

THE IMPACT OF ISLAMIZATION AND ARABIZATION POLICIES OF KHARTOUM
ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH SUDAN

REV. CANON DR. JAMES ARUMA ILARIOUS

INSTITUTION: THE EPISCOPAL UNIVERSITY, JUBA SOUTH SUDAN

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2024.5038>

IJMSSSR 2024

VOLUME 6

ISSUE 3 MAY - JUNE

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

Abstract: The Christian Church in South Sudan was the product of the CMS Missionaries who after 296296arriving in the Sudan in 1898 were not allowed to evangelize in North Sudan for the fear that the Missionaries would make a great impact amongst the Muslim communities of the north by 296drawing them into Christianity. There was also the fear that there would be another Mahdist uprising just as that which resulted in the killing of Gordon, the Governor General of the Sudan. For these reasons and many others, the CMS Missionaries were denied access to evangelize the north. They had to wait for quite a long time before they were granted permission to go to South Sudan. In South Sudan, the Missionaries worked very hard despite adverse conditions of attack by malaria and other related tropical diseases. They endured many hardships where some of them died either by diseases or even attack from the warrior African tribes. However, they managed to plant Christianity in some parts of South Sudan before their expulsion in 1964 by Khartoum regime, accusing them of being collaborators with the Anya-Nya gorilla movement that was formed as a result of discriminatory policies of Khartoum against the South. This study examines the impact of these policies of Islamization and Arabization of South Sudan, the Church being the target. Library method of data collection is employed where primary and secondary materials are gathered from books, diaries, published articles, and newspapers. Historical theories are also employed in the study. The findings include: merging of north and south to become one country by the colonial masters, nationalization of private-based missionary schools, changing of school academic system from English to Arabic language, marginalization and denial of Christians to hold key important positions in the civil and the private sector. The implications of these policies caused civil wars between North and South, death and displacement of the population in the south, destructions of schools and Churches, intimidation and harassment of the clergy and retardation of Church development.

Keywords: Impact, Islamization, Arabization, Policies, Christian, Church

INTRODUCTION:

Christianity in the Sudan had been in existence from the earliest times of the Nubian Kingdoms before the entry of the Arabs and Islam into the Sudan. This form of earliest Christianity was partly introduced by traders from across the Red Sea who came into Nubia for trade purposes. There were also Christians from the Middle East who were escaping persecution from cruel emperors of the time. Their contact with the Nubian people through trade activities and possibly intermarriages in later years brought the first phase of Christianity into Nubia.

On the other hand, some scholars believed that the Ethiopian Eunuch described in Acts 8:26-40, converted by Philip the Evangelist, into Christianity might have been the one who brought Christianity into Nubia in the second century, marking the beginning of the witness, "...to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). However, this could be true, but there has been no sufficient historical evidence of Church development arising from the conversion and probable witness of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

The second phase of Christianity in Nubia was through Missionaries sent into Nubia from Constantinople by emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. These Missionaries managed to evangelize the three Kingdoms of Nubia – Nabodia, Makuria, and Alwa. But with the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D, these Kingdoms were conquered by the Muslims. The Muslims introduced Islam that replaced Christianity.

The last phase of Christianity into the modern Sudan was equally a Missionary Christianity brought by the CMS Missionaries from Europe. The Missionaries arrived the Sudan in 1899 under the leadership of Henry Llewellyn Gwynne. The Mission was tagged as “CMS Gordon Memorial Sudan Mission.”

The Missionaries, while in Khartoum were not allowed access to spread the Gospel. They were totally denied to do any Church activity. According to Wheeler (1999), “The vision of CMS and Gwynne was to preach the Gospel in North Sudan to those at whose hands Gordon had died. The British authorities in Khartoum were opposed to this as they feared another Mahdist uprising” (P.83). As a result, the Missionaries were later sent to the South. In 1906, Gwynne accompanied the first team of Missionaries to the South, and oversaw their establishment at Malek – the first mission station of the Gordon Memorial Sudan Mission. This study is to examine the impact of Islamization and Arabization policies of Khartoum regimes and their effects as seen today in the life of Church growth and development. The study will be a very important contribution for Church leaders, theological institutions, researchers, government institutions, Missionaries and mission work and to the general public.

The Ancient Nubia:

According to Oriental Institute (2010), Nubia was the home to some Africa’s earliest Kingdoms. People settled in Nubia around 5000 BC. It was known as Kush for 2000 years. The Kushites developed powerful Kingdoms the first of this was centred at Kerma. The later Kingdoms had capitals at Napata and Meroe around 270 BC – 370 AD.

Nubia is a region along the Nile River, located in northern Sudan and southern Egypt. There were a number of Nubian Kingdoms throughout the middle ages, and the last of these collapsed in 1504, when Nubia became divided between Egypt and the Sennar Sultanate, resulting in the arabization of much of the Nubian population. Nubia became under the Ottoman Egypt in the 19th century and within the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as from 1899 – 1956.

The name Nubia is derived from that of Noba people, nomads who settled the area in the 4th century when the kingdom Meroe collapsed. The Noba people spoke a Nilo-Saharan language, ancestral to Old Nubia. Old Nubia was mostly used in religious texts dating from 8th and 15th century AD. Before the 4th century, and throughout classical antiquity, Nubia was known as Kush, or in classical Greek usage, it is included under the name Ethiopia.

