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THE PERSECUTED CHURCH OF SUDAN

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**THIS IS A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BACHELOR OF ARTS,
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution: all sources have been cited in full.

Joseph Faber.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this long essay to the Sudanese Communities in the South Sudan and for the refugees in Uganda and Kenya camps who have assisted me to accomplish this project.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

When I started to go deeper to understand better the problems of the Sudanese Church and the Islamic government of Khartoum, I was puzzled by the discriminations taking place in the Sudan. I stayed with the Sudanese Christian Communities in the northern Sudan-Khartoum, in the refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda experiencing the hard life poverty, diseases, famine and other difficulties Christians have from the hands of the Muslims. The atmosphere I lived in was all about questions, why are all these persecutions done to the Sudanese Christians and when shall the Sudanese be free? The Church in Sudan remains a Church of consolation and hope to its people. The Christian community in Sudan lives in its communities by teaching, communal life, sharing the joy and the sufferings, helping one another, celebrations and prayers like the early Christian community (Acts 2:42-47). Seeing and experiencing all that the Sudanese have undergone while their faith unites them inspired me to choose this topic, "The Persecuted Church in the Sudan": the present challenges in the Christian communities in the Islamic state. This long essay has been the chance for me to research more for my future work in the evangelization and missionary work in the Sudan or wherever I might work world-wide.

From my present way of thinking in this long essay, I want to look at some of the questions that can help me answer the problems of the Sudanese Churches between Christians and Muslims, for example: What is the cause of the war between Muslims and Christians? What can the Church do to encounter and to overcome these challenges and difficulties? Are the other Christian denominations in the world relevant to solve the Church crisis in the Sudan? These questions are to help and accompany me work

the theme of "The Persecuted Christian Religion in Sudan".

For more than forty years Sudan has been experiencing civil wars, which have caused untold suffering for thousands of people. During these civil wars which have continued from the very moment of the country's independence in 1956, the Christian religion has suffered the blows and effects of the wars. This is because, the Christian religion has spearheaded the move to preach about the social injustices effected by the Islamic religion. So without any prejudices the Church in the Sudan is persecuted on religious grounds. The Church's problem in the Sudan I shall present in this long essay, to show how the Church has been discriminated by the Islamic government of Khartoum, especially the Christians in the South Sudan. The Muslims prevented the Christians from worshipping God fully and from continuing with Christian evangelization, actions which are meant to categorize them as the second class citizens. In addition, the Islamic government oppresses their fellow Muslim tribes of the Beja Arabs, the Adandawa tribe, and the tribes in the Eastern Sudan from becoming Christians.

The Objective of this long essay is to present the main challenges of the Christian Churches in the war areas in the Sudan, to reflect on some of the notorious of biblical suffering, the Church teachings and the theological aspect of the Church's evangelization.

In the first chapter I shall present the history of the Christian Church in the Sudan, its origin and how it has continued to be persecuted by the Muslims under the Islamic laws. The second part of Chapter One, I will present the growth of the Christian Church through evangelization and martyrdom.

In the second chapter, first part, I shall look on the use of the evangelization

through the use of language translations and how they are a help in any process of evangelization in the South Sudan. The second part of chapter two, focuses on agents to the evangelization and the challenges the Christian Church faces in the formation of priests, laity and pastors. Also the question of the Christian refugees in exile will be discussed, especially the help given to the people by the Church leaders.

While in the third and final chapter, which is “The Christians and Muslims Inter-Religious, I will focus on the Christian-Muslim Initiative to solving the country’s religious crisis through “Dialogue”, Inter-Religious dialogue as an act to know and to understand the exercise of religious freedom. This is the result arising from the necessity of dialogue for bringing peace and unity among the Sudanese communities. In the second part there is a reflection on the Sudanese women the initiatives of Muslims and Christians contributing to bring about justice and peace through the formation of women associations, such as the WAG (Women Association Group-Khartoum) and SWAN (Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi).

I hope this long essay will be a benefit to the readers, especially those missionaries who want to research more work with the persecuted of the Sudanese Churches. This text is also a key to understanding the Christian life in the period of hardships in African Christian Churches.

CHAPTER ONE:

1.0 THE PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN SUDAN

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first century, the Christian believing community was persecuted because of their Christian faith. They were hunted down, arrested, tortured and thrown into the arenas to be eaten up by the hungry wild animals. Because of this situation some Christians did renounce Christianity to worship the pagan gods. It is a similar case today for the Sudanese Christian communities in the presence of Islam. In this chapter, the demonstration is on the early persecution of the three Christian kingdoms of Nobatia, Alwa and Makuria by the Arab Muslims in the Sudan simply because of their conversion to Christianity. In connection with the present Islamic Sharia law used by Sudanese as the penal code of administration reforms, which even leads to the concept of the killing of Christians in their homes there are interrogation centers in the hospitals run by the Muslims medical personnel, the worse being in the civil war. There is a desire for building up and bringing a law that is different and a better kind of community different from the Islamic Sharia law into which Nimeiry has plunged the Sudan.

Among all the Christian denominations, the Catholic Church is persecuted the most, since it is seen as being antagonistic to the idea that the Muslims are trying to convert the whole country to the Islamic faith. Some of the Catholic figures who became victims and who were offered as sacrifices for the sake of the Christian

faith will be worth mentioning in the Sudanese martyrs section. This will give us the clear understanding of the Islamic and Christian religions value to martyrdom.

The other aspect to be looked at is the manner in which Christians and Muslims dialogue in harmony to sort out the Sudanese problems of faith. Hence, the aim to dialogue is looking at the Sudanese major problems in understanding and relating with Muslims in the Sudan.

1.2 CHRISTIAN EVANGELISERS IN THE SUDAN.

EVANGELIZATION

Evangelization is basically the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, but it is not only that. For evangelization is the proclamation of the Good News that brings together the believing community of Christians. Fr. Shorter, in an African context, speaks of Evangelization as the spreading of the Good News about God's kingdom and realization of the kingdom. He also says that evangelization comprises not only proclamation, but also praxis and prayer.

Evangelization is a more comprehensive term. It suggests that the process is considerably more than one verbal teaching and preaching alone. The Word must not only be proclaimed: it must also be celebrated and lived. effective evangelization takes place through first-hand experience and action, rather than through teaching and theory alone. A basic slogan of this book, therefore, is that evangelization comprises proclamation, praxis and prayer.¹

In addition, Fr. Shorter mentions that evangelization has three integral elements: dialogue, inculturation and liberation.² The three complement one another. Dialogue refers to inter-religious or ecumenical dialogue as an important aspect of evangelization.

¹ Aylward, Shorter, Evangelization and Culture (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 7-8

² Shorter, Evangelization and Culture, 28.

It also refers to inculturation as dialogue between faith and culture. Liberation is the element that frees faith and culture from any oppressive structure. All these elements are essential for evangelization.

(A) THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN SUDAN.

The first community in the Sudan was founded after the collapse of the Meroitic Empire around 300 AD and came to be known as the three Nubian Christian Kingdoms of Nobatia, Alwa and Makuria. Nubia is a land lying south of Egypt and north of Sudan. This is known as Cush and its people are called Cushites.

