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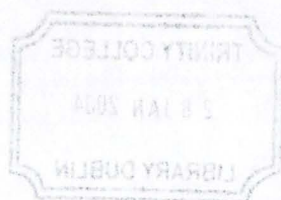
PROSPECTS FOR CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER
MUSLIM RULE IN THE SUDAN

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University of Dublin
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Irish School of Ecumenics

**PROSPECTS FOR CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER
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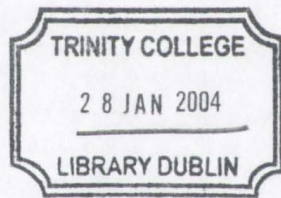


A Dissertation submitted in Partial fulfilment of the Requirement for
the Degree of a Master in Philosophy (Ecumenics) at the University
of Dublin, Trinity College (Irish School of Ecumenics)

By:

Eliaba Lako Obed

September, 2002



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DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of M. Phil (Ecum.) has not been submitted for a degree at any other University, and that it is entirely my own work. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the dissertation upon request.

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PROSPECTS FOR CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER MUSLIM RULE IN THE SUDAN

Eliaba Lako Obed Elias,

ABSTRACT

Forty-eight years of coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the modern Sudan have been marked strongly by tension and hostility, though with periods of creative co-operation and peace.

Geographically, Sudan is the largest political unit in Africa. This wide territory and its location serve as a bridge to link two distinctive cultural realms i.e., the black African cultural realm and the Arab-Islamic cultural realm. It is this reality that gave the Sudan a unique strategic, geopolitical and cultural dimension that continues to shape its development. Sudan is virtually a microcosmos of the whole Africa continent. The majority of her population are Muslims (about 70 percent) with 30 percent belonging to other religions, including Christianity.

The response of the Muslim majority rule to the presence and demands of non-Muslim minorities has required a major theological adjustment at least at the official level. This work looks into prospects for these minorities to coexist with the Muslim majority according to the principles of the international documents of human rights to which, Sudan is a signatory. It is absolutely necessary that both Muslims and non-Muslims be aware of the different challenges that face each of them, and respond to them in such a manner as to lay a new solid

foundation for a much desired new era of justice, peaceful coexistence and prosperity. This goal can be achieved only through inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogues of different forms, ranging from academic partnership to ecumenical bodies down to inter-city neighborhoods.

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INTRODUCTION

Christians and Muslims should learn to resolve their differences peacefully through dialogue and understanding, so that they may act out of genuine concern for the other's welfare. Both should also accept that they must live in communities made up of Christians, Muslims and people of other religions. Muslim and non-Muslim cultures and civilisations should be able to coexist without being dominated by the other. What has strained relations between Muslims and Christians in particular is the Muslim insistence on the concept of *dhimmi* or protected Christian or Jews minorities in a Muslim society. This concept reduces non-Muslim minorities to second-class citizens, because the Islamic law recognises a Muslim only as a full citizen in a Muslim society.

The concept of protected minorities makes it difficult for Muslims to associate with people of other religions in their society. Both Muslims and Christians however, need each other to co-operate in the common enterprise of making a world adequate for the historical maturity of humankind. In this respect, this dissertation urges Muslim scholars to rethink a new re-interpretation of the Islamic tradition, and especially the concept of *dhimmi*, to suit the principles of international human rights law.

This dissertation examines the prospects or changes in the concept of *dhimmi*, which have been made elsewhere in some Muslim societies. Thus, their

examples could be used for dialogue in conflicts, i.e., the North-South civil war in the Sudan. The dissertation is divided up into five chapters as noted below.

Chapter one looks at the historical background of *dhimma* status in the Prophet Mohammed's lifetime in Medina in AD 622. The *dhamma* status was originally modelled on the contract between Mohammed and Jewish community at Khaybar Treaty in 628, to regulate relations between Muslims and the Jews. After the death of the Prophet Mohammed, *dhimma* status became a model to determine the relations between Muslim victors and conquered population outside Arabian Peninsula. The chapter also examines *dhimmi* conditions under the Ottoman Empire and their emancipation under colonial rule in the Middle East.

Chapter two deals with *dhimma* status in changed circumstances under nation-states. This was the period after the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire and the European occupation of the Arab lands. It witnessed also the rise of Arab nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism and some religious movements as a result of the emancipation of *dhimmi*, new missionary activities in the Middle East and colonialism.

Chapter three is about the concept of *dhimmi* in Turkey and Egypt. These two countries were selected as examples because the concept of *dhimmi* was rethought and reformed. Also, because of their long historical background of contact with the Sudan, their examples could be used as common ground to support dialogue between the Muslim and non-Muslim in the conflict in the

Sudan. The chapter also deals in particular with Muslim-Christian relations in nation-states' struggles for independence from colonialism.

Chapter four looks into the practices of *dhimma* in the Sudan, the chief causes of the decay of Nubian Christianity and the rise of Islam in the Sudan. Later, it considers the period of Islamic conquest in the Sudan, Christian-Muslim relations during colonial rule and in the post-independence Sudan. Chapter five finally offers an opening discussion of inter-religious relations and social power in Turkey and Egypt, noting both similarities to and differences from the Sudan during the twentieth century. Then it will contrast the possibilities and limitations of applying these insights to Sudanese experience. The chapter concludes by commenting on the future prospects for the Sudan.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *DHIMMA* STATUS

1.0 BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The historical background of Christian-Muslim relations goes back to the birth of Islam, and the Prophet Mohammed's lifetime in Medina in the year AD 622. When Mohammed and a group of his followers migrated to Medina, the local population there consisted of Jews, pagan Arabs and a few Arabs who had converted to Judaism. Mohammed when he was in Mecca, had deep respect for the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians. He attempted to win the Jews over to his own religion, but in vain (*Q2: 4*). Later on, he organised Muslim immigrants into a community known as *Umma* (Muslim community). He taught them an egalitarian moral system founded on the principles of solidarity, charity, mutual confidence and respect that ought to prevail among Muslims.¹

In these principles, the heathen Arabs and those who had converted to Judaism had no choice but to convert to Islam, because the Prophet taught that an Arab was only to be a Muslim. ² Relations with non-Muslims was elaborated progressively on the basis of a strategy of hostilities and truces pursued in accordance with the requirements needed to assure Muslim victory. Part of strained relations between Muslims and non-Muslims was that the Jews did not recognise him as either Prophet or Messiah. They rejected the doctrine preached by Prophet Mohammed that claimed:

The *Qur'an* is a book of divine origins revealed progressively to Mohammed through the angel Gabriel. Islam is the only true and eternal religion. The prophets of Israel and Jesus had already preached it and foretold the coming of Mohammed, but the Jews and Christians, jealous of the perfection of the new religion, had rejected him and falsified their own Scriptures. ³

In 628, after taking advantage of a treaty of non-belligerency (*Hudaybiyah*) with the Meccans, the Prophet Mohammed took the opportunity to attack the Jewish oasis of *Khaybar*. The oasis was under siege for a month until the Jews surrendered to him under the terms of a treaty known as *Dhimma* or protected non-Muslim minorities. The word could also mean those conquered by Muslim armies but who refused to embrace Islam and accepted to pay head tax known as *jezya*. ⁴

The terms of the *Khaybar* treaty stated that the Jews were allowed to cultivate their oasis on condition that half of their products were ceded to the Prophet.

The Prophet retained the right to break the treaty and expel the Jews whenever he wished. Later, both Jews and Christians were to submit to Muslim rule under similar conditions to those set at the treaty. ⁵

According to An-Na'im, the Jews and Christians who accepted the *dhimma* pact were to pay *jizya* and submit to Muslim sovereignty in exchange for security of their person and property, and allowed to practise their religion and to apply their laws. ⁶ *Dhimma* status was granted only to Jews and Christian minorities who happened to live within a Muslim society, because the *Qur'an* recognised them as people who received divine revelations

previously. Although the Islamic world claims that the *dhimmi*s were tolerated and enjoyed protection of life, liberty, freedom of expression and possession of property during the pre-Islamic era, they were in fact subordinate minorities with a recognised but inferior position.

In spite of the obvious development in the attitude of the Prophet Mohammed, before his death in 632, he had already managed to create a sense of unity among the warring tribes of Arabia under himself as a religious and political leader. He made several treaties with the Christian communities there, most of whom were either Nestorian or Monophysite.⁷

In these treaties, he also guaranteed protection for their bishops, priests, monks and hermits, none of whom was to be moved from their abode. Yet some Christians and Jews fearing violence, the burden of paying heavy taxes, and who believed their protection as being temporary in nature, converted to Islam.

The death of the Prophet Mohammed brought about many changes later with regard to relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The *Khaybar* treaty, which was meant to define the relationship between Muslim victors and the local conquered inhabitants, was thereafter to be used as a model for treaties that were made with the conquered nations beyond the Arabian Peninsula.

