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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS: MARTIN LUTHER'S
THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE CURRENT *UBUNTU*
THEOLOGY OF DESMOND TUTU

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Nokukhanya Pearl Shabalala
December, 2019

Approved by:	Dr. Joel C Elowsky	Thesis Advisor
	Dr. Douglas Rutt	Reader
	Dr. Gerald Bode	Reader

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To the children of war: they who have voluntarily and involuntarily committed atrocities and those who think they are not worthy of redemption. Christ hung on the cross for you too. His body and blood cleanses you and your sins and restores you to full humanity, giving you an identity rooted in him and a hope for a war-less life. May you know that Jesus Christ is Lord and he saves. Indeed, he rescues and saves.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17–21

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has seen me from start to finish of my graduate studies. Without his favor and mercy, I would not be here. I owe my sincere appreciation to Dr. Joel Elowsky for his advice and guidance in the writing of this thesis. I am thankful for his unwavering support and for listening to my heart for Africa. Without him this work would not have been possible. I am also grateful to my readers Dr. Douglas Rutt and Dr. Gerhard Bode for their time and recommendations that helped to refine this thesis. In addition, I also want to express my sincere gratitude to Concordia Seminary and the Graduate School who afforded me the privilege to further my graduate studies.

The spirit of *Ubuntu* would not be in me if I don't take the time to acknowledge the people who have listened and honored the call of God over their lives. These people have seen me to this stage in my life: Danie Bosman, Esmari Oosthuizen, Dr. Cheryl Williams, Mitsy Wilson, Dr. Mary Scott, Dr. Akosua Adomako Ampofo and her husband Kwame Ampofo, Cheri Chan, Dr. Dan Waite, Lonnie Lee, Jesus Love Lutheran Church, Dr. Glen Fluegge, Dr. Jeff and Stacey Mallinson, Dr. Daniel van Voorhis, Cassidie McCorkel and the entire COSK family. Thank you for your prayers, love and support throughout the different stages of my life. Your encouragement does not go unnoticed. Finally, yet importantly, I would like to thank Reinhild Neibuhr and her husband Nico den Oudsten, for their selfless love and passion for the youth in Africa. Without your mentorship, love and support I would not have made it this far. I thank God for the call over your lives to raise African Christian leaders. To Kimmy Olivar for her support and constructive criticism in the writing of this thesis. To Guy Loum and his entire family for prayers, support and encouragement. To my family in South Africa who have endured many years of being without me as I pursued my academic career; thank you for cheering me on. To

my friends and ministry partners across the globe who have loved, encouraged and prayed for me through it all. I thank God for you all. Truly *umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu* (I am because we are). But I am all the more thankful that we are because Christ is.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire
ANC	African National Congress
CBO	Community Based Organization
CSI	Child Soldiers International
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i>
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

ABSTRACT

Shabalala, Nokukhanya, P “Truth and Reconciliation in Light of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theology of the Cross in Relationship to the Current *Ubuntu* Theology of Desmond Tutu.” Master of Arts Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2019. 97pp.

The issue of suffering in Africa has resulted in Africans attributing suffering to God’s work, ancestors’ anger and evil spirits or witchcraft’s work. This is a skewed understanding of suffering. And not only that, the suffering that has been perpetrated by the civil war has birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers resulting in Africa casting out its children. In both of these presented issues sub-Saharan Africans need to look deep into its *ubuntu* as a value system to find solutions for reconciliation in the region. With existing examples of reconciliation through South Africa’s restorative justice approach with their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Rwanda’s retributive justice approach with the *Gacaca* courts to borrow from for solutions, this research contends that true reconciliation between people is hard to achieve unless there has been a reconciliation with God. In providing another way for sub-Saharan Africa’s suffering, we will engage Martin Luther’s theology of the cross and two kinds of righteousness with Desmond Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology. Luther’s theology of the cross helps sub-Saharan Africans redefine their understanding of suffering. The two kinds of righteousness help them in understanding the vertical and horizontal relationships when it comes to forgiveness and righteousness. What this research essentially wants to point out is that forgiveness and reconciliation between the sub-Saharan communities and child soldiers, the warlords and government officials and civil war victims and perpetrators is very important but the forgiveness we should seek is God’s. As much as Africans live by *ubuntu* values, their understanding of *ubuntu* is worldly, in a sense that it only looks to the here and now, it doesn’t concern itself with the salvation of humans. Africans should be concerned about their salvation and where they will go next after this life which helps inform our role in the world now where Christ has given us a ministry of reconciliation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As an African I speak as a primary source for the narrative of this thesis. I grew up surrounded by a lot of suffering, ranging from poverty to diseases and, in later years, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I remember many times during my childhood when we would slaughter animals and perform rituals to appease the ancestors to spare us from suffering. There were times when my father would invite an *inyanga* (a traditional healer) to perform rituals. He would cut our skins and put some ointment on the wound and pour some mixed herb water over us and around the house *ukuqinisa umuzi* (to protect the house from evil spirits). We always performed rituals to be spared from hardships. Each time something happened it was attributed to the ancestors or witchcraft. This was a constant cycle. You always had to tread carefully because you did not want to anger the ancestors lest their wrath cost a family member's life. We placed our hope in these rituals as we faithfully performed them, but suffering never ended.

My life before Christianity was a life of fear and of a theologian of glory. My family raised me to always look for answers as to why we suffer and to always find a reason for why bad things happened to us, good people. We were good people because we helped our neighbors and we faithfully observed all the rituals for our ancestors. It was the same cycle every time: something bad would happen, we would make a sacrifice to our ancestors and we would wait for things to get better and they did but before you knew it, we were back at the suffering again.

When I became a Christian, I learned that there is nothing I can do to appease God. Even though God was a good, loving and merciful God, suffering still happened to Christians. Then I encountered Martin Luther's theology of the cross and I learned that suffering is part of our sinful world but the most comforting hope in our suffering is that Christ the suffering savior

suffers with us. He is our strength and comfort. We also know that this suffering will end, and Christ will come again to end the suffering once and for all. You don't have to sacrifice a goat to God, you can only believe and have faith in his promises. My life changed and I am always full of hope. The life I lived before becoming a Christian led to fatalism, especially when you think you have done everything good for the ancestors, but bad things continued to happen. This is the hope and the deliverance I hope Africa can have—hope in a suffering savior who will renew their hope and spirit in times of despair and not only that but a savior who will deliver them from their sins and give them a new identity in him.

The interest in the issue of child soldiers started at a very young age for me. I remember in 1994 during the fighting of Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC) my village suddenly had street battalions. Everyday around 5pm, crowds of older men and young boys with guns on the streets fired gunshots at each other. Sometimes they would forcefully enter people's houses to take their boys in order to join the party to fight. I always feared for my brothers' lives. Thankfully, they never got them. My village was mostly dominated by the IFP supporters. If they suspected you to be an ANC supporter you were killed, and your house would be burned. My full understanding on the issue of child soldiers did not start until I watched the movie "Blood Diamond" in 2007. Because of my experience, it triggered a desire for me to do something about it. I wasn't sure how to help until in 2009 when I became a Christian and I wanted to be a missionary in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I had a burning desire to go to this region to share the Gospel of Jesus with these child soldiers. Twelve years later I have not been able to go, but I have collected a lot of spiritual care experience to be able to confidently say that I am ready for the Lord to send me to central Africa.

When an opportunity came for me to work on my master's thesis research, I chose the issue

of suffering in Africa and the phenomenon of child soldiers that stems from Africa's suffering. I needed to learn more about the past and current status of this phenomenon and what attempts have been made to combat it, so I know where to contribute. I also got involved with this research because I have been part of Africa's suffering and I know how coming to the knowledge of Jesus helped bring me a hopeful approach to the issues we face in Africa. I understood that God may not give Africa answers for its suffering, but he can certainly give them much more than answers. God can reconcile Africa to him through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus. He can also help the sub-Saharan African people reconcile with one another. He can give Africa hope in the midst of her struggles.

I hope this research will make a contribution to the sub-Saharan African community by providing a signpost through Martin Luther's theology of the cross for them to understand suffering and find hope in the cross of Christ in their experience of pain and suffering. I also hope it will encourage the Evangelical churches and the Christian community to rise up and boldly preach the saving Gospel of Christ in these communities so that people may not only be delivered from their earthly strife but to have an eternal life in Christ. We cannot only be concerned about a breakthrough in the here and now, we need to seek eternal deliverance in Christ Jesus. Child soldiers need to hear of this suffering savior who went to war for our sins. The communities casting out these child soldiers need to hear of the ministry of reconciliation we have been given through Christ. Perpetrators of the civil war will have to encounter God's law and come to full repentance and when they are forgiven to go and sin no more. Families and women that have been victims of the civil war who have been stripped of their dignity through rape need to encounter a God who restores not only our soul but our identity and dignity.

It is my prayer that the Gospel in this thesis may bring comfort and a new hope to any

reader who reads it, but I pray all the more that God through the Holy Spirit may flow out of the pages of this thesis into the hearts of his people in Africa calling them to his son Jesus, that they may repent, be baptized and accept Christ as Lord and savior. May Christ be lifted up so he can draw his people to himself.

CHAPTER TWO

SUFFERING IN AFRICA

Suffering has been a part of human experience since the beginning when Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world. It has entered into every nook and cranny of life and permeated societies and cultures across the planet and in each era of history. And so, in one sense, suffering in Africa is not unique. It is part of human existence after the Fall. However, any objective examination of Africa's recent history from the era of colonialism through the independence movements of the last century to the present post-colonial era, will recognize that suffering has become endemic to African society and culture in ways that, to Africans, almost seem rooted in the African soil. The brief overview that follows is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to offer a window into the soul of a continent racked with seismic shifts to its identity and character; a continent that is searching for twenty first century answers to age old questions of human dignity and worth, especially among the most vulnerable members of African society—its children. Therefore, this chapter intends to engage with the issue of suffering in Africa by examining the causes of suffering in the continent and how Africans understand and interpret suffering.

The current dilemmas facing Africa have led many to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of suffering in order to try and understand it. For people in Africa, suffering is often attributed to God, ancestors, the evils of witchcraft, and colonialism. This has led to a skewed understanding of suffering. It has caused people to accept suffering as a punishment from these four sources. The misconstrued understanding of suffering has resulted in a fatalistic attitude causing some to embrace civil war and the phenomenon of child soldiers as their deserved misfortune and punishment. This phenomenon has had long-lasting effects in sub-Saharan Africa: dividing communities, displacing citizens and turning children into murderers.

This work aims to show that Africans have a skewed understanding of suffering. It will then propose a framework and possible solution for dealing with suffering on the continent utilizing Martin Luther's theology of the cross in interaction with the unique African concept of *Ubuntu*. Luther obviously had no concept of *Ubuntu*. But had he ministered in Africa perhaps he would have benefitted from an engagement with it. Africa may yet also benefit from his theology of the cross—a timeless theology that spans continents, cultures and epochs with its insights on the human condition especially in regard to suffering. The goal of this brief study is to find a way to understand and respond to present day African suffering under the guidance and interaction of Luther and indigenous *Ubuntu* theology. The hope is that this engagement will benefit not only Africans but the Christian body at large. However, for purposes of this thesis, our study will be focused more so on the sub-Saharan situation that is still affected by the phenomenon of child soldiers, the residue of civil wars and other misfortunes of life.

The theology of the cross and *Ubuntu* are analogous in that they both seek reconciliation. *Ubuntu* puts this reconciliation in the hands of the community. The theology of the cross puts this reconciliation into the hands of God through confession and absolution. Both are beneficial for Africa and her reconciliation with the most vulnerable of her society and culture. Once, in other words, the vertical relationship is dealt with (Luther's Theology of the Cross), there is a further impetus for horizontal reconciliation (*Ubuntu*) which can have deeper and more lasting effects for reconciliation.

Definition of Suffering in Africa

It is important for us to define the content of suffering in Africa, which may, in some ways, be foreign to Western experience. African theologians define suffering in various ways and can include many different types of suffering, some of which will resonate in the West more than

others. Peter Kanyandago has addressed the issue of suffering in Africa in his article, *The Cross and Suffering in the Bible and the African Experience*. He defined suffering as “the presence of physical or moral pain and deprivation as experienced by an individual or by a group of people, knowingly or unknowingly.”¹ Kanyandago defines suffering in this way because he claims that most of Africa’s suffering can be healed or ended, but the agony of her suffering is prolonged as she goes crying in pain.² In another article he wrote, he noted that the “cases of human suffering on the African continent are innumerable.”³ In this article titled *The Disfigured Body of Christ and African Ecclesiology* he lists the concerns that he addresses as challenges in the African church. These challenges are similar to those of the continent as a whole, such as generalized political backwardness and poverty, civil wars and refugees, famine and hunger. People’s lives are negatively affected in all spheres of life: politically, socially, economically and in health. In this article he begins with Jer. 31:15, describing Rachel who weeps for her children and yet refuses to be comforted after losing them. He compares Africa to Rachel in this way:

On the African continent, suffering is such a common phenomenon that there is a danger of accepting it as natural or God-ordered. The continent can be considered a place where mothers (parents), such as Rachel are wailing and weeping for the loss of their loved ones. There are those who die before they are born or who die prematurely. Millions die of hunger, famine, malnutrition, dehydration and diseases or in civil wars. Those who manage to become adults become non-persons in exile, refugee camps, prisons.⁴

¹ Peter Kanyandago, “The Cross and Suffering in the Bible and the African Experience,” in *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, ed. Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 1997), 123.

² Kanyandago, “Cross and Suffering,” 123.

³ Peter Kanyandago, “The Disfigured Body of Christ and African Ecclesiology,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, ed. Mugambi, J. N. Kanyua and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 1998), 180.

⁴ Kanyandago, ‘The Disfigured Body of Christ and African Ecclesiology,’ 179.

Mothers in Africa indeed wail daily for the death of their children caused by poverty. According to the World Bank the total number of extremely poor people has increased from 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ It is very clear though that these numbers are caused by political conflicts, lack of access to higher educational institutions and by both western and eastern (China) exploitation that benefits from Africa's resources. Children are dying in Africa because of malnutrition and lack of proper health care. Many people in Africa go several days without food and sanitation. While the children are dying because of malnutrition and lack of health care, the rest are dying because of hunger. The civil wars have likewise taken countless lives by turning children into soldiers and leaving others as refugees. Innocent children are dragged into war to fight for the ideologies of power-hungry politicians and war lords. Millions of Africans have become refugees and are displaced, separated from their families and scarred for life. Suffering in Africa is escalated by poverty, diseases, civil wars and exploitation.

Another African theologian provides a broader perspective on suffering with implications for Africa. John W. Waliggo in his article "African Christology in a Situation of Suffering," describes suffering in five categories: (1) self-inflicted suffering (through sin, misbehavior, ignorance, lack of self-control, laziness, narrow-mindedness, and malice); (2) suffering caused by others (when selfish individuals or societies inflict suffering upon others); (3) suffering on behalf of others (people who make sacrifices and suffer for those whom they love); (4) suffering in any endeavor to succeed (hardship that comes with ambition, plan or liberation or transformation of a society); (5) the mysterious suffering of the innocent (the suffering of Jesus

⁵ World Bank, Year in Review: 2018 in 14 Charts, accessed May 21, 2019, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/20-1_003.pdf.

