

Building Bridges of Collaboration Across the Cultural and Socio-Political Divides in Cameroon¹

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Abstract: *We live in times of strife, mainly due to cultural division and polarization in many countries, leading many to look to the Church for solutions. Although our faith calls us to Christian unity, our churches unfortunately remain divided along ethnic, tribal, religious, and political lines. The Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon (SDS) preaching method proposed by Leah D. Schade has proven effective in fostering collaboration and peacebuilding in divided regions. Having tested this method at Saint Charles Lwanga Parish in Yaoundé, Cameroon, and in various ministerial contexts across Cameroon, I propose the SDS method to equip preachers in Cameroon to mediate peace and build bridges of collaboration across the political divisions in this country.*

Introduction

Amid strife and cultural and socio-political divisions in many countries, the pulpit has served and continues to serve directly or indirectly as the bedrock of activism. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, used the pulpit as a preacher to address the severe moral deficits in society. As an erudite preacher, King understood the power of the preached word. He used his rhetorical agency to move his listeners beyond complacency to places of empowerment. During significant turbulence, war, and economic and racial injustice threatening the human race, King offered humanity precious pearls in sermons bearing the message of hope to shattered humanity.

In the same light, preachers in Cameroon can use this same platform, the pulpit, to help build a new, peaceful society in light of longstanding divisions across our country (see description of these below). Preachers in Cameroon have a crucial role in bringing about peace. Everyone in Cameroon knows the significant influence of religion in this country. In major state events, religious leaders are given privileged positions. The Church can be the harbinger of a new political future not by taking the place of politicians but by making its voice heard through what it knows best to do: preach. Instead of instigating division, the Church can use preaching to build bridges that will bring love and peace in our socially and politically divided context.

I am not an engineer and have never built a physical bridge. However, I am glad to share how “Preaching Builds Bridges with Indigenous Tribes and Communities.” Working with Professor Leah D. Schade, I have learned how to build bridges of collaboration across our cultural and political divides in Cameroon using the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon (SDS) method. I will first present my motivations for embarking on this work of building bridges; second, I will account for the political and cultural divisions in the context of Cameroon; third, I will show how preaching has been effective in building bridges in the cases of Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Gandhi; fourth, I will affirm that the SDS method is an effective tool for building bridges in our culturally and socio-politically divided country. Finally, I will present the training

¹ In keeping with the overall theme of the 2024 meeting of the Academy of Homiletics (held exclusively online), “Preaching Builds Bridges,” this paper was presented as part of an international panel asked to speak about how the theme relates to the speaker’s context. This author chose to address “Preaching Builds Bridges with Indigenous Tribes and Communities” in the context of divisions and challenges in Cameroon.

I received from Professor Leah Schade and how I trained other Roman Catholic priests and church leaders to apply this in different contexts in Cameroon.

Motivation to become a Preacher of Peace through the Sermon Dialogue Sermon Method

I was born in Bamenda in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. I had my primary and secondary education in the English-speaking part of the country, with English as the official school language for my primary, secondary, high school, and first-degree programs. I then studied in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé, in the Center Region, using French for my novitiate and theology degree programs as a Claretian Missionary. I identify as an "anglophone," although I am bilingual and fluent in French.

Cameroon has almost three hundred distinct groups and over three hundred indigenous languages. There are two distinct regional cultures, both influenced by colonialism; one primarily speaks English and the other French, and both use different legal systems. Cameroon has ten Regions (provinces, states). Two of the regions, the Northwest and the Southwest, are English-speaking. These two regions are called the "Anglophone Regions" or the English-speaking part of the country. Due to political, religious, cultural, and tribal polarization, fractions are increasing in Cameroon. Antagonisms are causing mounting tensions, with the "Anglophone war of independence" variously known as the Anglophone crisis, the Ambazonia war being the consequence—with the Church caught in the middle.

As a Church leader, the religious context of the Church of Cameroon challenges me to analyze how church leaders can preach in this situation of great divisiveness. These differences influence the way we think in all spheres of life. The Church, of course, is not limited to a building or the clergy. How can the Church, both laity and clergy, mediate peace, justice, and the reign of God in the socio-political realm of Cameroon? I ask daily what I can do to build bridges across my country's various cultural and political factions. As a preacher with responsibilities as a church leader, I want to help preachers preach peace amid my country's socio-cultural and political divisions.

