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# Towards A Northern Ugandan Church as "Field Hospital": For A Pastorally Attuned Appropriation of Church Teaching

James Moro

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**Towards A Northern Ugandan Church as “Field Hospital”: For A Pastorally  
Attuned Appropriation of Church Teaching**

A thesis by

James Moro, SJ.

Presented to

The Faculty of The Jesuit School of

Theology of Santa Clara University

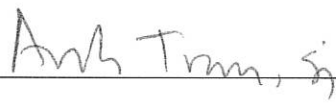
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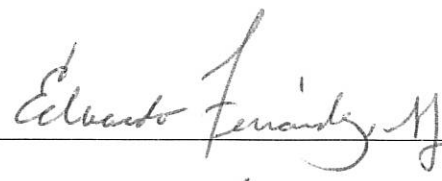
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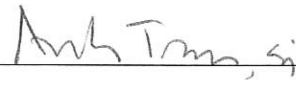
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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on northern Uganda in the context of war between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. I argue that the idea of Church as "field hospital" can help the Church there to reflect on its mission of bringing lasting healing, reconciliation and reintegration.

During the war, the people experienced displacement, gender and sexual violence, abduction, recruitment into the rebel ranks especially the children, mutilations of all kinds and horrific deaths. Moreover, the people were herded into internally displaced people's camps with very appalling conditions. The Church apart from attending to some of the immediate needs of the people, modeled its presence in the form of the "Church on its knees." The Church focused its mission on praying and appealing to the perpetrators of the war to come to the negotiating table to talk peace.

Given the changed circumstances due to the end of the war, I argue that the Church needs to move beyond being on its knees. With its emphasis on encounter, proximity, and accompaniment, the Church as "field hospital," in my view continues better the mission of the Church in the changed circumstances. This model enables the Church to pay attention to the people affected and afflicted by this war. This capacity helps the Church tap into the agency of the people and help them toward their healing, reconciliation and reintegration.

 5/6/2019

Anh Tran, SJ, Director

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God bless you all

For Victor-Luke Odhiambo, SJ.

May the shedding of his blood yield peace, healing and reconciliation

for South Sudan and Northern Uganda

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i>
AMECEA	Association of the Member of the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa Africa
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
CAR	Central African Republic
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
CSOPNO	Coalition Civil Society Organization for Northern Uganda
CUEA	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
DM	<i>Dives in Misericordia</i>
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
IDP	Internal Displaced Persons
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MV	<i>Misericordia Vultus</i>
PP	<i>Populorum Progressio</i>
UN	United Nations
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army



UPDF Uganda Peoples Defense Forces

USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Jesus expects us to stop looking for those personal and communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead to enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of [compassion and] tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated.” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*)

The people of northern Uganda are currently recovering from a civil war between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). This war spanned the period of the year 1987-2012. It forced people into internally displaced camps and led to untold sufferings of the population. Since then, there have been many efforts towards healing, reconciliation and reintegration of those displaced into their former communities. These efforts have been undertaken by various stakeholders including the Church. My lived experience in northern Uganda elicited in me a desire to study the Church and reflect on an alternative vision for the Church that can help it meaningfully engage the people and address their needs in this complex situation. This war happened when I was living in northern Uganda. I lived to experience the gun shots and to see those wounded, killed and mutilated. Though not directly affected, I know families whose children were abducted and who lost many relatives. Fear was real as cars could easily be ambushed by the rebels as we traveled in the region. I hope that this study will inform the ministry of the Church in Northern Uganda as well as in other parts of Africa such as Southern Sudan, Central African Republic, Eastern DRC, which face similar challenges.

## Nature of Study

Current studies about the Catholic Church in northern Uganda tend to be biographical and very descriptive. Among these works include the biographical work by Reggie Whitten and Nancy Henderson on Sister Rose Mary Nyirumbe titled, “Sewing Hope: Joseph Kony tore these girls apart. Can she stitch them together?” (Published 2013). The second study was by Carlos Rodrigues a missionary Priest of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Christ with the title “Tall grass” (Published 2009). Most studies tend to locate the role of the Catholic Church alongside the contribution of other religious traditions like the Orthodox, Anglican and Traditional religions. Such an approach, in my view has not brought out what the Catholic Church did or is doing distinctively.

I intend, therefore, to move beyond this biographical as well as historical and descriptive analysis to a systematic theological appraisal of the nature, reality, and mission of the Catholic Church in northern Uganda. Moreover, I want to demonstrate how a Catholic way of reconciliation, healing and integration could emerge from my study.

In terms of approach, I plan to make explicit in this study the interconnections among ecclesiology, missiology, anthropology and sociology. Using Pope Francis’ image of Church as “field hospital,”<sup>1</sup> I intend to explore the Church’s ministry of healing, reconciliation and new creation in the context of the violence and social disruption in northern Uganda. I will argue that, in the very process of healing wounds and warming

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *The Joy of Love: Amoris Laetitia: On Love and Family*, (Kentucky USA: Dynamic Catholic.com, 2015), 222. The theme of Church as “field hospital” is again developed by William T. Cavanaugh in his book, *Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World*. (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016).

hearts, the Church as “field hospital” continues better what the Church is doing especially by initiating new possibilities, that reflect God’s healing and reconciling presence in the world.

### **Ecclesiological Models and Church as ‘Field Hospital’**

Stephen Bevans, in his book *Models of Contextual theology*, states that “model as is used in the theoretical sense is a symbolic representation of selected aspects of the behavior of a complex system for particular purposes.”<sup>2</sup> Avery Dulles in his articulation of the models of the Church describes a model as a relatively simple artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated.<sup>3</sup> From this we glean the fact that models are not mirrors of reality out there; they are ideal types, either logically constructed theoretical positions or abstractions formed from concrete positions.

A model partakes in the metaphorical nature of all language, and so while it certainly affirms something real, it never really captures that reality, and so one can say the key to the proper use of models is to remember always the metaphorical tensions – the “is and is not” – in all our thinking and interpretation.<sup>4</sup> As constructions or of ideal types it is important that models be taken seriously. Pope Francis in answering the question

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church (Image Classics)*, Expanded, ed. (New York: Image, 1991), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 30.

posed to him by journalists on what kind of Church he dreams of, employs one such model of Church as a “field hospital.”

Using the understanding of model as described by Bevens and Dulles, I will examine the model of the Church as “field hospital” and inquire into how this new model as articulated by Pope Francis strengthens and makes more practical the understanding of the nature and mission of the Church in northern Uganda within its current circumstances.

One thing Christians would agree with Avery Dulles on is that at the end of it all, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the images and forms of Christian life will continue to change, as they have in previous centuries. For the fact of the matter is that in a healthy community of faith, the production of new myths and symbols goes on apace. The ecclesiologists of the future will no doubt devise new models for thinking about the Church. Nevertheless, what is new in Christianity always grows out of the past and has its roots in scripture and tradition. Because of the relative continuity of the past two thousand years, it seems safe to predict that the analogues and paradigms discussed in this study will retain their significance for ecclesiology through many generations yet to come with subsequent models bolstering previous ones, as I will demonstrate in this study.

## **Scope of Study**

In this thesis I intend to cover the reality and mission of the Church in northern Uganda with an emphasis on the Acholi sub region. I will situate this region in the conflict between the Ugandan Government and the Lord’s Resistance Army. Although this period of war extends back to the 1970s, I will focus primarily on the period from the year 2000

to the present. My choice of this period is explained by the following factors; this is the period when the conflict was at its worst; this period also saw the war come to an end; and, in this period, there has been significant intervention from the multinational humanitarian organizations, as well as from the Catholic Church. As a result, this period brought to the fore the mission of the Church and its understanding of its practice.

Much as the Church's intervention was occasioned by her mission to the afflicted, a proper study of this intervention is necessary so that aspects of this intervention that were taken for granted can be brought to the fore. Second, since the situation has changed, there is a need for a change of strategy in the church's intervention to suit the current circumstances of the people. My hope is that this study will benefit the people at the grassroots level and the Church hierarchy in northern Uganda. Second, if we understand the Church as the people of God on a journey through history, with joys and sorrows, then this study will inspire a creative way of imagining the Church in northern Uganda as it helps to foster healing of wounds, reconciliation, integration, and warming of hearts.

## **Thesis Statement**

Pope Francis' model of Church as "field hospital" with its emphasis on encounter, can enable the Church in northern Uganda to draw insights from pastoral situations and initiate new approaches that better reflect her mission to be God's healing and reconciling presence in the world.

## **Methodology**

I will use the pastoral circle to engage in a theological reflection that brings to the fore the ways in which the Church in northern Uganda can help promote harmony at both the individual and societal level, as well as, with the environment through fostering healing, integration and reconciliation in that part of the country. The steps of the pastoral cycle which determine my chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the study include four stages: Contact with reality (insertion), social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning. In using this method, I am aware of the criticism that at times the outcome of this process seems easily predictable at the onset. I hope to engage in this study in a way that I can expect the unexpected and be ready to incorporate unforeseen outcomes.

## **Significance of Study**

Since 2000, the Church in northern Uganda focused its mission during the civil war through its involvement with the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). This was a forum that brought together the Christian and Muslim leaders in the Acholi land in Northern Uganda. Its Vice Chairperson was His Grace John Baptist O'dama, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Gulu. This group played a significant role in creating a bridge between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This bridge building was in the areas of improving the level of trust and confidence on both sides with a strategy of putting pressure on the rebels and the government to stop fighting and initiate peace talks. ARLPI worked to advocate for an end to the conflict in northern Uganda and maintained communication with the LRA. Although the organization never played the role

of mediator specifically, it explored possible ways of keeping the two sides in contact. In the role of being a bridge, ARLPI was authorized by the government of Uganda to make contacts with the LRA. The organization's maxim was Religious leaders do not bend, they are always straight referring to the impartiality and integrity of the religious leaders in the region.

In other words, therefore, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) engaged in a number of activities for peacebuilding in northern Uganda. These peacebuilding activities ranged from training and peace education, advocacy and sensitization, support to community-based peace programs, and research documentation. These programs forged forgiveness, welcomed home some of the former rebels, and raised awareness about the war.

While the contribution of the Church was valuable, it tended to deal with immediate needs of the people in almost the NGO style. Therefore, for the Church in northern Uganda to be truly credible to its mission of journeying with the faithful in history, it must reassess its mission. First, during the war the Church paid more attention to the government and the LRA rebels and failed to discern the needs of the people properly. Second, the Church's relief effort used a top-down approach and so did not tap into the agency of the people who were affected and afflicted by the war. Thus, it needs to reflect on new ways of being Church. Therefore, the model of Church as "field hospital" can help the Church in northern Uganda discern a deeper and more relevant understanding of being Church given the circumstances under which it operates.



This study attempts to make three contributions: first, to take seriously the agency of the people affected and afflicted by the war in Northern Uganda. Second, it attempts to help the Church in northern Uganda reflect on new ways of being Church and discern a deeper and more relevant way of implementing her mission. Last but not least, this study takes the context of the people seriously in appropriating Church doctrine.

## **Overview of chapters**

What follows is a short summary of the various chapters of this study. In the first chapter, I offer an overview of African ecclesiology. The main question I pose in this chapter concerns the current state of the Church. From the broader perspective of the Church in Africa, I will explore in general what pertains to the subject of ecclesiology in Africa from the perspective of African theologians. In the end, I propose that this broader view of the Church in Africa will help buttress my study of the mission of the Church in northern Uganda. Although this study focuses on the Roman Catholic Church as the primary unit of ecclesiastical analysis, this focus does not confine the choice of resources to Catholic theologians.<sup>5</sup> Whether Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Indigenous-independent, the churches in Africa exist in context which evince similar characteristics.

The second chapter covers the first moment of the pastoral circle. This moment underscores the fact that “the lived experience of individuals and communities must be the

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<sup>5</sup> For the non-Catholic authors I engage in this study which makes this study ecumenical, see John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Oxford; Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 1990), J. N. Kanyua Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995). Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, *South Africa: My Vision of the Future*, First Edition. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

foundation for all pastoral responses: What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they are responding. These are the experiences that constitute primary data.”<sup>6</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* counsels the scrutinization of the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the gospel. The key questions I will ask here are: What is the socio-historical context of the Church in northern Uganda? What are the major issues arising from this context?

The third chapter will convey the second moment of the pastoral circle. It involves understanding and exploring the data on the Church in northern Uganda, especially in this period of conflict. Peter Henriot describes this step as “the effort to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships.”<sup>7</sup> The key questions I will grapple with in this chapter will be: What is the reality, nature and mission of the Church and its self-understanding in Northern Uganda given its context characterized by people recovering from a civil war? Another key question will be: How did the church address the needs of the people, both immediate and long-term? In broad strokes, this chapter identifies and evaluates the methods and strategies the Church in northern Uganda adopted to carry out its function in society.

The fourth chapter covers the third moment of the pastoral circle, I intend to shine the light of faith on the experiences that have been analyzed. Joe Holland and Peter Henriot say that this moment is an “effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analyzed

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<sup>6</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis, Linking Faith and Justice*, (New York: Dove Communications and Orbis Books, 1983), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis, Linking Faith and Justice*, 8

experience.”<sup>8</sup> Working out the riches contained in the image of the Church as ‘field hospital,’ amounts to a theological undertaking. Chapter four explores the theology of the Church as ‘field hospital’ in the service of reconciliation, healing and restoration: encounter, solidarity, and mercy, to mention but a few of these theological qualities.

The last chapter covers the fourth moment of the pastoral circle which is the stage of alternative praxis. Here, I will plan and propose some concrete action. As is evident, in any theological enterprise, one needs to be wary of a purely speculative approach. Therefore, we need to formulate concrete proposals regarding how the Church as “field hospital” might better effectuate its mission to the people of northern Uganda. The main questions in this chapter include: In the light of the experiences analyzed and reflected upon, what response is called for by the Church? How should the response be designed in order to be the most effective not only in the short run but also in the long term?”<sup>9</sup> The other questions I will ask here are: How can the model of Church as field hospital concretely contribute to healing, reconciliation and reintegration of the people of northern Uganda? What concrete solutions does Church as ‘field hospital’ propose for the Church in northern Uganda? I will argue that being a Church that is close to the people, Church as “field hospital” with its emphasis on encounter, proximity, and solidarity and beginning from experience, continues better the mission of the Church in the changed circumstances of northern Uganda.

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<sup>8</sup>Frans Wisjen, Peter Henriot and Rodrigo Mejia (eds.), *The Pastoral Cycle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications/ Daughters of St. Paul, 2006), 84.

<sup>9</sup> Wisjen, Henriot and Mejia (eds.) *The Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 84.

# Chapter 1

## Ecclesiology in the African Context: A Preliminary Survey

### 1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a preliminary survey of the state of the discipline of ecclesiology in Africa today. My task here is to review the relevant literature on African ecclesiology. I begin by mentioning the theologies on which the various African ecclesiologies emerge and are grounded. In particular, I examine the African theologies of Liberation with their sub trends like the theology of reconstruction, South African black theology and feminist theology. With this background I intend first, to provide a panoramic view of the development of theology in Africa. Second, to buttress the consideration of the idea of Church as “field hospital” for northern Uganda.

African contemporary theology has been studied from “two broad motifs: African cultural theology, which stresses inculturation and adaptation of Christianity to Africa, and liberation/ black theology in South Africa deployed to fight racial discrimination.”<sup>10</sup> In a broad categorization, we have the theologies of inculturation and the theologies of liberation.<sup>11</sup> In the following sections, I will concentrate on African theologies of Liberation and its influence on the work of healing and reconciliation in Uganda.

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<sup>10</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, “African Theology,” In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 245.

<sup>11</sup> Aylward Shorter in his book *Towards a Theology of Inculturation* (1999), states that the introduction and popularization of the term inculturation seems to be very largely due the Jesuits. According to him, the very first recorded use of the word in a theological sense seems to be by Fr. Joseph Masson SJ, shortly before the opening of the second Vatican council in 1962 when he wrote “Today there is a more urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated in in a variety of forms.” Second, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Congregation of the Jesuits is said to have used the actual word “inculturation” frequently. It is said that though the bishops

## 1.1 Family of God as the Model of African Ecclesiology

The official endorsement of the notion of the “Church as family of God”, as an ecclesiological concept by the Roman Catholic African Synod in 1994, found a fertile ground on African soil and so easily stimulated ecclesiological reflections. This endorsement stemmed from the understanding that Church as family expresses both the nature and mission of the Church in a way which is particularly appropriate for Africa. As a result, the African bishops found it appropriate to argue that “the mystery of the Love of the Triune God is the origin, model and purpose of the Church..., a mystery which finds suitable expression for Africa in the image of the Church- as-Family.”<sup>12</sup>

An examination of the model of family and clan or community reveal some potential liabilities. First, a distinction has to be made between the African traditional family and the contemporary One. In any case, the distinctive mark of the African family is that it is hierarchical and tends to vest authority and power in the man and the women in few cases of matrilineal societies and so reducing the other members of the family to a subservient position. More to that is the fact that the rights of children are only beginning to be realized and respected. The view of the Church as family is as well feared to entail a narrow conception of the universality of the Church. The question in the preceding regard is; despite these misgivings on the African family, why was the model of Church as

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of Africa and Madagascar made strong statements to the Rome synod on evangelization in 1974 about the reality of inculturation, they did not use the term. The word inculturation is said to have first appeared in a papal document in 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Maura Brown, ed. *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, (Maryknoll NY: Orbis books, 1996), 89.

family recommended? To this John Mary Waliggo has it that “when the Church as family model is recommended, it is important to agree that this does not mean any of the families that are not yet fully liberated.”<sup>13</sup> It is therefore a creation of “a vision of an African family where equality is guaranteed, sharing of responsibility is accepted, the clear option for the disadvantaged members is made, and deadly tensions are eliminated.”<sup>14</sup> Without this, he contends that; “the theology of the Church as family is a double-edged sword that may be used profitably but may also lead to benign paternalism.”<sup>15</sup>

Another response to the aforementioned misgivings about the African family as a model for the Church in Africa is that; to say that the Church is the family of God in Africa in the preceding circumstances “serves as a corrective to the defects of the family model.”<sup>16</sup> The Church as a family of God has a universal bond of relationships. To bolster this point, recourse is made to a proper understanding of Trinitarian theology. This is understood as serving to eliminate “the particularistic and enslaving tendency of the family.”<sup>17</sup>

God is, first, a community of the creator of the first human family to which we all belong. This human family is redeemed by Jesus Christ who, through the pascal mystery, has pulled down the dividing wall of separation: division of race, tribe,

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<sup>13</sup> Diane B. Stinton, ed., *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, SPCK International Study Guide 46 (London: SPCK, 2010), 42.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Orobator, “*Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*” (Marquette University e-publications, 1996), 269.

