

The Role of the Church in Peace Building – Rev. Musa Elgadi Kuku

Christians can and should play an effective role in reducing the bitter after-effects of war and in the healing of wounds caused by conflicts.

The Sudanese people have suffered war since independence. Millions of lives have been claimed. Despite all the agreements that have been made over the years, the roots of the problem remain. At last, on 9th January 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (C.P.A.) was signed in Nairobi, Kenya. The National Congress and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (N.C. & S.P.L.M.) reached middle ground on most issues, by negotiation.

The C.P.A. includes protection of believers' freedom and conscience, the exemption of Southern Sudan from Sharia law, respect for different religious customs and practices, building of places for worship, publications for a variety of religious issues, recognition of different religious holidays and festivals, with personal issues always to be judged by the laws and customs of the family's religion. Citizenship will be the basis of rights and responsibilities. There is no place for any discrimination because of religion, race, or culture.

To implement this agreement in real life, every member of all the different communities must play his or her part effectively. We must all make everyone else aware of what is happening. We must spread the culture of peace.

We appreciate the great achievement and the role played by all participating groups in the C.P.A. – the Government in Khartoum, the Government of Southern Sudan, the S.P.L.M., the Economic Growth And Development countries (E.G.A.D.), with other supervising and facilitating countries.

God has answered the prayers of believers. Many were kneeling down and praying, asking for peace in our beloved country. It was as Paul wrote in the New Testament: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for

kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”, 1 Timothy 2:1.

The war has left all Sudanese citizens with deep feelings. There is not one family untouched. Some have lost brothers, parents, other relatives or friends. Some still carry envy, hatred, bitterness or a spirit for revenge. Former South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “There is no future without forgiveness”.¹ We will examine what the Scripture says about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Please read Matthew 18:21-35, the parable Jesus told about the unforgiving and unmerciful servant. It finishes with these challenging words, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart”, verse 35.

Hatred and Bitterness

Hatred and bitterness result from kept anger. In his book “The Servant Guide” Pastor Billy Graham said that the Bible has not forbidden us from being angry, but it has given us two conditions. First, our anger should be clean from any hatred and bitterness. Second, we should check ourselves daily and ask how did we handle our negative feelings?

Matthew 5:43-45; Ephesians 4:26-27; 4:31-32; Hebrews 12:14-15; James 3:13-18.

There is an old Latin parable that says “the one that goes to bed with anger will find a demon on the pillow”. There are many platforms used by the devil in life as opportunities to lead us into evil feelings. The inside of everyone who hates is seared by these feelings he or she keeps. They hinder a person emotionally. He or she is made physically sick. This affects the ability to work and produce for themselves and their families. They find it difficult to sleep.

These burning feelings also ruin many relationships, both inside and outside of families. Some of those who hate are overcome from time to time by a controlling desire for revenge.

¹ Desmond Tutu No Future Without Forgiveness (New York: Doubleday, Random House) 1999.

The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-16 is an example of those who are sick with bitterness and a desire for revenge. Cain was angry because his brother's offering was accepted, while his own was rejected. The problem was not between Cain and Abel. The problem was between Cain and God because it was God who rejected his offering. Cain was depressed and angry. Instead of repenting and asking for forgiveness from the Lord, Cain went against his brother and killed him.

Many times people confess such sins because they are looking for sympathy or for comfort. They say "we have been misunderstood" and "we are mistreated". They will not acknowledge that bottled up sinful thoughts drive their wrong attitudes.

The Lord warned Cain, and He warns us, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it", Genesis 4:6-7.

Forgiveness

Pastor Billy Graham also wrote that "God's forgiveness is not just a passing statement, but it is a complete elimination of inequity and wickedness in our past, present, and future". The only reason for the forgiveness of our sins is that Christ has paid the price on the cross. "Christ died for the ungodly...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us", Romans 5:6-8. When we kneel at the foot of the cross in confession and repentance we receive forgiveness.

