

# Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering

by *Alan Howell*

Near the beginning of A. S. Peterson's fictional novel, *The Fiddler's Gun*, a reformed pirate and two young orphans have an interesting discussion about pain and suffering. They open up a wooden case revealing three objects: a fiddle, a bow and a pistol. After examining each of the elegantly crafted items, the former pirate tells them,

"Now, see here, you got to put that hurt someplace, and this is where old Bartimaeus learned to put his." He lifted the fiddle out of the case and caressed it.

"It's beautiful," whispered Fin.

"Aye," he said and crooked it into his neck. He drew the bow across the strings and the instrument moaned a forlorn note. "Beautiful, that's what you've got to do with that hurtin', you got to turn it beautiful."<sup>1</sup>

... "What's the gun for?" asked Peter.

Bartimaeus' face darkened. "That's where all that hurtful stuff ends up if you don't get rid of it. Got to get rid of it. You don't and it might just get rid of you, see here? I keeps it there to remind me. I put it down the day I got this fiddle. Swore I would never take it up again. Done too much hurtin', got to turn that hurt to beautiful, see? Otherwise the hurt turns hateful and the ole hand-cannon there like to wake up and do terrible things . . . terrible things."<sup>2</sup>

This fictional conversation illustrates well the stakes involved in possessing an effective response to pain and suffering. We all end up doing something with our pain. If we cannot frame suffering in an instructive or constructive way, it will become destructive—harming those around us as well as ourselves.

For close to ten years in northern Mozambique I've witnessed the effects of misappropriated pain: family members become isolated, people live in fear, neighbors are cursed, and there is no rest. Years ago, as we first began to learn the language and culture of the Makua-Metto people, there was one word that I was surprised to hear over and over again in conversation: *uhuva*. It's their word for suffering, and our friends talk about it all the time.

The problem is that their folk religion does not give them tools to deal with suffering constructively. The majority of the Makua-Metto people would consider

---

*Alan Howell, his wife Rachel, and their three girls live in Montepuez, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. Alan has a MDiv from the Harding School of Theology. The Howells have lived in Mozambique since 2003 and are part of a team serving among the Makua-Metto people ([www.makuateam.org](http://www.makuateam.org)).*

themselves Muslims, but at the core they are shaped by an animistic worldview. This folk religion binds them and their pain to a witchcraft system crammed full of curses, counter curses, spirit possession and divination. To borrow language from the fictional conversation above, they lack the ability to take their suffering and “turn it beautiful.”

Coming from my American cultural framework, I slowly came to the realization that their primary question is not *why* this suffering happens. Instead, they consistently personalize the evil they experience. They want to know *who* did this to them.<sup>3</sup> Their quest to determine the identity of the culprit leads them into divination, which, when indicating a human target, encourages them to reach for that “ole hand-cannon”—directing all that pain and anger at another. Human beings must do something with their suffering. If they are unable to do something constructive, or interpret their suffering in a way that is instructive, then they ultimately will do something destructive.

As an American I could see that there are different ways to pick up “the gun.” Generally those in my home culture tend to turn this destruction inwardly. We self-medicate with drugs, escape into the television or computer screen, experience depression or practice self-mutilation. This contrasts with my experience with Africans, who when unable to do something good with their suffering, generally tend to turn “the gun” on each other. It seems that this orientation affects the way both cultures approach Scripture as well. The American Christian will focus on texts about personal sin and forgiveness (internal), whereas the Africans I know are more likely to concentrate on texts about suffering, deliverance, and protection (external).

### *Two Sides of the Same Coin: Understanding the Driving Forces behind Folk Religion*

In my quest to understand how to engage this people group on a deeper

level I needed to understand the popular hold of Makua-Metto folk religion. This search led to a more fundamental question: What is the nature of folk religion and why are folk religions so influential in shaping culture and behavior? Tweed believes that they exert power in the lives of adherents for two main reasons: these “religions intensify joy and confront suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Or, put another way, we could say that folk religions serve two main functions: they provide (1) guidance in a quest for blessing, and (2) help in response to suffering. These facets are two sides of the same coin. Our Mozambican friends spend their time, talent and treasure in both the quest to find blessing (*iparakha*) and to confront suffering (*uhuva*).



In this article I want to focus on the suffering side of the coin. What role does religion, specifically folk religion, play in responding to suffering? There is a

long tradition of interpreters who have suggested that religions are responses to evil . . . These interpreters, and others, are right in suggesting that religions interpret and ease suffering: disease, disaster, and death.<sup>5</sup>

In writing about the Hispanic community, Espin notes that

popular religion is one of the most fundamental ways through which Latinos deal epistemologically with suffering, and indeed with all reality.<sup>6</sup>

He goes on to say that popular religion forms an epistemological network

made up of four primary components: beliefs, ethical expectations, rites and experiences.<sup>7</sup> I believe that Espin’s epistemological framework can be a helpful tool in formulating an assessment of the suffering side of the folk religion coin in a given context.