Christ).⁶ Waliggo says we should constantly fight against the first three categories in our lives and society while accepting and using the last two to grow in our Christian maturity and toward total human liberation. Waliggo asserts that much of suffering we see in Africa is inflicted by others. For instance, apartheid in South Africa was caused by the white minority, he asserts. Poverty and war in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan and Angola was caused by selfish political leaders who would not engage in dialogue to resolve the conflicts.⁷ One can go on to add that even the issue of child soldiers is inflicted by the selfish political leaders and war lords who enjoy political and religious power but fail to settle for a resolution.

Looking at these descriptions of suffering by African theologians, it is evident that suffering in Africa manifests itself in various ways that have to do with politics, health, society and the economy. Even though theologians in their scholarship have defined suffering in certain terms, African citizens still interpret suffering in various ways that differ from the theological.

Africa's Different Answers to Suffering

Suffering Interpreted as God's Punishment

Isaiah Majok Dau presents a theological reflection of war and how it affects the community and its citizens. He states that in Sudan, suffering is interpreted as God's punishment. This interpretation of events is not limited just to Sudan but is seen throughout Africa where many people believe that God causes them to suffer. For instance, in Africa, this notion plays out in songs and prayers that people sing and compose during times of suffering. The Bor Dinka

⁶ John Waliggo, "African Christology in a Situation of Suffering," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, ed. by Mugambi, J. N. Kanyua, and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton, 2003), 93.

⁷ Waliggo, "African Christology," 95.

community in Sudan during the war often sang: Ye ngo ye Nhialic wo yong? Meaning, “Why does God put us through this?”⁸ God does not only cause suffering, for some cultures in Africa, he also causes good to befall all people. These communities believe God to be all powerful. If he wanted to prevent the suffering, they do not doubt that he would unless he is displeased with them.

In the majority of African communities God is known to be good, merciful and kind. According to John S. Mbiti in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, “Many peoples, such as the Akamba, Banyarwanda, Ila, Herero and others, consider God to be merciful, showing kindnesses and taking pity over mankind.”⁹ For some, the goodness of God is seen in his averting calamities, supplying rain, providing fertility to people, cattle and fields.¹⁰ There are, however, situations when calamities, misfortunes and suffering come upon families or individuals, for which there is no clear explanation. Some societies would then consider these to be brought about by God, generally through agents like spirits or magic workers, or as punishment for contravening certain customs or traditions.¹¹ These African communities have no doubt that God causes good things to happen over their lives. The issue begins when they are suffering and have no explanation why they suffer; then they blame God, or they accept suffering as a form of punishment from him. They ask questions: Does God cause evil? Does he intentionally cause people to suffer as a punishment? Consequently, it is in seeking for these answers that the understanding of suffering becomes skewed.

⁸ Isaiah Majok Dau, *Suffering and God: A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, Faith in Sudan 13 (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Africa, 2003), 61.

⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 46.

¹⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 47.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 47.

Dau tells how the Bor Dinka community cites the Book of Isaiah to validate the view that their suffering is a punishment from God. In the Good News Bible Translation, Isaiah 18 is titled “God Will Punish Sudan.” According to Dau the Bor Dinka community accepts this misleading translation as the powerful summary of God’s prophetic judgment on Sudan and as an interpretation of her ongoing suffering.¹² Sudan’s current suffering is seen as the fulfilment of this Isaiah prophecy. The validity of this interpretation should be challenged. Dau more fully unpacks the meaning of this passage in his book, but for the interest of this research I will only share his concluding remarks:

The passage itself, like other OT prophecies, seems to have a double fulfillment, with one already having taken place in older times and the other still anticipating the future, an eschatological fulfilment to which the present upheavals of war and suffering may just be a prelude. The present realities in the Sudan are difficult to entirely divorce from an eschatological fulfilment.¹³

Dau contends that what is going on in the Sudan may be the second part of a prophecy fulfilled, but no one can say for sure. Therefore, the use of this passage to validate God’s punishment for Sudan is inadequate. There are no easy answers to the issue of suffering in Sudan. And not just Sudan but Africa as a whole needs to accept that our interpretation of suffering and understanding of the problem of evil are not sufficient.

Suffering Interpreted as a Result of Ancestors’ Anger

God is not the only one blamed by Africans for inflicting them with suffering. Others believe that suffering is also caused by the anger of the ancestors upon the sufferer. In his article, “The ‘Problem of Evil’ in the Context of Ancestral Intervention in the Affairs of the Living in Africa,” J.P Kiernan attempts to understand how the living perceive the ancestors. She says there

¹² Dau, *Suffering and God*, 61–62.

¹³ Dau, *Suffering and God*, 63.

is always an expectation that ancestors will serve the best interests of their descendants, thus deeming them 'good.' Despite this belief, "diviners and oracles commonly reveal that ancestors are responsible for suffering inflicted on their own descendants."¹⁴ Ancestors therefore have power to interfere with people's lives in a 'good' or 'evil' way. For example, the Zulus in South Africa perform sacrificial rituals to appease the ancestors. When the ancestors are pleased people flourish, but when one has wronged them suffering befalls the entire family. People always assume that the ancestors will bless them as it is their duty to see to their descendant's health, safety and prosperity. When things go wrong the "diviners and oracles commonly reveal that ancestors are responsible for suffering inflicted on their own descendants."¹⁵ Although some believe that the suffering inflicted upon them by ancestors is not to harm them but to discipline them for their wrongdoing. Kiernan asserts that this inflicted suffering is to bring the descendants to fulfil their proper obligation which is to sacrifice to their ancestors.¹⁶ Even though this is a prevalent practice in Africa Christians will have a healthy skepticism that suffering is caused by the anger of the ancestors. But they will also need to be aware that this is perhaps one of the most common explanations for suffering operative in African Traditional religion.

Suffering Interpreted as Evil Spirits or Witchcraft's Work

Another cause of suffering is believed to be evil spirits or witchcraft. Witchcraft is an African belief that is also used to explain the ultimate cause of evil, death and misfortune in the society. Although Carol McKinney defined witchcraft according to the Bajju of Kaduna State of

¹⁴J. P Kiernan, "The 'Problem of Evil' in the Context of Ancestral Intervention in the Affairs of the Living in Africa," *Man*, New Series 17, no. 2 (1982): 287–301. doi:10.2307/2801814.

¹⁵ Kiernan, *The Problem of Evil*, 289.

¹⁶ Kiernan, *The Problem of Evil*, 290.

Nigeria, her definition is applicable in most African cultures. Witchcraft by her definition is “an inherent capacity to exert supernatural influence over another person. This influence frequently causes harm, and it explains phenomena such as breaches in social relations, anti-social behavior, unexpected occurrences, sickness and death.”¹⁷

John S. Mbiti, another prominent African theologian referenced earlier, attests to this in his book *Introduction to African Religion*. He says when something goes wrong, the individual always wants to know who has caused it. In most cases, the prime suspect is someone using evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against the one who suffers.¹⁸ Most African societies hold this belief.

Engaging with the above theologians and Africa’s interpretation of suffering exposes how Africans’ interpretation of suffering attributes suffering to God, ancestors’ anger, and witchcraft: these attributes are clearly skewed interpretations of suffering. It is for this reason that the following research will aim to provide a recommendation on how Africans can interpret suffering in a Christian framework. This in turn will help us address the problem of evil in sub-Saharan African communities as it relates to the problematic nature of having child soldiers as well as provide for much deeper healing of the person and the community when the child soldiers and their communities come to realize what is the true cause of suffering and evil that plague African communities. It is also hoped they find the answer to that suffering and evil in Christ and the theology of the cross.

¹⁷ Carol Victoria McKinney, “The Bajju of Central Nigeria: A Case Study of Religious and Social Change (Kaje, Conversion, Southern Zaria),” Southern Methodist University, 1985, <https://search-proquest-com.csl.idm.oclc.org/docview/303420581?accountid=159367>, 119.

¹⁸ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 166.

Child Soldiers

The current state of the African continent presents both hope for a promising future and despair for the current prevailing way of life. Acknowledging this antithesis from the African theologian's perspective, Philomena Mwaura writes, "On the one hand, African Christianity depicts a picture of faith, hope, and dignity in the crucified Christ, on the other, one of despair, suffering, hopelessness and death."¹⁹ Mwaura is referring to the issue of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa where civil war has produced a kind of suffering that has robbed children of their innocence and has taken any semblance of hope from their communities. People in the communities have stopped trusting each other, strangers have escalated into enemies and even those who know each other are now careful with how they speak to one another.²⁰ African communities have lost *ubuntu*.²¹

The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers

According to UNICEF a child soldier is anyone "below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity; including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in

¹⁹ Mwaura Philomena Njeri, "Reflecting Christ Crucified among Africa's Cross Bearers: An African Woman's Perspective," *Mission Studies* 17 no. 1-2 (January 2000): 97.

²⁰ Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Sarah Criton Book, 2007), 37.

²¹ *Ubuntu* is Xhosa, a language from South Africa. *Ubuntu* is described as a way of life in Africa. It simply translates as 'humanity' or humanness.' "Etymologically speaking, the term *ubuntu* comes from the Zulu and Sotho versions of a traditional African aphorism, often translated as "A person is a person through other persons." *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Motho ke motho ka batho.* *Ubuntu* is a combination of *ubu* and *ntu*—the latter being a common root in most Sub-Saharan African languages, resulting in variations such as *shintu*, *muntu*, *Bantu*, *wuntu*, *kantu*, *buntu* etc. *Ntu* as such simply means "human." Johan Cilliers, "In Search of Meaning between *Ubuntu* and *Into*: Perspectives on Preaching in Post-Apartheid South Africa," (Copenhagen: Societas Homiletica: 2008), 67-68.

hostilities.”²² In sub-Saharan Africa, most of the child soldiers are boys and girls abducted by rebels and the government soldiers to fight. Dan Warburton in a recent article reported there are 20,000 children²³ used in armed forces. Most of them are girls who have been snatched from their families to be rebels who fight against government troops. Sixty percent of these recruits are children that are forced to watch their parents’ execution and then forced or coerced into enlisting.²⁴

There are various conflicts that have led to the use of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa to this day. A leading forum for Africans is *This Is Africa*, a website dedicated to reaffirming African identity and culture in prominent modern thought. The website notes that the top civil wars contributing to this problem are in Sudan, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²⁵ These conflicts exist alongside a long history of wars in Africa that have led to the current state of despair, suffering, hopelessness and death. Yet in all of the wars “there’s probably no more heart-wrenching symbol of war than a child

²² The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* (Paris: UNICEF, 2007), <https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf>, 7.

²³ There is no reliable data on the total number of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa. Child Soldiers International in their 2017-2018 annual report accounts for 14,000 child soldiers recruited in Central African Republic the last six years and 19,000 in South Sudan over the past four years. Other countries who have child soldiers with not specific statistics are the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda and Liberia. Child Soldiers International, *Child Soldiers International Annual Report 2017–2018* (London: Child Soldiers International, 2017-2018), <https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=841fa200-9315-4e8a-9a6c-cdf63a0af22a>, 5.

²⁴ Dan Warburton, “Hidden Story of Congo’s Child Soldiers Brainwashed into Battle Using Voodoo,” *Daily Mirror*, November 24, 2018, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/hidden-story-congos-child-soldiers-13638988>.

²⁵ Ettobe David Meres, “7 Civil Wars in Africa We Must Never Forget,” *This Is Africa*, March 14, 2017, <https://thisisafrica.me/7-civil-wars-africa-must-never-forget/>.

soldier.”²⁶

One of the key exploiters of child soldiers is Joseph Kony. He is a leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Over the past 30 years, his rebel group has abducted 67,000 youth, including 30,000 children under the age of seven. He has forced them to become child soldiers, sex slaves and porters. His campaign has brutalized communities since the groups’ inception in 1987.²⁷ His rebel group is also responsible for displacing 2 million people from 1986 to 2009.²⁸ In a CBS’ weekly show *60 Minutes*, one of Kony’s former soldiers confessed that Kony’s army has mutilated many: “Someone without a foot can’t run fast enough to report them, someone without lips can’t tell on them and someone without ears can’t hear their secrets.”²⁹ His comments paint a brutal picture of how the militants have inflicted suffering on many.³⁰ Rebels like Kony who have caused grave suffering run free at the expense of oppressed and divided communities whose children they have taken captive and exploit in ways almost beyond human comprehension.

²⁶ “DRC Country Profile,” *BBC News*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13283212>.

²⁷ Enough Project, “Lord’s Resistance Army”, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://enoughproject.org/conflicts/lra>.

²⁸ “A Resolution Condemning Joseph Kony . . . and Recovery of Affected Communities”, H. Res. 394, 114th Cong, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/394/text>.

²⁹ *60 Minutes*, “Interviews with Kony’s Child Soldiers,” aired April 21, 2017, on CBS, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/interviews-with-konys-child-soldiers/>.

³⁰ Indicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes in 2005. Kony rose to fame in 2012 with the #KONY2012 video campaign that was produced by Invisible Children Inc, a company based in San Diego, CA. This video was seen by over 100 million people as it went viral on social media. This was a movement by young Americans seeking justice for Uganda. Their movement sanctioned the American Congress to act. In 2011 close to 100 combat-ready US troops were deployed on a search to capture Kony. Six years later the search ended. Kony was never captured, he is still at large to this day.

The Suffering of Child Soldiers

Ishmael Beah tells a story of his first experience with the civil war in Sierra Leone in 1993. In his book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, he tells of how he was forced to become a child soldier during the civil war in Sierra Leone. He was twelve years old when the war broke. He remembers how he and his friends would risk their lives running in order to escape the rebels. He and his friends knew it was risky, he states:

But we knew we had no choice, we had to make it across the clearing because, as young boys, the risk of staying in town was greater for us than trying to escape. Young boys were immediately recruited, and the initials of RUF were carved wherever it pleased the rebels, with the hot bayonet. This not only meant you were scarred for life but that you could never escape from them, because escaping with the carving of the rebels' initials was asking for death, as soldiers would kill you without any questions and militant civilians would do the same.³¹

This is the life of child soldiers; this is their suffering. These children are scarred forever with this kind of suffering, not only with the rebels' initials but with emotional, psychological, and physical effects of the civil war. The atrocities they committed and have seen others commit will haunt them forever. The suffering of a child soldier is the kind that not only robs them of their childhood innocence, but of their families, livelihood and any sense of security that they might have had in their village community. Most of them after being rescued struggle to live a normal life. "Reintegration back into the community and returning to normal life can be difficult once they have been demobilized. Often they are left traumatized by their experiences."³² The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported last year that there were still over 3,000 children that were associated with armed groups on the Democratic Republic of the

³¹ Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, 24.

³² International Committee of the Red Cross, Ushindi, a former Child Soldier, on the Road to Resilience, (Democratic Republic of the Congo: ICRC, 2018). <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ushindi-former-child-soldier-road-resilience>.