The immediate context that has propelled me into building bridges is my country's crisis, which escalated in 2016 and gradually led to the unfortunate situation we have now in the anglophone regions of Cameroon. The problem has been aggravated in some areas by having no schools because of the incessant violence, kidnapping, and killing of people, burning of houses stemming from disgruntled youths known as the "Amba Boys," and the excesses of the official government military. In this contentious context, preachers are caught in the middle. Any preaching that favors the separatist group's plight will be seen as a betrayal of loyalty to the government and can earn the preacher a jail sentence. Any preaching that even hints at supporting the government against separatist groups can lead to the kidnapping and eventual killing of the preacher. I was abducted alongside four other Claretian Missionary team members on November 23, 2018, when we went on a food rescue mission to the parishioners of Saint Dominic's Parish in the Diocese of Buea, in the Southwest/English region of the country. Some youths who had lost houses, property, and loved ones became members of the separatist groups claiming to defend the people and the territory. Claretian Missionaries have served in this parish for over ten years and followed the Christians to where they are still ministering to the people today.

After being kidnapped, I knew how dangerous it would be to dare engage in prophetic preaching in the divided zone. My discovery of Leah Schade's *Preaching in the Purple Zone* gave me the basis for prophetic preaching in a divided context and helped me to learn how to

build bridges through preaching. I took an elective course with Professor Schade. Eventually, I wrote a thesis titled “Preaching Peace in a Culturally and Politically Divided Context: Church Mediating Peace in Cameroon.” My project was presented to the Faculty of the Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, Missouri, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching degree in December 2023. I graduated in May 2024 with strong convictions about the power and potential of preaching in building bridges across the cultural and political factions of Cameroon.

Identifying and Accounting for the Various Cultural and Political Divisions

Before identifying the various cultural and political divisions in Cameroon that need to be bridged, I will present short descriptions of different aspects of Cameroon.

Cameroon, the Thorn-Crowned Glory of Africa

Cameroon is a country in West/Central Africa and one of Africa’s most diverse countries. Jean-Germain Gros attests, “Like many of its neighbors, a wide diversity of ethnic identities is present. They animate intra- and inter-group relations in the country. It has regional differences, and its topography and natural resource endowments vary, affording grasslands, forests, and petroleum products. Regional variations also include distinct religious, ethnic, and political orientations.”² In addition to this, Cameroon “has one of the most complex colonial histories, having been colonized and/or administered by three European powers—France, Britain, and Germany.”³ Diversity, in this case, should be an advantage. However, in Cameroon, this has not been the case.

Cameroon faces several internal issues contributing to significant religious, cultural, and political divisions. Terrorism linked to the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the country’s Far North Region causes much insecurity and the displacement of many.⁴ Since October 2016, Cameroon has witnessed unrest, violence, and separatist armed conflicts, especially in the country’s North West and South West Regions. Many people from English-speaking areas have moved to French-speaking areas to attend school because separatist groups trying to fight government forces opposed the reopening of schools. The immediate cause of this problem is the strike organized by the Anglophone Lawyers and the Teachers’ Trade Unions of the English Sub-system of Education. However, these tensions go back to the colonial period. A brief survey into the history of Cameroon will account for the inherent cultural and political divisions within the context of Christian ministry.

Cameroon, a Country Imbued with Cultural and Political Division Throughout Its History

The name Cameroon traces its origin to the exploration of the River Wouri by the Portuguese in 1472. In effect, “when they entered the Wouri estuary (the Cameroons River), they

² Jean-Germain Gros, *Cameroon: Politics and Society in Critical Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), x.

³ Gros, *Cameroon*, x.

⁴ “Boko Haram, officially known as Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād (Arabic: جماعة أهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد, lit. ‘Group of the People of Sunnah for Dawah and Jihad’), is an Islamist militant organization based in northeastern Nigeria, which is also active in Chad, Niger, northern Cameroon, and Mali.” Wikipedia.org. Wikipedia, s.v. “Boko Haram,” last modified May 19, 2025, 14:14, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram.

found a variety of prawns in the region.... They called the river *Rio dos Camaroës or River of Prawns*.”⁵

From 1884, Kamerun (German for Cameroon) became a German territory with borders fixed in 1894 by an agreement that Germany concluded with France and England. On this note, Harry Rudin attests that “Germany’s brief connection with the Cameroons began in 1884 when Bismarck changed his mind about colonial matters and decided to give Germany’s overseas trade the kind of protection that domestic trade had been given by the protective tariff of the late seventies.”⁶ Before 1884, however, there were settlements and organized tribal kingdoms in different parts of Cameroon. The various tribes and cultures migrated due to jihads, intertribal wars, the slave trade, searching for fertile land for grazing and food cultivation, etc. This accounts for the diversity and multiplicity of the indigenous population of Cameroon.⁷ The process of migration involved raiding and subjugating neighbors, forcing displaced persons to migrate elsewhere, and even intensifying the expansion of the Muslim faith throughout the country. This further “created animosity between powerful and weak kingdoms.”⁸ These changes account for the cultural divisions and hatred that exist today among the different ethnic groups in the country.