The Foundation of Forgiveness

1. **We confess what we are** (sinners) **and what we have done** (specific sins). This is repentance. We face up to and turn away from our wrong ways. As David said – himself a murderer because of his lust for a woman – "For I know *my* transgressions and *my sin* is *always* before me. Against you, you only, have *I* sinned and done *what is evil in your*

sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge”, Psalm 51:3-4. (emphasis mine).

2. **We ask God for forgiveness.** Use words like these, "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow... Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquity", Psalm 51:7-9.

Three Results of Forgiveness

1. **Reconciliation:** When God forgives us our relationship with Him changes immediately. Instead of barriers there will be love and acceptance. Instead of enmity, friendship will be born. God is always working on "...reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation", 2 Corinthians 5:19.
2. **Purification:** Only when we receive God's forgiveness we can stand in His presence. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness", 1 John 1:9.
See also Romans 4:7; Psalm 51:7.
When God forgives us He purifies us from our sins and He forgets them, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more", Hebrews 8:12.
See also Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 38: 17.
3. **Justification:** Forgiveness means God has abandoned His judgement and He will not condemn us for our sins. Jesus said to the woman who was caught in adultery, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now, and leave your life of sin", John 8:11.
See also Romans 8:1.

It's a great privilege to share with those who ask about the happiness this woman received as a result of God's forgiveness. We can experience this happiness too.

Forgiveness – a godly example

The principle of forgiveness is a godly initiative.

- The Lord Jesus Christ applied it during his trial. He reconciled Herod and Pilate who were enemies, Luke 23:12.
- From the cross Jesus raised His voice in forgiveness for His murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing", Luke 23:34.
- Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer that forgiveness from God goes hand in hand with our own forgiveness of people. "Forgive us our debts (sins), as we also have forgiven our debtors (those who sin against us)", Matthew 6:12.

I have heard many people say that it is difficult to apply forgiveness in daily life. "How can I forgive the Arabs?" Or, "How can I forgive the Southerners, the Fur, the Beja , the Nuba, the Dinka and the Nuer, etc.?" "How can I forgive those who killed my brothers, raped my sisters, looted my cattle?"

This is an important issue and the role of the Christian clergymen is great in times when he has civilians coming to him from different places, but carrying inside them some of this bitterness. Christian ministers have a great role to play by preaching forgiveness from their pulpits. Imams may be able to do so from their Mosques. It is important for leaders to challenge and to correct people's wrong thoughts. Every Christian has a role to play in spreading this word to guests on the hoash and to colleagues around the campfire.

Without forgiveness there will be no genuinely peaceful future. The situation will only be transformed as Christians do what Jesus told us to do: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous", Matthew 5:44-45.

See also Romans 12:17-21.

Individuals make up any nation

In these crucial days of rebuilding our country we need forgiveness, reconciliation, peace and love. These are characteristics of Christianity. Individuals affect nations. Christian Sudanese who forgive and are peacemakers will affect Sudan. Sudan will not enjoy the healing of her wounds while there is no true peace within and between Sudanese individuals.

Peace

The word peace (the Jewish “shalom”) means rest from external disturbances that have happened as result of an attack by an army in war. It also means rest from internal disturbances of the soul or spirit. This word is used for greetings among the Jews. By it they mean “May you enjoy peacefulness, rest and joy”. They also use the word to describe external security, freedom from attack, freedom from political slavery.

Shalom is also a Christian greeting meaning “May you have the deep spiritual peace of heart that is brought by the blood of Jesus”. This is a peace that is not given by the world. This peace cannot be rooted out by the storms of life. This peace reigns in the heart of believers as a result of their reconciliation to God. This is why there was joy in heaven at the birth of Jesus. The angels sang for the coming of the King of peace saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests." Luke 2:14.

