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Christianity in Republic of the Sudan (Northern Sudan) And Republic Of South Sudan (89)

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**(89) CHRISTIANITY IN REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN (NORTHERN SUDAN)
AND REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN¹**

Chammah J Kaunda

Northern Sudan

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	6,126,000	60.9%	10,454,000	65.5%	3.6%
Independents	57,000	0.6%	92,000	0.6%	3.2%
African initiated	46,900	0.5%			
Orthodox	3,000	0.0%	3,000	0.0%	0.0%
Protestants	2,767,000	27.5%	3,900,000	24.5%	2.3%
Anglicans	1,554,000	15.5%			
Reformed, Presbyterian	833,000	8.3%			
Nondenominational	222,000	2.2%			
Pentecostal	87,300	0.9%			
Congregational	60,000	0.6%			
Roman Catholics	5,301,000	52.7%	7,300,000	45.8%	2.2%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	1,368,000	13.6%	1,856,000	11.6%	2.1%
<i>Pentecostals/Charismatics</i>	632,000	6.3%	840,000	5.3%	1.9%
adherents of traditional African religions	3,268,000	32.5%	4,500,000	28.2%	2.2%
Muslims	614,000	6.1%	920,000	5.8%	2.7%
Baha'is	620	0.0%	1,000	0.0%	3.2%
Chinese folk-religionists	480	0.0%	700	0.0%	2.5%
Buddhists	230	0.0%	400	0.0%	3.9%
Hindus	200	0.0%	300	0.0%	2.8%
people professing no religion	46,800	0.5%	74,000	0.5%	3.1%
Total population	10,056,000	100.0%	15,951,000	100.0%	3.1%

Source: Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS

¹ This version relies on the work of Andrew C. Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, www.dacb.org/history/christianity%20in%20sudan.html (accessed 08 December 2015). The original version of Wheeler was first published in Zablon Nthamburi, ed., *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991).

South Sudan

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	1,916,000	5.3%	1,947,000	3.8%	0.1%
Independents	19,300	0.1%	22,000	0.0%	0.9%
African initiated	19,300	0.1%			
Orthodox	97,000	0.3%	120,000	0.2%	1.4%
Protestants	758,000	2.1%	850,000	1.7%	0.8%
Anglicans	520,000	1.4%			
Nondenominational	210,000	0.6%			
Roman Catholics	1,081,000	3.0%	1,120,000	2.2%	0.2%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	394,000	1.1%	450,000	0.9%	0.9%
<i>Pentecostals/Charismatics</i>	137,000	0.4%	150,000	0.3%	0.6%
Muslims	32,810,000	90.9%	47,160,000	92.9%	2.4%
adherents of traditional African religions	1,007,000	2.8%	1,100,000	2.2%	0.6%
Baha'is	2,200	0.0%	3,000	0.0%	2.1%
Jews	2,200	0.0%	2,000	0.0%	-0.6%
Chinese folk-religionists	1,700	0.0%	2,000	0.0%	1.0%
Buddhists	800	0.0%	1,000	0.0%	1.5%
Hindus	700	0.0%	900	0.0%	1.7%
people professing no religion	374,000	1.0%	524,000	1.0%	2.3%
Total population	36,115,000	100.0%	50,740,000	100.0%	2.3%

Source: Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS

Introduction

The history of the church in Sudan is divided into three main phases: first, 543-1504, the church in ancient Nubia. This period in the history of northern Sudan has perhaps been best served by scholars, both historians and archaeologists. Second, c. 1700-1885, Catholic missions to Nubia. This second phase, up to the time of the Mahdiyya has, not surprisingly, been a particular interest of Catholic mission historians. The third is a period from 1899 to the present day in which the modern evangelization of Sudan has taken place. This period is from the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian Condominium² to the present. This is focus of this brief chapter.

Christian Mission during the Condominium 1899-1955

Scholars argue that Byzantine missionaries brought Christianity to northern Sudan (then called Nubia) by about the end of the first century after Christ.³ The Christian kingdom of Nubia prospered for about 600

² Condominium is a period from 1899 to 1955. In January 1899, an Anglo-Egyptian agreement restored Egyptian rule in Sudan but as part of a condominium, or joint authority, exercised by Britain and Egypt.