The First World War ended in Germany’s defeat, and as a consequence, Germany lost all its African colonies, including Cameroon. England took control of one-fifth of Cameroon, and France took over four-fifths.

Accounting for the Cultural and Political Divisions in Cameroon

The partition of Cameroon into French Cameroon and Southern (English) Cameroon, each administered independently by France and England, did not freeze the movement of people and goods. Animosity and divisions were heightened at the partitioning of Cameroon. Professor Nkwi observes, “The partition of Cameroon into French and English suddenly saw people look at themselves as enemies and, to a larger extent, strangers.”⁹

French Cameroon became independent of France on January 1, 1960. Southern Cameroon (English-speaking) chose to reunite with the Republic of Cameroon, forming the Federal Republic of Cameroon on October 1, 1961. With each region becoming a state in the Republic of Cameroon, the former Republic of Cameroon took the name of Eastern Cameroon,

⁵ Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800* (Limbe: Pressbok, 1996), 45. In discussing Cameroon’s History, an orthographic note is in order, given that authors of different cultural backgrounds spell ‘Cameroon’ differently, each spelling accepted in its context. English-speaking authors spell it *Cameroon* or *Cameroons*, French authors spell *Cameroun*, and German authors spell *Kamerun*. See Asombang Raymond Neba’ane, “*Bamenda in Prehistory: The evidence from Fiye Nkwi, Msi Crater and Shum Laka Rockshelters*,” (Ph.D. diss.); University of London, 1988, 5.

⁶ Harry R. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884-1914: A Case Study in Modern Imperialism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 414. Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) was known as the “Iron Chancellor,” serving as Chancellor of the newly united German Empire from 1862 to 1890.

⁷ To get these facts, I interviewed history, sociology, and anthropology professors from the University of Buea in Cameroon: Walter Gam Nkwi, Efuetnkeng Stephen Denis Fomin, and Henry Kam Kah. Dialoguing with these professors provided me with an overview of the history of Cameroon. They identified migration, intertribal wars, jihads, and the slave trade as the major causes of the diversity of cultures found in Cameroon. While accepting these as the causes of divisions, Prof. Nkwi asserted vehemently that the transition from Kamerun, one country, to the French and English colonies portrayed how a united country became divided. Up to the present day, brothers see themselves as rivals. This unfortunate phenomenon has eaten deep into the country’s politics, sociology, and religion. Cameroon, thus, is divided and in need of healing.

⁸ Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, 1.

⁹ Walter Nkwi. Interviewed by Jude Thaddeus Langeh. Buea, Cameroon, August 22, 2023.

and the former Southern Cameroon became Western Cameroon. This federal experience lasted only eleven years. On May 20, 1972, the people formed the United Republic of Cameroon by an overwhelming vote.¹⁰ Then, on February 4, 1984, President Paul Biya renamed the United Republic of Cameroon the Republic of Cameroon. In effect:

it is worth noting that he consulted the National Assembly before carrying out this constitutional modification. Although he consulted the National Assembly, most of the Members of Parliament had been elected on a single list, meaning their number could not decisively influence the decision. That constitutional modification went a long way to fuel the sentiments of the Anglophone elite.¹¹

It may not be surprising that what is now called "the Anglophone problem" in Cameroon reflects the feeling of marginalization of the Anglophones in the face of a longstanding Francophone majority. The former feel marginalized by the majority of French speakers, while the latter feel the minority group feels much entitled. In this situation, it sometimes becomes challenging for some people to cohabit in the same area. Prof. Walter insists, "One of the topics of contemporary Cameroon history which, since the mid-1980s, has attracted the attention of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, religious leaders and ordinary Cameroonians has been the 'Anglophone Problem.'"¹²

Accounting for the cultural divisions in Cameroon, scholar Shirley Ardener opines that "Cameroon is a meeting ground for a wide diversity of cultures and polities both native to Africa and intrusive from Europe."¹³ For example, in the "grassfields" of Cameroon, she notes a

multiplicity of political communities predicated on heavily stressed linguistic singularity, varying modes (and extent) of centralization of powers, and the seemingly idiosyncratic parceling up in individual polities of elements from a common core of cultural forms and practices. While not unique, this multiplicity of fiercely independent and linguistically distinct groupings is distinct from other broader and more homogeneous ethnic blocks such as the Yoruba or even the Tikar, from whom, paradoxically, many grassfields dynasties claim origins. The political and linguistic diversity of grassfields societies is susceptible to differing interpretations.¹⁴

Cameroon has experienced conflicts throughout its history, and these clashes have led to many community divisions. Churchill Ewumbue-Monono explains the situation, especially noting the Bamileke tribe spread over Cameroon:

In Cameroon there have been over 60 low-intensity conflicts emanating from conflict of interests between host and settler communities. For instance, the dynamic of Bamileke

¹⁰ Some scholars attest that after the vote, President Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon, unilaterally changed the country's name from the Federal Republic of Cameroon to the United Republic of Cameroon. Victor Julius Ngoh (ed), *Cameroon from a Federal to a Unitary State 1961-1972: A Critical Study* (Limbe: Design House, 2004).

