*Review*

# The religious cycle in Sudan history: Case study on the Sudanese religious conflicts up to 1983

**Samuel, J.B.M.\*, Catherine, J. and Paddy, M.**

Religion and Peace Study Department, Mekerere University, Uganda.

This article aims to give an insight to the role of religion in Sudanese history through the centuries before the birth of Christ to the present time by discussing; (a) Impact of Ancient Egyptian religions. (b) Judaism and its influence on Sudanese social transformation. (c) Entry of Christianity and its role in dividing the Nubian society into three kingdoms between two denominations Catholic and Orthodox. (d) Entry of Islam and its role in conflicts which led to the separation of South Sudan in 2011.

**Key words:** Religion, Ancient Egyptian gods, Judaism, Christianity/Missions, Islam, African Beliefs Ethnicity/tribes, British, Egypt, Sudan and South Sudan, Turkey.

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Sudan, it is acknowledged that religion is one of the main factors which had transformed the society both positively and negatively over the century.

The aim of this article is to examine the historical background and summarise the impact of the four religions which have played major roles in the transformation of Sudanese society. It is divided into the four parts: (a) Impact of the ancient Egyptian religions. (b) Judaism contacts in Sudan. (c) Christianity in old Nubian land and the modern Sudan, and (d) Islam in Sudan.

### Time scope

The article summarizes the religious cycle and its influence on the Sudanese society since ancient time (before Christ) up to 1983.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employs two types of methods; qualitative approach which was developed by Wilhelm Wundt in early 20th century (1900-1920), and the religious method by Durkheim (1912). According to Turuk (2010), mixed methods are defined as a type of research method where researcher combines two different types of methods. Therefore, qualitative and religious research techniques are used in data collection and analyses, and integration of the findings in a single study. Wundt advocated strongly that human life is encompassed of different aspects like culture, expressions, beliefs, morality and imagination and these aspects can only be researched qualitatively. Durkheim in his book says:

"*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*" emphasized

E-mail: madeing2002@yahoo.com. Tel: +211-955-713177, +211-977564482, +211-929214672.

that:*" The religion does not concern only belief, but also encompasses regular rituals and ceremonies on the part of a group of believers, who then develop and strengthen a sense of group solidarity amongst one another".*

In relation, religion forms the basic culture for the Sudanese people, Muslims, Christians including the African traditional religious followers. This is deeply rooted and can be easily identified in their daily lives in form of spiritual devotions of worship and dressing styles. Wedding ceremonies for example, are strongly connected with religion as a typical spiritual activity within the society.

## THE CYCLE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

According to El-Mahdi (1965), religion has played major roles in the official and social life of Sudan since ancient times (Before Christ). Werner et al. (2000) in their book "*The History of Sudanese Church across 2000 years*" confirmed that, the name Sudan emerged from the religious perspectives of three languages. Hebrews named the land which falls to the south of Egypt Cush as in (Isaiah 18), while the Greek called it Ethiopia or Cush (Act 8:27-40). The Arab in their contact with the area through Egypt along the Nile and the Red Sea, contextualized the two names of same the land *Belad al-Sudan* which means land of blacks (Werner et al., 2000). El-Mahdi (1965) and Yoh (2002) emphasized that, Sudan was a bridge between the Mediterranean Sea basin, Middle East, Arab world and the central Africa. Politically, Deng (1995) and Jendia (2002) described that, Egypt penetrated Sudan between 2755 and 2255 BC. The theory was confirmed by El-Mahdi (1965). The work also establishes that, their religions were able to quickly reach Sudan. This occupation of Sudan continued up to the 12th century BC making it one of its provinces. Artisans' government officials and religious monks have entered and built towns, pyramids and temples in many towns along the river Nile. The greatest temples were built in Jebel Barkal which was the religious capital for the Amunt god (El-Mahdi, 1965; Werner et al., 2000).

Anthropologists and historians posit that the worship of Egyptian gods spread to the south of Sudan. El-Imam and El-Sadiq (2000) also established that many of the religion and traditional practices among the Sudanese tribe stem from the Pharaoh period.

