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Theological Education by Extension in South Sudan

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I Introduction

The numerical base of Christianity has shifted over the last 100 years to the so-called *global south* comprising Africa, Asia and Latin America, with 8.7 million African Christians in 1900 rising to 389 million African Christians in 2005.[1] This tremendous growth has also brought great challenges for the churches in Africa, especially in the area of theological training, since theological schools cannot generate the number of pastors needed to oversee the churches, leaving them theologically weak. An often quoted saying and sad reality is that the African Church is like a river, which is several miles wide, but only an inch deep.

In response to this problem, the Guatemala-born *Theological Education by Extension* method of pastoral training, in short *TEE*, has been developed. It has spread around the world at a rapid rate over the last 46 years ever since its inception in 1963.[2] By 1980, it had reached 77 countries encompassing 55,378 extension students, of which 38.1% were in Africa.[3] The formal launching of the TEE services by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) in 1987 meant that TEE programmes gained

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1 F.R. Kinsler, 'Equipping God's People for Mission,' *International Review of Mission* (71/1982), 134.

2 P.J. Harrison, 'Forty Years On: The Evaluation of Theological Education by Extension (TEE)', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, (28/2004), 316.

3 W.C. Weld, *The World Directory of Theological Education by Extension: 1980 Supplement* (Wheaton: CAMEO. 1980), 6.

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more formal accreditation within Africa. When the *ACTEA Dictionary of TEE Programmes in Africa* was published in 1993, 152 TEE programmes were listed in 31 African countries using 47 languages. By 2002, the number had reached 342 programmes and is still increasing.[4]

Theological Education by Extension will be assessed and proposed as a viable theological training programme for South Sudan (SS). This study will be substantiated by the examination of available literature concerning TEE and empirical data requested and gathered in SS in the form of interviews and a questionnaire which was sent out to 600 tutors and students of the TEE programme of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS). The first part of this paper will give an overview of recent political developments in order to put the Sudanese Church into its social and political context resulting from almost 50 years of war. Having discussed these various contexts, their impact on TEE in SS will be investigated, especially focusing on the TEE programme of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS).

II TEE and the Church in South Sudan

1. Second Civil War: Revival in the South

Today, Sudan is perhaps best known internationally for the second civil war between the northern and southern halves of the country, which started again in 1983. After the National Islamic Front (NIF) gained power, Sharia law was proclaimed over SS in 1983.[5]

The Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) came into being in 1984. The outbreak of the second war caught the church in the south largely unprepared and left it bewildered.[6] However, a large-scale famine occurred from 1985-1987 in SS, which resulted in the founding of the United Nations (UN) *Operation Lifeline Sudan* in 1989.[7] This represented the beginning of international relief and development involvement with Sudan. This, together with the new peace, which was brought about by the SPLA, provided a more stable environment for social and church life in those areas of the south.

Large-scale revival came to SS in the 1990s, in refugee camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Sudan and especially in camps in Ethiopia. When these camps were dissolved in 1991, many southerners returned as Christians and started to share the good news in their communities.[8] The former child soldiers, now returning as part of the SPLA, often

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4 A. Wheeler, (ed.) *Voices from Africa* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 130.

5 A. De Waal, *Famine Crimes* (London: African Rights, 1997), 88.

6 R. Werner, W. Anderson, and A. Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment: The History of the Sudanese Church across 2,000 Years* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 2000), 525.

7 De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 97.

8 A.M. Preller, 'Present and Future Challenges to the Church in Africa—With Special Reference to the Church in Sudan', MA Dissertation, University of Pretoria/South Africa, 2006, 180.

saw themselves as the 'chosen generation', committed to the liberation struggle, but motivated by their Christian faith. For the first time, Bible study groups, prayer meetings and Sunday worship became part of life in the SPLA.

Large services and prayer meetings were held and the common experience of war, hunger, and bereavement resulted in an astonishing sense of unity and common purpose amongst the churches, which the founding of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) in 1990 signified.[9] At a denominational level, one of the best examples of revival and church growth is the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC), which was founded by the Sudan United Mission in the Nuba Mountains. When the last missionary had left in 1964, there were 150 baptised believers and a New Testament in 5 Nuba languages. 40 years later without any outside influence, SCOC is estimated to have grown to between 80,000 and 200,000 church members by 2004.[10]

2. The Church after the Peace Agreement

The second civil war ended in January 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). During the interim period, which will end in 2011, the SPLA governs SS aided by the United Nations and many NGOs. As such, the churches in SS are at a crossroads, experiencing radical changes.

Church leaders must lead their members in having a relevant and strong voice. They must guide church members in spiritual matters and work for bringing new growth and spiritual depth in the hundreds of rural congregations.[11] Not only is the church a political voice, but also a reconciliatory one. Inter-tribal warfare has flared up in SS ever since the CPA, due to considerable people movements of IDPs and returning refugees.[12] The Christian message of reconciliation is not only to be applied to the North/South conflict, but also to internal tribal issues.