### *Exploring the Suffering Side of the Coin in the Makua-Metto Context*

In using Espin’s categories to understand the Makua-Metto context, it’s important to see these categories as part of an integrated system. They do not function independently of each other. Espin states,

The relationship between/among beliefs, ethical expectations, rites and experiences creates a certain configuration that is imprinted and shaped by the ‘experiencia’ of the people who perceive the former as true and real. But once a plausible configuration is achieved (i.e., a network held to be true and real), it in turn becomes its own justification.<sup>8</sup>

The problem with this system is that it becomes an echo chamber with a demanding internal logic: “because this is how we have always done it then that is the way it is and shall be.”

### Beliefs

Overall, the Makua-Metto folk religion is mystical and mysterious as there is not a highly developed and commonly held perception of the spiritual realm. Very little religious information is passed on as the whole system is based on secrecy. If you have information you guard it so it won’t be used against you. Because of all this secrecy most people don’t have any developed understanding of how the spiritual realm functions—because no one will tell them. But that’s not to say there is no generally accepted cosmology. Iseminger describes a cosmology that includes a simple hierarchy of God, spirits and humans (see figure 1).

This Makua approach to religion is very syncretistic, and their assimilation of

Islam and Catholicism did not replace the traditional worldview at all. The Muslim imam uses his Islamic texts to produce magical results, not for the purpose of theological explanation. He is the most powerful type of *feteceiro* (witch doctor) and fits snugly into the magical/mystical system. In this religious system where imam and witch doctor deal regularly in curses and counter-curses, the dominant emotion is fear.<sup>10</sup> Fear is fundamental and universal and is fed by the uncertainty and confusion rooted in the lack of power and control that is accessible to the average person. Thus, in order to deal with the suffering that surrounds him or her, the animist finds in magic at least some “sense of mastery and a capacity to deal with the forces around him.”<sup>11</sup>

### Ethical Expectations

Espin describes this node as covering items

from moral/immoral evaluation of individuals and social behavior, to the manner(s) in which these evaluations are communicated in families and communities (i.e. popular wisdom, sayings, counsel, shame, etc.).<sup>12</sup>

The ethical values that most shape Makua-Metto relationships are shame and honor.<sup>13</sup> In this system, practically that means that personal confession of wrong doing and apologies have little value and the way to make things right is to give honor through gift giving.

**I**n a religious system where the imam and witch doctor deal regularly in curses and counter-curses, the dominant emotion is fear.

As was mentioned earlier, another significant aspect of the Makua culture is their conception of personal/relational causality. This is consistent with the African/animistic assumption that “there is no natural event without a spiritual cause.”<sup>14</sup> The Makua people assume that everything happens because of personal involvement by the living because,

unlike the quasi-scientific worldview . . . the African worldview under discussion has no room for accidental deaths and natural illness. It has no natural cause and effect category; every event has metaphysical etiology.<sup>15</sup>

This causality has important ethical implications. Since a natural explanation is not sufficient, this personalized causality often leads to divination in order that those responsible for the illness may be held accountable.

### Rites

As noted above, this strong sense of personalized causality leads many to divination to determine the source of suffering. Among the Makua-Metto, divination is used mainly in cases of illness, but it can also be used to diagnose the causes of misfortunes like divorce or in the case of theft. People trust in its power to reveal the

perpetrator. Burnett further clarifies the connection between divination, illness and traditional healers:

A primary occasion when divination is used is when a family member is ill. It is necessary in such a situation both to diagnose the cause of the sickness, and to recommend a cure. Sickness is not seen as the result of some natural process, but as resulting from a wide range of antisocial and unseen power . . . In the case of sickness, the diviner may pronounce the cause as being one of several different factors depending on his particular worldview. The sickness could result from sorcery, or witchcraft, or from an offended ghost or ancestor.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, divination—especially in the case of illness—serves as the connecting point for three other types of rites in the Makua-Metto folk religion system: spirit possession, witchcraft and ancestor veneration. First, spirit possession is linked to illness and many will endure inconvenient taboos, participate in daily rituals, and/or construct buildings to appease these spirits, all in the service of being healed. Second, being cursed or having witchcraft done against you can initially manifest in illness. Thirdly, the most common diagnosis of a diviner is that the root of the illness is a problem with one’s ancestors and an offering (*isataka*) must be made.

### Experiences

In order to describe the Makua-Metto experiences briefly and effectively I have mapped the following figure as a decision tree, showing the common paths taken in response to illness.

