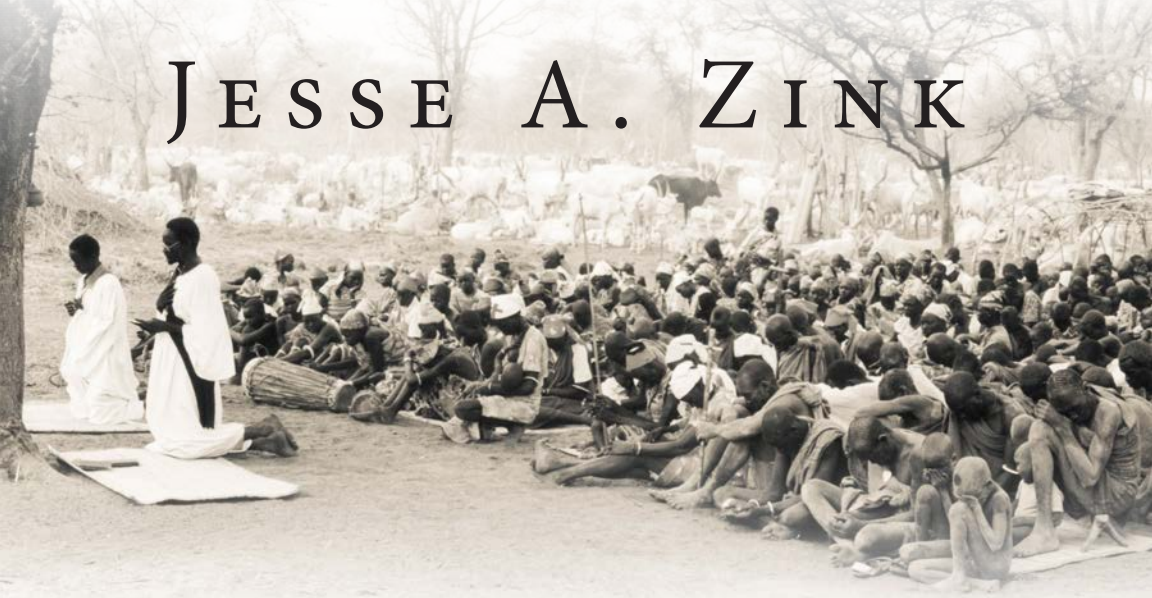
Jesse A. Zink



Christianity and Catastrophe in South Sudan

Civil War, Migration, and the Rise of Dinka Anglicanism

Christianity and Catastrophe in South Sudan

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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Series Foreword

It used to be that those of us from the global North who study world Christianity had to work hard to make the case for its relevance. Why should thoughtful people learn more about Christianity in places far away from Europe and North America? The Christian religion, many have heard by now, has more than 60 percent of its adherents living outside of Europe and North America. It has become a hugely multicultural faith, expressed in more languages than any other religion. Even so, the implications of this major new reality have not sunk in. Studies of world Christianity might seem to be just another obscure specialty niche for which the academy is infamous, rather like an "ethnic foods" corner in an American grocery store.

Yet the entire social marketplace, both in North America and in Europe, is rapidly changing. The world is undergoing the greatest transregional migration in its history, as people from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific region become the neighbors down the street, across Europe and North America. The majority of these new immigrants are Christians. Within the United States, one now can find virtually every form of Christianity from around the world. Here in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I live and work, we have Sudanese Anglicans, Adventists from the Dominican Republic, Vietnamese Catholics, Burmese Baptists, Mexican Pentecostals, and Lebanese Orthodox Christians—to name a few of the Christian traditions and movements now present.

Christian leaders and institutions struggle to catch up with these new realities. The selection of a Latin American pope in 2013 was in some respects the culmination of decades of readjustment in the Roman Catholic Church. Here in Grand Rapids, the receptionist for the Catholic bishop answers the telephone first in Spanish. The worldwide Anglican communion is being fractured over controversies concerning sexual morality and biblical authority. Other churches in worldwide fellowships and alliances are treading more carefully as new leaders come forward and challenge northern assumptions, both liberal and conservative.