As the Muslims grew more powerful, *Caliph* Ummar I, the successor of Prophet Mohammed and his followers used *dhimma* status for the spread of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. It was used for economic, political and religious interest. The future relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims was redefined through *jihad* or holy war against infidels, which was claimed by Muslims as their rights of conquest, part of the law pertaining to the division of booty, including the fate of vanquished populations whose lands were taken over by Islamic community. According to the Muslim tradition of the *Khaybar* treaty, the seized land belongs to *Allah* (God) and his Messenger. ⁸

The primary principles guiding *jihad* were to summon non-Muslims either to convert to Islam or else accept the supremacy of the Muslim conquerors. If this was refused, non-Muslims faced attack until they submitted to Muslim domination. *Dhimma*, in theory, meant that life and property were guaranteed to those who accepted the pact, but soon the interpretation and application of its conditions transformed the *dhimma* into a codified system of legalised tyranny, because of the difficulty of putting it into practice. The *dhimmi*s define were left under the mercy and protection of the Muslim leaders alone, who were free to either protect or give them up to humiliation and persecutions by their communities. ⁹ *Dhimma* evolved over centuries, and this process was governed by the irrefutable belief in the superiority of Islam and its universal supremacy.

For example in the *dhimmis'* concession to *Hira* (Iraq) in 633, a specific clause was introduced dealing with the principles of a distinction in clothing between Muslims and non-Muslims. Under *Caliph* Umar ibn al-Khattab (640), both Jews and Christians were expelled from the *Hijaz*. He based his action on the *Khaybar* treaty, which stated had that the land belongs to *Allah* and his Messenger, who could annul his pact if he so wished. And he justified expulsion of the Jews and Christians as a fulfilment of the Prophet Mohammed's advice that 'No two religions should exist together in the Arab peninsula.'¹⁰

This interpretation of Ummar I continues until today; non-Muslims are not allowed to enter Mecca or Medina. No churches are allowed to function in Saudi Arabia. Christian worship, services and activities are not openly permitted and Christian clergy are also not allowed into the country in any official capacity.

1.1 ORIGINS OF LEGISLATION GOVERNING *DHIMMA* STATUS

One gets the impression that the *Qur'anic* legislation for Jews, Christians and Sabeans, the so called People of the Book (*ahl al-Khitab*), was based largely on the Prophet Mohammed's conquest of *Khaybar* oasis in AD 628. Following his death, Muslim armies under the *caliphs* swept over the Arabian Peninsula up to non-Arab lands, absorbing a large number of conquered people and Muslim communities in the process.

Under Islam, land once possessed by Islam, if subsequently lost to the invader, remained land that is holy to Islam. It was especially imperative that such lost lands be restored to the rightful rule of Islam. Therefore, an Islamic system of legislation was required to govern the multitudes of the subjected people in an Islamic empire.

Thus, Muslim theologians used the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed or *Sunna* and codified it according to the four principal Orthodox Muslim schools of law: the *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*. They agreed unanimously that since Islam was the only true religion, what the Muslim community (*Umma*) accepted as being true and just must be so. These were the principles called *ijma* (the consensus of the Islamic community).¹¹ Later Muslim theologians elaborated on *dhimma* status based on the *Qur'an* and the Tradition as a special legislation to regulate the relationship of Muslims with Christians and Jews. This body of rules was known as the covenant of Umar I (634-644), though later Arab historians variously attributed it to Umar II (717-720).¹² The legal status of *dhimma*, thus defined, was based mostly on the contacts between the Prophet Mohammed and the Jewish and Christian tribes of Arabia in the *Khaybar* treaty.

Dhimma status thus lost its original character because of different leaderships and because of the behaviour of non-Muslims themselves towards their Muslim rulers. It became the formal expression of legalised persecution, and it also became instrumental in the success of the politics of Arabisation and Islamicisation of the vast regions outside Arabia, and the

progressive disappearance of indigenous peoples and cultures. *Dhimma* also became the source of an economy that encouraged Muslim armies to continue fighting for wealth, political power and the spread of Islam.

Islamic law however, recognised the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-khitab*) as the people who had received a previous revelation from God. They were entitled to tolerance in a Muslim society (*Q* 2:262, 5:69 and 22:17), but only Muslims were recognised as full citizens in the Islamic state. These principles did not, however, extend to heathen communities, who were made either to convert to Islam or face death.¹³

The Muslim view on *dhimma* cannot be found as such in the *Qur’an*. The Muslims considered the Islamic law to be legal code, or law, through which God legislates for all human affairs.¹⁴ Even Christian-Muslim relations in respect of Islam were determined by it. The origins of *dhimma* status came about through the conventional Muslim view, according to which the world is divided into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* (Muslim and non-Muslim territories). The status of a person, therefore, was determined by religious affiliation. In *dar al-Islam*, only Muslims enjoyed full citizenship rights, while the *dhimmi*s had rights in the form of concession, as noted earlier in this chapter.

According to An-Na’im, the victorious Muslim armies were entitled to take enemies’ property as spoils of war in accordance with prevailing practice, which was clearly recognised in the *Qur’an* which regulated the distribution

of such booty. ¹⁵ He further noted that, in Islamic law, Muslims might have to conclude peace treaties (*sulh or ahd*), suspending hostilities with non-Muslims as the politics of Muslim interests required. But such treaties must be of a temporary nature and for no longer than ten years. This was only to permit Muslims to resolve their internal affairs, or else to enable them prepare and reorganise themselves for the next round of war with non-Muslims. The reason was that Islamic law (*Sharia*) states that Islam and unbelief cannot coexist in this world. Therefore, whether through active fighting or other means, *dar al-harb* (non-Muslim controlled territories) must be brought within *dar al-Islam* (Muslim controlled territories). ¹⁶

It should be noted that this approach of *Sharia* contradicts the *Qur'anic* verse which commands that no force be used to convert unbelievers to Islam (*Q 2:257*). The verses Muslims used to justify fighting state, "Fight in the cause of *Allah* those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits, for *Allah* does not love the transgression" (*Q 2:190-193, 22:39*), which is a permission to retaliate in self-defence against those who waged war against Islam. The question is "How could Muslims' war outside their territory be considered as self-defence?" Even *Q 9:29*, that was used regularly to force unbelievers to convert does not permit anyone to do so. Its states, " Fight those who disbelieve in God and the last day, until they pay the *jizya* as compensation for military services a symbolic amount only."

Based on those verses, Christians and Jews could not be categorised as people who disbelieve in God and the last day, because they do so. Besides

those verses, the Muslims have a concept that they are to be superior to any believers of other religions, because they think that they are in the right path and faithful to God (*Q* 3:110). Therefore, Christians and Jews who refuse to embrace Islam, should be conquered and humiliated or subjected to the payment of *jizya* and *kharaj* (*Q* 4:29).

These were some of the reasons why the *dhimmis* were barred from sharing in government and from service in the army, in a Muslim society social. Such conditions alone could be a force to make non-Muslims accept Islam as a relief from burden. But such treaties, which would use force against a group of people for religious or political purposes, are no longer valid or tenable under the modern world's principles of human rights.

1.2 ASPECTS OF *DHIMMIS*' CONDITIONS

In order to understand aspects of *dhimmis*' conditions, one needs to define the term *dhimma*. The term means, a compact which a non-Muslim, Christian or Jew, agrees to respect and the violation which makes him or her liable to *dham* (Arabic word meaning to blame). As Ye'or puts it, *dhimma* is a status and the person who accepted it is called *dhimmi* or protégé (protected person).¹⁷ The *dhimmi*, then is, who lives in a Muslim society without being a Muslim. The *dhimmis* lived in Muslim society as minorities or conquered people. Their protection relied entirely on the Muslim leaders against the Muslim community itself, and sometimes, the threats of foreign

invasion. The *dhimmis* had a particular social, economic and political status as a group.

As mentioned in the previous section, during Prophet Mohammed's era, the *dhimma* status could be afforded to all non-Muslims who accepted the pact, except for pagan Arabs who had no choice but to convert to Islam. And the Islamic law (*Sharia*) dealt with them as members of a community not as individuals, because the *Sharia* regards the adherents of each religion as a community, controlled by a guardian of its sacred tradition, but which remains subject to the jurisdiction of the Islamic state in public affairs. ¹⁸ *Sharia* shows that the *dhimmis*, by the mere fact of their existence, had no claim to any rights apart from those conceded to given them as a community.

It seems the *dhimma* status under *Sharia* law was open to many interpretations, as the sources included contradictory and ambiguous statements of the Islamic state's attitude towards non-Muslims. There has always been incompatibility in theological declarations and the practical implementation by various leaders throughout Islamic history. Another problem was that *dhimma* status has no specific guarantees for minorities' rights, nor specific penalties for violation. The degree of tolerance toward the *dhimmis* depended on the Muslim rulers and each one of them had his interpretation and application of it.

