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**THE BEATITUDES IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL:
A Source of Strength and Consolation
for the Church in South Sudan**

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To the Comboni Family who has been working in Southern Sudan since the time of our founder and to all the people of the Beatitudes, that believe God is alive even in moments of poverty and persecution. This work wants to be, in this year of canonization of Blessed Daniel Comboni, a word of strength and courage to say all together: Your Kingdom come!

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Likewise, I want to thank Fr. Gerry Mueller for his great availability proofreading this essay.

Lastly, my words of thanks go to my beloved family, to my present community and to all those who are dear to me.

May God bless you all always.

Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: _____

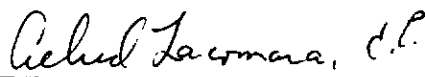


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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since I joined the Comboni Missionaries, I have known about the Church in Southern Sudan as the one struggling in poverty and persecution. This was one of the reasons the Comboni Missionaries served in these areas. Even now, poverty and persecution are still characteristics of these people.

As I have had the opportunity to visit Southern Sudan (also called New Sudan), I came to know first hand the suffering of the people. They are mainly Christians who hope to live in peace on their own land, yet many now are displaced. War and tension are always present, and they must flee at a moment's notice any moment, when the Antonov¹ comes to bomb the village or some other kind of attack may befall them.

As Christians, their questions and my questions are the same: what can God tell us about this situation? Where is He at this moment of poverty and persecution? I believe He is already acting by pouring out his Spirit, but I also believe he has something else to say to these poor, abandoned children. They are God's preferred ones.

The beatitudes are the Magna Carta of the gospel of Matthew. In them, God's kingdom is central and speaks with a powerful voice to the Church. The

¹ *Antonov* is one of the most common military planes used by the government of Sudan to attack villages

Church of Matthew's gospel also suffered persecution and poverty after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. This catastrophic event left the people without identity. Only God himself could bring them consolation. Through poverty and persecution, they became the people of the beatitudes.

Both Matthew's community and the southern Sudanese Christians, experience poverty and persecution. I hope to examine the beatitudes as consolation strength for the Church of southern Sudan. I will present the situation of both Churches, and state how the beatitudes challenge their situations. I will highlight common elements in both situations that speak of God's Kingdom as visible, despite moments of hopelessness and discouragement.

In chapter one, I will present the situation of the Church in Matthew's gospel and the important events that separated the Matthew's community from other Jewish groups, especially the Jewish-Christian portion of the community that lived more this separation. I will present also the challenge of recovering the identity of the Matthew's community, with the beatitudes that promise consolation.

Chapter two provides an analysis of the beatitudes as important theological expression for the community of Matthew. I will show how they are characteristic of a Christian community. The beatitudes are presented in a way that help us to see how God is acting among his people.

In chapter three, I will provide a short history of the situation of the Church of southern Sudan that will help us to understand better the current situation of war. Also, I will be presenting the challenges of the Church in southern Sudan, which is called to give consolation and strength to the people, living poverty and persecution.

Finally, in chapter four, I will try to show how the same beatitudes are also consolation and answer to the situation of persecution and poverty in Southern Sudan. The Church there has similar situations to the Church of Matthew. In this part, I stress the importance of the Small Christian Communities (SCC) as a way to share the experience of God's Kingdom as a poor and persecuted Church.

Chapter I

The Church in Matthew's Gospel

1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to locate Matthew's gospel in relation to its social and political environment and organization and significant events, and specially two, which occurred in Palestine in the first century. The first is the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman army. The second is the reorganization of Judaism by leading the Pharisees in the wake of this destruction. These situations will lead Matthew to face the challenges in the middle of a growing community as presented throughout this work.

2. Place and time of the church in Matthew

The general consensus is that Matthew's Gospel was written between 80-90 A.D. The preeminent issue in the Gospel is the separation of the Church of Matthew from the synagogue. Antioch, the capital of Syria is considered the most likely candidate for this new-born church. Antioch is a Greek-speaking metropolis with the largest Jewish population in Syria. It became the home of a Christian community

founded in the late 30's by a Hellenist group of Jewish Christians who began a mission without the rule of circumcision.

When one reads the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 11:19-26) and Galatians (cf. 2:11-14) we can surmise that a leftist Jewish-Christian Hellenist uncircumcised founded the Church at Antioch with a mission to the Gentiles. Although this was opposed by the extreme right wing of Jewish Christians, the council of Jerusalem accepted the innovation².

Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, was the emperor after the collapse of the Roman republic and the putative cessation of civil wars that dominated Roman life and politics for at least the last half of the first century BC. Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus, first emperor of Rome.

Jesus lived out his life in the Eastern Empire, which was becoming economically and politically important to Rome. In the midst of these political and economical developments lies Matthew's community, tucked away somewhere in Palestine. So, the empire in Matthew's world was well established.

Some issues had arisen in Matthew's community concerning relationship to Rome: To pay or not taxes to Rome, how to be both Jewish and Roman citizen. Living in this Roman Empire, we notice that this community was living and developing in a colonial context. Others controlled the land of Matthew's ancestors. Foreigners worked with the local elite and others whom they deemed necessary to maintain control.

In the middle of this situation the Matthew's Gospel arises. For Matthew and his church, it was well understood that they were not in charge of certain aspects of

² Cf. J. MEIER, *Gospel of Matthew*, ABD 4, 624.

their lives, even a loss of control. Survival meant to work with this political reality, and Matthew offers a piece of advice to his community in the Roman world.³

3. Socio-political situation of the Church in Matthew

The emperor Alexander initiated the *hellenization* of the East, included Palestine, in 330 B.C. Also, Palestine was a disputed land that provoked that reached a climax in the Maccabean revolt, in 165 B.C. with divisions in Israel. Fragmentation and tensions between various Jewish groups continued during the Roman occupation in Palestine.

In addition, the author of Matthew's gospel is also Jewish and claims, like so many others of this era, to speak about and for Israel and its God. His gospel is centered around Jesus of Nazareth, another Jew, and he addresses to this fragmented Jewish community.⁴

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is a transforming event in the Jewish revolt. The Romans shook the heart of Judaism founded upon temple worship in Jerusalem in 70 A.C. Titus, by then general and after Roman emperor, had become the villain. The Romans penetrated the defenses of the city, destroying the temple while defeating the Jewish factions. With this disaster, forms of Judaism disappeared, with some remnants:

...Others remaining forms of Judaism found themselves in the precarious position of living in a context where the traditional leadership position of living in a context where the traditional leadership had been profoundly disrupted, if not destroyed, and the organizing symbol and institution for the religion lay in ruin.⁵

Matthew needed to face this reality of crisis of leadership and identity. The relationship with Rome was also a question for all the Jewish. Together with the

³ Cf. J. A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 3-7.

⁴ Cf. Overman, 8-10.

⁵ Overman, 11.

community of Matthew, there is another Jewish group trying to survive to this disaster and Matthew calls it as *Pharisees*.⁶ They are considered the Jewish response to the destruction. J. Ben Zacchai, who was opposed to the violence, leads this group of Pharisees. He organizes in Jamnia a center for the study of the Law, settles a Sanhedrin that defines a canon for the Scriptures and makes the Judaism a religion out of the Torah. In a state of emergency, they make the criteria for belonging to the Jewish people. There are prayers in a uniform way. Some of these prayers are against the Church of Palestine, considered heretic.

So, it is clear that the Jewish leaders, especially those related with the temple, were seen in many circles in post-70 period as corrupt and faithless. In addition, hostility toward and rejection of the Jewish leadership are common characteristics of the sectarian communities.⁷ However, this hostility toward the Jewish leadership, the accusation that they persecute the righteous and have shed innocent blood helps us to see the social location of these sectarian communities:

The claim that the Jewish leaders have slain innocent blood and God's messengers or righteous becomes a common, albeit harsh, charge from the alienated communities in this period. It was one of the several ways in which the community sought to discredit the leadership and to assert that they, the sectarian community, were in truth God's chosen people.⁸

In addition, there is another reason, cited by Daniel Harrington. Internal divisions already present among the Jews, and had a hand in the destruction of the city and the Romans destroyed even those tensions.⁹

Thus, opposition, rejection and persecution from Jewish groups is felt strongly by the Matthean community. Matthew describes the trauma of separation

⁶ Cf. Overman, 12.

⁷ Cf. J. A., OVERMAN, *Matthew's gospel and Formative Judaism*, 19.

⁸ J. A., OVERMAN, *Matthew's gospel and Formative Judaism*, 23.

⁹ Cf. D. J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 11.

from Judaism throughout the Gospel as well as the continuing threat of hostility and persecution.¹⁰

4. Scribes and Pharisees.

Scribes were originally those who wrote legal documents. The Torah as a law was kept and interpreted by them for the religious tradition. On the other hand, the Pharisees were a religious sect distinct from the scribes, keeping the law in a strict manner.¹¹ Before the destruction of the temple, they were different entities. After 70 A.C., both Scribes and Pharisees look for reconstituting Judaism without temple and land.

