

Mission Work in Sudan Must Be Supported and Carried Out by the Sudanese –

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Sudan, being the largest country in Africa with a total area of 1,556,108 square miles, has a complexity of 254 people groups. Almost the same number of languages are spoken. The Sudan has suffered war since shortly after independence in January 1956, making it hard to get proper census data on religious population. Most estimates indicate that Muslims are 75%, Indigenous Traditional Religions are 15%, Christians 8%, with others 2%. History tells us that Christianity was the first to come to Sudan. Islam came shortly after the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632 Common Era (c.e.). Ten years later the Islamists invaded North African countries including Sudan. History records that in 652 c.e. the Christian cathedral in Dongola was destroyed. We can read how Islamization then spread southwards into traditionally Christian areas. The fact this happened so easily probably reflects poor understanding and practise of Christianity.

The difficulties and complexities in Sudan for the gospel include the numerous languages spoken, with few people having Bibles translated into their own languages, and the scattered population of 45,955,116 all over Sudan, with no good road connections. Statistics made by the Global Status of Evangelical Christianity in April 2008 state that unreached people groups in Sudan are 234 with a population of 42,980,973. Comparing these figures with the unreached Kenyans, 43 people groups out of 60, there is much more to be done in Sudan. The effectiveness of mission in Sudan lies with the national Christians.

Some argue that Christianity must have come to Sudan as early as second century. If that is the case, then the strategies used in spreading Christianity were not the right ones. The efforts to reach the unreached people of Sudan lag well behind where they should be.

There is a need for a paradigm shift of mission work in Sudan. The best strategy is to involve the Sudanese themselves. Sudanese must take the lead in the evangelisation of the whole country of Sudan. For this paradigm shift to take place, the church must undergo a thorough preparation.

With many natural resources coming from South Sudan and also with the greatest number of evangelical churches there, Sudanese missionaries sent by their own churches to all over Sudan, can be supported on a self-initiative basis.

I believe the solution to Sudan's searching for peace can only be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He brings peace.¹ Sudanese Church leaders must take this into consideration and act immediately. Gospel mission within Sudan by Christian Sudanese, will promote peace in Sudan.

The Sudanese Church Must Undergo Preparation for Gospel Spreading

To be effective in any successful accomplishment requires preparation. In Scripture we see the success of Christianity involving the preparation made by the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist. He came and prepared the ground by levelling it for Christ.² Christ was able to use the levelled ground to plant the gospel effectively. Studies show that the countries which are most developed on this planet prepared their citizens with good education.

In the light of these examples, I suggest that for the gospel to be preached extensively in Sudan to all the unreached people groups, the church must undergo a very extensive preparation. This preparation must cover three basic areas of need:

- Theological education with an emphasis on missions
- a change of mindset for the Sudanese church
- the practice of sending indigenous³ missionaries and supporting them to reach the unreached people groups in Sudan.

We will explore these three basic areas for preparing the Sudanese church in more detail.

1. Theological Education with an Emphasis on Missions

¹ Ephesians 2:13-18.

² Matthew 3:1-17; John 1:29-31.

³ "original, or occurring naturally in a country; native" Collins English Dictionary, (Glasgow: Harper Collins) 1995.

This means we need to prepare the church in Sudan through establishing Mission Schools. The preferable teaching medium must be both colloquial Arabic and English languages.

Why do we say Theological Education *with an emphasis on missions*? When we evaluate most of our existing Theological Colleges, their emphasis has made today's church what it is. The church in Sudan is full of wonderful pastors and administrators. My ten year's experience as a Bible school teacher and an academic dean can testify that many graduates from our own School become pastors and administrators. Therefore, I disqualify the syllabus taught in the present Bible colleges. It appears unable to produce missionaries. With no emphasis on mission, present syllabi cannot be used as basis for training missionaries. These colleges tend to prepare mainly those who have interests in teaching, pastoring and administration. These Theological Colleges have very little impact on mission. Mission is not their focus. For maximum effectiveness in the spreading of the gospel to unreached people groups, the Sudanese Church must undergo a thorough preparation, with the central focus being the fulfillment of the Great Commission.⁴ Theology needs to be simple, like that of the early Church.⁵

The simplicity of early Christian theology swept across the Empire of Asia Minor. The message of the apostles of Christ was made simple for a common man to understand. They preached about the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the second coming of Christ. This simple theology drew thousands upon thousands to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord. Complex theology may hinder rather than help evangelism. I am convinced that unreached people groups in Sudan need a simple Christian theology. This simple theology must be taught in a Theological Mission School in a simple Arabic and also in English.

We need to establish simple Mission Training Centres all over the regions of Sudan in order to prepare our Christians and their churches. One year of training can be enough for the purpose.

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:4-8; John 20:19-23.