<sup>17</sup> Orobator, *Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*, 270.

clan, social class, etc. Through the Son the Father pours out the Spirit on all believers, making them all children of one family.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, “conceived in such terms, the potentials of retrieving the values of the extended family are indispensable in the vital quest for the emergence of a truly African ecclesiology.”<sup>19</sup>

## **1.2 Ecclesiology in African Theology of Reconstruction**

The scenario for an African theology of reconstruction is this. From a simple view of statistics of the number of Catholics in the world, we find that the numbers are growing steadily in the African continent. We are constantly told of the demographics of the Catholic Church shifting to the global south. Yet on the other hand, the continent of Africa seems to be the theatre of a number of conflicts and other socio-economic challenges. The preceding scenario calls to mind Mugambi’s question “how can the most religious continent in the world be abandoned by God to perish in poverty, in debt and under the yoke of the great powers of the world?”<sup>20</sup> Is it that the religion embraced by the Africans has failed to empower them to express their agency in a more productive manner? It is these questions that occasioned Mugambi’s “call for the need to shift our theological gear from liberation to reconstruction.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Orobator, *Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*, 270.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> J. N. Kanyua Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 165.

<sup>21</sup> Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*, 165.

Mugambi's ecclesiology resonates well with that articulated by Elochukwu E. Uzukwu who says that "the theology of a Church-community that will become a credible witness to the social transformation of Africa is a theology which focuses on the emergence of an alternative society where the daughters and sons of Africa will enjoy their freedoms and liberties and participate in changing the continent."<sup>22</sup> That is why Ela invites African ecclesiologists to rethink the whole edifice of the Christian faith in Africa that is "called to confess Jesus Christ in a continent which tends to become a veritable empire of hunger, perhaps we should rethink the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith. Our reflection must begin with the concrete practices and alternatives wherein the memory and resistance of our people have been articulated."<sup>23</sup> This is consistent with the insistent call in the continent of Africa for the construction of the kind of society that will see Africa through its present crisis.

In the same vein, Katongole could not understand how an overwhelmingly Christian country became the site of the horrific events of the Rwandan genocide, and how the burden of disease, wars and poverty has continued to afflict Africa despite the growing numbers of Christians in this continent. In his recent publication *The sacrifice of Africa: A political Theology for Africa*, Katongole offers a perspective on a theological grammar of hope.<sup>24</sup> He writes, "the Church's unique calling and mission at the

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<sup>22</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 104.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 104.



intersection of social brokenness and repair is to be a sacrament of God's ongoing work of social repair."<sup>25</sup> This is what the Church can offer when people are confronted with misery and situations that could drive them easily into despair. Here the Church does not shield itself from the face of misfortune; it rather moves to the margins.

In a word therefore, the preceding views on how African ecclesiologies have emerged from the various inculturation theologies illuminate the ecclesiological dimensions and offer a fresh confirmation of why and how the Church is needed both as the recipient of God's gift of new creation and as its ambassador in a broken and violent world.

### **1.3 African Theologies of liberation**

African Liberation Theology is found mainly in the rest of black Africa outside South Africa. Since its early beginnings, it has been broader in scope in that it includes the problems of socio-economic oppression from the western powers and oppressive elements in the African socio-cultural context. While, the South African black theology, centered exclusively on apartheid.

What is key in Liberation theology of whichever form is the fact that the social context has been decisive for ecclesiology. One such ecclesiology is Mangosuthu Buthelezi's "creational and existential black ecclesiology centered primarily on liberation of South African blacks from racial oppression (apartheid) by the South African

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 265.

whites.”<sup>26</sup> Buthelezi’s ecclesiology is creational and existential in the sense that for him, creation and the Church are not two opposing or contending categories but are closely related. There is between them a continuity of the flow of wholeness of life from God. In other words, “God’s acts of creation and salvation (in the Church) are two events united by their *telos*”<sup>27</sup> As a result, through its salvific function, the Church participates in God’s creative work as well as in the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ to all humanity. To elucidate further the creational basis of human existence, Buthelezi refers to the biblical narrative that man and woman were created in the image of God. From this he concludes that all human beings are equal, and racism is therefore anti-biblical. In order to affirm further that all human beings are equal, he uses the theory of “natural or ethical demands”<sup>28</sup> as created qualities given by God to human beings to regulate and realize their life. He understands such ethical demands as a form of “existential givenness that make human beings aware of being human for the sake of regulating their relationship with other human beings.”<sup>29</sup> For this reason, she contends that whites and their

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Nyamiti “Models of the Church In African Theology,” in *Faces of African Theology: Proceedings of the Seventh Interdisciplinary Session of the Faculty of Theology and Department of Religious Studies, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa*, ed. Patric Ryan (Karen, Nairobi, Kenya: Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 2003), 117.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Natural ethical demands is an approach developed by Loegstrup a professor of Ethics and Philosophy to examine what ethical outlook is embodied in the love commandment by considering in more detail what it is to love the neighbor, and then to consider how to make sense of that commandment in terms of "decisive features of our existence," which include the metaphysical implications of taking it seriously.

<sup>29</sup> S.I. Munga, “Beyond the Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation.” (PhD Diss., Lund University, 1989), 391.

missionaries are blameworthy for their oppressive apartheid. All human beings who are equally related to God are also capable of knowing their responsibilities to each other.

Another existential reality Buthelezi employs for his purpose is “corporate solidarity.”<sup>30</sup> From the ecclesiological perspective, he uses this concept for two purposes. First, he uses it to explain the relationship between the world and the Church as characterized by “corporate solidarity in sin”, and second, in order to illustrate that the responsibility of the Church to the world is characterized by “solidarity in the Lordship of Christ”.<sup>31</sup> He uses these two types of solidarity to show that the superiority complex of the whites in relation to the blacks has no solid basis, and secondly, to indicate that the practice of apartheid had contradicted the meaning of the Lordship of Christ. In the ensuing circumstances, he states that “the Church has the responsibility to unveil the hidden Lordship of Christ, as an eschatological reality, through its service in the world.”<sup>32</sup> This concern with liberation is shared by African liberation theologians in other parts of Africa and the world who describe the Church as “a liberating agent in Africa.”<sup>33</sup>

With the coming of age of feminist theology, in the works of the circle of concerned African Women theologians like Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ecclesiological

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<sup>30</sup> “Corporate solidarity.” basically means that God sees us “together as a group” – that is to say that He looks at us not only as “persons,” but as “peoples.” The result of corporate solidarity is that we are related to others in such a way that we share in the consequences of their choices, for good or for bad.

<sup>31</sup> Munga. “Beyond the Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation, 391.

<sup>32</sup> Munga. “Beyond the Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation, 391.

<sup>33</sup> Laurenti Magesa, “Am I not a Human Being and a Brother/ Sister?” *African Ecclesial Review* 34, (February 1992), 95-114.

reflections have also taken gender, the experiences of women, and injustice as their important starting points for ecclesiology.<sup>34</sup> What is clear here is that women theologians are critical of the ecclesiologies that tend to undermine their dignity and downplay their contribution and influence to the life of the larger society and the Church. To this effect, the African women theologians employ “cultural hermeneutics to do a critical analysis of the histories and engagement of women in theological discourse.”<sup>35</sup> In their reflections they also pledged to fight HIV which has disproportionately affected women in Africa. Here they hope to work towards the realization of communities that affirm all humans and the entire creation. In the same vein, Hazel O. Ayanga claims that the Church can provide leadership in changing social attitudes regarding the subjugation of women by men in the church and civil society. She argues that probably because of its predominantly patriarchal power structure, the Church has so far failed to effect this change of attitude. Yet in her view “this prejudiced attitude of the Church goes against its own teaching; that in Christ all things are made new, the old has passed away.”<sup>36</sup>

Much as the African women theologians draw from African culture in their reflections, they employ cultural hermeneutics to do a critical analysis of the histories and engagement of women in theological discourse calling for a new way of relationships between men and women. Therefore, their concerns are geared towards finding

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<sup>34</sup> Mercy Oduyoye’s ideas are found in her book entitled “*Hearing and Knowing*”. The African women theologians present their ideas more in Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds., *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, Limited ed. (Eugene, Oregon: Orbis, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Bongmba, "African Theology" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, 246.

<sup>36</sup> Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng, eds., *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays. Second Edition*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999), 100.

transformed ways in which both men and women can feel that the Church affirms their humanity.

#### **1.4 Critical Assessment of the State of Ecclesiology in Africa**

The above presentation of African ecclesiologies is not exhaustive nor was it intended to be such. In spite of its limited scope, this exposition provides a reasonable grounding for the study. By reading the above exposition, I hope the reader will understand that, like African Christology, African ecclesiology is already an actual reality, giving some new original insights in articulating the mystery of the Church.

What comes out clearly as the main characteristic of the ecclesiologies we have examined is their practical intent. In practically all cases, the motivation is the solution of some practical problem in the Church and in the world especially the African theologies of liberation and the sub trend of theology of reconstruction. What is also praiseworthy is the use of African cultural categories for ecclesiological purposes. In this regard, African ecclesiology has tended to emphasize the communal model over other ecclesiological paradigms. This tendency has been heightened by the prescription of the African synod in Rome (1994) urging African theologians to construct an African ecclesiology of the Church as God's family. From the preceding description we can say African ecclesiology has already given a positive contribution to theology in the Church.

In spite of the positive elements, most of the studies on African ecclesiology lack in their theological and pastoral findings. This will require African theologians to move to the production of an authentically rigorous and systematic African theology. To this

effect, the following hints are deemed helpful. The employment of the principle of the interconnection of the Christian mysteries is an important element in leading to the further deepening of African ecclesiology. This principle implies that in doing theology, the African theologians should engage the Christian mysteries as organically related to each other. Hence, an ecclesiology that does not scrutinize the intimate link between the Church, the Trinity, the Eucharist and Christology is bound to be shallow and deficient. These mysteries are so closely related together in such a way that they mutually determine the inner mode of their being, so much so that none of them can be properly or adequately understood outside of its intimate relationship with the others.

Again, all genuine ecclesiology should avoid reducing the meaning and goal of the Church to merely human terrestrial benefits. The engagement of the Church in the problems afflicting society should never eclipse or overpower its spiritual duties and should be intended for and be determined solely by the mission of the Church to spread God's eschatological kingdom (which is essentially different from such terrestrial welfare, although it is inseparably tied to it) as willed by Jesus Christ. For this purpose, Nyamiti argues that "it is better to speak of integral liberation and integral reconstruction (of both body and soul) as being the proper task of the Church."<sup>37</sup>

In the same vein, ecclesiology should not be limited to the earthly Church alone. Recourse should be made to the Catholic traditional teaching that the Church is tripartite, in the sense that it consists of three Churches forming one Church. These are the earthly

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<sup>37</sup>Charles Nyamiti, "Models of the Church in African Theology," in *Faces of African Theology: Proceedings of the Seventh Interdisciplinary Session of the Faculty of Theology and Department of Religious Studies, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa*, Patrick Ryan, ed. (Nairobi-Kenya: CUEA Publications, 2003), 129.

pilgrim Church; the suffering Church in Purgatory, and the triumphant Church already in heaven. This understanding is relevant for the African family ecclesiology for the simple reason that the African traditional family as stipulated in the African ontology includes in itself the ancestors (the parallel of the Christian saints in heaven and purgatory), as its integral members.

Notwithstanding the preceding potential liabilities, I still deem it necessary that critical western scholarship should not dismiss the contextual interpretations as un critical inventions but rather take them as legitimate interpretations of the Churches of the African continent. The richness and multiplicity of biblical metaphors, symbols, and titles of Jesus Christ in the New Testament alone also legitimize this enterprise.

## **1.5 Conclusion.**

From this study one sees that there are two major trends in today's African Theologies. These are the theologies of inculturation and the one of liberation each with a variety of sub-trends within it. Their quality depends on their theological effectiveness and capacity to effectively meet the pastoral demands in a given place and time. Nevertheless, what is indisputable is that no theological method is absolutely perfect. We have to contend with the fact that in the world of theology there have been and will be many types of approaches and methods, but none of them can claim absolute perfection. Indeed, they are complementary to each other and so should be well studied and harmoniously integrated. The critical question in relation to ecclesiology is how to understand the nature and distinctive mission of the Church within a particular context

and in its relation to the whole household of God. What is at stake here is the need for an appropriate language to express the link between what the Church is and what it does. My interest in this chapter is to show that the development of a new way of being Church in Africa is rooted in the context and builds on and expands previous attempts in understanding what it means to be Church. I hope that this will entrench in the Christian community in northern Uganda as has been demonstrated by the theologies of inculturation and liberation from which the various articulations of ecclesiology in Africa have emerged the awareness that the Church does not exist for herself. Rather, her purpose is to bear witness to the risen Lord in the concrete circumstances of world.



## Chapter 2

### Socio-Historical Context of The Church in Northern Uganda

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter constitutes the first moment of the Pastoral circle; insertion into the reality in order to understand the social context in which the Church is situated and the issues that arise from that context. I am convinced that, understanding the context helps us examine how the Church has been present in that context.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first part I will examine the necessity of a historical consciousness to a social issue in understanding the social situation at hand. In the second part, I will explore the socio historical background of northern Uganda. My intention here is to reveal the root causes of the conflict and how it was experienced by the people. In the third part, I will analyze the issues arising from that socio historical context.

#### 2.1 The Importance of Historical Consciousness

I propose in this chapter a pastoral approach to a social situation that “looks at the reality from an involved, historically committed stance. The aim here is to discern the situation for the purpose of action.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the discernment of such a situation

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Holland and Peter J. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983), 7.

grounds the pastoral responses in the lived experience of the people and communities. One instance that has captured my attention in Mathew's gospel is when Jesus reproaches the Pharisees and Sadducees saying: "You know how to judge the appearance of the sky, but you cannot judge the signs of the times" (Mt: 16:3). According to T. Howland Sanks and John Coleman, judging the signs of the times in terms of the preceding statement means "interpreting historical events and values [in a way so as] ...to recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics."<sup>39</sup>

The questions I shall respond to in this chapter include: what are the people feeling? What are they undergoing and how are they responding? In fact, historical consciousness, which arises from a close examination of social history, leads to a fruitful reflection on how the Church can better serve the people in a particular context as it looks towards the future. The Christian faith in the Church is lived in history. It is always inscribed in a context, expressed in praxis and manifested in the Christian message of liberation in Jesus Christ. Applying the preceding understanding to Africa and especially to northern Uganda means analyzing the northern Ugandan context; beginning with the reality in which it is located in time and space. This helps us reap from the wealth of history by relativizing the immediate and situating us "in a larger context by clarifying our past and offering insights into the future."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> T. Howland Sanks and John Aloysius Coleman, eds., *Reading the Signs of the Times: Resources for Social and Cultural Analysis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Central in social analysis of any social issue is the historical question: “where are we coming from and where are we going?”<sup>41</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot argue that “this historical dimension is necessary if we are to avoid abstract analysis and recognize the concrete differences in each particular situation [all the while placing] current events and challenges into a perspective.”<sup>42</sup>

A snapshot of the socio-historical context of the Northern Ugandan Church reveals that this part of Uganda experienced a series of traumatic events during a horrific war that continues to define it. In order for the people and the Church to move beyond that trauma, it is necessary to reflect on how the past experience of the northern Ugandans influences the present in order to move forward. The Church, too, has endured difficult times as it endeavored to shepherd the people of God during these difficult periods. The civil war between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and the Government of Uganda has affected the Church’s self-understanding and its mission. Studying the Church in northern Uganda necessarily requires a study of the region’s past because historicity is very important in understanding the saving action of God in the World.

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<sup>41</sup> Sanks and Coleman, eds., *Reading the Signs of the Times*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 8.

## 2.2 The Socio-Historical Context of Northern Uganda

The socio-historical context of my study is northern Uganda which suffered a brutal war for over 21 years.<sup>43</sup> This war was between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony and the Government of Uganda led by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. There are a number of reasons that have been identified as having caused this war. These reasons shall be examined in the following sections of the study. Nevertheless, what comes out clearly as we shall see in detail is that, during this war, the fighters of the Lord's Resistance Army not only targeted or ambushed government and military establishments and vehicles; but also attacked villages, burnt down houses, killed indiscriminately, abducted children to mention but a few of these atrocities. By these acts, the rebels of the LRA exercised over Gulu (One of the central districts in northern Uganda) and the surrounding districts a "sovereignty of terror."<sup>44</sup> The government responded through its offensive operation dubbed "'iron fist' which began in 2002 against the rebels."<sup>45</sup> This operation tragically resulted in more retaliatory attacks and eventually led to the government's policy of confinement, forcing "more than 90% of the population to become internally displaced persons (IDPs)."<sup>46</sup> As the war raged on, the

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<sup>43</sup> See Uganda Bureau of statistics 2006. Northern Uganda is one of the four regions in the country Uganda. The Uganda Bureau of statistics report of 2006 indicates that Northern Uganda stretches over an area of 241,550.6 square kilometers and has a population of 7,188,139.

<sup>44</sup> See Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, The Eerdmans Ekklesia series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2011), 151. Here, Katongole describes the sheer brutality of the war in Northern Uganda. He states that the brutality defies comprehension. In a somewhat graphic way, he describes it as involving the burning of villages, cutting off of limbs and other body parts, rape, and killings executed in the most unimaginable manner.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

people had little or no access to their fields. As a result, the population was reduced to a desperate situation of mere survival within the internally displaced people's camps (IDPS). This gave way to other social ills like alcoholism and prostitution. These became rampant as people tried other ways to deal with their frustration and earn a living. The war came to an end in 2006 after twenty years of armed conflict when a ceasefire between the Uganda Government and the LRA was signed. Kony eventually withdrew from Northern Uganda to the north of Congo and Chad, where he is said to reside today.

### **2.3 Brief Description of the Origin of the Conflict in Northern Uganda**

Tor Arne Berntsen reports that the LRA war in northern Uganda began when “the Acholi soldiers who were serving in the national army, fearing ethnic extermination by the government forces under Obote and Amin fled north. This led to the birth of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA); a rebel group that many Acholi soldiers joined.<sup>47</sup> When Museveni and his National Resistance Army took power in 1986, he defeated the UNLA and “many soldiers formerly associated with this rebel group had problems demobilizing and reintegrating and so began attacking their communities.”<sup>48</sup>

The Acholi response to this situation through a political uprising against the southern government of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni marked the beginning of the LRA insurgency. This political uprising of the Acholi was complicated by a spiritual

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<sup>47</sup> Tor Arne Berntsen, "Negotiated Identities: The Discourse on the Role of Child Soldiers in the Peace Process in Northern Uganda," in *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*, Bible & theology in Africa v. 10, ed. Bård Mæland, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 41.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

dimension. The prophet Alice Lakwena emerged and raised an army of Acholi soldiers called the Holy Spirit movement (HSM).<sup>49</sup> Her military strategy was a combination of guerrilla tactics and spiritual ritual practices. With these tactics especially the spiritual ritual practices, she was able to convince her soldiers that “if they purified themselves, they would not be wounded in battle.”<sup>50</sup> With these tactics she could not register much success as one would expect leading to her defeat by Museveni’s forces in 1987.