In the process of sharing this decision tree with my Mozambican friends, I encountered the four following reactions:

The first response was typically an “aha” moment. They saw, maybe for

Figure 1: Makua-Metto Cosmology

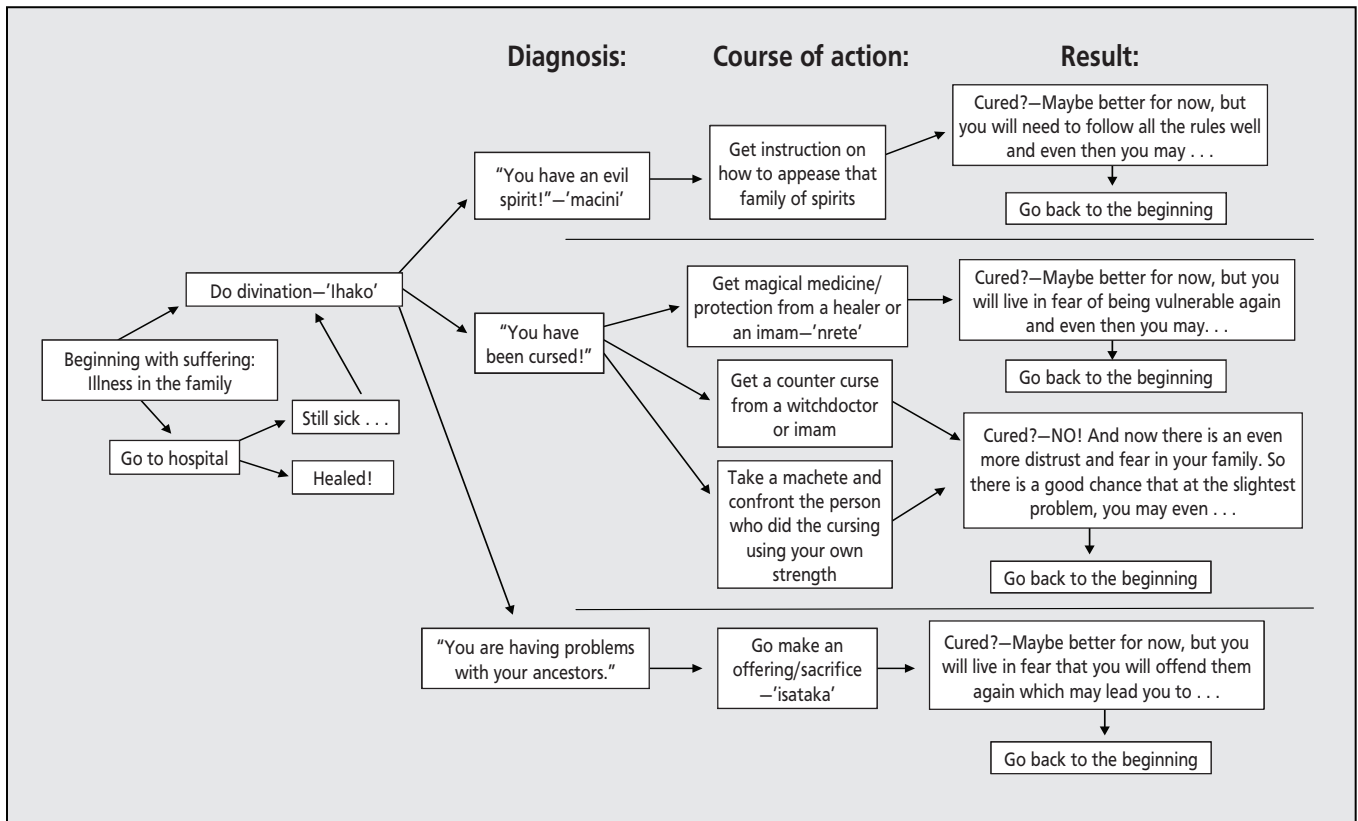


the first time, how the pieces of this folk religion system fit together. As a foreigner, I certainly did not provide any new information, but laying out the whole process in a decision tree like this caused

They were able to see how ineffective and broken their system truly is. They noticed how failure to resolve the illness following one branch of the decision tree leads participants to start over

diagram we see that speaking out against demon possession, for example, without addressing divination is ultimately only addressing one symptom of a larger problem. That would be like trying to

Figure 2: Makua-Metto Folk Religion Decision Tree: Responding to Illness



the connections and deceptions hidden within the system to surface. It brought a system normally hidden by darkness into the light. Remember, in the Makua-Metto context everything regarding the occult is shrouded in secrecy. People don't openly talk about these things, and when they do speak of the occult, they only talk about specific cogs in the machine, those pieces that are relevant to their current situations. The system does not encourage them to look at how each of "the cogs" fits systematically together to form "the machine."