Congo. They shared the story of a former child soldier, Ushindi, who had been recruited into the militia by his own father. The rest of his family had already been killed at that time. His father was later killed by another group of rebels. Ushindi was later rescued by ICRC and put into the demobilization program. He was later reunited with his extended family but once the rebels learned of his return, they went for him and brought him back into the militia. There is no escape for these child soldiers; the villages are not safe for them. “Returning to civilian life is an ordeal for most children who have been plunged into war against their will. Children formerly associated with armed groups like Ushindi have to cope with long-lasting psychosocial scars”³³ The wounds and the trauma that these children endured affect them all through their lives. The wounds even run deeper when they are rejected and stigmatized by their families and communities. “Sometimes families refuse to take the children back because of the harm they have caused, hostility in the community,”³⁴ and other reasons. Consequently, in the end most of these children either remain at the transit center, in refugee camps waiting for peace to happen, or they are forced to go back to the war as in their minds that might be better than being cut off from family.

It is more than ironic that the continent that coined the proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” is the one that is neglecting the safety and livelihood of its very own children and is subjecting them to these atrocities and suffering. The repercussions of the civil war have not only affected the children; they have affected families and communities and one might say even the soul of the continent. The suffering of war has torn apart the fabric of community. The continent needs to come together as a unity embracing *ubuntu* and seeking reconciliation to bridge the

³³ ICRC, Ushindi, a former Child Soldier.

³⁴ ICRC, Ushindi, a former Child Soldier.

divide and abolish the stigmatization of child soldiers. It will take the effort of all villages to raise these broken children, to endure the suffering that this life throws at Africa and to move forward into reconciliation and healing.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have observed how Africans understand suffering through the voice of prominent African theologians. Africa's suffering manifests itself in various ways that have to do with politics, health, society, the economy buttressed by traditional African beliefs regarding witchcraft and ancestor worship and distorted interpretations of Scripture that perpetuate African's sense of despair and abandonment by God. The most egregious suffering has come as African people have turned not only against each other but even against their own children. The civil wars have destroyed the fabric of the community that united them as humans and served as a line of defense for the most vulnerable members of African society.

Civil wars have brought a divide in sub-Saharan African communities and former child soldiers are stigmatized making it harder for them to return to their communities almost necessitating a return to war. In the next chapters we will explore this phenomenon further by seeking solutions that are readily at hand in African culture itself as well as in the theological resources of our Lutheran tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

UBUNTU AND RECONCILIATION

Ubuntu has been the fabric of African communities for centuries if not millennia. It has provided these communities with an ethos that is manifested in the way people treat each other. *Ubuntu* is concerned with human relations while also focusing on the moral and spiritual awareness of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with “another.” It means being inherently bound up with another person as if to say “I am human because I belong.” A person with *ubuntu* is one who is concerned about the other person; he/she is kind, compassionate and treats everyone with respect. Every individual in the community has rights and responsibilities and they are called to a certain account. They are called to love others as their own selves and treat others as they would want to be treated.

Ubuntu provided a vision and a framework for South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995 after apartheid. The TRC sought to bring about healing and reconciliation in South Africa through a sort of secular confession and absolution. All the perpetrators of apartheid were called forward to describe their atrocities in detail before the commission and the victims were encouraged to forgive and receive these perpetrators back into their communities. The TRC was guided by Desmond Tutu’s adaptation of *ubuntu*, and informed by biblical, Christian theology as he was the Archbishop of Cape Town within the Anglican church. This theology interacts with both *ubuntu* and biblical theology as Tutu emphasizes that to be human is to be made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) with the implication that one is also interdependent with others.¹ God created us for each other and *ubuntu* fosters such

¹ Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1996), 147–48.

interdependent communities. This also seems to reflect the very Trinitarian nature of God himself, who in his essence is also in community.

The brief overview that follows is meant to highlight and show that the ideology of *ubuntu* is a strength to the sub-Saharan communities. Where corruption, xenophobia and tribalism have produced the civil wars that have birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers, *ubuntu* calls Africans to reflect on what it truly means to be human. Human beings living in community are inherently bound up with one another. While biblical theology informs us that we are all made in the image of God, we also learn that he created us to be interdependent. The Genesis creation narrative helps us realize that even though God created mankind with distinct identities, they are made for community and these identities ought not to divide. Lastly, following in the footsteps of South Africa in their Truth and Reconciliation Commission we realize that *ubuntu* is necessary for human flourishing. *Ubuntu* helps us to reconcile with one another and bring about healing in our communities.

Definitions of *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is an African philosophy defined in Xhosa as “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,” or in Zulu “*umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*.” Literally translated, this means “a person is a person through another person” or “I am because we are.” This is not the same as Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” philosophy. While Descartes used the presence of mind solely to prove his existence as a being, the definition of *ubuntu* offers an alternate and perhaps more satisfying basis for the meaning of what it is to be human: “I am a human because I belong. I participate, I share.”² I exist in relationship with others. This is the very fabric of every African community.

² Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31.

Though the proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” is Xhosa, a language from South Africa, there are many interpretations of it in different African languages. For example, in Kikuyu, one of the largest ethnic groups in Kenya, they would say, “*Mundu ni Mundu ni undu wa andu*” which means “a human being is a person because of the other people.” You find the connotations of *ubuntu* in the idioms and proverbs of different African languages. In Zulu as well there is a proverb that says “*amasongo akhala ngamabili*” this means “a person is bound to succeed when he works or consults with others.” In Chichewa, a language spoken in Malawi, there is an idiom that says “*kali kokha nkanyama, tili awiri ntiwanthu*” which means “when you are on your own you are as good as an animal of the wild; when there are two of you, you form a community.” A summary on the meaning of these African proverbs and idioms can be drawn from Swanson’s understanding of the concept of *ubuntu*, “*Ubuntu* is borne out of the philosophy that community strength comes of community support, and that dignity and identity are achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity and community commitment.”³ Indeed this is attested by Desmond Tutu in South Africa who used *Ubuntu* to regain dignity and restore identity to black people in South Africa through reconciliation and forgiveness. In his *No Future without Forgiveness* Tutu reiterates Swanson’s definition of *Ubuntu*:

Ubuntu is a difficult word to render into the Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘*Yu, u nobunto*’; ‘Hey so-and-so has *ubuntu*.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, ‘My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life.⁴

Tutu emphasizes two components of *ubuntu* in this explanation: one is the act of generosity or caring and the other is a sense of community or togetherness. Both of these are exercised through

³ D.M Swanson, “*Ubuntu: An African Contribution to (re)search for/with a ‘humble togetherness,’*” *The Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2, no. 2 (2007): 55.

⁴ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 31.

hospitality and relationships. The idea of unity and compassion is paramount for *ubuntu*. It embodies interconnectedness and community. This is also evident in some of the African languages; for example, Shona, a language spoken in Zimbabwe. A Shona greeting in the morning is: *Mangwanani, marara sei?* (Good morning, did you sleep well?) in which the response is *Ndarara, (kana) mararawo* (I slept well if you did), or a greeting during the day: *Masikati, maswerasei?* (Good afternoon, how has your day been?), *Ndasweramaswerawo* (My day has been good if yours has been good). This shows that one's life is so intrinsically connected to the other person that if the other person did not sleep well or if their day is not going well then, the other cannot be expected to have slept well or to have a good day either. One must keep in mind that this greeting is not reserved for your loved ones, but it is for everyone you encounter inside and outside your home, village or city.

John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy* elaborates on the *ubuntu*'s interconnectedness, "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'"⁵ The life of individuals in African communities are linked together. This is also evident in their traditions and cultural practices as Mbiti attests: "Every facet of African life is shaped to embrace *ubuntu* as a process and philosophy which reflects the African heritage, traditions, cultures, customs, beliefs, value system and the extended family structure,"⁶ and in addition to defining *ubuntu* as a philosophy, for others *ubuntu* also has a language and ideas of social justice and righteousness.⁷ *Ubuntu* is an

⁵ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 141.

⁶ Nono Makhudu, "Cultivating a Climate of Cooperation through *Ubuntu*," *Enterprise* 68 (1993): 40.

⁷ Nhlanhla Mkhize, "*Ubuntu* and Harmony: An African Approach to Morality and Ethics", in *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, ed. Ronald Nicolson, (Scottville: University of KwaZulu-Natal

all-compassing way of African life. *Ubuntu* is being African in the midst of other Africans exercising kindness, extending respect and being in unity with others. Dr. Julius Gathogo from Kenyatta University defines *ubuntu* as a unifying worldview that has “both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It both describes human being as ‘being-with-others’ and prescribes what ‘being-with-others’ should be all about.”⁸ Being with others in the *ubuntu* societies means that you are concerned about the welfare of others and are called to a certain ethical behavior in this society.

Ubuntu has been the fabric of communities in sub-Saharan African, it has strengthened communities and provided for families since time immemorial. As a concept that promotes unity, acceptance, extension of generosity, duty to one’s neighbor and forgiveness especially when South Africa sought healing, reconciliation and forgiveness after apartheid, Desmond Tutu saw the ideals of *ubuntu* as critical in his formation of *Ubuntu* theology.

Desmond Tutu’s *Ubuntu* Theology

Desmond Tutu’s theology, rooted in the ideals of *ubuntu* as well as informed and guided by biblical theology, is tied to forgiveness and reconciliation, which is also a core value of Western salvation theology. But the latter often focuses on the individual’s reconciliation with God, while Tutu, through *ubuntu*, focuses on community reconciliation. He seeks to provide a corrective hermeneutic that recognizes the importance of the other in relationship through his theological model which lays “an emphasis on the integrity of creation and the habitual recalling of our

Press, 2008), 40.

⁸ Julius Gathogo, “African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and *Ubuntu*,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 130, (2008): 49.

image of God (*imago Dei*) in the midst of human conflict.”⁹ His theology is one that restores humanity, calling the oppressor and the oppressed to see each other as equal human beings that bear the image of God. Tutu’s theology is one that is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Gospel compels him to reject apartheid as totally unchristian and it also constrains him to work for justice, peace and reconciliation. Tutu believes that God has given each of us the mandate to be ministers of His reconciliation.¹⁰

As a believer, “Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology begins with the account of God’s creation, in which human identity is defined in the image of God.”¹¹ According to Tutu, God created finite creatures for the infinite, meaning that the only thing that can satisfy human longing is God himself. The material world cannot satisfy us but can only divide, but through *ubuntu*, communities are drawn together to experience God through each other. Just like apartheid divided South Africans, both black and white, tribalism and greed for power divided the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda. Apartheid for Tutu “makes no theological sense [because] it denies that human beings are created in the image of God.”¹² According to Tutu, apartheid is not consistent with the Bible, it is rather unbiblical, unchristian, immoral and evil. Apartheid claims that the skin color and ethnicity qualifies a person for privilege and political power which

⁹ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁰ Desmond Tutu, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: The Struggle for Justice in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 55.

¹¹ Battle, *Reconciliation*, 5.

¹² Desmond Tutu, “Response at Graduation of Colombia University’s Honorary Doctorate” (address), University of the Witwatersrand, August 2, 1982. (Tutu was prevented from flying to New York by the apartheid government, therefore the president and the trustees of Colombia University flew to South Africa to present the degree to Tutu).

eventually says that, “ultimately people are intended for separation.”¹³ Tutu continues to contend that the Bible is very clear in its teaching “that people are created for fellowship, for togetherness, not for alienation, apartness, enmity and division (Gen. 2:18; Gen. 11:1–9; 1 Cor. 12:12–13; Rom. 12:3–5; Gal. 3:28; Acts 17:26).”¹⁴ Just as God is a Trinitarian community, he also created us to live in community with one another. The story of God creating mankind in Genesis is an example of that. God said, “It is not good for man to live alone,” hence, God made Eve—that is to say that one of the ways Adam could delight in the Lord was through Eve. Hence, humanity is given meaning through dignified relationships. It is in this view that Tutu draws his Christian understanding of forgiveness, when a person’s humanity and dignity are tied to the image of God. Human beings are human because they bear the *imago Dei*.

In his book *Reconciliation*, Michael Battle lists four vectors in Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology. The first is interdependence: *ubuntu* theology builds interdependent communities. Tutu claims that Apartheid alienated and divided people, but Scripture shows that people are made for togetherness and fellowship. He makes a reference to the story of creation: that Adam needed Eve as a sign of interdependence. Second, *ubuntu* integrates cultures by recognizing that people have distinct identities. Third, it is able to combine the best of African and Western cultures to produce a new and distinctive theology. And fourth, it is strong enough to tackle issues of apartheid and even overthrow it.¹⁵ Tutu’s inclusive theological approach can be summed up in this understanding of *Ubuntu* as he describes it through the Biblical underpinnings:

Ubuntu teaches us that our worth is intrinsic to who we are. We matter because we are made in the image of God. *Ubuntu* reminds us that we belong in one family—

¹³ Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 147–48

¹⁴ Tutu, *Rainbow People of God*, 148.

¹⁵ Battle, *Reconciliation*, 38–50.

God's family, the human family. In our African worldview, the greatest good is communal harmony. Anything that subverts or undermines the greatest good is ipso facto wrong, evil. Anger and desire for revenge are subversive of this good thing.¹⁶

Tutu's theology is not only tied to the *imago dei*, but it also places emphasis on human beings as part of God's family. God's family is one that is inclusive and promotes peace. In this family relationships are paramount in helping people understand and live out their humanity. Tutu's definition of *ubuntu* embodies the idea of relationships in the bible. Biblical relationships recognize the importance and equality of human beings and reject any emphasis that champions the superiority of one individual or even one race over another—unlike apartheid and all the other issues that divide communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

The biblical ethos has a lot in common with *ubuntu*, and both call people towards an ethical responsibility that comes with a shared identity. Not only that, Scripture calls people to an even greater reconciliation and relationship with God which then should translate into greater relationships between people here on earth guided by love and forgiveness.

Truth and Reconciliation

One cannot engage Desmond Tutu's *ubuntu* theology without addressing South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that he was heavily involved in. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a court-like body that was formed after apartheid to deal with what happened under the apartheid government.¹⁷ The TRC was formed after the National Assembly passed the "Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act" in May 1995. It was a commission created to promote national unity and reconciliation. The commission was created to lay a

¹⁶ Desmond Tutu, *God Is Not A Christian: And Other Provocations* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 24.

¹⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>.

secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and the legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not victimisation.¹⁸

This need for *ubuntu*, understanding and reparation could only be achieved through forgiveness and reconciliation. Tutu as chairman of the TRC became an advocate for the philosophy and the spiritual ideals of *ubuntu* in extrapolating truths through “narratives of atrocities from the apartheid era. He also viewed it as necessary in the more important and subsequent processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, transcendence and healing that arise through the cathartic process of truth-telling.”¹⁹ As perpetrators of apartheid and human rights violators came forth to give an account of their atrocities and offenses they were forgiven and were reconciled to the rest of the society. The way this worked was the victims gave statements about their experiences and some were called forth for a public hearing. Perpetrators also had a chance to give their testimonies and request amnesty. Public hearings gave both the victims and perpetrators a chance to ask questions about what exactly took place and what went on in the hearts and heads of the perpetrators. It also gave the families of the deceased victims closure as they learned what took place at the death of their loved ones, and for some, as they were able to find their remains, even just a bone to bury.