¹¹ Walter Gam Nkwi, "The Anglophone Problem," in *Cameroon from a Federal to a Unitary State*, 185.

¹² Gam Nkwi, "The Anglophone Problem," 185.

¹³ Shirley Ardener, "The Catalyst: Chilver," in *African Crossroads: Intersections between History and Anthropology in Cameroon*, eds. Ian Fowler and David Zeitlyn (Oxford: Berghahn Books 1996), ix.

¹⁴ Ian Fowler and David Zeitlyn, "The Grassfields and the Tikar," in *African Crossroads*, 1.

settlers have clashed with many groups throughout the country. In 1956, there were clashes between the Bamilekes and the Bulus in Sangmelima. In 1960 there were clashes between the Bamilekes and the Bamouns in Bamendji in which over 100 people were killed. Another clash occurred in Douala between the Bamilekes and the Doualas in 1960, killing some 19 people. Finally, in December 1967, a clash occurred between the Bamilekes and the Bakossis in Tombel, leading to over 250 deaths.¹⁵

Preachers need to be aware of this. Our churches continue to suffer in light of this history. In most parishes, Masses are divided across cultural and linguistic groups.

A Call for the Church to Use Preaching to Build Bridges of Reconciliation in Cameroon

My research into the Doctrine of Nonviolence supports the idea that nonviolent preaching may effectively contribute to peacebuilding in Cameroon. Political activists like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. used their preaching and public speaking to work nonviolently for peace and justice. Preachers can learn how to share the nonviolent Word of God peacefully, which is made manifest in Jesus Christ. Preachers may use love and welfare to create a peaceful community by studying nonviolence.

William H. Willimon has said, “Preaching and leadership are inseparable.”¹⁶ As leaders, the preacher must do what Maurice Nutt recommends: “Injustice in the world must always and at all times be condemned by the Christian preacher, Catholic or Protestant.”¹⁷ The preacher, thus, as Ronald Allen would have it, “is called to help the congregation interpret social issues and a Christian response from the perspective of the gospel. The Church seeks for every social world to conform to the gospel, that is, to manifest relationships that are loving and just.”¹⁸

Our Cameroon society is riven with conflict and polarization regardless of where we go, what we watch, or how we connect. Regrettably, Christians appear caught up in the same hostility as the culture. Despite being called by our faith to be united as Christians, the unfortunate reality is that our churches face divisions of class, ethnicity, gender, and politics. The preacher’s function becomes increasingly significant when these societal divides widen within and beyond the church walls. Preachers, therefore, should use their influence in their pulpits to promote unity and reconciliation in their churches and communities.

Jean-Marc Ela, examining the Church in Cameroon, insists on the role of church leaders in preaching the liberation of the human person at all levels. Ela invites the Church to invest in the “liberation project of the African man and woman with an evangelical content.”¹⁹ He insists that “we must believe in Jesus Christ and put up a mighty resistance to all structures of oppression.”²⁰

Preaching as a Tool for the Church in Cameroon to Build Bridges of Peace: a Critique

¹⁵ Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, *Indigenous Minorities and the Future of Good Governance in Cameroon: An Inquiry into the Politics of Local Governance in the Local Councils of Fako Division 1866-2001* (Buea: CEREDDA Publications, 2001), 14-15.

¹⁶ William H. Willimon, *Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), 10.

¹⁷ Maurice J. Nutt, *Down Deep in my Soul: An African American Catholic Theology of Preaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 162.

¹⁸ Ronald Allen, *Patterns of Preaching* (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 1998), 199.

¹⁹ Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert J. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 101.

²⁰ Ela, *African Cry*, 138.

While not asking the Church to meddle in dirty politics, it is worth noting that the Church has a great platform to educate and form its faithful in its preaching. Through preaching, the Church can touch the lives of millions of Cameroonians daily and weekly. People still have confidence in the Church, and people come to the Church for the sake of their salvation.

On a sad note, churches in Cameroon throughout history have not been the best models of those who preach by example. This situation is common to all churches in Cameroon; however, this work appears concentrated in the Catholic Church. According to Paul Gifford, “The Catholic Church reflects the same deep and pervasive divisions as the country at large—in many ways it holds up a mirror to the nation.”²¹ Though the situation is getting better, it still affects people of God negatively, so that tribalism has eaten deeply into the heart of the Church. We see a dire need to build bridges through preaching.

