutierrez — the father of liberation theology — it is "an effort to cut the very roots of injustice rampant in the part of our world".⁴ He is best fit to help us understand liberation theology more deeply. Struck by unjust social structure that affected the poor and the oppressed — which contemporary theology declined to attack — Gutierrez felt a need for a change and for a new interpretation of the Scriptures from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. Liberation theology came to be born.

1.1 Orthopraxis and orthodox

In its approach to the Scripture, liberation theology is not limited to theory, but stresses that the Gospel should touch every aspect of people's daily life. It accords primacy to liberation praxis, though theoretical framework may guide the liberation process. Hence, "theology should reflect in and on liberating praxis".⁵ In addition, liberation theology challenges the overemphasis of the other-world aspect of faith which

²D. CAROLL, *What is Liberation Theology?*, 31.

³G. O'COLLINS – E.G. FARRUGIA, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 124.

⁴G. GUTIERREZ, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 144.

⁵G. GUTIERREZ cited, J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologians*, 170.

devaluates life in this world. It challenges spiritual reductionism that reduces "Christianity to a private spiritualised relationship with God" which can lead to neglect of social dimensions.⁶ Finally it presents sin and salvation with both its individual and social dimensions. Gutierrez stresses that, salvation is not only about a human soul going to heaven, but an inner-world power, unleashed by Jesus Christ, that transforms and guides the whole unified historical process: natural and supernatural. Human beings have the task of bringing this whole historical process to fulfilment.⁷

1.2 Jesus in liberation theology

Jesus is the liberator who came to bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and identify himself with the needy (Mt 25:31-46). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus liberated us from "sin and all the injustice and exploitation it breeds".⁸ He is therefore the liberator of the captives, defender of the poor and the oppressed, and the empowerment of those struggling for freedom, justice and peace.

Liberation theology considers oppression and material poverty as a subhuman condition resulting from injustice. It must be overcome.⁹ In brief, liberation theology seeks to humanize social structures, human relationships, and the earth. Putting the emphasis on praxis, on the social dimension of life, and on the here and now, liberation theology does not neglect orthodoxy, the individual, nor the other-world aspect of life. It simply worries about a biased spirituality that substitutes present needs with promises of

⁶G. Gutierrez cited, J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologians*, 171.

⁷G. Gutierrez cited, J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologians*, 172.

⁸G. Gutierrez cited, J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologians*, 173.

⁹G. Gutierrez cited, J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologians*, 174.

eternal life. Liberation theology is concerned about political and historical liberation, and liberation from sin. It is not interested in questions such as transubstantiation, the hypostatic union or the divinity of Jesus. It seeks to transform a sinful situation rather than trying to understand concepts.

1.3 Liberation and theology

"Theology is language about God. Christian theology is language about God's liberating activity in the world in the behalf of the freedom of the oppressed [...], for the word Christian connects theology inseparably to God's will to set the captives free".¹⁰ Liberation theology challenges realities that go contrary to the Gospel. It advocates Christian participation in history in order to promote the growth of the kingdom: love, justice, freedom and human dignity. It defends the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

In this context, liberation theology proclaims a Gospel of hope that encourages the oppressed to struggle for liberation. It proclaims the Gospel that raises awareness in the oppressed of their divine nature, dignity, and freedom. This awareness empowers the poor and the oppressed to take up their struggle for liberation, to struggle against evil, and then engage in praxis to heal the wound caused.

Our approach to liberation theology stresses in the first place liberation from social situations that promote oppression, exploitation, and marginalization that force many to live inhumanely. Then, it stresses liberation from fatalism and finally, liberation from sin. Though last in sequence, "liberation from sin gets to the very source of the

¹⁰J. H. CONE, *Speaking the Truth*, 4.

social injustice and other forms of human oppression".¹¹ Our approach is not foreign to the Christian tradition. Rather, it is the heart of the Scripture, a mandate to the Church "to proclaim an integral liberation, because nothing is left untouched by the saving work of Christ."¹² Liberation theology addresses historical oppression which is nothing but sin. In his writings, Gutierrez rightly describes sin as a type of fracture in our friendship with God and others: a human, social, and historical reality that alienates the divine image and likeness.

To sum up, liberation theology strives to recover the historical dimension of salvation such that, by God's grace, human beings may get involved in transforming the society. The transformation of the society is an aspect of the kingdom of God.

2. Foundation of human dignity and freedom

2.1 Human being: Image and likeness of God

God created human beings in his own image and likeness (Gn 1:26-27). Man and woman reflect God's splendor and glory and are the only creatures with whom God can dialogue as counterpart. Man is endowed with divinity (Ps 8:5), dignity and freedom, and is God's steward. As God's steward, a human being is mandated to rule as God's representative. Moltmann speaks of human being as a mirror-reflection of God himself, as God's proxy, and as God's own image that he created for himself. Therefore,

¹¹G. GUSTAVO, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxxviii .

¹²J.B. NICKLOFF, *Gustavo Gutierrez Essential Writings*, 261.

human being must be respected, feared and worshiped as God's image because *Gloria Dei est homo*.¹³

Furthermore, human beings are endowed with divine faculties that allow them to transcend themselves. Their transcendence and responsibility permit them to shape and control nature according to the divine mandate: "subdue the earth." Macquarie would say, "[M]an is a coworker with God in creation, a guardian of Being to whom has been entrusted the capacity to let-be".¹⁴ This status establishes man's dignity, freedom and responsibility.

2.2 Divine duties and rights

Created in the image and likeness of God, every human being has duties and rights. They have to reflect the image of God and build the kingdom. That is the purpose for which God resolved to share divine attributes with human beings so that they may understand God's will and project of liberation. This mission as well constitutes the foundation of human dignity, honor, and glory. Therefore, man and woman must be respected as holders of the divine image and likeness in the world. Oppressing human beings dishonors the Creator, for a man who sneers at the poor insults his Maker [Prov 17:5]. When human beings are enslaved, oppressed or dominated, they fail to play the assigned role as representative and coworker with God. They are reduced to animal status, for "when people suffer oppression, they lose their

¹³Cf., J. MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation*, 220-221.

¹⁴J. MACQUARRIE, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 61.

human dignity and are reduced to animal existence. Instead of enjoying the freedom that God intended for them as God's image bearers (Gen 1:27), others lord it on them".¹⁶

3. Biblical foundation of Liberation

Our purpose is to trace the roots of liberation in the Old and New Testament. Our reflection will find its climax in the New Testament focusing on Jesus as empowerment of the oppressed struggling for justice, freedom, and dignity and who encourages people to resist evil.

3.1 The oppressed: chosen of Yahweh

God's action in history had been a liberating activity of the oppressed from all evil that enslaved them. God revealed himself not only as liberator of human beings from sin, but also as a "political God, the protector of the poor and the establisher of the right of those who are oppressed".¹⁷ He saved his people and called them into a free and liberated existence, destroying the power that enslaved them (Ex. 6:6).

3.2 The Exodus experience: model of liberation

Israel experienced God's love, care, and mercy through the experience of numerous sufferings, difficulties, bondage and exploitation inflicted on them by foreign rulers as well as by their own leaders.

¹⁶J. H. CONE, *God of the Oppressed*, 10.

¹⁷J. H. CONE, *God of the Oppressed*, 57.

3.2.1 *Historical liberation*

The exodus experience is a history of God's liberating activities of the oppressed from bondage. God's initial actions of liberation were temporal. We see God exhorting the oppressors to let his people go so that they may serve him [Ex 5:1ff]. In Babylon the Jews refuse to sing to God in a strange land. It is what Gustavo appropriately means by saying: "How can we sing to God in a continent, in a country, of oppression and repression".¹⁷ Yahweh vowed to set his people free from the fear of every foe that we might serve him all our days, in goodness, love and peace (Lk 1:73-75). Thus, liberation from temporal bondage created freedom and opportunity for God's people to serve him. "Where anti-God forces in any form dominate and oppress God's children, God's rule cannot be real [...], for God does not rule where there is slavery, injustice, hatred, oppression".¹⁸

3.2.2 *Spiritual liberation*

After liberation from temporal enslavement, God educated his people, cleansed them, and exhort them to reject idols (sin) and serve him. However, the two bondage are intertwined. Once a human being is liberated from slavery of sin, he/she is liberated as well from enslaving, oppressing, and exploiting others. Sin is no more than oppression, exploitation, domination, for "different kinds of slavery in the cultural, economic, social, and political spheres derive ultimately from sin".¹⁹ The exodus is an experience

¹⁷G. GUSTAVO, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 22.

¹⁸J. L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 23.

¹⁹*Libertatis Nuntius*, II.2.

of oppression, struggle and liberation. In this experience we find that oppression and domination breaks man's relationship with God, degrade the former, ruin his dignity, and dishonors the divine image. For that reason, God intervenes to free his people (Ex 3:7-10).