Scribes and Pharisees represents for Matthew the responsible for what is going wrong in Israel.¹² They questioned the way the community of Matthew treated the law (Cf. Mt 12:1-8). They are elders' people or chief priests. For his part, Matthew considers his community the chosen one of God "to replace the Scribes and Pharisees as the heirs of the mantle of authority and carriers of God's promise to God's people".¹³

According to J.A. Overman, Scribes and Pharisees represent for Matthew's gospel those elements in the leadership coalition after the destruction of the temple. They were the ones who controlled the local courts, and they possessed influence and authority over the people. Their power was based upon their legal expertise and popularity with the people. They had become the judges and interpreters in the

¹⁰ Cf. G. STANTON, *Gospel for a New People*, 156-157

¹¹ Cf. Harrington, 15.

¹² "Matthew has increased the polemic against the scribes and Pharisees. One example is the scribe who comes to Jesus during Passion week (Mt 22:34-40) who, in Mark's account is impressed by Jesus (Mk 12:28-34). But Mark's story of the friendly scribe, in Matthew's hand becomes another example of scribal hostility and trickery" Lec, D.A., "Matthew's Gospel and Judaism", www.jcrelations.net/article/lee.htm

¹³ J. A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 12.

period after the 70 A.C., considering themselves authentic Jews. This coalition reached the so-called "rabbinic Judaism" whom, as I mentioned above, were a response to the destruction of the temple, trying to be faithful to the tradition while dealing with the changed political realities for Jews in Palestine. Nevertheless, later on they were influenced by this leadership coalition of Pharisees and scribes.¹⁴

Scribes and Pharisees are not confronted directly by Matthew, even though his denunciations remain polemical. They can represent anger and frustration at the continued rejection of Christian demands and at the continued hostility of Jews towards the new community. And the same time, they represent the self-justification of the Matthean community as a new reality, different from the rest of the Jewish groups, following the New Law in Jesus in a new family.

5. Synagogue and the church of Matthew.

The community of Matthew had its own manner of gathering.¹⁵ They called their small house communities, *ekklesia*. They perform similar functions as the synagogues, having with both disciples and leaders. On the other hand, the Matthean Jesus notes the difference between "their synagogue" and "my Church" (cf. Mt 16:18).¹⁶ In this church, no individual or group is to be accorded special honors or titles (cf. Mt 23:6-12).

¹⁴ Cf. Overman, 14.

¹⁵ "Many scholars, e.g., Barth, Davies and Humel, maintain that Matthew's church is still tied to the synagogue, despite growing tensions. Highly 'Jewish' material like the exhortation to accept the teaching authority of the scribes and Pharisees (23:2-3) is used as the basis for this position. However, an increasing number of exegetes, e.g., Strecker, Trilling, Frankemölle, and especially Hare, hold that Matthew's church had already broken with the synagogue by the time the gospel was written" J. MEIER, *ABD*, 625

¹⁶ Cf. Overman, 18.

Matthew explicitly associates scribes and Pharisees with synagogues, so that he places Jesus and his disciples on the one hand, and the synagogue on the other. In addition, the disciples are told not to follow the example of scribes and Pharisees in the synagogues. Thus, *ekklesia* stands in contrast to the synagogue in Matthew's community. While the reading of Torah is the central matter in the synagogues, the church emphasized the commands of Jesus.

In the story we can already see an intense hostility between Church and synagogue. Matthew's community feels angry and orphaned. It is bereft of the mother who gave it life, yet needing to find a new identity apart from the parent-body.

6. Situations to address in the community of Matthew

After the first revolt and the destruction of the temple Matthew's community had to face some issues. Why would God allow this to happen to his chosen people? Are they separated from the promises? Matthew, as well as others Jewish writings, presents the idea of two worlds or ages, anticipated by signs such as the coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, judgment with rewards and punishment and a new and better world and age in its fullness.¹⁷ The institutional forms and the means of legitimization employed by formative Judaism reveal the process of consolidation and how this group came out as the dominant group of the period, depriving the Matthew's community from a righteous before the Empire. At the same time, there is no clarity about reconciliation and mutual understanding between the two groups.

¹⁷ Cf. Harrington, 14.

The destruction of the temple and the subsequent cultural emptiness caused dissension among Jews in Roman Palestine. The Scribes and Pharisees threat the safety and life style of the Matthean community. Jesus is presented in the Gospel criticizing the current leadership and giving hope to the disciples so that one day they might take their rightful place as true leaders (Cf. 7:21-23).¹⁸ The current false leadership was responsible for the destruction and dislocation that had occurred in Israel. And Matthew tries to associate the present leadership with some of the villains of Israel's history. The persecution of the apostles and the community of Matthew at the hands of the Jewish leadership parallels the persecution and rejection by the false leaders of Israel's history.¹⁹

Another emerging situation is the dispute about the law and legal interpretation. According to the Scribes and Pharisees, the Matthean Jews "played fast and loose with the law". On the other hand, Matthew's community sees itself as the only one that truly understands and fulfills the law, living out in the correct way the Torah.²⁰ Matthew's community is clearly a community that keeps the law. It is not a question of law or letter versus spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6), but rather an authentic adherence to the law that is internal and external: merciful and compassionate as well as scrupulous, sincere and heartfelt as well as ethical (Mt 6:33). Therefore, Matthew's Gospel becomes a gospel of revelation, whereby Jesus is the true Moses, the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Matthew's community is the true Israel, the true people of God in which He reigns in the human history. It is a revelation theologically, Christologically and ecclesiologically.

¹⁸ Cf Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 20

¹⁹ Cf J A , OVERMAN. *Matthew's gospel and Formative Judaism*, 143

²⁰ Cf J A OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 21.

Community order and structure represent also powerful causes of uncertainty. Herein, arises the problem of identity: who are we? Only the Beatitudes can deal most directly with this question and they will be the corner stone for the rebuilding of this community. The beatitudes mark them off the Matthean Jews from other groups and leaders. This *we* constitutes the basic program for the beatitudes. Thus, Jesus in Matthew addresses this community in the midst of the tensions of a divided community. Jesus gives consolation by preaching about a future, where his promised is kept for the people of Israel who have struggled. They are persecuted now for being righteous.²¹ God does not forget his people and this sectarian community of Matthew remains God's true covenant community.

Embracing Jesus' preaching, the community of Matthew will become the kingdom of heaven, and it is the ultimate goal of the community's life together. In this way, Matthew's gospel brings hope in this crisis of faith and life in this community. They understand their role and place in Israel and how to survive in this precarious period. Jesus' followers can become active participants in the political and religious crisis of Palestine:

[Jesus'] disciples trained for the kingdom of heaven, understand who they are and where they are going, and why they are not going in another direction, namely the position offered by the competing local leaders. And Matthean disciples are trained to offer reasons and arguments for why their position, and their interpretation of the current state of affairs, is accurate...Matthew's gospel represents a voice and a claim about one community's identity and future amid crisis and concerns that confronted many Jewish communities.²²

The apocalyptic language used in many texts of the gospel present the experience of the community of Matthew that experience rejection, opposition and persecution, despite faithfulness to Jesus (Cf. Mt 5:12). Nevertheless, on the same

²¹ Cf. Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 22-23.

²² Overman, 418-419.

apocalyptic line, all people will be judged, rewarded and punished on the basis on the acceptance or rejection of followers of Jesus (Mt 25). And this represents a word of consolation and comfort to a community aware of the hostility of the Jewish and Gentile world at large.²³

The Scriptures are in perfect harmony with Jesus' life. The disciples see the past and present as continuity. The centrality of the kingdom of God in the Matthean Jesus establishes his rule over all creation and must be acknowledged by Jesus' disciples.

7. Conclusion

The community of Matthew is in opposition with the Jewish community of its time, which provokes a clear separatism. Matthew criticizes the piety of the Pharisees and the interpretation of the Law which demonstrates their ignorance of the real meaning of the Scripture.

The destruction of the temple causes both communities, Matthean and formative Judaism, search for identity. In the Scribes and Pharisees, Matthew presents the leaders that oppressed the people "in the name of the Law", that they say to represent. So, Matthew's church lives with the expulsion from the synagogue and struggles to forge an identity out of a ruptured past. Her identity is to recover by following Jesus' teaching and deeds. They are to embrace the kingdom of Heaven, living in an eschatological manner, in hope and by receiving strength and consolation through the Beatitudes. They imply and explain the way God is at work

²³ Several writers have recently stressed that historical and sociological factors are at work whenever apocalyptic language becomes prominent. In periods of historical crisis and trauma and in periods of a marked sense of alienation from the outside world, Jewish and early Christian writers turned to apocalyptic. Cf Stanton, 162-163.

in human history, providing graced moments in times of hopelessness and desperation.

The Beatitudes describe in ideal terms the traits and characteristics of the members of the community. Having the beatitudes as a source of strength and consolation, the community develops its own leadership. Matthew's Gospel is a Gospel of the new Christian praxis: the operative projection of a new justice, bigger than any one of Scribes or Pharisees. So, Matthew is attempting to reflect on Jesus' life and teaching in a way that will guide the community to resolve differences by living the life of love shown to them by Jesus.