For example, the pact of *Caliph* Ummar II (717-720) regulated the discriminatory status imposed on the *dhimmis*. They had to pay the *jizya*,

and in order to have the right to cultivate their own land they had to pay the tax of *kharaj* (land or property tax). The Muslim Empire was subsidised by the non-Muslims' taxes. ¹⁹ As this was during the late ninth century, some Muslim leaders discouraged the conversion of the *dhimmis* to Islam because it reduced the poll tax and upset the budget of the state. ²⁰

Caliph Umar II again placed more restrictions on the *dhimmis*. There was to be no construction of new churches or restoration of the old ones; the use of bells, sacred books, and crosses in public were prohibited; church services were to be in silence and no lamentation was allowed at funerals. Houses of *dhimmis* had to be inferior to those of Muslims. Blasphemy against Islam was punishable by death. Relations with *dhimmis* were discouraged. And *dhimmis* were not allowed to exercise authority over Muslims, and could not testify against them. Their movements were restricted and they were not allowed to bear arms. ²¹

The inferiority of the *dhimmis* was also expressed in their dress. They were to wear different colours to what the Muslims wore. They were permitted to ride only donkeys, and had to address their masters in a low tone.

In comparison to Umar II's era, the *dhimmis'* conditions improved greatly in the time of *Caliph* Mu'awiyya ibn Abu Sufyan (661-680) in the *Umayyad* era. Christians played an important role in the formative period of early Islam in Damascus and later in Baghdad. They were

involved in the translation and transmission of Hellenistic culture and philosophy into the Arabic language, and were also active in medical science. The prominent example of this was John of Damascus, who in 635 AD was involved with the opening of the gate of Damascus to the Muslim armies of Khalid ibn al-walid (died in 641/642). For many years John of Damascus served as secretary to the *Caliph* but later withdrew to the Saint Sabas Monastery south of Bethlehem, because he had fallen into disfavour. ²²

Despite John of Damascus' withdrawal or discouragement, the *dhimmis'* conditions were generally good in the *Umayyad* era. This is affirmed by Abel Malik, a Nestorean bishop (685-705), who described the Muslims as those who did not strive against Christianity, but came to defend it and won the respect of all Christians and even contributed to the church. These remarks demonstrate that the *dhimma* status had no specific rules governing it, but depended on the Muslim leaders throughout Islamic history. This upheaval conditions of the *dhimmis* led to European colonisation of the Muslim world, in order to influence the Muslims for the emancipation of the *dhimmis* in the whole Ottoman Empire. We shall explore what we can know of conditions of the *dhimmis* in our next section, which will look into their conditions under colonialism.

1.3 *DHIMMIS* UNDER COLONIALISM

The rise of colonialism had two major reasons behind it, European interest in the Middle East and the Christian missionary movement. These reasons were linked with the emancipation movement of the *dhimmis*, which was derived from the Declaration of the Rights of Man, as well as from the principles of national self-determination. 23

By the end of the 18th century Britain had lost its thirteen American colonies and the industrial age had started in Europe. The search for raw materials and new markets saw the rise of European interest in the Middle East. Another reason was that Christian Europe was convinced of its inherent superiority as both a religion and a culture. 24 For this reason the political challenge of colonialism was intensified by a wave of missionary activity that openly questioned the viability of Islam in the modern world. Thus, Christian Missionaries often served the imperial aims of their home governments. The printing press as they founded helped them to disseminate western ideas, through teaching European languages, civilisation and culture to the conquered peoples.

To Muslims, European interest in the Middle East was linked to emancipation movement campaigns as pretexts to undermine the sovereignty of Muslim states. They exploited the issue of the treatment of the *dhimmis*, claiming that it was unacceptable and clearly a violation of religious freedom by modern standards. Despite incidents of discrimination and mistreatment, the Muslims are proud that the relative tolerance accorded to non-Muslims, when judged by the standards of the

day, showed far greater tolerance than did the Christian west to their non-Christian minorities. 25

But from the Europeans' point of view, they saw that for centuries the status of *dhimmis* was determined by the *Sharia* in a situation where Muslim rulers enjoyed unchallenged hegemony over their non-Muslim subjects. As such, they felt that the treatment of non-Muslims under *Sharia* law was unacceptable and that therefore pressure needed to be exerted on Muslims earlier to secure emancipation for *dhimmis*.

This act collided with the Russian threat to occupy some parts of the Ottoman Empire. Russia, seeing the position of the Ottoman Empire weakened, claimed to exercise protection over the Orthodox subjects of the Empire. When Turkey appealed to Europe for alliance, France and Britain took advantage of the existing dispute between Russia and France over Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic monks at the holy places in Palestine. Also, Europe wanted to occupy Muslim states for the reasons mentioned above. Both France and Britain allied with the Turks and defeated Russia in the Crimean war (1853 – 1856). 26

The defeat of the Russian Army in the Crimean war meant the dominance of the (Western) French-English alliance throughout the Ottoman Empire. This was how modern colonialism started in the Middle East. When France occupied Tunisia in May/June 1881, a great

protest ensued in the Islamic East. ²⁷ These protests were because the Arab hopes for independence from the Ottoman rule, were dashed for several decades. The way was open for massive and uncontralled penetration by the economic, cultural, social and religious power of the West.

Another thing that angered Muslims was that after European powers had occupied Muslim states, they appointed themselves protectors of various Christian minorities, and aggressively monitored their treatment as pretexts for interfering in Ottoman Empire affairs. These pressures were a factor in the special edicts of the *Gulhane* Decree of 1839, and the *Hatti Humayum* 1856, which formally granted equality to all citizens of the Ottoman Empire.

According to Ovey, when the Europeans occupied Muslim states they should have worked to ensure the equality and unity of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. ²⁸ Instead, they invariably favoured non-Muslim minorities and invoked the need to protect them from the Muslim majority, as a rationale for their rule. Consequently, the non-Muslims underwent a gradual but radical change from their *dhimma* status into a status resembling resident aliens. Their rights and obligations were no longer fixed by the Islamic traditions, but by European foreign powers, who claimed to protect the entire Christian and Muslim communities. That raised tension, for according to *Sharia* law it was not possible for

Muslims to be protégés of non-Muslim powers, and to be entitled to the protection status of *dhimmis*.

These reforms were consistently rejected by both Christian and Muslim leaders. However, the church hierarchy rejected the reforms, as they feared that after the departure of the Europeans it could lead to their suffering at the hands of the Muslims. The Muslims rejected the reforms on the grounds that Islam was the only true religion and thus resented the government effort at equalising the status of *dhimmis*.²⁹ The Muslims considered that all the European Christian nations were united in a conspiracy against the Muslim World.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the emancipation campaigns favoured Turkish Christians. Both Muslims and non-Muslims retained equal rights based on citizenship. It was through European insistence that the rights of the *dhimmis* to dignity, equality and security were recognised and guaranteed. On the other hand, this resulted in the rise of Arab nationalism, and the sufferings of the Arab Christians and Arab Muslims at the hands of the Turks.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In sum, since the time of the Prophet Mohammed, Muslims are the only ones to exercise power in an Islamic state, according to *Sharia law*. *Dhimmis* were not to assume high offices where they could influence

important decisions or lord it over Muslims. As example of John of Damascus who reached a high position, but later had fallen into disfavor because of his Christian faith. Islamic legal system sees society divided into two classes of subjects, Muslims are the real citizens and others are tolerated subjects given limited guarantees by the Islamic state.

As citizens, therefore, Muslims are not equal to Christians, and do not have the same rights and duties before the law. This relative integration of non-Muslims in the state as accepted aliens is not only a theological theory, but has always been implemented in practice in different measures of strictness or tolerance. This history has left a bitter residue among Christians and Jewish communities under Muslim rule, who have been relegated to the status of second-class citizen in their own country. In reality, the *dhimma* status was intended by the Prophet Mohammed to designate a special covenant of protection between Muslims and non-Muslims. But later, it changed its meaning when used by Caliphs to gain different ends.

The concept of *dhimma*, in fact, was a sort of a covenant meant to regulate relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, which can be redefined today in the light of new realities. The multi-faith and multiethnic societies of Turkey provide a substantial example of pluralism. The *Qur'an* also emphasises this (*Q* 5:48): "God chose to create the world with different nations and tribes." Thus, there are possibilities for change, accommodation and coexistence between

Muslims and non-Muslims. Most of these prospects will be discussed in the following chapter, which deals with *dhimmi*s in changed circumstances under nation-states.

END NOTES

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8. Ye'or, The Dhimmi, pp 44 - 45.
9. Ovey, Muslim-Christian Relations, pp 32 - 33.
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17. Ye'or, The Dhimmi, p 30.
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CHAPTER TWO

DHIMMIS IN CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER NATION-STATES

Historically, *dhimma* status often lost its original character and became the formal expression of legalised persecutions. Its contracts included the humiliating *jizya*, exclusion from public office and inequality before the law. Other measures were designed to segregate and humiliate tolerated minorities. The best *dhimma* system could still discriminate against *dhimmis* and violate their religious freedom. This is especially objectionable in the context of modern nation-states. In such circumstances, Muslim scholars have to rethink the concepts of *dhimma* and *jihad*, and if possible consider reform of the rights, which are to be guaranteed to all citizens. These are the aspects to be dealt with in this chapter.