A few examples of the TRC hearing follow. Dirk Coetzee who applied for amnesty, was involved in the murdering of the civil rights lawyer, anti-apartheid activist and member of the ANC, Griffiths Mxenge. Here Coetzee is quoted during his appearance before the TRC:

I would just again, as I say, as pathetic as it might sound, and for what it's worth to - especially to the Mxenge family, the children at first, the mother and the brothers, my

¹⁸ Postamble to the Interim Constitution (Act no 200 of 1993), after section 251

¹⁹ Swanson, “*Ubuntu*,” 55.

sincere - and I can assure you coming from my heart - apology for the grief and sorrow I caused your family, and I know there's absolutely nothing that I can do but just ask you for - apologise [*sic*] to you, and I think it's unfair of me to expect from you to forgive me at all for that, because if I must put me in your situation I don't know how I will ever be able to forgive someone like Dirk Coetzee if you did something - what I did to your family, if you did that to my kids or one of my beloved ones. But I hope, sincerely hope, that with the years that pass that the wounds might heal. I will have to live with my conscience for the rest of my life, and with the fact that I killed innocent people, with hindsight completely innocent, a ridiculous act, but I don't think anything sane can come out of an insane system like apartheid. And I really hope that your wounds will in some way be able to heal over the years.²⁰

The Mxenge family was fortunate to hear about the death of their beloved and also to meet the man that murdered him. Other families—such as the Mhlauli family, whose beloved was abducted and killed by the police and his hand cut off and preserved in a jar on the senior officer's desk—it would be years before perpetrators came forth to confess the murdering of their loved one. Babalwa Mhlauli, the daughter of the victim, is quoted before the commission saying; “I would like to know who killed my father. . . . We do want to forgive but I mean we don't know whom to forgive.”²¹ Such was the reality of the TRC. As much as others found closure and healing some had to simply let bygones be bygones.

As much as the TRC commissioners and South Africans thought this was a useful platform to usher the country into a process of healing and towards a “united rainbow nation” others were skeptical. Christoph Marx in his *Ubu and Ubuntu: On the Dialectics of Apartheid and Nation Building* criticizes *ubuntu* as a propaganda construct, building a nationalist ideology that only appears to unite the nation while actually promoting division in the form of identity-building. In this way Marx likens *Ubuntu* to the ideologies that birthed apartheid. Marx further proposes that the inclusion of *Ubuntu* in the TRC does more harm than good, emphasizing the personal injuries

²⁰ TRC 1996 Amnesty Hearing Transcripts. <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/durban/coetzee1.htm>.

²¹ John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser For Peace: The Authorised Biography of Desmond Tutu* (London: Rider, 2016), 351.

of crimes while neglecting the causes rooted in the systematic structure of apartheid. Ramose is even more critical in his writing:

In an effort to win the support of the numerical majority population in the country, the conqueror appealed to *ubuntu* and used it tactfully to remove the causes of its own fear. Here it is important to understand that the majority of the South African population continues to be nurtured and educated according to the basic tenets of *ubuntu*, notwithstanding the selective amnesia of a small segment of the indigenous elite. For example, *ubuntu* was included in the interim constitution to justify the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Yet, the necessity for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission cannot be said to be the expression of the will of the conquered people of South Africa. This is because the necessity was a unilateral decision by the political leadership of the conquered people.²²

Ramose claims that the TRC lacked the will of the majority of the people and only served a political agenda.

In reply, one can also argue that even though the TRC had its weaknesses, *Ubuntu* was its strength as it sought to bring healing in a divisive and broken community. It created a platform for healing and unity. As Swanson states, “the struggle for *Ubuntu*, on a local and national scale, served as a philosophy of struggle for people trying to heal the brutality and desperateness of a deeply ruptured society. In heart-felt terms, the struggle for *Ubuntu* became the struggle for the *dignity* and *soul* of South Africa.”²³ *Ubuntu* provided a basis on which South Africans could find healing for their soul and regain their dignity as a significant people made in the *imago Dei*. Other critics accuse the TRC of blanket amnesty that focuses more on the perpetrators, rather than the victims, by granting them a free pass as long as they confess what they did without being tried by the court of justice. Tutu gives the following response, explaining why they chose amnesty as a way to draw perpetrators back into the society:

²² M. Ramose, ‘I Conquer Therefore I am the Sovereign: Reflections upon Sovereignty, Constitutionalism, and Democracy in Zimbabwe and South Africa,’ in *African Philosophy Reader* 2nd ed., ed by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (London: Routledge, 2002), 487.

²³ Swanson, “*Ubuntu*,” 54.

We could not have succeeded in persuading the country's former political leaders and generals in the security forces to sit down at the negotiation table if they knew they would have their day in court and be required to spend time in prison. So, on balance, I think we did the right thing. We said peace is more important than fulfilling the niceties of punitive justice. We traded truth for justice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not offer blanket amnesty or crass impunity, and I continue to believe that there is a place for the prosecution of those who refuse to acknowledge their complicity in evil. If those guilty of gross violations of human rights do, however, seek to live a new life and contribute to transforming the country, then we need to talk with them and where necessary strike a deal. We still have a long way to go, but we have made a start.²⁴

Tutu does acknowledge that they were not able to succeed fully with this approach, but it was a start at attaining peace for the country and its people. As people confessed, they were forgiven and were invited back into the community. The foundation of Tutu's plan offers a clear biblical picture of repentance and forgiveness. The same gospel of Jesus Christ, which compels us to reject apartheid as totally unchristian, is the very gospel that constrains us to work for justice, for peace and reconciliation. God has given us a mandate to be ministers of His reconciliation.

Biblical Underpinnings of *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is an African worldview that does not explain God, let alone point to Christ. It fits more in the realm of what theologians refer to as natural theology, as opposed to the revealed theology found in Scripture. *Ubuntu* as an African philosophy was not informed by Scripture, yet the *ubuntu* theology which Desmond Tutu practices moves beyond the natural theology of *ubuntu* to the reconciliation inherent in the vocabulary of Scripture itself (see 2 Cor. 5:17–20). *Ubuntu* theology came about as a biblical interpretation of the *ubuntu* a way of life found in villages and communities across the African continent. In his quest for equality during apartheid, Tutu interpreted a cultural practice (*ubuntu*) in a way that resonated with both black Africans and

²⁴ Desmond Tutu, Introduction to *Walk with Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa*, by C. Villavicencio (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009), x.

Christian biblical theology since the oppressors referred to themselves as Christians. He wanted to show them that God created everyone in his image thus making everyone equal, and if all are equal then—if they are indeed Christians—they should know that they are intrinsically bound to one another. Therefore, in view of Christianity apartheid had no grounds and it made no sense biblically.

For Tutu, who was at the time an Archbishop, it made perfect sense to link *ubuntu* with biblical theology as he focused on their commonality – equality of humans who are all created in the image of God. However, it was and still is critical to explain the differences in both *ubuntu* theology and biblical, Christian, theology as well. Living now two decades after South Africa’s liberation from apartheid, it is important to clarify that *ubuntu* theology is not equal to biblical, Christian theology. Rather it is an effective starting point as we seek to look for solutions to Africa’s issue of child soldiers and the divide that stems from it. *Ubuntu* theology, for instance, does not guide us to fulfill the first and greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord our God with all our mind, soul and heart. Africans know there is God the creator who created all things, but this is a knowledge grounded only in natural revelation. The confusion is in the medium they use to connect or communicate with the creator God apart from Christ, and this is where Martin Luther’s theology of the cross which follows in next chapter can bring *ubuntu* theology under the light of the cross, pointing Africans to Jesus Christ. Africa’s salvation is not in its ancestors or other traditional practices. Salvation is found in no one else, but Christ (Acts 4:12). *Ubuntu* theology is consonant with Christ’s commandments that calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39) and so in that sense can be a helpful starting point for talking about true and enduring reconciliation.

Ubuntu brings to the table an understanding of humanness, interdependence and mutual

respect. Being human by the definition as previously established means to bear the image of God and to be an individual who contributes to a greater whole. It also means that a person's life and actions affect the whole community. These are more or less what Christ came and modeled for the world. Christ came to reconcile all humanity to the Father and to one another. Both biblical and *ubuntu* theology teach ways that favor solidarity and mutual respect and acceptance over divisiveness. Both call people to treat others as they would want to be treated (Luke 6:31), to love their neighbors as their own selves (Mark 12:31). To corrupted leaders or warlords, this calls for them to reflect on their unethical behavior as they would not want what they are doing to be done unto them. It calls them to apply a broader understanding of neighbor because biblically, the term "neighbor" does not only mean one's blood relatives or people from their tribe. Rather, it means that every human being made in the image of God is your neighbor. *Ubuntu* teaches people to help those who are struggling and comfort those who need comfort just as Paul urges the Galatians to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Therefore the biblical message of *ubuntu* for sub-Saharan Africans who are believers is this: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:12–13). Healing and reconciliation in both the vertical and horizontal relationships is important. Just as humans experience reconciliation with God on a vertical plane, we are called to make peace with one another on a horizontal plane. The biblical and *Ubuntu* theology in sub-Saharan African communities can usher in healing, reconciliation and a fresh start in these communities as they work on overcoming the division and brokenness that has been brought by corruption, xenophobia, tribalism and war.

Issues That Threaten to Erode *Ubuntu*

The concept of *ubuntu* synergizes the relationship of an individual with that of the community and expresses respect and compassion for others by being kind, considerate and sensitive to the needs of others. Yet because of evil and the nature of the heart of man there are things that have eroded this concept of *ubuntu* in African communities and instead produce ideologies that promote individuality, tribal pride, and greed. The issues that are addressed under that category are corruption, xenophobia, and tribalism, which have led to many of the civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa and have birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers and other kinds of suffering in these areas.

Corruption

The first issue is corruption. Corruption in Africa has distorted the ideal of interconnectedness, hospitality, human dignity and respect. Political leaders flourish and exercise power over their people without accountability. They have a duty they owe to the public but have failed to keep it. “Corruption in Africa manifests itself in almost all aspects of human life. It epitomizes a breakdown of the rule of law and the loss of state legitimacy. It perverts human relationships and leads to increased personalization of political power.”²⁵ Corruption in sub-Saharan Africa has created individualistic ideals that elevate tribalism and nepotism as people seek to elevate the lives and fatten the stomachs of those who are from their tribe or family. The consequences of this is that they forget about their neighbors who are not of blood.

Mary Anne Monye in her article, “The Role of the Church in Eradicating Corruption and Enhancing Development and Unity in Africa,” lists three major groups of corruption: political

²⁵ Mary Anne Monye, “The Role of the Church in Eradicating Corruption and Enhancing Development and Unity in Africa,” *AFER* 58, no 1–2, (March 2016): 104.

corruption, bureaucratic corruption and electoral corruption. Political corruption is one that is prevalent in Africa with notoriously corrupt presidents like Mobutu in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and General Abacha in Nigeria. Politicians and those tasked with decision-making fail to uphold the law nor do they hold other politicians accountable; they keep making decisions that favor their own selfish gains. Bureaucratic corruption is common in both government and public sectors. It is prevalent in “hospitals, local licensing offices, police offices and learning institutions.”²⁶ In these sectors public service delivery is stifled as people obtain government funded projects that ought to implement change in society, but are instead using them for personal profit, abusing their power and thus neglecting those in need. Electoral corruption is seen mostly during elections. Two egregious examples are presidents like Mbasogo in Equatorial New Guinea and dos Santos in Angola who have reigned as presidents for 40 years with no real opposition allowed to mount against them. Electoral offices thrive “on relationships that sacrifice the public interest and welfare at the alter [*sic*] of personal greed,”²⁷ as they continuously accept bribes from these leaders. In addition to bribes, corruption in sub-Saharan Africa occurs through embezzlement, fraud, extortion, favoritism and nepotism by Africa’s leaders and those connected to them.

Xenophobia

The second issue is xenophobia. When xenophobic attacks broke out in South Africa in May 2008, the locals had long since been complaining about foreigners (people from other parts of Africa) who commit crime, undercut wages and are holding job positions that South Africans deserve. All these and more led to foreigners in most parts of South Africa being killed, and

²⁶ Monye, “Role of the Church,” 105.

²⁷ Monye, “Role of the Church,” 106.

their homes and shops burnt down. The *New York Times* reported on this issue and cited a South African who was part of the mobs that were attacking: “‘We want all these foreigners to go back to their own lands,’ said Thapelo Mgoqi, who considers himself a leader in Ramaphosa. ‘We waited for our government to do something about these people. But they did nothing and so now we are doing it ourselves, and we will not be stopped.’”²⁸ Words such as ‘foreigners’ and ‘these people’ are divisive words that do not align with the concept of *ubuntu* that African communities are so proud of. In a short span of time, a neighbor became an enemy to be slaughtered like an animal. One can also say that Africans have been exploited for a long time not only by the West but also Asia, especially China, and it can be hard for them as locals to extend hospitality in an environment where they have been exploited. Exploitation builds up resentment among local people where they would do anything to protect their land.

Gathogo and Phiri in their article titled *Xenophobia/Afro-phobia in the Post-Colonial Africa: Strategies for Combat*, raises an important argument saying that South Africans are attacking the very people who opened their countries for them when the apartheid government was oppressing them. He says countries like Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe provided black South African fighters with military bases.²⁹ South Africans seem to have forgotten the *ubuntu* that was extended by these countries during their time of need.

Gathogo and Phiri claim that there are three possible causes of xenophobia. The first is that when apartheid ended in 1994, millions of Africans came to South Africa for job opportunities

²⁸ Barry Bearak and Celia W. Dugger, “South Africans Take out Rage on Immigrants,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/africa/20safrica.html>.

²⁹ Julius Gathogo and Isabel Phiri, “Xenophobia in the Post-Colonial Africa: Strategies for Combat,” *Theologia Viatorum*, vol. 33 Issue 2, (2009), 1. https://www.academia.edu/7527974/XENOPHOBIA_AFRO-PHOBIA_IN_THE_POST_COLONIAL_AFRICA_STRATEGIES_FOR_COMBAT.

and a better life³⁰. When the African National Congress (ANC), ruling party, failed to provide for the needs of both South Africans and immigrants, “the immigrants were seen as scapegoats for many of the country’s social problems - crimes, unemployment, and inequality,”³¹ and this led to hatred and skepticism towards foreigners. “South African liberation struggles legitimised [*sic*] a culture of violence in the townships that refuses to go away. Under apartheid, violence was deemed legitimate as long as it had ‘political’ overtones, even though much of this violence was black-on-black living in the townships.”³²

The second factor is the negligence of both the Church and the government to address the symptoms of these xenophobic/afro-phobic attacks. *Independent Online* (IOL) produced an article, “Somalians Seen as Threats to Economy” in July 2007. *IOL* reported that 470 Somalis were killed in South Africa with similar reasons that drove the 2008 xenophobic attacks: “Livelihoods threatened by foreigners . . . they are jealous of the thriving immigrant community in the townships.” Somalians are an “economic threat” to other local shopkeepers.³³ It is discouraging to think that the church and the government that was once vocal about oppression and the killing of innocent people turned a blind eye to this issue that was to manifest itself in the 2018 outburst of xenophobic attacks in Alexander Township outside of Johannesburg which sparked similar attacks throughout the country.