3.2.3 *Liberation in the promised land*

God's concern for the oppressed did not cease with his wrath against the foreign oppressors. His wrath blazed against those who, after being liberated, turned to oppress their own people. After setting Israel free from Egyptian bondage, God strongly warned her not to oppress the poor and the destitute (Ex 22:21-24). Through the prophets God reminded the rulers of Israel to care for the poor and the destitute (Amos 4:2; 8:4). To those who oppressed the poor the Lord swore by his holiness that their time was coming. "Do not remove the ancient boundary stone or encroach on the land of orphans; they have a powerful guardian who will take their case against you [Prov 23:10-11]" RSV. God defends the poor against the rich, the weak against the strong: He threatened and swore to inflict severe punishment on those who would persist [Hos 13: 7-8].

When the people failed to heed Yahweh, he rejected them and submitted them to oppression [1Kg 11:39; 2Kg 17:20; Amos 6:14]. For this reason, Cone argues that, "if theology does not side with the poor, then it cannot speak for Yahweh who is the God of the oppressed... any other side is unbiblical".²⁰

²⁰J. H. CONE, *God of the Oppressed*, 65.

4. New Testament liberation

In the New Testament, Yahweh continues his work of liberation, in the person of Jesus. The "finger of God" that set Israel free is at labor in Jesus for the concluding battle against all forms of evil. God comes to liberate human being, to visit humankind and shares its suffering in the person of the Messiah. He is the One who will bring justice to all nations [Is 42:1]. His mission is to establish justice through suffering, a mission that starts with the struggle and conquering of Satan, the evil one. Therefore, "freedom for the oppressed can come about only by overcoming the forces of evil in this world".²¹ That is why Jesus stands in solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle against evil. He rejects political Messianism that would separate him from the suffering of those to whom he announces the Good News of liberation [Lk 4:18-19].

The Good News is that, God in Christ comes to the weak, the outcast, and the helpless, and becomes one with them, taking their condition of oppression as his own and thus transforming their slave existence into a liberating existence.²² It is the establishment of a new order in which reign love, justice, freedom and peace. This Good News was distorted by the power of this world in order to maintain the *status quo*.

²¹J. H. CONE., *God of the Oppressed*, 70.

²²Cf. J. H. CONE., *God of the Oppressed*, 76-77.

4.1 Traditional theology in wrong hands

The powerful and the rich of this world distorted and obscured the Good News of liberation in order to secure their interests. The church appeared to have lapsed slightly into the system. McAfee writes: during that period, "the church, in complicity with the ruling and corrupt powers, was on the side of injustice".²³ We shall expose in five points the teaching of traditional theology as it was manipulated by the powerful and the rich. Then we shall understand how it played major role in justifying exploitation and injustice.

a) Doctrine of God.

Traditional theology spoke about God as the ineffable, the immutable and the impassible. The powerful and rich, threaten by change, interpreted history as changelessness in order to maintain their social standing that was threatened by a new order.²⁴ For liberation theologians, that ineffable and immutable image of God fabricated by the powerful was merely "an idol of changelessness developed by those who are threatened by change, because the present order works in their favor".²⁵ We cannot reject the concept of newness in God and proclaim incarnation as the furthest depth of new divine self-revelation, as God taking human condition. God inaugurates a new era in which he is actively involved with the humiliated in their struggle. It is a new order.

²³R.B. MCAFEE *Gustavo Gutierrez*, 6.

²⁴Cf., J.L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 20-24

²⁵J.L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 24.

b) Doctrine of humility

According to the church's teaching, God is best served by our self-abasement and humility is held for the greatest value while pride was the root of sin. With this teaching the malicious asked the oppressed and the exploited to remain humble and patient like Jesus who, though condemned unjustly, accepted his allotted fate and was therefore led like a sheep to the slaughter. Like a lamb he was silent and opened not his mouth, though he was deprived of justice (Acts 8:32-33). This proclamation made many to believe that God wills some people to be borne slaves, inferior and poor while others, masters, superiors and rich. Nothing can be done about it.²⁶

As we discussed above, if the human being is the apex of creation (Ps 8) made after the divine image, and through whom God is exalted, humility that reduces him/her to slavery, to inferiority and to subhuman or non-person status is sinful. As theology fell into the wrong hands, it promoted the virtue of humility particularly to make the oppressed and exploited "stay in their place and refuse to claim their rightful status in human societies as children and heir of God".²⁷ Its influence never ceases to exist.

c) Doctrine of sin

Sin appeared to be restricted to individual misconduct such as adultery, envy, and stealing.²⁸ Sins that hurt the community were veiled namely, sins of social injustice mentioned in the bible for which Yahweh woes the perpetrators for decreeing iniquitous

²⁶Cf., J.L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 19-24.

²⁷J. L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 23.

²⁸Cf., J.L. GONZALEZ – C.G. GONZALEZ, *Liberation Preaching*, 23.

decrees, for persisting in writing oppression and turning aside the needy from justice, robbing the poor of their right, making widows their spoil, and the featherless their prey (Is 10:1-4; Mic 2:2).

d) Doctrine of eschatology

The futuristic character of salvation was emphasized to the extent that the present world was devalued and viewed pessimistically. The kingdom being restricted to a place in the afterlife, hope for its realization within history was absent. It was stressed that the world would be good and free only in the afterlife. Salvation was an affair of individual life after death or of an individual soul going to heaven. Individuals were asked to suffer, to be humble, and accepting in order to secure for themselves eternal life in heaven where all shall sit under God's vine and his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid (Mic 4:4). Worldly life was ephemeral and human beings were mere pilgrims here on earth.²⁹

Liberation theologians disavow this position and recover the Good News by declaring that the kingdom of God is not only the life in the hereafter; "the reign of God has already begun, here on earth, and is being built right now, by the grace of God and the efforts of people."³⁰ It is the transformation of this world into a new order in accordance with God's will. The transformation needs human active participation sustained by God's grace. The kingdom cannot be narrowed to a particular aspect, time, or place. The kingdom is already among you, here and now (Lk 17:12). How could

²⁹L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, 107.

³⁰L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, 118.

Jesus teach his disciples to pray for the establishment of the kingdom on earth (Lk 11:2), if it had nothing to do with this world. Jesus would not have made these statements: before this generation passes away all these things will have taken place (Mk 13:30), and some standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom come with power (Mk 9:1). To make this come true, the project of salvation and of the kingdom must be initiated in this world and its apex will be celebrated in heaven. In his encyclical "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*", Paul VI stresses that transcendent eschatological salvation has its beginning in this life but it will be fulfilled in eternity only. He urges the Church to strive to initiate a Christian struggle for liberation into the universal plan of salvation that she announces.³¹

e) *Doctrine of the cross*

The message of the cross emphasized that Jesus gave himself uncomplainingly into the greatest suffering because it was a divine will or decree. He never challenged his oppressors. He did this in utter trust and love and hence secured paradise for ever. Therefore, people have to accept oppression, misery, and exploitation uncomplainingly as a divinely assigned role. Enduring the suffering that flows from them will secure us eternal joy, peace, and redemption in heaven.³²

Moltmann is quite right as he affirms that the cross (suffering) is our Christian identity which cannot be removed. Ulrich Hedenger is not wrong either by describing suffering as an evil not to be accepted, but to be combated. The point is that suffering

³¹PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 9.27.38.

³²Cf., B. R. MCAFEE, *Gustavo Gutierrez*, 5.

must be salvific, thus justifying and legitimizing oppression and exploitation by the passion of the Lord is diabolic. Suffering for the sake of suffering should be kept at immeasurable distance from God, for it is evil and inhuman.³³

According to Boff, God assumes the cross by love in order to be in solidarity with, and in defense of those who suffer. His cross is worthy because his suffering and death was the result of his commitment to the cause of the wronged. Suffering, Boff insists, in battle against suffering is worthy, is rewarding, is endowed with dignity, and is profoundly liberating. Suffering as an end in itself is meaningless.³⁴ If prophets suffered persecution and death, it was because they were committed to defend the cause of the oppressed and the exploited. Therefore, the oppressed must reject submission to a blind fatality wherein God wills them to suffer, to be slaves, and to endure poverty as means of securing eternal life in heaven.

If we evoked the teachings of traditional theology, it is because we are concerned about the danger its distorted interpretations pose to the victims of evil. If God's liberating activity in history inspires us to combat suffering and work for liberation, suffering can only be an evil. Jesus' cross was the consequence of his liberation teachings. The way the Good News was interpreted aimed at silencing the exploited and oppressed, keeping them docile and quelling revolutionary spirit in them.

³³J. Moltmann, and U. Hadanger cited, L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, 106.