Until very recently, however, the academic and intellectual world has paid little heed to this seismic shift in Christianity's location, vitality, and expression. Too often, as scholars try to catch up to these changes, says the renowned historian Andrew Walls, they are still operating with "pre-Columbian maps" of these realities.

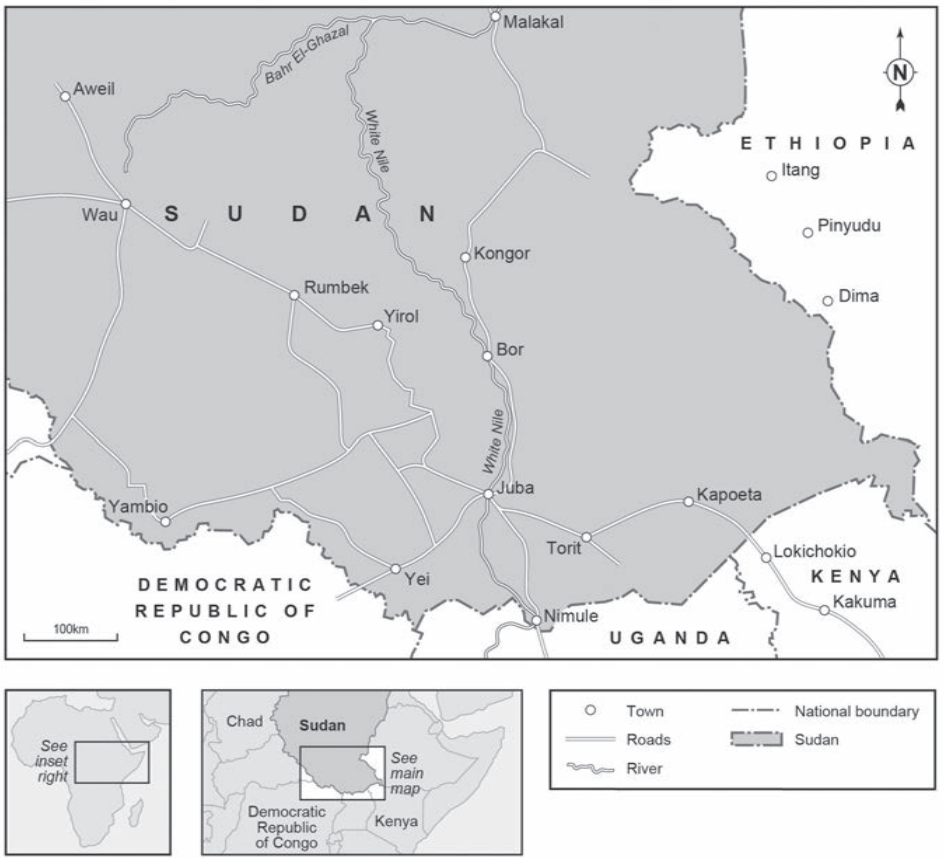
This series is designed to respond to that problem by making available some of the coordinates needed for a new intellectual cartography. Broad-scope narratives about world Christianity are being published, and they help to revise the more massive misconceptions. Yet much of the most exciting work in this field is going on closer to the action. Dozens of dissertations and journal articles are appearing every year, but their stories are too good and their implications are too important to be reserved for specialists only. So we offer this series to make some of the most interesting and seminal studies more accessible, both to academics and to the thoughtful general reader. World Christianity is fascinating for its own sake, but it also helps to deepen our understanding of how faith and life interact in more familiar settings.

So we are eager for you to read, ponder, and enjoy these Baylor Studies in World Christianity. There are many new things to learn, and many old things to see in a new light.