And these beliefs still reflect in their mode of worship which involves natural images which are believed to have super natural powers. This support the theory of some anthropologists who posit that most of the tribes living in South Sudan today of the Sarah Nilotic migrated from North Sudan and brought these beliefs with them

The impact of these religions is still reflected till today in some of the names of the towns and cities which originate from these languages; Though Jebel Barkal is the famous homeland of the ancient regions, Shendi,

Khartoum, Tuti and other areas[1,2]. Osman (1990) believes that, Khartoum is a Nilotic land, and was one of the oldest civilizations in the ancient Sudan based on the results of Radio-Active Carbon test. Therefore, it is believed that they migrated southward and brought the Egyptian gods with them.

## IMPACT OF JUDAISM ON SUDAN

The bible described the relationship between the Sudanese and Hebrew people as a social and harmonious one. For example, Moses who was both a spiritual and social leader in Israel married a Cushite lady (Number 12:1-2). In the Biblical context, Sudan was linked to Egypt (Isaiah 20:4, Psalm 68:31, Act 8:27-38). During the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, many other people went up with them (Exodus 12:38). According to the interpreters, some of those other people were the Sudanese living in Egypt, who have seen the miracles and signs of the Ten Plagues that God brought on Egypt has through Moses and Aaron, and accordingly, they believed in the God of the Hebrews.

Thus, instead of going back to Sudan, they chose to follow the Hebrews to the promised land (Number 34:1- ) and Moses married from among them.

According to Osman (1990), Moses himself was born in Sudan/Cush. The Bible continues to mention many occasions which depicts relations between Cush and Israel. Reference is also made to the famous, Cushitic man who was sent by Joab, King David's Chief Commander *(2 Samuel 18:21) "… Joab said to a Cushitic, Go, and tell the king what you have seen…"*[3]

This story indicates that, the Cushite man had an Israeli citizenship. Therefore, he was able to participate in internal warfare between the King David and his son Absalom, and was delegated by the Chief Commander, Joab as a trust worthy soldier and the right messenger. King David called him a good man who brings good news (2 Samuel 18:29). The influence of Hebrew religion on him showed in the way he addressed the King David when he said:

*"My Lord the king hears the good news! The Lord has delivered you today from all who rose up against you" (2 Samuel 18:30).*

El-Mahdi (1956) described that Sudan had an opportunity once upon a time to rule Egypt through its powerful kings like: Piankhi, Shabaka and Tirahka in 700 BC. El-Mahdi supported by Osman wrote that, Shabaka moved his

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[1] Gabriel Deng Nhial Chiok, a Southern Sudanese anthropologist and founder of Male cultural team 2009.
[2] Rev. Yat Michael Ruot, an expert in culture and traditions, a former lecturer at Upper Nile University 20th July 2010.
[3] All the Bible verses are quoted from the New International Virgin (NIV).

capital from Napata (North Sudan) to Luxor (South Egypt). In this regard, Sudanese/Ethiopian kings who became Emperors, had their power advance beyond the Egyptian boundary. In turn they became a refuge for Hezekiah, the king of Judah against Sennacherib king of Assyrian's massive attacks (El-Mahdi, 1956). And this theory is supported by the following verse:

"*Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Chushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him...*" (2Kings 19:9).

It seems that the advancement of the Cushite/Egyptian kings', power and wealth led to pride and wickedness in the eyes of God. Therefore, the two kingdoms of Judah and Cush/Egypt were punished as stated by the Prophet:

*"Then the Lord said "Just as my servant Isaiah has gone striped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush. So the king of Assyria will lead away striped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared to Egypt's shame. Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. In that day the people who live on this coast will say, see what has happened to those we relied on, those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria. How then can we escape?" (*Isaiah 20:3-6*).*

In other perspectives, Egypt and Sudan appear as different nations who are sharing borders. But they united from time to time because of their shared ambition especially when strong kings arose.

*"Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God*" (Psalm 68:31).

Ezekiel who prophesized during the Israeli exile to Babylon around 5th century B.C. indicated the location of Cush as attached to Egypt, but as a different nation:

*"Because you said: The Nile is mine, I made it, therefore, I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt a ruin and desolate waste from Migdol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush"* (Ezekiel 29:9)

Based on the mentioned relationships, many Sudanese have converted to Judaism, and they go occasionally for pilgrimage in Jerusalem the World Spiritual Capital (Acts 2:5-11, 8:27). Osman (1990) believed that, the Ark of the Covenant of Israel was taken from Jerusalem to Aswan Southern Egypt during the Babylonian exile. Where a house was built for it and it remained there for more than 200 years. Maki said, the Ark has been taken to Sudan, then to Southern Sudan. Both Osman and Maki believed that, the missing Israeli tribe got disappeared within Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda (Osman, 1990). In related

stories, in the mid-1970s, some of the Sudanese families in Kordofan declared their origin to be Judaism. They were converted compulsorily into Islam, but they kept their beliefs and traditions[4]. Also, some tribes or ethnic groups scattered in Africa are believed to be originally Jewish. This theory could support the case of Flasha Jewish Fugitives (exiles) who appeared in Ethiopia, and were repatriated to Israel during the time of Sudan former President Jaafar Nimeiry in early 1980. The same repatriation took place in the beginning of 1990s during the separation of the Eritrea.