The second response was to the way the map exposed the limitations of their epistemological configuration. Many commented that "no one who is blessed goes and does divination"—so divination is exposed as an act of desperation.

again. People are rarely healed and what relief they receive comes at a cost (both economic and relational). They must live in fear and risk being increasingly isolated from neighbors and family who may be out to get them. One person described the decision tree as a house with divination as the front door. As people enter this satanic house they are shuffled into the dark and depressing rooms of spirit possession, curses, and sacrifices. This person noted that this house is going to fall in upon itself and yet so many people feel trapped inside.

Usually the third response was a realization of the primary role that divination has in this whole system. They recognized how divination serves as a portal or gateway practice that leads to all of the other occult practices. By looking at the

saw off one branch of a dying tree without addressing the sickness at its roots.

The fourth response was usually a question: what should be done about this? Christian leaders who talked through this decision tree with me wondered how the church should specifically respond to this. We looked together at passages like Leviticus 19:26 where the Lord prohibits his people from using divination and magic. And we read the story of King Ahaziah's decision to consult with Baal-Zebub after an accident provoked God's anger (2 Kings 1). But, simply telling people not to do divination will be limited in its effectiveness. The mapping of the occult practices in a decision tree helped leaders understand the systemic nature of this challenge. It was apparent that the church needs to



provide a faithful, comprehensive and effective alternative to divination. In the following sections I want to address how the church can respond to suffering by focusing on “turning it beautiful.”

### *Towards a Christian Theology of Suffering*

One of the reasons that popular folk religion has such a powerful hold on the hearts and minds of its adherents is that it addresses the day-to-day questions of life; it deals with blessing and suffering. How can my business be blessed and successful? What should I do about my sick mother? In order for Christianity to speak meaningfully into the lives of people it must address these kinds of concerns. Otherwise, we end up with a split-level Christianity that deals with the high theological questions but does nothing to answer these middle-level questions that folk religion has claimed as its own.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we

must provide answers to people’s immediate questions, but those answers must be rooted in a biblical understanding of injustice, pain, and suffering.<sup>18</sup>

As we saw earlier, folk religion is a coin with two sides: the search for blessing and the response to suffering. In order for Christianity to reach deep into the lives of people it must respond well to both of these dynamics of life. The Christian coin needs to be made of sturdier and more relevant stuff than the coin of popular religion. Christians need to understand they possess something more valuable to their daily lives than the popular coin traded on the street. Followers of Jesus need to understand being blessed in the context of the Kingdom of God.

Christians need a biblical definition of well-being. Health in Scripture is defined, not in terms of personal well-being, but in terms of *shalom*, which is translated into English using terms such as completeness, soundness, peace, well-being, health, prosperity and salvation.<sup>19</sup>

While it would certainly be fruitful to explore more thoroughly a theology of

## *The church needs to provide a faithful, comprehensive and effective alternative to divination.*

blessing, this paper intends to focus on the *response to suffering* side of the coin. And that forces us to a question that will be impossible to comprehensively answer here. It is a question that all peoples have asked throughout the ages: If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why does he allow people to suffer? A quick biblical review will need to suffice.

Followers of Jesus believe that evil and suffering came into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. But,

in spite of its origins in the Fall, suffering is bent to the purposes of the stronger will and higher purposes of a benevolent God. The Bible states this in global terms in Romans 8:28, reminding us that God works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. But it also states this in more personal terms reminding us of the benefits of suffering both in the building of virtuous character (Romans 5:1-3; James 1:3-5) and also in the benefit that our suffering brings to others. For example, the suffering of Joseph paved the way for provision for all of the rest of his family during a famine (Genesis 50:20). Let us think this is unfair, Scripture also reminds us that suffering works in exactly this two-fold pattern in the life of the Lord Jesus. It both contributed to his character in that he learned obedience from the things he suffered, and it also contributed to the good of others because ‘having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation’ (Hebrews 5:7-9).<sup>20</sup>

In Christ, then, God took suffering and “turned it beautiful.” God took the evil plans of men and Satan to kill Jesus and turned them into resurrection and salvation. Jesus took his pain and suffering and entrusted himself to the goodness of God. As followers of Jesus,

it is instructive to look at the way our Lord dealt with pain and suffering. He responded in three basic ways:

1. Christ used his power to alleviate the suffering of those around him (Matthew 9:35-36).
2. Christ submitted his will to the Father and accepted suffering (Matthew 26:36-46).
3. Christ suffered and yet still loved his enemies, refusing to do violence to them—even going so far as to ask God to forgive them (Luke 23:34).