2.0 ARAB NATIONALISM

Modern Arab nationalism is a product of 19th and 20th century transformations. Before this, the Arabs and some non-Muslims identified themselves as either Muslims, Christians or as subjects of large political entities such as the Ottoman Empire. The introduction of the reforms noted in the previous chapter, particularly the emancipation of *dhimmis* and the equality of all citizens of the the Ottoman Empire return for

military and technological assistance, brought the Ottoman government into conflict with various religious circles.

What particularly angered Muslim circles was the growing context of co-operation, exchanges and cultural interactions between *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam*. The traditional concept of *jihad* was being replaced by a peaceful relationship favourable to the adoption of reforms and ideas inspired by the Europeans, and which could not be viewed solely according to Islamic theological concepts.

Thus the inner logic of *jihad* could not tolerate religious emancipation, because non-Muslim territories and the inferiority of conquered peoples constituted the interdependent and inseparable principles underlying the expansion and political domination of the *Umma*.¹ The *Ulama* (Muslim scholars) been to maintain the *dhimma* and to punish the insolence and arrogance of the *rayas* (*dhimmis*), stirred up fanaticism amongst Muslims and motivated them for a religious uprising. But the aim was political: to intimidate the Ottoman administration for carrying out the reforms.²

As one could deduce from the previous chapter, the reasons for the uprising were that both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians sensed that the European campaigns were aimed at undermining the sovereignty of their lands. Many also saw these attempts to promote religious equality as a pretext to jeopardise the Turkish authority over the entire Islamic Empire for colonial aims.

Wessels argues that the main factor that caused such hatred was the combination of colonialism along with new missionary activities. ³ The Arab Nationalist movements (both Christians and Muslims) saw the new Christian missionary efforts to be flowing from imperialist arrogance. They also considered the Christian missionary movement to be more harmful for Arab lands than imperialism, because imperialism only came to their land behind the missionary veil. The Arab Muslims especially, were convinced that the missionaries were using local Christians as tools for foreign powers in a divide-and-conquer politics that was intended to weaken their national movements. Although the missionaries provided schools and other services to the Muslim states, it was seen as a delaying tactic to the development of Arab nationalism.

The above reasons fuelled strong Arab feelings for Ottoman federalism and readiness to contain and fulfil Arabism within an Ottoman structure that had existed there before 1918. For what made the Arabs remain largely loyal to the Turks' rule was due to a combination of reasons: among which the very real fear of a European occupation loomed prominently; bulwark against further external aggression; internal dissension and the perpetuation of the inferior status of the *dhimmis*. ⁴ Since the demographic and political conditions by and large had reduced the scope of Ottomanism to the Muslim population of the empire, there was no any reason to remain under Ottomans rule.

Thus, the Arab nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire begot Turkish nationalism, which in turn inspired the rise of Arab nationalism. It came to a full tide during the devastation of World War I (1914 – 1918), under harsh military rule and the final defeat of the Ottoman armies. ⁵ This further accelerated the search for new political strategies, alignments and identities.

One evident feature in Arab identity in the 1920s was the desire and retrieves the Caliphate as an Arab prerequisite after its termination by the Turks 1923. The right to an Arab Caliphate had been urged by the influential author, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1848 – 1902), in the hardening of Arab feelings against the Turks. ⁶ He argued that aligning Islam more squarely with the Arabs would recover the pristine quality of the Prophet's "right guided" (Arab) successors.

It was in this national identity that both Arab Christians and Arab Muslims identified themselves as Arabs, according to their linguistic and ethnic origins that predated the Arab conquests. The late 19th century was known as the period of the Arab Renaissance (*al-nahda*), when experiments with modern literary forms, and the first stirring of secret national organisations developed. In the Arab Renaissance, there was a clear reference to co-operation between Christians and Muslims.

According to Ovey, Christians' co-operation with Muslims dates back to the Muslim conquest of Egypt and Northern Africa in 641/642, when the

Copts joined the Muslim armies to defeat a common enemy, the Byzantine Greek Christian Empire. Also during the Crusades which left a trail of bitterness between Christians and Muslims, the Arab Christians and Christians in Jerusalem co-operated with the Muslim armies and defeated the Crusaders. 7

In the struggle for national independence, both from Turkey and from European dominance, Arab Muslims and Arab Christians frequently fought side by side. The Copts and Muslims together resisted British rule in 1919 – 1920. In Egypt, the Cross and the Crescent appeared for the first time on the same flag, which made Coptic priests and Muslim *ulama* (scholars) walk arm in arm through the streets of Cairo. At the site of Martyrs' Square in Beirut both Christians and Muslims fell at the hands of the Turks. 8

It should be noted that Arab Christians, in their struggle for Arab Nationalism, thought that it offered the prospect of Christian-Muslim equality. Since the 19th century, they had fought side by side with their Muslim brothers for the assimilation of secular Arab democracy, which could have replaced the Islamic state. They did not notice the point that the Turks accepted the dichotomy between religion and government because of the pressure and impact of the Western ideas on the Islamic World. It was not because of the teachings of Islam, and this was the major factor that caused Arab Muslims to undermine the Ottoman

administration, in order to break with the empire.

Ye'or argues that the Arab Muslims were instead aiming to restore an Arab supremacy similar to that of the Arab Empire of the *Caliphs*, an empire that came into being through the Arabization of non-Muslim lands. ⁹ It must be understood that ideologically and historically, Arab nationalism was linked to *jihad* and *dhimma*. The Muslims tactically used Arabism to serve as a vehicle for Islamic values, because of their notion that traditionally Arabs should be Muslims only (see chapter one, page 1).

Regardless of this notion which says Arabs should be Muslims only, replacing an Islamic state with a secular democracy is unacceptable to any devout Muslim. Constitutionally, Islam considers those subjects of the state who are formally identified as Muslims as the only full citizens of an Islamic state, under *Sharia* law. They have a theoretical entitlement to the full range of civil and political rights. An Islamic-oriented state is a doctrinally constructed designed to uphold and promote the values of *Sharia*. ¹⁰ This means that an Islamic nation is a society based on a common belief and it could not be easily changed to a secular state.

Consequently, all individual rights and freedoms are limited by the principle, which prohibits either deviation from the ideology of the Islamic state, or advocacy of a different ideology, such as Western style democracy. This would amount to an act of civil disobedience and a call

to rise against the Islamic State in order to abolish its Islamic character.

¹¹ That was an area of Islam that Arab Christians failed to understand in their co-operation with the Muslims in various struggles. These tricks of using nationalism as a vehicle to achieve certain ends did not end with the Arab Muslims of that time, but continued in several struggles for independence in most states where Muslims and non-Muslims live together. Muslims always used 'nationalism' to serve as a substitute for pan-Islamism. We shall find the details in chapters three and four, which deal with nation-states' struggles either for independence or for equality and justice.

Unfortunately, the hopes of Arab nationalism and in Islamic states were overlapped by European colonialism in most of the Arab World. Beginning in the late 18th century and continuing through the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France divided up most of the Arab lands between themselves. Arab nationalism and secularism from that time on became particularised Nationalism – such as Egyptian Nationalism, Syrian Nationalism or Palestinian Nationalism. Ye'or argues that this particularised nationalism was the act that diminished Arab nationalism to produce nation-states' struggles for independence from colonial rule. ¹²

After the Second World War, the situation of the religious minorities in the Muslim states varied from one country to another. Their freedom and security increased to the extent that religious domination over politics

diminished.¹³ In 1923, Turkey abolished *Capitulations* (derived from the Greek word *capitulum* or “chapter”), the millet system disappeared, and minorities were given the right to organise themselves according to their laws.¹⁴ In Egypt, the country withdrew from the Arab Orbit and adopted a more liberal policy in keeping with her history, her interests, and with modern concepts of peaceful existence between Muslims and Christians.

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For Arab Muslims, that was not the end of *dhimma* status. All the rights given to *dhimmis* by the Europeans were considered destructive and humiliating to Arab nationalism. Therefore, they thought of withdrawing from the *dhimmi* groups the rights to their religious and cultural emancipation through European intervention, so that Muslim *dhimma* was now transformed into Arab *dhimma* and Islamic Umma became the Arab Nation.¹⁶

According to the Muslims’ point of view, these transformations into Arab *dhimma* and Arab nation would have guaranteed the *dhimmis* improvement of their conditions of life, i.e., various aspects of religious life, as well as legal equality and employment opportunities. And because the *dhimmis* accepted European human rights ideology, they were considered to be people who had betrayed the covenant in conformity with which they had once been accorded protection. So, they remained *dhimmis* and would not have equal rights with Muslims.

Before concluding this chapter, we should note that the weakness of Turkey and Turkish nationalism revived the spirit of Arab nationalism based on Arab convictions, historical background and heritage. Consequently, Arabs began to formulate their and historical national identity.

With regard to Christian-Muslim relations, Arab Christians and Arab Muslims struggled side by side to achieve national unity. In spite of this co-operations in the past, Christians were mistrusted and blamed by their Muslim brothers for colonial acts, that Arab Christians had been used by colonialists as tools for divide-and- conquer policies. But what really made the two groups different was that the Arab Muslims used nationalism as a vehicle for their struggle, beneath which was the ideology of pan-Islamism.