However, contact between the Israeli people and the Sudanese was constant from the ancient times of Moses and maybe beyond as mentioned in the following Biblical references (Number 12), King David's time (2 Samuel 18:21, 30), King Hezekiah's rule (2 Kings 19:9), time of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:5-11, 8:27), and during expression of the First Church (Act 13:1-4). In these regards, the impact of Judaism as a religion in the Sudanese society was established and it extended to the neighbouring areas in the region as the current Ethiopia, Eretria and Uganda.

## CHRISTIANITY IN SUDAN

It is believed that Christianity started on the day of Pentecost around 30 AD from among a small cell of Judaism. With new principals and the baptism system which became compulsory for every new convert (Acts 2:38), there was reference to the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by Philip (Acts 8:27), and this was acknowledged by Fantini (1979) and werner et al. (2000) as the first Sudanese/Cushite recorded to have converted into Christianity. He was an official in charge of finance for the Queen Candace from the Meroe kingdom in Northern Sudan (Fantini, 1978; Werner et al., 2000). But since his baptism, there was no further record of him.

Fantini (1979) recorded that, by the year 150 AD, the Christian world went into serious conflicts which divided it between the two doctrines and ideologies of Catholic and Orthodox. Both doctrines competed to send missionaries in order to convert Sudan into their faith. The Catholic Emperor Justinian persecuted the Orthodox Church of Alexandria, and sent its Bishop into exile. As a result, about 250 to 290 AD as described by El-Mahdi (1965), many Egyptian Orthodox Monks and Hermits fled into the Nubian land to find peace and solitude (Werner et al., 2000). These monks according to El-Mahdi and Fantini, became the pioneers' who established the Orthodox Church in the Northern Sudan, while the Catholic faith through the support from the Emperor reached the south to establish their Church in Soba. From there, historians

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[4] Family of al-Sheikh Abdullah and his brothers left Kordofan (Umruaba) in late 1970s to Wed-Madeni. Now Majority of them live in Khartoum, almost most of them are converted into Christianity now.

(those of: El-Mahdi, Fanity and Werner er-al) agreed that, Christian conflicts in the Mediterranean Sea Basin had an effect on Sudan, and resulted to the formation of three small Christian kingdoms of: Nubatia, Makuria and Aludia. However, the two northern kingdoms of *Nubatia* and *Makuria* of the Orthodox faith merged together to form one kingdom with its capital in Dongola. The southern kingdom of *Alodia* with its capital in Soba continued to follow the Catholic Doctrine, while the two Nubian Christian kingdoms had doctrinal differences and lived with hostility and enmity (Fantini, 1979). Therefore, Dongola kingdom which was dominating the northern part of the River Nile, which connected *Alodia* to its religious headquarter in Rome, did not allow the Catholic Bishops and priests to pass through their territories over the 90 years. The treaty reflected negatively and brought absolute end to the *Alodia* Church.

The Christian kings used their powers to occupy the ancient religious temples and used them for the Christian activities (Fantini, 1979). It got to the extent that religious enthusiasm reached the highest peak, that Christianity became a royal religion. Kings had a major role in the Church's internal affairs, and sent into exile the Bishops whom they did not want in their spiritual cabinet. The mentioned historians observed that, these attitudes did not grant Christianity good roots in the hearts of Sudanese, and its survival and growth depended on the rulers' support and motivation. As a result, with the dicline of the royal family, the reign of the Church also came to an end at the beginning of the 16th century.