Despite the inherent spells of tribalism, disunity, and divisions in the Catholic Church of Cameroon, “it has real leaders of considerable moral stature and intellectuals whose analyses carry weight.”²² In the Church’s history, the leaders have tried to combat oppression and injustice, even to the extent of suffering the martyrdom of its clergy. Much still has to be done by Cameroon preachers to propagate a new Christian identity based on renewal. There is a need to identify true Christian identity based on peaceful and respectful relations among people across tribal identities and loyalties. For this reason, I am convinced of the importance of building collaborative bridges through preaching. How can we do so in a divided Cameroon? I believe that hope is found in the Sermon Dialogue Sermon Method.

Using the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon (SDS) Method to build bridges in Cameroon

Preaching prophetically in a divided zone is a significant challenge for preachers. Because of this, many shy away from controversial topics and end up not being prophetic or relevant to their context. In sharing how Leah Schade trained me through the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon method and how I have used it to empower preachers to preach well in a divided zone, I believe that this method will be useful for preachers in different contexts as well.

Building Bridges of Collaboration in Saint Charles Lwanga Parish

Leah D. Schade proposes a “sermon-dialogue-sermon” process for preaching on politically difficult or controversial issues related to social justice. I find this process insightful in that it doesn’t assume a completed sermon when the minister leaves the ambo; instead, this preaching style invites ongoing dialogue that leaves room for a communal proclamation to emerge from the whole worshipping community. Raising difficult topics while listening and learning from one another affords real opportunities to initiate change in our congregations. Clearly guided dialogue that includes well-described steps is very helpful in leading conversations about difficult topics in various contexts and cultures.

Cameroon has no clear-cut red-blue divide as there is in the United States, as described in Leah Schade’s book, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide*.²³ Rather, Cameroon is experiencing multiple divisions in terms of language, culture, politics, religion, etc. However, before training preachers, I began with myself. Schade prepared me to test and see whether the SDS method and the “purple zone” principles would translate to a context outside of

²¹ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 255.

²² Gifford, *African Christianity*, 270.

²³ Leah Scade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2019).

the United States. In other words, would this method work in a country and congregation beyond the American purple zone? I decided to apply it to Saint Charles Lwanga Parish, Nkolbisson, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

I have known my congregation since 2006, when I began undergraduate theological studies in Nkolbisson, Yaoundé. By then, the Anglophone Community had fifty families, and my Claretian superiors assigned me to help minister to them. I gave catechism classes and strengthened different groups in the Church. Being the minority group in the parish, the community felt discriminated against. They prayed in the parish hall while others would use the Church. They were not always included in the decision-making of the parish. However, from 2006 to 2020, they had grown to more than two hundred families and constituted a significant force in the parish, contributing to its financial strength. With this growth, the “enemy” was no longer the Francophone community. Instead, there were internal divisions based on tribe, social status, political affiliations, and regions of origin. They were not collaborating enough with the entire parish or even among themselves. I sought to build a bridge of collaboration across the cultural and political divisions inherent in the community.

Description of the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon Process

In my context, I chose to do a variation of Dr. Schade’s outline of the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon process. In her method, the pastor preaches one sermon called the Prophetic Invitation to Dialogue that invites congregants to engage in the deliberative dialogue. Then the deliberative dialogue is held, followed by a second sermon called the Communal Prophetic Proclamation that integrates the spirit and insights from the shared dialogue and casts a vision of moving forward with next steps. Because of my parish’s layers of complexity and divisiveness, I decided that more than one sermon was needed to prepare the congregation for the dialogue. I preached three sermons as a prophetic invitation to dialogue, then held the deliberative dialogue session, followed by preaching the communal prophetic proclamation sermon.

I used the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the Sundays of July 11, 18, and 25, 2021, to preach sermons that would prepare the congregation for the dialogue. The lectionary text for my first intervention was based on Amos 7:10-17 and fit well into the context of division in my community. I aimed to address the tribalism, regionalism, and division within our Christian community. Reading John S. McClure’s *The Roundtable Pulpit*, especially portions related to collaboration, I chose the theme of my SDS process: *Living Together through Dialogue: Ministry of Collaboration in a Purple Zone*.²⁴ Speaking theologically, I feel that the Holy Spirit gave me an excellent opportunity to preach in the Purple Zone. The last paragraph in each sermon was an invitation to dialogue on the importance of collaboration in our local congregation.