Theoretical framework:

The theoretical framework looks at some theories about Islamization. However, the study notes that there is no single theory that would explain the process of Islamization. Rather, it appears that such a complex phenomenon as the introduction and expansion of Islam in many countries at different times cannot be fully understood on the basis of a single explanation of one theory. There are several theories that are complementary in nature to each other, for they refer to different historical stages for different and particular countries. Others refer to different facets of the Islamization process, like the sociological and psychological theories.

The Trade Theory:

This theory has been popular with many Western scholars. It maintains that Muslim traders brought Islam along with their merchandise and that, therefore, the Muslim trader was at the same time a religious mentor. A variation of this theory is that Muslim traders intermarried with the natives, and having persuaded their wives to accept Islam and Islamic names, they were able to raise Muslim families which served as nuclei in spreading the Islamic faith further. Close to this variation, is that the traders married into ruling families, enabling them as their descendants to eventually have political power which served as a means to spreading the Islamic religion and faith. However, this theory has been questioned on its imputed improbability, for it is believed that traders would not be guided much by religious motives, and even if they were, it is to be doubted whether the number of their converts would be large enough to be significant.

The Missionary Theory:

The theory explains how Islam was spread through the work of professional teachers of the faith who had come specifically for the purpose. One version of this theory is that Islam was spread by Sufis who followed the traders. A combination of this theory with the elements of trade theory is that some of the traders were themselves members of *tariqats*, which are Sufi brotherhoods. These two theories are not really incompatible, for although Islam is not a sacerdotal religion, some of its great teachers have dedicated themselves to this profession without necessarily abandoning a trade to supplement their earnings as teachers or preachers.

The Political Theory:

This theory maintains that the adoption of Islam by the rulers and their courts for political motives explains the growth of Islam in countries. For example, Islam was utilized as a political instrument with Muslim traders enjoying the protection of Muslim rulers while they, in turn, supported the rulers with their economic resources. Islam, too, legitimized the rule of rulers of minor principalities in their conflict with local traditional rulers. Montimer (1982), in regard to this theory has this to say:

Islam is a political culture. It often provides the form and the vocabulary of political action. It can greatly strengthen personal commitment to a course. Islam is distinguished from Christianity from its involvement with politics. This involvement is much more fundamental and all-encompassing. The Muslim duty is to build a good society in which God's law will prevail. The Qur'an tells the Muslims: 'you are the best community ever brought forth to men, bidding to good and forbidding evil and believing in God' Islam can be, and has frequently been identified with revolutions, progress, and freedom, and Muslims will fight for those causes with much stronger conviction when they identify them with Islam.

From the political theory and from what Montimer says about Islam, it is therefore noted that in, Islam there is no separation of religion from the state or religion and politics. All are bound together as stipulated in the Qur'an. The Qur'an is both a religious and political Book as Mohammed the Prophet of Islam is equally both religious prophet as well as political leader.

The theory fits perfectly in the situation of Sudan, then and now. The fact that Muslims have been heads-of-state throughout the history of Sudan cannot be over-emphasized. Muslims believe that they cannot be governed by a Christian leader or any infidel. The imposition of Shari'a in the Sudan in recent years has been the order of Islamic government in Khartoum to subdue all Christians and traditional religions under Islam. This speculation has been made more stronger by what Sadiq al-Mahdi, the then Prime Minister of Sudan said as quoted by Hassan (2002); "The failure of Islam in the Southern Sudan would be the failure of Sudanese Muslims to the international cause. Islam has a holy mission in Africa, and South Sudan is the beginning of that mission." (p.37).

Sadiq al-Mahdi learned and inherited the philosophy of his father or grandfather, Mahdi who set the foundation for future governments and generations of people of Sudan to build on. Gray and Hassan (2002) observe that:

The Mahdist revolution was part of the eighteenth and nineteenth century revivalist movements that encompassed the Muslim world. Their main objective was a return to the basic sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Hadith or Sunnah. Such objectives include among others, recasting an Islamic society by instituting the Shar'ia as a state law in accordance with practice of the Prophet Mohammed at al-Medina. In the Mahdist state, the Shar'ia was zealously administered. Indeed, the Mahdiyya left an indelible mark on the course of future Sudanese politics. The Mahdist state came to be regarded as the first independent state, joining the nation in independence to that of the establishment of a reformed Islamic State (p.19).

As Sadiq al-Mahdi has pointed out, the aim of Sudanese government is to advance Islam by all cost, dominate the majority of the African tribes of the South and subdue them to submit and accept Islam as has been the case with Nubia, Central, Western, and Eastern Sudan during the entry of the Muslims into the Sudan. South Sudan, in the eyes of Khartoum regimes has been an obstacle to the spread of Islam. On the other hand, the Christian South sees these policies of Khartoum as oppressive and discriminatory in the sense that they do not allow freedom of religious worship and expression. In fact, these policies have been the cause of civil wars between North Sudan

and the South over the years since 1955 to 2005 when the comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Nairobi, Kenya.