As followers of Jesus we are called to walk that same path—helping those who are suffering, trusting in God, and not giving in to the enemy’s tactics of violence. A robust theology of suffering will also highlight the conviction that someday, Christ will return and we will dwell with him in a kingdom of light where there is no death or pain and where he will wipe away every tear (Rev. 21-22). Scripture encourages us that by responding to suffering in a way that is consistent with the example of Jesus, we can trust God to “turn it beautiful.”

Life also testifies that suffering and challenges can make us fruitful. When I first saw holes cut through the middle of coconut trees in our region of Mozambique I misunderstood, thinking that the owners were trying to kill the plant. Then I learned that oftentimes as coconut trees grow taller they may fail to produce fruit until they feel distress. Those holes were designed for a positive stress. As painful as it is, suffering oftentimes leads us to be fruitful.

Life also teaches us that good stories will often include adversity. Finding a place for suffering in our own

narratives provides the suffering with meaning, or at a minimum allows us

to claim the suffering as ours. Every doctor can testify to the importance of indicating the causes of suffering (even if it is cancer) because the patient, knowing the cause of his or her suffering, is comforted by being able to name the affliction. Somehow it domesticated the suffering if we are able to locate it in our world.<sup>21</sup>

By finding the place of suffering in our life stories, we are better able to see the possibilities they hold for shaping a life that flourishes.<sup>22</sup>

The Bible mostly ignores the question of *why* evil exists in the world. Suffering is assumed to be part of the realm in which we live. What the Bible does tell us, on the other hand, is that we serve a God who is working to do something about it. We are invited to join God in his work of redeeming the world and undoing the destruction of sin, death and Satan. While popular religion often isolates individuals, imprisoning them in fear,

Christians can confidently proclaim that God truly does understand human pain, for in Christ he suffered and died. God does not abandon his people in their suffering; he is beside them and grants his Spirit to help them bear injustices (Heb. 4:15).<sup>23</sup>

### *Discernment and Illness*

Allow me to turn from this brief look at our Christian theology of suffering, and examine more specifically our theology of illness. It is helpful to reflect on what the biblical texts have to say about the origin of sickness. The Scriptures reveal five causes of illness that may or may not be related to any particular situation.

One source of illness in the biblical texts is the Evil One.<sup>24</sup> There are a number of references in the gospels to “illnesses as having demonic origins.”<sup>25</sup> In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath who had been “bound by Satan” in an illness for many years. It is clear that demonic forces use “illness as an occasion for oppression.”<sup>26</sup>

A second source of illness recognized by biblical authors is God himself. At some point in the writings of the majority of the New Testament authors, “God is described as the direct or indirect source of infirmity.”<sup>27</sup> Illness is used as

a warning from God intended to produce repentance on the part of those who arrogantly think they are beyond God’s reach.<sup>28</sup>

God used illness as

an instrument of punishment, a source of sanctification, a means of spreading the Gospel, or an instrument of salvation.<sup>29</sup>

Suffering and illness can also be used by God as a “worldview modifier.”<sup>30</sup>



In the story of Job, for example, we see how “God used his suffering to bring him to a more mature and deeper faith (Job 42:5-6).”<sup>31</sup> Thus, God should not be looked to only as a font of healing but also as one who exerts his sovereignty actively and is not shy about using sickness to achieve his righteous and redemptive purposes.<sup>32</sup>

The third cause of illness is human sin. In both the Old and New Testaments there is a link between repentance and healing.<sup>33</sup> One key text for understanding this dynamic is James 5:13-16, which makes clear that there exists some significant connection between sickness and sin.<sup>34</sup> The pain experienced through illness because of sin leads to

introspection, which then should lead to confession and forgiveness.<sup>35</sup>

The fourth cause has to do with illness caused by the sin of another person. In Scripture we see how David and Bathsheba’s child died because of David’s sin (2 Samuel 12:13-23). One current example, one especially relevant across the African landscape, is the population who contract the AIDS virus because of the infidelity of their spouses.

A fifth group are those illnesses that have natural or neutral causes.<sup>36</sup> While our human tendency is to want to assign an origin to every illness, the majority of “infirmities are treated by New Testament writers as neutral in terms of origin.”<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen so far, there are a variety of reasons why someone may experience illness. So, in communities of faith, “Christians must teach and model a biblical response to injustice and pain.”<sup>38</sup> The way we teach this should be suited to address the specific concerns and life situations of the believers. As the Rabbinic advice states: “If a person is visited by painful sufferings, let him examine himself.”<sup>39</sup> The body of Christ is called to gather around the afflicted person and help him or her examine himself or herself.