³⁴Cf., L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, 115-121.

5. Impact of traditional theology

In summation, we discussed how traditional theology in wrong hands served in justifying injustice, oppression, exploitation, and racism; and consequently it encouraged resignation, pessimism, fatalism, and the passive suffering of the innocent. Such an interpretation ignored Jesus as the active agent of liberation who struggled with evil. It failed to acknowledge *Gloria Dei est Homo*: human being as the summit of Creation, heir of the kingdom, child of God, bearer of divine image in whom God's glory dwells.

This theological approach left an influence on Christianity that we cannot naively dismiss as extinct. Thus, we need to recover God as defender of the weak, liberator of the oppressed, and author of human integral liberation. The Gospel does not restrict its liberation to spiritual salvation alone. It is interested in people's material condition. We cannot do justice to the Gospel if we project both the *already* and the *not-yet* of the kingdom to the other world. In his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI rightly emphasized that the Church is neither willing to restrict her mission to a simple temporal project, nor is she willing to reduce it only to the religious dimension and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems (n. 34, 35).

6. *Modern church and liberation preaching*

Deeply touched by the suffering of the oppressed, the poor, and the exploited, in a prayer-like statement, James Cone has this to say:

Let the Church rediscover and identify itself with groups of people that suffer because of unjust situations, and who have no way of making themselves heard, the Church should be the voice of those who have no one. [...] Here is the modern way of the Cross, the way of Christian responsibility.³⁵

Indeed, the Church has been working and continues to work for human integral liberation. She declares: "the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of freedom and a force for liberation".³⁶ Yesterday, the Church attended to the need of victims of evil mostly by providing charitable acts. Today she comes to understand progressively that providing charitable acts for the victims while they remain in an oppressive and exploitative system is not enough. Hence, the Church addresses the root cause of problems by defending the dignity of human beings "ridiculed and scorned in the midst of a variety of different oppressions: cultural, political, racial, social and economic".³⁷ She creates awareness in the people of their divine nature, of their dignity and freedom. If people are awakened, no one is called to accept enduring passively any kind of enslavement.

a) *Freedom for God and for others*

We do not take for granted that once liberation from unjust and oppressive social structure occurs, the human being is automatically for God and at the service of the

³⁵J. H. CONE -- G.S. WILMORE, *Black Theology A Documentary History*, 79.

³⁶*Libertatis Nuntius*, 3.

³⁷*Libertatis Nuntius*, 5.

kingdom. After temporal liberation, the formerly oppressed may assume the role of oppressor. This is not liberation. Liberation implies freedom for the oppressed and for the oppressor -- annihilation of oppression -- , the establishment of the kingdom of love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and the search for the good for both. For this reason, liberation from sin is of capital importance, for in sin are rooted vengeance, hatred, and various forms of evil

Conclusion

In the light of the Christian Scriptures, we mentioned that human dignity and freedom are rooted in the divine image and likeness. We mentioned also the important role that the Creator assigns to human beings as his own image and likeness: co-creator. For this reason, oppressing, exploiting, and enslaving a human being is an offense to the Creator. It is for this reason that God never ceases to defend the cause of the humiliated and the oppressed. Despite the broader recognition of this divinely assigned status, human beings continue oppressing neighbors. The point to discuss in this context is the Muslim and non-Muslim relationship in Sudan.

The problems which lie ahead concern the difficulty of using Christian tradition to tackle issues in pluralistic and conflicted religious and racial settings. Worse yet, the relationship between Muslims and Christians is a strained one in Sudan. Since we have no common source of liberation, on what grounds shall we talk of liberation? However, this difficulty must not penalize our reflection or hamper the struggle for liberation. Jesus remains the empowerment and liberator of the oppressed. If Jesus is with us, who is against us. If Jesus sets us free, we shall indeed be free (Jn 8:36), for all are called to be free (Gal 5:13).

CHAPTER II

LIBERATION: ASPIRATION OF THE POWERLESS AMIDST OPPRESSION – CASE OF SOUTH SUDAN

Introduction

This chapter deals with coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in southern Sudan. This coexistence has never been peaceful. The AMECEA delegation to Sudan, after a sustained investigation, observed and declared that "the refusal of the International Community to allow the South to separate from the North is futile. The facts on the ground have proved that the two cannot co-exist".¹ This means that the two communities suffer enormous difficulties to accommodate one another. This chapter is therefore an attempt to grasp the root-cause of the problem.

¹P. T. Too, "United with Sudan a Suffering Church", 147.

Being a Christian-Muslim matter, we shall present a brief Islamic concept of human being and discuss the principle of liberation, of human dignity, justice, freedom and equality. To unveil the root cause of the oppression, we shall discuss Sudan's major Muslim trends by analysing the historical development of Islam in the Sudan. At this point we can assess the existential reality of oppression and reflect on the possibility of a liberation process and praxis for the powerless and oppressed of that land.

1. Notion of Human being in Islam: vicegerent of Allah ²

For Muslims "Islam means total submission to the commands and will of Allah, who is the only true God."³ In another development, "Islam means to live a fully human and balanced life in perfect harmony with God, all other human beings and the whole of creation".⁴ Called to live in harmony with Allah, Allah has passed on some of his knowledge to man so that we can tend Allah's design to fulfillment. This liability gives an extraordinarily high dignity to every man and woman within Allah's plan. Human being must make sure that everything is executing its appropriate role in the plan of Allah.⁵ Hence, every human being is Allah's caliph, "a vicegerent of Allah on earth who must be treated as an end in himself and never merely as a means since he is the cream of Creation".⁶

²The data available to me focuses more on history. Rafiq asserts that, instead of highlighting Islamic theology and the religious quality a leader should have, Sunni *Ulamá* have ever stressed worldly qualities such as military prowess, administrative expertise, political acumen, the capacity to expand the domination of Islam and the ability to protect the lives and properties of Muslims. R. ZAKARIA, *The Struggle within Islam*, 62.

³B.D. KATEREGGA – D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity*, 1.

⁴C.T.R. HEWER, *The essentials of Islams*, 15.

⁵C.T.R. HEWER *The essentials of Islams*, 15

⁶D.A. RAHMAN, *Shari'a: the Islamic law*, 8.

Being Allah's representative, man must be respected, his freedom from all enslavement must be guaranteed, for "every man is born free from subjugation, sin, inherited inferiority [...], his right to freedom is sacred".⁷ Man is entitled to exercise his freedom of conscience, belief and worship without hindrance, for there is no compulsion in religion (Koran 2:256). Truth is from the Lord, let him who will, believe in it, and let him who will, disbelieve or deny it (18:29).

Every man enjoys equality, because "all men are created by one and the same eternal God, the Supreme Lord of all, just and kind to all his creatures, impartial to any race, age, or religion".⁸ The Prophet emphasized that "the Arab has no superiority over the non Arab and the non Arab has no superiority over the Arab. All are children of Adam".⁹ Within this framework of the Islamic concept of freedom, dignity and equality, no room is left for racial and religious superiority or persecution. However, since human being must make sure that everything is executing its appropriate role in the plan of Allah, *believers* (Muslims) must compel *infidels* (non-Muslims) to carry out their proper part in Allah's design.

1.1 Lot of infidels in Muslim Land

When one reads the Koran thoroughly, one realizes that, Muslims who advocate, defend, and promote equality, tolerance, freedom and justice for all people regardless of race, color and religion are liberals. Their actions stem from their own sense of humanity, good conscience and honest mind. In the light of the Koran and Hadith

⁷H. ABDALATI, *Islam in Focus*, 34.

⁸H. ABDALATI, *Islam in Focus*, 35

⁹J. RENARD, *In the Footsteps of Muhammad*, 72.

(Muslim tradition) liberals have very few cases to defend. For this reason, it is difficult to demonstrate at length a uniform theology of human being because the orthodox say one thing and the liberals say another.

Indeed, Islam has a praiseworthy theology of human being, and beautiful notions of justice, freedom, equality, tolerance, and human dignity. Unfortunately, for extremists, exclusively members of *Dar El Islam* (house of Islam) are qualified to be Allah's caliphs, cream of creation, born free, enjoy equality and have sacred right to freedom.¹⁰ Members of *Dar El Harb* are *unbelievers*. Allah hates unbelievers intensely (3:32; 2:190). They have no qualification to be Allah's vicegerent, cream of creation... He created them and predestined them for Hell. So believers must not befriend them,¹¹ but must force until they believe or face destruction. Here arises the question of two distinct human families: *Dar El Islam* (house of Islam) and *Dar El Harb* (house of non-Islam or war). Belonging to *Dar El Harb* is *ipso facto* being an enemy of Islam. A member of *Dar El Harb* is not suppose to enjoy the peace, friendship, privileges, or protection of *Dar El Islam*, unless the former accepts domination: status of *dhimmi* (second class citizen).¹² Consequently, we were at pains to provide evidence to unbelievers that, despite the Muslim stand against them, yet they belong to Allah.