Religion of the Sword Theory:

This theory stresses the role and use of military force in the diffusion of Islam in India and elsewhere dating at least from the time of the crusades. This idea received big boost during the nineteenth century, the high tide of European imperial domination over Muslim peoples, and subsequently in the context of world-wide Islamic reform movements of the late twentieth century. Its general tone is captured in the way many nineteenth and twentieth century-Orientalists explained the rise of Islam in the seventh-century Arabia, as Muir (1898), illustrates:

It was the scent of war that now turned the sullen temper of the Arab tribes into eager loyalty...warrior after warrior, column after column, whole tribes in endless succession with their women and children, issued forth to fight. And ever, at the marvelous tale of cities conquered; of repine rich beyond compute; of maidens parted on the very field of battle "to every man a damsel or two" fresh tribes arose and went. Onward and still onward, like swarms from the hive, or flights of locusts darkening the land, tribe after tribe issued forth and hastening northward, spreading great masses to the East and to the West.

Most Islamic conquests of parts of Africa, particularly North Africa, was through the use of the sword. This method of using military is what is referred to as jihad, which is fighting a holy religious war. The war between North and South has been described as jihad by Khartoum, while in the South, in defense of their land and right to exist, called it a liberation war, to liberate themselves from the occupying forces and the domineering policies of Khartoum against the Christian population of the South. Kayanga and Wheeler (1999) mention that:

The northern Islamic government believes that the only way that indigenous Africans in the South can be converted to Islam is by force that is the way that can be pursued to accept northern Arab Islamic rule. They believe that resistance by the indigenous Africans and Christians will be broken through jihad by mobilizing the Mujahedeen Militia who believe that death in a justified war will open the way of heaven (p.37).

The Economic Theory:

Complimentary to the political theory above, is the economic theory which maintains that with conversion to Islam, the rulers of principalities were able to participate more extensively and profitably in the international trade in the area of the Red Sea to the China Sea. The theory also assumes that Muslim traders had it in their power to patronize and enrich or boycott and cause to fall any port they desired. This theory, like the third makes the spread of Islam an affair of rulers. The recent activities of the Houthis in Yemen could be linked to this theory as they want to stop commercial vessels to reach Europe through the Red Sea.

The Crusader Theory:

This theory views the spread of Islam as the result of conscious response of the people of Sudan to the coming of the Christian Missionaries. The theory has two facets, one religious and the other political. The first sees in the Christian zeal at proselytizing, the Islamic response of a counter zeal and a dramatic increase in Islamic consciousness. This implies, therefore, that Islamic missionaries' activities had become mainly the work of Sudanese (Muslims) defender of faith. The other facet of this theory is that, Islam is able to serve as an ideological force or source of identity integrating Sudanese Muslims to present a united front or force to resist the introduction of Western ideas which have come to be regarded as alien compared to Islamic ones.

Respecting this view, Islam serves, as it were, a form of pre-nationalism. Combining two facets, the crusader theory, in brief, propounds that Islam served as a force counteracting the coming of Western imperialism and Christian colonization. Islam thus became an affair mainly of Sudanese Muslims, supported by foreign Muslim traders who had much to lose by the breakdown of their time honored and profitable trade.

When the British took over the administration of Sudan in 1898, there had already been underground nationalistic movements in Sudan following the fall of Mahdiyya rule in the Sudan. With the British now in full control of the

Sudan and with the hope that they would evangelize it, yet the fear of revolt disturbed their minds, and instead of allowing the missionaries to begin their work in the North, the British administration banned any missionary activity in the North. The Missionaries waited for long before they were sent to the South in 1905 to begin their work. It took longer time to establish the Church in the South because of harsh conditions such as death of Missionaries through infections by malaria and sleeping sickness parasites.

The Missionary Society Act of 1962:

When the Church was finally gaining strength in the cities, the government of General Ibrahim Abboud passed the Missionary Society Act in 1962. With the enactment of this bill into law, Church activities were forbidden and controlled by this law. Sunday became a normal working day throughout the Country, and Friday became a day of rest and prayer for everybody. By 1964, all the Missionaries operating in the South and elsewhere in the Country were expelled and the schools they have established were nationalized. Arabic language was enforced throughout and teachers of English language were made redundant and replaced by Arabic ones from the North, and the following were enforced:

- i. Teaching of Islamic history and culture imposed on Christian children.
- ii. Teaching of African history and issues such as slave trade were discouraged and forbidden by this Act.
- iii. Southern students seeking admissions into Law faculty and other related institutions had to take examination on Islamic religion and Arabic language to guarantee their admission.
- iv. Arabic language was made compulsory for every student to pass in order to gain admission into the university or get the award of Sudan School Certificate of Education (SSCE).