Despite the war, during this time many new churches were founded. Whole communities were reshaped by the gospel in SS and the church expanded through indigenous leaders, who had little if any secular and theological education and often only minimal Bible knowledge.[13] These local leaders developed an indigenous approach to evangelism and church planting without the presence of ordained pastors. Consequently, one of the major challenges the churches in SS face today is to now develop these leaders for these many new churches.

3. TEE and the Church in South Sudan

According to *Operation World*, the proportion of Christians in SS rose from 5% in 1960 to 70% in 2000.[14] The liter-

9 Rolandsen, *Guerrilla Government*, 130.

10 P. Johnstone, and J. Mandryk, *Operation World,* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 597.

11 Preller, *Challenges*, 272.

12 Preller, *Challenges*, 277.

13 Preller, *Challenges*, 283.

14 Johnstone and Mandryk, 597.

acy rate is about 60%[15] but due to the underdevelopment of the south and the long civil war preventing education, statistics have to be separated from the north and looked at individually. The UNICEF statistics published in 2004 come closest to reality in the south and place the literacy rate at 24%, only 12% for women.[16] This situation is not likely to change overnight as UNICEF furthermore reports that by 2006, only 22% of an estimated 2.2 million school age children were enrolled in primary school; four boys attend school for every girl.[17]

When considering the literacy rates, one will realise that the normal requirement set for seminary attendance of a completed secondary education, will reap only a small harvest in the south. Residential colleges were also often the targets of air strikes during the civil war, and a high rate of people movement made residential teaching almost impossible.[18] These factors, coupled with the sheer numbers of pastors needed to cater for the new churches, leads one back to the model of TEE, which is proposed here as a viable option for the training of the ministry in the south.

15 The World Factbook, *Sudan*, accessed at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/su.html on 08 October 2008.

16 Unicef, *Towards a Baseline: Best Estimates of Social Indicators for Southern Sudan* (Juba: New Sudan Centre for Statistics and Evaluation in Association with Unicef, 2004), 3.

17 Unicef, *Unicef Southern Sudan: Quarterly Report January—March 2006*, accessed at www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/UNICEF_Southern_Sudan_Quarterly_Report_Jan-Mar_2006.pdf on 12 September 2008.

18 Werner et al, *Day of Devastation*, 509.

III A Proposal for TEE in South Sudan

This section is aimed at painting a picture of what TEE in Sudan could look like in the future.

1. Inter-denominational Cooperation

Statistically, the best-working programmes are inter-denominational ones, because resources can be pooled. An inter-denominational SS TEE project would guarantee quality and also standardise TEE. Accreditation could be sought from ACTEA to make the programme more official and give the students a better 'international' qualification on finishing the programme. However, this may be unlikely. Denominationalism has increased considerably and it is probably more feasible to assume that a denomination would adopt a TEE programme and arrange it around its own structures.

Whether denominational or inter-denominational, the one thing which will make or break the programme, will be grassroots support from the churches that want their pastors to be trained. Although the acceptance of a programme will be fostered by a general promotion by leaders, it has to be made sure that churches are 'on board'. One suggestion would be to produce a 'vision, purpose and requirements booklet' to distribute to churches, similar to a normal degree prospectus. The TEE program of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (TEE-ECS) has now been operating for 8 years quite successfully, and one reason for this is that they have complete support from the grassroots level.

2. Programmed Texts for Sudan

TEE-ECS currently uses a set of 12 TEE texts, originally written by Andrew Wheeler.[19] The books were written specifically for the Sudan and fit that context very well. However, while some of the books have been updated, many still date back to the 1980s. One particular area of need is the TEE text on Sudanese Church History, which dates back to 1982, but Sudan has had major revival and church growth since.[20] A full set of books is available in English and the Arabic script—about half of the books are available in Dinka, Bari and Moru.

Coming back to a point made earlier about the low literacy rate in SS, it might seem almost pointless to talk about the translation of materials if people might not be able to read and study them. While TEE-ECS currently uses only the English PTs, and therefore requires a good working level of English in order to enrol for the programme, as soon as materials are translated into native Sudanese tongues, enrolment is estimated to increase. Furthermore, as soon as materials are translated, they can be recorded for oral use. The MegaVoice Players have been an impressive resource in order to make oral scriptures more available and can also be used to distribute TEE programmes.[21] ACROSS has a large Christian radio ministry based in Yei, SS, which could also be commissioned to do the recordings.[22] Literacy classes should be offered alongside the provision of oral TEE programmes and manuals.