Chapter II

The beatitudes in Matthew's Church

1. Introduction

This chapter tries to analyze each Beatitude (Mt 5:3-10) to find out its importance for the community of Matthew attached to it. The community saw itself as poor and persecuted. Each Beatitude reflects the characteristics of a community, and above all the person of Jesus. Thus, the Beatitudes are located within the context of the Sermon on the Mount that formed the core of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God.²⁴

2. The Beatitudes.

Now that we have seen the situation of the Church in Matthew, we review how the Beatitudes become a gospel of consolation. They are the pattern for Matthew's Gospel. They are not law but Gospel, that is, announcement and promise, which is communicated on the mountain. In preaching the Beatitudes, Jesus is

²⁴ Cf. LAMBRECHT, J., *The Sermon on the Mount*, 40.

teacher and gives the image of a lawgiver.²⁵ Matthew presents the Beatitudes with the Messiah's words within the context of grace: before speaking, Jesus heals (4:23-25). And after the Beatitudes, the verses 13-16 are the presentation card of what follows.²⁶ To be salt of the earth and light is described in 5:17-7:12. So, the Beatitudes are enclosed by words of grace in Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus addresses to the disciples and before the crowd²⁷. Jesus, the savior of the poor (cf. Mt 1:21), and God becomes God-among-us, builds the new people of God on this promise: God comes to reign over you. This pronouncement of Jesus at the beginning of his public life already takes into account his messianic awareness. Jesus proclaims with the beatitudes the great breakthrough of God's grace and then calls for a response that consists primarily in love of neighbor.

2.1 Beatitudes in the biblical context

The word beatitudes, μακάριος, brings the usage of the LXX, where it expresses the happiness which is the result of God-given salvation.²⁸ μακάριος then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life. The English word happiness gives its own case away. It contains the root *hap*, which means chance. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy. Instead, "a human being speaks Beatitude

²⁵ Cf. D. C. ALLISON, *The New Moses. A Matthean typology*, 175.

²⁶ Cf. W. D. DAVIES - D. C. ALLISON, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to St. Matthew*, I, 440.

²⁷ Cf. Lambrecht argues that even the crowd are potential disciples, as they present and listening attentive to Jesus. Cf. Lambrecht, 30.

²⁸ Cf. G. N. STANION, *Gospel for a New People*, 298

upwards: one notices and praises in another person something that is worthy of honor and offers congratulations for something desirable"²⁹. The Christian blessedness is completely untouchable and unassailable: "No one will take your joy away from you" (Jn. 16: 22). The Beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain. It is joy, which sorrow and loss, are powerless to touch. It is a joy, which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away. Beatitude is in itself a piece of Good News, a first concrete application of the proclamation that the kingdom is at hand. Thus, the Beatitudes have an eschatological dimension, which was used in the Old Testament to address people in dire straits, and the promise to them is of future consolation, and made a religious joy.³⁰ As Jesus speaks these Beatitudes, his focus on the special joy which we experience when situations easily can be destructive. The Beatitudes render them meaningful by our union with him.

As we have seen the situation of Matthew's community, we find within the beatitudes three important questions, which deal with the identity problem of the people: who is God and how does he reign in their favor?, who are the poor? and what promise is it and how does it belong to them? These questions are connected with the hopeless situation of Matthew's community. The Beatitudes can explain how God is still acting with his Spirit upon them. Poverty is a characteristic for the Beatitudes. In addition, the Beatitudes keep the promise made by God to his children.

The Beatitudes cannot be read as if they referred to eight different types of people or situations different from one another. In fact they speak on one message,

²⁹ Lambrecht, 46.

³⁰ Cf. Davies Allison, 432-434.

which comes to us in these Beatitudes. We cannot understand one of the terms isolated from the rest. *Poor in spirit* in 5: 3 must not be understood as a safeguard of the rich whom have intention of interior detachment without reference to the hunger and thirst of justice, or to the pain before the suffering of people, or persecution for the sake of justice. In order to support this affirmation, we need to make a literal analysis of the text, even with a translation, which acknowledges the Greek terms used in the text.

The cultures that give more importance to what is said rather than what is written use literary tools to facilitate the memory, as well as stressing ideas that wish to communicate. The scheme is called *chiasm*. Its importance relies on the connection between the first and the last element, the second and the last but one, and so on. In this form we can understand in a better way each term with reference to its parallel and to its situation in the scheme.

The beatitudes can be arranged in this way:

Blessed are:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| a. <i>the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven</i> | present |
| b. <i>they who mourn, for they will be comforted</i> | future passive |
| c. <i>the meek, for they will inherit the earth</i> | future active |
| d. <i>those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they
will be satisfied</i> | future passive |
| d'. <i>the merciful, for they will be shown mercy</i> | future passive |
| c'. <i>the pure in heart, for they will see God</i> | future active |
| b'. <i>the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God</i> | future passive |
| a'. <i>those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven</i> | present |

3. Who is God and how does He reign over them?

The first and the last one (a, a') speak about the Kingdom of heaven like something that *already* belongs to the hearers. This group of people is typified by two characteristics, which are complementary: they are poor in spirit and are persecuted in the cause of righteousness. Members of Matthew's community are the poor and persecuted.

Unlike Luke, these Beatitudes do not speak about an upside down world whereby the poor would be rich, and the persecuted would be persecutors. It is just declared that for them God reigns. The meaning that God reigns will be clarified by the other Beatitudes.

In the other Beatitudes we find perfect symmetry (b-c-d = d'-c'-b'). The promise is referred to the future, but in four phrases the passive future tense (b-d / d'-b') is used and in the other two beatitudes active future tense is used (c/c'). This is very meaningful, because the Jews did not pronounce the name of God. Instead, Matthew uses the formula the *Kingdom of Heaven*, and for that reason he uses the passive form (divine passive). Therefore, we must understand that God is the one who comforts³¹ and strengthens the suffering. He is the one who gives the name of his children to those who make peace, the one who fills those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and who has mercy with those who have mercy on others. These four terms are a first presentation of what God will do when he reigns in favor of the poor and persecuted.

4. Who are the poor?

Matthew wants to equate the word *poor* (πτωχος) with the meaning of poor, needy³². They are *the ones who suffer* (πενθουντες, *path*; as to suffer, to distress). They mourn, and this pain is manifested to outside. Matthew's community, where identity as God's people has been removed, is restored here. They are the meek, humiliated and oppressed people of God. This poverty implies economic poverty, that is, they are poor in spirit and poor in fact.³³

³¹ Using divine passive Matthew explains that God is the one taking the initiative to act upon his people: "The passive voice of 'for they shall be comforted' is the divine passive, i.e. a semitic circumlocution for referring to an act of God" D. Hamm, *The Beatitudes in Context. What Luke and Matthew Meant*, 85.

³² The Hebrew term for "poor" is *anav*, which can be literally translated as "bent" and also as "socially undistinguished oppressed" Cf. Lambrecht, 55.

³³ Cf. Davies Allison, 443.

They are the powerless in the eyes of the world (πρᾶξις),³⁴ that is, those expelled from the synagogue. They are denied the Promised Land, which is the guarantee of God's fidelity to them. As they put their hope in God, they once again are offered the earth.

These poor, separated from righteousness, feel the need for righteousness in a similar way as the ones who hunger and thirst but do not have food and water. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are the same as those who "seek above all else the kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). In the Mosaic covenant, righteousness is indispensable for life. Only life makes fullness possible. What is primary in these Beatitudes is God's free gift, his grace, which is always present before any human action.³⁵ But righteousness must ever seek the goal which lies ahead: it is never in the grasp.³⁶ Those who lack righteousness, God himself will satisfy them, making real the new righteousness, the new relations. A person that has righteousness is that one who is "right with God", that is, he or she lives out the covenant relationship with God and neighbor.

These three beatitudes form an *inclusive* block. The two situations of suffering (affliction-hunger and thirst for righteousness) refer to an attitude: the powerless and non-violence people who cannot use their rights.

The following three beatitudes also form another logical block: the merciful and the peacemakers are referred to an interior attitude: purity of heart. These poor and persecuted demonstrate three characteristics:

³⁴ Cf. Davies - Allison, 449.

³⁵ Cf. Lambrecht, 56.

³⁶ Cf. Davies - Allison, 451-453.

1. They act in favor of the other, moved by mercy. This term implies efficacy, and cannot be reduced to a vague term of inefficacious solidarity. "Mercy and its cognates imply that merciful action is the concrete expression of loyalty to God, and that God demands is not so much activity directed God ward ('I desire... not sacrifice') but loving-kindness benefiting other people ('I desire mercy')." ³⁷

2. The *purity of heart* has nothing to do with *purity* or *chastity*. On the contrary, it is not bad intentions that cause bad actions against the others ³⁸. It involves integrity, a correspondence between outward action and inward thought. It is a lack of duplicity. It is sincerity of intention, and the desire to please God above else. Irreproachable behavior predicates just relations and a society where one can trust in the other. Transparency in relationships makes possible the access to God's experience, who is manifested in the person that takes away obstacles in his or her heart.

3. Peace (*shalom*), is not referred here to a religious peace, but goes to the whole essence of *shalom*. It is a consequence of true righteousness and the right of the genuine relations with God, with the others, with the whole creation and with oneself. This is *God's project*. To those who work as he does, he makes them his children, because in being peacemaker they imitate their Father in heaven, the God of peace. Those who act as God does are those who act in favor of humankind, for love. This Sonship, in the eschatological sense, means likeness to Him; a degree of intimacy with God heretofore not experienced. ³⁹

³⁷ Davies – Allison, 455.