⁵ Read their sermons in Acts 2:14-41; Acts 3:12-26; Acts 4:7-12; 5:29-32; Acts 7:2-53; Acts 8:30-35; Acts 10:34-43; Acts 13:16-41; Acts 14:14-17; Acts 16:31-32; Acts 17:2-3; Acts 17:22-31; Acts 22:1-21; Acts 28:31.

Such a basic message, carried by Christian Sudanese to our fellow Sudanese, is recommended because Sudan is a multi-racial, close knit society. We can use this to our advantage in reaching “our own” with the gospel.

2. A Change of Mindset for the Sudanese Church

The Sudanese people in all the Evangelical Churches (that is “Gospel churches”, not only those named Evangelical Church) need a change of mindset. There must be a transformation to achieve our greatest potential in the fields of mission and missiology.⁶ Attitudes of heart and mind which kill self-initiative must be fought.

One attitude is the dependency syndrome practised in all churches of Sudan. In this mindset, the concept that the church is a source of livelihood has made people depend on almost everything coming to them from outside Sudan. The motivation of most people who come to church is merely based on a thought for monetary benefit rather than following God’s call to His ministry.

The common saying in colloquial Arabic, “taba khenisa”, means “under the responsibility of the church”. “The church will pay”! Some people even go to the extent of requesting the church to pay their bride price for the wife they intend to marry! Also there are several Christians who have the mentality of dependency which looks at the church as their source of relief. People who think like this come to pastors many times and beg for things to meet their needs. In actuality, they are supposed to support the well-being of their pastors.⁷ They do completely the opposite. What a curse! The problem with this dependency syndrome in the church is that it has killed the self-image and self-initiative of the whole church in Sudan. It must be revised. The church in Sudan is boxed in a carton where their own local initiatives are seen as sub-standard. The money they raise to meet other ministry needs is seen to be without value. This has been the lifestyle of churches in the Sudan over the years. It must change.

⁶ Romans 12:2; Philipians 2:5-11.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:3-12; 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

Do the congregation really know that the responsibility for the church, and the responsibilities of the church, are in our own hands? To understand this clearly: the running of our churches is in the hands of the Sudanese ourselves. We can do it full of joy!⁸ The responsibility to run all the church programmes, including sending out missionaries to the unreached people groups, should be given to and taken by indigenous Sudanese people.

Churches must think of many ways to succeed in their programmes when trying to stand alone. Partners with resources from outside *should take the lead in preparing the church* to do what she can, *before* they come to fill any gaps the church in Sudan failed to cover. This is the team spirit required in Sudan. The partners will teach Sudanese how to fish, so that in the shortest possible time the Sudanese fish out their own fish. Our own supply is more secure than waiting for a continued supply by the partners. Therefore, outside church and mission partners with Sudan should invest much in preparing Sudanese people through joint seminars, workshops or even Theological Mission Seminaries, teaching the idea of self-sustainability. The goal is to change our mind set. This is the top requirement.

3. The Practice of Sending Indigenous Missionaries and Supporting them to Reach Unreached people groups in Sudan. This is essential for the Sudanese church. The church in Sudan will not see the potential of her members fully realised until the evangelisation of the whole Sudan is accepted as our responsibility.

In South Sudan there are many evangelical churches. I think this is where the focus of sending out missionaries⁹ to the unreached parts in Sudan should be. Also, South Sudan with many evangelical churches should host most of the training.

South Sudan evangelical churches should think immediately to form associations or societies across the denominations specifically to send out missionaries into North Sudan. The traditional

⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

⁹ "Missioner" is a less common word for "missionary", a person sent out to share Jesus Christ with others.

mindset, with its common practice of each denomination having its own agenda for its programmes must now stop. We want a shift in mission paradigm in Sudan. A team-working spirit in associations is highly required more than ever in Sudan. Put down other things. The emphasis is on fulfilling the Great Commission of the Lord.

There is an obvious danger for any union of churches to avoid. Any organised group made up of the majority of the church denominations in the Sudan will only reflect its members. It will reflect their major objectives of material relief and social work rather than of evangelistic mission. Existing groups have covered wonderful programmes of physical and academic needs. But they have left out one, and that is the spiritual task of evangelism and mission. The reason for the omission is simple. Much emphasis has been placed on the traditions of our denominations – the same churches which make up the united organisations – at the expense of fulfilling the Great Commission. Once Christ said on this matter, “Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition”, Matthew 15:6. Therefore, let the churches in Sudan pay less interest to our traditions and be united in addressing the matter of evangelising the whole Sudan. Then the perfect peace that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be realised in Sudan.¹⁰

Most of the problems that emerged in the Sudan during war and conflict arose as a result of the absence of God. Nepotism, tribalism and humanitarian crises are examples of this. Our lack of sending missionaries to reach unreached groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ has created this gap. The gap, the absence of God’s presence, no acknowledgement of God, has created no fear of God among the government leadership of S.P.L.A./S.P.L.M.¹¹ in South Sudan. Why do I say so? Two reasons justify this.