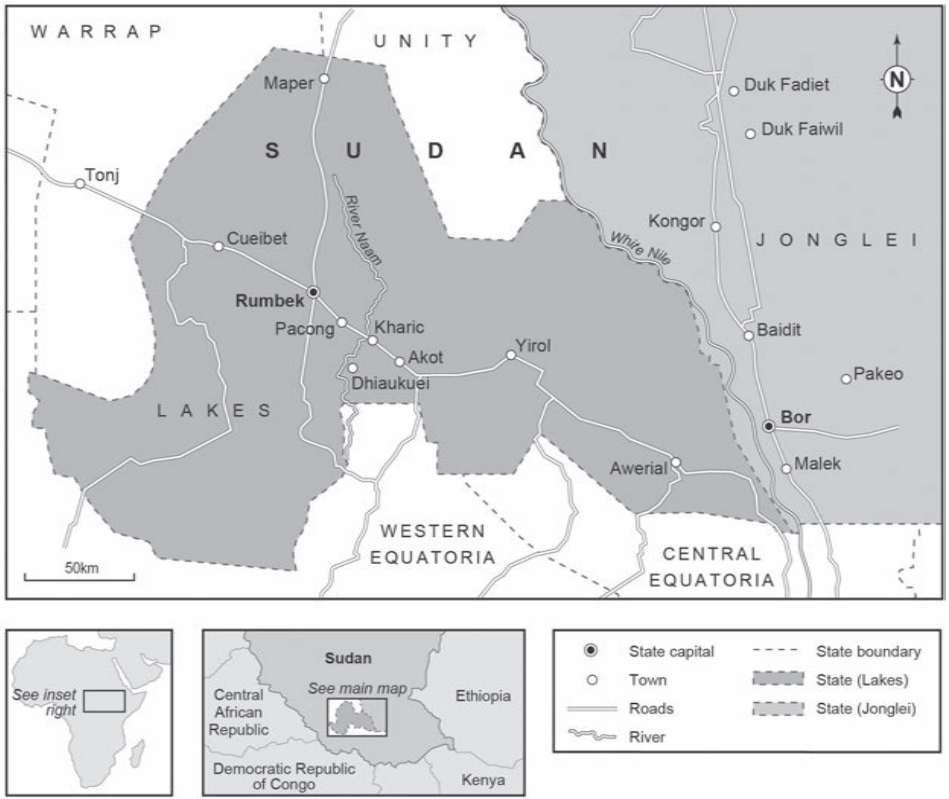
Joel A. Carpenter
Series Editor

To all the peoples of South Sudan,
that they may know peace.

Map 1
The Republic of South Sudan at independence, July 2011



Map 2
Primary area of focus of book



Map 3
Dinka communities on east and west banks of the White Nile

Contents

Dinka Orthography, Names, and Vocabulary

The language of the Dinka people is known as *Thɔngjieng* (*Thuɔŋjäŋ*). One linguist divides it into four dialects: Rek, Agar, Bor, and Padang.[1] The Summer Institute of Linguistics' *Ethnologue* divides Rek to produce five dialects: Northeastern (Padang), Northwestern (Rek), South Central (Agar), Southeastern (Bor), and Southwestern (Rek).[2] The lack of agreement is a reflection of the language's diversity and lack of standardization. There is no standard orthography, and writing conventions vary. There are some 78 different vowel sounds.[3] This book is concerned primarily with the Bor and Agar dialect groups, though the vocabulary used is widely understood across all dialects. In the list below, I have included the Dinka words used in this book, spelled in both English transcription and the Dinka alphabet. In the text of the book, I have generally retained breathing marks for vowels but used the English transcription of some Dinka letters for ease of reading. Thus "ŋ" is rendered as "ng." The letter "c" is frequently pronounced as "ch." As I have spelled names in accordance with how individuals spell them, this means that the name Acol Deng, for instance, is spelled as Achol Deng. I have retained the Dinka

[1] Job Malou, *Dinka Vowel System* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1988), 1.

[2] "Dinka," *The Ethnologue*, http://www.ethnologue.com/language/din.

[3] Malou, *Dinka Vowel System*, ix.

vowels "ɛ" and "ɔ" The former is pronounced like the "e" in "let" and the latter like the "aw" sound in "saw."