The imposition of these policies were basically meant to destroy the activities of Missionary Schools in the South and to stop students gaining entrance into universities or institutions of higher learning in the country or even abroad. These policies were met with a very strong resistance from Southern politicians, students and Church leaders. There were student unrest in schools throughout the South, as such, the government of Sudan responded by closing down the schools in the South indefinitely. With the closure of schools, many teachers and students left the country, some to seek for education in the neighbouring countries of East Africa or elsewhere, while others joined the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) known as the Anya-Nya which was by then gaining strength by the time. With the intensification of attacks by the Anya-Nya soldiers on government positions, 1965 saw a bloody year and the years following. The Government in the North came with a full force and there was a general massacre of civilians in all the three southern provinces. Homes, schools, churches, and hospitals were raised to the ground. South Sudan became a war front. Thousands of people were killed and many thousands displaced while others remain in the bushes of South Sudan and many thousands fled the country and became refugees. This was the situation in the first Sudanese war, occasion by policies of marginalization, discrimination of southerners from political positions and the students from gaining admission into institutions of higher learning in the country or abroad.

Although the first war ended with peace agreement 1972 by granting the southerners local autonomy, with the hope for a referendum for self-determination after a stipulated period of time, the agreement Sudan led by Jaafar Mohammed Neimeri decided not to follow or implement the the terms of the agreement, he abrogated the Addis-Ababa agreement by enacting the policy of “divide and rule”. He divided the “One Southern Region” into smaller administrative areas to control and govern. When Southern politicians complained about this Act, Neimeri quickly through the advice of Turabi, issued a decree pronouncing the Shari’a Laws for governing the Sudan in 1983.

This action of Neimeri matters more worse that angered the Southern elite and politicians resulting in the break-away of army units to form a guerilla movement. John Garang was by then in Khartoum. He was sent from Khartoum to put down the mutineers, but on arrival he instead joined the mutineers and became their commander. This marked the emergence of SPLM/A movement in 1983.

The Second Civil War (1983-2005):

The second Civil war as cited above was as a result of many reasons:

1. There was a general discontent within Sudan and South in particular with the state of affairs failing the country as far as development and sustainability of the “Regional Autonomy” in South Sudan is concerned.
2. The domination of power in South Sudan by one tribe (Dinka) was unacceptable to some of the tribes who saw themselves as being marginalized from the political corridors of power in the greater Southern Region. These agitations created tensions among students in higher institutions of learning which resulted in massive demonstration calling for re-division of the South. The re-division of the South means that every person working or doing business has to be redeployed to his/her own place/state of origin. This policy leads to the third point.
3. Nimeri, probably after having consultations with some southern politicians and elders, used this as an opportunity to re-divide the South. On June 5, 1983, President Nimeri unilaterally suspended the 1972 Regional Self-Government Act Constitution following the Addis-Ababa agreement. Uwachue (1991) says that, Nimeri formally decreed the re-division of Southern Region into three smaller regions of Bahr-el-Ghazal, with Wau as the Capital; Equatoria, Juba as the Capital; and Upper Nile, with Malakal as its Capital.

To the disadvantage of all southerners, the three newly formed regions were stripped of the powers and rights which had been conferred on the former single Southern Region by the Constitution and the Southern Region Self-Government Act of 1972. With the re-division of South Sudan, Nimeri attempted to redraw the border between North and South. Part of the rich agricultural lands and the oil producing areas of South Sudan were to be formally incorporated into Northern Sudan and the villages in the said areas were attacked by Sudanese Air force to scare people abandon the area. According to Uwachue (1991), in May 1983 Wat area in Upper Nile was attacked. In October 1983, over 800 people were reported killed by government forces in Bentiu, and Alunayakar in Bahr-el-Ghazal province over 100 civilians were also reported killed by the same Sudanese security forces from the North Sudan.

4. In the face of opposition to Shari’a Law, Nimeri in April 29, 1984, declared a state of emergency throughout the nation while ignored the central issue of the worsening economic situation in the country. It was therefore against this background and other reasons that two battalions of the Sudanese army, mainly from the South, broke away as was with mutiny of 1955 in Torit. These battalions formed the nucleus of what became to be known as “Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) under the leadership of Colonel John Garang de Mabior.

Many people believed that this movement came as a reaction to the declaration of Shari’a Laws. But others saw as a reaction to the re-division policies propagated by some other tribes of South Sudan who saw themselves as being marginalization and dominated by the Dinka groups who seemed to have welded power and authority into their own hands and had become administrators in every arm of government in South Sudan. This school of thought maintained that the Dinka found themselves pushed against the wall by this policy. This could be true, but it should also be remembered that the main enemy of the South is the North, though within South Sudan there were communal and tribal conflicts, notwithstanding, these conflicts were considered minor and were not in any way undermine the unity of Southerners against the common enemy.

Church in the midst of Wars:

Like in the Anya-Nya war, when the SPLM/A were gaining more grounds in the South by taking over towns in the Eastern, Central and Western Equatoria and in some parts of Upper Nile and Bahr-el-Gazal provinces, the government of Khartoum responded by sending massive troops into the South. The Church again was under a severe test. Civilians within the government controlled cities, especially in Juba became the target. Many high government ranking officials were arrested including some officers from the unified forces like the police, prison wardens, or wild life officers and some leaders of Christian congregations. Few of these people were later released

but most never came back till today.

The worst of it was that, there were no international reporters in the Country. The world was kept in darkness of atrocities and judicial killings that were happening in Juba, the capital of the South. People in the government controlled areas were not allowed to travel out of the city even to farm. You need to obtain permit from the security to enable you go to your farm or collect fire wood. The parameters of the town or the roads leading out of the town were all mined with anti-personnel mines. People lived in state fear as to what would happen next.