Since then there have been other incidences of xenophobia in 2015 and in April 2019. The 2015 attacks were sparked by King Goodwill Zwelithini’s speech where he urged immigrants to

³⁰ Gathogo and Phiri, “Xenophobia in the Post-Colonial Africa,” 2.

³¹ Gathogo and Phiri, “Xenophobia in the Post-Colonial Africa,” 2.

³² Gathogo and Phiri, “Xenophobia in the Post-Colonial Africa,” 2.

³³ Candice Bailey, “Somalians Seen as Threats to Economy,” *IOL News*, July 9, 2007. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/somalians-seen-as-threats-to-economy-361168>.

return back to their homes, saying, “We are requesting those who come from outside to please go back to their countries. The fact that there were countries that played a role in the country’s struggle for liberation should not be used as an excuse to create a situation where foreigners are allowed to inconvenience locals. I know you were in their countries during the struggle for liberation. But the fact of the matter is you did not set up businesses in their countries.”³⁴ A King like Zwelithini who grew up under the apartheid regime ought to know better and to remember the welcoming hand these countries had towards South Africans seeking asylum at the time. These countries showed *ubuntu*. South Africa, a country that elevated *ubuntu* both as a theology and philosophy to combat apartheid by responding to their atrocities in forgiveness instead of retributive justice, ought to know better.

Tribalism

The third issue is tribalism. Tribalism in Africa has existed long before colonization. Before colonization tribes were not inherently an evil thing. Being part of a tribe extended beyond family lines. Individuals were part of the kingdom and each kingdom took care of its people. This is not to say there were not disputes over food, land and rivalry derived from intermarriages, but these communities understood their differences and kept clear of each other. With post-colonialism and its arbitrary boundaries that forced people to live within artificial borders, evil ensued. Communities became enemies and were divided. “More profoundly, modern (colonial) state power seemed to be inherently more divisive than that of Africa’s pre-modern kingdoms”³⁵. The Forced Removals in South Africa gave birth to such tribal rivalry as

³⁴ Clive Ndou, “Foreigners Must Go Home- King Zwelithini,” *The Citizen*, March 23, 2015.

³⁵ John Lonsdale, “Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribal-ism,” in *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (Denmark: Institute for Development Studies, Roskilde University, 1994), 134.

the racist legislation in the 1900's where Zulus, Indians and Xhosa were forcefully removed from their homes and required to occupy certain areas divided according to their ethnic groups. Only the mixed-race and population remained in urban areas with whites. The racist government "used tribalism to ensure that South Africans were divided so that subjection of one race by the other could take place."³⁶ Currently tribalism is one of the issues in sub-Saharan Africa that threatens to erode *Ubuntu*. "*Ubuntu* has always been used as a tool to unite black people across various cultures, traditions and ethnic divides."³⁷ Africa has a history of ethnic strife that has torn nations apart such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Congo where political leaders have exploited tribal loyalty for their selfish gains. The tribal interest has played a huge role in propagating armed conflicts and civil unrest in sub-Saharan Africa which has birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers spoken of earlier.

Africans are inherently tribalistic and they are loyal to their tribes which have always had a system that provided for the welfare of their members. Currently, the tribal benefits outweigh those of a nation, although Tanzania is an exception to this case. When Julius Nyerere became Tanzania's president, he endorsed national unity and nationalized Swahili as the country's language to promote unity. He used the principles of *ubuntu* to promote acceptance and unity. The result has been different tribes in Tanzania living together in harmony.

As we conclude this section, it is evident that there is a healthy and unhealthy way of *ubuntu*. In the words of Smith et al. in *Ubuntu in Christian Perspective*, a healthy *ubuntu* is able to bind people together across the borders of race, color, and gender. And the unhealthy side is

³⁶ Elijah M. Baloyi, "Tribalism: Thorny Issue Towards Reconciliation in South Africa – A Practical Theological Appraisal", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 2, (June 2008). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i2.4772>.

³⁷ Baloyi, "Tribalism," 2.

when *ubuntu* is only extended to members of a particular group. This unhealthy approach to *ubuntu* can lead to xenophobia, nepotism and distrust of anybody outside that group.³⁸ Sub-Saharan Africa needs to go back to the generic understanding of *ubuntu*, the one that strived to benefit the whole community and not just a selected few.

Ubuntu's Contribution to the Current State in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ubuntu has a lot to contribute to sub-Saharan Africa's current situation. *Ubuntu* offers hope and great possibilities in its human rights contribution.³⁹ For issues such as corruption, xenophobia, tribalism and wars that threaten to erode *ubuntu*, *ubuntu* can shed a light that draws people back to unity and human interconnectedness where there is acceptance for each individual and extended compassion for the welfare of the whole. The old ways of *ubuntu* if applied faithfully will see sub-Saharan politicians serving their people and not themselves, where politics and its ideology are for the welfare of its people, where the villages are raising and protecting their children and where the church is calling people to a different kind of interconnectedness, an eternal connectedness with the Father and the rest of the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter we observed that *ubuntu* is an ancient African way of life that emphasizes the essence of being human defined as “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.” Literally translated, this means “a person is a person through another person” or “I am because we are”. It is an all-

³⁸ Jacobus H. Smith, Moya Deacon, & Schutte Augustine, *Ubuntu in Christian Perspective*, (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University Press, 1999), 12.

³⁹ Swanson, “*Ubuntu*,” 53.

encompassing way of life that emphasizes on interconnectedness. For decades Africans have shared villages with different tribes and have been able to share resources and settle disputes through the recognition that one is human because of others. *Ubuntu* promotes the ideals of unity, acceptance, generosity and forgiveness. Desmond Tutu's *ubuntu* theology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided a theological and political platform that was created to bring about unity after apartheid. It called forth oppressors to confess their atrocities and for them to be forgiven and received back into the community. It promoted unity and forgiveness instead of retributive justice. Tutu's *ubuntu* theology and the TRC urged people to confess their wrong and for the victimized to offer forgiveness and to reconcile both parties and welcome the oppressor back into the community. Tutu's theology and *ubuntu* itself have many biblical underpinnings. They model the life of Christ and that of a Christian, exhorting people to love one another as they love themselves and to do unto others as they want to be done unto them. *Ubuntu* theology calls people to a relationship and a reconciliation between one another and ultimately between them and God.

We also looked at issues that threatened to erode *Ubuntu*. Some of these issues we identified were corruption, xenophobia, tribalism each of which has contributed to the birth of the phenomenon of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa. These issues threaten to erode *ubuntu* because they are not communal serving, they only serve certain individuals that are in power and forget those who are in need. *Ubuntu*, echoing Scriptural truth recognizes that only by carrying each other's burdens can communities experience healing. The goal in these communities that will be guided by *ubuntu* and the biblical ethos as a way of life in the end is to provide a deeper and more lasting reconciliation that cares for the soul of the individual and the heart and soul of the community as well, while recognizing the challenges African communities face which we

outlined. The Christian hope in Africa is that every community with its political leader and especially a child soldier would be able not only to say, “I am, because we are” but “I am because He is.” God has brought us to himself and made us his own because he came as a child to go to war with sin, Satan and death and has redeemed every fallen child of God. While here we have focused on *ubuntu* and some of its Biblical underpinnings, the following chapter will provide a more focused examination of the gift of Martin Luther’s insights for where true reconciliation and community can be found: in the cross of the One who came to save the world and reconcile everyone to himself as well as to each other.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS: MARTIN LUTHER'S HEIDELBERG DISPUTATION OF 1518

The resources of *ubuntu* and Scripture discussed in the previous chapter offer much to post-colonial Africa and its struggle to come to terms with the suffering and division that have come about through challenges from without and from within. While it may seem counter intuitive and perhaps even ironic to utilize a theologian from an area of the world that contributed to some of Africa's contemporary problems, Martin Luther's focus on the theology of the cross speaks directly to Africans because it speaks to the human condition all humans share, whether from Africa, Asia, Europe or the Americas.

This chapter will engage with Martin Luther's theology of the cross from the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation, endeavoring to extrapolate what the theologian's response to suffering ought to be and providing a framework on how sub-Saharan Africans can become theologians of the cross. Martin Luther's theology of the cross could be conceived as one of many Western colonialist approaches to an African problem. Such a view, however, neglects the fact that true scriptural theology is not the purview of one culture or one period in time. The theology of the cross provides biblical insight into the deepest yearnings of the human condition: Is forgiveness possible when what one has done goes beyond the pale of what can even be imagined? The crucifixion event and Luther's theology answers this question in the vertical realm of our relationship with God even as they recognize the horizontal implications of the cross for reconciliation not only with God but with one another. Christ's death and resurrection has afforded forgiveness between God and human beings and also between human beings themselves, proving that forgiveness is possible for a horrendous injustice or sin.

We begin by defining Martin Luther's theology of the cross according to his 1518

Heidelberg Disputation followed by why the theology of the cross matters for this research. “True theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ.”¹ In his theology of the cross Luther demonstrates that we come to know God in both Christ’s suffering and in the suffering of the Christian’s life. The cross is always seen by Luther as connected to the resurrection. It was a “necessary”—or perhaps better—“God-ordained” means of setting evil aside or abolishing it. The death it brought leads to life as the path to true human life comes with the death of the old identity as sinner. This view does not provide escape from our responsibilities to fight for social justice and proper human behavior in others, but it does provide a basis for hope in the midst of suffering. Christ had no need for this suffering, but the whole human race did.² The event of the cross took place to reconcile us with the Father. Christ’s atonement makes right our vertical relationship with God and as righteous Christians we are then called to live rightly before our neighbors. The implication of forgiveness and reconciliation in our vertical relationship with God is that we too can live a life of forgiveness and reconciliation before our neighbors. This framework will help Africans to become theologians of the cross and to approach their misfortunes as theologians of the cross. This foundation brings the hope that they will not seek to cast blame for their suffering, but to know that their savior is suffering with them. They will be satisfied with not having answers for their misfortunes but rejoice in their righteousness through Christ that makes them right before God so that they are ultimately guided to live a righteous life of *ubuntu* in their communities.

Therefore, sub-Saharan Africa can greatly profit from a redefinition of its understanding of

¹ Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation, 1518,” in *Career of the Reformer I*, trans. Harold J. Grimm, vol. 31 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 53.

² Martin Luther, “Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering, 1530,” in *Sermons*, trans. John W. Doberstein, vol. 51 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 197.

suffering; a new understanding would facilitate movement forward. The region can profit from embodying the understanding and practice of *ubuntu* informed by the theology of the cross as a framework to foster truth and reconciliation based on the healing and forgiveness that the suffering Christ displayed on the cross.

Luther's Theology of the Cross

Forms of the theology of the cross and particularly its view of suffering remained in Luther's theology till the end and his theology of the cross can provide a helpful framework to understand suffering. Gerhard Forde in *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: The Reflections of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, makes a distinction between theology and the cross. He classifies the cross as an event, and theology as an explanation and reflection on this event.³

Theology is about Jesus on the cross and the implication of his death and resurrection for us. In his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 in theses 19–21 Luther defines a theologian of the cross:

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20]. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.⁴

These three statements are the heart of Luther's theology of the cross. His 19th thesis is also tied to Rom. 1:22; Paul also called these kinds of 'theologians' fools. A person who knows the virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, and goodness of God does not necessarily know who God is and therefore cannot be called a theologian. In Thesis 20 Luther states that a theologian is one who is

³ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

⁴ Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation, 1518," *LW* 31: 40.

a theologian of the cross. A theologian understands that God is not known through human wisdom and works. Instead God reveals himself and is known by his humility, weakness and foolishness, therefore destroying the wisdom of the wise. God has chosen what the world thinks as foolishness to save believers (1 Cor. 1:18). Human “wisdom” thinks that virtuous actions make us right before God; the kingdom of heaven is an inversion of the world's priorities.

Consequently, a true theologian “comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.”⁵ The true theologian seeking God must stop at the foot of the cross of Golgotha. In the crucified savior, mankind comes to know God who is a gracious and merciful father. This reality is not known to man but must be revealed to him by God.⁶ Luther’s theology of the cross essentially brings us to a hidden, invisible God (*Deus absconditus*) which opposes the theology of glory since such a theology assumes a revealed, visible God (*Deus revelatus*) through signs, theoretical knowledge and practical application. Just as Philip in his theology of glory in John 14:8 demanded a sign from Christ (“Show us your Father”), Christ had to curb Philip’s speculation of God being elsewhere by pointing Philip to himself saying, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Therefore, the true knowledge of God is through Christ. Thesis 21 defines the theologian of glory as the one who claims to know God through his own wisdom and works. He prefers works and the glory of works over the cross and suffering. He is therefore the enemy of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18). This kind of theologian looks at the cross and Christ’s suffering as evil. Luther describes how “he who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. He prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly,

⁵ Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation, 1518,” *LW* 31: 53.

⁶ Heino O. Kadai, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 1999): 181.

and, in general, good to evil.”⁷ This distinction between God Hidden and God Revealed meant, for Luther, that not all questions about the course of human events or the will of God could be answered on the basis of human observation and reasoning. Suffering may be used for good by God, but it is not God’s will for humankind. Therefore, any explanation we attempt to use to master questions regarding the origins of and reasons for evil is bound to fail. Such explanations lie with the Hidden God. He is, Luther argues, the same as the Revealed God even though sometimes what he does or permits seems to us contradictory to the Revealed God as we experience him in Jesus Christ. Suffering is not good in itself, but in this world God is present and can use suffering to his good purposes. On the other hand, he may simply grieve with us and there is no way to explain the use of some instances of evil. It remains a mystery, in the hands of the Hidden God.

Why Does Luther’s Theology of the Cross Matter in Africa?

At this time in Africa’s history, the people of Africa want to work with the theology of glory through militant force, violence, witchcraft and what Rev. Dr. Palmer calls the ‘big man’ complex. All these are the aspects of the theology of glory that want to dominate through power. We know God does not work that way and societies that use brutality and divination as means of control murder both their adversaries and innocent people. With such skewed priorities, humans are treated like obstacles to eliminate and life is devalued. However, when operating with the theology of the cross, suffering is the crux of salvation. His suffering is salvific, that is, it changes who we are in our vertical relationship with God, while our suffering at best only serves the neighbor or our own faith. Just as Christ suffered to bear the burdens of the world, we are

⁷ Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation, 1518,” *LW* 31:53.

called to bear one another's burdens to show Christ's love to the world. If Africa continues with the theology of glory the meek will be neglected and the quality of life for the community as a whole diminishes. A theology of glory allows and may even impel individuals to pursue selfish interests. Consequently, weaker individuals are exploited.

Currently, child soldiers are the epitome of exploitation as a result of social corruption. The fact that abusing children does not burden the consciences of oppressors shows how self-centered African social priorities have become. They have perverted their cultural mantra that “it takes a village to raise a child” by using their authority to persecute the youth. In his article “Luther’s Theology of the Cross, and Africa” Rev. Dr. Timothy Palmer, a senior lecturer at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, engages Luther’s theology of the cross in addressing Africa’s ‘big man’ complex that hinders the development and well-being of the church and society. He defines the ‘big man’ as the one who uses all resources for his personal gain mainly to ‘perpetuate his own rule and glory.’⁸ He always puts his needs above others. Palmer contends just as I will later contend that Luther’s voice in his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 couldn’t be more resonant for Africa today. With the notion of the ‘big man’, in a world where people pursue their own glory as opposed to that of their neighbor, the cross reveals God’s humility and love. It reveals God’s compassionate heart.