Fortunately, the stand taken by liberals Muslim theologians shades a glimpse of hope. We appreciate it as positive sign of change leading towards liberation from Koranic oppressive and exclusivist principles. We see some Islamic States slightly

¹⁰See, B.D. KATEREGGA – D. W., SHENK, *Islam and Christianity*, 54-58.

¹¹Whoever speaks in the Koran declares: "O ye who believe ! Take not Jews and Christians as friends. They are but friends to one another. And he amongst you who takes them as friends, then surely he is one of them. Allah guides not the unjust people" (5:51).

¹²G.J.O. MOSHAY, *Who Is This Allah*, 15.

detaching from Koranic principles and enrolling themselves in struggle for equality, liberty, tolerance and peacefulness.¹³ Regrettably, the Sudan — object of our study — is far from being one.

1.2 *Muslims' mission to the infidels !*

When we analyze the relationship between *Dar El Islam* and *Dar El Harb* from Koranic point of view, we find few occasions when conciliatory and soft words are uttered towards *Dar El Harb*. The reason is obvious. At the early stage the prophet faced severe opposition and had not gathered enough followers by then. Hence, the tone of divine directions was mild and reconciliatory. We read: "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256; 6:108; 10:99-100). Such an attitude was necessary in order to win the favor of Jews and Christians who were the majority.¹⁴ After Mohammed had gathered sufficient military manpower, divine directions changed to threats and harsh warnings. Since then, Allah commands *believers* to kill, to nail on trees, to have the hands and legs cut off, and to drive *infidels* out of the land (5:36). *Believers* must help Allah smiting the neck of anyone who refuses to accept the teaching of Islam (47:4). They must fight and slay *unbelievers* wherever they are caught (2:190-191; 9:29,41).

¹³H. DJAIT, *La Personnalité et le Devenir Arabe-islamique*, 139.

¹⁴It is argued that Mohammed's policy of "there is no compulsion in religion" is today adopted by Muslims. The policy is: migrate to Christian areas because they are tolerant. Pretend to be peaceful, friendly and hospitable; begin to clamour for religious, political, and social rights that you will not allow Christians in an Islamic country; breed fast there and settle down as you increase in a particular area, insist that there should be no Christian activities in your community; you may speak and write to discredit their religion, but they must not talk about Islam. Begin to expand your community, the moment you have enough military might against this '*disbelievers*', these Trinitarian *kaferis*, go ahead and eliminate them or suppress as much as you can, and be in control. G.J.O. MOSHAY, *Who is this Allah*, 16.

Allah rewards jihad more than any other religious duties, declared the holy prophet (9:19-22). Besides, jihad is not only a religious duty, but a profitable commerce, a business (61:10-12). The Hadith — traditions -- stresses that the jihad is the best method of earning blessings, both spiritual and temporal. If victory is won, there is enormous booty of a country, which cannot be equaled to any other source of income. If there is defeat or death, there is everlasting paradise...¹⁵ Then, carnage committed against infidels is a religious rite, spiritual, theological and moral.¹⁶ Liberal Muslims question the nature of their religion at this stage. Even at the early stage, liberals protested to Muhammad: "Our Lord,! Why has Thou ordered us to fight? (4:74-80). The republican brothers are one of these groups in Sudan.

2. Historical analysis of Islam in Sudan

Our historical analysis attempts to uncover the identity and attitudes of northern and southern Sudanese towards one another. The North is of Arabic speaking population, of Muslim identity, and fundamentalist background. The South is inhabited by Christians and other ethnic groups of traditional religious affiliation.

¹⁵*Mishkat at Masabith* Vol II, page 253, as found in G.J.O. MOSHAY, *Who is this Allah?*, 16. See (Koran 4:74-77).

¹⁶*Mishkat at Masabith* stresses that, he who dies without having fought, or having felt it to be his duty will die guilty. See G.J.O. MOSHAY, *Who Is This Allah*, 18.

2.1 Muslim Arabs entry into the Sudan ¹⁷

Christianity was received in the Northern Sudan during the first century AD and was wiped out in the 16 century under Islamic ascendancy. Islam started "converting existing churches into mosques and islamicizing the people as it advanced into the Central Sudan".¹⁸ Islam was assimilated, the northern tribes were Arabized and Islamized, except for those of the South.

Initially, the southern people experienced slavery and oppression under the conquest by the Turko-Egyptian forces (1821-1881). The Turko-Egyptian pillaged the South, and enslaved it for nearly 40 years. Arab slave traders carried out frequent raids, used superior weapons, violence, and dreadful treatment. They succeeded in inciting ethnic communities against each other in order to acquire slaves. By 1860, the southern population was plundered to almost extermination. It is estimated that Arab raiders carried off about two million blacks from the South alone. This period left a sad and unforgettable memory among the southern population. In 1877, Britain and Egypt signed a convention on slave suppression which the Muslim Arabs greeted with great bitterness and stiff opposition.¹⁹

¹⁷Sudan Islamic extremists get their inspiration from Mawdudi, an Indian Muslim whose goal was to turn Islam into political ideology. He writes: "when the true mahdi (messiah) appears along with Jesus Christ, they would lead Muslims in an apocalyptic battle against Jews and Christians at the Plain of Armageddon. They hold it impermissible for a Muslim to live in a country not governed by Islamic law without seeking to overthrow it and make it Islamic. For them, a nominally Muslim government is apostate and should be overthrown and its leaders killed. They regard Christians and Jews as infidels rather than people of the book, and therefore withdraw their protection and even persecute them. MANECK, S., "The Theology of Osama bin Laden", <http://bahai-library.org/essays/index.html>, 09/16/01.

¹⁸D.A. RUAY, *The Politics of the Two Sudans*, 156. See also P.T. TOO, "United with Sudan a Suffering Church," 148-152.

¹⁹D.A. RUAY, *The Politics of the Two Sudans*, 19, 173.

2.2 Mahdist revolution 1885-1889

Toward the end of the Turko-Egyptian rule (1881), a certain Muhammad Ahmad Abdallah proclaimed himself a *Mahdi* (Muslim Messiah). His ideal was to purify Islam, guide Muslims, and topple the Turko-Egyptian regime. Muslims' interest in the movement was to purify Islam and to resume slavery. Southerners cooperated with the *Mahdi* to uproot the Turks in order to free themselves from foreign control and from rapacious raids. The Mahdist befriended the Southerners during the campaign in order to crush this common enemy. After the defeat of the latter, the Mahdist resumed slave raids and the Muslim Arab "reminded the Southerner that he was nothing more than a slave, and that he (Muslim Arab) was superior to the simple African created by Allah to be a slave".²⁰ The Mahdi regarded the Southern Sudan, as an alien region of infidels and impending reservoir for slaves.

This period marked the beginning of Islamic theocracy in the Sudan. The *Mahdi* declared that "his movement was not a religious order that could be accepted or rejected at will, but that it was a universal regime, which challenged every man either to join or to be destroyed. Islamic religion was imposed on the Southerners with an iron hand".²¹

The re-conquest of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium forces (1889-1955) brought a relative peace, they abolished slavery and established law and order. The South began to rise, and new opportunities opened to missionary societies to replant Christianity. At the end of the Anglo-Egyptian rule, slavery resumed.

²⁰P. I. TOO, "United with Sudan a Suffering Church", 98.

²¹D.A. RUAY, *The Politics of the Two Sudans*, 160.

3. Islamic theological trends in the Sudan

Within Sunni Muslims in Sudan we find two theological tendencies: the Republican Brothers, and then the two fundamentalist groups which dominate the political scene: the neo-Mahdist and the Muslim Brothers.

3.1 Reformist Islamic trend: Republican Brothers

The republican movement aims at reforming Islam. Its mission is to re-interpret the Koran, to re-define Shari'a and reconcile it with human rights, religious freedom, sexual and social equality. They find Shari'a as applied by the extremists, discriminatory and non-democratic. For them, Shari'a was a mere transitional stage whose golden age will come when "Islam is preached and accepted as a tolerant, fair, democratic and socialist system, where all men and women are equal and free to embrace whatever religion they wish or, indeed, none at all".²² Therefore, time of a new Islam had come. The fundamentalist approach to Shari'a is outmoded, it belonged to a different era and was never intended for our time.

The Republican Brothers exercise nonviolent militancy. They are opposed to Jihad, slavery, segregation, and enforced Islamization and Arabization. "Islam must help liberate individuals from the enslavement of science, and be the guiding principle of freedom, human and religious equality".²³

²²G. BARSELLA – M.A. AYUSO-GUIXOT, *Struggling to be heard*, 52.