See also Colossians 1:19-20; John 14:27; John 16:33

Three Types of Peace

- **Peace with God:** This comes as a result of the forgiveness of our sins, thanks to the atonement made by the crucified Christ. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”, Romans 1:5.
- **God's Peace – the peace of God:** This is the inheritance of every believer in Christ. It comes as the direct result of walking in obedience to God's will. Many believers have peace with God, but they do not experience peace in their lives. They are blown around by fears and worries which destroy their spiritual firmness and joy. This peace is God's gift. It is a right for every believer, but many are not enjoying it. Peace of God

is an unstoppable fountain flowing from complete fellowship with God. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus", Philippians 4:7.

- **Peace with Others** : This comes as result of having peace with God and knowing the peace of God flowing. This peace is helped by forgiveness and reconciliation. We say in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us", Matthew 6:12. However, for anyone to live in peace with his brother he must first forgive. Christians must take the initiative to forgive because human forgiveness goes hand in hand with godly forgiveness. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone", Romans 12:18. See also Matthew 5:23-24.

Peacemakers

Jesus talked both about peace and war. He warned about the certainty of wars, Matthew 24:6. On the other hand when Jesus described the citizens of His kingdom He characterises them as active peacemakers and declared that His followers who are peacemakers are children of God, Matthew 5:9. Peacemakers receive God's blessings, because peacemaking is godly command, James 3:18. God made peace with us and among us by Christ. We cannot call ourselves true children of God if we do not participate in peacemaking.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near", Ephesians 2:13-17. Since Christ was a peacemaker, we Christians must be peacemakers too.

Practical initiatives

Here are some ways we can make peace, based from John Stott's chapter on "Wars and Rumours of Wars" in "New Issues Facing Christians Today"²:

1. **Christian peacemakers must pray.** It is the role of every church and every Christian to pray and intercede to God for all kinds of people and every situation. See 1 Timothy 2:1-4.
2. **Christian peacemakers must show by example** that we are congregations of peace. See Romans 12:17-21.
3. **Christian peacemakers must pursue trust-building** and encourage loving public discussion. This happened at the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Navisha. Now we have a greater challenge with roles to be played by *all* Sudanese citizens. How will we keep the peace, stability and calmness we have gained? How will we rebuild trust and spread the spirit of forgiveness, reconciliation and love? The word love (agape) in the Greek language means giving and offering attachment and affection for others. It is used in Jesus' summary of the Ten Commandments, "Love God *and* love your neighbour", Mathew 22: 36-39, (summary and emphasis mine).
See also 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

The Voice of God

In the Old Testament the prophets were the ones who spoke the voice of God to the people. They criticised corruption in society and urged positive justice, see for example Micah 6:8; Amos 5:14-15.

We urge all politicians to speak the truth and to stop giving empty promises to the people.

As Jesus Christ said "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. *Then* you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free", John 8:31-32 (emphasis mine).

Our society needs faithful men and women who always show the spirit of truth, of peace, and of justice, one hundred percent.

The prophet John the Baptist rebuked different categories of people who came to him at the Jordan river, Luke 3:7-14. He said to some that their wealth should be distributed justly, so

² John Stott New Issues Facing Christians Today (London: Marshall Pickering) 1999 page 119.

that there will be no one in want, verse 11. He said to others they should be trustworthy and honest, bringing economic development to society, verses 12-13. He said to another group not to seek bribes for selfish gain and not to falsely accuse other people. Everyone should be satisfied with a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, verse 14. This brings justice to all parts of society.

We rebuke all people who do not live upright and honest lives and we pledge ourselves to be like the righteous man described by God in Ezekiel 18:4-9. We acknowledge we belong to God and everything we do must represent Him on earth.

God criticised the overseers (shepherds) who should have been leading Israel justly but were not doing so. He said, "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally", Ezekiel 34:4. Later that chapter God says He will hold leaders accountable, verse 10. God will do what is necessary to look after His own people, verses 12-16.