The reason that had led to the growth of Christianity in Nubia land is contacts with Egyptian merchants who traded in north Sudan with the Nubian traders. But the Christian faith to the Sudanese came through a Sudanese who came to know God on his way to worship in Jerusalem. The Sudanese man who came from northern Sudan is well known as the Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles (8:26-40). This is a story of a Meroitic court official and a treasurer of the queen's mother of Meroe, known as Kandake. He had a desire to worship the God of Abram, Jacob and Isaac in Jerusalem. On his way to Jerusalem to worship God he was reading a book he bought to relax from his boredom; he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. He never understood the scripture he was reading, so God sent Deacon Philip to his assistance as a spiritual guide for the journey; he was later converted to Christianity and was baptized. The Ethiopian eunuch or the Northern Sudanese received the joy of becoming a born again Christian. From then on Christianity continued to exist in the Sudan with the witness of the eunuch and the invitation of the missionaries in the kingdom of Meroe.

So it is highly likely that already in the fourth and fifth centuries

after Christ and well before the official conversion of Nubia, that a small but growing number of Nubians accepted the Christian faith.³

The Egyptian monks and hermits fled their country into the Nubian land and influenced the people to believe in God during the persecution under the Roman Emperor Decius in 250 AD and under Emperor Diocletian in 297 AD, because Egypt at the time had a good number of Christians in the Roman Empire. Up to today on the outskirts of Khartoum north in the Haj Yousif residential area stands the Coptic monastery. Because of the rapid conversion of the Muslims to Christianity in the neighborhood of the monastery,

the Islamic government of Khartoum has confiscated the monastery properties for fear of further conversions of the Muslims and the increase of Christians in the capital city of the Sudan, Khartoum.⁴

The other category of people who entered Sudan with the Word of God in the Christian kingdoms of Nobatia, Alwa and Makuria with were the Egyptian traders in the year 297 AD, during the Diocletian persecution. The Egyptian traders promoted the start of the Sudanese Church by building Churches in Soba which today are ruined down on the outskirts of Khartoum south. The following is how the three Christian kingdoms of Nubia fell in the hands of the Arab Muslims:

1. THE NOBATIA KINGDOM

The spread of Christianity to this Kingdom came during the era of king Silko of Nobatia. Silko is said to have been either the last pagan king or the first Sudanese king ca. 450 AD before king Eirpanome of Nobatia in the year 559 AD converted to

³ Roland Werner, William Anderson, Andrew Wheeler, Days of Devastation, Day of Contentment: The History of the Sudanese Church Across 2000 Years, Faith in Sudan, No.10 (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2000), 28.

⁴ John Oryem, "What Does the Term Evangelization Signify for the Church in Sudan", The Voice of St. Paul's Major Seminary, Vol. 6, No.2 (11th Nov. 1985): 9.

Christianity. King Silko and his nobles were baptized to Christianity by Julian who was a monophysite and a missionary bishop to Nubia from the year 543-546 AD.

Julian presented to the king the precious baptismal garments he had brought from Byzantium, and other gifts, amongst them, presumably, copies of gospels and other books, as well as icons and objects to be used in the Church as crosses and chalices.⁵

After becoming a Christian, King Silko drove away the Blemmeyes and described them as the idol worshipers who wanted to make his kingdom into a non-believing kingdom. He also imprisoned the cult priests of the cult of Isis at Philae, and he requested "Emperor of Constantinople to send him missionaries to preach the gospel throughout his country."⁶

2. THE MAKURIA KINGDOM

The Christian kingdom of Makuria embraced Christianity from the Emperor Justin II (565-578) from the Nobatia mission to evangelize Nubians. When the Arab Muslims from north Africa attacked them, King Silko made a pact known as Baqt promising to adopt the Christian faith in the Empire of Makuria,

A peace that endured for six hundred years, guaranteeing the faith of the Christian and promising annual imports of northern fabrics and foodstuffs in return for a yearly payment of 360 slaves.⁷

3. THE KINGDOM OF ALWA

The Kingdom of Alwa received Christianity under Bishop Longinus just at the time when the people of Makuria were receiving Christianity in their kingdom. Longinus underwent many difficulties before reaching Soba, the capital of Alwa. He was barred from going through Makuria land as he was a monophysite Christian, but the Lord

⁵ Werner, Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment, 27.

⁶ Giovanni Vantini, Christianity in the Sudan (Bologna: Collegio delle Missioni Africane, 1981), 37.

⁷ Robert July, A History of the African People, 4th ed. (Nairobi: EAEP, 1992), 89.

made his way clear to Soba. Longinus settled among the people, instructing the king, nobles and the whole people in the empire. lastly, he baptized them into Christianity. The inhabitants of Soba today in Khartoum come from the devastating war areas of Southern Sudan. Most of them hold Christianity as their religion of faith.

(B) THE ISLAMIC SHARIA LAW

The Islamic Sharia law was promulgated by president Jaafar Nimeiry in September 1983 as the sole legal system for the administration of justice in the Sudan. The main purpose of the Sharia was to reduce the spread of crime such as prostitution, theft, alcoholism, and was an attempt to uplift the moral and spiritual and political reforms of the Sudanese. Nimeiry's promulgation of the law was not applaudly welcomed by the highly Sudanese religious and political leaders, because he was not a qualified Islamic lawyer or Imam, and his life was not a good one. Even his government ministers and the people close to him in the Palace would talk bad of him. The Sharia law in the Sudan was considered as a religious fraud, amounting to heresy and self-selfishness.

Nimeiry's system was dictatorial as he demanded *Baia'a* from every single Sudanese soldier, Muslim or Christian believers. *Baia'a* is an important Islamic oath of allegiance volunteered by Muslims to their leader whom they had chosen strictly in accordance with the provisions of *sura* or Koran. Here the Muslim vows his poverty, his life, his soul and his children to the service of Amir El Mumiin and in the service of Islam. Those who vow allegiance by this oath would automatically become Islamic crusaders.⁸

Nimeiry would move from one brigade headquarters to the other, demanding, organizing and actually receiving the *Baia'a*. He has practically turned the entire

⁸ The African Watch Committee, eds., Denying "The Honor of Living" SUDAN: A Human Rights Disaster, African Watch Report (New York: The African Watch Committee, 1990), 56.

Sudanese national army into Islamic crusaders against the infidels, that is, the Christian living in the south of the Sudan and the other non- Muslims.

The practical application of Sharia law in the Sudan severely discriminates against the non-Muslims and savagely violates every single word or letter of their human rights as provided in the United Nations charter of human rights. For example, no Christian or any other non-Muslim may dream of becoming head of state, Chief of staff of the Sudanese Armed Forces, or Minister of Education, of Finance or Foreign Affairs. A permanent ceiling is hereby laid upon the Southern Sudanese's capabilities and ambitions. He has no claim for an equality before the law because the law itself discriminates against him and his interests, unless he becomes a Muslim. In law courts his testimony against a Muslim is that of minor and therefore of no consequence. If he is a Christian his religion is regarded dangerous and he may not preach it publicly. All other marriages conducted in accordance with the traditions and customs of the tribes are therefore considered to be sheer prostitution. An Arab Muslim you violates the sanctity with impunity and you get no justice or redress for the damage suffered, because the Islamic courts do no recognize the traditional marriages. This constitutes a severe pressure for the people to convert to Islam or opt for arms against this system.