³⁸ "In the biblical tradition the heart is the real or true self, the psyche at its deepest level; it is the seat of emotions, volition, and the intellect, as well as the internal sphere in which the divinity is encountered" Davies – Allison, 456.

³⁹ Cf. Davies – Allison, 458-459.

Those who live in according to the Beatitudes lifestyle will obtain, as a consequence, persecution. However, the present participle indicates a reality that has happened in the past and whose effects still endure: *dediogmenoi*⁴⁰. The agent of this persecution is a society organized around the power, imposition, terms which are opposed to those of the beatitudes. The option for the Kingdom implies and takes to assume poverty and persecution, imposed by the logic of the history of the oppression of a person by another person.

4. What promise is it about?

There are two beatitudes remaining in the active voice: the meek will inherit the earth, and the clean of heart will see God. They seem distant realities. Yet, Jesus declares that there is equivalence between *inheritance of the earth*⁴¹ [c] (a promise that strengthened Israel's hope) and *seeing God* [c'] (fullness of life, unreachable, because we could not see God without dying, and now is possible). For Israel to have the land was a condition to see God. In this possession they experienced the fidelity of Yahweh to the promise. In a foreign land, it is difficult to maintain access to life as well as the access to God. These two points are also characteristics of the poor and persecuted: non-violence and purity of heart.

What is promised is located partially in the present and partially in the future. In the first and eighth beatitudes the promise of the Kingdom is fulfilled immediately, it is at work (a/a'). The rest will be the consequence of the action for opting for poverty and being persecuted, because of the *new righteousness*. Actually

⁴⁰ This term is suggesting that Matthew is addressing a community that has already persecution in question, such as Jewish rejection and the increased hardening between church and synagogue. Cf. Hamm, 107.

⁴¹ *Earth* evokes the Promised Land for the Jews, and in the context of the Sermon on the Mount it refers metaphorically to the Kingdom of Heaven. Cf. Lambrecht, 65.

the earth that is inherited, that is, the Kingdom, is spiritualized and divorced from geography, as the kingdom is already present.⁴² Taking this into account, the typical “already and not yet” of the Kingdom is connected.

The poor-persecuted must feel consoled by the mere fact of being poor-persecuted. They have the security of belonging to the Kingdom.

5. The beatitudes as gospel of revelation.

The ninth beatitude is both conclusion and summary, and concretizes the message for the community of disciples. It does not say *they*, but *you* (plural). In the environment of persecution that the Christian suffers this Beatitude makes sense. It describes the way they are treated and excluded from the synagogues: “this is how they persecuted the prophets before you” (verse 12). The term *your reward will be great in heaven* (*en tôis ouranôis*) does not refer to an *other life* or an *other history*. It means that God dwells in history, reigning on the earth in favor of persecuted and giving himself as a reward. The sign of belonging to God and to his Kingdom is the persecution that she or he suffers. We find here a reference to the consoling dimension of salvation history: the prophets in the past did not have better luck. The past and the future are thus connected in the salvific plan of God.⁴³ The term *Kingdom* is used to foretell the eventual realization in human experience of the fullness of God’s presence. It is considered the great treasure of Matthew’s gospel. It is God reigning with its eschatological meaning, though present recompense is not excluded.

⁴² Cf. Davies · Allison, 450

⁴³ Cf. Lambrecht, 53.

Therefore, the Beatitudes reveal to the poor-persecuted the identity of God. The beatitudes speak of how he works in their favor, who they are, why they are persecuted and the meaning of their destiny both today and in the future. It is revealed that they are the true people of God of the Covenant, because they follow Jesus. He is the One who has been persecuted by the synagogue, crucified by the political and religious powers and was raised by the Father. "Being hated and reviled on account of the Son of Man is in itself already a profound reason for joy and provides a foundation for beatitude"⁴⁴.

This Beatitude is meant to be community formation and a word of comfort created by the primitive Church after Easter when Jewish Christians were excluded from the synagogue and the temple cult.⁴⁵

6. The beatitudes as the gospel of the new Christian praxis

The text of the beatitudes concludes with two declarations: *you are the salt of the earth* (5:13). This phrase reminds us of the symbol of the Covenant in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 2:13; Num 18:19). It is an ecclesiological declaration: *you are the salt, the true Israel*. They are no longer the former Israel. Thus, the Covenant of God becomes a universal plan for the whole humanity.

The second symbol is the *light* (5:14). The light, glory of God, is not anymore in the temple, but in the disciples and in their works (described in 5:7-9). It is something that cannot be hidden. There are important understandings for Matthew. Matthew is more inclined to *orthopraxis* rather than *orthodoxy*, as a criterion of the true Israel.

⁴⁴ Lambrecht, 53.

⁴⁵ Cf. Lambrecht, 54.

Christian is reflected in the words of Jesus who says to them: “For I tell you, if your righteousness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:20). It is the time of a new justice in relation with God, with human beings, with the creation and with oneself. “Now the members of the new covenant would be more blessed than the chief figure of the old”.⁴⁶

Jesus does not nullify the Law, but elevates it. As the new Moses, he declares that the Law must be interpreted as the radicalism of the future, and not as literal sense of the past. Thus, we have the declarations made in v.21: “You have heard how it was said to our ancestors...but I say to you”. Statements like these open new paths of radicalism in justice.

7. Conclusion

In summary, the beatitudes console poor people that official religion declares marginalized. They are persecuted because of the conflict between the Jewish people and the empire.

Their consolation is based upon the revelation that they are the core of the true Israel. The Kingdom’s project belongs to the believers in Jesus. The gratuitous will of the Father, precisely because they are poor and persecuted.

The beatitudes bring consolation and comfort to Jesus’ heavy-laden followers, and function as a practical theodicy. Although 5:3-12 does not explain

⁴⁶ Allison, 181.

evil or human suffering, the verses do, contextualize the difficulties of the present. They lessen the pain and effect encouragement.⁴⁷

The believers must act, as consequence, as the salt of the New Covenant and light of God's glory for the world (vv. 13-14). They must live a new praxis of justice that overcomes the past practice of the Mosaic Law.

⁴⁷ Cf. Davics · Allison, 467.

Chapter III

The Church in South Sudan

1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the situation in South Sudan by giving the historical background of the present situation. I will present the reasons for the current civil war in Sudan, where the Church plays an important role by giving strength and consolation. The Church is obliged to make visible God's promises in her prophetic testimony living closely with the suffering and persecuted people in South Sudan.

2. The formation of the Church of South Sudan.

The modern Church in Sudan is called the *fourth Christian community*. It began at the end of the 19th century when the époque of Madhi was over and the *Condominium Agreement* was signed by British and Egyptian governments to control the whole of Sudan.⁴⁸

The first missionaries arrived at the end of 1899, at the conclusion of the Madhist war, after 14 years of absence. Bishop Antonio Roveggio, a Comboni

⁴⁸ Cf. R. WERNER – W. ANDERSON – A. WHEELER, *Day of devastation. Day of Contentment*, 211.

Missionary, started his pastoral work in 1900, in Omdurman. The time the Comboni Sisters arrived at the end of the same year. The Catholic Church in Sudan started its precarious activity, due to the enthusiasm and generosity of missionaries, catechists and later local priests.

2.1 The beginning of the Church in South Sudan.

Missionary activity has been difficult since the beginning. The British opposed any work of evangelization in the north, in order to avoid any conflict with the Muslim majority. Missioners were allowed to work only in education and health centers. Mons. Antonio Roveggio opted to leave Khartoum to go to the South Sudan on December 13, 1900, and settled among the Shilluk in Lul in March 1901.

After the death of Mons. Roveggio in 1902, his successor, Mons. Franz Xavier Geyer, continued working in schools, which were at the same time catechumenate centers. In 1905, the British-Egyptian government created the mission sphere, which divided the South into religious zones: Islam and Christianity. In addition the Christian area was divided into the British Missionary Societies, the Austrian Catholic Mission and the American Mission.⁴⁹

In 1913, the Vicariate of Central Africa was divided to facilitate the pastoral care of this enormous area. World War I cut off missionary activity. However, the pastoral work of missionaries continued. They composed books and dictionaries in six languages of South Sudan (Dinka, Zande, Bari, Shilluk, Lotuho and Nuer) as suggested by the government of that time⁵⁰. This initiative reflected the desire of the

⁴⁹ Cf. Diocese of Rumbek, *The Church in the Sudan*, III-IV

⁵⁰ Cf. J. PERSSON, *In our own languages*, 21.

government of creating self-reliance groups, hoping one day that the South Sudan would separate from the North Sudan to become another African country.

In 1938, the Italians were expelled from Sudan to please the British government. This action was taken in response to the situation in Ethiopia where Italy had expelled Protestant missionaries.

Despite the many struggles of the Church continued. Some religious communities arose and vicariates and prefectures were erected, in order to spread the work of evangelization in the South Sudan. Another important event took place in 1947 in Juba, where both sides, North Sudan and South Sudan, agreed in principle, to national unity. The South was allowed to participate in the Legislative Assembly.