²³G. BARSELLA – M.A. AYUSO-GUIXOT, *Struggling to be heard*, 54.

a) *Mahamoud Muhammad Taha: Martyr*

Mahamoud Muhammad Taha's — head of the Republican Brothers — liberating and reforming ideas caused bitterness among Sudan Muslims. In the course of his mission, many members abandoned him for his emphasis on Islamic reform, human equality, and religious freedom was threatening Arab-Islamic domination.²⁴ His movement was considered unorthodox, dangerous for Islam and for the Sudan, and a threat for Muslim elite and their political ambitions.

Taha's reinterpretation of Islam and his effort to create a tolerant and pluralist society was saluted with stiff and violent resistance from the fundamentalists. He was jailed for denouncing the fundamentalists' manipulation of religion for political gain. He described them as "retrenched Muslim authorities outmoded and irrelevant to the present age".²⁵ His positions led to his condemnation to death and execution on 18 January 1985. His movement's activities were strictly curtailed.

3.2 Muslim brotherhood: fundamentalists

The fundamentalists advocate a rigid and puritanical interpretation of Shari'a, emphasizing Arab-Islamic supremacy, and unity over diversity. Their objective is to create an Islamic State: *one nation, one religion, one culture*. Their militancy is of a violent character. Jihad is their method for radical Islamization of the country, and the South in particular. They dream of an Islamic State exemplary to Africa and to the Muslim world and hence "vowed to Islamize the entire country by whatever means

²⁴A.C. WHEELER – W.E. ANDERSON, *Seeking an Open Society*, 42.

²⁵G. BARSELLA - M.A. AYUSO-GUIXOT, *Struggling to be heard*, .55.

necessary, to Islamize at the cost of destroying the essence of human being, his freedom and fundamental rights, to islamize and arabize at any price".²⁶

a) *Agenda on the South*

The fundamentalists' plan is to Arabize and Islamize Africa. South Sudan is an obstacle to the project. Former Prime Minister Sadiq El Mahdi, in his address to the assembly declared: "The failure of Islam in Southern Sudan would be the failure of Sudanese Moslems to the international Islamic cause. Islam has a holy mission in Africa, and Southern Sudan is the beginning of that mission".²⁷ In 1994, upon recapturing some towns from the Sudan People Liberation Army in the south, the National Islamic Front raised banners displaying: "We will only stop when the forces of Islam have raised the Islamic flag over Capetown and the whole continent of Africa has been Islamified".²⁸ Fundamentalists are persuaded that Arabization and Islamization of Africa is not possible without subduing South Sudan, thus, "unless they destroy and subdue the south completely, there shall be no Arab influence in the Sudan and in Africa".²⁹

b) *Non-Muslim status and rights*

Non-Muslims are called *dhimmis* — second class citizens — and enemies of Islam. Their rights are restricted. They have right to life and religious practice, "but are strictly forbidden to exercise these rights (except the right to live) in public lest they would

²⁶ DIOCESE OF RUMBEKI, *The Church in Sudan journeying towards*, 307.

²⁷ R. ZACKARIA, *The Struggle within Islam*, 35.

²⁸ A. M. LESCH, *The Sudan Contested National Identity*, 213.

²⁹ D.A. RUAY, *The Politics of the Two Sudans*, 176-177.

offend their fellow Muslim countrymen".³⁰ They cannot hold public or constitutional posts to supervise over a Muslim. They are denied legal proceedings when aggressed by a Muslim.

c) Search for freedom, peace, and dignity

The above analyses can lead to the conclusion that non-Muslims in Sudan are oppressed and persecuted. This paper is an attempt to frame strategies — in a Christian context — leading to liberation from what we described above. The questions remained to be answered are how to go about it. How to reconcile the two communities? How to defuse their tensions? How to cultivate dialogue while it is considered meaningless between believers and infidels?³¹ Since violence is not Christian liberating process, what option is left to attain justice, freedom and peace? submission, alienation, or resignation?

³⁰D.A. RUAY, *The Politics of the Two Sudans*, 165.

³¹AMECEA, October 1999, No. 507, 5.

Conclusion

According to our analysis, the strained relationship between non-Muslims and Muslims in the Sudan finds its root in racial and religious discrimination. The extremists intend to spread Islam and the Arabic culture to the south and beyond: entire horn of Africa. Aware of this, the southerners strive to defend not only their political destiny, but also and specially their cultural and religious identity. As Tanui describes, for Muslim extremists, to exist in the Sudan is to be either Arab or non-Arab-Muslim. Non-Arab and non-Muslim (infidel) — being a threat to the spread of Islam — must disappear from the Sudan. Violence, bribery, starvation and extermination are means applied to achieve the goal.³² What part can Christians play in bringing justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation?

After all, Jesus is the Master of all situations, who never minced words nor submitted to any oppressing and enslaving institution of his time. His inspiring role encourages the oppressed to struggle for identity, justice and freedom. The oppressed are called to be agents of their own liberation and destiny. They can achieve liberation only if they are aware that the suffering they endure is not divinely pre-established, but imposed. Since liberation is not a gift from the oppressor, the oppressed must take up their struggle to defend their freedom. St. Paul stresses that, for freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).

³²Cf., P. T., Too, "United with Sudan a Suffering Church", 151-152.

CHAPTER III

CONSCIOUSNESS: PATH TO PEDAGOGY OF LIBERATION FOR THE OPPRESSED

Introduction

Consciousness of identity leads to accomplishment of one's mission and it grants confidence in facing challenges and problems that arise. In this sense, attainment of Christian mission depends on the awareness of their identity: peacemakers in a violent and hostile world. The point to discuss is Muslim / non-Muslim relationships and Christian witness in a violent Sudan. We shall briefly portray the manner in which violence, oppression and persecution is carried out in Sudan. The goal is to cultivate Christian ethics leading believers to a peaceful search for freedom, justice and peace by holding Christian values and Church teachings in their liberation process.

1. Consciousness of Christian mission and identity: Christ bearers

In the midst of violence, Christians are called to shape a nonviolent world. Their hope is to form a world in which people shall no longer learn to wage war, in which nations shall no longer lift swords against each other and swords shall be hammered into ploughshares and spears into sickles (Is 4:4). The kingdom pictured by Isaiah is a new era that the Messiah would inaugurate: humankind shall live together in peace, harmony, and understanding. People shall flow to the house of the Lord and he will teach them his ways. The wolf and the lamb shall dwell together (Is 11:6). This deepest longing was (to be) fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Messiah.

1.1 Jesus the non-violent: fulfilment of Isaiah

Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:10), a Kingdom of love, justice and peace. His mission consisted in preaching the Good New of liberation, in winning a multitude for God, in bringing peace and reconciliation. Indeed, Jesus was a peaceful man and a peacemaker for whom peacemakers are children of God (Matt 5:9). Violence and revenge were not in his vocabulary. Jesus' hatred for violence and vengeance is manifest in his attitude towards his enemies. Though he suffered violence he did not commit it. We find him reprimanding his disciples who resorted to violence to prevent him from being arrested. Jesus exclaimed: enough with violence, put your sword back into its sheath (Lk 22:50-51; Jn 18:10-11). This indicates Jesus' rejection of violence. It is an invitation to refrain from violence, to love, to forgive and to reconcile

with enemies. Christian mission and identity is rooted in this vocation: bearing Christ, the Prince of peace, to the world.¹

Believers are called to be conscious of this vocation which, in other words, is the shaping of a nonviolent society where love, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation shall prevail. They received Christ's peace (Jn 14:27). They are called to witness to that peace and to shun violence. John Paul II in his encyclical "The Gospel of Life" describes any form of violence as destructive. Violence destroys life, disrespects the dignity and growth of other persons as it inflicts physical, psychological, spiritual or religious, material and moral injuries on the human person or society.² Gandhi's position on this matter is quite instructive: "[P]ersons who have adopted a nonviolent attitude respect all forms of life and treat others with civility, gentleness and compassion".³ He asserts that, in a liberation process, while the oppressed struggle against the oppressors' meanness, they (the oppressed) should not "try to destroy, defeat or humiliate them, but rather seek reconciliation for the good of all concerned."⁴ Christ's love, the love of God that has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), guides Christians to seek the good of all, oppressed as well as oppressors.

In this sense, the primacy in the Christian liberation process is assigned to love, nonviolence, forgiveness and reconciliation (Lk 23:34). Thus, each believer is called to conscientize and sensitize people to the evil of violence, to disqualify it, and discourage principles that promote cruelty and hostility. Christian tradition promotes love,

¹*Guadium et Spes* n.78.

²JOHN PAUL II., *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 8, 52-53.

³J.J. BAKIT, *Contemporary theologian*, 271.