The introduction of Islamic laws as the sole system of administering justice in the country deals multiple fatal blows to the entire range of the people, traditional and cultural existence, and ethos. It is calculated to bring about tragic cultural shock and dislocation, and the collateral moral metamorphosis. This Islamic law can be compared to apartheid because of its nature in racism.

Collectivism characterizes a very broad range of the economic, social and cultural activities of the African ethnic groups inhabiting the South and most parts of

the Sudan. Land, for example, is a collective asset. It belongs to the dead, the living, and yet to be born. The hunting grounds, the grazing grounds for domestic animals, the fishing streams and lakes and farm lands are all communally owned. The related activities such as fishing, hunting, clearing of farm lands and actual cultivation are communal. And because money economy has not yet been adopted by the communities, local liquor or *marisa* plays a very fundamental role in all these activities. For instance, if the family of Joseph want a few huts erected for them. The people are informed and the *marisa* made. The people come together and drink, and the huts are up. This process is repeated by many other families and for a variety of purpose, and life happily goes on. It has been so over the past several hundred years.

Drinking *marisa* is therefore a very important social activity. It brings the people together by not getting drunk but to discuss and tackle their problems. It is organized in such a way that real communion of people is actually practiced. They share the same pot or calabash which is passed from person to person. In this manner, social discipline, community solidarity, sentiment and cohesiveness are developed and maintained. But the Sharia law indicates that nobody should brew nor drink *marisa*, else he or she gets fifty lashes in public. The substitute he offers is Arabism, Sharia and Islam. This is despotic intolerance as well as religious intolerance and persecution under which humankind has bled and suffered for so long.

The Sudan wriggles in an agony of misgovernment and poverty. Jaafar Nimeiry mismanages state affairs with such relish and overlooks the Sudanese as if it is his right, and even in his interest, to render the citizens miserable. A few men out of the majority poor steal a few pounds here and there because they are in such an oppressive need. They get caught and taken to Kobar central in Khartoum-North. After a hasty trial,

after which they are often found guilty, a Friday is chosen, the Muslim holy day of worship. It is then announced to the public through radios and the state television of the amputations of legs and hands of the victims who are mostly Christians. Through the chopping with the sharp swords the amputees are left to bleed and suffer a painful punishment. This, we are told, is Sharia, the law of Allah.

1.3 CHRISTIAN MARTYRS IN THE SUDAN

(A) THE CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

The Southern Sudan is considered as the heart of Christianity, deeply Christianized through the boldness and courage shown by those who died to defend the Christian faith. The seventeen-year-old civil war in southern Sudan has fostered Christian evangelization to grow faster as both local and missionary priests go along with their gospel message to those thirsting for the word of God in the devastating war regions of Southern Sudan. The sheep are calling for the shepherds to go out and preach the message to them. In the Southern Sudan today, evangelization is very difficult because of the civil war and lack of priests. But the old village catechists according to their abilities and means spread the word of God by organizing the Christian teachings in all localities in the village. They can move far the areas of evangelization. Even in the Khartoum state the Christians go from house to house evangelizing the people in their places of work.

People believe they must "announce the light"--and they do it at home, in the countryside, in the cities, even in Northern Sudan.⁹

⁹ Andrew Wheeler, Announcing the Light: Witnesses to the Gospel, Faith in Sudan, No.5 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 183.

The Christian teachers meet with a lot of obstacles in their daily work, being rejected by the adamant villagers who cling to their traditional cults. For instance, the Acholi people believe the *jok* to be a god of their ancestors living in the forest, rivers or mountains, and they offer sacrifices of animals to it for protection. Each family at least has a god to whom they offer sacrifices instead of the One true God of the universe. This makes it very hard for the evangelists and catechists to teach them the word of God. A story of a Sudanese catechist shows how he was killed because of the preaching of the witchcraft among the Acholi's. Eliseo Lokwada was a dedicated catechist in Palotaka mission parish from a village called Imolong'o. He was educated as a catechist in the year 1964 at Juba Catechetical Center . He was an educated man with a family of six and of a Christian family. During his ministry in the war torn area of Acholi, he went on teaching and baptizing and celebrating the liturgy of the word to the people of God. He rebuked the people to keep away from evil, witchcraft and turn to God. It is told that many "snake" women burnt their charms in secret and in public in conversion to Christianity. Because of his boldness in preaching and in the midst of various challenges, he was poisoned and died a Christian death with a message to the Christian community not to loose hope in their Christian endeavors.¹⁰

The other persecution aspect that prevented the task of evangelization is the hard time the Islamic soldiers give to the women in the Southern Sudan. The Muslims soldiers in their ambushes and patrols in the villages and towns force girls and young women for sex. Meaning the children born out of the sexual acts are a blessing to the Islamic faith increase in population. The assaults and sexual harassment are forms of persecution in the Sudan.

¹⁰ Jackson Wani interviewed by Joseph Tabu, 24th August 2000, Gulu, Uganda, verbal talk.

(B) THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE PERSECUTION

In the Sudan, the Catholic Church is playing a greater role in initiating peace and religious tolerance among the Christian and Islamic religions. In the Sudan Catholic Christians are 40% of the population. The Islamic government fears them, because it is one of the strongest Christian denominations in the country pursuing justice and peace for the persecuted people. This has resulted in the interrogation of Bishops, priests, and the lay people by the Khartoum government which accuses the Catholic clerics of misleading the Sudanese. Bishops Paride Taban and Macram Max and Joseph Gasi are the exiled Catholic pastors barred from the areas controlled by the Sudanese government from 1985 till the present day. Yet they remain with the people in the zones which were captured by the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA).

In the North Sudan, the closing of Catholic Churches makes evangelization difficult. For instance, on the 3rd and 10th May 1999 in Khartoum North on the outskirts of Haj Yousif, the government tore down two schools and Catholic Churches, claiming that the Ministry of Engineering Affairs had not approved the site for the development. This shows the government's hostility toward Christian students and believers, their education and worship of God. Throughout the Khartoum state the Catholic Church returns with goodness to the displaced Catholics, Protestants and even Muslims by giving them food in the camp of Jebel Aulia. So this is a case as in the scripture where Jesus Christ fed the crowd, 5000 men by giving them the bodily food and the word of life (Mt.14:13-21). So, the Catholic Church is seen as not only a relief organisation but also a place where every hungry and thirsty person goes for physical and spiritual assistance. The Catholic Church in a way has a educating hand to its

people. Both the young and the old go to the Catholic schools (known as the Comboni schools) to write and read. The schools are in the Catholic Church compounds filled up daily with students with interest in education because they cannot afford to go to the government schools and many students are from poor families. The scripture shows Jesus not only as a prophet but also as a teacher. It is true in the Sudan and everywhere in the world that the rich do not struggle for education, because they have everything at their disposals. Instead the poor ones are the best in education because of their efforts in their education.