The *Condominium Agreement* was completed in 1953, and another agreement was signed concerning self-determination without any participation by Southern Sudan. This provoked tension between both sides. A new administration was assembled with 800 members from North Sudan, but only 6 from South Sudan.

On January 1, 1956, Sudan was declared an independent country. The draft of the constitution nationalized Christian schools and made Islam the state religion. As the minority, Southerners wanted a federation, and so they left the Parliament in 1958.

2.2 The Church in South Sudan after independence

Just four months after independence, the first civil war began. Southerners (composed of followers of traditional religion and Christianity) were executed by Northerners (Arabs and Muslims). In 1956, several missionaries were accused of supporting the guerillas in the South and were then expelled. In 1960, Friday was

imposed as a public holyday. In 1962, The *Missionary Society Act* was created to restrict missionary activity and religious freedom, especially in the South. In 1964, all Christian missionaries were expelled from Southern Sudan. They were accused of:

- a. Promoting instability and internal insecurity by inciting people in the South against the government and encouraging them to break the law.
- b. Using religion to impart hatred and implant fear and animosity in the minds of the Southerners against their fellow Sudanese in the North with a clear objective of encouraging the set-up of a separate political status for the Southern provinces thus endangering the integrity and unity of the country.⁵¹

Nevertheless, vocations continued to emerge. Seminaries in Khartoum and in Uganda, together with local priests with bishops strengthened the local Church. Above all, the work of catechists and other lay people kept alive the Christian communities and spread the Christian faith in new areas when there were no priests or missionaries.⁵²

This period was characterized by the solidarity, presence, testimony and prophetic denouncement in favor of the Sudanese people who were oppressed and treated unjustly. The Church continued to be persecuted and martyrdom among the Christians was common.

While the Church in the South suffered, in the North she still could do some activities, especially in education. In the middle of this conflict, the Church initiated dialogue and improved relations on the political and religious level. As the war intensified, the Church cared for thousands of refugees who arrived in Khartoum from the south.

⁵¹ P. TANU TOO, "A history of the Sudan Conflict", 108.

⁵² Cf. J. GONZALEZ NUÑEZ, "Un conflicto mantenido", 38.

The variety churches played an important mediating role during the war, while assisting the victims of the war. The *Addis Ababa Agreement* ended the war in 1972⁵³. The Episcopal Conference of Sudan was created in 1976. Unfortunately, the Sudanese government ignored the *Addis Ababa Agreement* and imposed the Islamic Law or *Sharia*. In 1983, the second civil war broke out in independent Sudan.

3. Socio-political situation of the Church in South Sudan

During this war, the Church exercised her prophetic missionary activity with dedication and courage, despite of facing two oppressing forces: the government army and the rebels fighting against the current regime. In the beginning, the tribes in the South gathered to form the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the military arm of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Anya-Nya II also formed the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army, a guerrilla organization. As a result, several missions were attacked, looted and demolished. In addition, priests, religious brothers and sisters imprisoned at this time. The government army supported by paramilitaries, attacked and destroyed villages. Later on, the SPLA allowed the Church to continue working in the areas controlled by them.⁵⁴

3.1 The Reasons for the Existing War.

3.1.1 Religion.

This longstanding conflict can be attributed to the clashing interests of religion and power in the state. Religion has been both used to support the

⁵³ "The *Addis Ababa Agreement* opened a period of hope for peace and development. The Agreement gave regional autonomy to Southern Sudan, thus both peace in the South Sudan and the unity of the country were achieved". Diocese of Rumbek. *The Church in the Sudan*, vii.

⁵⁴ Cf. Diocese of Rumbek, IX

implacable stand of armed suppression and violent resistance and as a basis for initiatives in justice, peace, and community building.⁵⁵ The Muslim government wants to create an Islamic State in Sudan. In addition, the government uses Islam for political purposes and economical interests. For instance, the Islamic military government supports and arms Arab militias in the North, which has committed many killings in the South. The Islamic military regime in Khartoum has already declared a Jihad against the people of Southern Sudan.⁵⁶ It fights against those who resist this campaign, especially the tribes of the South Sudan. This situation has caused the displacement of many people in the South who flee to the North or other neighboring countries such as Uganda, Congo and Kenya.

3.1.2 Ethnic situation.

The ethnic situation is the second cause of tension. The North is composed of tribes and communities coming from the Arabs, who have invaded Sudan since the seventh century. "The Black African Race in Sudan is threatened. An Arab minority wants to assimilate the Africans to destroy the African traditions, beliefs, way of life and to do this by force".⁵⁷ They are exploiting the native tribes of the country.⁵⁸ The imposition of the *Sharia* Law, infringes upon the freedom of worship of other religions, especially in the South where primarily they practice Christianity.

⁵⁵ Cf. Y. FADL HASAN - R. GRAY, *Religion and conflict in Sudan*, 11.

⁵⁶ Cf. TANU.TOO, P., "A History of the Sudan Conflict", *AFER* 44, 117.

⁵⁷ Advent Pastoral Letter of Bishop Paride Taban. Amecea, January 1st 1995, 5.

⁵⁸ Mons. Gabriel Zubeir, archbishop of Jartum, has said: "Sudan is multiracial, with a plurality of languages, cultures and religions. So, when it is presented as a Arabic or Muslim country, we are already doing injustice to other cultures, religions and ethnic groups." XII Encuentro de Antropología y Misión, *MN*. 7. (My translation)

3.1.3 Oil

The discoveries of extensive oil reserves around Bentiu in Upper Nile in 1978, by an American oil company has also worsened the relationship between North Sudan and South Sudan.⁵⁹ In fact, the South is rich in oil and natural gas, but they are scarcely exploited. The government is chasing away people from the oil zones, in order to start the extraction, processing and exporting of the crude oil. The government attacks and destroys villages, displaces or even kills people, impeding any kind of development in the South. The bishops of Sudan have denounced this situation and many transnational companies are taking part, and “publicly appeal to their governments, oil companies, banks and other enterprises to refrain from doing business with Sudan’s oil industry before the attainment of peace”⁶⁰. The government already has contracts with other countries to start extracting the oil. In addition, the bishops have found that the benefits from the oil are not shared for the development of the South and other marginalized areas. This fact alone will increase the existing conflict.⁶¹

3.1.4 Water

Water is not as great a factor in the struggle as is oil, but it is still a cause for concern. The government wants to build a channel to increase the current of the Nile River in the north, so that it can sell water to Egypt. This would cause an ecological disaster, since the water would be extracted from the marshes of the Upper Nile,

⁵⁹ Cf. Tanui Foo, 111.

⁶⁰ AMICEA, “In Solidarity With a Church Under Persecution”, *AFER* 44, 127.

⁶¹ The Catholic Bishops of the Sudan, “Message to IGAD”, AMECEA DS, 3.

where it overflows and forms rivers and lakes. This would contribute to the desertification of the south.⁶²

4. Consequences of the war in South Sudan: situations to address in the Church of South Sudan

In South Sudan, the present war has provoked selfishness, refugees, loss of families, culture and identity. People are forced to give their own children as soldiers, food or any other good that they may have to the army of the South. The list of the consequences of this war is practically endless. There is a lack of spiritual formation, minimum knowledge of the Bible, poor collaboration between the people and pastoral agents, poverty, marginalization, forced emigration, the violation of human rights, the loss of a moral sense, and islamization as a source of continuing division.

Poverty. Sadly, most of the displaced people are women and children, who live in extreme poverty and in state of socio-economic deprivation. To survive they must change their faith each time they need food or water.⁶³

The *Islamization* in the South is also mixed with slavery. At times, children are taken from the South on the pretext of educating and caring for them. In reality, they are indoctrinated into Islam and given military training. Later on, they are sent to fight against their own people. In this program, girls are given as concubines to Muslim soldiers or as domestic workers. Others are sold to Arabs in the North to work under as slaves in houses and farms. At the same time, the government has

⁶² Cf. GONZALEZ, F., "El Pueblo Nuer, su Vida y su Ambiente", *EM*, IV.

⁶³ Cf. The Catholic Bishops of the Sudan, "He should be Supreme in every way", AMECEA DS 452, 9

been promoting ethnic militias, and even recruiting persons of African origin, with the idea of *fighting slaves using slaves*.⁶⁴

Displacement. Many people are being moved from their own land due to the government with the approval of the International Community to ensure the creation of oil projects. The bombing of the South has intensified even around humanitarian and civilian targets to scare people away from the oil reserves.⁶⁵

It is clear that there is outright discrimination based on racial and religious grounds. The North fights to spread the Islam, and to impose the “superior” Arabic culture upon the Christians of the South Sudan. On the other hand, the South is fighting a political war of self-determination and for cultural and religious identity. The Southerners are not Arabs, and are forced to convert to Islam or to disappear from Sudan.⁶⁶

However, the violation of the human rights is a problem for both, the Government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). The bishops of Sudan have spoken out against terrorizing people, decrying the lack of support from the international community.⁶⁷

5. Role of the Church at the present challenges

Over the last twenty years, the Church has continued her work of evangelization in the midst of war. It has strengthened Christian communities, forming leaders, and assisted war victims in collaboration with other churches, Non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and United Nations Organizations.