Dinka names are patronymic. Thus Akurdit Ngong Akurdit refers to a man given the name Akurdit, who was the son of Ngong and the grandson of Akurdit. At Christian baptism, many Dinka took biblical names. Akurdit became Reuben Akurdit Ngong Akurdit. In a facsimile of Western naming practice, this is often shortened to Reuben Akurdit, though in practice he remains universally known as Akurdit. Such naming practices make subsequent references and alphabetization difficult. Initial references are to the full name. In subsequent references, I followed local custom in referring to people. Nathaniel Garang Anyieth becomes variously Garang, Garang Anyieth, or Bishop Nathaniel, while Benjamin Mangar Mamur becomes Mangar Mamur. In the bibliography and elsewhere, I have alphabetized according to the first Dinka name.

The following is a glossary of Dinka words and phrases used in this book. The spelling in Dinka characters, if applicable, appears in parentheses.

agayth: sub-group of *Jo Wo Liec*

aloong (*alooŋ*): a sub-group of *Jo Wo Liec* related to music

bëny bith: master of the fishing spear

Bung de Diɛt ke Duɔ̈ɔ̈r (*Buŋde Diɛt ke Duɔ̈ɔ̈r*): *Book of Songs for Worship*, a Dinka hymnal

gäm ë rou: second promise (in relation to baptismal preparation)

gäm ë tök: first promise (in relation to baptismal preparation)

jɔk (sing.), *jak* (pl.): local divinity

Jo Wo Liec (*Jɔl wɔ liec*): literally, "Turn back on us"; also a Dinka Anglican youth organization

jɔngrac (*jɔŋrac*): evil spirit

Jɔngdït Lajik (*Jɔŋdït Lajik*): Holy Spirit

jur (sing.), *juur* (pl.): those who are not Dinka, foreigners

lek: (good) news; the gospel

Lierpiɔu (or *Lirpiɔu*): name of a prominent *jɔk* among some Dinka on the east bank of the Nile River

luak: cattle byre

luang de guëër (*luaŋde guëër*): gathering byre (i.e., church)

luängic (*luäŋyic*): a sub-group of *Jo Wo Liec*

mën: central post that supports a *luak*

Muɔnyjieng or *Jieng* (*Muɔnyjiëŋ* or *Jiëŋ*): the Dinka people

Nhialic: God, the heavenly one

pawɛɛr: scattering (a kind of *riäk*)

ran ë Nhialic: person of divinity or a prophet

riäk: catastrophe, disaster

Thuɔngjieng (*Thuɔŋjäŋ*): the language of the Dinka people

tiet (*tiët*) (sing.), *tit* (pl.): ritual expert

toc (sing.), *toic* (*tuɔc*) (pl.): seasonal grazing land

Thiec Nhialic: literally, "Beseech God"; also a Dinka Anglican women's group

Tuk Yinhiɔl: literally, "Bow down"; also the "prayer warriors" of *Thiec Nhialic*

wut (sing.), *wuöt* (pl.): cattle camp; also a closely related kinship group

yath (sing.), *yiëth* (pl.): spirits

yang apar (*yaŋ apar*): a famine year (1986) where people ate *apar* plants

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Abbreviations

ACOA	Anglican Communion Office Archive
BDD	*Bung de Diɛt ke Duɔ̈ɔ̈r*
BGC	Bishop Gwynne College
CCCWA	Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide Archive, Cambridge, UK
CMS	Church Missionary Society (Anglican)
CMSA	Church Missionary Society Archive, Birmingham, UK
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
ECS	The Episcopal Church of the Sudan (Anglican)
GMSM	Gordon Memorial Sudan Mission (CMS)
JWL	*Jo Wo Liec*
NSCC	New Sudan Council of Churches
NSCCA	New Sudan Council of Churches Archive, Juba, South Sudan
SAD	Sudan Archive, Durham, UK
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SSNA	South Sudan National Archive, Juba, South Sudan
SUM	Sudan United Mission
UN	United Nations

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHCRA	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Archive, Geneva, Switzerland
VFM	Verona Fathers Mission (Roman Catholic)

List of Images and Maps

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Preface

On my second visit to South Sudan, I found myself with a group of mostly Dinka clergy debating what to do for dinner. We were in the town of Wau in western South Sudan, and the group had just spent the day organizing relief supplies to be sent to the disputed border region of Abyei. People were tired and there was a question about whether to take a taxi or walk to a local shop for dinner. "I'll walk," said one of the members of our group, a senior cleric in the region. "I walked from here"—he pointed to the ground—"to Ethiopia. Then I walked to Kenya." Almost as an afterthought, he added, "That's how I became a Christian." We walked to dinner that night.