## ISLAM IN SUDAN

Islam reached Sudan after the conquests of Egypt, and immediately, the Muslim troops attacked Dongola capital of the northern Christian kingdom in 640/1 AD (Yoh, 1997). In 652 Abdullah Bin Abi Saed managed to sign a deal with the Nubians in a treaty which gave the Muslims rights to lay down foundation to build Mosques in Dongola. Historically, this was the first occurrence of Christian-Muslims conflicts in Sudan. According to El-Mahdi (1956) and Yoh (1997), Abi Saed forced the Nubians to pay a tribute called "*Bagt*"; it is an amount of 360 slaves yearly. In 1217, al-Amir (*Prince*) Seif Alden Abdullah Bershombu El-Nassery took over the power from his maternity uncle king David through support of the Muslim troops from Egypt.

Fantini (1979) and Yoh (1997) wrote that, Seif Alden was the first Muslim King who turned the main Cathedral of Dongola into a Mosque. However, Christianity remained active in Alodia kingdom in Soba and some remnant isolated islands along the River Nile between the two kingdoms. But the Arab tribes of the Qawesma formed an alliance with the black Islamized Funj in Sennar. According to El-Mahdi (1965) this brought an end to the Alodia Nubian Christian state of Soba in 1504.

Thus, at this time all of Northern Sudan became an Islamic territory.

By the beginning of the 18th century, black Islamic Sultanate started to capture people from other African tribes and non-Muslims as slaves. Qalandar (2004) wrote that, the business increased where rulers *Sulatiin* and their subordinates totally depended on slaves to build their army, and for food production. Qalandar stated that, by the year 1770, about 12,000 to 14,000 slaves from the black Africans were living in the villages surrounding Sennar town. After the conquest of the Funj kingdom by the Ottoman Empire in 1820 and 1821 slavery activities increased highly, and non-Muslims became targets (Jendia, 2002; Johnson, 2011), and the number of slaves increased to about 30,000. The Arab merchants like; Zubeir Wed-Rahma El-Jumiabi, Mohamed Kheir, Ahmed Dufallah, and others gained more powers and upper hands (Collins, 2010). By the year 1863, towns like; Khartoum, Al-Obeid, Sennar, and Shendy became the main assembly points for exporting the slaves to Egypt and to the rest of the Arab World (Qalandar, 2004). As a result of the propagation of Islam by the Arabs, the religion became desirable and Islamized tribes began to claim Arab origin (El-Mahdi, 1956; Deng, 1995). Werner et al. (2000) described that, the business reached the point where young children of three and four years were sold for about 30 to 60 Piaster each while girls and boys from 10 to 15 years old cost 100 to 300 Piasters. In Comparing the slave prices with other items, large sheep was priced at 15 to 18 Piasters while the best camel was about 150 piasters (Pallme, 1844).

Austrian-Hungarian business man named Ignaz Pallme wrote a book on the slavery in Kordofan in German in 1843. Pallme's book was translated into English in the second year and became the only source of information about Sudan (Werner et al., 2000). European community through the pressure from the church, in turn pressurized the Ottoman Empire to stop slavery activities in Africa. As a result, Khedive Ismail Pasha appointed the British explorer Samuel Baker in 1869 to establish military posts to stop slave raiding along the River Nile. Baker was succeeded by the British officer, General Charles Gordon who later on was appointed governor general of Sudan (Jendia, 2002; Yoh, 2002). Furthermore, Gordon ordered that all the slaves be freed.

In 1881, a Sufi man, Mohamed Ahmed who called himself the Al-Mahdi *(the one to come for the whole world)* rose up in Abba Island in the central Sudan claiming that, he had been sent by the Prophet Mohamed to maintain peace on earth in the name of Islam (Abdul-Fatah, 2008). Whoever refuses his message is against *Allah's* order, and must die. Within a four year period, al-Mahdi was able to mobilize a huge Muslim army, and marched towards Khartoum and killed the General Gordon on 26th January 1885 (Dau, 2011). Al-Mahdi himself died in July 1885, but his successor Al-Khaliffa Abdullah continued leading the country.

## ROLE OF RELIGION IN BRITISH OCCUPATION TO SUDAN

After the murder of Gordon by al-Mahdiyya the Great Britain became worried about the future of British colonies in East Africa. Hence two factors were identified which enabled the British retake Sudan from al-Mahdiyya:

(a) The interest to dominate the River Nile basin from Delta in Egypt to the Great Lakes in the heart and eastern part of Africa.
(b) To prevent the spread of Islam into Africa.