This is very important for us “since one’s view of God’s nature often determines our own nature. If God is compassionate, then we too should be compassionate”⁹ This love and compassion should then translate to the way we treat our neighbor. He goes on to say that the

⁸ Timothy Palmer, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross, and Africa,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 24 no.2 (2005): 129.

⁹ Palmer, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross, and Africa,” 136.

theology of the cross reveals who the ‘big man’ really is. Luther would say that “the big man *par excellence* is Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Jesus, who himself was in the form of God, but yet not consider equality with God something to be grasped, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:6–7). If sub-Saharan Africans are to model Christ, they need his humility and not the ‘big men’ mentality that is “only concerned about their well-being: Jesus Christ, who was the biggest man, took the form of a servant.”¹¹ This is exactly the attitude needed in Africa, as Africans love and serve their neighbor.

As we address the issue of suffering in sub-Saharan Africa, we take into consideration the distinction Luther makes between the theologian of the cross and a theologian of glory that can serve as a guide to why Africans need to become the theologians of the cross. According to Luther, theologians of glory seek to understand God through human knowledge. They tend to speak where God has not spoken. Theologians of the cross understand that God has revealed himself through Christ and they live by faith, trusting in Christ and what he did on the cross. Their comfort in suffering is the suffering savior on the cross. The theology of the cross does not seek to give an answer for why suffering exists, but it acknowledges the suffering for what it is and recognizes that not all is right with the world due to the fall into sin: “The theology of the cross does more than address the fleeting problems and miseries of one age. It refines the Christian’s focus on God and on what it means to be human.”¹² For Africans seeking answers to their suffering, the theology of the cross offers more than temporal desires. It offers eternal comfort through God in the manger: Immanuel coming down to dwell amongst his people and

¹⁰ Palmer, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross, and Africa,” 136.

¹¹ Palmer, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross, and Africa,” 136.

¹² Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Theology of the Cross,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2002): 445.

that includes the people of Africa. It offers God hanging on the cross taking their suffering and sin upon himself to the point of death. It offers the resurrected God.

Robert Kolb in his article “Is anybody home: What to do when it seems like God isn’t there?” shares more of what the theology of the cross provides. He lists his points in five paradigms. The first one is the paradigm for witness, friendship and support both during emergencies and in the normal routines of those we are surrounded by.¹³ As God’s creatures we are called to embody the living presence of God’s love amongst others. This paradigm also reveals who God is to us. Here we do not attempt to contemplate the hidden God, but the theology of the cross brings us to a God who “appears to us as a kid in the crib, the criminal on the cross, the corpse in the crypt.”¹⁴ This is our God in human flesh, on the cross, risen from the dead. The fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ who reconciles all things to himself by making peace with his blood on the cross (Col. 1:19–20). In the understanding of this paradigm a sub-Saharan African will not attempt to speculate about God, but will be directed to God in human flesh, on the cross, risen from the dead. This truth becomes their comfort and a tool to witness to others as they embody the living presence of God’s love.

His second paradigm explains how “the cross defines who we are.”¹⁵ The theology of the cross helps us to understand what it means to be human and how broken humanity is. We are sinners, forsaken by God and vulnerable to death. But through the righteousness of Christ our identity is restored, and we become full creatures who trust and obey God. For Sub-Saharan Africans, especially child soldiers who are not satisfied with the identity they have acquired as

¹³ Robert Kolb, “Is Anybody Home: What To Do When It Seems Like God Isn’t There?” *Modern Reformation* 6, no.4 (Jul/Aug 1997): 16.

¹⁴ Kolb, “Is Anybody Home?” 16.

¹⁵ Kolb, “Is Anybody Home?” 16.

soldiers, there is a promised restoration in Christ and a bestowing of a new identity as they learn to trust and obey God.

It follows then that through his third paradigm, child soldiers can experience healing because of how “the cross shows us the way back to life: through faith —alone!”¹⁶ Our way back to life is through justification by faith. God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). We were dead in our sin and separated from God, but Jesus’ death and resurrection reconciled us to God. He made us his own. Our lives are in his hands. He battles our sin and suffering with us. For Africans, the way back to life is not through government or the intervention of Western aid, although these gifts of God can be profitable and beneficial on one level. A theology of the cross does not ignore those benefits but recognizes that these things in themselves do not bring reconciliation. Christ’s death and resurrection has brought Africa to reconciliation with God and one another.

Although we live in a world of sin and death, the fourth paradigm discusses how “the cruciform paradigm reveals how God restores life.”¹⁷ God restores our lives by taking us through Christ’s death into our own. But just as God raised Christ from the dead into a new life, he also raised us up with him into a new life. All of Africa was dead to its sin but through Christ Africa has life. God raised Africa from death just as he raised Christ. By faith God will restore Africa’s brokenness that has been caused by sin. By faith God will restore communities. By faith God will restore child soldiers to normal life and to safety. The implications of this faith will only begin to manifest once Africans believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Restoration can only take place in Christ.

¹⁶ Kolb, “Is Anybody Home?” 16.

¹⁷ Kolb, “Is Anybody Home?” 16.

Kolb's final paradigm comes full circle to the theology of the cross which "presents us with the way in which we live our lives in him."¹⁸ As theologians of the cross we live our resurrected lives no longer for ourselves but for our neighbor by embodying God's love. We become "God's new instrument of righteousness,"¹⁹ bearing crosses for others for the sake of Christ (Matt. 16:24). For those who have had their identity taken from them—as child soldiers indeed have—their new identity in Christ means they can start over in a new life with the community from which they were taken. They need to hear the words of absolution proclaimed to them and the community needs to be able to speak those words to them as well, knowing that they too have received mercy from God. The suffering Savior reconciles them to God and to one another. A theology of the cross brings hope and the assurance that Jesus is walking with us in our suffering which Africa so desperately needs. This is the comfort and strength of the cross, that God is not removed from us, but he dwells among us, suffers with us, and brings us to him and teaches us how to relate to one another in our new identity in Christ.

One cannot interact with Luther's theology of the cross, especially in view of the two relationships—the vertical relationship between God and us and the horizontal relationship between mankind—without engaging his two kinds of righteousness. According to Kolb, Luther came to a realization that "what made him genuinely right in God's sight had to be distinguished from what made him truly human—genuinely right—in relationship to other creatures of God."²⁰ When Luther made a distinction between what it meant to be human or righteous both before

¹⁸ Kolb, "Is Anybody Home?", 16.

¹⁹ Kolb, "Is Anybody Home?", 16.

²⁰ Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 451.

God and before others, it became very clear to him what Jesus meant when he divided the law into two parts: loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37, 39).²¹

On this basis we explore Luther's two kinds of righteousness to help the sub-Saharan African communities understand how to live their lives as fully human before God and their neighbors. Also, in view of child soldiers and the divide within the sub-Saharan communities, Luther's two kinds of righteousness can help Africans understand the dignity and the worth of human beings. The two kinds of righteousness help to affirm the dignity and worth of every human being, because dignity and worth comes from God. Consequently, when God gives a new identity through passive righteousness, he affirms the worth of the forgiven human being who has done awful things.

LUTHER'S TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

According to Luther there are two kinds of Christian righteousness: alien righteous and proper righteousness. Alien righteous is the "righteousness of another, instilled from without."²² This is the righteousness of Christ in which we are justified through faith.

Righteousness means to be rightly related. It is functioning in your creatureliness (being fully human) and doing what God has created you to do. To be human is to be a relational being. At creation, God intended for humankind to live in community with him and one another. Dr. Charles Arand sums it up as this: "Integral to His design, God created us as relational beings: and

²¹ Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," 453

²² Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Career of the Reformer I*, trans. Harold J. Grimm, vol. 31, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 297.

human relationships take place within two fundamental realms or arenas: we live before God (*coram Deo*), and before the world (*coram mundo*).²³ We live simultaneously in both God's presence and in community with one another. As God's creatures, he has given to us the responsibility of caring for our neighbor. The two kinds of righteousness then help us to understand what it means to function in our full creatureliness—the way God intended us to be. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther starts by saying that there are many kinds of righteousness, he lists them as political righteousness, ceremonial righteousness, the righteousness of the Law or of the Decalog, and the one above all of them is the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness. This righteousness is from outside of us, it is the “most excellent of righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, it is a merely passive righteousness”²⁴ Luther also refers to this passive righteousness as alien righteousness,²⁵ and it ought to be carefully distinguished from the other kinds of righteousness. In terms of passive righteousness, we don't do anything, we don't give anything to God, we simply receive, and God does all the work in us. Luther contends that the other three kinds of righteousness listed above stem from laws of the emperor, pope's traditions, and God's commandments. He goes on to say that they are based on our works and can be achieved by human effort, therefore they are active righteousness. In his preface to the Galatians, Luther recognizes that the two kinds of righteousness are necessary in order for us to live a life that God

²³ Charles P. Arand and Joel D Biermann, “Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 118.

²⁴ Martin Luther, “The Argument of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians,” in *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1—4*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 4.

²⁵ Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Career of the Reformer I*, trans. Harold J. Grimm, vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 297.

created us to live.

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits.²⁶

Our theology consists of a clear distinction between two kinds of righteousness and an understanding of what makes us genuinely right before God and what makes us human and genuinely right in relation to God's other creatures.²⁷ In his 1519 sermon on *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, Luther makes a distinction between two kinds of righteousness, the alien and the proper righteousness. The alien righteousness is righteousness from outside of ourselves. This is Christ's righteousness that justifies us through faith. Proper righteousness is about human ability. With the help of alien righteousness, we put in work. This is righteousness before people. We are righteous before our neighbor and the rest of God's creation when we rightly relate to them and love them. Luther says proper righteousness is the product or the fruit and consequence of alien righteousness.²⁸ In this realm we are expected to love others and seek the good of another. This righteousness models Christ (1 Peter 2:21) and it is transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). This is what Christ commands. Christ did all things for us without seeking his own good while demonstrating obedience to God the Father. Therefore, he requires that we should set the same example for our neighbors.²⁹

A proper understanding and proper distinction of the two kinds of righteous can help Africans understand what it means to be a human creature as God intended them to be. Kolb

²⁶ Luther, "The Argument of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," 7.

²⁷ Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," 451.

²⁸ Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

²⁹ Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

helps us to understand how the life of a human creature looks like in these two realms:

Human life is cruciform—eyes lifted to focus on God, feet firmly planted on his earth, arms stretched out in mutual support of those God has placed around us. Having the focus of our lives directed toward Christ inevitably extends our arms to our neighbors. Human beings are truly human, that is, right or functioning properly (according to the design for human righteousness that God made) when their identity does express itself in the activities that flow from that identity.³⁰

To an African this statement easily sounds like *ubuntu*—but an *ubuntu* augmented and informed by Christian principles. A life that loves, trusts and looks to God for provision and ultimately serving and loving the neighbor. A life that says, “We are because God is.” This life before God (passive righteousness of faith) will provide and continually reaffirm the core identity of Africans. Before their neighbor, the active righteousness of love will flow from and through these justified children of God in service to the surrounding creation,³¹ just as *ubuntu* reaffirms identity of sub-Saharan communities, calling them to love their neighbor as their own selves living in harmony with one another. *Ubuntu* here is in no way augmenting human activity to equal God's righteousness; active righteousness, however, mirrors *ubuntu's* ideological aims and the societal expectations it impresses upon people to maintain community cohesiveness. Therefore, *ubuntu* fits in the horizontal realm with the way relationships between God’s creatures ought to be.

Conclusion

We have interacted with Martin Luther’ theology of the cross from his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 focusing on theses 19–21. In these theses Luther makes a distinction

³⁰ Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness”, 455–56.

³¹ Charles P. Arand and Joel D Biermann, “Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 134.

between a theologian of the cross and the theologian of glory. He defines the theologian of the cross as he who does not assume the visible things of God and a theologian of glory as one who assumes the invisible things of God and seeks to explain God through theoretical knowledge and practical application. Africans as theologians of the cross will know that they cannot know God through human wisdom and works but only through Jesus and the cross. Our God is revealed in humility, weakness and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18).

Therefore, as Africans move forward, they now understand that there is no completely adequate explanation for suffering. Even Luther himself does not simply give advice or guidance on how to cope with suffering, but he does point to Christ who is our strength in times of suffering. We don't always know why we suffer but we can rest assured that the suffering savior is with us in our suffering. As Africans embody the mindset of *ubuntu* informed by the theology of the cross they will begin to seek reconciliation first with God and then with one another, allowing Christ to bring about healing, forgiveness and restoration in their community in a deeper way than just *ubuntu* on its own would be able to accomplish.

CHAPTER FIVE

A WAY FORWARD

This chapter aims to interact with *ubuntu*, Martin Luther's theology of the cross and his two kinds of righteousness while seeking Biblical understanding of the theology of the cross and *Ubuntu*. It will reflect on the importance of healing and reconciliation in both the vertical and horizontal relationships and how this understanding can bring healing, reconciliation and a fresh start in the sub-Saharan Africa as societies work on overcoming the divide and brokenness that has been brought by the war. It will also look at initiatives of reconciliation that other sub-Saharan African countries have put in place to help their countries with healing and a way forward such as South Africa with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Rwanda with its *Gacaca* court system.

South Africa opted for restorative justice after apartheid. They understood that for the country to overcome the bad past of apartheid there had to be understanding, reparation and *ubuntu* instead of vengeance, retaliation and victimization.¹ The TRC became an absolution and confession system where apartheid perpetrators publicly gave full disclosure of their past acts. They were granted amnesty and the chance to receive forgiveness from the victims. Rwanda with its *Gacaca* court system opted for both retributive and restorative justice. They needed to punish the genocide perpetrators, but also offer them a chance to repent publicly to receive forgiveness and be restored back into the community. Both the TRC and the Gacaca court framework of restorative justice have Biblical underpinnings in the sense that even the Biblical narrative is a story of God's restorative justice. This chapter engages with these two truth and reconciliation

¹ Postamble to the Interim Constitution (Act no 200 of 1993), after section 251.

models with the aim of identifying the benefits and the drawbacks of these initiatives in order to find helpful nuggets to help towards healing and reconciliation in the current sub-Saharan African state of affairs especially the phenomenon of child soldiers.