In the folk religious system described earlier, medicine (*nrete*) played a role in the healing process. How then should we understand the role of medicine from a biblical perspective? The stories of two Old Testament Kings are instructive. When Hezekiah was sick he fervently appealed to God for healing as well as applying a type of ointment as prescribed by the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 20:1-7). King Asa’s illness and subsequent death, though, serves as a warning. 2 Chronicles 16:12-13 tells us that he

was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians.

In the New Testament we find instructions for the leaders of the church to anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14). Oftentimes,

wounds were anointed with oil to cleanse them (cf. Lk 10:34), and those with headaches and those wishing to avoid some diseases were anointed with olive oil for medicinal purposes. Oil was also used to anoint priests or rulers, pouring oil over the head as a consecration to God. Christians may have combined a symbolic medicinal use with a symbol of handing one over to the power of God's Spirit (Mk 6:13).<sup>40</sup>

It seems that the biblical ideal is that when medicine is used it should be in combination with an ultimate trust in God as the Healer. Thus, in the process of discernment the church may see the need to treat an illness with oil or medicine, administering it in the name of the Lord.<sup>41</sup>

Using James 5:13-16 as a foundational text, the following figure shows how the church can use a process of discernment

# *By communicating a theology of suffering and practicing discernment, the church can close the door to divination in their community.*

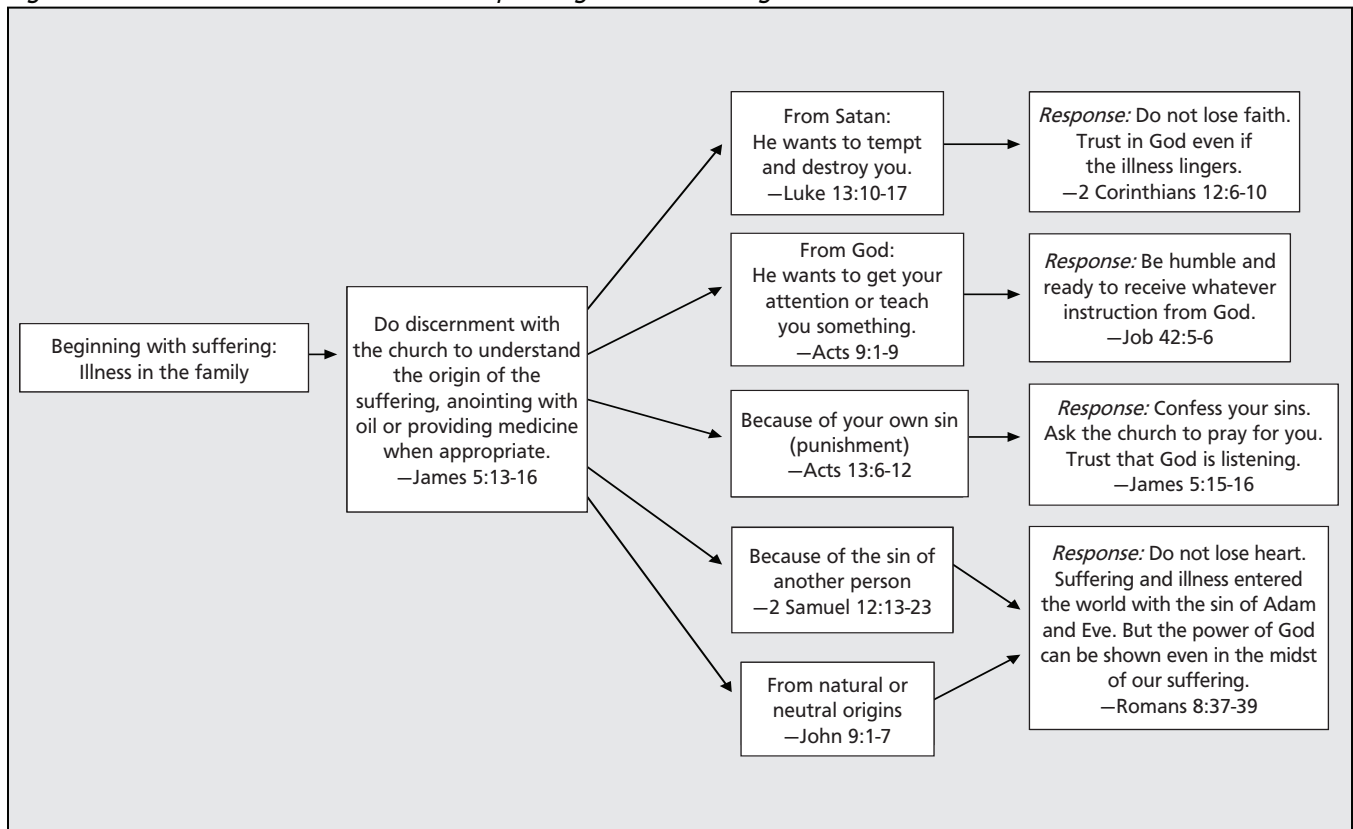
to help those suffering from illnesses. Instead of a decision tree with divination as the portal leading to responses to suffering, this decision tree for the church highlights the role of discernment in confronting suffering.