To the outsiders, the fate and faith of the Church has already been destroyed. Many people in Diaspora thought and believed that the Muslims had already overturn the Church. The people within were the only ones that believed that the fate and future of the Church lie in hands of God Almighty, the Father and Owner of the Church. It has been their belief that one day God would decide for the day of restoration of His Church. In fact, during this time the word of God became food, both for the soul as well as of the body. Every Christian would live everything to be destroyed in his/her house, but would run away with the Bible in his/her hand.

The courage and faith of South Sudanese Christians in the face of such adversity is a miracle of God's grace. Witts (1991) says that when Pope John Paul II visited Khartoum in 1993, he spoke of seeing in Sudan a "Reproduction of the mystery of Calvary in the lives of the majority of the people" (p.10). Witts on her own visited one of the devastated areas around Bor, in Jongolei Province in 1992 and has this to say:

I was profoundly moved to meet with Christians in a situation that humanly speaking could only give rise to despair were vibrant with hope. The reality of the 'Paschal experience within their lives was almost tangible. That deepest challenge and inspiration to my own faith has come through the witness of such brothers and sisters who have offered a glimpse of what it means to trust in Christ alone when all other securities have been swept away (p.10).

The testimony above indeed was the nature and persistence of Christians in sustaining and defending the Church and their faith in the midst of all attempts of Khartoum to silence the Church and to resurrect forced Islamization and arabization of southerners, a move started by General Ibrahim Abboud in 1960's.

Wheeler (2002) on the other hand observes that:

Despite the inescapable effects of living in a society riven by conflict and violence, the Sudanese Church has managed to sustain a significant degree of unity. This is probably related to two factors: First, decade of suffering and desolation have forced Sudanese Christians to recognize and depend on spiritual basics; trust in a present and living God, where compassionate heart is shown to us in the cross and calls us into a community of healing and service. And secondly, a common enemy, represented by the unrelenting policies of Arabization and Islamization of successive governments in Khartoum, compels people to draw together in common purpose and fellowship...is a pervasive sense of shared faith and common experience between different denominations at local level. At the national level, it has led to creation of Council of Churches that are unusual in bringing Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians together and enabling a common voice to be raised on crucial national issues of human rights, religious freedom, reconciliation and peace (p. 25).

These testimonies speak to the truth of faith South Sudanese Christians in the midst of persecution. Witts remarks that: "The forced Diaspora of Sudanese Church has been, and remains on massive scale yet in God's providence, has resulted in sharing of the Gospel in new ways and great depth" (p. 11).

One of the things that revitalized and strengthened the faith of South Sudanese Christians was the belief that, God allowed this kind of trouble to come upon the Church to test the genuineness of its faith in order to:

- a) Help them humble themselves;
- b) Wean them from the allurements of the world and to drive them back to God;
- c) Revitalize their prayer and allow them to experience more of God's faithfulness;
- d) Make them more dependent upon God;

- e) Encourage them to submit to God's purpose for their lives; and
- f) To make them more compassionate towards others in trouble.

This attitude of mind described above embraced the whole Church. It was able to carry the Church through its difficult moments. Churches within government controlled areas in the country were subjected to severe supervision by the state security personnel. With the state of emergency already in place, Church gatherings, apart from Sunday were banned. Funerals and other social gatherings were disallowed except with the permission of the state security with a specific number of days or hours granted. At the elapse of the permission, everybody has to find his/her way home. Failure to comply with the order, members of the family and those found around would be arrested and taken to unknown destination for questioning. Sometimes they are tortured and the women raped before being released.

The treatment of Church members in this manner made them very much to rely on the word of God. Though the Church at this time appeared not to be confrontational to the government for obvious reasons, it was committed to its course. Crusades, fellowships, and funeral places became breaking grounds for evangelism. The 1988 declaration of 'Decade of Evangelism' in the Lambeth Conference, the Church got the opportunity to carry the Gospel to market places, residential areas and into the camps of the internally displaced people. The Revival Group, commonly known as the born again, were instrumental in this assignment. The age old 'week of witness instituted by the Missionaries, was effectively used for massive evangelism where encouraging portions of scriptures in times of trials, temptations and persecution were always studied. Lives of Christian martyrs in the early Church discussed and statements such as "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church by Tertulian explained. All these were meant to encourage believers to learn lessons from their suffering and be strengthened in their faith.

The Impact of Islamization and Arabization Policies on South Sudan:

The effects of Islamization and Arabization policies of North Sudan against the Christian South had a great impact on the Church and the population of South Sudan in many ways, including but not limited to the following:

The effects of Muslim occupation of Sudan:

The occupation of Sudan by the Arab Muslim tribes affected the social, ethnic, and religious life of the people of Sudan in three ways: their culture, their religion, and their language. In North Sudan, majority of the people embraced Islam wholesomely. This led to the transformation of their African culture into Arab culture, and their religion from African traditional religion/Christianity into Islamic religion, and their languages into one common language – Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. In the South, most of the cities and the urban towns were equally affected. Though a small percentage of people were converted into Islam, Arabic language has become the language of communication throughout South Sudan. Arab culture and the mode of dressing is visibly noticeable among South Sudanese people. The effects of the two civil wars on the Christian Church are both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that the Church experienced growth and the faith the members was made strong through the long suffering of persecution surrounding them. It is also positive because some of those who took refuge in neighbouring countries received education, a thing they would have not achieved if they had remained within the country.