³ S. Jakobielski, "Christian Nubia at the Height of its Civilization," in *General History of Africa – Volume III – Africa*

years before being raided by Islam. Modern Sudanese Christianity was reintroduced into South Sudan by British missionaries in the nineteenth century. Yet British imperial authorities restricted missionary activity to the south.⁴ In order to briefly represent Christianity in the two countries of Sudan – North and South, this essay is divided into two major parts.

The Republic of (North) Sudan

As soon as the city of Omdurman fell in the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, in which Lord Kitchener defeated the Mahdist forces and killed the Khalifa, placing Sudan under British control, several missionary groups began to enter Sudan. But the Verona Fathers, one of the most enduring Christian missionary presences in the country, had already arrived in 1854 under the leadership of Denial Comboni who became the first Catholic Bishop of Central Africa.⁵ The members of the Comboni missionary society,⁶ together with the Sudanese Catholic converts who had escaped from Mahdi to Egypt, returned to work in Sudan. The Protestant missions were established by the New Zealand branch of the Sudan United Mission (SUM), a broad non-denominational missionary organization and the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS). Scholars argue that the missionary presence did not determine its success in establishing a Christian community until the indigenization of the churches during the 1960s and 1970s, after the expulsion of the missionaries.⁷ The first task of these missionaries was to gather a small Christian community in Omdurman. Several key factors can be linked with the spread of Christianity in the Nuba Mountains.

The second form of witness that missions developed in northern Sudan was educational activity. The government did little to encourage modern western education. They were content to support the traditional Qu'ranic education of mosque and *khalwa*.⁸ The Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum was established in 1902 with an aim of training clerks and craftsmen for government service. It has gone through transformation over the years and provides technical education, and was established in 1956 as Khartoum University when Sudan gained independence.⁹

The missionaries were responsible for modern education in Sudan, which was perceived as a way of civilizing the Sudanese people and also as a tool for evangelization. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Verona Fathers started two girls' schools, in Khartoum and Omdurman. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) started a Coptic all-girl school in Khartoum in 1902. These schools attracted both Christian and Muslim girls from Egypt and Sudan. The Presbyterians also started a boys' school in Khartoum in 1905. There are many other mission schools that laid the foundation of all contemporary primary and secondary education in the Sudan. Initially, the government sponsored some of the elementary schools, but this policy was abandoned in the 1920s in favour of the *khalwas*.¹⁰

The third evangelistic method that missionaries made use of was within the government restrictions of medical work. Both the Catholics and CMS maintained clinic work in Khartoum and Omdurman. The

from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century, eds. M. El Fasi and L. Hrbek, 194-223 (San Francisco: UNESCO, University of California Press, 1992).

⁴ From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Christianity in Sudan," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Sudan#cite_note-5 (accessed 9 Dec. 2015).

⁵ Sophie Ibbotson and Max Lovell-Hoare, *Sudan* (Bucks: Global Pequot Press, 2012).

⁶ The Comboni missionary order originated from the charism of St. Daniel Comboni who believed that the time had come for the regeneration of the African people.

⁷ Siri Lamoureaux, "Nuba Christianity: the Search for Security in the North," www.cedej-eg.org/IMG/pdf/Siri_Lamoureaux_editsSL_May2013.pdf (accessed 9 Dec. 2015).

⁸ *Khalwa* refers to secluded retreats for initiates to the Sufi mystical orders that dominated Sudanese Islam. In the twentieth century it refers to the schools for instructing the young in the *Qur'an*.

⁹ Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

¹⁰ Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

CMS hospital in Mahdist capital of Omdurman under Dr Edmund Lloyd was established with the objective of equipping Sudanese medical staff.¹¹

It must be highlighted here that the presence of Christians in positions of power was perceived as an affront to Islamic authority. Thus, throughout the condominium and the independent period, there were major restrictions on Christian activities in most parts of northern Sudan, with the exception of the Nuba Mountains.¹² Andrew C. Wheeler noted that ‘this has in part been due to official policy, and in part the natural antipathy of a predominantly Muslim population’. In the early 1990s, northern Sudan was perceived as a land of opportunity for education and employment for most South Sudanese until the independence of South Sudan in 2011. The large congregations that meet in northern towns which started as early as the 1940s consist mainly of southern migrants, with a few others from the Nuba Mountains. Before the independence of South Sudan, Christians in the north, as a minority, received strong support from the majority Christian community in the south. Despite the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), including Omar Bashir’s own promises of cultural and religious diversity, it seems there were no legal systems that protect the interests of Christians in the new constitution.¹³ In recent times, there have been increased threats, prejudice and discrimination against churches and Christian minorities in the north.