During the Deliberative Dialogue, there were twenty-four people, including myself (there were also six other people who either came late or left early, so I am not counting them). Among the participants were eighteen adults between the ages of 18 and 65. As a church community, we sought to address division in our families, parish, local community, town, and country. As the opening question, I asked: *Have you ever been a victim of or experienced division in your community?* At first, people were hesitant to share these stories. It is not an easy thing to be vulnerable in a group situation. I offered my own story first about how I was discriminated against for being an Anglophone in a Francophone-dominated community. Then, one by one,

²⁴ John S McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

people opened up and discussed their painful situations. In an open discussion, members shared situations where they had faced rejection, stigmatization, and separation based on tribe, social status, religious and political affiliation, or economic divisions between the rich and poor. This is important because it shows that with modeling and permission-giving, this congregation was willing to be honest and forthright, to share their experiences and feelings in a way that builds trust. The people were open to sharing their experiences, including talking about rivalries between the rich and poor which inhibits collaboration. One person also expressed concern about the division among religious denominations and faith traditions (Muslim, Christian, etc.) within school contexts.

After the deliberative dialogue, I had the opportunity to share the Communal Prophetic Proclamation the following Sunday. Fortunately, the lectionary readings for this week coincided well with the themes of dialogue and collaboration: Exodus 16:2–4, 12–15 and John 6:24–35. I invited my congregation to see Jesus as the food that binds us despite our differences. The need for physical food by the participants helped me to talk about the importance of actual food for nourishing our bodies. We learned something about the power of God to bring us together, help us listen deeply to each other, receive shared wisdom, and envision a future of everyone being nurtured physically and spiritually. In effect, I encouraged my parishioners to continue to value family and community meals that bind us together. With that experience, I was satisfied because I felt I had succeeded in building a bridge to help my community work harder to bring together peace and unity.

Analysis of the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon process in Saint Charles Lwanga

Organizing a Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon process has been a fascinating way of building cultural and political bridges in my community. The choice of the theme of collaboration fits well into the dialogue process because “the tone and the use of language in the Communal Prophetic Proclamation sermon are what communicate this prophetic collaboration experienced in the deliberative dialogue.”²⁵ Looking through the lens of Amos 7:10-17, I understood the inherent divisions running through the Anglophone community itself due to regional, tribal, social, and political differences. Choosing the theme of collaboration was not only important for the parishioners but also for me to learn consultative and collaborative leadership. On this note, McClure insists:

Consultative and collaborative forms of leadership, however, are more effective when leaders hope to build the strategic prophetic, evangelistic, and pastoral commitments that are needed in our churches today. Situational studies of leadership demonstrate that collaborative forms of leadership are particularly effective in building lay commitment and lay leadership.²⁶

With this in mind, I strove to move toward a collaborative homiletic. My prophetic invitation to a dialogue sermon and the whole process centered around collaboration for a compelling mission. Collaboration comes from the Latin *Collaborare* (*Co* and *laborare*)—work with. When applied to the process of preaching, McClure describes collaboration in this way:

²⁵ Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone*, 124.

²⁶ McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 12.

The word *collaboration* means "working together." It implies a form of preaching in which the preacher and hearer work together to establish and interpret the topics for preaching. They also decide together what the practical results of those interpretations might be for the congregation. The preacher then goes into the pulpit and represents this collaborative process in the event of sermon delivery.²⁷

I understand McClure's insistence that the preacher "collaborates with members of the congregation, galvanizing in the pulpit the actual talk through which the community, in response to the biblical message, is experiencing and producing in its own congregational life and mission."²⁸ It became apparent that the Deliberative Dialogue and the principles of the Purple Zone worked in my context of Saint Charles Lwanga, and I deemed it worthwhile to widen its application to other parts of Cameroon.

Training Preachers in Different Cultural Contexts in Cameroon to Build Bridges through the SDS Method

Having built the bridge of collaboration in Saint Charles Lwanga and been coached by Schade, I felt equipped to train other preachers to use this method in their congregations. Specifically, I trained two priests and one layperson to use the SDS process in various congregations in Cameroon. The training, therefore, involved a thorough understanding of Schade's *Preaching in the Purple Zone*, a presentation of how I applied it to my Cameroonian context, and words of caution and suggestions on how the collaborators could use it in their different contexts. I also drilled them on sermon preparation by using the dialogical lens to exegete their texts. At the end of the training, I can attest that my collaborators showed signs of satisfaction and readiness to serve in their different parishes. I encouraged each collaborator to choose a topic and propose a theme for the sermon-dialogue-sermon method.

My collaborators organized the SDS process in their different parish communities. Each of the three collaborators minister in a different diocese in Cameroon, spread across three distinct cultural and political regions: Center (Yaoundé), Littoral (Douala), and North West (Kumbo) Regions of Cameroon. These interventions represent areas with pronounced needs: Kumbo, where the current armed conflict is at its apex; Yaoundé, which is the political capital of Cameroon; and Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. Two collaborators were from the English side of Cameroon and did their training in the French side of Cameroon. One was a French-speaking Cameroonian, and he did his intervention in the English-speaking side of Cameroon. I choose them to ensure a balanced appraisal of the method across different Cameroonian contexts.