⁶⁴ Cf. Tanui Too, 116-118.

⁶⁵ Cf. Tanui Too, 118-119.

⁶⁶ Cf. AMECC/EA, 151-152.

⁶⁷ Cf. AMECC/EA, 127.

Laity, sisters, brothers, priests, missionaries and bishops have remained faithful to their apostolic work despite the dangerous conditions to be Christian as well as pastoral agents. The stories of Sudanese martyrs have produced thousands of new Christians converts and instilled in the local Church courage and enthusiasm. The Church in South Sudan continues to speak out about the terrible situations for the Christians though there has not been a genuine and humanitarian answer from the international community. The Church estimates that two million people have been killed and more than four million refugees have been displaced due to the war (including genocides and famine).⁶⁸

A book entitled, *But God is not defeated*, by the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, sheds light upon the work of the Church of the Christians in South Sudan. God is not defeated. God is bigger than our problems, and his grace is sufficient to overcome all the setbacks that the Church of God may face.⁶⁹

The experience of the Sudanese Church in the South is the experience of the church of Matthew. Persecution and suffering contribute to the growth and expansion of the Church. The words of Tertullian speak eloquently: "the blood of the martyrs, is seed of the Church". The Church has remained with her people, and has become a new community capable of supporting the suffering people, both Christians and non-Christians. In this war, the Church provides encouragement, protection, refuge, healing and hope for the victims. They feed the hungry, nurse the wounded, cloth the naked, educate the illiterate, defend the defenseless and speak for the voiceless and marginalized.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ The Catholic Bishops of the Sudan, "Towards a Just Peace in the Sudan", *AMECEA DS* 507, 1.

⁶⁹ Cf. S. E. KAYANGA -- A. C. WHEELER, *But God is not defeated*, 7.

⁷⁰ Cf. I. MAJOK DAL, *Suffering and God*, 59.

For their part, the Christians of South Sudan, live in extreme poverty and displacement. They often ask themselves why God allows such atrocities. They face an identity crisis. They have lost health, loved ones, possessions, tribal roots, education and land. The problem of racism also creates a psychological pathology that allows people to look without spiritual recognition into the faces of human beings. At the same time, believers see that future fulfillment may be possible, and that punishment cannot exist forever.

They see that God has been always with them. They recognize Him in the Christian communities, which are places of communion and forgiveness:

I have felt during this time of being separated from my relatives that my faith has grown, despite difficulties and persecutions. Without God and his church, that is, many brothers and sisters that I have met in the Christian community I would feel nobody. Nevertheless, in the Church I feel at home. God has not abandoned me. And forgiveness comes because God has been good with me.⁷¹

The prophecies of the Old Testament promise a double fulfillment: one already taking place and the other still anticipating the future. So, the present realities in the Sudan are cannot be separated from an eschatological fulfillment. In the context of suffering and war, any interpretation of the Scriptures that emphasizes judgment alone and ignores the message and hope and restoration must be regarded as biblically and theologically one-sided and deficient.⁷² The Christians in South Sudan are already experiencing the God's presence, despite many inhuman situations.

⁷¹ Testimony of a Bari woman, displaced from Juba. See Appendix 2.

⁷² Cf I Majok Dau, 63-64.

6. Conclusion

The story of the Church in South Sudan at this time of suffering and war is a story of people on a journey of faith. With losses and destruction everywhere, the Church is exploring, praying, trusting and wrestling with the meaning of Christian faith in the midst of upheaval and devastation.⁷³ In this situation the Church experiences God who gives to his people strength and consolation. The suffering and persecuted Church is a witness of the amazing grace of God. We see a Church full of life, but housed in refugee camps in terrible conditions.

It is true that there are still many tasks to be completed to form the one body of Christ. The Church must break down ethnic and tribal barriers. At the same time, the word of God creates among the different Christian communities one people, united in hope and faith in Christ.

In the end, the Christians in South Sudan believe that persecution and poverty is not the last word. They stand firm in the hope of the person of Jesus Christ, as the person who comes to be one among them. They are people of the Beatitudes, as they place their faith in him and his kingdom already at hand. This hope is based on the promises of God who is ever present in his people.

⁷³ Cf. I. Majok Dau, 79.

Chapter IV

The Beatitudes in the Church of South Sudan

1. Introduction

After having studied the situation of the Matthean Church and the Beatitudes in the gospel as an answer to her situation, to bring the consolation of the promises made to them, this chapter attempts to locate the consolation and hope for the Church in South Sudan. The Beatitudes constitute the core for the Church of South Sudan who is poor and persecuted and in need of evangelization through the Small Christian Communities.

2. Church in South Sudan: Church of the poor, Church of the beatitudes.

We have seen that the Church in Southern Sudan is poor and persecuted for religious, ethnic and economic and political reasons. It is true that bishops, priests and religious are many times targets of persecution. However, Christians and other ordinary people are the most affected. They are the first to be affected and persecuted.

The bishops of Sudan have proposed the formation or consolidation of Small Christian Communities among the Christians of Southern Sudan, as the preeminent place to be strengthened and share the experience of God.

The current situation of suffering and uncertainty in our country, and the dispersion of Christians almost everywhere, demand that we develop suitable and diversified ministries to cater the needs of our Christians wherever they may be. The Small Christian Communities we envisage will become the breeding places for the development of such ministries.⁷⁴

The Christian communities in South Sudan are called to become the Church-as-family, as it is called in the document *Church in Africa*.⁷⁵ These communities are poor, and as one family they live as *ekklesia*, that minister as protagonist of a Church. The Christian communities are not just for the poor, but formed by poor, whereby they take the main role in the decisions of the Church-as-family and in the historical journey of the community of Jesus. This Church is both participatory and grassroots, built upon the work of catechists and other lay people. The small Christian communities are the pastoral priority for the bishops to build the Church as God's people.⁷⁶

Poverty in these Christian communities is one common characteristic. They mourn because they have lost their cultural identity as a large family. They hunger and thirst for a new future for their children. They have been deprived of their land because of oil. They have no a serious catechuminate, because of the continuous movement from place to place. Islamic Law imposed by the government of the North considers them inferior.

⁷⁴ The Catholic Bishops of Sudan, "United and Faithful", Diocese of Rumbek, 51.

⁷⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Church in Africa*, n.63

⁷⁶ Cf. The Catholic Bishops of Sudan, "United and Faithful", Diocese of Rumbek, 51.

Their suffering is *their daily bread*. They are always scared of the possibility of displacement by rebels or the government. They are threatened by bombardment at any moment. They feel they have no right in this war.

Christian communities can work for peace, healing and reconciliation among war-battered and ethnically polarized southern communities. These communities look forward relationships with those who have persecuted them. They indeed have learned to pardon and to pray for the persecutors. They have grown to understand, excuse and hope. Only in this sharing can they experience the forgiveness coming from Jesus for all of humanity.

3. Family that lives the consolation of the gospel in the struggle of life.

Suffering is a common issue in Southern Sudan. On the 15th of September 2000, the bishops of Sudan manifested their concern about the bombing in schools and the displacement of villages. They stated:

- a. In the border areas between North and South Sudan, we have seen many individuals maimed and physically handicapped, hundreds of unaccompanied orphans and numberless psychologically traumatized victims of slavery.
- b. We have watched young girls of 13 or 14 years of age carrying babies born from cruel and humiliating acts of rape and abduction that will traumatize them for the rest of their lives.
- c. A common example of social violation of human rights is to deny starving people their share of relief. A woman in Bahr El Ghazal had to sell the poles from her hut under construction to have enough money to buy her rightful share of relief for herself and her family.
- d. (...) The Government of Sudan (GOS) deliberately vetoes the international community and the NGO's from reaching areas that are in need of relief assistance. (...) GOS decides where and when humanitarian goods can be taken by Operational Lifeline Sudan, the aid agencies and the Church and it has interfered repeatedly by bombing relief flights indiscriminately.
- e. With the regards to religion freedom, it is known fact that building permits are not granted to construct churches, schools and chapels while more and more church structures are being destroyed or confiscated by the Government.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The Catholic Bishops of Sudan, "Message to IGAD", *AMECEA DS 526*, 2.

This description clearly speaks of the suffering of Christians in South Sudan. The letter of the U. S. bishops, dated November 14, 2000, states: "The cruel, fratricidal conflict in Sudan continues with few signs that an end is in sight. One of the worst human tragedies of our times has been met with relative indifference by the international community". These words are reminded of the fourth song of the servant of Yahweh: "He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem"(Is 53:3). People of South Sudan have no identity in their own country nor before the international community.

Struggles are also borne by the members of the Church. Religious brothers and sisters, priests, bishops journey hand in hand with the people of South Sudan. To be priest or religious in Sudan can be painful. They are considered allies of SPLA by the government, and obstacles to the SPLA and other rebel guerillas. The call of the bishops, though criticized and threaten at times, remains firm: "We have come to the unanimous conviction that the situation of war at the present stage has become immoral and a tragic farce. It is not any longer a struggle for freedom of the Sudanese people and for the defense of human rights".⁷⁸

We cannot overestimate the hardness of life in South Sudan. The light of the beatitudes however diminished because of their consolation and strength are real. As the small Christian communities come to share their experience of faith, they realize that the beatitudes are Good News for them.