The negative effects of course being that human lives and property were lost during the conflict. People suffered under deplorable conditions of starvation, disease/illnesses of various types, torture, rape, abductions/slavery, extra-judicial killings and denial of human rights,

Church Growth Experience:

The years following the expulsion of the CMS Missionaries from the Sudan in 1964 were years of great suffering and turmoil for the Church in South Sudan, yet they were also years in which the Church experienced growth. The Church grew to maturity both as an institution and in the quality of its faith and practice. In 1964, Elinana Ngalamu and Jeremiah Datio were consecrated bishops after the retirement of the first indigenous bishop in

1961 due to ill-health. Following the return of peace to South Sudan in 1972, the Episcopal Church became independent province within the Anglican Communion in October 1976, with Elinana Ngalamu as the first Archbishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan. These developments marked the first step in the growth experience of the Church.

Social Dislocation:

This is another factor that was undoubtedly important in explaining the rapid growth of the Church. The social dislocation caused by the civil war, where the traditional social patterns and social structures everywhere were thrown into confusion. People displaced from their place of origin or taking refuge in neighbouring towns, more especially the youth found themselves opened to new world views and new commitments of faith. This is particularly evident among the pastoral Nilotic tribes, who had previously shown little interest in Christian teachings. Their displacement took them to new environments where Christianity is in full swing. The displacement camps within and the refugee camps became centres for Christian evangelism and teaching.

Nationalization of basic Missionary Schools and Health Centres:

The nationalization of the Missionary Schools and health centres in 1957 in the South and the establishment of the Missionary Society Act in 1962 were meant for quicker advancement of Islam and to harass the activities of the Sudanese Church respectively. Such policies by Sudan to advance Islam in the South succeeded only in alienating many southerners, including those who would have considered themselves moderate and non-political to join in the struggle, (whether outside or within the country) for the freedom of South Sudan.

Unity of Church Denominations:

The Islamization and Arabization policies of Khartoum regimes created an avenue for Church denominations to unite in order to speak with one voice. The assault of Abboud's regime on Christianity in the South was felt by all Christian denominations in the South to be an assault also on the southern sense of identity. As the concerns of national unity and of Islam were increasingly united in northern perception, so in southern perception Christianity was increasingly identified with the issue of southern rights and aspirations. Christian faith and southern identity became virtually synonymous.

Confiscation and destruction of Church Property:

The effect and the extent of Sudan's policies have taken another dimension of confiscation and destruction of Church property as cited by Wheeler (1999), who reports that:

As Christian Southerners and the Nuba began to come to Khartoum from about 1940, the Cathedral ceased to be the preserve for expatriates and began to be a much-loved home for Christians of all denominations from all over Sudan. Its seizure by the government in 1971, supposedly because it presented a security threat due to its closeness to the presidential palace, was a great blow to the Episcopal Church. The loss is still remembered even though a new Cathedral has been constructed in Khartoum (p. 57).

This confiscated Cathedral has been turned to become part of the presidential palace. The concrete Cross on the top of the belfry still remains visible till today.

The fate of displaced South Sudanese in Khartoum:

South Sudanese people who left South Sudan for safety in Khartoum found themselves in deplorable conditions. Upon arrival, they were taken to the displaced camps far into the desert to be taken care of by the humanitarian organizations for the supply of food, water, clothing and medicine. When they have settled and schools and Churches were built and become operational, the government would claim the area for construction of building projects. Without notification, police with tractors, lorries, and bull-dozer were sent to harass and bull-doze places of worship, schools and the entire camp, reducing it to rubble. They were then once again transferred to another location of the desert to start live anew under the harsh conditions of the burning sun by day and extreme

cold in the nights. The aged and the children often became victims from pneumonia and other related sicknesses and they die.

Denial to hold key public position/office:

Denial of some key government positions to southerners has been one of the discriminatory policies of Khartoum. These positions were only reserved for Muslims and not for Christians. This policy also applies to students who aspire to join Law Faculty. All students from the South who aspire or qualify to join faculty of law were not allowed unless they have passed Arabic language or Islamic religion examinations. This policy became a barrier to southern students who were Christians taught in English and not Arabic. This was a strategy to put out southern students from the law faculty and other departments associated with law. This is clearly seen in the judicial system in the country then flooded with Muslims. Few southern students who might have studied in Arabic and under pretext took examinations in Islamic religion, got the opportunity to study law, but again when they graduate, they were kept under the lower ranks of the judiciary system until they retire.

Increased Persecution of Christians:

Persecution of Christians in the Sudan is an endless process even when South Sudan became independent from the North. The Sudanese government seems to be on its way to becoming the next Iran, regardless whether Omar el Bashier remains in power or not. According to Mauro (2012), the country is moving towards becoming a full-blown shari'a state, comparable to Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Afghanistan. About seven hundred thousand Christians were ordered to leave Khartoum by April 8, 2012 or else they would be treated as foreigners. The declaration was enforced and thousands of Christians of southern origin left Khartoum as from Sunday 29, April to complete movement by Saturday May 5, 2012.