3. Questionnaire Results

In August 2008, Rev. Wick agreed to assist with the distribution of a questionnaire amongst her students and tutors of TEE-ECS.[23] Rev. Wick was given 600 copies of the questionnaire for each of her 500 students and 100 tutors. Unfortunately she was able to hand out only 150 of the 600 questionnaires and collected 42, due to communication difficulties. Although the author hoped for a larger quantitative sample, it was decided nevertheless to bring in the 42 collected samples as qualitative research and draw pointers from them for future TEE work in SS.

Statistically, the average age of TEE participants is between 30 and 44 years. Only three out of the 42 participants were female, similar to the general trend for Africa. This problem should be specifically targeted for any new programme starting up in Sudan. The average amount of education was at a lower secondary level. This is surprising as the general level of education in SS is considerably lower than that due to the years of war but TEE-ECS requires fluency in written and

19 SLC, *Catalogue 2006* (Nairobi: ACROSS, 2006), 4-5.

20 A. Wheeler, *The Church in Sudanese History* (Nairobi: SLC, 1982), 1-99.

21 *MegaVoice, Breaking the Silence*, accessed at www.megavoice.com/players.php on 09 October 2008.

22 ACROSS, accessed at www.across-sudan.org on 10 October 2008.

23 The questionnaire was taken from G. Holland, *TEE Study Materials—Which Way for a Changing Africa?* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing, 1993). The questionnaire was changed to suit the local SS context.

spoken English, which will have been achieved only by those having had more than primary education. If a TEE programme were to be developed in the mother tongue, the general level of education would most likely be only at higher primary. 62% of participants lived in a village setting, which will influence the infrastructure of a TEE programme. More local small classes will need to be founded due to the lack of good roads and public transport to reach towns.

Problems with drunkenness in the family were highly reported. However, the books developed for TEE in Sudan do not address alcoholism at all and this topic would certainly have to be included to make the programme socially relevant. The recommendation would be to couple it with teaching on how to deal with traumatic experiences.

40 people responded yes to the question concerning the need for deliverance from long-term sickness. This reflects the low medical care provided in SS at present. While TEE can hardly improve the health care system in SS, there is still a need for teaching on healing, for a theology of suffering and teaching on how/when to pray for and counsel sick people. In addition to this, 43% of participants stated that the most recent prayer request in their church was prayer for healing.

Question 23 dealt with young people falling into sexual sins and received a staggering 39 yes answers. Partly, this shows the inability of the church to affect traditional ways of marriage formation in SS, which usually requires the woman to be pregnant first before she gets married in order to show that she is fertile. Given this background, it is hard to understand why the current books do not deal with the topic at all. There is no teaching on marriage, or on pre-marital behaviour nor on sexual ethics. The same issue came up with question 19, referring to problems caused by polygamy, which is also not addressed in the current books. Given the fact that polygamy is still prevalent everywhere in Sudan it is simply astounding that this topic is not discussed at all. 38% of participants also stated that someone recently came to them for advice on marriage. Polygamy was also stated as the number one reason for people leaving the church. The rather obvious conclusion here is to include biblical teaching on marriage, on sexual ethics and polygamy in the TEE schedule and to produce a new TEE manual for these topics.

Not knowing how to do evangelism, and deliverance from evil spirits, both received 86% of yes answers. The high percentage for the question on evangelism is rather surprising as there is a TEE manual and good teaching on evangelism. A suggestion would be to have practical evangelism and outreach being incorporated into the teaching. SS is still largely animistic in outlook and a strong belief in the evil supernatural is often retained. The fact that this is not being dealt with in the current TEE books is again rather astonishing. The obvious conclusion here is to produce a TEE manual on how to deal with traditional beliefs and also to free up considerable time in class to talk about it.

4. TEE and Social Issues

It is mandatory that TEE be made relevant not only to the spiritual context in

SS, but also to the social one, otherwise it will produce only inward-looking leaders.[24] Issues like trauma and grief counselling, the return of refugees, HIV/AIDS, tribalism, community development and grass-roots political involvement have to be addressed. TEE students should be encouraged to reflect critically on what is happening around them in their culture and to take action. They should furthermore be taught how to identify key leaders and organisations that may be able to give direction on dealing with these problems.[25]

So far not a single TEE text used in SS addresses these issues, as has been made partly obvious in the preceding section. TEE-ECS has tried to solve the problem by putting on seminars on specific issues like HIV/AIDS, which are then run in the different dioceses.[26] This, however, does not negate the need for further PTs on these issues. It seems that NGOs and UNHCR are much more proactive in this regard than the church—one would think, however, that the future of the church in SS very much depends on how it reacts to the changing social and economic challenges. Where better to start than with its future leaders?

Another social issue is the place of women in church and family. Women should be openly encouraged to take part in TEE and also be given the chance to then use what they have learned in church. Since women in Sudan are generally less educated than men, special support and care should be given to them.