2.1 FUNDAMENTALISM

The term fundamentalism derives from a Protestant context that is referred to as a Christian renewal movement (faith renewal). But Islamic fundamentalism is not identical with the Protestant phenomenon. It has its distinctive marks in the term resurgence or traditionalism. In the Muslim context, the term used is 'renaissance' (*nahda*) or 'revival' (*ihya*).¹⁷

The rise of fundamentalism has its root causes in Muslim confrontations with Europeans both during the Crusades and later during the colonial era. It is primarily of a social, economic and political nature. ¹⁸ And it was in the colonial era that Hassen al-Banna (1920s), an Egyptian teacher, founded the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic reform movement that focused on moral and social purification stimulated by a revitalization of Islam. ¹⁹ He saw that the impact of Western ways was penetrating into the Islamic world. And al-Banna called for the establishment of an Islamic State under *Sharia* law. The Muslim Brotherhood, like Muslims in the era of Arab nationalism, considered Christianity and Christians to be part of western force against Islam. This movement has had a significant influence upon the whole Muslim world.

Watt argues that there were factors underlying this resurgence, some of which are: Muslims saw that they were losing their Islamic identity, because of Western ways that were being introduced to their cities. The arrogance and superiority of European colonialists, who treated Muslims as inferior, together with the introduction of new Christian Missionary activities, were harmful to their land. It is to be noted that the *Ulama* (Scholars) now thought they had less power than their predecessors did. ²⁰ Thus, they claimed that all would be well if Muslims returned to the ideal Islamic practice of the Prophet Mohammed's lifetime, and that of the first four "right guided" *Caliphs*.

Ultimately, the fundamentalist movement connected with Arab Nationalism which, as we have noted, was based on pan-Islamism. Fundamentalists were against secularism and modernity. They also denounced secularism as an evil neo-pagan force in the modern world. 21 Some Muslim fundamentalists claimed that Modernity as a process of change had already taken place in the Islamic world in the past centuries and which had already transformed the political, economic, social and even cultural structures of the Muslim World.

Apart from these motivations, the fundamentalists' aim was the restoration of the *Sharia* law as the sole authority for jurisdiction and government in Muslim countries and, in order to return to a strict orthodoxy it would also be necessary to purify Islamic society from previously framed foreign legislation. 22 That meant, of course, another revolution against the secular governments now established in some of the Arab countries.

The fundamentalists also saw that there were problems of under-development and political setbacks, which resulted from the foreign influences; they thought that these foreign influences brought divine punishment upon the wayward *umma*. Thus, they rejected the West and its scientific and technological civilisations. They also proclaimed the need for the redemption of humanity from the corruption and wickedness by inflicted western civilisation. 23 In reality, their aim was to regain supremacy by applying to our time the seventh century principles that

established the past strength and glory of Islam.

With regard to Christian-Muslim relations, Muslim fundamentalists viewed colonial ventures and the new Christian missionary activities as a renewal or continuation of crusades, and the local Christians as a force behind it, although they were motivated by the Western economic concerns.

The polarization of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the 20th century accompanied the phenomenon of fundamentalism, which had disastrous consequences for Christians in the Middle East. It led to the further isolation of Christians, resulting in the massacre of Armenians in Turkey in 1915, and continued emigration from the Middle East. Christians suffered for decades in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Eastern Christians were sacrificed in the interests of western power in the Middle East. ²⁴

One could say that, for fundamentalists, religious issues were not the primary causes of conflict with Christians, it was rather, for the most part because of social, economic and political tensions. They thought that colonial policy had failed to resolve the social and economic issues of the Muslim world, and that the indigenous Christians were behind it.

For example, when foreign missionaries were banned from the Sudan in 1964, indigenous Christian churches were exposed to persecution. It was again a result of political struggle against the English and not *jihad* against Christianity.²⁵ One sees that in the view of the fundamentalists, local Christians are not only accused of being part of the world wide crusade against Islam, but are also held accountable for economic exploitation, social disease and moral decay. As we noted earlier in this chapter Copts and Christians in Jerusalem had co-operated with the Muslim armies so as to defeat the Crusaders. Also Jews and Christians in the East suffered persecution and death together with the Muslims at the hands of Crusaders. Here one finds no logic to hold all Christians accountable for what the Europeans did in the Muslim world.

As a resident in a Muslim country, it is evident to me that the major issues facing Muslim fundamentalists is their ability, if in power, to tolerate diversity and political dissent. The status of *dhimma* and freedom of speech under their rule remain serious issues. In the Sudan especially, this raises serious questions about the rights of non-Muslim minorities and women under the present Islamic-oriented government. The growth of Islamic revivalism in the Sudan has been accompanied by attempts to restrict the rights of minorities and women, and their role in the society. These Muslim attitudes towards non-Muslims and women are neither the teachings of the Holy *Qur'an* nor traditional Islamic values, rather they are political motives meant to gain different ends.

Thus, it is not easy for fundamentalists to have a spirit of ecumenism or to dialogue with people of other religions. As found elsewhere in this chapter, they consider dialogue with other religions as a betrayal of *Allah* or God, because of their beliefs in the *Qur'an* as the only true eternal revelation of God. But this does not mean that Islam has closed the doors for dialogue. There are some Muslim traditions that seek to find adequate solution to the religious tensions and the deepening fear between Christians and Muslims.

In this respect, Dr. Hassan A. Turabi, the founder of "The Muslim Brotherhood" in the Sudan in the 1950s, confirmed in his lecture to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) 1992 that:

Non-Muslim communities would enjoy the freedom to assert their special identity, promote their respective spiritual and material well-being, and manage their own community affairs, in equality, tolerance and full collaboration, moral and material, with their Muslim brethren. 26

These are the same rights granted to *dhimmis* by the *Sharia* law discussed in chapter one, above, but presented in a different way. This is what has happened in the Sudan today: Christians are granted autonomous state governments controlled by Christian governors, who are always appointed by the central government in Khartoum. These states are said to be exempted from Islamic law, yet remain under the jurisdiction of the central Islamic authority in public affairs.

2.2 MODERNITY AND THE FUTURE: A CHALLENGE

Modernity is a general term for the political and cultural process set in motion by integrating new ideas, economic system or education into a society. It is a way of thought characteristic of living in the contemporary world and accepting change. Modernisation is the introduction into society of the artefacts of contemporary life i.e. railways, communications, industry, technology and household equipment. Therefore, modernisation is a process leading to an attitude of enquiring into how people make choices, be they moral, personal, economic or political. And modernity is simply the institutionalisation of doubt: choice and doubt imply rationality, debate and discussion that lead to disagreement.²⁷

This is a great challenge to Islamists, who perceive unsought change in the modern world and would like to defend what they believe to be traditional ways of thought. Many would also like to try to regain that past, with all its beliefs and attitudes, and to re-integrate it into modernity. But it should be noticed that at the heart of modernity is a principle of development and change which itself rejects the past.

One example of Islamists who oppose modernity was Qutb, the successor of Hassen al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. To him Islam was a complete social system which caters for all people's needs and which differs fundamentally from all other systems.

So the past of Islam must be summoned up to combat Western modernisation, and all ideas of *jahiliyya*, or 'primitive ideas,' should be destroyed. ²⁸ He predicted the death of capitalism and criticised all attempts to reconcile Islam with contemporary society.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a well known Islamist who lived in Egypt during the 19th century, accepted changes and formulated ideas on how Islamic society should react to this western challenge. Afghani did not reject all western ideas; instead he was influenced by some of them. He believed in the human ability to act to change conditions and make progress in social and individual development, but remains in his or her faith. ²⁹ The point he made was that society could reform itself if it returned to true Islam, to apply the principles of the Holy *Qur'an* afresh to the problems of the time. And regarding Christian-Muslim relations, he argued that Europeans had modernised because they were no longer really Christians and Muslims are weak because they are not really Muslims.

These arguments show that Muslim fundamentalism does not really reject western scientific advances and achievements in the world. It mostly criticises all attempts to reconcile Islam with contemporary society or with other religions. Most Muslim thinkers, like Mohammed al-Ghazali, argue that they want to teach their young men religious education and spiritual development to be better Muslims who are able to live successfully in the modern world. He feels that certain elements

of modernity are acceptable, such as scientific progress. But its philosophical standpoints such as atheism, communism, and stimulating desires, which are socially damaging, are not acceptable in Islam. 30

The purpose of teaching young men Islamic values from the Islamists' point of view was so that they could islamise modernity rather than modernise Islam. This derives from the notion that modernisation had already taken place in the Islamic world in the past and had transformed the political, economic, social and cultural structure of the Muslim world.

To more moderate Muslim thinkers, a Muslim has to coexist with modernity because the problems of the world are also problems of every Muslim. They instead want an open society and look for a political solution which pays heed to democracy, human rights, women and minorities' rights. 31 Also, some of the moderate thinkers believe in a style of education which suits the present era, and which does not encourage doubt, criticism and questioning.