That comment remained with me, and later I asked him to tell me more about it. The story he told was characteristic of the "Lost Boys" who are the subject of the fourth chapter of this book. When this priest was forced to leave his home village as a child, he was not a Christian and knew little of the faith. First in refugee camps in Ethiopia and then later in Kenya, he became a Christian, was educated, and returned to his home as a Christian evangelist where he was now involved in leadership in the church. It was one of many similar stories I heard during my early visits to South Sudan. I had originally traveled there as a theological student to learn more about the church and its ministry in the world's newest nation. But the more time I spent talking with people, the more I became interested in the church's recent history, the trauma it had experienced, and its resilience. In those conversations this book was born.

I conducted my research in South Sudan in what in retrospect appears to be a narrow window of hope about the future of the country. In July 2011, South Sudan declared its independence from Sudan. It was the culmination of a process outlined in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and a decision endorsed overwhelmingly in a referendum of January 2011. I was in Juba, the capital, on 9 July 2011 as the country formally declared independence. A sign I saw that day at the independence celebrations said, "From today, our identity is southern and African, not Arabic and Islamic. We are not worse Arabs but better Africans." It was characteristic of the feelings that marked that day.

Yet in December 2013, shortly after my last research visit to the country, a split in the government led to violence in Juba that spread quickly across the country, often along ethnic lines. Various efforts to stem the fighting have largely proven ineffective. At the time of this writing, parts of the country continue to be consumed by violence, new streams of refugees have sought shelter in neighboring countries, and the world's newest nation is on the verge of becoming a failed state.

The Episcopal Church of South Sudan—the successor of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan that is the focus of this book—continues to play an outsized role in South Sudanese society. The recently retired archbishop, Daniel Deng Bul, was at various moments in his ministry asked to take part in peace and reconciliation efforts. More significantly, at the grassroots level bishops and priests continue to minister to displaced communities in similar ways to those documented in this book. The Diocese of Kajo Kaji, for instance, is now displaced and is working with refugees in northern Uganda in a way that is not dissimilar from the work of the Diocese of Bor described here. More worryingly, one also hears stories of the way interethnic divisions in society continue to affect the church. As the generation of church leadership described in this book retires, there is concern over divisions in the church at a time when the nation it serves is desperately in need of unity. This book cannot address all these issues. Its focus is historical. One of the most sobering parts of writing this book was to see the clear parallels between the events of previous civil wars and events taking place today. History is not so far in the past. Only by understanding what has come before will we—South Sudanese and all those who care about and support them—be able to see the path out of the current situation.

This book is a heavily revised and expanded version of a dissertation submitted to Cambridge University in 2015. My supervisor, David

Maxwell, was instrumental in channeling my interest in and enthusiasm for Christianity in southern Sudan into the dissertation and thence this book. His guidance, questions, and challenges improved my work immensely. The growing community of scholars in Cambridge dedicated to the study of African Christianity, especially Emma Wild-Wood and James Gardom, improved the quality of my work and made the period of my research especially fruitful. I am grateful to the examiners of my dissertation, Joel Cabrita and Kevin Ward, who gave pointed and encouraging feedback. Feedback from the Audrey Richards prize committee as well as anonymous reviewers further strengthened the work and gave me new questions to pursue. Several organizations funded my study and travel to South Sudan, including Emmanuel College, the Spalding Trust, the British Institute in Eastern Africa, the Faculty of History's Lightfoot Fund, and the Episcopal Church Foundation.

In South Sudan, I am indebted to the help and assistance of countless people who took an interest in me and my work and helped me along the way. To name them all would be impossible, but I note my particular thanks to Daniel Kon Malwal and John Jurkuc Wal, who both were exemplary translators. Samuel Galuak Marial and the students at Bishop Gwynne College were always welcoming and added depth and texture to this book. Hilary Garang Deng was a warm host when I visited him in Malakal. I can only hope I repaid this hospitality during his sabbatical term in Cambridge when his insights into the Sudanese church offered me new research avenues to pursue. Malith Kur helped answer some critical final questions in Montreal. Ben Stuchbery prepared the index.