We will also engage with UNICEF's current Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) program that aspires to help ex-combatants get back into normal civilian life, but with a focus on child soldiers, both male and female. We will see, however, that the DDR program is not enough to help combat the issues of war, the stigmatization of former child soldiers and the animosity between the ex-combatants and community members. The DDR as well as other sub-Saharan African communities can benefit from *ubuntu* as a worldview, *ubuntu* theology, Luther's Two Kinds of Righteousness and truth and reconciliation initiatives such as South Africa's TRC and the Rwandan *Gacaca* courts as a framework to bring truth, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Luther's Theology of the Cross and Two Kinds of Righteousness in Relationship to *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu, though younger than the crucifixion event and the biblical ethos, is not removed from the ideals of a Christian life. *Ubuntu* focuses on human relations as well as moral and spiritual awareness of what it means to be human. *Ubuntu*'s understanding of what it means to be human is mostly tied to human relations: mutual respect, compassion, bearing one another's burdens, loving others as one's own self and treating others as you want to be treated. This is tied in very well with what Christ taught and what the church continually teaches to this day, but it does not address what it really means to be fully human as Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross and Two Kinds of Righteousness does. Luther's Theology of the Cross and explanation of the Two Kinds of Righteousness help us to understand that to be fully human means first to be rightly related with God — living a life that is dependent on God as a forgiven sinner who is

reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We were once enemies of God, but Christ's atonement reconciled us to the Father. Christ's righteousness has been bestowed on us and we now appear blameless before God (Col. 1:21–22). God also lavishes his love on us, and we are called his children (1 John 3:1). As God's forgiven children we have a responsibility to love and take care of the rest of God's creation. We have been called into the gospel to share the good news of salvation and have been given the responsibility to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30–31). Proclaiming, embodying and advocating *Ubuntu* and Luther's theology of the cross and two kinds of righteousness could help sub-Saharan Africa move forward towards a true and enduring reconciliation.

The theology of the cross and the two kinds of righteousness are not the same. However, they both help clarify what forgiveness looks like in both vertical and horizontal relationships. Forgiveness before our neighbor only takes care of the earthly relationships. They reconcile fellow human beings to one another. Whereas forgiveness before God takes care of the spiritual relationship it reconciles human beings to God.

Ubuntu and especially Luther's theology of the cross and two kinds of righteousness matter for Africa because they are not just another Western idea aiming at dressing Africa's wound without treating the wound. This speaks to the wound; it addresses the wound while fostering a collaboration between Scripture, a 16th century European and an African worldview—a cross cultural collaboration that transcends colonialism because it is grounded in the work of the Spirit who works through His Word. Africa's wound is one that is affected by colonialism, corruption, xenophobia and tribalism. It oozes colonial dehumanization, political greed, war, exploitation of children and broken communities. But *ubuntu* and Luther speak to the heart of the wound.

In a continent where the dignity of its people has been denied by colonialism and been stripped off by war, Tutu's *ubuntu* theology remind Africans that they are made in the image of God; the oppressor and the oppressed are equal human beings before God and are all intrinsically interconnected. From Luther we learn that Africans have been redeemed by Christ's death and resurrection and are made righteous before God by faith. Through the righteousness of Christ their identity has been restored. Child soldiers who are not satisfied with the identity they acquired as combatants or a woman who was raped and stripped of her dignity and identity have their identity restored by Christ. He covers their shame and makes them completely new. In Christ they are not a thing to be exploited but are God's image bearers who are worthy of his death and redemption. Instead of a greedy and corrupt government that has operated as the 'big man' in their lives, they encounter Christ, the big man *par excellence* who even though he had equality with God he humbled himself, obediently serving God and humanity without greed, but with love and compassion. As God's image bearers Africa knows that in God there is neither Hutu nor Tutsi, neither civilian nor rebel, neither foreigner nor intruder but all are God's children, all are family whose citizenship is in heaven. Even colonizers learn that Africans are God's creatures as much as they are. As God's creatures they can all happily share this continent and the rest of the world that God has blessed them. *Umuntu ungununtu ngoKristu*—we are because Christ is.

Luther's theology of the cross matters especially in the above context because the cross helps Africans to understand who God is. God is not some hidden figure who created the world and left it to suffer. God continues to restore and take care of the world through divine providence. God is here with Africans in their various sufferings. God has revealed himself in the manger, at the cross and in his resurrection. When African's understand who they are and

who God is, the two kinds of righteousness help them to navigate their lives both before God and before their neighbor. When the righteousness of Christ is imputed upon them, their relationship with God is right. They are reconciled and forgiven. Their right relationship with God helps them to have right relationships with their neighbors exercising love, forgiveness and reconciliation where needed. Because Africans have been forgiven by God, they too are able to forgive the ex-combatants, to love them and welcome them back into the community. The women who have been raped are able to forgive the rapist by the help of God and are able to welcome them as fellow neighbors. Here forgiveness does not mean that they simply let bygones be bygones. A truly penitent rapist may be forgiven but he still has to be held accountable and punitive justice promised to him should he commit the act again. Even in God there is forgiveness of sin and consequences of it. The Bible makes it clear that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Also, God has given us two realms of authority that represent him: the church and the government. God has instituted the government to punish evil doers (Rom. 13:1), while the church has been instituted by God to reconcile those evil doers to God where there is repentance and faith. We cannot overlook sin because of penitence, but we have to acknowledge what it has done and continues to do to our society. Once we acknowledge our sinful state as humans, we can move forward with a holistic understand of absolution and confession, as well as reconciliation. Forgiveness before our neighbor only forgives the earthly sinful act but does not forgive sin before God. Our sin before God can only be forgiven by the blood of Christ and once sin has been forgiven, we are reconciled to the Father which gives us joy and a spiritual ability to reconcile to our neighbor (2 Cor. 5:11–21).

The theology of the cross and *Ubuntu* both seek reconciliation. With *Ubuntu* putting this reconciliation in the hands of the community and theology of the cross putting this reconciliation

into the hands of God through confession and absolution. Once, in other words, the reconciliation with God takes place (Luther's Theology of the Cross), it will prompt reconciliation amongst people (*Ubuntu*) which can have deeper and more lasting effects for reconciliation. If the sub-Saharan African communities receive Jesus as their Lord and savior and they embody *ubuntu* and approach life as theologians of the cross, Africa will transform and embody the Christian hope as its people live harmoniously with another in Christ's forgiveness and love. This place of suffering will become an inspiration for other nations. Its wound will heal and every community with its political leader and especially a child soldier will not only be able to say, "I am because we are: but "I am because He is."

Rwanda's Gacaca Courts

The Rwandan genocide happened between April and July 1994. In a mere 100 days about 800,000 Rwandans were killed. The Rwandan Hutu *génocidaires*² who were neighbors, friends, and even families of the Tutsis turned against them. The Hutus also turned against other moderate Hutus who opposed the genocide against the Tutsis. The Human Rights Watch report on the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)³ also states that the RPF was also responsible for the killings of the Hutus, leading to their fleeing to neighboring countries⁴. It is important to keep in mind that these killings and the ethnic divide existed long before this genocide. The genocide transpired because of centuries of injustice and brutality on both sides that had been fueled by

² This is how the people who killed during the genocide came to be known.

³ The RPF represented a group of Tutsi refugees who fled Rwanda from as early as 1960s and took refuge in Uganda.

⁴ Human Rights Report, The Rwandan Patriotic Front, 1999.
<https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno15-8-03.htm>.

colonialists. Beyond the senseless tribal atrocities committed and the political upheaval it brought; the Rwandan genocide was significant because it was the most severe outbreak of ethnic cleansing in the history of the country which had been marked by such a periodic brutality since its independence,⁵ and it is also one that we should learn from.

The genocide ended around July in 1994. But the aftermath of the genocide led to another war between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) with the help of Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) invaded the Hutu refugee camps in Congo which was then Zaïre and massacred them as a strategy to drive them back to Rwanda, resulting in the push back of genocide trials

When the genocide trials finally took place, the Rwandan government was overwhelmed with cases because after the war the country had lost its judicial personnel and the courts, jails and other infrastructure were destroyed. Around the year 2000, there were over 100,000 genocide suspects who awaited trial. Because of this reason a participatory justice system called *gacaca* was implemented to deal with the backlog of cases.⁶

Gacaca is Kinyarwandan for ‘grass,’ implying being out in the open for all to see. It is also understood by the natives to mean a place where communities gather to resolve disputes. The *gacaca* was a system of 12,000 community-based courts that were formed by the Rwandan government to try genocide-related crimes. These courts sought to promote forgiveness by victims, to make criminals take ownership of their guilt and to promote reconciliation in the community. The *gacaca* courts executed both retributive and restorative justice. This system

⁵ Allison Corey, and Sandra F. Joireman, “Retributive Justice: The Gacaca Courts in Rwanda,” *African Affairs* 103, no. 410 (Jan. 2004): 73.

⁶ United Nations, Outreach Programme on Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>.

wanted to make sure perpetrators receive the rightful punishment for their atrocities, but they also brought in the community for forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. The public confessions were not only comforting and helpful for the victims who were able to locate the remains of their loved ones for burial, but also for the perpetrator who had “a sense of release from feelings of shame and social dislocation as a result of confession to—and apologizing for—their crimes in front of their victims and the wider community.”⁷ In 2012, when the gacaca courts closed, they had settled 1.9 million cases and the Rwandans were back as one people.⁸

The Gacaca courts were not the only means to bring about reconciliation in Rwanda. Different organizations were created in different parts of the country to help the country reconcile and heal. Another story that stands out is the one told by Denise Uwimana in her book “From Red Earth: A Rwandan Story of Healing and Forgiveness.” In this book Uwimana walks us through her personal journey of healing after the genocide and how she left a business career to devote her life to restoring her country by empowering women and children to heal and rebuild their lives through sharing their stories and bearing one another’s burdens as they work together to bring forgiveness and reconciliation in several villages. One of the women Denise writes about in her book is a lady called Beata Mukarubuga. Beata lost her husband and children during the genocide. She was brought to Solace Ministries by Drocella Nduwimana who rescued her from committing suicide at the Nyabarongo River. Solace Ministries is a Christian organization that was created to meet the needs of genocide survivors and their children. What

⁷ Emile Adjibi, “The Impact of Gacaca Courts in Three Rwandan Communities,” Master’s thesis, Durban University of Technology, 2014, http://openscholar.dut.ac.za/bitstream/10321/2432/1/ADJIBI_2015.pdf.

⁸ Innocent Rukundo, letter to the editor, *The New Times*, June 18, 2012, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/54110>.

stands out with Beata's and the rest of the other women's stories in this book is their ability to forgive their perpetrators that is rooted in their knowledge of Christ. When Beata speaks of forgiveness, she describes it as a choice and an attitude to life: "it's a decision I have to affirm every day, with God's help. Because when I wake up each morning, my husband and children are still dead... My forgiving is based on what Jesus did. He took the punishment for every evil act throughout all time. His cross is the place we find victory."⁹ In her journey of healing Beata began a prison ministry and she would visit the *génocidaires* urging them to open their hearts to God and also seek the forgiveness of their victims. She would proclaim to them, "The way to escape your darkness is to face the light, confess your sin, and run to the cross. ... The blood of Jesus speaks louder than the blood you shed, louder than your self-accusation. It can wash killers clean."¹⁰ This is the message that both the victims and the perpetrators of the civil war in sub-Saharan Africa needs to hear. This is the message that needs to be proclaimed to both the child soldiers and the communities that are casting them out because of their past. The blood of Jesus can wash anyone clean.

The gospel of Christ can be proclaimed in the war-affected areas in sub-Saharan Africa in such a way that it can help these communities open their hearts to give and receive forgiveness. The gospel did the same for Cancilde, who was able to forgive Emmanuel a young man who had killed her husband and five children during the genocide. When Emmanuel approached her seeking her forgiveness. "My heart had been freed from hate by then, because we Iriba Shalom mothers had been sharing the gospel together. Its message prepared my heart to forgive."¹¹

⁹ Denise Uwimana, *From Red Earth: A Rwandan Story of Healing and Forgiveness*, (New York: Plugh, 2019), 169.

¹⁰ Uwimana, *From Red Earth*, 169.

¹¹ Uwimana, *From Red Earth*, 193.

Through Christ Cancilde was able to forgive Immanuel and received him as one of her sons. When Immanuel needs advice he goes to her and when she needs help with house repairs or has cow problems, she calls him. This story is a true depiction of how when the vertical relationship has been dealt with, the horizontal reconciliation can take place. This is truly easier said than done. Forgiveness is not easy when you constantly have to see and live life with perpetrators, but through prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to forgive one another just as Christ forgave us (Col 3:13).

Restorative Justice: TRC and Gacaca courts

The TRC and the Gacaca's restorative justice both have biblical underpinnings. The Biblical narrative is a story of God's restorative justice; God coming down to us, born in a manger, to live, suffer, die and resurrect in order to restore mankind into its rightful place and mend the broken relationship between him and them. From the beginning of creation in Genesis to the birth of Jesus God works to restore justice in the world and reconcile the world to himself.

God's justice is one that brings freedom to the oppressed. It does not treat the offenders as they deserve, but it is rather concerned about making things right. It is a justice that restores; reconciling the offender with God and also restoring the offender to their rightful identity while also reconciling them to others. God's justice delivers from oppression and brings about peace and unity. Even though the TRC and the *gacaca* do not deliver one from spiritual oppression nor give spiritual peace and unity, they do bring peace to the community, uniting fellow neighbors to one another. This restorative justice teaches us to also restore offenders into the community with gentleness (Gal. 6:1). This justice unites the sinner with the community and restores both the human relationships and God's relationship with mankind. This justice also causes people to reaffirm their love for the sinner (2 Cor. 2:6–8) who is repentant.

Just like the *gacaca*, God's justice is both retributive and restorative. This image is painted most clearly by the parable of God as the vineyard owner who is merciful, compassionate, patient and loving. But also, he is a God of judgement. He will punish unrepentant hearts. And Christ as the vineyard keeper will help us to grow spiritually and bear the fruit of our righteousness. The implication of this parable for Africa is that even though community members may not see that the child soldiers and other ex-combatants are worthy of redemption, the Christians in these communities will see it and they know it. The Christians have a responsibility to be like the gardener in the parable, to step in the gap and advocate for them. The community will do well by loving the ex-combatants enough to give them another chance, just as God loved us enough, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), to give us new hope and life through Christ's death and resurrection. Proclaiming, embodying and advocating for restorative justice in African communities just might provide the opportunity for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation in the region.

Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) program was started by UNICEF in the 1980's as a component of peacemaking operations in Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Liberia, and Sudan. There is also a DDR engagement in the non-peacemaking context in the Central African Republic, the Congo, Somalia and Uganda. There are other DDR programs in other countries outside of Africa as well. The aim of the DDR is to disarm, demilitarize and reintegrate combatants from the Armed Forces or armed opposition groups into a normal civilian life. The DDR program also ought to be aware of the background factors of the conflict and its fighters such as: how they were recruited or joined the forces, if they won or lost in the conflict, the skills they gained during the

war, whether they entered as children or adults, if they were sexually abused and if the abuse resulted into any children and also if the fighters committed any atrocities in the community.¹²

This is how the process works:

- Disarmament is the initial stage. It is concerned with collecting, documenting and disposing of the weapons of the combatants with the aim of decreasing the prospect of violence resurgence.
- Demobilisation is concerned with formally disbanding armed groups and separating the combatants from their commanders. The combatants are usually taken to a temporary place and given basic necessities and counseling as part of their preparation for re-entry into civilian life. During this time, they also arrange for them a way to return home or new living quarters. During this process there is also Reinsertion; this process takes place prior to the long-term reintegration process. This is a transitional phase that offers financial and in-kind-assistance such as goods and services, and vocational training on a short-term basis.
- Reintegration is concerned with the transition of ex-combatants back to civilian life. They are assisted with basic necessities such as food, housing, clothing, medical services, education and vocational training. The long-term goal for reintegration is to help ex-combatants acquire full civilian status and sustainable income.¹³

The reintegration process is essentially a social and economic process and it is usually the

¹² Dyan, Mazurana, and Linda Eckerbom Cole, “Women, Girls, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” in *Women and Wars*, ed. Carol Cohn, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 206.