Therefore, in November 1898, the British troops occupied Sudan and killed al-Khalifa Abdullah the successor of al-Mahdi. Mohamed Ahmed described that, within one year, many Sufi-men appeared who claimed to be prophets inspired by al-Mahdi against the *al-Kufar* (Godless).

The first 10 years (1900 to 1910) of the British administration in Sudan, witnessed high religious conflicts, because more than 12 religious men appeared. Some of them declared themselves as the Prophet Mohamed, others claimed to be Essa Bin Mariam (Jesus son of Mary) and some claimed to be incarnate of the El-Mahdi himself (Bashir 1983), but the British reacted quickly and aggressively. The accused suspects were either executed or exiled as wizards, rebels, false extremists with terrorist ambition (Al-Tahir, 1992).

Similarly, Southern Sudanese tribes who were practicing the African traditional religions developed negative feelings towards all the foreigners whom they believed had come to invade their homes. The experiences learned from the Turko-Egyptian rule from 1821 to 1885 and Al-Mahdiyya from 1881 to 1898 on raid for slavery and random tax collections instigated similar response. Therefore, there were similar resistances from tribal leaders who claimed to their followers to be inspired, spiritually possessed and or have supernatural powers (Alier, 2003). Each tribe had a strong belief in its leader to bring rain, protect them, their children and livestock from natural disaster, heal their diseases, and make their women fertile.

Initially there were differences between the southern and the northern resistance of the British; (a) the north had a central government under al-Mahdyya; (b) the north was unified by Islam as the religion, culture and the Arabic language. According to Yoh (2002) and Alier (2003) each tribe or clan in the south struggled independently with the intention of fighting any other power that is in coalition with the British, and every leader was seeing his tribe boundary as all the most important. (c) The south did not have specific religion to be united under. There were different forms of religion and this had both positive and negative effect.

On other hand, after the fall of al-Mahdyya in 1898, the Christians used the opportunity to increase missionary work in Sudan. As a result, four Christian missions entered to operate in Sudan namely; Verona Fathers (Catholic), Church Missionary Society (Episcopal), the American Mission (Presbyterian) and Sudan United Mission (SUM). But according to Ahmed (2002), Lord Cromer the Governor General of Egypt and Sudan in his first speech in Omdurman on February 1899 indicated that, his government will avoid all kind of religious antagonism in Sudan, especially between the Muslims and Christians. The conflicts which occurred between the Catholic and Protestant missions operating in Ugandan territory under the British colonialism have alarmed the government. Therefore, Christian missions were prevented from operating among the Muslims in the north except on social activities[5]. And the whole of South Sudan was divided geographically among the four mentioned missions.

Deng (1995) described that, Christian Missions in the South had a long vision; hence, they influenced the government to create specific laws to keep the south blocked (Jendia, 2002). In addition to that, after the First World War, Egypt and Northern Sudan began to unite their interests in a move which created tension for the British administration in Sudan. From that time the name South Sudan began to appear and was used officially to identify specific ethnic groups (Yoh, 2000). (a) In 1918, Sunday was introduced to be the official weekend holyday in the south, and English the official language. Beside English, the local languages were developed, and education became the best tool for the missions to recruit their converts. The boundaries demarcation instructed that, Southern Sudan is a closed district through Act implemented in 1930, and Northern Sudanese who wished to visit the south had to do so with visages approved by the government with specific reasons and period of time to spend. The same also apply to the southerners visiting the north.

## THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN UNITY OF SUDAN AND THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST CIVIL WAR

Historical documents supported that the unity of Sudan was determined based on religious interests. The graduate congress (GC) a northern Sudanese intellectual's entity initiated unification of Sudan in 1946 with conditions for government to cancel its support of missionaries, and unify the educational curriculum. The motion was inaugurated officially during the famous conference held in Juba in July 12 and 13th 1947.

Six years later, in 1953, the British, Egypt and North Sudan held another conference in Cairo were decisions were made concerning Sudan without involving the south (El-Imam and El-Sadiq 1998; Jendia, 2002; Yoh, 2002). Following the Cairo conference in 1954, the elected Prime

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[5]*Memorandum to Mudirs, enclosure in Cromer to Salisbury 17, March 1899, F. O. 78/5022.*

Minister Ismail al-Azhary formed his government and the south was not happy with policies of the government. (a) The south had only three members in the Cabinet. (b) In public service, the entire south was given only six posts out of 800. (c) Constitutional committee which comprised of 46 members, had only three representatives from the south; and the 43 northern members decided to draft an Islamic constitution for the country. These issues in addition to other reasons according to Yoh (2002) led to the outbreak of the first civil war in Torit town in August 18th 1955.