The Sudan United Mission in the Nuba Mountains

The Australian branch of SUM began sending missionaries to work in Sudan in 1914. From 1920, they concentrated on the eastern Nuba Mountains, which became the SUM field. The church established by SUM in 1913 is known as the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) which became autonomous in 1962. The congregations are located in the capital city and in the Nuba Mountains.

The Church Missionary Society in Nuba Mountains

In 1929, Wilson Cash who was the then General Secretary of CMS, visited Sudan. This visit was the result of his vision of taking the gospel to the Nuba Mountains through medical and educational work. In 1933, the government invited CMS to help provide Christian and vernacular education in the western Nuba Mountains (SUM, as noted above, was working in the east). SUM and CMS translated the Bible into the Sudanese languages, and the New Testament has been published in Moro, Krongo, Otoro, Haibani, Nyirere and Koalib. But CMS work in the western Nuba Mountains was not as strong as SUM’s in the eastern. Frequent changes in staff and a shortage of staff slowed down the work. Also, the strong emphasis on education meant that CMS was less active in evangelism than SUM. SUM’s commitment to evangelism made them more active in Bible translation.¹⁴

The Nuba Churches in Khartoum and Omdurman

Today, the Sudanese Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church of Sudan have a number of congregations in the Nuba Mountains. But the greatest growth has taken place in Khartoum and Omdurman. The Omdurman Bible Training Institute (OBTI) was established in 1970 by Bishop Butrus Shokai. The Institute was later renamed after its founder as the Shokai Bible Training Institute.¹⁵

¹¹ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

¹² Wheeler, “Christianity in Sudan.”

¹³ Lamoureaux, “Nuba Christianity: the Search for Security in the North.”

¹⁴ Wheeler, “Christianity in Sudan.”

¹⁵ Shokai Bible Training Institute, “Shokai Bible Training Institute,”

<http://khartoum.anglican.org/index.php?PageID=sbti> (accessed 9 Dec. 2015).

The Republic of South Sudan

South Sudan is the youngest African country, and became an independent state on 9th July 2011, following a referendum that was passed with 98.83% of the vote in favour of creating a new state. The country had remained shut off from northern Sudan until the mid-nineteenth century with the establishment of the 'route through the Sudd in order to plunder ivory and slave traders, and to the ineffective and corrupt efforts at administration of Egyptian and Mahdist governors'.¹⁶ Throughout the twentieth century, the relationship between the north and the south entrenched oppression and exploitation by the northern political administration. The creation of condominium government gave freedom to the north but at first had little or no effect on the socio-political life of the South, as repression continued by both British colonialist and northern Sudan. In the south, the English language, rather than Arabic, was encouraged as the official language, along with six other southern languages as the basis of instruction in elementary education. The southern policy was meant to protect missionary work against Muslim infiltration in the south, but the government had no interest in developing modern education, or any other form of socio-economic progress there.¹⁷

The story of the emergence of a Christian community in Southern Sudan must be seen against this backdrop of government policy. The aspirations of both Muslim and Christian communities are perceived by the Sudanese to be at the heart of post-Independence conflict in the Sudan. Religion is a highly political issue in Sudan, and its political context must always be kept in mind.

The condominium government prohibited missionary activities in northern Sudan, but they were encouraged in the south. The Catholics were most eager to embark on work there. By 1903, the 'spheres policy' committed the Verona Fathers to working in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region of south-western Sudan. They developed mission stations and the area remains staunchly Catholic. They also established trade and an elementary school. But the evangelistic work was not successful. The Verona Fathers gained permission in 1910 to open a station at Gondokoro where they consolidated a few believers who had been baptized fifty years before. This was later closed and further stations were opened at Rejaf East, and Juba on the Nile.

The American Presbyterian Mission established themselves after some delay in Doleib Hill near the mouth of the Sobat River in 1902. They emphasized evangelism through education and practical training and economic development.¹⁸ In 1903, they founded a school which was approved by the government. The school developed and, in 1924, became a boarding school and the centre of a large network of several schools. In 1907, the mission bought a boat to help provide healthcare up the Sobat River to the Nuer people. This work resulted in the establishment of a hospital high up the Sobat River amongst the Nuer in 1923. Despite this success in practical work, progress in evangelism and church planting was slow. The first baptism took place only in 1913, and by 1923, the number of baptized believers was only about 200. The Presbyterian Church still remains the smallest among the three main churches of Southern Sudan.