The most 'modern' of them all were Mohammed Talbi of Tunisia and the late Mahmud Mohammed al-Taha of Sudan (executed in January 1985). Talbi advanced a positive Islamic vision of people with freedom of choice, able to interpret the contemporary world, and fix their position in it for themselves. He believed that God has given mankind entire

freedom or choice. ³² Therefore, there is no meaning to faith without freedom or choice, and there is also no need to use Islam politically or try to harmonise faith with the world in which we live.

Taha's emphasis was on human equality and religious freedom. He called for the establishment of new principles of interpretation that would permit applying some verses of the *Qur'an*, using the Meccan version and accompanying *Sunna*, instead of others i.e. the Medina version that was harsh, which he termed the "Evolution of Islamic Legislation". ³³ It was a good trial, but it would not solve the problems of Christians and Muslims having equal rights in Muslim society. Re-interpreting the *Qur'an*, whether from Meccan or Medina versions, could still give Islam the upper hand over other religions. Likewise, it will not remove the Muslim notion of the *Qur'an* being the final and true revelation, which should not be associated with contemporary society or other religions.

2.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the hopes for Arab Nationalism ended up unsuccessfully, because of Arab Muslims' lack of confidence in Arab Christians. Both Christians and Muslims had two different objectives: the former group was struggling to reach national unity and democracy, while the latter was using Arab nationalism as a vehicle for pan-Islamism. Another point was that the European colonisation of the Muslim world diminished

Arab nationalist movements to nation-states' struggles for independence. Later Islamic movements, i.e. Muslim Fundamentalism and the Liberal Islamists who sprang from it, tried to re-unite the Muslim world under the banner of pan-Islamism.

With regard to Christian-Muslim relations, Muslim fundamentalists rejected pluralism because they are against any attempt to reconcile Islam to other religions. This rejection has shown that the tolerance which present-day Muslims profess for Christians is too often not that of humble believers for those whom the *Qur'an* recognizes as serious seekers of the same truth, but the contempt of the strong for the weak. They would only like the *dhimmis* to live and practise their faith under their rule, forgetting that modernity has crept into their house.

The persecutions and suppression of non-Muslims by some Muslim governments and Islamic movements underscore the need for re-interpretation and reform of the rights of citizens to be guaranteed. Even moderate Muslim thinkers or reformers, who have argued the need for equality, still aimed for the acceptability of a fresh re-interpretation of Islamic sources of law or a reformulation of it. This would never be a solution to Christian-Muslim differences. None of them has ever argued for equal rights based on citizenship alone, as seen in the example of Egypt and Turkey.

We shall find out more about Christian-Muslim relations in the coming chapters, which will discuss more about nation-states' struggles for independence from colonialism, and Christian-Muslim relations in the following countries: Turkey, Egypt and Sudan.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF DHIMMA IN TURKEY AND EGYPT

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the concept of *dhimma* in Turkey and Egypt.

These two Muslim-majority countries were selected as examples because the concept of *dhimma* was rethought and reformed in them. In addition, both countries have long-standing association with the Sudan. Therefore, it may be of interest to consider and analyse two such examples, and to ponder whether Sudan itself can hope for brighter prospects in the immediate future. A country which today provides one of the worst examples of inter-faith relations in Africa, together with its long civil wars and heritage of mutual suspicion which exacerbate old divisions of ethnicity and language.

THE EXAMPLE OF TURKEY (OTTOMAN EMPIRE)

3.1.0 THE RISE OF OTTOMAN POWER

The rise and expansion of the Ottoman Turkish power resembled the original conquest by Islam in the seventh century during the four *Caliphs'* era. The prestige of Islam passed from Arabs to the Turks when Turkey overthrew the Byzantine Empire with the capture of

Constantinople in 1453 A D and renamed it Istambul. Later it became the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks also threatened the heart of Europe for about two centuries until John II of Poland defeated them in 1683. ¹

Unlike the *Caliphs*, the Turkish Sultans Salim I (1512 – 1520) and Sulayman the Magnificent (1520 – 1566) extended Ottoman power into Arab Muslim territories south and east of their Anatolia heartlands. The former defeated the Mamluks in Syria and Egypt, hitherto their rivals in those areas. ²

This appears to be a turning point in Muslim history, as two Muslim powers were engaged against each other. But the aim was that by liquidating the Mamluk sultanate, the Turks would have added a clearly Islamic dimension to the vast gains they had made at the expense of Christian Slavs, Greeks and Thracians. The other reason behind these conquests was that the Turks wanted to take into their custody the Mamluk sultanate from Egypt, and so the Ottoman caliphate was inaugurated, devising devious to underwrite the Arabs from the Prophet, understood as essential to the title. ³

With the conquest of Egypt in 1517, Cairo gave away to Istanbul and the authentication of Ottoman Islamicity was complete. It endured in power until the rise of Turkish nationalism and the fall of the empire in the 19th century. ⁴

When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, ending the reign of the Byzantine emperor, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch inherited many of his privileges and responsibilities. As far as non-Muslim were concerned, the Ottomans inherited but re-inforced the concept and application of the *dhimma* system. The Ottomans refined the *dhimma* status into the *millet* system (nation, community or *tawa'if*) of their own empires in which Christians and Jews did not share in the Ottomans military or religious organisation. Non-Sunni Muslims were also marginalised and denied a share of power. ⁵

According to Cooley, each community formed a closed world sufficient unto itself. ⁶ They were separate, minority communities which coexisted but did not intermingle, and who regarded one another with suspicion. The *millet* system made it possible for the minorities to retain their autonomous communal life, and they played a great part in commerce, finance and certain crafts, but their position was always precariously dependent on the ruler's caprice.

The *millet* system in the early Ottoman Empire was generous towards its subjects, more so than the one operated during the early Arab conquests. In the Ottoman Empire, they did not pay *jizya* or *kharaj*, nor were they forced to endure discriminatory conditions. What they lacked was sharing in the power of the empire, which non-Sunni Muslims also experienced. Cragg argues that in the *millets'* charter, it referred

significantly to the possible relief of many Christians which he termed as: "The peace of Christendom." 7

For Ovey, the Ottoman Empire was a classic example of a pluralistic society of the time. As he notes:

Muslims, Christians and Jews worshipped and studied side by side, enriching their distinct cultures. The legal tradition and practices of each community, particularly in matters of personal status that is, death, marriage, and inheritance were respected and enforced through the empire. 8

These attempts to promote religious equality in the Ottoman Empire, although important and good, operated only at the highest political levels. The Turkish authorities tried to solve some of the problems faced by the minorities, but they failed to apply more reforms for the liberatisation of the *dhimma* status, for fear of antagonising many Muslims who were convinced of their superiority and who attached to their Islamic traditions of domination.

According to Cragg, the *millet* system had no guiding rules or specific guarantees for those rights, and therefore Christian concerns were left loosely to the church leaders. 9 The Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Protestant matters were to be channelled through the Ottomans' recognised Patriarchs at Istanbul. This allowed the Turkish state to play politics with the minorities' issues and around these it instigated unhappy traditions of strife and conspiracy. Heavy bribes were extracted, or offered, for recognition of patriarchs by the state. Between 1595 and 1695 there were more than 31 patriarchal changes.

Such a system encouraged corruption, power struggles for influential position and led to enmity among the minority groups, for the benefit of the Turkish state. The patriarchs were too weak to represent or defend these groups because their status depended on a good relationship with the state administration. This flexibility in the *dhimmi*'s administration by the state led to tension with the authorities, whilst Christian groups underwent harsh conditions. For example, the system of recruiting Christian children into Janissaries steadily diminished the Christian communities.

3.1.1 THE CAPITULATIONS

The Capitulations were a system of trade agreements, which granted certain fiscal rights and privileges to foreign merchants. These advantages in the Ottoman Empire were denied to the indigenous merchants who were forced to only focus exclusively on internal commerce. Yet, the capitulations served benefited indigenous Christians who were recruited to serve foreign traders.¹⁰

The term 'capitulation' derived from the Latin word *capitulum*, a 'chapter' which also meant, as Cragg puts it:

The documents granted to foreign merchants gave them exemption from certain criminal procedures and relief from custom dues, with right to recruit local agents, as dragomans or translators, and as facilitators of their enterprises. ¹¹

The most significant Capitulations were during the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent, who made an alliance with Francis I of France in 1536, granting the French commercial privileges and rights in his empire. Later, English and other traders from Mediterranean cities were also granted the same privileges. ¹²

Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent had reasons to allow that trade, such as: the empire had now reached its greatest extent, and was thus obliged to adopt a defensive strategy. Defence needed a permanent and large army, which soon came to represent an enormous burden on the economy. And, as the superiority of arms henceforth belonged to the West, it needed materials of warfare, which were important to the Ottomans. The Europeans also sought silks, spices and oils from the east. ¹³ As noted in our previous chapters, Europeans pursued an agenda of emancipation for the indigenous non-Muslims, which could be executed only through colonisation of some Ottoman states.