⁴J.J. BAKIT, *Contemporary Theologian*, 272.

forgiveness and peace. Jesus urges his disciples to have salt in themselves and to be at peace with one another (Mk 9:50). He offered *shalom* to his disciples, breathes peace on them as his departure gift (Jn 14:24) and grants them his spirit of love, joy, and peace (Gal 5:23). Hence, Christians are called to spread the peace of Christ to the world.

1.2 Jesus: nonviolent but dynamic.

The nonviolent character of Jesus' ministry differs from passivity. He struggled to liberate his people from slavery to sin, to the law, and to all forms of evil. His death will be the consequence of his effort to transform his society, of the conflicts he roused, of his praxis and demands. His time was marked by oppressions, among which can be noted religious legalism, to which he never submitted. Law degenerated into slavery imposed in the name of God (Lk 11:46). Jesus did not tolerate scrupulous and outward performances of the law (Mk 7:9). He pleaded for love, mercy, justice and good faith (Matt 23:23). For this reason he rejected religious based discrimination that laid barriers between the pure and the impure, between neighbor to love and enemy to hate, between people loved by God and those God "hates". Hence, he roused tensions between religious authority and himself.

Despite hostile resistance, Jesus persisted in confronting Jewish religious authorities. He wanted justice and that the right thing be done. He was not ashamed to associate with sinners as the law forbade. He defended fearlessly those who are enslaved, associating with the discriminated, the oppressed and the weak in order to help them liberate themselves. He persevered to the death. His preaching with authority consisted in persuasive arguments, he appealed to reason and good conscience and

creating space for freedom. If Jesus behaved this way, believers are called to offer their lives as a sacrifice for peace, freedom, justice and the salvation of humankind. They are to be agents of change, to transform the society into a better place and establish the kingdom here and now.

1.3 Pacifism and violence

Following the example of Jesus, the Church never adopts passivity as her approach to violence or to flagrant violation of human rights, dignity, and freedom. She teaches: "Whoever remains silent in the face of violence is an accomplice of evil."⁵ Indeed, the Church's traditional teaching invites all citizens and governments to work for the avoidance of physical violence, war or armed conflict. However, she recognizes threats posed by sinful humanity. She emphasizes that — due to human beings' sinful nature from which derive criminal and destructive acts such as liquidation of a particular race, domination, or war threat (GS 79) — people must not remain passive and indifferent in the face of frightful crimes that threaten human disaster. The Church admits that, insofar as human beings are sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and will so continue until Christ comes (GS 78). For this reason, "as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed" (GS 79.d).

In a persistent deplorable situation, the Catholic Catechism presents armed *résistance* as an option. But only if there has been a serious and prolonged violation of

⁵*Libertatis Conscientia* n. 57.

justice on the part of the authority; if all possible means of correcting the situation without using violence have been attempted and failed; if the armed resistance could cause no greater misery and disorder; if there is reasonable chance of success; and finally if no better solution can be foreseen by prudent persons (n. 2243).⁶ The Catechism foresees situations where recourse to force is unavoidable: when there is no longer any other alternative, when it helps to avoid greater evil, and when it cannot cause greater harm or damage. On such matters, despite his commitment to nonviolence, Gandhi writes: "when there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence."⁷

The Church does not adopt a naïve optimism. She is rightly realistic by acknowledging situations whereby the pacifism can only lead to disaster and greater evil. Her position is not a call to violence, but to spontaneity. Circumstances and situations can force believers to decide with freedom independently of ethical guides from Jesus in order to save the situation. Jesus came to liberate men and women from the Pharisees' absolute dependence and blind obedience to the law which ignored conscience and love. The good Samaritan illustrates Jesus' orientation towards love, conscience and responsible action. Doing the will of God is not obeying a set of rules, but doing what is right, salvific, liberating and just. The point is that "responsible action is a free venture, it is not justified by the law [...]. Good, as what is responsible, is performed in ignorance to good and in surrender to God of the deed which has become

⁶The Church even recognizes the right of people subjected to obvious and prolonged tyranny to have recourse to armed struggle to oust that tyranny. See *Libertatis Conscientia*, n. 79.

⁷J.J. BACIK, *Contemporary theologian*, 272.

necessary..."⁸ Responsible action, in this sense, is to be taken between the less and the greater evil. Therefore, every one is called to be a person on the "present moment", to act spontaneously and responsibly with love and mercy in situations. Pacifism would be another extreme approach to violence.

2. Consciousness of being oppressed and persecuted class.

In the first place, Christians are invited to be conscious of their mission as messengers of peace ready to radiate love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Though circumstances might threaten the use of force, their vocation accords primacy to peace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation as we stressed.⁹ They are obliged to do their best to restore peace. Secondly, they are conscious that, being Christ's bearers and for the sake of so being, they are persecuted and oppressed. Yet they are invited to persist in bearing witness to Jesus' message of peace in oppressive situations, to strive to perpetuate the Gospel and to profess their creed amidst oppression and persecution.

2.1 Christian-Muslim togetherness in Sudan

Oppression and persecution much spoken of are believed to be carried out by the politically, economically, religiously and militarily powerful Muslims in the north of Sudan. Indeed, relationships between non-Muslims and ordinary Muslims have been relatively friendly. Hostility, oppression and persecution of non-Islamic people is believed to be an act of Islamic extremists in power.¹⁰ Not all Muslims buy the

⁸J.H. CONE, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 142.

⁹See *Libertatis Conscientia*, n.79.

¹⁰Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 87-90.

extremists' ideology. For this reason, one can find both Christians and Muslims on both sides of the conflict in Sudan because "many northern Arabs are opposed to Khartoum's extremist Islamic fundamentalist form of government",¹¹ which is aggressive, oppressive, and repressive, not only to non-Islamic people, but also to Muslim Arabs who oppose it. Mr. Telar describes:

Islamic fundamentalism as practiced in Sudan is a very aggressive ideology. Savage and barbaric. If religion is interpreted the way this religion is being interpreted, there is no sense of humanity. In their eyes, it is a jihad against all non-Islamic people, and they believe that to Islamise south Sudan would create a gateway to the rest of Africa.

2.2 Extremism and intolerance

At the issuing of *Fatwa* in 1992, decree legitimizing jihad against *infidels*, appeared a document containing *Sunna* and Koranic verses selectively quoted to support and justify atrocities, indiscriminate killings and persecution against non-Muslims and Muslim apostates.¹² The extremists' hidden agenda was uncovered: Islamization and Arabization is meant to get rid of any religion, culture, or race from the Sudan except Islam, Arab culture, Arabized and Islamized people. Since Allah had sent his messenger with guidance and with religion of Truth, Sudanese extremists, in accordance with the Koran, have the duty to make Islam conqueror of all religions, however much the "idolater" and "infidels" may be reluctant (Koran 61:9). Therefore, whoever seeks religion other than Islam, is doomed to loss (3:85), and those who refuse to repent and to embrace Islam shall not escape Allah. The prophet must give such "infidels" tidings

¹¹Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 63.

¹²Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 109. Koran, 5:54; 2:217; 66; 9 4:145.

of painful doom: when the sacred months pass, slay them whenever you find them, besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush (9:3). No captives must be taken until massive slaughter has been made in the land (8:67). These paraphrased verses and many others determine the fate of *infidels* and fuel oppression, persecution, violence and intolerance in the Sudan, such that hope for tolerance and freedom of religion is quite slim.

2.3 Portraying oppression and religious persecution

The main sticking point that fans oppression and persecution in Sudan is this issue of Islamization. The then President of Sudan Omer Elbashir, shortly after the issuing of *Fatwa* in 1992, reaffirmed his commitment to jihad against non-Islamic people. In turn, the first vice president Ali Osman Taha reiterated the same position as he declares: "The jihad is our way, and we will never abandon it and will keep its banner high; we will never sell our Faith and will never betray the oath to our martyrs."¹³ In order to incite the Muslim population against the south, the National media portrays the civil war in the South as a struggle by the *infidels* to uproot and destroy Islam.¹⁴

¹³A. MOORE, *Sudan Jihad Forces Islam on Christians*, 27.

¹⁴On April 27, 1992, it was declared by the government on the state radio that Southern Sudan started a war against the State and Muslims with the aim of killing, desecrating mosques, burning and defiling the Koran and raping Muslim women. The conclusion was the declaration: an insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate; and a non-Muslim is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam, and Islam has granted the freedom of killing both of them. See Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 109.