In sharing this *discernment tree* with our Mozambican friends, especially as a comparison with the *divination tree*, there were generally five responses we observed.

The primary takeaway from this comparison was the way that *a good theology of suffering can help the church short circuit their popular system of magical/occult practices*. By communicating a theology of suffering and practicing discernment, the church provides a more valuable alternative and can close the door to divination in their community, effectively cutting off the path to a host of other occult practices.

Secondly, *in discernment we put ourselves under the authority of the church*. In effect, we are saying that we are open to correction if that is in fact necessary. This humility indicates a radically different posture than those who do divination. In divination, participants don't expect to see that they themselves are at fault. In fact, people will travel a long distance to see a *neutral* diviner. Their preference is not to use a diviner from their own village whose interpretation might be corrupted by his familiarity with their situation and knowledge of their family dynamics. Divination is always about finding someone to blame, whereas discernment opens up the possibility that it may be one's own fault. There is a significant difference, therefore, between the posture of divination and that of discernment.

Figure 3: A Decision Tree for the Church: Responding to Illness through Discernment





A third observation was *the powerful influence of the group in the discernment process*. We may more often imagine divination to be a solitary exercise—the diviner and his client alone. In reality, divination typically involves a community. Often families will push their sick family members to do divination—they want healing for the sick person. Likewise, the church should also be a community that encourages its members to find wellness, but through discernment and not through divination. Having a group of leaders present and active in the discernment process releases the wisdom and experience of the community to bless the one who is sick through instructive counsel.

A fourth reaction was *the importance of teaching the natural causes of illness*. One church member noted that instructing people on the importance of washing hands could limit the popular tendency to blame illnesses on others. It is true that,

many people attribute all misfortune to spiritual or human causes. They need to be taught scientific explanations to help them understand the nature of diseases, but these explanations must be included in a broader biblical understanding of the ways God works in his creation. Misfortunes are opportunities for open dialogue, and for helping people to deal with their problems in Christian ways.<sup>42</sup>

A fifth observation was *the hope that the Church's teaching on suffering can reveal its constructive purpose*. The church can show that, "The role of suffering is not to endure it for its own sake, but for the sake of cultivating the flourishing life."<sup>43</sup> Though painful,

. . . both suffering itself (Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24) and also the attendant comfort one might receive in the context of suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 7:4-7) contribute to one's union and intimacy with Christ.<sup>44</sup>

If we are willing to be shaped in the crucible of suffering, then adversity has a constructive potential "in providing

the context for the cultivation of enduring, virtuous traits of character."<sup>45</sup> God's ultimate will for us in the midst of suffering is that we would become a people who look like Christ.

### *Conclusion: The Hard Work of Teaching Others to "Turn It Beautiful"*

As we have seen in this study, we must engage people where they are, offering a viable and ultimately a more valuable alternative to folk religions. We must help them see that the Christian "coin" deals with suffering and blessing in a more worthwhile way than the "coin" of popular religion traded on the street. We must help the church see itself



as a community of discernment that helps people interpret their suffering in instructive and constructive ways. In this way we can undo some of the destructive tendencies of the culture. These churches will then be

caring communities in which the fallen, sick, oppressed and needy find refuge, and in which the hostilities and jealousies of life which give rise to witchcraft are handled and forgiven.<sup>46</sup>

Allow me to return to the story from the introduction, where we find Fin, one of the orphans, asking Bartimaeus to teach her how to play the violin. Without waiting for instruction she rakes the bow across the violin, making a horrible sound. The former pirate

then convinces her to let him teach her how to play the instrument.

For the rest of the morning Bartimaeus immersed himself in the long process of teaching Fin to tame wild sound into music. Fin hoped she'd be playing like Bartimaeus by the end of the day but was a little daunted at how hard it turned out to be. Fin wasn't one to give up easily, though. She resigned herself to keeping with it and meant to make Bartimaeus stick to his promise of teaching her—no matter how many mornings it took.<sup>47</sup>