The total number of participants was 39, comprising 20 men and 19 women, primarily young and middle-aged. Thus, there was a relative gender balance among participants. Analyzing the data, I can infer tips and lessons from the dialogue and questions I gathered with my collaborators. Training preachers to preach in a divided zone can be challenging and necessary as it involves addressing sensitive issues and promoting understanding, empathy, and unity among diverse communities.

After going through the post-deliberative dialogue survey and reading through the reports of the preaching collaborators, Dr. Schade pointed out moments of tension that arose during the SDS process. The participants were wrestling with feelings of harm and mistrust. There was

²⁷ McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 48.

²⁸ McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 50.

legitimate airing of grievances, expressing their feelings and not letting the pot boil over to become strained. Dr. Schade said: "A container was created to hold these problematic thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and it relieved some anger, despair, and frustration because at least they were being heard." This appraisal alerted me to several insights learned in our Cameroonian context from the deliberative dialogue process.

Insights Gleaned from the Cameroonian Context of Building Bridges

Analyzing the SDS process of my collaborators with Dr. Schade, I agree with her observation that "The dialogue occurred in a country where people have been colonized. In this case, white colonizers imposed on them without getting their feedback." True enough, Cameroon passed through three white colonial masters: the Germans, the French, and the English. Despite whatever positive impacts colonialism may have had, one understands the comment of historian Thomas Pakenham in his book *The Scramble for Africa*: "The European powers had no regard for African rights or interests. They simply partitioned the continent among themselves, drawing arbitrary lines on maps and ignoring the existing political and ethnic boundaries."²⁹ Thus, the first insight to be gleaned from participation in the SDS process is a renewed awareness of the imposition of colonial control and its extensive impact on the development of Africa. It resulted in the deterioration of traditional African cultures and institutions and the exploitation of African resources to benefit European powers. Africa still feels the effects of colonialism. Many African countries are still grappling with the economic and social difficulties generated by colonial control. Sometimes, they have made significant decisions with the "chiefs" without consulting the people. Concerning local chiefs, we can make the second contextual observation.

Second, the interventions of colonial leaders took place within the context of a traditional monarchy and a hierarchy in which the chief (*fon*) is considered "next to a god" in stature and authority.³⁰ In effect:

The *fon* is exceedingly prestigious and regarded as being quite apart from other human beings. He obtains the protection of the late *fons* and their benedictions for abundant crops. He is sacred; he performs rituals... Many things in the life of the *fon* indicate his separate status... He does not eat in public, and in fact, many people believe he does not eat at all. People do not talk openly about him or about his body, but only indirectly or by metaphors. No one would say 'the *fon* is ill' but 'there is sickness in the palace;' or 'the palace is hot.' His children and wives are not referred to as the *fon*'s children and wives but as 'children and women of the palace.' His eyes are 'stars,' and his feet are 'things.' No one could talk to him unless they bowed, cuffed their hands over their mouth, and spoke through their hands in a low voice.³¹

It is important for leaders in the SDS process to acknowledge that church authorities sometimes behave like alternative forms of religious *fons*, contributing to a high degree of clericalism.

²⁹ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Abacus, 1991), 590.

³⁰ Exodus Tikere Moffor "The Making of Fons Kings: An Insight into the Regalia of a Newly Crowned Cameroon Grassfields Fon" in *IJIRMP*, 10, no. 5, (September-October 2022), 3.

³¹ Cf. Paul Nchoji Nkwi and Jean-Pierre Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields* (Yaoundé: Department of Sociology, University of Yaoundé, 1982), 61.

Third, clericalism within the Church continues to pose significant problems. A harbinger for justice cannot sit quietly amid gross social inequality and the suffering of the poor masses facing famine, drought, and disease. After experiencing this weight of suffering, injustice, and deep frustration, Jean-Marc Ela offers “small steps of liberation” and the faith’s impact on marginalized peasants’ lives. In *My Faith as an African*, Ela observes that many African people still have empty granaries, lack of health care, and experience increasing injustice. Stemming from this assertion, Ela insists that the Church must root the Gospel in the people’s lives. Therefore, he presents the Church community as “the conscience of a conscienceless society.”³² In contrast to a Church marked by clericalism, it should be a Church of the poor.

My collaborators called people into dialogue within such political, cultural, and ecclesial contexts. In such situations, it is not unusual to observe from the beginning that there will be a lack of trust. In effect, each preaching collaborator confirmed they experienced a timid beginning because participants were very reticent to share their stories. By contrast, the dialogue process, in the words of Leah Schade, asserts, “Your voice is important, and we are going to figure out how to live together in community and not just impose upon you from the outside and the upside.” There was no imposition in the deliberative dialogue. It was dialogue, indeed. In effect, the SDS process provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of this dialogical approach for addressing division and fostering unity within a congregation, community, and country.