CMS was the last of the three missions to begin work in the south. By 1905, it became urgent for CMS to become involved in mission work there before it was taken over by one of the other missions. In 1920, the South Sudan Mission was placed under the episcopal oversight of the Bishop of Uganda and became part of the CMS Elgon Mission. Bishop Leonard Kitching was consecrated the first Bishop of the Upper Nile Diocese, whose jurisdiction covered the whole Elgon mission area. After his death in 1935, the south of Sudan was restored to the Diocese of Egypt and the Sudan. CMS also gave attention to education and medical work but this was done among individual ethnic groups in the south. The revival that spread from

¹⁶ For detailed discussion on the history of oppression and exploitation of the South by both British colonialists and Northern Sudan, see Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

¹⁷ Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

¹⁸ Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

Uganda to the south of Sudan in 1941 resulted in the conversion of about 18,000 Christians. In that year, the first African clergy were ordained. Daniel Deng became the first Sudanese Anglican bishop in 1955.¹⁹

Active Churches in Northern Sudan and South Sudan

South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC)

The comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) in 2005 eventually led to the separation of Sudan into two sovereign states, decided in the referendum of 2011. The Sudanese Council of Churches (SCC) decided to establish two separate ecumenical organizations for the two countries; the decision was reached at the SCC's 20th General Assembly from 3rd-7th July 2013 in Nairobi, Kenya.²⁰ The council for the Republic of South Sudan known as South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) and the other, for the Republic of Sudan, is known as Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). It is important to emphasise that the Church in South Sudan is a stakeholder and plays an important role in nation-building and also played an historic role in peace-making, and in preserving the heritage, civilization and values which underpin the concept of humanity. It has also recognized the need for a single body to embrace all the churches as a basis for clear consultation and co-operation in promoting Christian witness to the values of justice, peace, love and reconciliation, which are necessary for promoting stability and peace among the Sudanese people. The following are some of the active church traditions in South Sudan:

The Coptic Orthodox Church

With the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the Coptic Church was reorganized in Sudan to care for the many Copts who now came to Sudan as government officials or as traders. In 1904, the foundations of the Coptic Cathedral were laid in Khartoum. Other churches were built to serve the Coptic communities in the Nile Valley and in Kordofan, including Omdurman, Atbara, Wad Medani, Gedaref, El Obeid and Kadugli. Today, there are two dioceses: the Diocese of Nubia Atbara and Omdurman stretches from the Egyptian border southwards and up the Blue Nile. The Diocese of Khartoum and Uganda stretches south of Khartoum to Uganda.

The Coptic Church is mainly concerned with the pastoral care of Copts working in Sudan, although in recent years there has been some evangelism amongst southerners and Nubans living in Khartoum. The Coptic community has always been active in education and they are amongst the most educated people in northern Sudan.

The Roman Catholic Church

In the north, until 1950, the Catholic population consisted mainly of expatriates or Catholic belonging to various Catholic religious orders. After 1950, and especially since the disturbances in the South, many Catholics from the south have settled in the north. Many of the Catholic communities in the north today are made up of southerners. Since 1960, northern Sudan has been divided into two vicariates, each with its own bishop. These are the Vicariate Apostolic of Khartoum and the Vicariate Apostolic of El Obeid. Like the other missionary-founded churches in northern Sudan, the Catholic Church is growing quickly, but this growth is mainly amongst southerners and Nubans who are moving to the towns.

¹⁹ Adam Matthew Publications, "Church Missionary Society Archive," www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/church_missionary_society_archive_general/editorial%20introduction%20by%20rosemary%20keen.aspx (accessed 9 Dec 2015).

²⁰ World Council of Churches, "South Sudan Council of Churches," <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/africa/south-sudan/sscc> (accessed 9 Dec 2015).

Sudanese Church of Christ

This church has grown from the work of the Sudan United Mission. Today it has a Church in Nuba Mountains, Khartoum and Omdurman. It has also spread to all cities of northern Sudan. It has 37 local congregations with 87 pastors and evangelists all over the Sudan. It shares a Bible school at Melut with the Sudan Interior Church.