Lastly, the Church for us has got a missionary dimension, to guide and to instruct through evangelisation of the Word of God. Our Sudanese Church in this era of civil war acts fully in the evangelization of the Word of God among those denied chances to Christian faith. In the war torn areas of the South Sudan, the laity plays a great role in evangelization by preparing the people for the sacraments. In the area of the Nub mountains, because of lack of priests for years, some catechists decided to commemorate the sacraments of the Eucharist by baking the unleavened bread, assembling the people and praying over the bread. Then, the bread would be eaten by the Christians in commemoration of the real Eucharistic supper celebrated by Jesus in the person of a priest.

The Christians have not had a priest among them—or the Mass and the Eucharist—for the last fourteen years. The desire for the Eucharist became so acute that their catechists decided to celebrate a Eucharist-centered prayer gathering, from time to time.¹¹

Such para liturgies help the Christian community to be in communion in their faith.

With good intention, they first imitate the first Christian community in praying and

¹¹ From *Informworld Sudan*, AMECEA Documentation Service, "We Are Hungry for the Bread of Life", September 1995, No. 452 (March 15, 1996): 12.

eating the Body of Christ together (Acts 2:42-47). The Church through the laity gives hope to the Christian communities according to their gifts and missions. The laity learn to imitate the love of Christ physical and spiritual healing (cure of a paralytic Mark 2:1-12).

When a man is filled with the creativity of the risen Lord, he transcends the limits of his own time and open up future horizons for the Church's mission in the Word, so much for that human history itself.¹²

(C) MARTYRDOM OF CHRISTIANS IN THE SUDAN

The word *shahid* in the Arabic language means witness to anything. It denotes a certain happening in one's life in faith sacrifice as a witness. In the Sudan, the term is used by the Muslims to show the patriotic heroism in the holy Islamic war, the Jihad. As an example, the *mujahiddin* (the holy Islam fighters) are the ones who fight the infidels and when killed they are pronounced to be martyrs and patriotic citizens.

But for Christians, the understanding of martyrdom has a different meaning : it is Christian death in acceptance of the death of Christ, and such is the supreme act of love. For a Christian to become a martyr, certain justification have to be established such as, his death proof an effectiveness of grace as an outside sign, *as quasi ex opere operato*.

In the Sudan today, Christian believers witnessing to Christ have died in the hands of the Muslims, freely choosing to die rather than to disown Christ and the Church. Christians have been persecuted in different ways; by the fire squad, through butchering by sword, burying a person alive in hole and so on. But Christians, out of their strong faith persevere and receive the persecution in the name of the crucified

¹² Francis Pierli, Maria T. Ratti, and Andrew C. Wheeler, Gateway to the Heart of Africa: Missionary Pioneers in Sudan (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 28.

Christ. So the Christian persecution is a building spiritual force the Sudanese Church needs to know in becoming a true witness in religious belief.

In general, Sudan was a Christian state even before the entry of Islam in the Christian kingdoms of Makuria, Nobatia and Alwa in the Nubia land. In fact the Islamic religion and Christianity are monotheistic religions as in Judaism. They profess the One God, the creator of heaven and earth. The Islamic confession, "There is only One God (Allah) and Muhammad is his prophet", shows resemblance with the first and the second law of the Judeo-Christian decalogue, "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the One, the only Yahweh" (Dt.6.4) "You will not swear by the name with intent to deceive and thus profane the name of your God. I am Yahweh" (Leviticus 19.12). We can see that Christianity and Islam religion professes the One God, the creator of heaven and earth. And the most important thing for Christianity is the encouragement given to them by the Christian Ecumenical council in issuing pastoral letters asking the Christian communities to persevere in prayers and to encourage one another in the unity of Christ Jesus. The Church, in favor of justice and peace, does not regret in the Islam persecution but positively sees the oppressive states contributing to the growth of Church in holiness as well as in number. The Second Vatican Council says,

[t]he church itself also recognizes that it has benefited and is still benefiting from the opposition of its enemies and persecutors.¹³

¹³ Second Vatican Document, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, no.44, in Vatican II, ed. Austin Flannery, 849.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by speaking out against social injustice, the Church becomes the voice of the voiceless. In many cases, the Church leaders die shedding their blood, inquest for justice as they speak out against social injustice. In the years 1960's and 70's the Catholic Church in the Sudan had several of the priests killed by the Muslims because of the struggle against the social injustices to its people. Some of the priests killed are from the Diocese of Torit; Fr. Saturlino Lohure was murdered by the Muslims militia in collaboration with the Ugandan soldiers because he struggled to fight the injustices in the southern Sudan. The others are Frs. Gabriel Dwatuka, a Zande priest, Deng Barnabas, a Dinka, Ali Archangelo, Ndogo all from Bahr El Ghazal province. The all believed in the freedom of their people and for it they fought to the end.

They didn't plan politics of hunger, but they showed us how to eliminate injustice. we have to honor these noble leaders with a posthumous noble prize of peace.¹⁴

Truly, the Church is an organ for introducing political reforms in order to get rid of corruption, religious persecution, bribing and killings in a society of self-interested persons. The Church in the Sudan has a great task in fighting injustices and, in particular, religious discrimination in the northern and southern Sudan. Therefore, applying the meaning of the persecution in the Sudan to our lives today as Sudanese religious, it is an essential and basic sign of total, radical consecration to God. memorial sign of discipleship in renouncing our lives and following Christ, a prophetic sign of the future: perfect life in heaven, a sign of full and joyful anticipation of eternal life.

¹⁴ Neno Conran, They are a Target: 200 African priests killed, (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1996), 152.

CHAPTER TWO:

2.0 THE CHALLENGE FACED IN THE SUDANESE CHURCHES.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The understanding of evangelization in the Sudanese Churches means the expansion of the Church in all its spiritual and material aspects, meaning the Sudanese Church has a challenge from the Islamic religion in a world full of oppression, lack of religious freedom and evangelization.

In this chapter, the focus is on the difficulties faced in the Sudanese Churches through evangelization. We like to understand the term evangelization in the present Sudanese community by the use of scriptures. That is, using the scripture translation to benefit all the tribes in the Sudan, by understanding and preaching the Word of God in the language of the local people. For example, Arabic, Acholi, Bari, Dinka, Nuer, Nuba languages and others. This is to show how the bible can be used to evangelize the Christians, cult's worshippers and the Muslims.

Also we would reflect on the scarcity of priestly formation as a challenge in evangelization the Sudanese in the midst of Muslims by looking at some of the root causes preventing the young people from joining the training to priesthood or religious life, such as the color differences, classes discrimination in sexes, destruction of Churches, denial to re build or build Churches and the rights to worship freely in the Sudan. The Islamic religious intolerance toward Sudanese Christians, in fact, has prevented the Church from maintaining a priestly formation program, stable in the South Sudan. Hence, the young people see no value in entering religious or priestly life,

for they see that the Sudanese government would bar them from their Christian rights and prevent them from preaching and teaching their believers in the laws of the Church.

The Sudan civil war has made many of the Sudanese to stay in Diaspora in many parts of Africa such as Kenya, Uganda, Egypt, Chad, Central Africa and Ethiopia as refugees. The challenge remaining is the Church in Sudan fostering an active Christian education of the spiritual life of the refugees in the neighboring countries spiritually? We shall examine whether the Christian education assists the refugees in leading a healthy Christian way of life in their environment and in the public places, and how they can know each other in order to evangelize the non believers towards God in the Christian and Islamic faith.