What is the nature of this consolation? It is an increased faith, hope and love. It is the confirmation of the Small Christian Communities in their commitment for

⁷⁸ Declaration of the Comboni Missionaries Working in Southern Sudan. See Appendix 1.

the building up of the Kingdom to strengthen them in the face of adverse structures. This strength comes from sharing of God's Word, from communal celebrations and the daily praxis of fraternal love. As the family of God, these Small Christian communities, live the Gospel of consolation and become consolers for the rest of the people. They give hope to others by restoring in them their identity as children of God. They can see that God is very near to all his persecuted and suffering people. God cares and is really at work!

4. Small Christian Communities that receive the revelation of the Gospel.

Consolation comes from experiencing God in situations of poverty and persecution. The poor can experience Jesus, the revelation of God, in the context of the Church. Bishop Paride Taban, writes:

“I have witnessed people living in the love of God, sharing the life with Christ, finding time to pray. They are easy to please because they do not have material things to desire. I have seen people shedding their sweat, blood, tears and the little they have, to help their fellow human beings in their sufferings.”⁷⁹

The Small Christian communities are inspired by the Spirit to strengthen the poor and persecuted in South Sudan, so that all of them may see God as Father of a large family of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. God is experienced as *Emmanuel*, as God among us. Jesus is a brother who lives with them and struggles with them. Jesus incarnate embodies a great reality that gives the community hope for a new creation and a new world. In this revelation, they are members of God's family born from the God's Word. In these Small Christian Communities they

⁷⁹ Letter of bishop Paride Taban, AMECEA, January 1st, 1995

analyze the reality and their commitment as a Church to strengthen their service to others.

5. A community that lives a new Christian praxis from the Gospel.

The term *righteousness* implies two dimensions: gift and human task. We say first it is a gift coming from God. This gift makes us righteous by pure grace with its creative capacity to make us his children. Secondly, it is task. The Father entrusts the Christians in South Sudan with the task of true righteousness. Christians share the creative capacity of the Father in the manners of Jesus Christ.

Through this Word of love, the Small Christian communities can transform the life that surrounds them. They re-create relationships with God, with others, and with the whole creation. God is seen as a Father. People are the family of God. The world is the patrimony of the children of God. As a consequence, each person recovers a genuine place in the world. All people are oriented toward God as sons and daughters. We are oriented to others as brothers and sisters.

This transformed life makes us be aware of the place of the small Christian communities. If the Church is experienced as God's family, the Church can call others to fraternity. Fundamental equality links the members of the human family. The small Christian communities practice a new righteousness and warn people about the unjust structures. Like the disciple who hears the sermon on the Mount, we long for wholeness in our brokenness. The leaders in South Sudan also are called to be sensitive to the brokenness of others, due to poverty, persecution and suffering.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Cf. FALLON, M., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 93.

For this reason, the Church must prepare leaders with Christian values. Churches must sponsor schools and support catechists, but this is not enough. We need to formulate a serious pastoral plan for the formation of true agents of evangelization. This implies commitment and support from the International Community. Consequently, the so-called *first world* must also change. We need an economical system where human beings are placed at the center. Without substantive change, we shall continue receiving donations from the outside which may release guilty consciences, but we still keep alive the culture of economic dependency.

6. Conclusion

Similar to the community of Matthew, the Church in South Sudan lives in poverty and persecution. The Church in South Sudan can find in the Beatitudes the Good News as well as her identity before the world.

The Beatitudes constitute their source of consolation. They are the light that reveals their condition of being the privilege children of the Father, and brothers and sisters of Jesus. They are the bearers of Spirit's consolation and strength to the others.

The Beatitudes demonstrate the way of re-creation in relationships with God, with others, with oneself and with creation. We pray for the historical realization of a new justice over South Sudan, where the new creation will be a reality for the whole of Sudan and for all human beings.

This change cannot be done by half measures. Jesus wants to save the human person on every level -- a plan by the Father since the beginning. The salvation of

Jesus implies makes authentic integral humanism possible. In this way, the New Covenant is already fulfilled in Jesus Christ and may be experienced fully in the Church of Southern Sudan.

The people of the Beatitudes know that there are sinful situations that oppress human beings. They have experienced this evil in South Sudan. The forces of destruction can take away liberty and condemn others to slavery. As people of the Beatitudes, disciples deliver themselves from their own self-seeking and embrace the Spirit and the strength of the Beatitudes. In genuine human liberty, the disciple becomes active liberators for others.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In Chapter one, I presented the situation of opposition between Matthew's community and the Jewish community of that moment. At the same time, I showed how the destruction of the temple caused a search for identity in both communities, already under stress due to *Hellenization* of this area. The presence of Scribes and Pharisees represent the leaders that oppressed the people, "in the name of the Law". The community of Matthew after the expulsion from the synagogue gathers and forges a proper identity as followers of the new Law in Jesus Christ. Matthew's Church is strengthened and consoled about the future. The people realized how God reigns over them and causes grace in moments of hopelessness and desperation. They are empowered to live a new Gospel as the Law of Jesus in order to be children of God in a new community of love.

In chapter two, I showed how the beatitudes are the source of consolation for the community of Matthew, after its expulsion from the synagogue. They are persecuted because they embraced an apocalyptic understanding of Judaism and proclaim the centrality of Christ.

In analyzing the beatitudes, I proved that consolation is founded upon the revelation made to them. They are the children of God, the true Israel. As the poor and persecuted, God chooses to be at their side. I continued my explanation by advocating the meaning that the poor and persecuted are all part of the same people of all the Beatitudes. As the new people, they are the salt and the consolers of the New Covenant for all human kind. They are bearers of the light within themselves, by living the new Law and following the person of Jesus.

In Chapter three, I described the situation of the Church in South Sudan where the people suffer poverty and persecution in the midst of war. I presented the role of the Church that is giving strength and consolation in this moment of hopelessness, so that they may see the grace coming from God in the midst of persecution and poverty. They are the people of the Beatitudes because God calls them his children and reigns over them.

Similarly, the Church in South Sudan lives under persecution and has been expelled from its own land in the name of the official religion. Their poverty is real, in a socio-economical deprivation. They suffer slavery and ethnic discrimination. The Church shows how God's promises are present because poverty and persecution is not the last word.

In the last chapter, I showed how the Beatitudes are the identity card for both Matthew's Church and the Church in South Sudan. They are the source of consolation, the assurance that God reigns over the poor and persecuted in South Sudan.

To come to this experience of God's reign, I have underlined the role of the Small Christian Communities as a place to share the experience of God in the middle of poverty and persecution. Hope is restored as they find the eschatological dimension of a new creation and the genuine *shalom*, where God is with his people and his by his grace. Forgiveness, and reconciliation with other religions in South Sudan is needed for this new creation. This new creation means the day of the Lord, where God brings Good News to everyone in the midst of desperation.

In his mission and preaching the Beatitudes, Jesus reveals not only the nature of the Kingdom of God, but also reveals a loving Father that wants to save all human

beings. They are saved not because of their merits, but because of God's grace. So, the Beatitudes are revelation or manifestation of the Father who wants joy for everybody. The joy that is described through the beatitudes comes from the Father. To call someone *blessed* refers to the experience of contemplating the Father, the source of all goodness. God wants all persons to be his children and wants them to experience the joy of those who accept His gifts. Human beings respond to this call as children of God by putting into practice the new Christian praxis given by Jesus. The task of real ecumenism with Islam is at hand. At the same time, the international community must also be involved in South Sudan, so that they too can experience the fraternal love given by God. This will happen because Christians are called to be the revelation of the goodness of the Father and his Kingdom in imitation of Jesus Christ, the missionary of the Father.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AFER</i>	<i>African Ecclesial Review</i>
<i>AMECEA</i>	<i>Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Documentation Service</i>
<i>ECA-WIDNET</i>	<i>East and Central Africa Women in Development Network</i>
<i>EM</i>	<i>Esquila Misional</i>
<i>FIS</i>	<i>Faith in Sudan</i>
<i>IGAD</i>	<i>Inter Governmental Authority for Development</i>
<i>GNS</i>	<i>Good News Studies</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Mundo Negro</i>
<i>SCC</i>	<i>Small Christian Communities</i>
<i>SPLA</i>	<i>Sudan's People Liberation Army</i>
<i>SPLM</i>	<i>Sudan's People Liberation Movement</i>
<i>SPS</i>	<i>Sacra Pagina Series</i>

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Declaration of the Comboni Missionaries Working In Southern Sudan.

Nairobi, Kenya
January 19th, 2001

We, the Comboni Missionaries working the “liberated areas” of Southern Sudan, gathered for our annual assembly, have painfully analyzed and evaluated the present tragic situation of war and violence in Southern Sudan.

We have come to the unanimous conviction that the situation of war at the present stage has become immoral and a tragic farce. It is not any longer a struggle for freedom of the Sudanese people and for the defense of human rights.

The war has become a struggle of power, business and greed. Many heartless people are taking advantage of it and enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. Global interests have the Sudanese resources at heart, not the well being of the Sudanese people. Religion is distorted and misused as a means for other interests.