- The good idea of chaplaincy in the army, brought by the late Dr. John Garang, has currently been thrown out. It appears to have died a natural death.
- The legislators, Members of Parliament of the South Sudan government have voted out prayers in the parliament.

¹⁰ Romans 5:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1; Revelation 5:9-10.

¹¹ Sudan People’s Liberation Army / Movement

Government without God surely has a poor impact upon the people of God it has jurisdiction over. There is the possibility of anarchy where everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

The Sudanese church must take the blame for not bringing God to impact upon the leaders who are in government. The church is the watchman for the leaders and the people.¹² We are also to bring the whole counsel of God to the leaders and the people in Sudan.¹³ These messages can be taken by means of the missionaries throughout Sudan. The whole church must begin to think differently if a change is to occur in the socio-political and economical status in Sudan.¹⁴

I am of the opinion that the evangelical churches in Sudan can overcome these problems by forming themselves into societies and associations with the expressed purpose of sending out missionaries to the unreached people groups. They can minister the word of God to politicians and to the heads of governments in the Sudan, so that the fear of God may return to our nation. My view based on the scriptures sees this as an absolute means of attaining peace in Sudan.

In order to start societies across the churches, church leaders must overcome their selfish attitudes. Denominational barriers must be broken. Only then may we promote the unity of all Christians with our main focus on fulfilling the Gospel commission.¹⁵

Therefore, the fact of sending missioners by the Sudanese Churches must be emphasised. In principle this was the way we Africans received Jesus Christ. The churches in Europe sent missionaries all over the world, including to Africa. The churches in Europe which sent missionaries out would not have received the gospel themselves if Jesus Christ did not originally send Apostles to go out across the world with the gospel.

¹² Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:1-7.

¹³ Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁴ Matthew 7:24-27.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:11-16; John 13:34-35.

The whole church in Sudan has this present obligation to send her own missionaries to every single area of Sudan. The church must undergo preparation by theological education with an emphasis on missions. The Christian people in Sudan must have a different mindset. And then the Sudanese church should practise the targeting of her missionaries all over in Sudan.

Resources the Sudanese Church can Use for Fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In South Sudan where the most evangelical churches are situated, there are many natural resources. I believe these resources were placed here by God in order to fulfill His will on the planet by the Church worldwide. Isaac Bior and Dr. Odra, editors of the book "Resources and Conservation in South Sudan" said that "South Sudan with an area of 648,051 sq.km. (about quarter of the whole Sudan) has plenty resources in the areas of producing the best agricultural products. 68% of Sudanese Biomass forests are in South Sudan. The Sudd region of South Sudan produces gigantic fish farms. Minerals like gold, copper, zinc, lead and aluminum are available in South Sudan. There are many petroleum products in South Sudan."¹⁶

Given the rich resources in South Sudan where most of the evangelical churches are, the church in South Sudan should be in the lead tapping into these resources for propagating the gospel throughout the whole Sudan. How can this be possible? The church must be business oriented in order to get the most from the resources. The church can become an implementing partner with the government for extracting of the minerals. The church should take advantage of the current global hunger by farming on large scale for commercial purposes. While doing these and similar businesses the church needs to preach the gospel and win many more people to know Christ and join His church so that more tithes may be collected – enough to support mission work.

The church needs faith that can move mountains to translate much of the resources in South Sudan into their own hands for propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ. The faith the church

¹⁶ Deng and Odra, Resources and Conservation in South Sudan (unknown publisher) 2002, p.1.

needs is both to send the missionaries and to trust God how our natural resources can be used in fulfilling the Great Commission. The Scripture confirms this, "For by him (*Jesus Christ*) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him *and for him*", Colossians 1:16 (italics mine). Therefore the natural resources of South Sudan were created by Christ and for His purpose of spreading the Gospel throughout the world. The mission of reaching the unreached people groups in Sudan is top priority when the natural resources of South Sudan are used for their right purpose.

The church at this time needs to put her faith in Scriptures such as that in the book of Colossians. It is the will of Christ to carry out the Great Commission. If the resources in South Sudan are created by Christ and for Christ then we must claim them for Christ. We can use what we earn to send several missionaries to all parts of Sudan.