The SDS process also encouraged greater congregational engagement and participation. Congregants shared their views and perspectives during the dialogue. Observations indicate that participants from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and points of view felt secure expressing their opinions during the dialogue phase. The intervention demonstrated that the dialogue process positively affected the relationship between the preacher and the congregation, promoting a sense of candor and connection between them. True enough, in the different contexts of my preaching collaborators, I observed that dialogue allowed the division to be addressed and steps toward reconciliation were taken. Our experiences confirmed that the SDS process promotes healing and reconciliation, increasing empathy and understanding. Participants shared that the SDS process positively impacted the relationships within congregations, diminishing the sense of division among them. Many felt it helped bridge divides and create a more inclusive and caring community.

Specific Findings after using the Sermon Dialogue Sermon Method to Build Bridges

The Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon method used for our ministerial context was initially developed for the United States political context of the red-blue divide. During my independent study with Leah Schade, I tested this method in a different cultural, political, and religious context. I then absorbed this material, made it my own, and went further to train others. In a video discussion with Dr. Schade, she expressed her gratitude for this move and likened it to “taking a musician’s piece of music to another symphony and having them learn and perform in a concert.”³³

The most significant adjustment I had to make was to take this method from a red-blue divide to a multifaceted context. There was a shift in context. Cameroon has divisions at many different levels of tribe, language, and religion. I took the method from a clear-cut red-blue divide to a multi-division perspective. That is the main shift in what I did. The first and most

³² Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 51.

³³ Zoom discussion on September 13, 2023.

important finding is that the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon method, which worked in a red-blue divide, can also work in a multifaceted divide. It is a method that can work in different contexts.

The three preachers successfully conducted the SDS method in their different work areas. I agree with Dr. Schade when she observed, “The whole thing was about trying to find a way for people to literally not kill each other and to be respectful and to be empowered, to have their voices empowered.” I can attest that the method worked. The preachers were able to identify specific problems and call people to round-table discussions. Before, it was the big man or woman standing and talking. In this process, however, we have been collaborators in preaching—naming a problem, looking at it together, and trying to make everyone’s voice heard. The most outstanding achievement was the capability of creating round-table pulpits, circles where people listened to their problems as they were spoken of in sermons and could react to them by making their voices heard. After the preaching moment, they could sit in a group and talk about what they were experiencing and propose possible solutions for the problems being discussed.

From this, I can attest that the SS method is a way to preach and teach that can be adapted to fit different cultures. This way of presenting a message takes into account how important it is to keep the audience’s attention and get them talking and involved. The Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon method works well in Western societies, where independence and critical thinking are valued. During the dialogue part, it encourages people of all ages to get involved and talk by asking questions and giving their points of view. In many African and indigenous cultures, communication is based on oral history, stories, and group conversation. This method fits in with these ways of communicating. The Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon process fits well with these cultural ideals and can help bridge the gap between traditional spirituality and Christian teachings.

Conclusion

Political activists have used lessons and sermons to direct listeners toward a culture of nonviolence and to build beloved community, thus changing a violence-oriented society into an oasis of peace. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. used the pulpit not only to give speeches. As a minister and preacher, he moved from the pulpit to the streets. The current society of Cameroon is in dire need of leaders who can preach peace. The preachers and church leaders in Cameroon have the pulpit at our beck and call to redress the nation by preaching peace to a culturally and politically divided Cameroon.

To help preachers use nonpartisan, biblically-centered approaches and deliberative dialogue to address Cameroon’s current situation of division, I found that the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon Method of Leah Schade fits well into my context. Before delving into teaching others, I had the opportunity to learn and practice the deliberative dialogue process myself. Preaching prophetically in a culturally and politically divided context is a great challenge, especially for the preacher. In the bid to help my congregation collaborate with one another despite our inherent divisions, I wondered if the SDS method would work in a country and congregation beyond the “purple zone” of the United States. I have journeyed with the English community of Saint Charles Lwanga Parish, Nkolbisson Yaoundé, utilizing the SDS process and have ascertained that it works outside of a United States context. To use the Sermon-Dialogue-Sermon method in various cultural settings, one must be sensitive, flexible, and familiar with the audience’s cultural norms and beliefs. It means understanding how vital conversation and involvement are in identifying different issues concerning the cultural and spiritual needs of the community.

Preachers need to be attentive to their particular congregation's culture, language, political conflicts, and unique experiences. Still, the SDS process holds the hope of being applicable to other contexts (including interfaith contexts) as well.

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