2.2 CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES FOR EVANGELIZATION

In Sudan, the Muslims are far ahead in the spread of their faith, not because they preach Allah, or carry the Holy Koran, or put religious *hijabs* (something like, a scapula wrapped with Koran verses) on their bodies, nor because they recite their *tesbih* (the 99 beads indicating the beautiful names of Allah). Rather it appears as if the Muslims form of religious instruction promotes converts in all aspects of their Islamic faith. Christians seemingly fear to identify their religious affiliation as Christians in the world of Islam. Many Christians have gone far in denying themselves when confronted with Christian challenges. For example, Christian are afraid to carry their rosaries or bibles in public among the Muslims, because they have low esteem about themselves.

It is only a misguided or fearful Christian who would think that the defense of the "image of God" i.e. the dignity of the human being, and of the Lord Jesus is a political rather than a religious duty.¹⁵

¹⁵ Catholic Bishops of Sudan, "He Should Be Supreme in Every Way", AMECEA Documentation Service No. 452 (15th March 1996), 5.

In other words, we deny our identity to Christian discipleship, and too often abandon Christ to walk alone to Calvary.

2.3. THE BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The main problem in the use of the scripture arises because of language and interpretation. For a long time the Arabic version and English version were the only ones used in the Sudanese Christian Churches. This had hindered the proclamation of the Word of God to the people who do not know either of the two languages. The arrival of the first Catholic Christian, Fr. Knoblercher, along the Nile to the Dinka and Bari tribes in the South Sudan and the American Presbyterians Eli Smith and Conelius Van Dych missionaries from Egypt and Lebanon in 1852 brought the gospel in the Sudan. They used the local languages of the people which they learnt from the people to interpret and preach the Word of God.

Fr. Uebercher, who went to Sudan in 1854, translated long extracts from the Gospels and Epistles in Bari, wrote a bible and composed some hymns.¹⁶

The availability of the Bible in the a variety of the local dialects helped in the spread of Word of God to the interior villages. The translations made it easier to teach the scripture and to be understood by the unlettered person. Yet, apart from the Arabic use in the north Sudan, translation of the bible in other languages fostered the Christian faith and strengthened the Sudanese communities.

A Christian community at the service of the faith to grow from being a simple study or prayer group, or a social action group in which the members their faith with one another through the proclamation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Janet Person, In Our Own Languages: The Story of the Bible Translation in Sudan, (Nairobi: St. Paul Communication, 1997), 9.

¹⁷ Catholic Bishops of Sudan, "He Should Be Supreme," 9.

2.4. OTHER SUDANESE CHALLENGES : VOCATION AND REFUGEE

LIFE

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has been at war since independence in 1956, with just a difference of 11 years peace of 1972-83. The war whose roots are in the country's colonial past, have provoked the start of the liberation movements in the south Sudan against the government in the north Sudan.

During this civil war, the Sudan has the largest number of internally displaced persons in the world, most of whom live under harsh conditions in the camps of Dar Es Salaam, Jeberona, and Jebel Aulia on the out skirts of Khartoum. It is believed that the Khartoum government does not want to improve the condition of the refugees/displaced living in the Sudanese deserts because majority of the displaced are Christians. Then, it is termed as a form of religious persecution and way to kill or get rid of the Christian southerners with their plea for justice and peace.

“Any hindrance of exercise of religious freedom, in that it calls into question the inviolable transcendence or the human subject, injures the cause to peace”.¹⁸

In the East Africa countries of Kenya and Uganda the refugees acknowledges the good treatments by the Ministry of internal affairs and the Unite Nations High Commissioner for the refugees compared to the displaced camps managed by the Khartoum state. In East Africa refugees are shown to be self reliant after being taught in various training like carpentry, mechanics, weaving and religious instructions. We shall reflect more on life of the spiritual journey in the life of the refugees in a theological understanding.

¹⁸John Paul II, Obstacle To Exercising Religious Freedom Injure Cause of Peace”, Holy Father's address to the Bishops of Sudan AMECEA Documentation Service No. 379 (1st December 1992), 2.

The problem of vocation in the Sudan is in fact caused by the Islamic government which wants to erase Christianity in the Sudan by putting up tough rules and regulations as we have discussed in the section of Sharia law. But the point is the government's the denial to give chances to religious freedom to the ministers of the Word of God to evangelize the Sudanese. Hence, we shall continue our discussion on what are the difficulties that hinder the vocations to the priesthood and Ministers to the Protestant Churches.

1. THE SUDANESE FAITH EXILE

The life of the refugees can be traced back to Old Testament times when Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden, the son of Noah (Ham) was cursed throughout his life, Abram journeyed to a new country, the exile era of the people of God in Egypt and Babylonian exile. The Christians refugees life inside and outside the Sudan imitate the life of the Israelites in the Old Testament times, where they were exiled from one place to another and reflects the life of Jesus who took refuge in Egypt during his infancy. This interpretation of exile gives hope to the Sudanese people who are driven from their homeland. They are called to be disciples of Christ to show love and care to the helpless. Jesus calls each one of us to share in his personal life and to be a model to all those who are persecuted and exiled. He want us to experience the missionary hardship in the exile life of faith. "Be prepared for the people to hand you over to the Sanhedrin and scourge you in their synagogue" (Mt. 10:17). Like many other priests of God, Fr. Anywar Leopoldo worked among the Sudanese refugees in Uganda, in provimissions. The laity learn to imitate the love of Christ physical and spiritual and materially. In a letter of 7th August he wrote:

“These poor people are in extreme need of moral and material help”.¹⁹ The Sudanese Church is ever on the move in all sort of challenges it meets in the exilic life. The Sudanese pastors want to journey together with their people by living and working like them in all manner of life a refugee can experience. The Southern Sudanese Bishops Paride Taban of Torit, Macram Max of El Obeid and Joseph Gasi of Tombura/Yambio Dioceses are always on the move visiting, consoling, caring and giving moral and spiritual teachings to the people in the camps in Uganda, Kenya and Central Africa Republic. The bishops give hope to the refugees community by praying with them for peace in their country and for leaders despite their hard situations and humiliations but in hope in their savior Jesus Christ. Bishop Paride Taban encourages his flocks by saying,

I have become a nomad following my people.. and Jesus Christ has allowed us to share in his humiliation, hunger, poverty; his grace strengthened us to share in this suffering and sufferings of his people.²⁰

Indeed the Catholic bishops in exile want their people to realize that they are not alone in the journey of exile. They are only there to help their flock to know the type of service God wants of them to come out of the sufferings in the foreign land. The Church pray ceaselessly for the freedom, peace and justice to all the citizens of Sudan for reconciliation. The Sudanese pastors and priests view the Church as a ,

A companion with people in their struggle for reconciliation and peace, challenging them to remove hatred from their hearts, stop enmity between villages, tribalism and offering forgiveness to each other.²¹

¹⁹Contran, They Are a Target, 153.

²⁰ Bishop Paride Taban, “I Have Become a Nomad following My People”, AMECEA Documentation Service, No. 432 (1st January 1995), 2.

²¹ Taban, “I have Become..”, 6.