According to Werner et al. (2000, Jendia (2002), Yoh (2002) and Deng (1995), after Torit, the Church became a target, the government and press continually accused the missionaries, to be instrument of disunity in Sudan, and caused obstruction to the advancement of Islam. The entire South Sudan came under tension, and a state of emergency and schools were closed for some years. Werner et al. (2000) described that, series of incidents occurred which targeted the church leaders. For example, the Catholic Priest Gabriel Dwatuka was arrested in Yambio, and tortured. Pastor Gideon Adwok Deng of the Sudan Interior Church and three elders of his Church were accused of aiding the rebels in Malute. Therefore, their bodies were weighted with stones, and dumped in the White Nile River (Werner et al., 2000).

In February 1960, the President Ibrahim Aboud issued a decree which made Friday instead of Sunday as the official holy day for the south. The decree met an immediate resistance from the students in Rumbek the only Secondary School in the south. Fr. Paulino Doggale was arrested together with three active students on the accusation that they assisted in organising the strike in protest of the decree to hold lessons on Sundays.

In May 1960, the government issued an order that, all the businesses belonging to the missions such as; bookshops, printing presses, and flour mills should be closed by the end of June of the same year, and to be handed over to the government.

According to Alier (2003) and Deng (1995) the type of education was changed; bushes (village) schools were replaced by *al-Suq* schools (market place) the *Khalawi* for memorizing the Quran, and English was replaced by the Arabic language. In May 1962, the government issued the decree that, all the missionaries' activities must depend on annual license granted by the Council of Ministers, but no licenses were granted (Werner et al., 2000; Jendia, 2002).

From 1962, most of the south Sudan politicians' intermediates and secondary school students fled to the neighbouring countries especially Uganda and Zaire were they formed a rebellion movement. In other religious development according to Omer (2004), Uganda at the same time was facing internal politico-religious conflicts especially between the Protestants, Catholics and Muslims, as Protestant preferred to form alliance with Muslims against the Catholics. In the same extension,

Omer said, in 1966 the Ugandan troops assassinated Fr. Setarino Lahore the Catholic Priest who was a Sudanese former Member of Parliament in Sudan-Ugandan border. Fr. Lahore was the founding member of Sudan African National Union (SANU), the political wing of Anya-Nya. Furthermore, Joseph Odohu leader of the (SANU) was arrested in Kampala during the visit of the Sudan Prime Minister Sire El-Khatim El-Khalifa to Uganda (Omer, 2004). The internal religious conflicts in Uganda reflected negatively upon the Sudanese rebels.

## FORMATION OF SUDAN COUNCIL OF CHURCH AND INITIATIVE FOR PEACE AGREEMENT

In 1964, 543 missionaries working in fields of pastoral, education, health and other humanitarian and social services were expelled from Sudan, being blamed for insecurity in the South. And they were accused of using their rural network of Evangelism to gather security information on behalf of the Anya-Nya rebels (Image, 1999; Jendia, 2002; Yoh, 2002). Expulsion of the missionaries from Sudan, and the restricted laws led the church to speaking with one voice. The protestant churches formed the Sudan Council of Churches on 29th January 1964 (Werner et al., 2000). Later on non-Protestants Churches like; Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and others joined the Council, in order to play the role of advocacy on behalf of the Sudanese Church so that there would be relief.

In October 1964, the President Aboroud was overthrown through a general stake led by different civil society organizations including the students' unions. Islamic Charter Front organized itself very well and led the political forces into serious conflicts dividing the entire civil society among the different ideologies (Jamiaa and Hamid, 2010). The Communist Party which was growing very fast among the intellectuals became the scape goat. In November 1966 during its political rally held in Teachers' High Institute in Omdurman, its member quoted statement about the Prophet Mohammed's wife. Immediately, ICF used this as an opportunity to cause religious uprising. The communist party tried to apologize and deny the meaning, but ICF took advantage, and suggested the dismissal of the Communists members from Parliament, and the dissolution of the party. Immediately the motion was supported by the absolute majority, dissolving the party, and their members were chased away from the house (Deng, 1995; Jendia, 2002). The action was a direct credit for ICF from the public in the name of Islam. Southern Sudan members of the Communist plus the Liberal Party members were beleaguered (Fadl, 2010; Jamiaa and Ahmed, 2010).