Sudan interior Church

This Sudan Interior Mission is one of the largest Protestant missions in the world. It mainly works in Nigeria and Ethiopia. In 1935, when the Italians invaded Ethiopia, all the SIM missionaries were expelled. Some of them came to Khartoum, hoping to keep in touch with Ethiopia, to ask the colonial government for permission to work in Sudan. They were allowed to work in parts of the Blue Nile and upper Nile provinces. In Khartoum they have maintained an active work with a lively Church, active youth and a bookshop. In 1976, the name Sudan Interior Church was adopted for the Sudanese congregation.

Episcopal Church of Sudan

Nuba Mountains, though nearer to Southern Sudan than Khartoum, falls under Khartoum. As highlighted above, missionaries were banned from working in the Nuba Mountains to avoid educating and converting the Nuba people to Christianity. But later the government gave permission to the missionaries, but only to work in education and medical work. The work began in 1899 in Omdurman and spread to the southern region. Until 1974, the Diocese of Sudan was part of the Jerusalem archbishopric. It was restored to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury until the new Province, consisting of four new dioceses, was established in 1976.²¹

Other Churches in Northern Sudan and South Sudan

There are other churches which are yet to be admitted to SCC membership. These churches are the Ethiopian Orthodox, Armenian Church, Greek Catholic Church, Africa Inland Church, Presbyterian Church of Sudan, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Baptist Church, Brethren Church, Christian Brotherhood Church, Episcopal Methodist, Free Evangelical Church, Full Gospel Church, Great Commission Church, Kush Church, Lutheran Church of Sudan, Lutheran Evangelical Church, National Lutheran Church, New Apostolic Church, Reform Church, Sudanese Brethren Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church-Shigls, Sudanese Reform Church and Sudanese Brethren Church.

The Church in the Search for National Unity in South Sudan and Northern Sudan

The church in northern Sudan has been experiencing attacks which increased as the south voted for independence. The struggle for liberation in the south resulted in the emergence of a vibrant church based in the north. But the attacks and threats of attacks have continued, with the Sudanese government sanctioning destruction of some churches in Khartoum, Omdurman and the Nuba Mountains.²² Some Christians have been killed in air raids by government forces.²³ But this has not dampened the spiritual

²¹ Anglican Communion, "Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan & Sudan," www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/member-churches/member-church.aspx?church=sudan (accessed 9 Dec. 2015).

²² World Watch Monitor, "Two Sudan Churches Destroyed, One for a 'Marketplace'," <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/10/4077326/> (accessed 9 Dec. 2015).

²³ Bos News Life, "Sudan Christians Mourn Murdered Believers; Church Destroyed," (July 7, 2014), www.bosnewslife.com/33294-sudan-christians-mourn-murdered-believers-church-destroyed (accessed 9 Dec. 2015). The report by Asylum Research Consultancy gives a detailed explanation about the situation in the Nuba Mountains:

fervour of the church in its evangelism, or in dedication and innovativeness in equipping its members in the businesses, hotels and industries of the north. The church is now a significant and permanent part of the northern religious landscape. This must be seen as relevant to the contemporary debate over the place of Islam and Christianity within northern Sudan.²⁴

The church has always played a central role in South Sudan. It was a vital instrument in the peace agreement that led to the nation's independence. The Catholic Church succeeded in persuading church leaders in Rome to give a pastoral response to the oppression and repression in Sudan. In fact, churches such as the Catholic and Anglican have long played a role of provider of basic services such as education and health. In the violent period, the churches have helped the most vulnerable and provided immediate relief and means to help people rebuild their lives and the country. The post-independent civil war in South Sudan has also brought together the religious and political identities of most South Sudanese. The churches in South Sudan have remained steadfast in their commitment to providing immediate relief for the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and to the ultimate goal of peace and reconciliation in South Sudan.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at Christianity in South Sudan and northern Sudan, and several factors were observed that led to the establishment of the church. Some of these were the British colonial policy of separation and related education policies, health and education, material support and transnational connections to higher education and training, literacy and Bible translation. Later factors include conflict-related social and political identity and insecurity.²⁵

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see Asylum Research Consultancy, Mountains, "Situation in Khartoum and Omdurman," (9 September 2015 – COI up to 18 August 2015) www.refworld.org/pdfid/55efe85e4.pdf (accessed 9 Dec 2015).

²⁴ Wheeler, "Christianity in Sudan."

²⁵ Lamoureaux, "Nuba Christianity: the Search for Security in the North."