The condition of the refugees is very appalling in many countries, and of every group of people suffering persecution on a political, religious, racial and ethnic aspect. At times these forms of persecution lead to merciless killings in which people hate themselves, for instance the genocide cases in Rwanda where grudges is the order of the day. The Church stand on the refugees life is that, these suffering group of people look forward for support and love from the Church in pleading with them in their sufferings and injustices.

There is the plight of the refugees, of people persecuted because of their political ideas or for professing the faith; there is the violation of the right to be born; the justified limitations placed on human and religious liberty; the defective social structures which increase the sufferings of the old and of the maginalized...²²

Then, the life of exile is the continuation to having faith in God, to understand and to experience His help and mercy and hand in trust and hope in one another through the Church.

The Church in the Sudan advocates a human community that is not only based on the similarity of its members- -the same race and same language, the same class, the same views and the same morals.²³

The Sudanese refugees believe in improving their condition in a combined effort from the community of God and in the following ways:

- a. to know God in the Word of God in the scriptures as the model of the exiled Israelites' struggle for liberation from bondage.

²² Austin Flannery, O.P., ED., Vatican Council II: The More Post Conciliar Documents, Vol. 2 (Bombay: St. Paul's, 1998), 264-65.

²³ Samuel E. Kayanga, Andrew C. Wheeler, "But God Is not Defeated!" Celebrating the Centenary of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan 1899-1999 (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), 39.

- b. to learn the laws of God (Decalogues) and the Church precepts by Catechetical and bible classes.
- c. to understand the effort of the Church and political leaders who are struggling for peace and stability.

The Christian Churches in the Sudan are convinced that the above approaches will help the Sudanese refugees in their camps to facilitate the finding of the root causes of Sudan problems, able to engage in pastoral contact, sympathetic, patient listening and courageous challenges based on the understanding of the gospel.

2. VOCATIONS TO RELIGIOUS AND PRIESTLY LIFE IN THE SUDANESE CHURCHES

The Sudanese Churches are challenged in the words of Daniel Comboni who says in his phrase, "Save Africa with African", applying to the present situation in the Sudanese vocation life. The vineyard of the Lord needs to be harvested but there are no volunteers to clean it. In the Sudan, Vocations are low in number, and these few are elderly, with little strength for the work of the Lord. The Christian denominations like the Catholic Church cry out for the young people to sacrifice themselves to the Lord's vocations to the priestly and religious life. It is hard to find able youth volunteering freely to the study for priesthood. The young Christian people only know to work in the Islamic government to secure their ranks and positions, and when things go wrong in the places of work they convert to Islamic religion. That is very embarrassing to the Church and a tremendous loss to its faithful in the face of the Islamic faith. The Catholic Church as an example, is hard hit here because the already existing Seminarians leave the formation houses for other vocations, like marriage life. This is

discouraging to those who want to join the religious and priestly life. The country Sudan could have had the largest number of vocations from the locals and the expatriates, but because of the unfavorable situation of the civil war and conversions to Islam many Christians centers are closed due to lack of priests. It is very unpleasant to find in the towns of Torit, Tombura/Yambio the mass evacuation of mission houses which are now the offices and army barracks. For example, in Khartoum a Protestant Church is permanently turned into a republican Palace for the president and his cabinet ministers. This shows the Islamic government hostility towards the Christian Churches.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the challenges we have seen so far are the understanding of evangelization. Maybe, the little understanding to the Church evangelization was basically to expand the Church in the material aspect. This difficult to evangelization is all about the announcing of the love of the kingdom of God in various ways, for instance, through pastoral works, catechism classes, sharing the bible classes in the small Christian communities and others. However, the role of evangelization in a deep sense of the Word in Sudan should be to Change the Sudan Churches from the material understanding to the spiritual handicap and to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord of yesterday, today and tomorrow, without any distinction of race, culture or nation. Christ's message is that the Father loves us, invites us to express our faith in the presence of the Father's love among us and to celebrate it. This is with respect to the mission given by Jesus during His farewell (Mt. 28:19).

Finally, the new perspective of today's Christians is the spreading of the Good News in our families, in our places and through our priestly and religious life.

CHAPTER THREE:

3.0 THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH PERSPECTIVE OF DIALOGUE IN SUDAN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Christian and Muslims have lived together for centuries in many parts of the world. in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, in South India and in North Africa. They both live and relate with one another according to their religious backgrounds. In times of wars (Jihad and Crusades), the destruction of Mosques and Churches, slanders bring suspicion between the two parties. However, the two communities had never lived in friendship, respect and co-operation.

over the centuries, many quarrels and dissension's have arisen between Christians and Muslims. the sacred council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding for the benefit of all, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values.²⁴

In this chapter, the encounter is on the understanding of peace between Christianity and Islam to come to know about the necessity of dialogue in an Ecumenical environment. Dialogue, without the use of arms but by accepting each other's weakness and limitations on a more fraternal level is needed. The method of dialogue, it will replace the existing civil war in which people's peace and rights are disturbed and violated. Especially to use dialogue to negotiate the lifting of food stuff to the starving people in the south Sudan and to share equally the countries resources, government

²⁴ Second Vatican Council, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3, in Vatican Council I, ed. Austin Flannery, 669.

responsibilities and the freedom to worship freely must be stressed. So our reflection is on how to work together with the Christian and Islam religion in an Ecumenical spirit to sort out the Sudan religion problems of harassment, freedom to worship with the Islamic government and to find other methods to justice and human rights.

Particularly, this chapter on dialogue will demonstrate the role of the Catholic Church in pursuing for justice and peace with the Islam religion. Also, what the Catholic Church hopes for the future of the faithful in the lord in working along side with their brethren the Muslims is explored. The Catholic Church in the Sudan believe in ecumenical dialogue with Islam as the way to bring unity and peace, liberty and social justice for the Sudanese people.

Finally, the section on the Sudanese and the women activities is a new way to look at dialogue for peace in the Sudan. We can see the oppression on women in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan for been denied rights to do work in the public offices, they are controlled in dressing attires, not allowed to drive cars and so on. It is a trial for women in the Sudanese society to cultivate already what they have started for the good of all the oppressed and the persecuted in political and spiritual life. The main approach is the serious continuation of dialogue in the atmosphere for mutual co-operation in reconciling the nation and religious differences.

3.2 THE NECESSITY OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND ISLAM

The Church mission to the world is a necessity to live the death and resurrection of Christ as a call by God to conversion in the faith of Christ and in fraternal love, perfected in the mutual help of helping and sharing the material and spiritual goods. So

the Christian dialogue is a path to be aware of the presence of God between Christianity and the Islamic religion. It is again a discovery of God's holiness and sanctity. It is a challenge that is posed in the Sudan in the present uneasiness of restlessness of faith and politics. However, the most important concept is that dialogue should come as a deeply pondered aim by the two religions, to respect and learn from each other and respecting God's gratuitous work. There dialogue is defined as, "A discussion between people with different options: a useful dialogue on common problems".²⁵

Dialogue is the basic means to inter-faith relationship between the Christian and Islam religions in settling the religious quarrels brought about by the civil war which is religiously motivated rather than politics. The Catholic Church in the Sudan specifically has the need for dialogue as a path to grow in faith and to know the weak areas of our Christian faith. Some difficulties such as having courage to discuss faith similarities and the communitarian way of living, learning to know the other beliefs without prejudices and to know better the culture and religion tradition of Islam must be overcome. This meeting need to be conducted in a fraternal mood without many struggles and strive to consensus by the people of God to know their beliefs.