2.3.1 *Infidels under jihad*

It is worthwhile to describe the nature and method in which jihad and forced conversion is being carried out. The picture is only one of many of the similar atrocities committed by jihad fighters against non-Muslims in the Sudan. Many events testify that when jihad fighters meet any non-Muslim villages, villagers are forced to convert to Islam or face death. Numerous incidents proved the indiscriminate character of jihad operations: even women who are Christians, "soldiers gang-rape them, cut their breasts and leave them to die as an example for others."¹⁵ Such cases are the atrocities committed by a jihad Commander, Taib Musba, who massacred an estimated 15,000 unarmed Christian civilians in the late 1980s in south Sudan. When he entered Uduk village, he declared to its Christians: "You are all going to convert from Christianity to Islam today, because here is what's going to happen to you if you don't."¹⁶ To instill terror into the population, he killed five of the church leaders in front of the gathered crowd. The act outraged the crowd and they refused to convert. Before killing each person, he asked: "do you renounce Jesus Christ"? Anyone who refused was killed by driving a three-inch nail into the top of the head."¹⁷

Furthermore, when the jihad forces experienced Christian resistance to forced conversion, they changed their tactics. When they attack a Christian village, they kill everyone they catch. Those who flee lose everything necessary for survival, meanwhile the forces burn crops, grain-stores, and houses. Now with a struggle for survival, all the

¹⁵A. MOORE, *Sudan Jihad Forces Islam on Christians*, 43.

¹⁶A. MOORE, *Sudan Jihad Forces Islam on Christians*, 48.

¹⁷Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 110.

family has to do is to change their names to Muhammad or Ramadan, convert to Islam and walk two days back to the government of Sudan who will take care of them.¹⁸ Jihad is carried out in various ways in different parts of the south, but there is only one aim: "Christianity and other non-Muslim religions have no place in the 'ideal Islamic state', as defined by Muslim extremists."¹⁹

2.3.2 *Reaction to jihad*

Consciousness of the situation determines non-Muslim attitudes. It sparks violence in the victims, attitude of defense, vengeance or hatred. If cries of disaster of those who hunger and thirst for tolerance, freedom, justice and peace can be heard in Sudan, it is because they experience oppression, dehumanization, and persecution. Because of this situation, the International Community and Human Right Watch multiply condemnations, the Church proliferates appeals and articles to voice her concern about the situation.²⁰ Nonetheless, Jesus calls all believers to radiate peace and to be messengers of love and reconciliation.

3. Christian liberation and liberating process

Is liberation, freedom and tolerance possible in the situation described above? What method of liberation can lead to freedom, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence sought for years?

¹⁸A. MOORE, *Sudan Jihad Forces Islam on Christians*, 52.

¹⁹A. MOORE, *Sudan Jihad Forces Islam on Christians*, 37.

²⁰See AMECEA Delegation, "In Solidarity with a Suffering Church under Persecution", 125-

3.1 Gospel and liberation

The Gospel of Jesus is a power of liberation. Liberation is first and foremost to free human beings from slavery to sin: greediness, glory and domination. Physical oppression and other forms of evil find their root in sin. If human beings remain slaves to sin or incapable to overcome temptation to sin, liberation from other forms of oppression shall prove difficult, even impossible. Therefore, our approach to liberation pedagogy must start with the call to conversion of the hearts of both the oppressed and the oppressor. If liberation starts from inside as a transformation of people's lives into a Christ-like attitude, all shall live as brothers and sisters. For it is from inside that evil is generated and then materializes. Liberation is possible when change of hearts occurs so that human beings shall make peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation their own. Though the challenge of proclaiming peace, love, understanding, and reconciliation with the oppressor is great, trust is in dialogue.

3.1.1 The Power of Love

As discussed God's love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit goes beyond the love of neighbors. This love knows no limits. It is extended to enemies and persecutors. Jesus Christ loved his brothers and sisters and gave himself to save them from slavery to sin, and all evil. He extended his love to his enemies so that they too, should be saved. Love builds a peaceful society, for it engenders truth, freedom, justice and peace. Pope John XXIII, in his letter "Peace on Earth" stressed that relationships in society aim at building a society "that is genuinely human... whose foundation is truth, whose measure and objective is justice, whose driving force is love and whose method

of attainment is freedom".²¹ Thus, believers in the Sudan are called to spread the teaching and example of Jesus: promoting justice, peace, freedom, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The motive force to attain justice, peace, and reconciliation is found in sharing in the Love of Christ that recognizes human dignity (Gen 1:26), as well as the dignity of those who offend us (Rom 12:17), such that we forgive those who offend us and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44). Praying and loving those who persecute us is a search for justice filled with mercy (Jn 8:11), for justice devoid of mercy is revenge (Rom 12:20-21). In this way we can find true reconciliation which leads to peace, harmony and mutual understanding. In brief, believers are called to love their enemies, shun the foe's conduct, and work for the good of both oppressors and oppressed.

Christian witness to love (*agape*), peace, and forgiveness has never been fruitless in northern Sudan. Despite Muslim criminal law for apostasy, many Muslims of Arab descent leave Islam and are attracted to Christianity because of the Christians' style of life. Among many converts a prominent figure's conversion shook the whole north: impressed by the Christians' way of living their creed, Abdullahi Sha Eldeen got converted to Christianity with 300 members of his extended family.²² Also, one of the reasons for the execution of Mahmoudu Mohammed Taha, leader of the Republican Brothers, is said to be his close interaction with Christians and their Scriptures. In his speeches he used to quote Jesus, especially the sermon on the mount. This earned him

²¹*Pecem in Terris*, section 149.

²²Abdullahi's spiritual pilgrimage from his Muslim past to Christianity is said to be determined not by missionary efforts or scriptural persuasion, but was characterized by a gradual realization of Christian truth and witness. See A.C. WHEELER – W.E. ANDERSON, *Seeking an Open Society*, 9.

ridicule and laughter from his critics who labeled him “the first Sudanese claiming to be Jesus Christ”.²³ Suspicion grew higher.

Coexistence between ordinary Muslims and Christians relatively runs smoothly. The proof is that some Muslims are being accused by the extremists of complying with the Christian *infidels* to undermine Islam in Sudan. Others are persecuted. Thus, we can see that in Sudan there is a difference between Islam as a religion and the radical position of the extremist groups. Oppression and persecution have proved to be the work of the Islamic extremists, the political elite, and their acolytes, not of the general Muslim population.²⁴

3.1.2 Salvific value of suffering

Christians must be taught to appreciate the positive value of suffering. Suffering has salvific value when defending a just cause, when seeking freedom for the oppressed. The prophets experienced suffering as consequence of the stand they took in favor of the downtrodden (2Chr 36:16; Matt 5:10; Acts 7:52). God gave them courage, strength and perseverance to bear adversity and even death. Perseverance is of great value for those facing hardships. However, it does not mean despair, resignation and fatalism.

3.2 Praxis in the pedagogy of liberation

Liberation is not only spiritual nor simply an inner change. The Gospel needs to transform all aspects of peoples' lives and create a better humanity. The word of God

²³A.C. WHEELER – W.E. ANDERSON, *Seeking an Open Society*, 51.

²⁴However, the game of double standard that Muslims play entertains skepticism about the nature and authenticity of their relations with non-Muslims. E.g., Hassan El Tourabi declaring a jihad against southern Sudan rebels and then reconciling with them in time of hardship.

aims at changing the world and renewing it. Boff writes: "The word of God comes to manifestation as a factor for transformation and for liberation of the oppressed, striking terror in the hearts of the lover of the prevailing system and ideology."²⁵ The transformation of hearts implies transformation of the world. Thus, concrete action is needed to transform people's miserable material conditions and provide basics that alleviate misery which might draw people away from God. Gutierrez asserts: "Liberation praxis concerns concrete actions performed in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed leading toward the creation of a transformed world and a new humanity."²⁶ Since oppression, persecution and conflict in Sudan have extremely impoverished the ordinary population, the extremists therefore have the advantage to manipulate, dominate, Islamize and Arabize their fellow non-Muslims.

Spiritual transformation or liberation from sin aims at transforming the temporal condition in order to attain integral liberation. People's material conditions must be improved. Boff notifies that "Christians [...] who oppose quantitative changes in the society are not just conservative citizens. They are Christians disloyal to the gospel, since they are being deaf to the cries of the oppressed."²⁷ Therefore, without improving the material condition of the poor and the oppressed, they are exposed to the temptation of abandoning their faith in time of necessity. Thus, preaching the Good News includes praxis, works of charity, self-generating projects aiming at liberating the oppressed from inhuman material conditions.

²⁵L. BOFF, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 40.

²⁶G. GUTIERREZ, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 67.