After Alice Lakwena was defeated, “Joseph Kony became the new rebel leader in the north, claiming to have inherited the spiritual powers of his predecessor.”<sup>51</sup> He immediately established himself and became the leader of the Lord’s resistance Army (LRA), which consisted of many fighters formerly associated with the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM). He took up the mantle in the footsteps of Alice Lakwena of those in the Acholi tribe who remained fixed on a military victory as the only solution to the ongoing turmoil afflicting their homeland.

A question that remains unanswered in relation to the LRA war is, why did Kony, at some point, direct his wrath in unprecedented proportions against his own people, the Acholi? Yet, in the beginning, he claimed to fight the injustices perpetrated by the regime

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<sup>49</sup> See Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirit: War in Northern Uganda 1986-79*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999). This book recounts the Story of Alice Auma an Acholi woman from Northern Uganda who on January 2 ,1985 was possessed by an alien Christian spirit known as Lakwena (‘Messenger’ in Acholi) and became known as Alice Lakwena. From this event ensued a powerful movement, and its very nearly successful military insurrection against the government of Uganda laid background to the Lord’s Resistance Army.

<sup>50</sup> Behrend, *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirit*, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Dunson, *Child, Victim, Soldier*, 32.

against his people. From the way, the LRA war started and eventually developed, the LRA initially enjoyed popular support among the Acholi, partly due to hostility in the northern region towards the southern dominated government, led by Museveni. However, as this support waned, the LRA became increasingly brutal as it felt betrayed by the people who initially supported them and so started attacking their own civilian population and abducting children.<sup>52</sup> These terror tactics played out in large scale particularly after 1994 when the peace talks between the government and the LRA failed. The war then assumed an international dimension when the Sudanese government started supporting the LRA in a proxy war scenario and provided them a safe haven and arms, presumably in retaliation for the government of Uganda's support of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army insurgency.

## **2.4 Causes of the Conflict in Northern Uganda**

The conflict in northern Uganda can be explained in terms of a complex web of historical, cultural, and tribal factors operating in various proportions to the turmoil. In general, James Ojera Latigo suggests that these factors include, "ethnic dominance (or polarization), which produced stereotyping and hate and enemy images; economic disparities (marginalization) and or underdevelopment, exacerbating poverty; inconsistent pseudo democratic and autocratic regimes; and other complicating factors."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dunson, *Child, Victim, Soldier*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Latigo, "Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region," 88.

However, from the historical account of the behavior of the post-colonial governments, what is clear is that beneath all the factors mentioned above that played a role in causing the conflict, “untrammelled and absolute power”<sup>54</sup> that has characterized the exercise of political power in Uganda is the bigger culprit.

#### **2.4.1 Ethnicity, Stereotypes, and Hate and Enemy Image**

The conflict in Northern Uganda, is rooted in both the colonial and post-colonial politics of Uganda. The British expanded their power influence over Uganda through force. This included a manipulation of preexisting differences among the kingdoms and chiefdoms and an adoption of the administrative strategy of ‘divide and rule.’ As a result, Uganda was “divided into administrative ‘paddocks’ . . . meant to resource the labor needs of the British in areas such as the army, capitalist agriculture, industry and junior administration for the colonial service.”<sup>55</sup>

This historical background led to a theory commonly referred to as “the ‘north-south divide.’”<sup>56</sup> This theory operated in such a way that the northern inhabitants, were used as a labor reservoir, while the southern inhabitants; were used as producers of cash crops. This explains why to the present time, the north has lagged behind the south in

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<sup>54</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 88.

<sup>55</sup> Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> See Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 89. See also *the International Crisis Group Africa Report*, (No. 77 issued April 2004,) 2. Here the ‘north-south divide’ is explained as resulting from an economic imbalance that suited the colonial administration. This was manifested in the introduction of industry and cash crop production in the south with the north becoming a reservoir of labor. The northerners came to dominate in the army as they were told by their colonial masters that they were born warriors as the southerners helped the colonial powers in administration.



terms of development and also why the Acholi, in particular, came to dominate in the army. Therefore, the conflict in Northern Uganda has been portrayed to a large extent as a reflection of the ‘north-south divide’, explained in terms of the notorious colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ that was ably applied with impunity by both the colonial and the post-colonial regimes.

This colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ fed stereotypical prejudices into the minds of Ugandans and led to a misrepresentation of facts for political reasons.<sup>57</sup> This became the *modus operandi* for many of those who sought political office. That is why since independence the political elite in Uganda as well as those in many other African countries have politicized ethnicity as a means by which they can acquire and maintain political power in the country.<sup>58</sup> To a very denigrating extent, stereotypical labels of backwardness, primitiveness and ignorance applied to the northerners have arisen from this unprincipled political tribalism.

Stereotypes of the Acholi people as war mongers echoed over and over again even in academic circles to the extent that prominent social scientists like Ali Mazrui, who is regarded as a knowledgeable writer found himself referring to the Acholi in terms of notions of military ethnocracy and military democracy.<sup>59</sup> Not only that, government officials have been implicated in referring to the Acholi as a martial tribe and have tended

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<sup>57</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 89.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> See Ali A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (London: Sage Publications, 1975). See also Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 45.

to legitimize oppression in ethnic terms.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the late army commander James Kazini is quoted to have said on one occasion “if anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problem [referring to the war in Northern Uganda] ... it is the cultural problem of the people here: they are very violent. It is genetic.”<sup>61</sup>

This imposition of collective guilt was reinforced in the mindsets of people in northern Uganda to the extent that it became difficult to interrogate this historical memory or record. These stereotypes constantly fed into the ethnic and regional divide and caused the Ugandans and others to perceive the conflict in Northern Uganda as war between the north and the south.

#### **2.4.2 Economic Disparities, Marginalization, Underdevelopment and Poverty**

Northern Uganda is one of the regions that continues to be marginalized and disadvantaged in terms of social and economic development compared to other parts of the country.<sup>62</sup> One indicator of this marginalization is the great imbalance in the levels of development in this region compared to that found in the central and western parts of the country. This marginalization has made poverty worse in the north. According to Latigo, the poverty status report in 2003 indicated that “one third of the chronically poor and a disproportionate percentage of those moving into poverty are from Northern Uganda.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 86.

<sup>61</sup> Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 114.

<sup>62</sup> Berntsen, “Negotiated Identities,” 41.

<sup>63</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 90.

Although at times poverty may be treated as an escalating factor that creates resentment in society, its role in the conflict in northern Uganda is only part and parcel of the structural factors underlying the conflict. Much of this is because it was deliberately rooted in marginalization. Besides, when it comes to young people, unemployment and the lack of opportunity to meet their needs easily drives them to violence for economic gain.

### **2.4.3 A Weakening State**

Around the period of the war in northern Uganda, there were simultaneous uprisings in the “Teso sub-region in eastern Uganda.”<sup>64</sup>As can be expected, when the uprising in the north took place in 1987, the military capabilities were overwhelmed.

Moreover, there were other operational and professional problems within the military that prolonged the rebellion. Among these were “a lack of a clear counter insurgency military strategy and a lack of logistical support for the zonal forces.” The Ugandan Government forces were implicated in a series of violations of civilians in the north. Corruption and mismanagement alone are said to have “consumed approximately a quarter of the defense budget and hampered its effectiveness”<sup>65</sup> despite Museveni’s promises to professionalize the army. The corruption in the army assumed different shades from “low level thefts, creation of ghost or non-existent soldiers whose pay was pocketed by pay masters and commanders, to the acquisition of faulty military equipment

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<sup>64</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 90.

<sup>65</sup> See the Human Rights Report entitled “*The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda*” (New York: Library of Congress cataloging, Sept.1977), 80.

including helicopters and tanks.”<sup>66</sup> All these dented the legitimacy of the NRM/A government as it failed in its responsibility to protect the population. The impression the people of northern Uganda got was that there was no legitimate authority in place whose task was to protect lives and properties of its citizens. Secondly as the conflict dragged on, the people of northern Uganda also wondered if the government forces had a sense of direction in quelling the rebellions given their poor record of human rights abuses.<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, the government’s failure to carry its responsibility to protect created a vacuum which could be exploited by different actors who might have been political opportunists, criminal gangs or armed men and women seeking political power or opportunities for plunder.

#### **2.4.4 Other Conundrums of the Conflict**

The autocratic actions of the political leadership in Uganda created the preconditions for mistrust, deprivation and suspicion among the different communities in the country. Such mistrust provided “the foundation for a revenge syndrome”<sup>68</sup> in the sensibility of Ugandans. Social-psychological studies of collective behavior argue that “feelings of deprivation and frustration can tip over into and amplify a violent course of

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<sup>66</sup> Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in Acholi region,” 90.

<sup>68</sup> R. J. Rummel, *Conflict in Perspective, Understanding Conflict and War* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1977), 74.

events.”<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, if such feelings of deprivation and frustration are acknowledged and attended to, they could be diffused without negative consequences.

However, this was not the case in northern Uganda. The situation escalated because the government tended to downplay the gravity of these preconditions and dismissed the conflict as inconsequential; relegating it to a problem of insecurity caused by criminals and terrorists, supported by the opposition and opportunists in neighboring countries.”<sup>70</sup> Yet, the LRA expressed their discontent clearly and articulated their demands in three manifestos. These manifestos were dated April 4, 1966, 1988 and 1999 with the latter building on the previous two. The key points in these manifestos were:

The restoration of multi-party politics; the introduction of constitutional federalism; the promotion of human rights; nationwide economic balance; the establishment of nationwide peace and security; an end to corruption; free and fair elections; good relationships with neighboring countries; the separation of the military from the judicial and executive arms of government; and reform of the parliament to empower it to deal with the critical political and economic issues of the country.<sup>71</sup>

From the onset, while the LRA perceived itself as a liberation movement, the Government of Uganda propagated the view that the rebels were a criminal gang that had to be crushed using military force. Therefore, in the preceding circumstances, one understands that in terms of understanding, predicting, or even controlling the risk factors

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<sup>69</sup> Rummel, *Conflict in Perspective, Understanding Conflict and War*, 75.

<sup>70</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 90.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

responsible for causing, perpetuating, and transforming the conflict, the root causes were wrongly diagnosed. At the end, a military stalemate ensued with grave consequences for and devastating effects on the population of northern Uganda; with spillovers to Sudan and the Central African Republic.

## **2.5 The Problems Arising from this Context**

Different social groups in the conflict areas have suffered differently depending on their degree of social vulnerability, with children and women bearing most of the ugly consequences. This war left deep scars on the people in the region. Some of the diverse effects of this war included mass displacement of the people and abduction of children for the purpose of recruitment and indoctrination. These abductions gave rise to the reality of night commuters.<sup>72</sup> There was also the destruction of families' livelihoods, infrastructure, the environment, cultural fragmentation, abject poverty, vulnerability to preventable diseases, sexual abuse, mutilations of all kinds and loss of lives.

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<sup>72</sup> See Dunson, *Child, Victim, Soldier*, 98-99. As marauding rebels are most active at night, having attacked both the IDP camps and family huts in rural villages, children lived in great fear and so left their parents every evening to walk to the town centers where it is safer. These children came to be called the night 'commuters' because they commuted every single night from home to a safer place to lodge. John Baptist Odama the Archbishop of Gulu keen observer of the destruction this war has brought to his children decided in June 1998 to be in solidarity with the night commuters. One day he simply decided to join them. While in their company he remarked with a smile to bystanders puzzled by the sight "These are my colleagues, my fellow night commuters,". For four consecutive nights and many times thereafter, he became a frequent companion to those too frightened to stay home because home is not a safe place.

### **2.5.1 Staggering Human and Economic Cost**

According to the UN, by July 2010, among other countless costs of this war, approximately 700,000 people had become internally displaced in South Sudan, DRC and CAR because of LRA activities since 2008. The Coalition Civil Society Organization for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) put the net cost of the conflict by November 2020 at least US\$1.33 billion over the last 16 years representing about 3% of GDP.<sup>73</sup> The bulk of this cost is related to Military expenditure, loss of livestock and crops and the cost of ill health and deaths. The same report points out the damage done to infrastructure such as bridges, market accessibility and production, poor judicial processes, land speculations and seizures; encroachments due to clouded land rights and human and capital flight.

### **2.5.2 Appalling Situations in Camps**

The UN humanitarian report indicated that “Over 1.6 million people, representing 90% of the affected population in Acholi land,”<sup>74</sup> were forced to abandon their often-self-sufficient homesteads for a life confined to the squalid internment camps. These camps were commonly known as internally displaced persons camps. The situation in the displaced persons camps was described by UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland, in a widely reported address to the United Nations, as

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<sup>73</sup> “Sixteen-Year Conflict in Northern Uganda Has Cost the Country More than US\$1.33 Billion - Uganda,” *ReliefWeb*, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/sixteen-year-conflict-northern-uganda-has-cost-country-more-us133-billion>.

<sup>74</sup> “Uganda: UN DHA IRIN Humanitarian Situation Report, 3/15/97,” accessed March 24, 2019, [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin\\_31597.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin_31597.html).

“the forgotten Humanitarian crisis.”<sup>75</sup> In a similar way, the CSOPNU, in a survey report released in July 2003, revealed that “at least 1.000 people, mainly children, were dying in the camps every week.”<sup>76</sup>

In an attempt to offer them security from the rebels, millions of the internally displaced peoples were accommodated in a number of camps established by the government. In these camps the people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Food was scarce, water supply was severely insufficient, sanitation was very poor, and the provision of health and education services was minimal. Besides, fear of the LRA stopped people from farming, the economic mainstay of livelihoods in the area. Insecurity along the road rendered many of the camps inaccessible for delivery of vital food and another humanitarian assistance except with heavy military escort.<sup>77</sup> All these bottlenecks made the conditions in the camps worse with devastating consequences for the population.

### **2.5.3 Chronically High Levels of Sexual and Gender Based Violence**

Chronically high levels of sexual and gender-based violence were reported for women and girls in the internally displaced persons camps. “An estimated 30,000 children,.”<sup>78</sup> mainly from the Acholi sub region, were abducted and conscripted as child

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<sup>75</sup> Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 58.

<sup>76</sup> “Sixteen-Year Conflict in Northern Uganda Has Cost the Country More than US\$1.33 Billion - Uganda.”

<sup>77</sup> Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region,” 94.



soldiers and rebel wives. Many people suffered terrible violations of human rights, including being abducted, beaten, maimed, tortured, raped and murdered on a daily basis. As described earlier in this study, “up to 40,000 children”<sup>79</sup> circumstantially become night commuters to avoid abduction.

Summing up these atrocities brings to the fore the following. There were many deaths recorded during this period of conflict. Deep seated trauma continues to have consequences years after this experience of conflict. There is also the sense of social guilt, especially when the community feels that it failed to protect its members and even in some circumstances failed to bury some of their dead who ended up being eaten by pigs and dogs and other wild animals. This resulted into a sense of desecration, fear of cultural undoing, abomination and psychological torture. The experience of war also broke the fabric and backbone of the community, resulting in a broken community. This robbed the individuals and communities of the chance to live meaningful lives. This brokenness is further lived inter-generationally due to the abuse of children, most of whom were forcefully abducted to fight in the war. It is these scars which the government, the cultural institutions, and the Catholic Church through their various agencies engaged and continue to engage in healing.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined the context in which the Church in northern Uganda situates itself. The experience of the war: death, abduction, rape, displacement and

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<sup>79</sup> Dunson, *Child, Victim, Soldier*, 98.

trauma continue to affect the people of northern Uganda. The question that arises then is how the Church carried out her mission when this conflict was going on. In other words, how did the socio-history of northern Uganda affect the Church's nature, reality and mission?

## Chapter 3

# Nature, Reality, and Mission of the Church in Northern Uganda during the LRA War

“The Questions of our people, their sufferings, their struggles, their dreams, their trials and their worries, all possess an interpretational value that we cannot ignore if we want to take the principle of the incarnation seriously. Their wondering helps us wonder; their questions question us.”  
(Pope Francis GE 44)

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter constitutes the second moment of the pastoral circle. It provides a social analysis of the Church’s self-identity and mission in northern Uganda in the context described in the previous chapter. Here, I demonstrate that the Church took on the role of ambassadorial advocacy and assumed the character of Church ‘on its knees’. By praying for the war to end and appealed to the perpetrators of the conflict to negotiate a peaceful end to the war, the Church had responded to the pastoral needs during wartime. However, due to the changed socio-ecclesial context brought about by the end of the war, the Church needs to move beyond the style of Church ‘on its knees’. In this new situation, that mode of being Church is no longer adequate in addressing the new needs of

the Church in northern Uganda. Nevertheless, some aspects of the Church ‘on its knees’ remain because as we know prayer is at the heart of the Church’s self-identity and mission.

This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part, I examine the general response of the Church through its umbrella body the Uganda Episcopal Conference. In the second part, I discuss the work of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). In the third part I examine the work of Archbishop John Baptist O’dama<sup>80</sup> of Gulu Archdiocese towards ending the war. In examining the work of Archbishop O’dama, I will explain the theological, spiritual and devotional matrix that grounded his commitment. In the third part, I draw from the previous parts, and highlight and examine the ecclesiological image or model that can be determined from the Church’s self-understanding and her mission in the context of the violence and war that engulfed Northern Uganda. After examining the ecclesiological model of church on ‘its knees,’ I propose the model of church as ‘field hospital.’

### **3.1 The General Response of the Church in Uganda to the War in Northern Uganda**

In the early years of the conflict in Acholi land, the Church through its agencies like Caritas and The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) responded immediately as the conflict broke out. Understandably, given the immediate needs of the people, the Church focused

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<sup>80</sup> I highlight the work of archbishop John Baptist O’dama in this study to demonstrate how our faith formation can inform our response to dehumanizing situations especially those of conflict and war. He is one example among many bishops and other people who played a big role in working towards the end of the war. His work can inspire those working for peace and reconciliation in the world.

on offering material, moral and spiritual support to the people. As a result, the Church's institutions became centers for sheltering victims of the conflict, especially children and women. Faced with ever-growing numbers of people seeking shelter and food, the Church leaders came to a consensus to be more proactive. They got involved in processes that would lead to an end to the war and towards peacebuilding. This responsibility resulted in a number of initiatives.