Mauro says that al Bashier, the President declared that any person whose great-grand parents were born in the South or is part of a southern ethnic group would no longer be considered a citizen after the expiry date of April 8, 2012. This declaration is a clear indication that the government of Sudan is all-out to clear Christians out of North Sudan or else subjugate those who resist the order into slavery or compel them to submit to Islam just as to what happened hundreds of years ago in ancient Nubia.

Looking at what the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is doing in Sudan, one really wonders if they would not return Sudan into the era of al Bashier Islamism in case they win the war. What is now happening in Western Sudan – Dafur and Al Fashir is a repeat of what happened during al Bashier presidency – killing of non-Arab Dafurians and Christians. These killings were carried out by the Janjaweed militia, recruited and armed by Omar al Bashier then to clear the non-Arab tribes in Western Sudan – Dafur and Al Fashir.

Religious Freedom:

The main reason for the civil wars between North and South was religion. The manifestations of religious intolerance started when a Council of Ministers Resolution of February 1960 was passed, substituting Friday for Sunday as the weekly day of rest in the South. Two years later, General Ibrahim Abbud's military regime (1958–1964) passed a legislation imposing severe restrictions on Missionary activities such as establishment of new Church buildings or acquiring of land for Church development and providing for expulsion of foreign Missionaries. In recent times, the Copts, Southern, and Nubian Christians were not exempt from the application of the Islamic laws promulgated by Neimeri and the National Islamic Front (NIF) of al Bashier. Indeed, a score of Christians from the South and the Nuba Mountains had their hands and legs amputated following the promulgation of the September Laws, known also as Shari'a Laws.

Personal Freedom:

Khalil (2002) reports that human rights organizations have reported scores of extra-judicial deprivation of personal liberty. The National Islamic Front (NIF) has, moreover, been accused of the most heinous form of transgression of human dignity and personal freedom. Slavery is a crime by the municipal law of the Sudan which is a party to international covenants forbidding that offence. The Shari'a allows enslavement of a person taken as

hostage in a war between an Islamic and non-Muslim aggressor. But the Sudanese armed forces were engaged in enslaving Christians and minority of Muslims. In the definition of Islamic Classical Law, the law of enslavement does not apply to persons taken as hostages in a war operation between government and rebel forces. Notwithstanding, by publicly declaring the war as jihad (religious holy war) and describing young men who die in military operations as martyrs, the NIF regime has, perhaps unwittingly, imparted a color of legitimacy to acts amounting to, or materially resembling, slave trafficking.

Disregard for sanctity of Human life:

According to Khalil (2002) violations of the human universal declaration of human rights and the international covenants on civil and political rights have been violated in Sudan as a result of the Islamization of the legal system. The Qur'an emphasizes the sanctity of human life, by making the application of death penalty subject to the compelling requirements of al-hag (the truth) a prior justice (Surah 6:15), it further makes murder and armed attack on persons or property, fasad fi al-aid, the only ground that justify capital punishment (Surah 5:32). Article 6 of the covenant argues that:

In countries which have abolished the death penalty, sentences of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes and should only be carried out pursuant to a final judgment rendered by a competent court and that anyone sentenced to death should have the right to seek pardon or commutation of sentence (p.62).

Notwithstanding the Qur'anic prohibitions and the express provision of the international convention to which Sudan is a party, Omar al Basheir on the pretext of safeguarding the integrity of the newly established Islamic state, declared dealing in foreign currency an offence punishable with imprisonment not exceeding ten years and with death where the act constituting the offence was done in conspiracy with others. Two young men were tried before a special court under constitutional decree of the NIF regime. Despite local and international plead for mercy, the death sentence was hastily carried out. Similar cases of extra-judicial killing were also carried out in South Sudan. There was mass arrest of government officials in South Sudan in 1991. The people numbering in hundreds were executed without proper court proceedings and hearing. Their bodies were buried in unknown location or probably they were carried by helicopter and dumped somewhere in the Nile to become food for crocodiles. Such executions negate both local and international justice and declarations of human rights.

Cruel Punishment:

Khalil (2002) refers to 1925 Penal Code which authorizes lashing of young delinquents. Flogging of adults, however, considered too degrading, was introduced in Sudan penal system by Niemeri's anti-liquor legislation of 1977. In further violation of Article 5 of the universal declaration and Article of the Covenant, the Penal Act of 1983, prescribes such harsh punishments as amputation and cross-amputation of limbs and crucifixion, the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime has resuscitated the *lex talionis* of times of old.

