Title: A pastoral approach in comforting the bereaved from the Toba Batak perspective: a case study

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Abstract:

This research is a pastoral-theological case study from Toba Batak perspective. The case story happened in Balige, Indonesia, and describes an old man with a prolonged grief reaction after the sudden death of his wife. The main pastoral-theological issue in the case is: How might a pastor effectively help a person with overwhelming grief over the loss of a loved one?

The purpose of the study is twofold: (1) to give guidance to the pastor and the parishioner in answering the normal questions of the grieving person regarding the problem of suffering and (2) to identify effective ways to comfort the bereaved. The study involves the following procedures: (1) description, (2) analysis, (3) Biblical-theological interpretation, and (4) pastoral action.

Part I includes two chapters which present the case and give an introduction to the research. The introduction explains the background of the Batak tribes, pastoral-theological issues, methodology, delimitation of the study, presuppositions, descriptive outline, and significance of the study.

Part II presents three chapters devoted to analyzing the case through the socio-cultural, religious, and psychological dynamics. The Toba Batak customs and practices in dealing with
the grief are remarkable and valuable, if performed with heartfelt sympathy and understanding. The cultural religious concept on suffering and death is securely adapted by the Toba Batak Christianity. The concept of predestination and immortality of the soul are generally believed. The funeral ceremony has meaning in helping the bereaved to accept the reality of death.

Part III discusses in three chapters the pastoral theological issue in the case story through a Biblical-theological interpretation. The Bible speaks of suffering as originated by Satan, but God overrules the evil for the benefit of his people. God allows Satan to exercise his power but in a limited way. The people of God will never suffer in vain. An exalted purpose underlies every experience of suffering endured by a child of God.

God is the father of all comfort. To comfort the bereaved is a holy calling. The pastor and the parishioner may use the cultural rituals and the funeral ceremonies effectively to bring comfort. Moreover, the pastor should be able to utilize the Biblical techniques in the helping the bereaved one to cope with grief. The pastor is often the only one in the Toba Batak society to whom people can turn to for professional help. People expect a professional pastoral professional approach to comforting the bereaved.

Part IV describes the result of the study with summary, conclusions, and applications to the ministry. Pathological grief can be prevented and decreased by applying heartfelt cultural and church ceremonies, and by professional application of pastoral approaches based on Biblical principles. The bereaved can come out of the grief experience stronger in faith and more capable of comforting others who are experiencing bereavement.