One initiative undertaken by the Ugandan Episcopal Conference was the writing of pastoral letters and the mobilization of aid. The other initiative was the founding of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in 1997. This was a formalization of the cooperation between the Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and later Orthodox leadership in the region.<sup>81</sup> Some personalities inspired by their religious charisms and convictions undertook to do something as well. These included Archbishop John Baptist O'dama,<sup>82</sup> Sr. Rose Mary Nyirumbe,<sup>83</sup> to mention but a few of these personalities.

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<sup>81</sup> Latigo, "Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region," 97.

<sup>82</sup> John Baptist O'dama is the Catholic Archbishop of Gulu, an archdiocese in Northern Uganda. He was very instrumental in negotiating Peace between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance army especially as Chairperson of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). See Todd D. Whitmore, ed. *My tribe is Humanity: An interview with John Baptist O'dama*, *Journal of Peace and Justice studies*, (2010), 61-75. Also see Emmanuel Katongole, *The Journey of Reconciliation: Groaning for a New Creation in Africa*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 121-136.

<sup>83</sup> Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe is a Religious Sister of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart Sisters of Moyo. She is instrumental in founding the St. Monica's vocational school to rehabilitate girls who were abducted by the rebels during the brutal war in northern Uganda. On a biography and work, see Reggie Whitten, *Sewing Hope Joseph Kony Tore These Girls' Lives Apart. Can She Stitch Them Back Together?* (Oklahoma City, OK: Dust Jacket Press, 2013).

These initiatives made it possible for the Church to pay attention to the immediate needs of the people, support a political solution to the conflict, and address the consequences of the war, as I will discuss in detail in the body of the study.

### **3.1.1 Response of the Uganda Episcopal Conference**

As the war in northern Uganda raged on, the Uganda Episcopal Conference, along with providing help both material and spiritual, issued pastoral letters to highlight their concerns and rally the Ugandan masses towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. One of these letters was issued in April 2004 entitled, “A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda.”<sup>84</sup> In this letter, the bishops expressed their concern that the high expectations of the Ugandans for political progress in the form of democracy were waning.<sup>85</sup> These waning expectations according to the bishops gave way to increased violence and intolerance. They also voiced the concern that government organs were giving undue attention to issues that tended to distract it from the crucial needs of the majority of the people; especially the sufferings in northern Uganda.<sup>86</sup> Another thing they brought forth as a concern was that despite the government’s opening of the political

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<sup>84</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “A Concern for Peace, Unity, and Harmony in Uganda,” Accessed March 7, 2019, <http://www.uecon.org/>.

<sup>85</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “A Concern for Peace, Unity, and Harmony in Uganda,” Section 5.0, Para. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “A Concern for Peace, Unity, and Harmony in Uganda,” Section 5.0, Para. 3.

space, fear and anxiety remained rife because the political space was not being navigated in a spirit of unity, selflessness and harmony for the country as a whole.<sup>87</sup>

As a result of these concerns, the bishops called upon the government and all the citizens to: seriously adhere to the constitutional and moral principles of Good governance; continue with genuine dialogue with all political opposition groups; take advantage of the available constitutional framework to express their discontent rather than resort to conflict.<sup>88</sup>

The bishops appealed to the president of Uganda, the entire executive branch, the parliament and the military leaders of the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF), to do all that is possible to give the peaceful negotiations a chance and make ending of the armed conflict their priority. They urged the government soldiers not to give up in seeking for peaceful solutions to the conflict. The government was also to immediately provide the necessary moral and legal framework within which the humanitarian crisis should be handled so that more services could be provided punctually to fully address the catastrophic, humanitarian consequences of the war.

In their appeal to both the government and the LRA to resolve the conflict peacefully, the bishops requested the LRA to stop the killing and instead utilize the amnesty act while, government for its part was to stop recruiting and arming local

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<sup>87</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “A Concern for Peace, Unity, and Harmony in Uganda,” Section 5.0, Para. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “A Concern for Peace, Unity, and Harmony in Uganda,” Section 5.0, Para. 4.

militias and instead use the reserve force of the army to protect the civilians in the camps.<sup>89</sup>

The bishops appealed to the people in the affected regions of the north and east to unite, form a very strong movement for peace, and put pressure on both sides (the government and the LRA) to negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict. This appeal extended to all donors both within Uganda and abroad to fully support this peace movement.

The bishops drew inspiration in this letter from the following sources: St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians 4:1-6, where Paul writes to the church to live in a manner worthy of the call they have received with all the human love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit as they were also called to the hope of their call, one lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is over all and through all in all

Exodus was yet another book from which they drew inspiration. Here they made reference to the instance when people were bringing to Moses issues for arbitration. "What you are doing is not good," Jethro counsels Moses. "You and the people with you will wear yourselves for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it alone. God will be with you." (Exodus 18: 13- 23).

A second letter issued by the Uganda Episcopal Conference in regard to the conflict in Northern Uganda was in June 2005 entitled "Towards a Democratic and

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<sup>89</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, "A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda," Section 3, Para. 3.



Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good.”<sup>90</sup> The general concerns in this letter were, the conflicts in northern and eastern Uganda, the Karamoja conflict, and the paramilitary groups that were formed as a result of these conflicts. In this letter, the bishops “called upon the government to institute an instrument for reconciliation, to discuss and analyze the conflicts in the country and agree on how to resolve them.”<sup>91</sup>

They appealed to the politicians and political parties to strive to resolve their internal conflicts in a peaceful manner; desist from sacrificing the common good for selfish ends; develop meaningful manifestos with clear strategies to deal with the most pressing challenges of our times, like insecurity, corruption, nepotism, and the widespread poverty; act with maturity in the face of challenges; embrace unity in diversity as an important mark of a pluralistic dispensation; desist from politics of empty promises and celebrate victory and loss with dignity.<sup>92</sup>

In this pastoral letter as well, the priests were asked to encourage their congregations to continue praying for peace and reconciliation in Uganda. The theological grounding for this letter is *Pacem in Terris*, issued in 1963 by John Paul XXIII. This letter makes it clear that “the chief concern of civil authorities must be to

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<sup>90</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “Toward a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good,” accessed March 7, 2019, <http://www.uecon.org/>.

<sup>91</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “Toward a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good” Section 5.a, Para. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, “Toward a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good” Section 5.a, Summary of Paras. 5,6,7,8,9.

ensure that rights and duties of individuals are acknowledged, respected, coordinated with other rights, defended and promoted.”<sup>93</sup>

### **3.1.2 Brief Analysis of the Pastoral Letters of the Uganda Episcopal Conference**

In response to the war, the Church provided leadership in efforts to draw local and international attention to the conflict. Here the Church played a prophetic role by first conveying the ideal of God’s message that calls us to live in peace and harmony, upholding the common good, and respecting individual as well as community rights. Second, the Church highlighted how people had failed to live by what God expects of them, namely, his commandments and the beatitudes.<sup>94</sup> Third, the Church invited people to be rooted in God through prayer, prize harmonious living, and live up to her mission of proclaiming the gospel in the circumstances of war.

However, the Uganda Episcopal Conference did not offer a coherent ecclesiological framework out of which justice, peace and reconciliation would take place. One would hope that what these letters put forth could be accompanied by the institution of robust faith-based programs in the grass roots. Such faith-based programs would have resulted in the creation of support groups which would have been

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<sup>93</sup> John XXIII, “Pacem in Terris (April 11, 1963), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html). Accessed March 27, 2019.

<sup>94</sup> See Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes* (Garden City Books, 1952). The Catholic online dictionary defines beatitudes as the promises of happiness made by Christ to those who faithfully accept his teaching and follow his divine example. Happiness is assured already in this life, provided a person totally gives himself to the imitation of Christ. In his book Sheen argues that if we live the beatitudes as we are called to do so, then we have also chosen the cross because living the beatitudes involves making choices that involve making sacrifices and doing things that seem counter cultural.

instrumental in creating healthy networks for peace and spaces for healing. In summary, these groups would have eventually valorized the agency of the people.

In addition, the question which remains unanswered for the readers of these pastoral letters is why is it that during the twenty-one years of this conflict, the bishops issued only two pastoral letters? Could it be that the letters reflect the view of Archbishop John Baptist O'dama who was seen as representing the Uganda Episcopal Conference when he was negotiating a peaceful end to the conflict through the umbrella body of the ARLPI?

Moreover, the pastoral letters emphasize the Church's priestly and prophetic ministry to the extent that concrete actions towards liberation and action in hope were kind of peripheral. Nevertheless, the aid initiatives made some impact on the lives of the people on the ground. The relief items mobilized by the Church helped keep hope alive as the people waited for the war to end. A number of initiatives that attempted to attend to the needs of the people came more towards the end of the conflict. As a result, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the Church became instrumental in forming and joining community-based organizations and local non-governmental organizations to address the consequences of the war by promoting reconciliation, and regeneration. For example, the Church worked with elders and traditional leaders to establish a reception center for ex-combatants in the period 1989-1990.<sup>95</sup> The Church since then has also been active in psycho-social programs, particularly those focusing on the rehabilitation of returnees and

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<sup>95</sup> Edward Jada, *Church Initiatives for Peace in Uganda and Sudan: The Role the Church Has Played in Resolving Conflict in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), 59.

supporting rape victims and amputees. In this study my wish is that these efforts can now be deliberately coordinated so that they can bear much fruit.

### **3.3 The Work of Archbishop John Baptist O'dama and the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)**

In this section, I examine the contribution of Archbishop John Baptist O'dama of Gulu Archdiocese. I locate his work within the umbrella body of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). My intention here is to explain the theological vision that grounded his commitment to peace, reconciliation and reintegration. Besides, I also want to determine what ecclesiological images can be drawn from the Church's self-understanding and mission in this context of the conflict in northern Uganda.

#### **3.3.1 The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)**

John Baptist O'dama through the ARLPI was instrumental in the peace process and worked quietly behind the scenes to mediate between Museveni's government and Kony's LRA. The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) to which O'dama was vice chairperson was formed in 1997.<sup>96</sup> This was a forum that brought together the Christian, Muslim, Orthodox and cultural leaders in the Acholi land in northern Uganda, for purposes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. According to Edward Jada, the "short-term objectives of the ARLPI was to mobilize both local and national leaders, non-

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<sup>96</sup> Sidonia Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 1st ed. 2018 edition. (New York, NY: Springer, 2018), 134.

governmental organizations, and the international community in order to find a mediated solution to the rebellion.”<sup>97</sup> While, the “long-term objectives were to deal with the multiple problems of post-conflict, social injustice and economic development which was brought to a standstill during the period of the conflict.”<sup>98</sup>

Sidonia Angom observes that “the ARLPI was established at a time when the prospects for a negotiated settlement seemed very bleak.”<sup>99</sup> In such circumstances, the ARLPI had to take this leap of faith of seeking a negotiated peaceful end to the conflict, and it eventually “distinguished itself as one of the most credible forces in pursuing dialogue.”<sup>100</sup> In a significant way, the ARLPI played the role of bridge-building between the government and the Lord’s Resistance Army by improving the level of trust on both sides. Another strategy they adopted was to put pressure on the rebels and the government to stop fighting and initiate peace talks. For instance, O’dama traveled a number of times with a delegation of the ARLPI into the bush to meet with Joseph Kony and his commanders. In these travels, he appealed to and pressured the rebels to stop the fighting. While on the side of the government, O’dama appealed to and put pressure on the government to give up the ‘Operation Iron Fist’ and agree to talks with Kony.<sup>101</sup> In

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<sup>97</sup> Edward Jada, *Church Initiatives for Peace in Uganda and Sudan*, 56.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Angom, *Women in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*, 134

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> For an explanation of the ‘operation Iron fist’ see Ronald R. Atkinson, *From Uganda to the Congo and Beyond: Pursuing the Lord’s Resistance Army*, (New York: IPI Publications, 2009), 17. This was an intervention by the army meant to pursue Joseph Kony and his rebel group in South Sudan. It was meant to deal a deadly blow to the rebels and wipe them out. As it turned out it became a costly intervention in terms of the loss of human lives. Also, after this operation, the rebels became more brutal and inflicted the worst atrocities on the civilian populations. In a nutshell this operation was counterproductive.

doing so, O'dama served as a strong advocate for the displaced people, children in particular.

The efforts above paid off and saw the government of Uganda mandating the ARLPI to make contacts with the LRA so as to kickstart the negotiations to a peaceful end to the war. The strength of the ARLPI lay in its credibility and close links with the community and global networks. Therefore, the work of the ARLPI changed the approach of the government to ending the war. Earlier on, the government had wanted a military solution to deal with the conflict, but as the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative came into the picture, the government developed two alternatives to deal with the impasse.<sup>102</sup> One was to give amnesty to all rebels that surrendered within a set time frame.<sup>103</sup> Second, the government requested the ARLPI to spearhead an intervention and mediation process that would lead the two sides to agree to talk peace.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the contribution made by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, there has been some limitations with their approach. First, the government initially viewed ARLPI peace efforts with suspicion. Similarly, the rebels viewed the ARLPI peace efforts with suspicion, thinking they were proxies of the government intend on exposing them to attack. Secondly, the ARLPI did not bring on board other religious leaders from other parts of the country to help them build a national constituency and

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<sup>102</sup>Latigo, "Northern Uganda: tradition-based practices in Acholi region," 97.

<sup>103</sup> Mæland, ed., *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*, 49.

momentum.<sup>105</sup> This would have borne more fruits on the parties to the conflict and would have resulted in ARLPI establishing more internal contacts and support than from without. Perhaps that explains why in the whole course of the war, the Uganda episcopal conference issued only two pastoral letters. Nevertheless, the work of the ARLPI was remarkable. As a result, on September 18, 2012, O'dama received the World Vision Peace Prize. On this day he had this to say, "I represent all, indeed this is an achievement of all of the tribe of humanity who have achieved this award."<sup>106</sup>

### **3.3.2 The Theological Vision of Archbishop O'dama**

Much as O'dama had extraordinary leadership and advocacy skills in working towards Peace in northern Uganda, his work was grounded in a deep theological vision.<sup>107</sup> His theological vision, according to Katongole, "grounded his struggles and leadership, while opening up resources for his extensive social, pastoral, and activist innovation in dealing with the situation in northern Uganda."<sup>108</sup> In the next section I expound on this theological vision.

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<sup>105</sup> Mæland, ed., *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*, 49.

<sup>106</sup> "Archbishop O'dama Receives World Vision Peace Award - THE ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS PEACE INITIATIVE," accessed April 21, 2019, <http://www.arlpi.org/Home/september-28-2012-archbishop-odama-receives-world-vision-peace-award>.

<sup>107</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Journey of Reconciliation: Groaning for a New Creation in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 2017), 126.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

### ***3.3.2.1 Universal Humanity***

Archbishop John Baptist Odama's work was first grounded on the vision of a universal humanity rooted in God. In an August 2006 interview entitled, "*My Tribe is Humanity*" O'dama loves to speak of a foreign visitor who asked him about his tribe and to whom he responded: "my tribe is humanity."<sup>109</sup> O'dama notes that among many western visitors to Africa there is a preoccupation with locating Africans within tribes. In his view, such a preoccupation leads people to the misconception that "humanity is a name of a particular tribe."<sup>110</sup> He brings out this point to encourage a new way of seeing and relating, a way of seeing and relating that goes beyond the tribe, race, and nation. This way of relating, ultimately, leads to the recognition that we are first and foremost human beings created in the image of God. His reference to his tribe being humanity, therefore, points to the need to resist entrenched forms of tribalism through which people tend to view those different from themselves as strangers. This universal outlook is connected to O'dama's Catholic identity and the unique gift of baptism.<sup>111</sup> It was baptism into the Catholic faith that opened up for him this universal dimension of humanity. Baptism locates one who gets baptized within a community that extends far beyond one's place of birth and makes one at home among people they have not yet met.

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<sup>109</sup> Todd D. Whitmore, Interview by author, Gulu, Uganda, Fall 2010. "My tribe is Humanity: An interview with John Baptist O'dama," in *Journal of Peace and Justice studies*, 64.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.



### 3.3.2.2 *Identification with the Local Places*

O'dama call for a conversion from the local to the global vision of humanity should lead one to a deeper identification with the local places they find themselves in. To this effect, the bishop said "whenever I go to a new place, the first thing I do is learn the local language; acquire a taste for local food, attend local functions and celebrations in the village . . . on realizing that I am one of them, the people have often given me a local name."<sup>112</sup> Here we see O'dama immersing himself deeply in the concrete circumstances of the people he serves, enacting the incarnation in our times.

To understand O'dama's identification with the local places, Katongole counsels that "an elaboration on the understanding of what a village is in Africa will help to drive this point home."<sup>113</sup> Katongole explains that, "in Africa, 'village' does not so much name a place as a state of abandonment and neglect. This is the antithesis of modernity, and therefore, represents all that is backward and despised."<sup>114</sup> Therefore, O'dama's identification with the villages and other abandoned places locates him in what Katongole describes as "a movement of counter-modernity."<sup>115</sup> No wonder, as archbishop of Gulu he earned the description of one "wearing the simplicity of a country pastor."<sup>116</sup> O'dama sanctifies the village, makes it attractive and challenges one to work towards turning villages into places where living a dignified human life is possible. It is the identification

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<sup>112</sup> Katongole, *The Journey of Reconciliation*, 128.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 130.

with the village as a form of the most neglected that explains O'dama's special love for children, who within the context of war in Northern Uganda are quite often the most abandoned and abused. He gave the children the nickname *ngini ngini*, which in the Luo language is the name of the tiny ants that are almost invisible and are thus readily trampled upon and crushed.<sup>117</sup> For O'dama, to call the children *ngini ngini* is a sign of his endearment to the most precious, weak and vulnerable creatures of God.<sup>118</sup>

This universal image of humanity lived out within the local village and abandoned places and individuals, especially children, lay behind O'dama's fierce determination to end the civil war. This image of humanity also empowered him in his efforts toward a comprehensive peace solution in northern Uganda.