Inequality:

There has been a great sense of inequality between North and South as far as political, religious and social issues are concerned. The Muslims consider themselves superior to black Africans from the South. From the wake of independence in 1956 till date, no Southerner has ever ascended to the throne of presidency. It was John Garang de Mabior, the leader of Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) who ascended to the post of the First Vice President of Sudan, a post he held for only seven (7) months as from January 9- July 30, 2005 when he died in a helicopter crash. Garang's ascension to the post was part of the comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Nairobi in 2005. The declaration of Sudan as Islamic state made things difficult for politicians from the South to ever think or dream of becoming President of Sudan. The views of two Islamist on the subject suggest their different logical techniques, but reveal the same mentality. According to Khalil, Sadiq al Mahdi, leader of the Umma Party and twice Prime Minister, was asked the question whether a Southerner would ever become a president of the Sudan. Sadiq al Mahdi answered the question negatively, but hastens to say that this need not worry Southern politicians as at any rate, the Muslim majority would not vote in a non-Muslim as head of State. Hassan al Turabi, the NIF's ideologue, however, concedes on a non-Muslim's right to be nominated for that position, a view regarded as heretical by Al Ikhwan al Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood). Turabi defends his

idea or political stance by arguing that as no Southerner can ever secure the necessary majority votes, the country would always end up with a Muslim as head of State. The Classical Islamic Law stipulates being a Muslim as an imperative qualification. Turabi's versatility cannot assure the Christians of the Sudan even of the theoretical constitutional rights to equality. From the above, Khalil notes that Islamic law, as traditionally interpreted is inconsistent with human rights and is inimical to coexistence in the multi-religious society like the Sudan. Radicalism seems to be the only aspect of present Islamic surge in the Sudan; the other and more pervasive aspect, is that it has engendered in Muslim masses a desire to reassert their cultural identity. Anayat, a Muslim scholar is quoted by Khalil (2002) as saying that: "Since the second World War, there has been a growing trend among Muslim masses to reject any political idea, however, desirable, unless it is shown to conform to Islamic principles" (p. 66).

Conclusion:

For the whole period of the civil strife beginning from 1955 to 2005, South Sudan has seen the successive Khartoum regimes as oppressive and evil. The Church in the whole of Sudan and more particularly in the South had suffered terribly from the hands of the dictatorial regimes of Khartoum. These oppressive regimes could be traced back to the time of Muslim incursion into the Sudan. The colonial masters equally suffered the same fate from the Mahdist Islamic revolution, though they were able to contain them for a time. At the wake of independence in 1956, following the unification of North and South as one country and the departure of the British administration from the country, the civilian government that was put in place was soon toppled and previous chapters of Islamization and Arabization were opened that came alive during General Ibrahim Abboud's regime. What the then Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi said confirms this Islamization agenda. Sadiq al Mahdi says that: "The dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one, and its overpowering expression is Arabic, and this nation will not have its entity identified and prestige and pride preserved except under Islamic revival" (p. 32). He continues to say that "The failure of Islam in South Sudan would be the failure of Sudanese Muslims to the international Islamic cause. Islam has a holy mission in Africa, and South Sudan is the beginning (gateway to other African nations) of that mission" (p. 37). All avenues were used by the North to crush the Church whom they saw as the power behind the resistance of people of the South. According to Mazrui et al (2009), Islam in furtherance of its faith uses three processes: process of geographical expansion, process of cultural revival, and the process of political radicalization" (p.14). All these processes were carried out in the South, but God in His infinite mercy as the owner of the Church was able to save His Church from the hands of evil men and women. The Church continues to grow from strength to strength looking forward for a better prosperous future, though yet facing some minor challenges from South Sudan government emanating from 2013 and 2016 protracted war for power struggle between two rivals.

References:

1. **Gray, R. & Hassan, Y.F. (2002).** Three Religious traditions and their encounter with modernity. In H. Yusuf and G, Richards (Eds.). *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, (pp.13 – 21). Nairobi: Pauline.
2. **Hassan, Y. F. (2002).** The Role of Religion in the North – South Conflict with special reference to Islam. In H. Yusuf and G. Richards (Eds.). *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, (pp.23–47). Nairobi: Pauline.
3. **Kayanga, S. E. & Wheeler, A. C. (1999).** But God is Not Defeated. Limuru: Kolbe.
4. **Khalil, M. I. (2002).** Human Rights and Islamization of Sudan Legal System. In H.Yusuf and G. Richards (Eds.). *Religion and Conflict in Sudan*, (pp.58-71). Nairobi: Pauline.
5. **Mauro, R. (2012).** Sudanese Christians given until April 8, 2012 to leave. Retrieved 04/27/2024 from <https://www.ruthfullyyears.com/2012/03/28/ryan-mauro-sudanese-christians-given-until-april-8-to-leave>.
6. **Majul, C. A. (2006).** Theories on how Islam came to Malaysia. Retrieved 04/02/2024 from <https://www.ranaocouncil.com/history?id=8>
7. **Mazrui, A. A. et al (2009).** Africa's Islamic Experience History, Culture, and Politics. India: Sterling.
8. **Montimer, E. (1982).** Faith and Power, the politics of Islam. New York: Random House.
9. **Oriental Institute (2010).** The Ancient Nubia. Retrieved 12/17/2023 from <https://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/nubia>.
10. **Uwachue, R. (1991).** Africa Today. London: Africa Books.
11. **Witts, D. (1999).** Forward II. In K. Samuel and W. Andrew (Eds.). But God is Not Defeated, (pp.9-12).

Nairobi: Pauline.