The tasks of pastors, clergymen, politicians and other leaders are many. More effort is needed to pastor and guide our Sudanese people in many different areas. Spiritual counselling is one role that will help. Practical advice and resources to address specific problems will help too. By God's help we can build a peaceful and prosperous Sudan.

Servant Leaders

The world does not need kings, but faithful servants to serve the people. Our Lord Jesus said, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves", Luke 22:25-26.

Christian leaders must be good role models to everyone else. As Paul urged his son in the faith Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity", 1 Timothy 4:12.

We appreciate what the President of the Republic said when he received the Constitution document from the commission. He said that the people of Sudan are a forgiven people, are able to forget the bitterness of the past, and are able to complete this great initiative of sealing the negotiations. He also said that all Sudanese must move to the second stage of implementing the Constitution. This is an encouraging sign towards achieving the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Therefore we urge all the believers and all other people in Sudan generally to forget the past and to heal the wounds. Present, offer and accept forgiveness to and from each other. Help Sudan close the painful past and start a new stage of development. Let us all rebuild what was broken by the war.

We must remember from earlier the solemn warning our Lord Jesus gave in Matthew 18:35. God will judge us if we do not forgive!

Solomon the wise man said:

- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline", Proverbs 1:7
- "Where there is no revelation (*vision*), the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law", Proverbs 29:18 (italics mine).
- "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people", Proverbs 14:34.

We call upon all Christian leaders to bring to Sudan respect and honour for God, to frame all our goals by God's revealed law, and to live personally in transparent honesty before God and before the Sudanese people. We need twenty-first century examples, role models of forgiving and being reconciled to one another, building a peace that can work..

Practical Recommendations:

1. The formation of a commission of forgiveness and reconciliation at the federal level.
2. The organising of workshops and a symposium on forgiveness and reconciliation for all categories of people
3. Intensive programming about peace in all forms of media.
4. Developing a curriculum of peace, teaching forgiveness and reconciliation in schools and religious colleges.
5. Compensation for families affected by war to reduce their bitterness and wounds.
6. Encouragement to include issues of peace and reconciliation as topics for preaching in the churches and mosques.
7. Setting up committees for counselling at all levels to help those who are affected with guidance and advice.

A prayer from St Francis of Assisi (born 1182, died 1226)

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
Not so much to be understood as to understand;
Not so much to be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we awaken to eternal life”

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. Do you find it easy to “love your enemies” as Jesus told Christians to do? Matthew 5:43-45.

Why? Why not?

Why do you think Jesus commanded this?

How can it be done? Consider Matthew 19:16-26.

2. What bitter roots do you think affect your immediate society today?

How can they be dealt with in a Christian spirit?

3. Imagine you are sitting outside one evening with a group of your neighbours, some Christians and some not.

Explain in ways they can easily understand *how and why* you want to forgive other people because you know God has forgiven you.

Consider Matthew 6:12 and Romans 12:17-21 among other Scriptures.

4. "Sudan will not enjoy the healing of her wounds while there is no true peace within and between Sudanese individuals".

(a). If this is true, what needs to happen where people have problems with others?

Be as practical as you can be in your answer.

(b). Can the Bible's teaching help a Christian play his or her part in this?

Share some of the Scriptures you think are relevant.

5. Why do some believers not enjoy the peace of God in their own hearts and lives?

Philippians 4:7.

6. Describe how you think "a Christian peacemaker" would operate in today's Sudan.

(Think locally rather than nationally or internationally).

Describe the characteristic activities of a "congregation of peace" .

7. If you were "developing a curriculum of peace, teaching forgiveness and reconciliation"

what relevant parts of the Bible would you put into it as a priority?

List Bible books and chapters and verses – and briefly say *why* it is included.

8. St Francis' prayer is an example of a person focused on the needs of others, not his own.

Why is selfishness such a problem in forgiveness and reconciliation?