### ***3.3.2.3 Redeeming Places***

Thirdly, as archbishop of Gulu, O'dama understood his task as that of redeeming the place. When he was appointed the rector of a seminary in northern Uganda that had been looted and abandoned, he displayed his solidarity with the people saying "I am not a stranger. I am one of you. We are going to work together. This is our common ground. The seminary is our common ground. And you and I have to cooperate to redeem this place and bring back life and the seminarians to this place"<sup>119</sup> This gesture of solidarity

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<sup>117</sup> "Congratulating Bishop Odama – Justice and Reconciliation Project," n.d., accessed March 27, 2019, <http://www.justiceandreconciliation.org/blog/2012/congratulating-bishop-odama/>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> John Baptist Odama, "My tribe is Humanity:" An interview with John Baptist O'dama, *Journal of Peace and Justice studies*, Whitmore, ed. (Fall 2010), 64.

indicated to those present that the task to end the war in northern Uganda must be pursued with urgency. This theme of redemption went a long way to ground his commitment not just to end the war but to build a peaceful society where the future aspirations and the full humanity of all can flourish. It is this very local, concrete and urgent task that led Archbishop O'dama into all forms of advocacy, which have included drawing on the global contacts of his Catholic world to advance the search for peace in northern Uganda.

#### ***3.3.2.4 Accountability to God***

However, even as these contacts around the world proved vital to his work, O'dama had a practice of setting Thursday aside as a day of prayer, fasting and adoration. In his view, he undertook this practice so that he would not take himself too seriously. He acknowledged that the mission of peace is not his, rather, it is Gods mission, and he is merely a servant. He explains his Thursday practice in terms of reporting, in his own words "He God is my boss. God is the one who has given me this. I see this as Gods mission. The mission of Peace is Christs, is of God."<sup>120</sup> Such a practice situated him as an ambassador for a new future which only God can realize.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 65.

### **3.4 Ecclesiological Determinations from the Work of the ARLPI and John Baptist O'dama**

From the description and examination of the work of the Uganda episcopal conference, the ARLPI, and Archbishop John Baptist O'dama, the main image of the Church we decipher is that of the Church on its knees.

This image derives from the reflection on the following instances. In the first pastoral letter of the Uganda Episcopal Conference in regard to the war in northern Uganda, the bishops "called upon all pastoral agents to encourage their congregations to say one 'Our Father,'<sup>122</sup> each day at the end of the holy mass for peace in northern and eastern Uganda. Families and all Catholics were encouraged to say this prayer again just before they retired to bed for the same intention of peace in northern and eastern Uganda.

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Secondly, the pastoral letters tended to emphasize the prophetic and priestly ministry of the Church. This was reflected in the tone of the message. What the bishops mostly did was denounce the war and all that was related to it. They then asked the faithful to pray and plead with those who are perpetrating the conflict to end it.

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<sup>122</sup> The Lord's Prayer is a common name for the Our Father, the prayer that Christ taught to His disciples when they asked Him how to pray. The name "The Lord's Prayer" is used more often today by Protestants than by Catholics; however, the English translation of the new order of the Mass refers to the recitation of the Our Father as the Lord's Prayer. The prayer is also known as the *Pater Noster*, after the first two words of the prayer in Latin. The best way to understand this prayer is to explain it part by part and this is what Pope Francis does in this book. See Pope Francis, *Our Father: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer* (New York: Image, 2018).

<sup>123</sup> Uganda Episcopal Conference, "Toward a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good," Para. 8.0 Accessed March 7, 2019, <http://www.uecon.org/>.

In the same vein, Archbishop John Baptist O'dama is portrayed in one instance as kneeling before the children to ask for forgiveness for the atrocities inflicted on them by the war. Not only that, O'dama's Thursday practice of kneeling the whole day in prayer, fasting and adoration further presents the image of the Church on its knees. In the instances above, the preeminent modality of the Church's mission was that of ambassadorial advocacy.

These images bring together and illumine in a vivid way the nature, identity, and mission of the church in northern Uganda as the war raged on. This ambassadorial advocacy in no way suggests that the Church did not pay attention to the material needs of the people. On the contrary, in their pastoral letter of April 2004, the bishops encouraged their congregations in the respective dioceses to make special collections and donations to the victims of the war and the internally displaced peoples in the northern and eastern parts of Uganda. What is expressed in this chapter is that a lot of effort and resources were devoted to negotiating a peaceful end to the conflict. The Church prayed and pleaded with the perpetrators of the war to prioritize negotiations for peace.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have done a social analysis of the Church in northern Uganda. I have reviewed the activities of the Church as it responded to the ravages of war. I examined the response of the Uganda Episcopal Conference in the two pastoral letters they issued. I have also examined the work of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative and the work of Archbishop John Baptist O'dama. I made a determination that

the Church acted mainly as intercessor by being on its knees praying and appealing to the perpetrators of the war to come to the negotiating table to find peaceful ways of navigating their differences and eventually end the war. However, due to the changed northern Ugandan context brought about by the end of the war, there is a need to reflect on a new ecclesial paradigm that would enable the Church to be more effective in healing the people of northern Uganda from the trauma of war.

I propose the model Church as “field hospital” as an effective model which can help the communities in northern Uganda develop an ecclesiology that can foster healing, reconciliation and reintegration. The ‘Church on its knees’ cannot be separated from Church as field hospital. My suggestion is to shift the emphasis so that more energy and resources can be deliberately expended to empower the people to be proactive in their own psycho-social and physical recovery.

In the next chapter, I discuss the model of Church as “field hospital.” There I examine how it can help the Church in northern Uganda heal the human and social infrastructure.

## Chapter 4

### The Church as Field Hospital in the Ecclesiology of Pope

#### Francis—A Model for Northern Uganda

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may be. (*Evangelium Gaudium* 24.)

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the theology of the Church as "field hospital". With its emphasis on healing wounds and warming hearts through encounter, solidarity, and mercy, to mention but a few of its theological qualities, this model best describes the necessary continuation of the work of the Catholic Church in northern Uganda in serving the people after 21 years of war. Moreover, I believe that the Church modeling her activity as "field hospital," offers the best response to the changed circumstances of the situation in northern Uganda.

This chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first part I undertake the task of examining the socio-cultural and religious context of Pope Francis. In the second part, I describe Pope Francis' model of Church as "field hospital". It is here that I also draw out and examine the salient features of this ecclesiology. In the third part, I justify my choice of this model over other models as disposing the Church better in responding to the changed circumstances of the people of northern Uganda.

## **4.1 The Socio-Cultural and Religious Context of Pope Francis**

To understand the ecclesiological musings of Pope Francis, one needs to situate him in his roots as an Argentine Jesuit, in the teachings of Vatican II especially *Gaudium et Spes*, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Latin American situation of the time. All these, in their varied proportions influenced Bergoglio's ecclesiology as shall be examined in the following sections.

### **4.1.1 Family Life**

The influences that shaped Bergoglio's ecclesiological thought can be traced to his early family life. According to Allan Deck, key among these influences were the fact that he was the first born among five children born to Mario Jose and Regina. Moreover, since his paternal grandparents lived close by, he had an ongoing contact with his grandmother, Rosa, who, as Pope Francis has noted frequently, was the single most important influence on his religious and spiritual life. This background according to



Allan Deck was “a source of inspiration for Pope Francis.”<sup>124</sup> For instance, he frequently heralds women especially mothers and grandmothers, as principle evangelizers or teachers of the faith. Furthermore, Pope Francis at the Angelus on March 17, 2013, referred to a pious lady who grasped quite well the central truth of Gods mercy. This woman answered to the question as to whether she had any sins, and if she did, whether God really would forgive them, by saying that “of course God would forgive them because he always does.”<sup>125</sup> Repeated calls for “a deeper theology of women in the Church and for their more incisive participation in the Church’s life”<sup>126</sup> have resounded more vigorously in the pontificate of Pope Francis.

Second, Bergoglio has strong devotion to Mary. In practice, and in his writings, Virgin Mary’s witness constitutes a central role for the Church’s evangelization mission. The centrality of Mary is also a recurring motif in all Bergoglio’s ministries as a Jesuit, bishop, archbishop and now pope. He sums up the Virgin Mary’s attitude as that of “listening, decision and action.”<sup>127</sup> Words that in his view, point out a way for one who faces what the Lord asks of them.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome: The Gospel for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 8.

<sup>125</sup> Pope Francis, “Angelus, 17 March 2013,” [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_angelus\\_20130317.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130317.html). accessed April 12, 2019,

<sup>126</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 2014), 133.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Third, The Salesian charism, which stresses care for the poor youth and young adults and promoted Catholic Social Teaching marked, Bergoglio in remarkable ways. For one-year Bergoglio attended the Salesian college in the house of Ramos Mejia. In a letter he describes his experience there as follows.

Through the awakening of conscience and truth, the college created a “non-bigoted’ Catholic culture. Study, social values of coexistence, social references to the needs of the people, sport, competence and mercy. Everything is real and everything contributed to raise up habits that shaped a cultural way of being.”<sup>129</sup>

#### **4.1.2 The Social Milieu**

Bergoglio’s roots in the Latin American milieu have influenced his ecclesiology as well. His lower, middle-class origins determined that He could not access the prestigious and exclusive Catholic schools, so he went to public schools. This left him with a sharp sense of the need for social justice, and he became aware of the struggles of the poor and the lack of solidarity among the social classes. Here, according to Allan Deck, he “experienced the anti-clericalism that was typical of the Latin American intellectuals imbued with the spirit of the enlightenment.”<sup>130</sup> As Buenos Aires was a great cosmopolitan center that attracted people from all over the world, this sowed the seeds of Bergoglio’s fascination with what he would later call the culture of encounter.

Peronism,<sup>131</sup> a term used to refer to the ideology and legacy of Argentine president Juan

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<sup>129</sup> “What Pope Francis Owes the Salesians,” *Catholic News Agency*, accessed April 23, 2019, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/what-pope-francis-owes-the-salesians-44154/>.

<sup>130</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 10.

<sup>131</sup> See Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, First Edition. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 26. This book presents a favorable view of Peronism. It states that the arguments that Peronism was and is Authoritarian Populism, left wing nationalism, miss the deeper point that it was a vehicle for Peron, not for any particular ideology. Peron, far from being an ideologue, was an intuitive political genius with an uncanny ability to articulate the interests

Domingo Peron and his wife Eva (Evita) Duarte de Peron, was yet another influence in the Latin American milieu in Bergoglio's life. Whatever be the subsequent track record of Peron's rule, his first term as president was seen as a period of remarkable social advancement for the Argentine working class. For instance, the average wage of workers increased by one third in his first five years; the number of unionized workers became the highest in Latin America and significant progress was made in access to medical care, social security, and education for ordinary Argentines.<sup>132</sup> These accomplishments together with the charitable concerns of Evita, Peron's wife, according to Allan Deck "seem to have etched Peronism in the very DNA of the Argentine popular classes, both urban and rural."<sup>133</sup>

While there is an enormous ambiguity about the real accomplishments of Peron and his wife Evita, Allan Deck contends that the influences of Peronism on Bergoglio include:

The drive towards inclusion of and concern for all social classes and the most forgotten elements of society; the ability to successfully communicate with the broadest possible audience; an ability to avoid and transcend narrow ideologies of the left and right; and a resulting popularity that becomes a source of leverage for further change."<sup>134</sup>

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and hopes of the new classes – the immigrants and their children, the folks arriving in the cities in search of a better life.

<sup>132</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 14.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 14.

### 4.1.3. Ecclesial influences

The spirit and manner of the Second Vatican Council is another big influence in the ecclesiology of Pope Francis. The documents that are central in influencing Bergoglio's ecclesiology are, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The last is considered Bergoglio's favorite.

*Lumen Gentium* emphasizes the notion of the Church as people of God (LG 9).<sup>135</sup> This notion was very important because it helps introduce a way of looking at the Church for contemporary times. While grounding itself in biblical and ancient ecclesiological traditions, *Lumen Gentium* spoke to the contemporary world according to Rausch and Gaillardetz, "in a way that was much less patronizing or alienating."<sup>136</sup> It marked a departure from the juridical and institutional ecclesiological discourse of the late eighteenth, the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Church as people of God challenges the idea of "an active 'teaching Church' of the Pope, Bishops, and the wider Clergy on the one hand and the passive 'learning church' of the laity on the other hand."<sup>137</sup> Instead it encouraged a great sense of collaborative ministry across the Church, and affirmed the priesthood of all believers, with the laity sharing in the threefold offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king. The sense of "co-responsibility in the Church was

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<sup>135</sup> *Lumen Gentium*. n. 9. Accessed May 3, 2019, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

<sup>136</sup> Gerard Mannion, "Re-engaging the people of God," in *Go into the Streets! The Welcoming Church of Pope Francis* eds., Thomas P. Rausch SJ and Richard R. Gaillardetz (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 63.

<sup>137</sup> Gerard Mannion, "Re-engaging the people of God," 63.

firmly underscored.”<sup>138</sup> This document outlined the true apostolic role of the laity and the universal call to holiness. Consequently, it encouraged a wider sense of active engagement and participation in the Church’s roles and offices by the laity.

In this sense, while holding to the fact that the Church is a mystery rooted in the trinity, according to Francis “it exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers transcending any institutional expressions however necessary (EG 111).”<sup>139</sup> This is rooted in the council’s acknowledgement that the Spirit endowed holiness on the whole people of God by virtue of their baptism. By this baptism, they have become missionary disciples and because of that should not to be considered passive recipients of some special insights from a professional class.

The influence of *Lumen Gentium* is evident in Pope Francis’ ecclesiology as attested to in *Evangelium Gaudium* where he states that, “the Church as the agent of evangelization is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God. (EG 111)”<sup>140</sup> With this understanding, Pope Francis demonstrates that being a Church means being God’s people in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love with the practical consequence of being God’s “leaven in the midst of humanity.” (EG111)<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> See Co-responsibility as explained by the Episcopal Commission for Doctrine Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Here they adopt the understanding of the word by Pope Benedict as underscoring the role of the Laity in the Church according to which the laity should not be considered as collaborators with the clergy rather as persons truly co- responsible for being and acting in the Church.

<sup>139</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 111,

<sup>140</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 111.

<sup>141</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 111.

In *Gaudium et Spes* we see an orientation of the Church to a deeper engagement with the modern world in a spirit of dialogue. Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* brought the theme of development to the fore. A novel feature of his approach is that he added to it "a distinctively Christian anthropology in which he stresses that, development has to be "for each man and the whole man." (PP 14)<sup>142</sup> Finally, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* we find the roots of three of Bergoglio's most longstanding beliefs: Evangelization as key to the Church's very identity; popular religion as an important source of values that ought to not be ignored, even though it must always be guided by sound catechesis from the Church's broader doctrine.<sup>143</sup> For Bergoglio, "the gospel cannot be reduced to a worldly project even in the midst of powerful and legitimate demands"<sup>144</sup> presented by the contemporary times however noble these may be.

In terms of the ecclesiastical situation, the Latin American bishops were trying more relevant ways of implementing the conciliar documents. In this regard, according to Thomas Rouke, "they prophetically addressed the themes of development and social injustice at the Medellin conference in 1968. They made the clarion call for the Church to recognize the need for a decisive action to promote development and to end the scourge of poverty."<sup>145</sup> This conference paralleled the development of the Theology of Liberation

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<sup>142</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, n. 14.

<sup>143</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), n, Accessed April 8, 2019, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

<sup>144</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*,

<sup>145</sup> Thomas R. Rourke, *The Roots of Pope Francis's Social and Political Thought: From Argentina to the Vatican* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 66.

which in its core made social justice the central focus of pastoral work. all these themes would emerge in the ecclesiology of Pope Francis as we shall discuss in the next section of this study

#### **4.1.4. Bergoglio's Jesuit Roots**

Bergoglio's Jesuit roots have also influenced his ecclesiology in remarkable ways. Bergoglio began his Jesuit life in March 11, 1958. Of significance for his ecclesiology was the strong humanistic orientation of Jesuit education. Around the time of his ordination, the Jesuits diversified their approach to giving the spiritual exercises<sup>146</sup> from these being preached to being directed. From his Jesuit roots, Bergoglio was steeped in the values of freedom in the liberty that is central in the spiritual exercises, discernment and pastoral boldness.

These key factors played a role in varied proportions in influencing the values and personality of Pope Francis and consequently his ecclesiology. In the following section I now describe and explain this ecclesiology.

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<sup>146</sup> See "What Are the Spiritual Exercises," *Ignatian Spirituality*, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/what-are-the-spiritual-exercises>. The spiritual exercises grew out of Ignatius Loyola's personal experience as a man seeking to grow in union with God and to discern God's will. To this effect therefore he kept a journal as he gained spiritual insight and deepened his spiritual experience. Eventually he gathered these prayers meditations, reflections and directions into a carefully designed framework of retreat which he called spiritual exercises.

## **4.2 The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis: Its Salient Features.**

### **4.2.1 Brief Description**

Pope Francis as we know has not authored a book on the Church. Nevertheless, there are a number of ecclesiological themes present in his writings and talks. In this study I examine these key themes. These include, Solidarity, People of God, Mercy, Encounter, Dialogue. As a method for this Church we have the inductive method So that this church is rooted in the historical exigencies. These themes together reflect Pope Francis ecclesiology. These challenge the Christian community to rethink what it means to be Church.

Pope Francis' description of the Church as 'field hospital' was foreshadowed by the events that usually precede the election of a pope. As has been the practice in the Catholic Church, in the days leading to a conclave, cardinals deliver addresses designed to help their brothers discern where the Spirit is calling the Church. Such a discernment would help them see who among them would be best suited to lead the Church as Pope. During the opening session of the 2013 pre-conclave interventions, Bergoglio addressed his fellow cardinals: "in [the book of] Revelation [...] Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks."<sup>147</sup> The common interpretation is that Jesus is knocking from outside the door. But Bergoglio inverting the image and asked his brother cardinals and indeed the whole Church to consider the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. For Bergoglio, when the Church keeps Christ to itself and does not let him out, it becomes self-referential and enervated. To avoid this problem, he proposes that the

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<sup>147</sup>As quoted by Cardinal Blasé Cupich, "Field Hospital," 72.



Church must go out of itself to the peripheries to minister to the needy.<sup>148</sup> That is why in *Evangelium Gaudium* we have “an inauguration of a missionary option” (EG 27)<sup>149</sup> understood as a missionary impulse that would be able to transform the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times, schedules, language and structures. As a result, the major focus of the Church will be directed to the evangelization of today’s world not self-preservation.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, in his consequent interviews, homilies, talks and writings this ecclesiology was articulated and given the expression ‘field hospital.’ For sure, anyone attentive to the pontificate of Pope Francis cannot miss hearing this reference to the Church.

The phrase “field hospital” was first used by Pope Francis during an interview with Jesuit Fr. Antonio Sparado, editor-in-chief of *Civitta Catolica* soon after he became Pope.<sup>151</sup> Pope Francis responded to the question; “what kind of church do you dream of?”<sup>152</sup> by saying.