The number of victims is escalating, especially among women and children. Spiritual, human and cultural values are getting lost. Corruption, tribalism and fratricidal hatred are fostered. Degradation, underdevelopment and anarchy increase. Humanity in Sudan is getting lost.

The word "liberation" is abused. What improvement do we see? Oppressor and oppressed are running for their life. Nuer and Dinka are fighting against Arabs. Nuer and Arabs are fighting against Dinka. Dinka against Dinka. Nuer against Nuer. Southerners against Southerners, Northerners against Northerners. There are no winners, all are losing. NGO's and churches unintentionally prolong the fighting through the relief aid that supports also the warring factions. The country has so much wealth and natural resources that would guarantee a good livelihood for all Sudanese.

We Comboni Missionaries have decided to *break the silence* and intensify our commitment against the injustice that fuels the war in Sudan.

We appeal to you leaders of the warring sides: In the name of God, lay down the guns! Stop fighting!

We appeal to all people of goodwill: Break the silence and re-propose your meditation for peace in Sudan!

We appeal to you, political and economic powers of the world, give up your greed and your selfish interests! Help Sudan to regain its lost humanity and identity.

Appendix 2: Interviews

The interviews were done in Lomin, Kajo Keji county, Southern Sudan, where most of them are Kuku, a clan from Bari tribe.

1. Samuel Woja Thomas

The Bari tribe started some centuries ago in the region near Juba. The Bari can be divided into some clans: Nyagwara, Mundari, Kuku, Katwa, Pajulu, Lulubo and Bari.

The Bari as a tribe used to live in small huts to protect themselves from wild animals. They planted and, as the land was fertile, they had enough food to survive. The commercial trade used to be done in exchanging goods.

In the beginning Bari people were Christians and others practiced their traditional religion. There was a catechumenate that lasted for two years. Sacraments were a common practice - baptisms, marriage and confessions - which nowadays are not easy to see.

At the same time, traditional religion was present. There was syncretism, where they had a mixture of Christian religion and traditional beliefs.

The coming of the Arabs

The Bari tribe has been searching for peace for centuries. In the 18th century the Arabs came to Sudan as traders. They started building, even though they had another motive: they wanted to get people as slaves and such resources as gold, ivory, silver, diamonds and others. In the beginning they arrived as traders, but later on they became slave traders

They found the Christians already in Sudan. They started little by little imposing Islam by oppressing people and dismantling chapels and other Christian centers.

Christians felt oppressed and they refused to enter into the *Sharia* law. They were not allowed to worship. Friday was declared a day off and Sunday a normal way to labor. There were a lot of killings of Christians in Juba, Forit, Mundari, Yambio. Education was done in mosques. All the people of the region started thinking of God. Some thought God

was not helping them, others thought God will help them, keeping faith in Him even unto death.

Displacement

Many people had to leave their land. Persecutions of Christians made us run away. The journey from Juba to Kajo Keki took three or four days. While traveling families had many difficulties: wild animals (like lions or leopards), no water or food. Some died on the way looking for a good and peaceful area where to live.

The poverty was so strong that some had decided to sell their own daughters for goods.

People arrived to Kajo Keji at the beginning to the 20th century. People found themselves in peace. They continued worshipping God from their Christian belief. Other continued practicing their traditional religion. Nevertheless they believed that if God helped them, He would continue helping them on this land. On the other hand, recalling their experiences they used to debate on: How did God allow this persecution?

Kajo Keji and Bari people

We are now in the fourth generation of Christianity in Sudan. The war has also come to this area of Kajo Keji. On this area most of us all are Kuku, a clan of Bari. We feel persecuted, like somebody not being at home. We are in exile. We notice resources are not well distributed. We want to study to open our eyes. However, we need to go to the North and fulfill some especial requirements, for example, to know Arabic, other wise we are expelled.

Nowadays education is low. And faith is diminishing, as there is no interest in religion. Doubts of God's existence are also normal. Yet, only faith in God can sustain us.

2. Hellen Dehia

I have two children. My husband is in Khartoum and we are not together due to the war for 15 years. We escaped from Rajaf during an attack done by the government. I remember the *sharia* law was introduced in my place in 1985. So, by that time we were not allowed to wear short clothes, on the contrary we had to use long veil and circumcision was by force.

I came to Kajo Keji in 1986. My brothers and sisters tried to come later and stayed hidden in the bush for two months, but they were killed by SPLA, because they did not

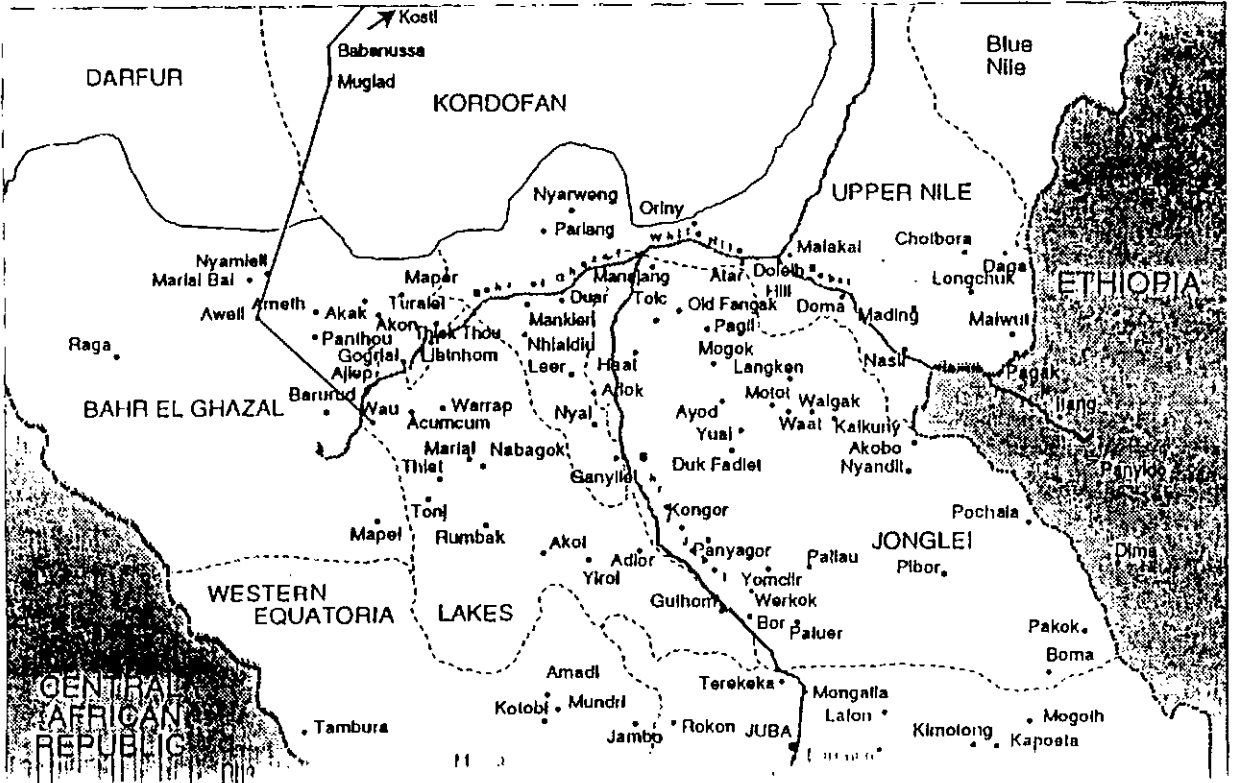
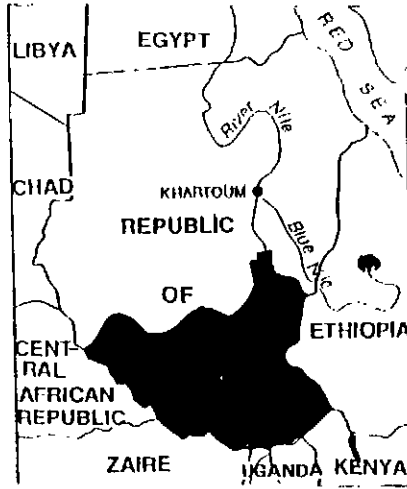
allow people to move. In 1990 the Arabs came to Mundari, near Kajo Keji, and in 1992 the *Antonov* came disturbing and causing struggles in Kajo Keji.

Sometimes I have felt alone as I lost my family and my husband is in Khartoum. I have other relatives in Juba and others are scattered all over Sudan, but I know they are alive. My home is in Juba and I want to go back. To live in persecution is terrible. I feel oppressed and every time I hear the *Antonov* coming I think I should go away.

I have felt during this time of being separated from my relatives that my faith has grown, despite difficulties and persecutions. Without God and his church, that is, many brothers and sisters that I have met in the Christian community I would feel a nobody. Nevertheless, in the Church I feel at home. God has not abandoned me. And forgiveness comes because God has been good with me.

I think Southern Sudan is composed of people who have gotten wounds. They are traumatized and now even rude. People need to unite to forget many killings and eliminate the hunger. Forgiveness unites ourselves. The Church offers love to get peace. Through the missionaries she has come and offered herself to us.

Appendix 3: Map of Southern Sudan.



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