In order to replace divination with discernment we are going to need to patiently instruct Christ-followers in the skill of taking hurt and turning it beautiful. We have to disciple people in this new way of dealing with suffering or they will return to a more popular option of dealing with pain—"the ole-hand cannon." They must, like Bartimaeus, swear off using "the gun" and submit to the discerning community of faith as it develops in them the skill of turning their suffering and pain into something beautiful. It will take work to "tame wild sound into music," but the end product is something more beautiful, more valuable, and more effective in conforming us to Christ. **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peterson, *The Fiddler's Gun* (Nashville, TN: Rabbit Room Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>3</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 173.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religions* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Orlando O. Espin, "Popular Religion as an Epistemology (of Suffering)" *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 2, no. 2 (1994) 55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>9</sup> Personal notes of John Iseminger's "Lecture on Makua Culture," SIL, Nampula, Mozambique, March 3-4, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>11</sup> Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism* (New York: Friendship Press, 1959), 35.
- <sup>12</sup> Espin, 69.
- <sup>13</sup> Isiminger.
- <sup>14</sup> Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, Theological Perspectives in Africa, no. 5, ed. Tite Tiénou (Africa Christian Press, 1993), 64.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.
- <sup>16</sup> David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion* (Eastbourne, England: MARC and Monarch Publications Ltd., 1988), 109.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 90-91.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, Richard Langer, and Jason McMartin, "The Role of Suffering in Human Flourishing: Contributions from Positive Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010), 116.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Hiebert, 227.
- <sup>24</sup> John Christopher Thomas, "Spiritual Conflict in Illness and Affliction," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau et al. (Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications, 2002), 41. Thomas goes on to say that "the attribution of infirmity to the Devil or demons is primarily confined to three New Testament documents: Matthew, Luke and Acts. Neither James nor John gives any hint that the Devil or demons have a role to play in the infliction of infirmity." For Paul, his one attribution of illness (thorn in the flesh as messenger of Satan) ultimately identifies God "as the ultimate origin of the thorn." While Thomas is reluctant to place Mark in this continuum, it seems clear that 9:25 places him with the other Synoptic writers in attributing some illnesses to the demonic.
- <sup>25</sup> Hwa Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognizes the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau et al. (Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications, 2002), 15. Related texts include: Luke 9:42; Matt. 9:32.
- <sup>26</sup> L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 198.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* James, Paul, John and Luke all attribute some sickness to God, whereas Matthew and Mark do not.
- <sup>28</sup> Jones, 198. Related texts include: 1 Cor. 11:30; Rev. 2:21-22.
- <sup>29</sup> Thomas, 41.
- <sup>30</sup> Hall, 117-118.
- <sup>31</sup> Hiebert, 164.
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas, 41.
- <sup>33</sup> 2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:15 and Acts 28:27
- <sup>34</sup> Jones, 198.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas, 44.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Hiebert, 227.
- <sup>39</sup> Berakoth 5a ([www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth\\_5.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_5.html))
- <sup>40</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 703.
- <sup>41</sup> Because of space limitations, this discussion of the use of medicine by the people of God is painfully brief. It certainly deserves a full treatment such as Gary Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009).
- <sup>42</sup> Hiebert, 167.
- <sup>43</sup> Hall, 111.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.
- <sup>46</sup> Hiebert, 377.
- <sup>47</sup> Peterson, 38-39.

## References Cited

- Berakoth 5a ([www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth\\_5.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_5.html))
- Burnett, David  
1988 *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion*. Eastbourne, England: MARC and Monarch Publications Ltd.
- Espin, Orlando O.  
1994 Popular Religion as an Epistemology (of Suffering) *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 2 (2): 55-78.
- Ferngren Gary  
2009 *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Hall, M. Elizabeth Lewis, Richard Langer, and Jason McMartin  
2010 The Role of Suffering in Human Flourishing: Contributions from Positive Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38 (2), 111-121.
- Hiebert, Paul G., R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou  
1999 *Understanding Folk Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Holy Bible; New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.
- Imasogie, Osadolor  
1993 *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*. Theological Perspectives in Africa, no. 5, edited by Tite Tiénou. Africa Christian Press.
- Iseminger, John  
2005 personal notes of his "Lecture on Makua Culture," SIL, Nampula, Mozambique.
- Jones, L. Gregory  
1995 *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Keener, Craig S.  
1993 *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Nida, Eugene A. and William A. Smalley  
1959 *Introducing Animism*. New York: Friendship Press.
- Peterson, A. S.  
2009 *The Fiddler's Gun*. Nashville, TN: Rabbit Room Press.
- Thomas, John Christopher  
2002 Spiritual Conflict in Illness and Affliction. *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*. edited by A. Scott Moreau et al. Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications. Pp. 37-60.
- Tweed, Thomas A.  
2008 *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religions*. USA: Harvard University Press.
- Van Rheenen, Gailyn  
1991 *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Yung, Hwa  
2002 A Systematic Theology that Recognizes the Demonic. *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*. edited by A. Scott Moreau et al. Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications. Pp. 3-27.