I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness and proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he or she has high cholesterol and about the level of his or her blood

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<sup>148</sup> As quoted by Cardinal Blasé Cupich, “Field Hospital,” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon: Essays by over 50 noted Bishops Theologians & Journalists*, eds. Joshua J. McElwee and Cindy Wooden (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), 72.

<sup>149</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27.

<sup>150</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi: A New Spring in the Church?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 136.

<sup>151</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2016), 1.

<sup>152</sup> “A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis,” *America Magazine*, last modified September 30, 2013. Accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.

sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds... and you have to start from the ground up.<sup>153</sup>

By referring to the church as a field hospital, Pope Francis wanted to draw the attention of all, in particular Catholics, to radically rethink ecclesial life. He wanted to awaken those who profess faith in Jesus Christ to a quality in the expression of their faith they had taken for granted; the priority given to the wounded. One is to place the needs of others before one's own. In a nutshell, his chosen image places the Church in the midst of human suffering and ambiguity, emphasizing the healing and reconciling ministry of Jesus as the foundation for the Church's mission.

Pope Francis envisions Jesus himself as the model of this 'field hospital'. One learns from Jesus the closeness he showed to everyone. For instance, scripture attests to us that when Jesus spoke to anyone, He looked in to their eyes with deep love and concern. "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10:21). We see how accessible He is as He draws near the blind man (Mk 10: 46-52). He eats and drinks with sinners (Mk 2:16) without worrying about being thought a glutton and drunkard himself (Mt 11:19). We see his sensitivity in allowing a sinful woman to anoint His feet (Lk 7:36-50) and in receiving Nicodemus by night (Jn 3:1-15). In the ensuing circumstances what becomes crucial is for the Church to develop its capabilities so that it can be able to undertake this task after the heart of Christ whose mission the Church enacts in the world. Pope Francis steeps his ecclesiology in the theological qualities of mercy, nearness or proximity, encounter, and service in humility.

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<sup>153</sup> See "A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis." See Also Erin Brigham, "The Church as a Field Hospital: The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis," in *Pope Francis and the future of Catholicism in the United States: The challenge of becoming a Church for the poor*, eds. Erin Brigham, David E. DeCosse, and Michael Duffy (San Francisco: University of San Francisco Press, 2016), 33.

## 4.2.2 Salient Features of the Ecclesiology of Pope Francis

### 4.2.2.1 Mercy

A keen observer and follower of Pope Francis will know that mercy emerged early as a central theme in his ministry even before he became pope. Already as bishop, his coat of arms proclaimed the motto *miserando et eligendo* (by gazing upon me with the eyes of his mercy, he has chosen me). Francis contends that the mercy of God is a beautiful truth of faith for our lives. Mercy manifests God's love for us, which is deep, unfailing always taking us by the hand and supporting us, lifting us up and leading us on.<sup>154</sup> According to Donald Bolen, "In his Angelus<sup>155</sup> address the first Sunday after being elected Pope, he spoke of God's face as the face of a merciful father who never tires of forgiving us."<sup>156</sup> More to that, Bolen continues, "two years later, he surprised the Church by calling for an extraordinary Jubilee, a year with the mercy of God at its center," [a year to be] steeped in mercy, [so that] the balm of mercy [might] reach everyone."<sup>157</sup> (MV5, 25)<sup>157</sup> Grounding Pope Francis' reflection on mercy in the scriptures Bolen states thus:

Reflecting on Psalm 136 and its constant repetition that God's mercy endures forever, he notes that the refrain seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love. It is as if to say that not only in history, but for all eternity man will always be under the merciful

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<sup>154</sup> Francis, "The Embrace of God's Mercy" Homily for the Mass for the Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, 7 April 2013. in *The Church of Mercy*, (Chicago: Loyola press, 2014), 3.

<sup>155</sup> Angelus is a Catholic prayer said at morning, noon, and evening in commemoration of the Incarnation.

<sup>156</sup> Donald Bolen, "Mercy," 126.

<sup>157</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, cited in Donald Bolen, "Mercy," 126.

gaze of the Father. Therefore, loving mercy is at the very foundation of creation and redemption.<sup>158</sup>

Therefore, according to Bolen, the pope assigns to the Church the primary task or mission “of introducing everyone to the great mystery of the creator’s mercy by contemplating the face of Christ to be a convincing herald of mercy.”<sup>159</sup> That is why in *Evangelii Gaudium* he speaks of ‘pastoral care in conversion’ that is reorientation. (EG 25).<sup>160</sup> He explains this pastoral conversion as “nothing other than the exercise of the Church’s motherhood. She gives birth, breastfeeds, lets grow, corrects, nourishes, leads by the hand.”<sup>161</sup> Therefore, this presents the need “for a Church that is capable of rediscovering the womb of mercy. Without which, it is hardly possible today to penetrate into a world of the ‘injured,’ who need understanding, forgiveness and love” (EG 25).<sup>162</sup>

In the same vein, Francis, in continuity with his predecessor, cites St. John Paul II when he says, “the Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy; the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer; and when she brings people close to the source of the Savior’s mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.” (DM 15 in MV 11)<sup>163</sup> In a practical way, in its preaching and the sacraments,

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<sup>158</sup> Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, 4.

<sup>159</sup> Donald Bolen, “Mercy,” 126.

<sup>160</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 25.

<sup>161</sup> Speech to the bishops of Brazil in Rio De Janeiro, quoted in Walter Kasper and William Madges, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), 38.

<sup>162</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 25.

<sup>163</sup> John Paul, *Dives in Misericordia*, n. 15 cited in Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, n.11.

“the Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the gospel” (MV 12)<sup>164</sup>

Consequently, during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis gave particular attention to the sacrament of reconciliation, encouraging confessors to model themselves after the father in the parable of the prodigal son, who rushes out to meet and welcome the prodigal son despite his sin. Confessors are, the Pope says, “called to be a sign of the primacy of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what” (MV 17).<sup>165</sup> He insists that “the confessional must not be a ‘torture chamber’, but rather a place of encounter with God’s mercy” (MV 44).<sup>166</sup>

In order to avoid misunderstanding in terms of the expression of mercy, Pope Francis explains the logic of pastoral mercy. The background to his explanation is that many people find Pope Francis’ talk of mercy suspect. His critics confuse mercy with a “superficial *laissez-faire* pseudo-mercy and, when they hear of mercy, they perceive the danger that what is being spoken of thereby, is a weaker pastoral permissiveness and a way of being Christian at a reduced cost.”<sup>167</sup> So, they see in mercy what Walter Kasper describes as “a kind of ‘fabric softener’ that undermines the dogmas and commandments and abrogates the central fundamental meaning of truth.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, n.12.

<sup>165</sup> Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, n.17.

<sup>166</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 44.

<sup>167</sup> Kasper and Madges, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 34.

<sup>168</sup> Kasper and Madges, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 34.

To the misgivings expressed above, Pope Francis responds by expressing that it is clear the Church should propose the full ideals it teaches. He comments that “a lukewarm attitude, any kind of relativism, or undue reticence in proposing that ideal, would be a lack of fidelity to the gospel and a lack of love on the part of the Church for [all its followers]” (AL 307).<sup>169</sup> Yet, according to Pope Francis, “to show understanding in the face of exceptional situations, never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being” (AL 307).<sup>170</sup> This is because showing understanding in the face of exceptional situations demonstrates that more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen people, especially those who fall sort of the mark in their various situations. In the reasoning of Pope Francis, it therefore follows that “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the stages of personal growth, making room for ‘the Lord’s mercy, which spurs us on to do our best’” (AL 308).<sup>171</sup>

The following statement of Pope Francis captures the balance the Church should exercise in upholding the truth of Church doctrine and exercising mercy:

I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes gets soiled by the mud of the street. (AL 308)<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 307.

<sup>170</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 307.

<sup>171</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 308.

<sup>172</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 45, quoted in *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 308.

The instruction to Church pastors, is that in proposing to the Church's faithful the full ideal of the gospel and the Church's teaching, they must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. Pope Francis justifies the instruction above on the grounds that we should enter in to the reality of other people's lives and help them know and experience the power of tenderness, rather than look for those "personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and to know the power of tenderness" (EG 270 in AL 308).<sup>173</sup> According to him, it is only then that "our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people"<sup>174</sup> and we are able to heal wounds and warm hearts.

The misgivings presented towards Pope Francis' teaching on mercy according to Walter Kasper, "is a gross misunderstanding of the deep biblical sense of mercy. For mercy itself is itself a fundamental truth of revelation, a demanding and challenging commandment of Jesus. It stands in an inner connection with all the other truths of revelation and commandments."<sup>175</sup> Kasper continues, "It does not abolish justice but rather surpasses it. It is the higher righteousness, without which no one can enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20)."<sup>176</sup> Therefore, according to Kasper, Mercy which is the

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<sup>173</sup> Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, n 270, quoted in *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 308

<sup>174</sup> Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, n. 270.

<sup>175</sup> Kasper and Madges, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 34.

<sup>176</sup> Kasper and Madges, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 34.

fundamental attribute of God and the greatest of all the virtues, “should be understood in the sense of the hierarchy of truths as the hermeneutical principle, not to replace or to undermine doctrine and the commandments, but rather to understand and actualize them in the right way, according to the gospel.”<sup>177</sup>

#### **4.2.2.2 Encounter**

As far as encounter is concerned, Pope Francis has modeled this understanding of the Church as embracing all people, particularly the poor in the midst of their own battles. He urges the church to listen to, dialogue with, and bring to Christ all those it encounters in life.<sup>178</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium* he makes it a task of all the baptized precisely in their work as missionaries to be involved in the lives of others. He expresses it thus:

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. (EG 24)<sup>179</sup>

According to Erin Brigham, Francis provides examples of such shepherding as she recounts thus:

During his first year as pope, Francis washed the feet of women and men in a juvenile detention center on Holy Thursday. That year he also visited a community of migrants on the island of Lampedusa and challenged the world to overcome apathy towards their suffering. He welcomed a group of homeless people on a tour of the Sistine chapel, reminding all Catholics that their Church is a Church for the poor. In these instances, and others, Francis places himself and

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Francis, *Pope Francis on Twitter*, Publication / USCCB Communications No. 7-519 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), 52.

<sup>179</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24.



the Church on the margins of society in solidarity with those living in poverty, and in doing so, manifests the Church as ‘field hospital’.<sup>180</sup>

In the same spirit, Pope Francis invites ministers to act not as distant administrators but as pastors walking with the people and meeting them where they are. In providing a theological basis for encounter, Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* begins his reflection on the proclamation of the gospel by saying, “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (EG 3).<sup>181</sup> In continuity with his predecessor as expressing the same theological basis, he quotes Pope Benedict: “being Christian is not a result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (DCE 1 in EG7).<sup>182</sup> This encounter with God’s love, for Francis, is the foundation of the Church’s activity in the world. Francis has been clear throughout his papacy that if one wants to encounter Christ, one could turn to the poor. The orientation of the Church as described by Pope Francis requires that Christians “go forth to everyone without exception.” (EG 48)<sup>183</sup> That is why he expresses boldly his preference of “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own

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<sup>180</sup> Erin Brigham, “The Church as Field Hospital: The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis,” 26.

<sup>181</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 3

<sup>182</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), n.1, quoted in Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 7. accessed April 19, 2019. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html).

<sup>183</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 48.

security” (EG 49).<sup>184</sup> More to that, Pope Francis draws upon the concept of the *sensus fidelium* (the sense of the faithful) that allows all the baptized to come to know God. Based on this, Pope Francis has challenged bishops, priests, and theologians to be in close contact with the people of God and the sense of the faithful. These people of God according to Pope Francis provide a reliable and challenging source and norm for the confession of faith consequently enriching Church teaching.

According to Archbishop Victor Fernández, Pope Francis’ ideal is for all members of the Church, and one could argue that this applies to the world, to come together in an encounter, “forming “a ‘polyhedron’ with many facets that create a unified whole with many different *aspects*.”<sup>185</sup> The impression here is that, he projects “a vision of society in which different people can live together, complement each other, and illuminate each other.”<sup>186</sup>

However, the encounter with the other does not mean losing one’s identity because “one’s identity is also part of the polyhedron; it is his or her contribution, his or her gift to diversity.”<sup>187</sup> Consequently, such encounter opens up space for the other, for what is different. A point of novelty in Pope Francis’ writings on encounter according to Fernandez is that “when he uses the expression, ‘culture of encounter’, the word culture refers to something that has penetrated to the heart of a people ... it has become a shared

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<sup>184</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 49.

<sup>185</sup> Victor Manuel Fernández, “Encounter” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon: Essays by over 50 Noted Bishops Theologians & Journalists* eds. Joshua J. McElwee and Cindy Wooden (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), 61.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> Fernández, “Encounter” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, 61.

‘passion’, and in the end, a lifestyle that characterizes that human group.”<sup>188</sup>

Consequently, it means that at the core “as a people we are passionate about seeking points in common, building bridges, and creating projects that include us all.”<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, at the root of encounter lies “the capacity to appreciate, with profound conviction, the great worth of a human being always and in any circumstance.”<sup>190</sup> This is precisely, the deepest foundation of an authentic culture of encounter: “the other person has rights, but they do not have them due to the economic value of what they can do. Instead, their rights are due to “the infinite value of their human dignity, which transcends any circumstances or any result.”<sup>191</sup> That is why Pope Francis says if this principle were forgotten, there would be no “investments and efforts towards helping the slow, the weak, or the less talented to find opportunities in life” (EG 209).<sup>192</sup>

By emphasizing encounter, Pope Francis presents an understanding of the Church that reflects the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. He reinforces the Church’s solidarity with humanity developed in *Gaudium et Spes*. This document presents the Church squarely within human history taking on “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of everyone, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (GS

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>189</sup> Fernández, “Encounter” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, 61.

<sup>190</sup> Fernández, “Encounter” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, 63.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 209.

1).<sup>193</sup> This insight captured in *Gaudium et Spes* follows from the recognition that the Church and the world are made up of the same people, historically situated, called to holiness. Therefore, Encounter reinforces the pilgrim quality of the Church and this strengthens the theological concept of the people of God.

#### **4.2.2.3 Church as People of God**

Following the Second Vatican Councils Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which presents the Church as the people of God prior to its hierarchical expression, Francis writes: “the Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God” (EG 111).<sup>194</sup>

According to Pope Francis, understanding the Church as the people of God allows one to stress the historical nature of the Church and to prioritize the people who make up the Church over its visible structures because as he says “ she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary” (EG 111).<sup>195</sup> The concept of the people of God emphasizes baptism as the primary way to participate in the life of Christ and the ministry of the Church.

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<sup>193</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*. n. 1 Accessed May 3, 2019, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>194</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 111.

<sup>195</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 111.

On the basis of this theology of the people of God, Pope Francis is as Walter Kasper puts it “averse to every form of clericalism.”<sup>196</sup> Francis makes it clear that lay people are the vast majority of the people of God. The minority, ordained ministers, are at their service” (EG 102).<sup>197</sup> This means that the same spirit that empowers the laity to discern what is of God also enables the bishops and the priests to exercise their role in the Church, and so all should participate in the life of the church. The centrality of the lay in the mission of the Church, challenges the leaders in the Church to educate and form them and to evangelize the professional and intellectual life of the people.

#### ***4.2.2.4 Church always in Dialogue***

The recognition that the whole Church is a recipient of divine truth and is involved in a polyhedron, makes dialogue between the bishops, priests, cultures, science, the faithful and even those who do not profess the Catholic faith a necessary element in the self-understanding and mission of the Church.

In Pope Francis’ ecclesiology, the centrality of dialogue in the life of the Church is masterfully set out in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Pope Francis prioritizes three areas where the Church needs to be present in order to promote full human development and pursue the common good: “dialogue with states, dialogue with society which includes dialogue with cultures and the sciences and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the

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<sup>196</sup> Kasper and Madges, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*. 39.

<sup>197</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 102.

Catholic Church” (EG 238).<sup>198</sup> In each of these cases, “he asks the Church to speak from the light which faith offers, contributing her two thousand years’ experience and keeping ever in mind the life and sufferings of human beings”(EG 238).<sup>199</sup> The light of faith according to Francis “transcends human reason, yet it can also prove meaningful and enriching to those who are not believers and it stimulates reason to broaden its perspective” (EG 238).<sup>200</sup> Francis points out necessary elements that make the dialogue bear fruit, like humility, meekness and becoming all in all, while emphasizing the quality of active listening.

In her dialogue with the state, Francis cautions the Church not to present herself as having solutions to every particular issue. Rather together with the various sectors of society, she should support those programs which best respond to the dignity of each person and the common good. In supporting those programs, she proposes in a clear way the fundamental values of human life and convictions which can then find expression in political activity.

Francis contends that “dialogue cannot take place in a vacuum; it has to take place in a context based upon a starting point. That starting point according to him has to be one’s own identity.”<sup>201</sup> A person’s consciousness of their own identity makes their engagement in real dialogue more meaningful. The Pope says.

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<sup>198</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 238.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 238.

<sup>201</sup> Nieves, O.F.M, “Dialogue” in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, 40.

People cannot start dialoging from a foggy sense of who they are. Nor can there be authentic dialogue unless they are capable of opening their minds and hearts, in empathy and sincere receptivity, to those with whom they speak. A clear sense of one's own identity and a capacity for empathy are thus the point of departure for all dialogue.<sup>202</sup>

The necessary requirements for dialogue then become empathy, an act of opening up and welcoming the other, and acceptance. At the end of it, all dialogue then becomes an expression of charity, because, while not ignoring differences, it seeks to share the common good and so invites one to stand before the other as a gift of God.<sup>203</sup> This challenges one to identify with the other, to know the other, to understand the other; placing oneself in an attitude of listening as the best condition to welcoming the best aspects of one's interlocutor, in order to have a life-giving encounter.<sup>204</sup>

### **4.3 Church as “Field Hospital” for Northern Uganda**

From the description and characterization of the Church as “field hospital”, the main trait we discern is that of an institution that marshals all its institutional resources in order to serve those who need the most help. This prioritizing of the needy imposes the requirement of an understanding of their sufferings and challenges. In terms of the above,

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<sup>202</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Bishops of Asia (August 17, 2014), quoted in Archbishop Roberto O. Gonzalez Nieves, O.F.M, “Dialogue,” 41.

<sup>203</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Bishops of Asia (August 17, 2014), quoted in Archbishop Roberto O. Gonzalez Nieves, O.F.M, “Dialogue,” 41.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

the methodology imposed by the Church as “field hospital” is that of the inductive method; dealing with situations starting from the context.

In the ensuing circumstances, proximity, attentive listening, dialogue, solidarity and discernment become key. The appropriate questions in the prevailing circumstances become: What is it? or what is the situation? How can we help? What is possible? What is of value? What resources can we draw from? What is working in the person or situation that will help realize better results? It is only then that such a Church will be able to contextually appropriate its teaching while enriching its teaching as a result of these encounters.