5. A Viable Administrative Base

Lo identifies a solid 'administrative infrastructure' as an important part of a successful TEE programme.[27] This means that any programme needs a full-time, salaried director to oversee it. Most Sudanese are farmers and they have to tend to their fields or hold down another demanding job to support their large families. If a programme is to work well, then people need to be given the chance to focus on their work and be paid for it. Wick also identified the issue of non-payment of tutors as one of the main reasons for a lack of motivation and poor quality of the tutorials.[28] Since tutors are not full-time but indeed part-time, the solution often practised is to offer 'incentives.'[29] These can be anything from a small amount of money, to in-kind gifts.

Once a course is up and running it is important to provide adequate administrative resources to ensure stability and continuity. Often, however, the emphasis falls upon writing and tutoring whilst the administrative details are neglected. This in turn leads to the logistical support becoming over-

24 R. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 136.

25 J. Lo, 'Seven Ingredients of a successful TEE programme', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (38/2002), 339.

26 Wick, *Interview*.

27 Harrison, *Forty Years On*, 324.

28 Wick, *Interview*.

29 S.G. Snook, *Developing Leaders through Theological Education by Extension—Case Studies from Africa* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1992), 54.

stretched and an otherwise useful TEE programme grinding to a halt. Especially in a country like SS, which lacks basic infrastructure, logistical planning is very important. The administration generally has to (1) fit the context, (2) be run with integrity and (3) be funded well.[30] When considering the context of SS, communication is slow, sometimes things get lost, and book deliveries can be late. TEE-ECS tried to aid this situation by providing bicycles and motor bikes to some tutors who have groups spread out over a large area. A pragmatic suggestion would also be to build up a 'circle of mail carriers'. NGOs and local people frequently travel to places and can often take letters, a handful of books or a small box with them. It is advisable to have local TEE centres spread over SS, where books can be stored safely and exam papers/details of students kept. Small libraries could also be established there to help students in advanced classes.

Funding has to be considered candidly, as it is always likely to be an issue in developing countries. While students should pay for their books, this tends to cover only 5-15% of running a TEE programme and funds for salaries, incentives, and travel costs have to be found somewhere else. The funding issue would be aided by inter-denominational cooperation. Furthermore, it is easier for a large programme with a number of participating churches to apply for donor funding than for a small programme to do so.

A few suggestions for finding local funding include the following: where possible, 'in kind' payments, i.e. goats, chickens etc., should be accepted in payment of fees. Furthermore, creative fund-raising schemes can be initiated locally, e.g. TEE gardens or hostels led by students, whose proceeds would go towards the programme.[31] In addition, solutions have to be found to develop less costly books, possibly producing them locally in order to avoid transportation and custom costs.[32]

Conclusion

During the last 22 years of war, ending in January 2005, SS has experienced a revival similar to that in South Korea and the percentage of Christians is now estimated at 70%. However, the churches consist generally of farmers or cattle herders that are mainly illiterate or semi-literate—the leaders are often older with good standing in their communities but no education and little knowledge of the Bible. Unless the church in SS finds a way to cater for all these new churches and believers, they will become an example of that sad saying that says that the African church is like a river, which is a mile wide but only an inch deep. SS has had one of the earliest inter-denominational TEE programmes in Africa and therefore has a good history to turn to when considering TEE for the future. Hence, the first proposal for a new TEE programme in SS is pointing to the past, suggesting inter-denominational cooperation as a vital and significant factor for a successful and affordable programme.

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30 Harrison, 323.

31 Wick, *Interview*.
32 Snook, *Developing Leaders*, 54.

There are already TEE manuals that were written specially for the Sudan in the 1980s, which are a valuable resource to use, although they are dated. ECS restarted their TEE programme in 2001, which has since excelled at training their pastors, both ordained and lay—TEE-ECS is using the Sudan TEE manuals. TEE-ECS has therefore been used in this paper as an example and a platform from which to make further suggestions and to test the manuals as to how well they still respond to the current social and political context in SS. There are teaching gaps, particularly on marriage, drunkenness, and the spiritual world, which have to be addressed in a new programme (and of course would be suggested as an improvement for TEE-ECS as well). More in depth discussion is needed on the reality of salvation and also more practical evangelism outreach training to substantiate teaching on evangelism in tutorials. Generally, it was found that TEE is not yet responding well to social issues in SS—trauma counselling, a theology of suffering for SS and teaching on HIV/AIDS are still issues left unaddressed. In order to make the programme accessible to semi-literates and illiterates, it is proposed to develop the teaching on tape or megavoice player.

As far as funding goes for TEE in SS, it is unlikely that a new programme would be completely self-sufficient at the beginning due to the many years of war and the unavailability of hard currency. Therefore, a few donor organisations have been proposed who have funded TEE in the past. However, although donor funds can be sought, self-sustainability should always be the aim.