Let me give you an example of this concept of faith undertaken by my church. Our church has dozens of missionaries sent to the Nuba Mountain area in Southern Khordofan, a place in central Sudan predominantly occupied by Muslims. Also some of the missionaries were sent to Raga, near the Central African Republic. These missionaries and our church had no money. But we had a vision. Our trust was based on the Scriptures. Now for several years the Sudanese missionaries are planting churches and receiving constant support. The light of Christ shines on them giving them a bright future.¹⁷

I believe the money that comes from developing the resources in South Sudan is being placed where there are many evangelical churches. God's purpose is the reaching out to all of Sudan with the gospel. Mission by the Sudanese to the Sudanese. Self-supported mission. This money from our natural resources may either be received directly or indirectly according to the plan of God. It can be received directly by the church entering into business ventures with the

¹⁷ John 1:1-16; John 17:17-18; John 20:21.

government as contractors or sub-contractors. The profit realised will then be used for supporting missionaries. The indirect money that will be received for God's work may come from tithes, offerings and gifts given by members of the churches, from their wages earned working in the industries. The church must then make most of her people's effort by trying to win as many members as possible. The church must pray for success in people's employment and business ventures so that they can have something to give to the church – their vital part of the mission work.

Therefore, let the Sudanese church not sleep but make most of the opportunities coming from the natural resources in South Sudan. Church leaders should sensitise church members about the importance of making the church and Christian business people involved players in developing the resources and using the money so made. Gone are the days when the church wrongly believed that doing business for profit was a worldly thing. Christians must be at forefront to engage in business because it is a means to work hard and earn money.¹⁸ These are resources created by Christ and for His work. Sudanese church leaders should teach the importance of paying tithes in the church¹⁹ and engaging in business by all biblical means, to bring money into the churches for us to fulfill our mission.

Conclusion

Maximum effectiveness for gospel propagation in Sudan must be made by the Sudanese ourselves. Yes! The fact that Sudan is multiracial, with close knit societies and love among themselves, can make for very effective mission among the Sudanese by the Sudanese. We have some advantages over the foreigners! The foreigners who come may learn classical Arabic which is only useful for reaching a very few elite. Colloquial Arabic language stretches widely from Southern Sudanese to Northern Sudanese ethnic groups.

¹⁸ Exodus 20:9; Deuteronomy 8:18; Daniel 6:3, 28; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.

Therefore, it is of great value that Sudanese Christians are prepared for effective evangelism using the right language. Missionary Training Centres which teach mission in colloquial Arabic are to be preferred in South Sudan. This type of training will enable trainers and students to focus on fulfilling the Great Commission. Unlike our current Bible colleges, the courses will not emphasise becoming wonderful administrators, pastors and teachers. Our courses will impact on mission.

We must prepare the Sudanese church to change her mindset from a fixed dependence on resources that come from outside for running almost all of her ministries. This attitude kills local initiatives to reach the entire Sudan. The great destruction has brought the church into crisis. After many decades of Christianity existing in Sudan 234 unreached people groups out of 254 shows the church has failed in her business. I recommend the church should take the initiative herself to become self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting. Only this initiative will return the church of Sudan to its rightful track.

Lastly, the church in Sudan should take advantage of the unexploited natural resources in our country by becoming a lead agency in extracting them. Profit from business or employment can be used for propagating the gospel. The benefit can be received directly by the church entering into business deals with the government. It can also be received indirectly as church leaders encourage believers and converts to enter into business or employment to boost church income through tithes, offerings and gifts. The church treasury will support evangelism among unreached people groups all over the Sudan.

It is my prayer that the whole church in Sudan will shine and obey the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will evangelise all the unreached people groups. The impact of this will bring the presence of God before all Sudanese leaders. The common people will fear God. The peace that comes from the gospel will reign in Sudan for ever and ever.²⁰ Amen.

²⁰ Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13-22.

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. List the advantages Sudanese Christians have over foreigners in evangelising Sudan.

List any disadvantages you can think of.

2. What is the main lesson to be learned from the way Islam was able to dismiss a lot of early Christianity from Sudan?

Consider Scripture availability, practical discipleship, recognising truth from error, etc.

3. Why do you think many present day College syllabi are “unable to produce missionaries”?

What needs to be done to change this?

Consider the support benefits currently offered to a church pastor and those that could perhaps be offered to a missionary sent by a church.

What happens where there is no local church to support anyone? 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.

4. Why is the mindset, “taba khenisa” “the church will pay” so terribly wrong?

Who are “the church”?

Discuss the words of Jesus in Acts 20:35 in relation to this.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive”.²¹

5. What would a “Society across the denominations” to send and support indigenous missionaries look like?

What would be its major challenges?

How can they be overcome?

6. How does indigenous mission help bring peace to Sudan? Matthew 5:9; James 3:17-18.

7. Discuss *how* the church can and should be a watchman for the nation.

8. Why must “Christians be at forefront to engage in business because it is a means to work hard and earn money”?

How will this help Sudan-wide mission? Acts 18:1-4; 1 Corinthians 9:1-27.

Are there any dangers to overcome? How?

²¹ This beatitude of Jesus is not recorded in the gospels, but Paul and Luke obviously knew of it.