True Christian dialogue can never exclude nor be indifferent to the aims of evangelization. even when in dialogue with others, the Christian must always be true to the name, bearing the obligation to witness to Christ.²⁶

Whatever the dialogue taking place between Christian and Muslims on matters of inter-faith, it should not appear as preaching and forcing one idea to the other party. In the inter-religious dialogue, each is showing the understanding of the faith professed in a

²⁵ A. P Cowie, Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary, 4th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Synod of Bishops, The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the year 2000 "You Shall Be My witness" (Acts 1:8): Lineamenta (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 55.

particular religion, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and so on. The need to dialogue is a question of sharing on a particular problem, which is common to the two parties meeting. At times in dialogue process hot discussion arises and to certain faith matters, because one side tries to support while the other opposes the view. So Christian dialogue with other religious believers and non-believers is a place to form the ecumenical spirit when they meditated on a motion by analyzing it in a true spirit of fraternity. An Ecumenical spirit promotes unity and understanding of God's family without becoming a prey to the other religious faith.

The overall risk is that during the process of argument the "weaker" partner in dialogue may become confused, or he might be theologically overpowered, and may be imperceptibly wheeled into religious doubt, or into abandoning his/her religion and embracing that of the more "powerful" dialogue partner.²⁷

The necessity to dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the Sudan is a matter of addressing the essentials and the common grounds among them. And dialogue should not be limited to problems, but it should even occur in times of harmony between the communities of Christians and Muslims. The inter religious faith dialogue in the Sudan in a way is a call to peace, religions, traditions, Christian, and Muslim values. It is a path to inter-human relationships striving for peace and love to form a one religious nation in the African Sudan.

The other important aspect for dialogue is the formation of the Sudan Council of Churches in Kenya and Sudan with the aim to establish religious relationships between the Christians and Muslims. The Sudan Council of Churches wants each religion to recognize, to respect one another culture, language and religion. Every single

²⁷ Francis Cardinal Arinze, Meeting Other Believers (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 22.

ethnic or religious group in Sudan needs to have the liberty to develop its culture and language and to worship God in accordance with its own religious traditions and laws. One of the roles played by the Sudan Council of Churches is to urge the Khartoum government to allow the teaching of the Christian religion in government Schools where the Christian students get taught by their religious educators. They persistently wrote to the officials of the government in the Ministry for Social Planning,

It is a common knowledge that the government educational program is based on religious values. We also understand that Christian education in government schools is to be taught.²⁸

So the emphasis to dialogue with the Islamic religion in the Sudan should be taken as a flow, not on a human level but also seen as a gift from God rooted in prayer, the prayer that transform and repairs all human differences to live together. "You have heard how it was said, you will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. However, I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:43-45).

3.3 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN THE SUDAN

The Catholic-Muslim dialogue in the Sudan aims at establishing harmony and peace in a religious atmosphere. Christianity in the Sudan has suffered a great deal in the face of the challenges from Islam and traditional faiths. Christian people in their homes, villages, cities and refugees outside Sudan all continue to suffer; this is clearly seen in the civil war of the Sudan which is being fought on religious and political backgrounds. For instance, the relief food being distributed by the non-governmental organizations is registered through the Khartoum government. This is done unjustly in

²⁸ Sudanese Church Leaders, Letters to Mohammed Osman El Khalifa, 25 November 1997, photocopy, p.2, n.3.

order to give food only to the people who accept Islam faith. This is a starting point where the Catholic Church disputes with the Islamic government of Khartoum for the injustice in the distribution of food. It wants the government to come with a consensus to meet the needs of the people of God. The Catholic Church's way is to bring peace and reconciliation by being open in speaking the truth from the heart by the rejection of killings and all other forms of violence. So to dialogue with the Muslims, the Catholics hope to call upon forgiveness and repentance in the communities of Christians and Muslims. The Catholic Church in Sudan is strongly motivated to dialogue with the Muslim leaders and to co-operate with the Muslim community. The point is, in order to erase the social injustices in the minds of the Muslims, the two communities ought to see from the small example dishonesty and grudges can spring up. This is the level in which both Catholics or other Christian denominations and Muslims should create an initiative for dialogue. The dialogue which is reached do solve the differences among the leaders in the various types of communities entrusted with responsibility for order and peace. St. James in his letter addressed the issue of dialogue as the outcome of peaceful understanding, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise of righteousness" (Jas 3:18). It is applied in the Catholic-Muslim dialogue as a struggle to overcome the poles of suffering by liberating the people from oppression, tortures, manipulations, by using peaceful methods of prayers that heal and unite the broken hearts. So the religious bodies, when united in an ecumenical body, establish a pact for the common good of the people of God that the government political body can not penetrate.

Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her to discover and acknowledge the sign of Christ's as well as to examine more

and display her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she received for the good of all.²⁹

The Catholic Church in the Sudan has taken initiative through its justice and peace body to work out with people and represent their grievances to the government in a peaceful way. This is to make the people among themselves to imitate the Church system to the approach of justice rather than to take the law in their hands. The Catholic Church and the Islamic religion are bound to be witnesses of unity and truth by approaching one another in knowing one another, living among one another, be with one another and to share the life conditions of each other. Since Christians are to take the first step to approach the Islam religion, they should know that the encountering with Islam is God's gift through ecumenical prayers as means to peace. Thus, dialogue becomes fruitful in mutual co-operation in looking for the national reconciliation and getting rid of the past religious differences in replacing it with respect and understanding for one another.

What we have just said {about the need for Christian ecumenical activity} must also be applied- - although in another way for coming closer together with the representatives of non-Christian religious, an activity expressed through dialogue, contacts, prayer in common, investigation of the treasures of human spirituality, in which, as we know well, the members of these religious also are not lacking.³⁰

3.4 SUDANESE WOMEN AND DIALOGUE

The dialogue initiative that women have taken is very encouraging because it makes men to think more on the problems and the methods to solve the community

²⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 56.1, in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1996), 542.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* no. 6.3, 53.

wrangles peacefully. The following are the reasons why women maintain silence in the Sudan. First, women consider themselves as second persons in the society, because of its male dominating culture. Also the issue of marriage and culture have made a woman to esteem herself as a domestic worker in the house she lives in. Secondly, the Islamic religion looks at females as not having an equal status in society and in the religious organizations of Islam. They are always put in the back of the lines if they have to appear in public places. For instance, when in a bus or in the Mosques they are obliged to stay in the back line and distant from men. In the scripture God created man and woman to be the co-worker of the other in the daily duties of the day, and woman was the best companion God could give man. "Then, Yahweh God made the man to fall into a deep sleep. In addition, he was asleep; he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh up again forthwith. Yahweh God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gn 2:21-23). This manifests God's creation as equal to both male and female to value each other as one flesh with the rights and duties distributed to all alike.