What is clear in Pope Francis’ approach to referring to the Church as “field hospital” is the fact that instead of approaching the questions affecting the people of God from an idealized portrait of the institution, we should turn overwhelmingly to the context of the people.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, proximity to wounds is where the Church needs to be found. Such requires setting the priorities of the Church clearly. In this regard, the most important thing then becomes the first proclamation: “Jesus Christ has saved you.”<sup>206</sup> Then, “since salvation is not just something of the spirit as we are bodily creatures, the suffering and materially poor then occupy a center stage in the ministry.”<sup>207</sup> Therefore, when Pope Francis says that the Church needs to heal wounds and warm hearts, he is addressing both those who suffer material deprivation and those who suffer spiritual

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<sup>205</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2016), 1.

<sup>206</sup> Antonio Spadaro, Interview with Pope Francis “A Big Heart Open to God.”

<sup>207</sup> Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital*, 2.



deprivation. That is why he denounces the economy that dehumanizes when he says that “the exclusion of a billion people from access to a dignified subsistence is directly related to the sickness of spirit that worships at the altar of capital. The idolatry of money is both a material and a spiritual wound.”<sup>208</sup> Applying this to the practice of the Church, he portrays the Church as having the character that is event-like and dynamic which creates spaces for healing.<sup>209</sup> In this regard, the image of Church as “field hospital” “creates new mobile and improvised spaces where different kinds of politics or economic practices can take root.”<sup>210</sup>

In a general way we can say the Church “as ‘field hospital’ is an organization of people with a specific healing purpose, not merely one of individual Christians going out into the world to help.”<sup>211</sup> Moreover, strictly speaking, “the Church is not a collection of individuals, not even just an organization but an organism; not an it but a ‘We’, a living subject, united to Christ its head, a body of people that brings many individual persons together.”<sup>212</sup>

Finally, this model of Church exalts solidarity as the axis on which the Church hinges. The kind of Church Pope Francis dreams of is that which goes out into the world and helps to bind wounds and warm hearts by taking on the sufferings of others into the

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<sup>208</sup> “Pope’s Quotes: Creation of Wealth,” *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified 9:00am, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-s-quotes-creation-wealth>.

<sup>209</sup> Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital*, 2.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> Fernández with Rodari, *Francis Project: Where He Wants to Take the Church*, 74.

suffering body of Christ. All people, Christian or not, are members of, or potential members of, the body of Christ. To see all humans as made in the image of God which Colossians 1:15 identifies with Christ is to see the deep solidarity of all human beings.<sup>213</sup> Based upon this evidence provided, the Church as ‘field hospital’ provides a better theological model for the mission of the Church in northern Uganda.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined the idea of Church as “field hospital.” I did this by situating it in the influences of Pope Francis. These influences included his early growth experiences, the Latin American milieu, the Vatican II, and his Jesuit roots. What is central in the examination of the model of Church as “field hospital” is that, the Church cannot be a presence that binds wounds and warms hearts in the world by simply being faithful to tradition or through articulating a credible and persuasive ethical perspective. On the contrary, the Church’s effectiveness in its mission depends on preaching the gospel to all nations and its ability to appreciate and understand its rootedness in the design of God in founding a people for himself. It depends on the Church being a humbler partner in the dialogue with people in their concrete situation of life, secularism, other religions, science, other cultures and all the diversity that constitutes the world and by which the world is indelibly marked. To the degree that the Spirit can lead the Church

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<sup>213</sup> Fernández with Rodari, *Francis Project: Where He Wants to Take the Church*, 74.

into this kind of new relationship with all of God's people and creation, shall the church be capable of 'seeking and finding God in all things. It is only then that the evidence of the Church as "field hospital" will begin to be evident. In the next chapter I examine concrete ways in which the idea of Church as "field hospital" can be realized in northern Uganda.

## Chapter 5

# Church as ‘Field Hospital’ for Healing, Reconciliation and Emergence of New Creation in Northern Uganda

### 5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the idea of Church as “field hospital” and discussed its implications in the northern Ugandan context. In this chapter, I make that discussion concrete by exploring various pastoral initiatives in which the Church should engage its efforts to help realize peace, reconciliation and restoration in northern Uganda. In terms of the pastoral circle, this chapter covers the fourth moment, the stage of alternative praxis. In fact, in any theological enterprise, one needs to be wary of a purely speculative approach. One needs to for the case of this study formulate concrete proposals regarding how the Church as “field hospital” might better effectuate the mission of the Church. The main questions in this chapter include the following. In the light of the experiences reflected upon, what response is called for by the Church? How should the response be designed in order to be the most effective not only in the short-run but also in the long term?”<sup>214</sup> In relation to this study, the questions I raise are: How can the model of Church as “field hospital” concretely contribute to healing, reconciliation and reintegration of the people of northern Uganda? What concrete solutions does Church

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<sup>214</sup> Wijssen, Henriot, and Mejia, eds., *The Pastoral Circle Revisited*, 84.

as “field hospital” propose for the Church in northern Uganda? Since the model of Church as “field hospital” emphasizes encounter, proximity, and solidarity and employs the inductive method, it stands a better chance of drawing from the agency of the people in working toward their own healing, reconciliation and reintegration.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I discuss the role of mission in the Church-sponsored works of reconciliation and restoration. If the Church in northern Uganda is to live concretely the core values of Church as “field hospital,” it should place mission at the heart of its self-understanding. As a result, the various Church structures which include the small Christian communities, the parish communities, and the diocesan structures should facilitate the realization of God’s saving action in history. In relation to mission, I examine how this mission orientation bears on priestly formation. Here, I call for an examination of priestly formation. First, seminary formation should ground seminarians in the essential message of the gospel. Second, it should not uproot seminarians from the mainstream of society, but rather allow them to reap from the wealth of encounter. Third, seminarians should model how accompaniment through participation another value drawn from the Church as “field hospital,” can foster the healing mission of the Church in northern Uganda.

In the second part, I discuss how the idea of Church as “field hospital” should concretely empower the Church to embrace its healing ministry with a new vigor. Here the challenge for the Church in northern Uganda is to enter into dialogue with local initiatives towards healing and reconciliation. To this effect, the Church in northern Uganda should engage the local initiatives by the Acholi and distill the values this

traditional method of healing and reconciliation proffers to strengthen its healing mission. Related to this examination of the Church's healing ministry, the Church should also rethink the celebration of the sacraments by locating them in the context of community.

## **5.1 Catholic Identity as Rooted in Mission**

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis grounds everything relating to ecclesiology and Catholic identity in the light of mission. He states that “the word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him ‘to go forth’” (EG 20).<sup>215</sup> As a result, ministry and the various practices in the Church flow from mission and not the other way around. Quoting John Paul II, Francis states “all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EO 19 in EG 27).<sup>216</sup> Such an understanding of the activity of the Church yields a pastoral attitude which informs the Church's engagement. Grounding the Church's activity in mission is essential for the Church in northern Uganda especially in accompanying the masses that have experienced the brunt of war for such a long time.

For example, the proper pastoral care of those who find themselves in irregular situations as a result of the war, will go a long way to restore them back to living their lives normally and practicing their faith as before. In this category one might think of those whose marriages were destroyed. Second, in this group are those who joined the rebels and on return were treated by their communities with a great animosity. They were

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<sup>215</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 20.

<sup>216</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (November 22, 2001), n. 19, quoted in Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27.

considered killers and communities did not want anything to do with them. Last but not least one might consider the countless youth who, have been affected by war and who completely lost their orientation in life.

The proper pastoral care of these groups I have mentioned above and many other marginalized groups, will enable the Church in northern Uganda to be true to its character of reaching out, seeking to heal, reconcile, and encourage. Allan Deck describes this as “the insight about Christ’s and his Church’s fundamentally maternal, or Marian, outgoing, or inclusive nature.”<sup>217</sup> By going about her business in such a manner, the Church in northern Uganda will be paying attention to what Pope Francis calls the “hierarchy of truths” (EG 246).<sup>218</sup> According to this “hierarchy of truths,” Pope Francis contends that “all revealed truths derive from the same divine source and are to be believed with the same faith. Yet, some of them are more important for giving direct expression to the heart of the gospel than others” (EG 36).<sup>219</sup> Francis continues, “In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead” (EG 36).<sup>220</sup> Therefore, in his ecclesiology, Francis always wants Christians to be clear about the necessary place of Church doctrine, which to him should always be consistently oriented towards the basic Christian proclamation. In this way Christians will be able to situate such doctrine within the pastoral life of the Church. The pastoral consequence of a proper understanding of the

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<sup>217</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 103.

<sup>218</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 246. See also Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, North American ed. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third pub, 1985), 126.

<sup>220</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n, 36.

hierarchy of truths is that it empowers the Church in northern Uganda to adopt what Francis describes as “a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion” (EG 35).<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, the Church in northern Uganda should be a presence that brings healing, reconciliation and restoration by articulating the first proclamation “Jesus has saved you out of his love.” It is only then, that it will empower the people towards their own healing, reconciliation and restoration. By doing so, the fruits of the idea of Church as “field hospital,” will be evident.

### **5.1.1 Renewal of the Missiological Nature of the Ministerial Priesthood**

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis describes the Church as missionary. He states that “every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus. We no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (EG 120).<sup>222</sup> This reference in relation to the ministry of the priesthood according to Allan Deck, “highlights the inadequacy of the idea of a cultic priesthood.”<sup>223</sup> To meet the needs of this missionary Church, the ministerial priesthood should be easily adaptable to new circumstances. For Allan Deck this means, “neither the diocesan nor the religious order priesthood is the plane to find a niche, a get away from the messiness of the world, or

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<sup>221</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 35.

<sup>222</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120.

<sup>223</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 113.



pursue an ecclesiastical career.”<sup>224</sup> For this reason, all Christians and more especially priests are urged to integrate all their views of the Church however legitimate these may be into what Pope Francis calls the “horizon of Peters gaze.”<sup>225</sup> That is to say, they should integrate their views about the Church into “their specific mission at the service of the communion and the unity of Christs flock”<sup>226</sup> If the Church is missionary to its core, it therefore becomes necessary for the Church in northern Uganda to revise its style of training priests in the light of the demands of this pastoral, missionary orientation. The question the Church in northern Uganda should ask is: what is the status of seminary formation in the current context of northern Uganda?

First, the Church in northern Uganda should pay attention to the cultural milieu of the seminarians. As is the same in many other parts of the world, the new Ugandan generation is a product of its time which bears the following characteristics. First, it is the world of social media. Second, in many parts of the country especially northern Uganda which has been afflicted by war, there are many broken families. Consequently, there is a lack of clear parental direction and formation. There is also a rise in individualism, which mean the preoccupation with one’s own needs and the drive to meet them that makes one insensitive to the needs of others. Despite all these influences, there are still seminarians who according to Allan Deck “have a deep sense of deep generosity and desire to give of

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<sup>224</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 112.

<sup>225</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the community of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, “The Leprosy of Careerism” (June 6, 2013), In *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

themselves,”<sup>227</sup> and I would add, who have boldness, and courage rooted in their deep spiritual grounding. One also finds seminarians who as Allan Deck describes “have found consolation in the Church’s emphasis on order, orthodoxy, and moral imperatives.”<sup>228</sup> The end result is that, if not checked, seminarians could easily fall into strengthening boundaries between people for example boundaries with those of a different sex, religion, culture and ideology. This makes it difficult for them to navigate their way in the terrain of a pluralistic society.

In order to bring to life the values of Church as “field hospital,” the Church in northern Uganda should as Allan Deck states “check such insular attitudes because, these run counter to the spirit of authentic evangelization which requires an ability to reach out to what is other, unfamiliar, different, to listen, and dialogue rather than hunker down with one’s Catholic identity.”<sup>229</sup> For indeed, according to Allan Deck “reaching out to other cultures, whether ethnic, national, or globalized like the culture of the modern secular world is part and parcel of an authentic Catholic identity.”<sup>230</sup> Such a culture as we see is rapidly promoted by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, to mention but a few of these platforms, and so is an inescapable reality in the lives of the seminarians. Therefore, seminarians should be helped to get out of the attitude of retreating from real engagement with such a world. Pope Francis articulates this real engagement with the world in his

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<sup>227</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 113.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 113.

theme of encounter which from an anthropological point of view, is primary because it is our most human characteristic. Francis states “we are beings of encounter, beings who live out our lives in a way that cannot be denied or ignored.” [In other words] “we encounter one another through our capacity to resonate with others and with all things, which is why an encounter unleashes creative realities.”<sup>231</sup> It is only through reaching out to others that, the seminarians will adopt what Allan Deck describes as “a truly missionary and servant style of priestly life.”<sup>232</sup>

To realize this attitude of reaching out, the Church in northern Uganda should evaluate the period of pastoral work incorporated into the seminary curriculum. After their studies of philosophy, seminarians are supposed to engage in an extensive one-year period of pastoral work in a parish or in another Church institution. My experience is that, the work they do tends to depend to a great extent on the whims of the parish priests or whoever is directing them. As a result, some parish priests have taken advantage of the seminarians, turning them into gardeners or food and drink buyers. In such circumstances, the seminarians are shielded from the bruises and pangs of the real life the ordinary Christians have to endure on a daily basis. This keeps them from growing in affective maturity. Consequently, they would end up being ministers who are indifferent to the needs of the people. Yet, under the demanding circumstances of a Church that functions as missionary and, I add, as a “field hospital,” “affective maturity is an urgent

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<sup>231</sup> As quoted in Diego Fares, Antonio Spadaro, and Robert H. Hopcke, *The Heart of Pope Francis: How a New Culture of Encounter Is Changing the Church and the World; with a Foreword by Antonio Spadaro*, The Pope Francis resource library (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2015), 22.

<sup>232</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 113.

need if priests are going to successfully face the challenges of the new epoch”<sup>233</sup> as they encounter with various situations and people. For as Allan Deck concludes, “the pluralism of today’s world and the complex demands of Church ministry, require more rather than less affective maturity among ordained ministers.”<sup>234</sup>

### 5.1.2 Pastoral Accompaniment through Participation

For the idea of Church as “field hospital” to be realized in northern Uganda, the Church should strengthen the practice of pastoral accompaniment. According to Bruno Forte, “every local Church must be a travelling companion of the people to whom it proclaims the word of God so that, the gospel may be interlaced with the daily deeds and fraternity.”<sup>235</sup> In similar manner, Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* quoted by Amy Gress describes accompaniment in these terms: “conversation with the priest in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgement on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the church and on what steps can foster and make it grow” (AL 300).<sup>236</sup> In such circumstances then, love becomes concrete and credible in the sharing of the day-to-day lives of those the Church serves. This accompaniment therefore requires humility, listening to the other person, honest

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<sup>233</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 113.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>235</sup> Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A brief Study*, trans. Robert Paulucci, (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1991), 96.

<sup>236</sup> Amy Gress, “Amoris Laetitia’s Language of ‘Accompaniment’ Is Nothing New,” *Inside The Vatican*, June 1, 2016, Accessed April 16, 2019, <https://insidethevatican.com/magazine/editorial/dossier/amoris-laetitia-language-accompaniment-nothing-new/>.

communication, discernment, conversion, openness of heart and a genuine spiritual encounter. The necessity of accompaniment lies in Pope Francis quote of saint John Paul II who “proposed the so called “law of gradualness” in the knowledge that the human being knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth” (FC 34 in AL 295).<sup>237</sup> For example the law of gradualness would apply in the discernment of the irregular situations that arose as a result of the war. One of which is where some women married after their husbands were abducted or were thought to be dead. Then after the war they returned and did not want anything to do with these women, yet they were married in Church.

When the Church in northern Uganda undertakes this task of accompaniment, it will be enacting the principle of the incarnation; totally immersing itself in the situation of northern Uganda and identifying with the most afflicted, hoping to restore them to wholeness. This is what Pope Francis highlighted when he said that “Pastors must have the odor of the sheep.”<sup>238</sup> This means, setting out with their faithful and with all those who turn to them, sharing in their joy and hopes, their difficulties and sufferings.

The accompaniment expressed in this study should not be something strange to the Church in northern Uganda. This is because this accompaniment is related to the African sense of community and participation expressed in the sense of Ubuntu.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), n. 34 quoted in Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 295.

<sup>238</sup> Pope Francis, Address to a Group of Newly Appointed Bishops Taking Part in a Conference, “To Be a Pastor” (September 19, 2013), in *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 87.

<sup>239</sup> See Jacob Mugumbate and Andrew Nyanguru, “Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of Ubuntu in Social Work,” *AJSW* 3, no. 1 (2013): 82-99. Here Ubuntu is defined as an ethic or humanist philosophy that focuses on people’s allegiances and relations with each other. The origin of the word is

Ubuntu expresses that we all participate in each other's life as John Mbiti states, "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am."<sup>240</sup> Participating in other people's lives makes it possible for us to share in the bond of life. The spirit of Ubuntu expressed in the African sense of family and community is an affirmation of the interconnectedness of all things. That is why in articulating an African ecclesiology, Emmanuel Orobator affirms that "the African notion and experience of community aptly embodies the meaning of Church."<sup>241</sup> He states that, "for Africans, community creates the context in which African belief systems are formulated and lived as communion by all its members."<sup>242</sup> As a fundamental structure of African spirituality, community facilitates participation, fellowship, and personal and interpersonal relationship from which no one is excluded.<sup>243</sup> This means community creates the space which allows for the valuation and promotion of "the gifts and talents as well as the burdens of all in it with each member having an important role to play which is not predicated merely on his or her status."<sup>244</sup> As a result of this understanding, we glimpse the insights and possibilities that the African

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traced to the Bantu languages of eastern and southern Africa and is seen as a classical African concept. A person with ubuntu is described as open and available to others, affirming others and does not feel threatened that others are able to achieve greater things. He is described as having a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated, tortured, or oppressed. In this same book, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela give detailed explanations of the concept of ubuntu.

<sup>240</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Oxford: Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 1990), 141.

<sup>241</sup> Orobator, *Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*, 269.

<sup>242</sup> Orobator, *Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*, 269.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> A. E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 90.

understanding of community has a lot to offer in bringing to life the notion of Church as ‘field hospital’. For this notion is comparable to the African understanding of church as “a community of faith where the presence of God is experienced in the context of community life and existential realities.”<sup>245</sup>

This African theology of relationship and participation rooted in the African extended family and community has something to offer to the Church in northern Uganda in bringing to life the idea of church as “field hospital.” It offers “the value of the commitment and inner conviction that when one’s brother or sister suffers, when the earth is bleeding, the African sense of community calls each one to become one with the reality of pain in order to bring healing and wholeness.”<sup>246</sup> This accompaniment through participation in and with others, brings healing and harmony in creation because it rallies everyone to working and walking together for reconciliation, peace and reintegration. More importantly, accompaniment through participation empowers especially the afflicted to be proactive and play a more active role in their own empowerment and psychosocial healing.