It is also important to note that the Capitulations brought the relationship between western Christians and Christians under Ottoman rule closer. The recruitment of local Christians to work as traders brought mutual advantages. According to Cragg, the Muslim Turks in any event tended to despise such trade as unbefitting their dignity, or disdained close association with foreigners from beyond Islam. ¹⁴

Christians were more likely to know foreign languages or be willing to acquire such knowledge and also to see that in international connections

they could develop some respite from their inferior status under Islam. Indeed, as the Capitulation system grew, it could be said that it displaced the *dhimma* status with foreign cliency or blunted its incidence in practice. In its character, Capitulations, according to Cragg, referred significantly to the possible relief of many Christians who were in thralldom.¹⁵ As a system it was concerned with the peace of Christendom as well as pursuing commercial benefits.

As trade grew, local recruits made a number of attentions to the trading system in their own interests and made themselves indispensable. By doing so, they built small trade empires of their own. For a variety of reasons, Western states began to extend the idea of protection from trading clients alone to whole communities in major parts of cities and beyond. In some cases, local consuls and resident merchants were actually granted alien citizenship, and slowly this became in turn a pretext for European intervention in the Ottoman Empire. The Sultans also began to claim protection for Muslims outside their domains.¹⁶

Since the power of the Christian nations was able to keep the Turks in check, the Ottoman Empire declined. The European powers did not fail to make use of Capitulations on behalf of various Christian or even non-Christian minority groups. It coincided with their own interests and the emancipation of the *dhimmis*.

3.1.2 CHRISTIAN CONDITIONS AFTER THE CRIMEAN WAR

As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, the Crimean War was fought between Russians and Turks allied with France and Britain for reasons mentioned earlier. Before the war, France was recognised by the Sultan as the protector of his Roman Catholic subjects, which gave France and England the motivation to support Turkey in its war with Russia. When Russia was defeated, a treaty was signed in Paris on the 30th March 1856 in which the integrity of the Ottoman Empire was guaranteed. ¹⁶

The Crimean War and the Treaty of Paris, according to Wessels, were decisive turning points for Christianity in the east. ¹⁷ The defeat of the Russian army meant the dominance of the (Western) French-English alliance throughout the Ottoman Empire, and they aimed to keep the Turkish government alive in order to influence the rest of its states. The equality of the Empire's subjects-Muslims, Christians and non-Christians- was to be maintained, as confirmed by the decree of the Sultan, which Wessels viewed as the first step toward the secularisation of the Ottoman Empire.

Before the Sultan's decree, a Muslim who converted to Christianity was guilty of apostasy from the Islamic faith (*ridda an al-Islam*), and until 1844 in accordance with *Sharia* law it was punishable with death. On the basis of co-operation with the French and English during the war, the

Sultan abolished this traditional death penalty for apostasy. As a result a mission to the Muslims was opened, as it was now legally permissible for a Muslim to receive baptism. The Sultan agreed from then on guarantee to all his subjects, regardless of race or religion, all the advantages of communal rights that the citizens of free 'liberal' Europe enjoyed. 18

Christians after the Crimean War and the Sultan's decree of *Hatti Humayin* (1856) as noted in chapter one, among them the laity, rejoiced at the removal of the social restrictions under which they had lived. To ordinary Turkish Muslims, it became increasingly clear that the Christian minorities constituted a potential danger to the empire from within. This led to persecutions of Christians by Turkish Muslims, who retained their belief that Islam is the only true religion and who therefore resented the government's effort at equalising the status of Muslims to that of the *dhimmis*. 'Christian' came to mean anti-Turkish and anti-nationalist. To Muslims, it was not an issue of secularity but an issue between Christianity and Islam. 19 But this did not really change the decree of the Sultan. He had taken a courageous step forward which has made Turkey a good example of a pluralistic society amongst Islamic countries today.

3.1.3 THE DECLINE AND THE FALL OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE

It should be noted that the dismantling, the decline and the fall of the Ottoman Empire had its origins in the size of the empire: it was too vast,

and with so many fronts to defend and so, needed western military support. Second, the defeat of Russian army in the Crimean War resulted in the total control of the West over the Ottoman Empire and the emancipation of *dhimmis*. It was against this background that France and England attempted to encourage local nationalism i.e., Ottomanism and Arabism, for their interests. They might have allowed the separation of religion from politics to open the way for the emancipation of the *rayas* or *dhimmis*. By applying international principles of equal rights for all citizens, and the legitimacy of the nation, nationalism suppressed the concept of *jihad* and its direct consequence: the *dhimma*.²⁰

Under the leadership of Bismarck of Germany at the Berlin Congress, 13 June to 13 July 1878, the Ottoman Empire was divided into spheres of influence. France occupied Syria and Lebanon, while England took Egypt, Iraq and Palestine. The hope for religious freedom arose among the indigenous Christians in these areas, which provoked opposition from the Muslims.²¹ This division of the empire was done with the intention of preventing the Ottoman Turkish Empire from total collapse.

This conviction was justified because, when the empire reached its absolute low point after World War I, the Ottoman Empire fell apart and the West occupied the heartland of the Arab world, which found itself powerless to oppose their colonial masters.²² Finally, in the 1920's, the prostrate Turks opted for territorial nationhood (or Ottomanism) and the relinquishment of the empire to prevent Turkey from further fragmentation.²³

Thus, on 24 July 1923, the Turks signed the Treaty of Lausanne; later ratified by the new Assembly, whereby the Capitulations were abolished and the *millet (dhimma)* system disappeared. The religious minorities were given rights to organise themselves in accordance with their own laws. An exchange of population was envisaged, Greeks were sent from Turkey to Greece, and Turks from Greece to Turkey. ²⁴ Thus, Christian-Muslim relations were based on equality before the law, equality based on citizenship only.

Some of the problems and challenges the churches faced under the Muslim environment in the past and present will be discussed in the coming section entitled, the 'Perspectives of Egypt' (below).

3.1.4 CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS TODAY

Turkey, since the treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923, is struggling to put its house in order. If it manages to make the necessary constitutional reforms it would show the entire Muslim world how to reconcile Islam's culture and authoritarian heritage with real democracy. Whit Manson argues that modern Turkey has looked westwards for over eighty years, ever since the introduction of secular government in the twentieth century. It is a long-standing member of NATO, and it has made many social changes to suit Western traditions. The big debate right now in Turkey is about how the country can make the changes required to join

the European Union (EU). To mention a few: Turkey is to adopt Constitutional reforms only in order to join EU, e.g., abolition of death sentence, independence of judiciary and promotion of Kurdish civil rights (education in their language and the use of it in radio and television). 25

It is not an easy task for Turkey to confront the painful changes it needs to make. But if democracy were to be fully implemented in Turkey, it would have solved many problems; in particular Christian-Muslim relations could improve greatly. According to Manson, the fear is that if the generals relax their grip, Turkey will be engulfed by a religious driven revolution like the one that consumed Iran in 1979. 26

THE PERSPECTIVES OF EGYPT

3.2.0 BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EGYPT

Egypt, the land of the Nile, is situated in the North East of Africa where the river Nile pours its water into the Mediterranean Sea. It is a country whose history and civilisation reach back into the earliest recorded times, with a present population of 49 million people, 91 percent Muslims and 9 percent Christians, making it the most populous country in the Middle East. 27

The history of the Christian community in Egypt goes back, according to Christian tradition, to the ministry of Saint Mark in the first century A.D. Before the religion of Islam was introduced in the seventh century,

Christianity was the religion of Egyptians. Since the Muslim conquest of Egypt, the present Christian community has gradually decreased to its present size, becoming as a result, a minority community as compared to the Muslims who are now the majority. 28

During the early centuries of the Christian era, the majority of Egyptians embraced the Christian faith, but some were opposed to the will of the Greek and Roman Christian rulers. As such, they established a church known as the Coptic Orthodox Church. 'Copts,' literally means Egyptian (derived from the Greek word *aigyptos*). 28

According to Wessels, this led the Byzantine emperors who ruled over them to persecute the Copts because of their heresy. 29 The response of the Christian community in Egypt was martyrdom and monasticism. Their differences were theological, the Copts believe in one divine/human nature in Jesus (Monophysitism), against the Byzantine-Chalcedonian two natures.

Most damaging to the Copts, however, was the fact that the Coptic patriarch Dioscurus of Alexandria (died 454) was deposed by the council of Chalcedon and exiled for his heresy. The deposition and exile of the patriarch caused Chalcedon to be seen not only as a condemnation of the Coptic Christology, but as a national humiliation. These were some of the reasons the Copts welcomed the Arab invaders as liberators from the Byzantine yoke. 30

3.2.1 MUSLIM OCCUPATION OF EGYPT

It was at this time of Byzantine persecutions that the Arab conquest of Egypt took place. When the Muslim invaders came from Arabia in 641, the Copts were positively disposed toward this change of matters. They welcomed the Muslim armies as a relief or deliverance from over two centuries of oppression by the Byzantine emperors. ³¹ From the Copts' point of view, the difference between the old and the new masters was that the latter were interested only in the civil administration and financial matters, not in their religious affairs - which was a misjudgement as it could be seen later.