So in the year 1996, the Sudanese women formed a group known as Women Action Group (WAG) to facilitate the women activities in the Sudan. The purpose of the group was to engage in dialogue about peace and development. Since it is the right of all human beings WAG formation function calls upon all the oppressed women to dialogue in a more calm manner without revolution. It is a cry to eliminate the war against the brutality and the abuse of woman and children by the aggressive man. In one of their meetings in Khartoum the northern women expressed the need for all Sudanese women to meet and to express themselves in the Sudan that "Dialogue only

begins when ordinary women come together and see what is their problem".³¹ Because of coming together from all parts of the Sudan, the women's way of dialogue is becoming challenging to men who see and think that the only way to bring peace is to use guns. But for women the end of the civil war is an exercise of seating on a table conference and dialogue without the use of guns and bullets with the oppositions. Indeed women can bring peace and joy in the Sudan if they are given the chance to dialogue with their northern and southern males. For, in the beginning of the Church in Antioch the Christian women worked along-side with men to build up the unity of the Church without prejudices. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

I once talked to a member of southern Sudanese Women association (SWAN) in Nairobi about their role in the Church and this initiative to bring peace in the Sudan through dialogue. The following were the result of our discussion; (T: Tabu, A: Asunta).

"T. What is SWAN?

A. SWAN is the formation of the Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi who meets once in a month to know of their state of living, their families and for the entire Sudanese communities living in Nairobi.

T. What comparison can you make of between "SWAN " with "WAG" ?

SWAN and WAG are the associations started by the Sudanese women, and that for SWAN it is the association for the Sudanese women in Nairobi aiming at the education role of the community in Nairobi, while for WAG it is the association founded by Lillian Graig Harris in Khartoum to co-ordinate the dialogue between the

³¹ Stuart E. Brown, Seeking an Open Society: Inter-faith Relations and Dialogue in Sudan Today, Faith in Sudan No. 2 (Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1997), 93.

women in the north Sudan and south Sudan in solving the Sudan problems. Another aim of the association is to establish a woman's role in the society in understanding that she has something to offer in the community where she is oppressed. A woman in the Sudan who is outside her country works better to intervene in bringing peace by the use of dialogue with other women world wide.

T. What type of the activities do you do in the Association?

A. Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi work together to see that the educated and professional women help the uneducated women to work for peace and development. We are trying in all levels also to ask for donors to support us materially, financially and morally in starting projects like tailoring, Nursery and kindergarten schools and hand crafting

T. Apart from the above mentioned activity do you play a role in bringing religious peace in the Sudan?

A. Oh! The Sudanese Women in Nairobi with the help of the Catholic Diocese of Torit priest and its staff in Nairobi work together by writing letters to the Sudan government and the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) to leave their weapons and to start to dialogue. The Diocese of Torit and other Protestant Churches also are of great help in supporting us with advice in knowing what we are doing for the good of the society and not for the self-interest".³²

Therefore, the SWAN women are working along alongside Muslims Southerners in the Sudanese embassy in Nairobi distinguishing no religion affiliations, race color and language. Their hope is to see that future peace is achieved in the hearts

³² Asunta Kiden interviewed by Joseph Tabu, 11th November 2000, Nairobi, Kenya, verbal talk.

and minds of the devastated community inside and outside the Sudan.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The Sudanese community believed in living peacefully and communally in their village setups. Racism was a thing unheard of, because it was an aspect of manipulation and oppression of people towards the weak, the poor, the marginalized or the disabled. All the factors mentioned brought barriers to dialogue, since they bring destruction to people's cultures, spiritual values, restrictions of freedom and social life of the people by becoming alien in one's own country.

Dialogue in the Sudan is needed between the Christian and Muslim religions today, because it makes people to live and work harmoniously, sharing their opinion, food and spiritual goods with one another. The usefulness to dialogue widens the horizons of individuals to communitarian value in sharing the sorrows and the joys of one another. On the other hand, it makes the Christians and Muslims approach one another without fear and suspicion. This approach to meet and to talk is a way to realize that Christian and Muslims are friends and not enemies. They live and work in the pastoral field of God (Allah) to make known the only one God, the creator of heaven and earth to their believers.

Therefore, dialogue between Christian and Christians, Christians and Muslims and the role of women is the step in experiencing God's reconciliation, mercy and love. Dialogue, also frees the existence to male's domination over females to restore, to change our cultures where necessary and glory in our Africa Sudanese ancestry and heritage.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The persecution of the Church of Sudan is a matter of faith challenges. They are challenges like those the Church faced even from the early Christian community of Antioch where the believers first became known as Christians (Acts of the Apostles 11: 19-26). The Christians in Antioch experienced growth in faith in the face of suffering and death. So this enabled the Christian communities to grow spiritually, pastorally and morally in the face of suffering.

The Church persecution is a challenge not only to the Christians but also to evangelization of Christians in the Islamic state. So, the Church is to show this by reforming the corrupted political systems to abolish religious persecution, killing, and corruption in the community. The reformation can come about when all the Christians and Muslims unite as one religious body.

There is an urgent need for the Church in the Sudan to find a way to form priests, lay religious catechists. They will evangelize all over in the Sudan by promoting vocations and ministries in devastated areas. Evangelization is not to be understood as a task left only to the ordained clergy. In one way or another each individual is called to use his/her gift to evangelize in the community in which he/she lives. Without any distinction evangelization is to foster a relationship in the Church where every person is involved is the exercise. This is the time when the Sudanese Christians are to be aware of their rights and their ability to create a new Sudan Christian Church. They need to sit down and think of all the challenges given to them by the Khartoum government. For instance, the arrests of priests, the faithful and the destruction of their Church centers as a growing realization on the part of Christian communities.

On the question of justice and peace, the Sudanese bishops have boldly tried to

defend the rights of Christians to be seen as the Sudanese citizens with equal rights and obligations. It has been their pastoral concern to appeal for the end of the seventeen years old civil war. This war has caused death, poverty, suffering and exiling has led to the exiling around three million Southerners who have taken refuge in the East Africa countries. The bishops and the Church at large have used the available means to dialogue in all their procedures to establish peaceful atmosphere between the Muslims and other Christian denominations.

Finally, persecution in the Sudanese Churches is a block towards true dialogue and true reconciliation between the Muslims. The new growth in the universal Church will certainly help the Sudanese Church to stay together with the Islam religion in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Glossary

- Allah*** is the Arabic word for God used among Muslims and among Arabs of all faiths.
- Baia'a*** is an Islamic oath of allegiance volunteered by Muslims to their leader who they had chosen strictly in accordance with provisions of the Koran.
- BAQT*** it is a peace treaty made between the Muslims from North Africa and the Christian kingdoms of Nubia in the Sudan.
- Hijab*** is a word in Arabic meaning a magic charm that protects a person from any ill will motives of death, witch craft and sorcery.
- Jok*** is Acholi word for gods and the bad spirits.
- Koran*** is a sacred book of the Muslims, written in Arabic, containing the revelations of the prophet Muhammad.
- Marisa*** is the Arabic word for local liquor.
- Mujahiddin*** the Islam holy jihad fighters.
- Sharia law*** is the sole system of administrating justice in any Islamic country.

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Abbreviations

- SPLA Sudanese People Liberation Army.
SWAN Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi.
WAG Women Association Group in Khartoum.

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Interviewer: Jackson Wani.

Date of the Interview: 24th August 2000.

Personal Data: He is a retired SPLA soldier and now works as a farmer in Uganda.