²⁷L. BOFF, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 38

3.2.1 *Unity in liberation praxis*

We saw in the second chapter that in the yesteryears the Muslim fellow brothers in the north succeeded in inciting southern tribes against each other in order to acquire slaves. Today, due to southern disunity, the north succeeds in dividing southern tribes — creating and deepening the rifts among them and weakening them — in order to rule. Paulo Freire discovers oppressors' tactics and explains:

As the oppressor minority subordinates the majority, it must divide it and keep it divided in order to remain in power. [...] the oppressor halt by any method (including violence) any action which in even incipient fashion could awaken the oppressed to the need for unity.²⁸

Freire draws our attention to the point that, oppressors dominate, manipulate, exploit and oppress a people through a policy of *divide-and-rule*, that is, when victims are broken into communities hostile to each other. We find this state of affairs in Sudan and we can dare say, as long as divisions widen and hostilities deepen among the non-Islamic people, they shall remain easy prey for domination, exploitation, manipulation and oppression. Only unity and cooperation can change the condition of the oppressed. For this reason, the oppressed need to unite in order to rid themselves from oppression, exploitation, and miserable material conditions that make them fall easy prey to the snares of the oppressor.

3.2.2 *Mass media role in pedagogy of the oppressed*

The mass media is an instrument of total change, of education, and of information which must eradicate ignorance. It is a process of looking around to see how other people live, behave and what their rights are. Above all, the media should

²⁸P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 141.

foster dialogue, socialization, development and globalization. It awakens conscience. In Sudan, the media has never promoted the above values. Rather, it has been prominent in creating divisions, fueling conflict and propagating religious and political hatred. “No private radio or television stations are allowed. The State television is full of Islamic propaganda”²⁹ and anti-Christian propaganda. This makes it impossible for exchange of ideas that would promote genuine dialogue.

3.2.4 Dialogue: essential communication

Dialogue among religions is an essential element in promoting tolerance, understanding, coexistence and peace such that one group cannot impose, dominate or manipulate the other.³⁰ Commitment to dialogue is a commitment to peaceful settlement of tensions. To foster the spirit of genuine dialogue and mutual trust is to build unity, coexistence, understanding and tolerance. Dialogue is the cornerstone on which the respect of the other’s right to speak, to build the society, and to practice and express one’s conviction is built. Dialogue guides men and women to reflect and to work together for the building of a just, peaceful and humanized society.

Genuine dialogue can occur only when love is present, for love implies a commitment to the good of the partners engaged in the dialogical process. Love in dialogue speaks the truth without fear. There is no fear in love (1Jn 4:17-18). If it is geared by personal interests and ambitions to dominate, and not by love, it is an

²⁹P. T. TOO, “United with Sudan a Suffering Church”, 146.

³⁰*Nostra Aetate*, n.1.

inauthentic dialogue. Paulo Freire writes: "If I do not love the world, if I do not love life, if I do not love people, I cannot enter into dialogue".³¹

3.2.4 Obstacle to dialogue: arrogance and prejudice

When one group considers the other inferior, ignorant, incapable of reasoning or deciding, the former group dictates, imposes its convictions and dominates the latter. It is violence. Partners in dialogue need humility to acknowledge that everyone has limitations and that one person cannot possess the full truth. They need to cultivate mutual trust as well as a spirit of sacrifice, that is, renouncing a part of truth that one holds dear in order to reach a common ground where the rights, interests and convictions of the partners are respected. In this case building the society will not be restricted as a privilege of the elite. Such a dialogue is what can bring tolerance, peace, freedom and reconciliation to non-Muslims and Muslims in Sudan.

³¹P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90.

Conclusion

The strained relationship existing between non-Islamic people and Muslims in the Sudan is a complex reality. Persecution, oppression, and marginalisation have their origin in religious, racial, or political segregation. Religion seems to be manipulated to serve political and racial interests of Muslim fundamentalists. Leaders differ in tone when they are in power or in powerlessness. We see Hassan El Tourabi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, declaring jihad against the southern rebels in 1992, but when ejected from the government in 1999, he signs a memorandum of understanding with the same group.³² This indicates opportunistic stands in the matter. Since the reality is too complex, the liberation process should embrace all levels, and its methods should respect human dignity, life and growth.

Educating victims to hold on to human values, ethical guides, and Jesus' teachings in the struggle for liberation is imperative. Believers should radiate their identity as peace-seekers, reconcilers, and lovers of justice. Their method in search for freedom should differ from other worldly approaches. Furthermore, the oppressed must have knowledge of the ideology that oppresses them, why it oppresses them, where the oppression leads to, and with what consequence. Believers should understand Islam, the Koran, and especially the trend of Islam practiced in Sudan; its basic teachings, finalities and strategy of propagation. In this way cohabitation and liberation can be possible.

³²Y. F. HASSAN – R. GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 37.

General Conclusion

One might contribute to the miserable plight of victims of oppression, exploitation, and poverty by maintaining silence. In this paper we articulate our concern about the plight of millions of people victimized by injustice and oppression in the Sudan. Our vocation as Christians recommends us to speak out against evils. Doing little or nothing to avert evils, we become accomplices in the conditions of millions of innocent victims for failure to rebuke the ruthless, defend the orphan, or plead for the widow (Is 1:16-17). The Church stresses that “the evil inequities and oppression of every kind which afflict millions of men and women today openly contradicts Jesus’ Gospel and cannot leave the conscience of any Christian indifferent”.³³

In our first chapter we discussed how precious and dignified human beings (every human being: righteous or sinner [Mk 2:17; Lk 7:34]; of every race: white or black; and of every religion: Buddhist or Muslim [Mt 13:30; Mt 11:20-24, Rom 12:19-20])³⁴ are in the sight of Yahweh — God the father of Jesus Christ. He wants them to live free from oppression, sin and all forms of evil. He ever struggles to free them whenever they fall under the oppressive power of Satan and the evil ones of this world. This divine act inspires the oppressed to search effectively and resolutely together with God/Jesus for liberation. In the second chapter we saw human beings as the vicegerent of Allah — God of the Muslims. Allah loves only *believers* who fight for him and he commands them to destroy *unbelievers* who refuse to accept the message of Islam, his religion. We demonstrated this case, in bare fact, as the lot of non-Islamic people in the

³³*Libertatis Conscientia* n. 57.

Sudan. As victims of the Islamic mission. The third chapter reminded Christians (*infidels*) of their identity as Jesus Christ's ambassadors of peace, non-violence, forgiveness and reconciliation. It reminded them as well of Jesus who never submitted to an oppressive and unjust social system. We briefed the manner in which jihad is carried out to remind non-Islamic people of the extremists' determination to silence every religion, race, and culture in the Sudan. The one who remains silent can only be an accomplice of evil.

Christians are caught up in a dilemma: to renounce violence and face destruction, or to resort to violence and fake their identity as Jesus' ambassadors. Jesus invites us to speak the truth with love, and through witness to that love, we draw many to him. Through genuine dialogue we can understand each other and achieve much, especially with the liberals. Christian truth need not be defended with arms. The Truth of Jesus will defend itself. Only a lie needs physical force to impose itself. Thus, the philosophy, theology, manifestoes, ethics and institutions of the two great religions should be imperatively discussed in seminars or taught at schools, or distributed in pamphlets for the search for truth. Fear to annoy each other should be avoided, but the truth should prevail. Jesus never abandoned the will of the Father for fear of conflict, persecution or death. What can separate us from his love? Anguish, persecution...? In all that we are victorious (Rom 8:35-37). The blood of those killed in name of Christ has revitalized the Church in Sudan more than ever.³⁵

³⁴*Dignitatis Humanae* n. 11-12.

³⁵CE, Y.F. HASSAN – R.GRAY, *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, 148-154;
See also G.J.O. MOSHAY, *Who Is This Allah?*, 31-34.

The struggle against poverty and misery should be in the forefront, for it forces many to fall victim to manipulation. The culture of brotherhood, sisterhood, charity and Christian unity is of great value. What if all the above fail to achieve liberation? The Abraham-Lot account is quite instructive. In his wisdom, Abraham found it comfortable for him and Lot to part ways in order to eschew unending discord (Gen 13:7-12).

To sum up, Jesus' approach to non-violence was not passive or a resignation to fatalism. He was a man of bare truth and spontaneity. His character invites men and women of good will to act responsibly. The Church is not passive either. She calls for action, for the change of unjust structures that victimize millions of people, and she encourages "those who suffer oppression on the part of the wealthy or politically powerful (to) take action, through moral and licit means, in order to secure structures and institutions in which their rights will be truly respected".³⁶ This position echoes the church's concern about the gravity of human suffering that cannot leave a person of good conscience indifferent.

Our aim is to discourage despair and fatalism; and to instil hope. Jesus is the liberator to whom the poor and oppressed take their burdens. With him nothing is impossible. He encourages the poor and the oppressed to work effectively and resolutely for the realization of justice, freedom, peace and respect of human dignity. Through struggle, people are freed and assume control of their own lives, become subjects of their own history, artisans of their destiny, and finally overcome domination.

³⁶*Libertatis Conscientia*, n. 75.

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