¹³ General-Secretary United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, “What is DDR?” May 2005. https://www.unddr.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx.

one that is often left hanging as it is contingent upon the input of foreign donors.¹⁴ It is also the most difficult phase of the DDR as it prepares the ex-combatants to assume social and economic roles when they return to their communities with the hope that they will never pick up arms again. Therefore it is recommended that the United Nations, and various nongovernmental organization (NGOs) and aid groups such as the World Bank that are involved with the DDR in sub-Saharan Africa, work closely with the communities to ensure that there are long lasting effects of reintegration and that there are enough funds available to execute this process.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Challenges

The DDR program faces a lot of challenges especially in the sub-Saharan Africa where the program co-exists alongside the ongoing war, high unemployment rates, political unrest and community division. The following DDR challenges are reported by different organizations on their reports:

- Some of the Disarmament procedures put in place are not conducive in certain circumstances. For example, a “one man, one gun” policy only focuses on disarming the male combatants and neglecting women and children.¹⁵
- “Dashed expectations, dissatisfaction with their situation at the end of the war and difficulties in resettling into civilian life can be powerful triggers for combatants to take up their weapons again and resort to war.”¹⁶ This is something we have seen in

¹⁴ Angela Rabasa, John Gordon et.al, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration” in *From Insurgency to Stability: Volume I: Key Capabilities and Practices*, (California: RAND Corporation, 2011), 53.

¹⁵ Stephanie Hanson, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa, February 15, 2007. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr-africa>.

¹⁶ Lilli Banholzer, “When Do Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programmes Succeed?” German Development Institute, 2014. 3. https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_8.2014.pdf.

Angola and Rwanda where soldiers refused to abide by the peace process.

- There are a lot of reintegration challenges such as economic challenges, where a soldier returns home and they have no source of income, lack of education, no credentials or experience which prevents them from finding work. With this challenge there is a high risk that they might resort to violence for financial provision. This then creates the high crime rates that we have seen in post-war countries.¹⁷
- The gruesome reality the children face when they reintegrate into their communities: these children face lack of community acceptance and support which drives some back into the war.¹⁸
- On a macro-level the Reintegration appears to be successful, but this does not take into account the realities on a micro-level where former child soldiers suffer identity crises, trauma, lack of community involvement and emergency education.¹⁹

The DDR has been put in place to combat the war and the phenomenon of child soldiers and to help ex-combatants become civilians again. A lot of effort has been expended to prevent children from being recruited as soldiers, to rescue them from armed forces and groups, and to offer them a comprehensive way to rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community. Even though the program is also created to help the former combatants with psychological repercussions of the war and to find treatment, there is not much research showing that this is executed faithfully

¹⁷ Banholzer, “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration,” 4–5.

¹⁸ Anne-Lynn Dudenhoefter “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration is Not Enough: Improving the Micro-level (Re)Integration of Former Child Soldiers, *Accord*, May 31, 2018. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/disarmament-demobilisation-and-reintegration-is-not-enough/>.

¹⁹ Dudenhoefter “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration is Not Enough.”

in sub-Saharan Africa. And because of lack of funds, UNICEF lacks resources to provide individual counseling, but it does partner with Community-based organizations (CBOs) to offer group therapy. Group and individual therapy are critical in the life of ex-combatants as it helps them mentally and emotionally deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, disassociation and disruptive behavior. One cannot take lightly the effectiveness of psychotherapy in one's life, but therapy only takes care of the mental/emotional aspect of one's life. It does not address the spiritual yearnings of the individual's heart which seeks to find peace, forgiveness, and identity after the war have stripped them off. A combination of the two, psychotherapy and a theology of the cross, can bring a holistic healing not just for the individual but also for the community affected.

The Reintegration process neglects an important aspect of meaningful reintegration: it neglects the most important spiritual component in that it does not foster forgiveness, spiritual healing and reconciliation that brings the child soldiers and the affected community together as one and it does not address the divide in communities where former child soldiers are stigmatized and members of the community don't welcome them after reintegration. It becomes evident that the DDR and the sub-Saharan African communities can benefit a lot from *ubuntu* as a worldview, *ubuntu* theology, Luther's Two Kinds of Righteousness and truth and reconciliation initiatives such as South Africa's TRC and the Rwandan *Gacaca* courts framework.

The DDR needs to address what it means to be a community that embodies *ubuntu* and live it out. Here we offer three components that the DDR, UNICEF together with its communities could adopt as they move forward toward helping ex-combatants reintegrate into their communities: (1) South Africa's response to apartheid which was forgiveness and reconciliation through their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and (2) Rwanda's community based

gacaca courts which ensured justice and reconciliation in Rwanda and (3) Luther's Theology of the Cross and Two Kinds of Righteousness—that addresses who we are and how we ought to live our lives before our neighbor. These different approaches in the Reintegration process can provide for a much longer lasting and enduring effect on reconciliation that does not only remove arms from the ex-combatants' hands for peacebuilding, but that frees their arms to embrace a new identity in Christ. It grants them the courage to confess their misfortunes and atrocities to God and to their community and to receive the loving embrace of both through the forgiveness which only Christ can bring while receiving them into the community as renewed civilians.

Conclusion

In a continent where the dignity of the people has been denied by colonialists, Tutu's understanding of *ubuntu* in the *imago dei* takes away the picture of Africa painted by colonialists and says even Africans are made in the image of God. It says that God died for Africans because they too are worth dying for. They are not just a thing to be exploited but beloved children of God. The proclamation of the Gospel of Christ through Luther's theology of the cross and the two kinds of righteousness will call Africans to a new path, where they seek the righteousness of Christ by faith, striving for a peaceful community rooted in the love and gospel of Jesus Christ. This will prompt them to a realization that even though there is suffering and despair in this life, God has promised us a blessed ending through Christ where there is true peace and reconciliation. The suffering Savior is our hope for a breakthrough.

Therefore, as Africa moves forward towards healing, the church needs to take a bold and visible stance in the proclamation of the gospel. The church would do well by working together with UNICEF and local organizations in the DDR programs to champion absolution and

confession and spiritual care initiatives that will bring healing to both the individual's body and spirit for the life here and the life that is to come.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Theologians of the cross learn from Luther's understanding of Scripture that God has revealed himself through Christ and they live by faith, trusting in Christ and what he did on the cross. Their comfort in suffering is the suffering Savior on the cross. The theology of the cross does not seek to give a final answer for why suffering exists, but it acknowledges the suffering for what it is and recognizes that not all is right with the world due to the fall into sin: "The theology of the cross does more than address the fleeting problems and miseries of one age. It refines the Christian's focus on God and on what it means to be human."¹ For Africans seeking answers to their suffering, the theology of the cross offers more. It offers God in the manger. Immanuel coming down to them. It offers God hanging on the cross taking their suffering and sin upon himself to the point of death. It offers the resurrected God to a world that sees little hope beyond the grave. The cross helps us to understand what it means to be human. We were dead in our sin and separated from God, but Jesus' death and resurrection reconciled us to God. He made us his own. He battles our sin and suffering with us. This is the comfort and strength of the cross, that God is not removed from us, but he dwells among us, brings us to him and teaches us how to relate to one another in our new identity in Christ. He brings the possibility of hope, life and reconciliation to African children and communities devastated by the exploitation and conscription of their children by those motivated by greed and a lust for power.

Ubuntu as a value system that defines the unique identity of Africans is written in every African's heart like natural law. Therefore, its contribution to this study is the one that reminds

¹ Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2002), 445.

Africans of their interconnectedness and the strength of a collectivistic society especially with the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation. *Ubuntu* moves one from an individualistic mindset towards community. Just as Archbishop Desmond Tutu evoked *ubuntu* to establish justice in South Africa, sub-Saharan Africans can also invoke it to establish justice and a framework for reconciliation and healing in that part of Africa as they tackle issues perpetrated by the civil war.

The interaction of *ubuntu*, the theology of the cross, and the two kinds of righteousness to address the issue of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa proposes a collaborative solution that recognizes that God wants his world to be reconciled to himself and to one another. He can use a human institution like *ubuntu* that embodies in many ways the second table of his Law for the good of Africa and its children where we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Africans understand *ubuntu* and have practiced it for many years. By appealing to a value system that they honor, it will bid them to put their differences aside for the benefit of the greater whole. In turn, Biblical theology calls them to the gospel of Christ that seeks to deliver them from earthly strife and eternal damnation, addressing the important vertical dimension of reconciliation.

The theology of the cross and *ubuntu* together construct a framework for the sub-Saharan communities that will see child soldiers welcomed back into their communities with *ubuntu* and most importantly welcomed back into the relationship with God where they receive reconciliation, forgiveness and a new identity. The collaboration of the two will contribute toward helping child soldier's reintegration into the community and women who have been victims of this civil war find healing and therapy while calling the greater community towards a reconciliation based on confession and absolution founded on Christian principles. "*Ubuntu* can be understood as the very thing that God in Christ was up to reconciling a wayward creation to itself and its Creator. As a people of faith, how do we become the loving and reconciling gaze of

God toward a disoriented world? The key to a Christian practice of *Ubuntu* is embodied in the liturgies of confession and forgiveness, both individual and corporate”² Although *ubuntu* takes care of the earthly relationships, focusing on reconciliation here and now, the church entrusted by God to be the ambassador of Christ proclaims the gospel of Christ that does not only offer forgiveness of sin for the here and now but also in the afterlife. This reconciliation in turn leads Christians to live out the ministry of reconciliation given to them by Christ. A community of reconciled believers will understand the ministry of reconciliation better. They will know that in Christ God reconciled the world to Himself, forgiving their trespasses against them while entrusting to them the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19) to be practiced and lived out amongst each other. Forgiven communities are likely to forgive and extend the same Godly grace to others as God has extended his grace towards them. True reconciliation is hard to achieve unless there is a reconciliation with God. This is where the Evangelical church comes in.

Evangelical churches need to realize that they have a deeper role than they may realize in providing a solution for Africa’s healing. The Evangelical church in sub-Saharan Africa has a huge role to play towards Africa’s healing. The church should be the agent of reconciliation. The Gospel of Christ is a message that prizes human dignity and appeals to the marginalized African societies. Christ’s suffering brings meaning to Africa’s suffering and encourages hope and joy that is to come at the resurrection. The Evangelical church in Africa ought to echo this message by partnering with the NGOs and CBOs in these communities in order to pioneer a reconciliation rooted in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation.

We heard in the previous chapter about an initiative by UNICEF in partnership with other organizations to rescue child soldiers and lead them through the Demobilization, Disarmament,

² M. Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009), 139.

Reintegration (DDR) Program. Evangelical churches could be deeply involved in this Reintegration process if they were able to communicate this added dimension of reconciliation. As child soldiers return to their communities, they face stigmatization, unemployment, lack of educational opportunities and post-traumatic disorder. The church needs to be the church, a communion of saints who will come around the ex-combatants and provide financial and educational support for them, just like the church in the book of Acts where there was no needy person amongst them because others sold their land and houses and brought the proceeds to the church (Acts 4:34).

The role of the Evangelical church in Africa currently should be the one that exhibits a social-ethic by educating the communities around them about social accountability to fulfill one's civic duty and on the knowledge of what is right, honorable and ethical. Jesus teaches us a lot about social ethics. He embodies social ethics throughout his life and ministry by loving people (John 13:12), helping the poor freeing the captives, giving sight to the blind (Luke 4:16–19), honoring his Father even to the point of death and teaching people the way they are to live their lives before God and before their neighbor. Once the church has been able to evangelize to these communities where ex-combatants, victims of the civil war and its perpetrators reside the church will do well by raising these new members in a distinct way with distinct rules and accountability. This means that they might want to prioritize discipleship and also encourage their members to teach virtue both inside and outside of church. Even though the church, in one sense, is not of this world, it nonetheless is called to serve this present world and it would be critical to make sure that its congregants are not conforming to the patterns of this world but are being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:2) as they live a countercultural righteous life (Matt. 5:17–48). God's people look towards the life that is to come and live their

lives waiting for the return of Christ Jesus our savior, knowing that no matter how difficult life becomes, they can rejoice knowing that Christ will come again to renew and restore the world to himself and everything will be perfect ultimately. The believing sub-Saharan Africans will live this life recognizing the challenges of the here and now while putting them in the contexts of what ultimately awaits them at the end of the finish line. Consequently, the resurrection hope in Christ becomes the end goal as they live lives worthy of the gospel, they have received modeling themselves after the ethics of Jesus Christ.

Confession and Absolution in the Reintegration Process

Absolution is God's Word of forgiveness. The combatants during war commit a lot of atrocities and they experience brutal life conditions that sees them go through post-traumatic stress syndrome when they have been rescued from war. Some of these combatants are forced into being child soldiers and to commit these atrocities. When they come out of war, they are not proud of what they did, although some who have been brainwashed are. But to those who come out feeling ashamed and stigmatized by being cast out of the community it is important for them to know that Christ was also cast out, that he wants to wash them clean and take their shame away. It is critical for them to be able to confess their sins and hear the words of a life-giving promise of absolution "your sins are forgiven," pronounced to them.

In conclusion, Africa's skewed interpretation of suffering goes hand in hand with the issue of child soldiers who are the product of civil war and self-centered ideologies that go with greed and the hunger for power. In such a context Africans would benefit from looking to the cross of Christ not for answers to their suffering but for strength and hope in the midst of struggles. With *ubuntu* that has biblical underpinnings rooted in social ethics demonstrated through the life and ministry of Jesus Africans can learn to love others as themselves. They can learn to embrace all

ethnic groups knowing that they need each other and are interconnected and made in the image of God. *Ubuntu* will not solve Africa's suffering, but it will be able to bring people together as a unity to create a platform for a dialogue of reconciliation. Africa's reconciliation cannot only be solely rooted on the existing approaches of reconciliation that we have seen in South Africa and Rwanda. Africa needs a reconciliation that is rooted on Christ. Africans need Jesus. They should not lose hope in their suffering; instead they need to have faith in the blood of Christ on the cross. If they believe and have faith in Jesus, they will be reconciled to God and their earthly sins will be forgiven. They will be in a better position to understand the ministry of reconciliation that God has given to us through Christ and they too can live this out in their communities.

The child soldiers being rescued from the war, the victims of the civil war and the perpetrators of the war will all hear the good news of salvation. The ex-combatants will hear the words of absolution spoken to them: "your sins are forgiven," now go and sin no more. The victims of the war will hear of a savior who comforts those who are distressed and receives them into a fellowship not only with him but the rest of the believers around the world and they will walk in that grace, extending it to one another through the process of healing. A forgiven ex-combatant will come to the knowledge of God's law that is both earthly and heavenly restorative as well as retributive. They will know that if they commit any crime after this forgiveness God's authority here on earth will call them to account (Romans 13). There will be punishment. Through all of this the Evangelical church of Christ will minister boldly, taking care of souls and bringing them to Jesus for forgiveness and guidance on how to navigate this challenging life as they look forward to the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus to deliver them from this world and its hardships once and for all. Africa must know God is the only one who saves and has power to reconcile us to him and to one another.

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