Through support that they gained from the public, between 1964 and 1969, ICF categorized its programs into four points for the future of Sudan, in order to gain more support from the tradition/major parties: (a) Sudan

is an Islamic country. (b) That the presidential system of government will be practised in the country. (c) Legislative constitution, decrees and by-laws will be based on the Islamic Laws, and Opinions of the Islamic Spiritual Leaders. (d) Decentralization of the governance and the rights of minority will be protected (Jamiaa and Ahmed, 2010). From then, ICF became very popular in the country, challenging the major parties, wining the marginalized Muslims and training its cadres in all fields. In other and the major parties those of democratic unionist party (DUP) were busy of designing the Islamic constitution and other personal issues related to certain families of al-Mahdi and al-Mirghani. The war continued to develope in the south and this encouraged the millitants to want to take over.

The Colonel Jaafar Mohammed Nimeiry took over through military coup on 25th May 1969 with support from communist party. Immediately, Nimeiry declared his government's interest in peace and granted one year period for general amnesty. This made the Christian agencies believe that the time had come for them to mediate between the government of Sudan and the rebels. In 1971 to 1972, the World Council of Churches (WCC,) All African Council of Churches (AACC), and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) contributed to this initiative with a visiting committee. Nimeiry's liberal government began to believe that, Christian institutions might understand the Sudan's view. These mutual feelings brought the two sides, the government and the rebels to a face-to-face meeting following the secret preparatory negotiations in Ethiopia. On 15th February 1972, the negotiations began with leading African Churchmen moderating the proceedings. In March of the same year, a peace agreement was signed in Addis Ababa, ending the 17 years of war. The southern Sudan gained autonomous regional rule for the first time with the formation of the regional government of the High Executive Council (HEC). General Nimeiry issued the decree for establishment of the Ministry for the Religious Affairs in the North. The same principle was applied actively in the Southern Regional Government in Juba.

The agreement gave room for general revision of educational system especially religious freedom and equality. Christian religion was taught in public schools as well as Islam (Abdurahim and Zein, 2004). Christian workers in the public and private sectors in the north were granted prayer time on Sunday morning, and resumed work after 10 o'clock am. For northern Islamic Anti-Nimeiry, the period from 1973 to 1983, Sudanese Church was considered supporter for Nimeiry military regime (Maki, 1991). Practically, Sudan government signed diplomatic agreement with the Vatican in 1973 (Maki, P.32) and, the Vatican played a big role in the support the Regional Government in the South financially (Ayom and 2009).

Suddenly, General Nimeiry changed and became a born again Muslim, and declared Sudan an Islamic state in September 1983. In reaction, southern Sudanese considered it an absolute violation of the peace agreement. Furthermore, Nimeiry went further by crowning himself Imam[6] for Sudan, and pasted his Islamic photo on the national currency. Nimeiry's religious attitudes led to appearance of Anya-Nya II with the objective to separate the south from Sudan. But, the regional environment did not favour Anya-Nya II's demand.

Other neighbouring countries and the Arabs in the northern Africa, who were interested in the change of regime in Sudan, opposed the separation of Sudan. Therefore, all the rebel groups ended up by forming one movement named the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) in 1983. The objective was to demand for a total change and to deliver Sudan from religious domination and ethnic discrimination.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this article has described the religious historical background and its impact on Sudan through the centuries. Religious impact started with the Ancient Egyptian religions, followed by Judaism which had a big influence on the Sudanese social life. Christianity which substituted the Judaism played a role in the transformation of the Nubian society into a religious community. At the same time, it played a negative role of dividing them into small kingdoms. But the negative part was the religious enmity between them which brought the collapse in 16th century. Christianity entered into Sudan again with support from the British colonial government at the beginning of the 20th century. The third religion which entered into Sudan was Islam, and it conflicted with Christianity from the beginning. The documents proved that it introduced two cultures. (a) Violence and continuous wars against non-Muslims. (a) Ethnic conflict between the Arabs and non-Arabs which continued till the 21st century. However, the article sees the extremism as the basis for division, setback, and hatred among the citizen. The article acknowledged the lack of harmony among the community through the centuries as a result of religion conflict and this should be avoided in the world at large.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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[6] Imam is an Islamic leader, the only one with ligament and spiritual power to issue Islamic decrees.

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