Walking together with the people would also challenge the pastoral agents in northern Uganda to work together in helping one another, asking for and receiving forgiveness, acknowledging their mistakes and limitations and building flexible and open structures of accountability amongst one another in a kind of peer review mechanism. It is only then that they will be able to enter people’s lives and eventually be able to move

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<sup>245</sup> Orobator, *Perspectives and Trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology*, 270.

<sup>246</sup> Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis*, (New York, Maryknol: Orbis books, 2018), 149.

from providing social services to social empowerment that enables the psychosocial encounters that will lead to the healing, reconciliation and the eventual social transformation of northern Uganda.

### **5.1.3 Rethinking Preparation and Celebration of Sacraments.**

In an ecclesiology of the Church as the people of God, sacraments are at the heart of the life of the Church. The realization of the idea of Church as “field hospital,” challenges the Church in northern Uganda to rethink the celebration of the sacraments. According to Allan Deck, “the celebration of the sacraments must be grounded in the broader life of the Church and of society, so that their celebration is not an isolated ritual and they do not become an item of religious consumption.”<sup>247</sup> The Church in northern Uganda needs to form the people well so that these people will be able to relate the celebration of the sacraments to their daily lives. The two features flowing from Pope Francis’ outlook that are very important for the Church in northern Uganda in its context is the small Christian community context in which the candidates are prepared or formed and the parish community where they eventually will be integrated.<sup>248</sup> These features are very important because they create the space where the people cultivate interactions at all social levels from families to the basic Christian communities and at parish level. More to that, these communities make it possible for people to study the scriptures and to pray. This in a sense gives a good chance for a contextual living of the word of God. This goes

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<sup>247</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 117.

<sup>248</sup> Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, 117.



a long way according to Allan Deck “to help people overcome the tendency toward anonymity and makes it easy for them to move towards community.”<sup>249</sup> In this sense they are able to live in a concrete way the values of their faith.

Therefore, in this light, I suggest that the Church in Northern Uganda should examine the effectiveness of basic Christian communities. This is to make sure that they do not degenerate into social groupings or loan schemes where all what happens there is targeted to meeting the temporal needs of the members. One thing I propose for the Church in northern Uganda is that small Christian communities should encourage the celebration of the Eucharist because the Eucharist is the most crucial sacrament in healing, reconciling and empowering the faithful in their journey of faith. John B. Ambe observes a parallel to the Eucharist in African traditional practice where, “in African societies the aspect of the meal is key in reconciliation ceremonies.”<sup>250</sup> That is why he notes that “at all levels of the reconciliation rites, the conclusion always includes a meal in which all present share.”<sup>251</sup> The reconciled parties eat together from one dish as a sign of further strengthening of the restored peace and love among them that comes with reconciliation. This reconciliation and the fellowship meal can be compared to the traditional connection between the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist in the Church. To express the effectiveness of this means of reconciliation, one might turn to the parable of the loving father in Luke 15: 4-7; 11-32 comes in handy. This parable

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> John B. Ambe, *Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa*, AMECEA Gaba Publications spearhead 123–124 (Eldoret, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba, 1992), 37.

<sup>251</sup> Ambe, *Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa*, 37.

according to John Ambe, “shows the great joy that prevails at the table in the kingdom of God because a son/daughter has returned home.”<sup>252</sup> The emphasis on the celebration of the Eucharist will help to ground all the efforts the Church in northern Uganda is undertaking to heal and reconcile the people of northern Uganda with God, among themselves, and with creation.

## **5.2 The Church’s Role as a Healing community**

The ecclesiology of Pope Francis has a lot to offer to the Catholic Church in terms of its work in providing health care. Healing<sup>253</sup> is at the heart of Pope Francis’ ecclesiology as we saw in chapter three. When he was asked what kind of Church he dreams of, his answer was as follows.

I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugar! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds...and you have to start from the ground up.<sup>254</sup>

The images of nearness, proximity, “field hospital” and other images like the culture of encounter, accompaniment which he employs in his ecclesiology can easily be incorporated into the vocabulary of Catholic health care. The Church in northern Uganda should examine how they can create healing communities where health care is informed

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<sup>252</sup> Ambe, *Meaningful Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Africa*, 37.

<sup>253</sup> In this study I use the word healing intentionally because it involves wellness while also acknowledging the interconnectedness of mind, body and spirit.

<sup>254</sup> Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God.” *An interview with Pope Francis*.

by these images of the ecclesiology of Pope Francis. A concrete way of doing this is to evaluate the performance of the health facilities the Church runs as well as the chaplaincy systems in these health facilities. One key criterion they can borrow from the ecclesiology of Pope Francis is to understand that “the Church’s mission is not a cloistered one enclosed in one place. The mission is constantly assessing people’s needs and struggles.”<sup>255</sup> The Gulu Archdiocese in northern Uganda runs ten healthcare facilities. According to a report by the diocesan health coordinator Sister Liberata, most of the facilities face challenges of limited space to accommodate all those that seek their services, shortage of medicines, and a growing number of patients who cannot afford to pay for the services provided.<sup>256</sup> The services provided by these facilities have to be evaluated and a deliberate effort should be made to equip them well with medicines and staff.

### **5.2.1 Ongoing Formation for Catholic Chaplains**

The idea of Church as “field hospital” should help the Church in northern Uganda examine the work of hospital chaplains as well. In fact, when a priest is called to the bedside of the sick to pray, anoint and to comfort, he is performing one of the roles of Christ who accompanies his people in all circumstances. Given the case of northern Uganda where people do not only need physical treatment but also psychological and

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<sup>255</sup> “Chaplains, Pope Francis and the Healing Encounter,” accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/may-june-2018/chaplains-pope-francis-and-the-healing-encounter>.

<sup>256</sup> “Projects,” *Gulu Help Foundation*, October 31, 2010, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://guluhelp.wordpress.com/guluhelp-our-mission/projects/>.

psychiatric treatment, the chaplains need to be broadly equipped to meet this task. It is therefore logical that some ongoing formation by doctors and theologians be arranged specifically to support the chaplains in the health centers run by the Church in northern Uganda.

The other points from the ecclesiology of Pope Francis that will be helpful for the chaplains are the following. Since chaplains work in hospitals or healthcare centers in which not all patients are not only Catholics, they will have to be ecumenical enough to seek non-Catholic ministers to provide spiritual programs for the others. They should not understand their work as only for the sick and the dying. Rather, they should also be attentive to the needs of the medical personnel like the doctors and nurses who encounter the sick on a daily basis. The chaplains should also cherish a spirit of dialogue with the staff. According to Mushota Kasama, to the extent that “the Catholic point of view is in most cases considered conservative on many medical matters, the chaplains will have to acquire sufficient formation in medical ethics, and the theology of medicine.”<sup>257</sup> In situations where the healthcare centers do not have chaplains, the parish priest in those areas should as a matter of course take that up such chaplaincy as one of their main apostolates. With their effective ministry, the chaplains will be able to bring to life the idea of church as “field hospital.”

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<sup>257</sup> Mushota Kasama, “The Chaplaincies II” in *Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980's: Record of the AMECEA Study Conference Held at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Nairobi, 14-21 December 1973*, AFER v. 16, nos. 1 & 2 Amecea, ed. (Kampala: African ecclesiastical review, 1974), 249.

### 5.2.2 Dialogue with Local Initiatives of Healing and Reconciliation

When the war in northern Uganda was coming to an end, the Acholi people of northern Uganda made recourse to their traditional rituals to heal and reconcile their society. The traditional ritual they adopted was called *Mato Oput* (literally, “to drink a bitter root”)<sup>258</sup> and they used this method widely. To realize the idea of Church as “field hospital,” I recommend that the Church in northern Uganda should examine this traditional method and enter into a dialogue with it. Entering into this dialogue will help the Church to tap into what is close to the people’s experience. In this section of the study I would like to explain this method and invite the Church to draw from its values so that the church’s work can be more effective.

The practice of *Mato Oput*, according to Ojera Latigo, “is rooted in the Acholi belief that humans are sacred beings whose blood ought not to be spilled without just cause.”<sup>259</sup> As a result, the disposition of the Acholi community towards life is such that, if one person happens to kill another person from the same or a different clan, the killing is believed to provoke the anger of the deities and ancestral spirits of the victim. It was, and still “is believed that the angered deities and spirits of the ancestors would permit or even invite evil spirits to invade homesteads and harm the inhabitants.”<sup>260</sup> Moreover, “such

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<sup>258</sup> Tom Patrick, “The Acholi Traditional Approach to Justice and the war in northern Uganda.” (Master’s thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2006), 4. *Mato Oput* is a traditional Acholi justice practice that aims at restoring relationships between clans that would have been affected by either an intentional or accidental killing. This ritual was aimed at promoting reconciliation through forgiveness and restoration.

<sup>259</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in the Acholi region,” 103.

<sup>260</sup> Tom Patrick, “The Acholi Traditional Approach to Justice and the war in northern Uganda.” (Master’s thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2006), 4.

killings were automatically believed to create a supernatural barrier between the clan of the killer and the clan of the persons who have been killed.”<sup>261</sup>

For this reason, as soon as the killing occurs, the members of the two clans immediately stopped eating and drinking from the same bowl or vessel, and they also stopped engaging in social interactions of any form. The supernatural barrier mentioned above remains in force “until the killing is atoned for and a religious rite of reconciliation is performed to cleanse the tainted relationship.”<sup>262</sup>

In the meantime, before the ceremonies of reconciliation are performed and reconciliation is made effective “the killer is ostracized and treated as an outcast or unclean person.”<sup>263</sup> A killer is therefore prohibited from entering any homestead other than his own for fear that he is a companion of the evil spirits and will pollute the soil of the homestead with the evil spirit.

The *Mato Oput* in the ensuing circumstances then becomes “both a process and a ritual ceremony that aims at restoring relationships between clans that would have been affected by either an intentional murder or accidental killing”<sup>264</sup> It bring together the two conflicting parties and promotes forgiveness and restoration and overcomes revenge. The Acholi conduct the ceremony of *Mato Oput* because they believe that after the ceremony

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<sup>261</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in the Acholi region,” 103.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in the Acholi region,” 103.

<sup>264</sup> David-Ngendo Tshimba, “Beyond the Mato Oput Tradition: Embedded Contestations in Transitional Justice for Post-Massacre Pajong, Northern Uganda,” *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2015), 69.

“the hearts of the offender and the offended will be free from holding any grudge between them.”<sup>265</sup>

As a matter of procedure, the *Mato Oput* practice includes the critical first step of confession by the perpetrator to his own clan or village of the crime he or she has committed.<sup>266</sup> This confession is then followed by acceptance by the clan of communal responsibility for the crime, and this unites the clan so that it ceases now to be an individual act and rather becomes a communal act.<sup>267</sup> This is then followed by apologies and reparation offered to the victim’s clan by the perpetrator’s clan. Finally, there is a ceremony in which both villagers drink together from a concoction of juice of a bitter root and make peace with a communal meal where they eat from the same bowl.<sup>268</sup> According to Ojera Latigo, the drinking of the bitter herb means that the two conflicting parties accept the bitterness of the past and promise never to taste such bitterness again. The payment of compensation then follows the ceremony. The victim or his/her family is compensated for the harm done, for example, in the form of cows or cash and if the killing was established to have been deliberately committed, the family of the offender is to offer a young lady to the family of the victim.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Tshimba, “Beyond the Mato Oput Tradition,” 70.

<sup>266</sup> John Baptist Odama, *Reconciliation Process (Mato Oput) Among the Acholi Tribe in Northern Uganda.*” A Commemorative Address Made During the Ceremony for the 21<sup>st</sup> Niwano Peace Price Award in Japan.

<sup>267</sup> John Baptist Odama, *Reconciliation Process (Mato Oput) Among the Acholi Tribe in Northern Uganda.*” A Commemorative Address Made During the Ceremony for the 21<sup>st</sup> Niwano Peace Price Award in Japan.

<sup>268</sup> Patrick, “The Acholi Traditional Approach to Justice and the war in northern Uganda,” 3.

<sup>269</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in the Acholi region,” 103.

In conclusion, “at the core of *Mato Oput* is the creation of a space that allows for reconciliation which brings the two belligerent sides together through the intercession of elders, leading to the acceptance of responsibility and an indication of repentance.”<sup>270</sup>

Latigo summarizes the ritual of *Mato Oput* as follows. “The precursor for all these processes of societal recovery is the acknowledgement aimed at ultimately furthering both the act and process of forgiveness through the remaking of relations of trust and the restoration of social cohesion.”<sup>271</sup> The process “recognizes and seeks to salvage and affirm the moral worth and dignity of everyone involved, victims, perpetrators and the community at large- in the pursuit of a descent society.”<sup>272</sup>

In summary, *Mato Oput* embodies the principles that both the entire society and the perpetrator should contribute to the extent possible to the emotional restoration and repair of the physical and material wellbeing of the victim. My own reading of the embedded principles underlying the practice of *Mato Oput*, which the Acholi uniquely have used successfully in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation for generations, are actually to a great extent the very principles found in the Christian understanding of reconciliation and fostering of forgiveness.

The good values in the *Mato Oput* notwithstanding, the Church in northern Uganda will have to enter into dialogue with this traditional system especially in terms of the aspect of compensation. Traditionally, the offender’s community was required to pay

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<sup>270</sup> Latigo, “Northern Uganda: Tradition-based Practices in the Acholi region,” 103.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Tshimba, “Beyond the Mato Oput Tradition,” 70.



ten heads of cattle if the murder was not deliberately committed. However, if it was proven to have been deliberately committed, the community of the offender was required to give one of their young daughters to the victim's family.

Although the compensation is meant to symbolize the collective responsibility for any kind of crime committed by a member of a community, and was to act as a deterrent to every community to not be the first criminal offender, this mode of compensation oppresses and violates the rights of the girl child who is sacrificed on behalf of the entire offender's community. Therefore, an examination and refining of the whole idea of compensation would help to make this traditional practice an organic vehicle for the ideal of Church as "field hospital."

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored various concrete solutions the Church as "field hospital" can offer to address the problems faced by northern Uganda. In the first part of the chapter, I focused on the importance of emphasis on mission, an examination of the ministerial priesthood, the celebration of sacraments, and participatory accompaniment rooted in the African values of family and community. I also proposed a rethinking of the preparation for, and the celebration of the sacraments. In the second part I looked at how the idea of Church as "field hospital" challenges the Church to examine its role as a healing community. Here, I proposed a tapping into the traditional efforts towards healing, reconciliation and restoration of relationships. To the extent that the Church in

northern Uganda can undertake to do these efforts, it will realize the vision of Church as “field hospital” for the people of northern Uganda.

## Chapter 6

### General Conclusion

In this study, I examined how Pope Francis' idea of Church as "field hospital" offers new insights for the self-understanding and mission of the Church in northern Uganda. This to me is a great resource in the Church's quest to help the people achieve healing, reconciliation and restoration after the period of war.

I used the pastoral circle method to undertake the study of how the activity of the Church informed by the idea of Church as 'field hospital' continues better the mission of the Church in northern Uganda.

The socio-history of northern Uganda revealed a number of social problems which were a result of the war. There was mass displacement of the people and abduction of children for the purpose of recruitment and indoctrination. There was also the destruction of families' livelihoods, infrastructure, the environment, cultural fragmentation, abject poverty, vulnerability to preventable diseases, sexual abuse, mutilations of all kinds and loss of lives.

The bulk of the cost of the war was related to military expenditure, loss of livestock and crops, and the cost of ill health and deaths. There was also damage done to infrastructure such as bridges, market accessibility and production, poor judicial processes, land speculations and seizures, encroachments due to clouded land rights and human and capital flight.

In an attempt to offer the people security from the rebels, millions of the internally displaced peoples were accommodated in a number of camps established by the government. In these camps the people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Food was scarce, water supply was severely insufficient, sanitation was very poor, and the provision of health and education services was minimal. Besides, fear of the LRA stopped people from farming, the economic mainstay of livelihoods in the area. Insecure roads rendered many of the camps inaccessible to delivery of vital food and other humanitarian assistance without heavy military escort. All these bottlenecks made the conditions in the camps worse with devastating consequences for the population. Chronically high levels of sexual and gender-based violence were reported for women and girls in the internally displaced persons camps.

Summing up these atrocities revealed the following. There were a lot of deaths recorded during this period of conflict. Deep seated trauma continues to have consequences years after this experience of conflict. There is also the sense of social guilt, especially when the community feels that it failed to protect its members and even in some circumstances failed to bury some of their dead who ended up being eaten by pigs and dogs and other wild animals. This resulted in a sense of desecration, fear of cultural undoing, abomination and psychological torture. The experience of war also broke the backbone of the community, resulting in a broken community. This robbed the individuals and communities of the chance to live meaningful lives. This brokenness is further lived inter-generationally due to the abuse of children, most of whom were forcefully abducted to fight in the war. It is these scars that the government, the cultural

institutions, and the Catholic Church through their various agencies engaged and continue to engage in healing.

The period of war in northern Uganda made the Church to project a presence that saw it 'on its knees'. Apart from paying attention to the immediate needs of the people like shelter and food, the Church prayed and appealed to the perpetrators of the war to come to the negotiating table to talk peace.

In proposing the Church as "field hospital," I considered its strengths which in my view would inform the activity of the Church in the changed circumstances of northern Uganda. Consequently, making it continue better the work of the Church informed by the model of Church 'on its knees.' These strengths as I discussed included its rootedness in the scriptures, the vision of Vatican II, and its grounding on the theological categories of proximity, mercy, encounter and service in humility. Moreover, I also noted the fact that Church as 'field hospital' prizes participatory accompaniment. This value as I discussed, fits well within the African philosophy of Ubuntu that grounds the African values of family and community. Last but not least I also noted that this participatory accompaniment helps tap into the urgency of the people and so makes them involved in their own healing, reconciliation and restoration.

I could have given more proposals towards concrete action had I been able to carry out interviews to gauge the situation as it stands now on the ground. Nevertheless, what I have proposed sets the stage for the adoption of the model of Church as "field hospital." This notwithstanding, as the pastoral circle is open ended, this study can be continued to furnish it with the information that I did not explore in depth. This locates

this study as having started a conversation within the broad conversation on the Church's self-understanding and mission in northern Uganda

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