The active community of people in the north Atlantic world who are connected to South Sudan have helped sharpen my interest in this subject, including Ellen Davis, Robin Denney, Sharon Hutchinson, and Andrew Wheeler. Over a dinner of chicken and chips in Juba one night, Jo Bailey Wells perhaps unknowingly planted the thought that became the seed of this book. Sam and Marvis Bergen were generous in their hospitality when I visited Reedley, California, to learn about Marc Nikkel. Joel Carpenter and the team at Baylor University Press encouraged me in the work, offered helpful feedback, and saw the book through to publication.

My wife, Debbie, helped keep me grounded and focused and constantly encouraged me in this work.

To all, my sincere thanks.

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Introduction

Religion and Civil War in Sub-Saharan Africa

By June 1989, Bishop Nathaniel Garang Anyieth had been cut off from communication with friends, supporters, and other church leaders outside his region for nearly five years. Garang was the Anglican bishop of the Diocese of Bor, a vast area on the east bank of the Nile River in southern Sudan populated by a variety of sub-tribes of the Dinka people. In December 1985, one year after his consecration as bishop, he and a majority of the civilian population of the town of Bor had been forced to flee into Bor's rural hinterland in order to escape attacks by the Sudan Armed Forces. It was the early years of Sudan's second civil war. The army of the Khartoum-based government sought to control urban areas in southern Sudan like Bor. The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army largely controlled the rural areas to which Garang and others fled. At that time, the diocese was a small collection of congregations located in the court centers and other small towns in the region, while the dominant religious expression in the rural areas was a set of beliefs and practices that had evolved among Dinka over generations.

Cut off by a war that would eventually result in the deaths of more than two million people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more, Garang was unable to communicate with his superiors and international supporters. But in June 1989 Garang was able to get a letter to a friend. In it, he described what had taken place in the previous four years: "God is now moving among the Dinka people. There is great change when I came among them. . . . What is going on among the people here in our country is [a] mystery to them, and it is unknown to

the world. One can burn his or her idol and come into the church or call Christians to burn it. You can see the cross everywhere. Many churches are being opened. Many new Christian songs are being composed in a great number, very very spiritual songs."[1] Dinka religious expression was changing rapidly, away from a religion of "idols" and towards Christianity. Nine months later, in a letter of appeal to Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, Garang wrote: "during this terrible time of seemingly uninterrupted suffering, God in His own plan is doing wonders in our country the Sudan. It is surprising to notice that there are more converts to Christianity now than any other time, particularly in the Southern Sudan, especially the Dinka Nationality."[2]

The changes that Nathaniel Garang described were one part of a movement of religious change the scale and rapidity of which have little parallel in the history of independent Africa. In the middle of civil war, in territory both within Sudan and among refugees who had been displaced across international borders, in communities led by women and men, young and old, educated and not, Dinka people on both the east and west banks of the Nile River repudiated the beliefs and practices of their traditional religion and turned in large numbers to Christianity, particularly the forms provided by the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, a denomination established by British missionaries and a member province of the Anglican Communion.

This book is the story of that religious change, tracing how an African people, the Dinka, once known by missionaries for their "resistance" to the gospel, turned to Christianity. It is a portrait of a church in crisis, shattered by the catastrophic impacts of civil war and at the same time encountering large numbers of potential converts and unsure how to respond. It is the account of how a mission church feebly planted by European missionaries became a grassroots indigenous movement that spoke clearly to the needs of its people at a time of immense trauma. It is the story of how a people, in the midst of violence, found in Christianity new answers and new resources to help them survive in a changed world.

* * *

Since the end of the colonial period in the 1950s and 1960s, many African countries have been formed and deformed by extended periods of

[1] Nathaniel Garang Anyieth, letter to Marc Nikkel, 30 June 1989 (NSCCA).
[2] Nathaniel Garang Anyieth, letter to Robert Runcie, 27 March 1990 (NSCCA).