

Summary of PhD dissertation

Theology of Inculturation and Liberation in the People to People Peacemaking Process in Southern Sudan (1997-2002)

PhD candidate: Daniela Lucia Rapisarda

The present PhD dissertation is a theological-empirical study of the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted in Southern Sudan in the years 1997-2002.

The theoretical profile, or 'framework' as referred to in the literature on the peace process in question, has been defined a synthesis of three elements: the first is African Traditional beliefs, values and methods of conflict resolution, particularly in the Dinka and Nuer traditions; the second is Christian values and beliefs; and the third is contemporary approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking.

The research question I aim at answering is: *What kind of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion, and peacebuilding theory and praxis?*

In the process of analysing the intersection of contextual theology, or theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, both in the literature about the People to People Peacemaking Process and in empirical material (interviews), I have defined a model of contextual theology that I use as analytical tool. In such a model, I highlight a movement from theology to Traditional Religion and culture via peacebuilding in the frame of inculturation, and a movement from theology to peacebuilding through Traditional Religion and culture in the frame of liberation.

Literature on African theology shows the ways in which in the African theological landscape inculturation theology and liberation theology have often been developed by different groups of theologians, in different geographical areas, with different hermeneutical assumptions and agendas. Literature refers to tension and even conflict among inculturationists and liberationists in the African continent.

My thesis is that the theology of the People to People Peacemaking Process is a contextual theology that has managed to hold in a positive, productive relation the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation/peace (in the Southern Sudanese context liberation includes the dimension of peacebuilding). In this respect, I aim at contributing to the field of African theology with this study.

This dissertation also aims at producing knowledge on the People to People Peacemaking Process as a faith-based, grassroots peacebuilding and peacemaking initiative. It is my hope that the present study of the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process and the theology there developed, may provide lessons for inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding to be applied in the context of South Sudan, currently once more at war.

I define this research as theological-empirical. I consider my study theological because its main aim is to answer a theological question, namely what type of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process. It is empirical because, given the limited amount of literature available on the subject, an answer to the research question can be given only on the basis of information empirically gathered through interviews. I have conducted thirty in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews with key-actors in the People to People Peacemaking Process.

The paradigm for this research is abductive, as theory and information empirically gathered are in a circular relation where theory guides the analysis of empirical material and the study of empirical material in turn offers new insights to existing theory.

The dissertation is structured in five sections. The first section consists of introduction, research design, and methodology.

The second section concerns theory in relation to the theoretical framework chosen for the present dissertation, namely contextual theology and the elements of inculturation and liberation within African theology. I also make use of the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation to read the theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of the People to People.

In the third section, I provide information on the contexts of the case-study, both historical and hermeneutical. In the historical chapter, I present the history of the People to People Peacemaking Process with references to the history of conflict in Sudan and Southern Sudan.

In relation to the hermeneutical contexts, in the subsequent three chapters I provide background information on the three elements that contributed to the theoretical 'framework' of the People to People, namely African Traditional Religion, particularly in the Dinka and Nuer traditions; Christian theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war; and peacebuilding theories, in particular as elaborated in the work of peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach. I argue that the elaboration of Lederach had absorbed lessons learned in the context of Southern Sudan.

The fourth section is devoted to the analysis of interview material and is divided into six chapters. The first deals with the theoretical 'framework' of the People to People Peacemaking Process as perceived by actors in the process. The second and the third chapters address the inculturation aspect of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. These deal with different approaches and theological responses to the synthesis of African Traditional Religion, Christian theology and peace by participants in People to People events, and with the perceived relation between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist in the context of the People to People. The third and the fourth chapters address the liberation aspect of the theology elaborated in the frame of the People to People. The fourth chapter explores the position of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army towards Marxism, religion and Christian theology, while the fifth chapter looks at the issue of liberation theology as developed in relation to the People to People Peacemaking Process. The sixth chapter of the analysis section examines perceptions among interviewees concerning the possible influence of international partners on theological elaboration in the frame of the People to People.