Like the early Christians of the seventh century, the Copts fell under the same *dhimma* status. It is customary to regard the Copts as having in fact welcomed the Muslim armies with lively, or perhaps only sullen, emotion as liberation from the tyranny of the Byzantines. But the evidence is not conclusive; while it is true that deep resentments persisted from the time of Chalcedon's deposition of the patriarch, there should have been a Christian concern with seeking for reconciliation and forgiveness rather than welcoming enemy forces.

According to Haines, the early Muslim rulers in Egypt were friendly at the beginning and provided a great degree of justice for the Christians. ³² But a feeling of inferiority was enhanced by the emigration of Christians,

because this meant a diminishing proportion of Christians in Egypt.

Also, historical, political and military changes created by internal rivalry and conflicts among the Muslims themselves, resulted in alternating regimes with varying degrees of tolerance toward Christians.

However, these Muslim rivalries caused many sufferings among the Christians in Egypt. In a time of economic recession, there was often an increase in the tax burden on the Copts. In 868, one of the *Caliphs* doubled both the property and head taxes, and those who had been exempted from the taxes i.e., the monks and clergy, lost their exempt status. As a result, many Copts sought to enter the desert monasteries to escape the heavy taxes. For similar reasons, many of them converted to Islam, but some times mass conversions were discouraged for fear of loss of revenue. ³³

In times of stability under good ruling dynasties, for example during Tulunid (835 – 905) and the Shi'ite or the Fatimid (969 - 1171) dynasties, the Copts were well treated and received official favour. They had high positions and the rulers were sympathetic to them. Even al-Hakim ibn 'Amr Allah (990 – 1021) who was harsh to the Copts at first, toward the end of his life, was influenced by a certain Coptic monk and improved the position of the Copts again. In 1013, he permitted the Jews and Christians who had converted to Islam, to return to their original religions. They were also allowed to rebuild the destroyed churches and their confiscated property returned. ³⁴

There are many reasons that contributed to the upheaval in the life of the Copts, however, the scope of this paper limits us to an examination of the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks and the Copts' situation under the Turks. In 1517, during the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks, and for the reasons discussed in our previous section (3.1.1.), Copts' conditions improved greatly. The Turks used Egypt (1520 – 1566) only for fiscal yield to the central treasury and for recruitment to the imperial forces. Egypt was basically a taxable entity necessarily farmed out to officialdom. 35

It was a situation that had a deep impact on the Coptic population that might have improved Christian-Muslim relations. Notably, due to their skills they might rise to positions of prominence in administration and so capitalised on commercial opportunities as had happened to Christians in Turkey during the Capitulations.

For almost three centuries between Salim I and the rise of Mohammed Ali in Egypt (1805 – 1849), Christians fared well. Under Mohammed Ali, Christians attained high positions in the land and suppressed outbreaks of fanaticism. His successor, Sa'id abrogated the *dhimma* status of non-Muslims, thus granting them equal citizenship. As such, the early 19th century marked a return to better conditions for the Christians.

Consequently, Christian-Muslim relations reached their highest point. Christians were increasingly sought out as artisans, physicians, engineers, accountants, financiers and then even acquired lands and education, while the Muslims dominated politics and the government. ³⁷ But that did not mean there were no problems, sometimes Christians were despised, yet generally they were acknowledged as trustworthy by the Muslim rulers.

3.2.2 CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS UNDER COLONIAL RULE

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British occupied Egypt according to the terms of Berlin Congress of 1878, which had divided some parts of the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence (see page 50, above). This was the period of radical changes in Christian-Muslim relations.

As the French had done in Egypt, the British used the skills of Christians in the administration of the government in Egypt. This fact, together with the presence of foreign Christian missionaries in Egypt emphasized the divisions between Muslims and Christians. The Muslims had an impression that Christians were in collusion with the colonialists. And yet, Christians were and are loyal to an Egyptian identity and nationalism. They participated with the Muslims in political parties and

in the events that led to the revolt of 1919, and the subsequent establishment of a government of independence, with some exceptions under British control. 38

Like the French, the British did not favour the Copts on the basis of religion, their disposition was instead determined by power politics. Moreover, Christians had mere skill in establishing the administration than had the Muslims. In the British viewpoint, the Copts were simple opportunists, while the Syrian Christians were more modern, more emancipated and closer to Europeans than the Copts. 39

In my opinion, the Copts were not actually opportunists: they made tactical use of different situations, for fear that their power might be diminished and they could have paid a high price at the hands of the Muslims. For example, the Copts who supported the French under Napoleon and attempted to restrict recruitment had to suffer after the departure of the French. 40

3.2.3 THE ARAB NATIONAL AWAKENING

The Copts enjoyed the protection of the European consulates that were, with the support of European Christian public opinion, continually ready to intervene on behalf of their fellow believers in this Islamic land. The subsequent phase of the struggle for independence bore Islamic and somewhat anti-Christian traits. Thus, the Copts remained rather reserved with respect to national independence. 41 This was because Egyptian or

Arab nationalism required a Christian-Muslim solution to its meaning. The Arab Muslims could do nothing without the involvement of the Arab Christians.

In the 1870s, the Copts were at first reluctant to participate in the national movement out of fear that independence would cause them to lose the improved status they had gained under the European powers to the Islamic majority. They regarded the new era from the perspective of liberation from the *dhimma* status. When in 1910, the nationalist theme erupted with Mustafa Khamil that Copts and Muslims were: "One people bound together by nationality, culture, character and ways of life." 42

The theme had a much more Islamic flavor, but its leader wanted to unite Muslim and non-Muslim elements as somehow Muslims, even if only culturally, so that pan-Islamic solidarity might not be compromised by extraneous scruples. In other words, these politics were directed toward maintaining national solidarity against the West. The Copts were Christians, but 'Muslims' culturally and by nationality.

Cragg argues that the Copts could not recognize that their best interest lay not in separatism but in opting for inclusion. The Copts trusted Islam, defined in the 1923 Constitution as the state religion, and participated in a broad common front in the name of an Egypt committed to the British departure. 43 It seem to me that the Copts, as minority group, could not chose to be against their national interest, and allow the British to

continue ruling their country for the sake of their group interest and survival. They had to co-operate as Nationalists with the Muslims against the British otherwise they could be eyed as fifth columnists.

When the British left, they had ensured that Egyptian nationalism would leave Copts no option but an Islamic future. But the delegation (*wafd* in Arabic) demanding independence from British in 1918, succeeded in uniting Copts and Muslims against the British government. And it was true that, at first, in the independent state the Copts and Muslims had the right to the same freedom and privileges. Two Copts took part in the first government of Said Zaglul and that has remained the rule of Egypt until today. Boutros Pasha Ghali-the grandfather of Boutros Boutros Ghali became the Prime minister on the 20th February 1920. He was assassinated later by a Muslim who admitted that he had done so out of religious zeal. 44

In the first parliament, more Copts were elected members of parliament but successive regimes have, by and large, aimed to sustain a basic continuity of majority-minority relations. Yet the constitution of 1923 established a modern, democratic government. It contained, however, two crucial provisions: one, provided that only a Muslim could be the heir to Egyptian throne, and the other that made Islam the state religion. 45 Thus, it contributed to the growing discriminations against Christians in state affairs and to internal conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt today.

3.2.4 CHRISTIANS IN THE CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM ENVIRONMENT

It was before the establishment of the modern democratic constitution of 1923 that Muslim Fundamentalism emerged, as discussed in chapter two, above. This movement, known as the Muslim Brotherhood (*ikkwan al-muslimun*) was a radical group that dismayed Coptic minds. For the fundamentalists, Christianity was a part of Western force that needed to be resisted.

In the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952 – 1970) who was brought into power by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Christian community became increasingly marginalized. Besides that, there were major disputes occurring between the Muslims themselves on religious, social and economic issues. At the heart of the religious question was the role of Islam in the development of a modern nation. These issues led Nasser to outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood because of differences in understanding with the role of Islam in the organization of the Socialist State, the management of state resources and the meaning of Arab nationalism. ⁴⁶

Under this regime, Christians found themselves removed from the positions of responsibility and authority within the government that they had enjoyed under the old party system. The Copts' conditions worsened when various acts of violence were perpetrated upon them by some segments of Muslim population, for reasons, which were always unknown to the Christians. ⁴⁷

In 1970's, under President Anwar Sadat, the situation did not change much. He made some reforms by allowing more freedom of speech and adjusted policy with regard to investment, but once again the Muslim Brotherhood pressurized his government to implement an Islamic state and *da'wah* (Islamic mission or call). This created problems both for Sadat and the Christian community alike. ⁴⁸ In response to their demands, in September 1981- before his assassination by the Muslim Brotherhood - Sadat instituted a number of measures, including penalties for apostasy from Islam, and he had the Coptic patriarch removed from his duties and exiled to a monastery in wadi Natran for two years. ⁴⁹ These acts created tension not only between the Copts and the government, but also with Muslims in general. Sadat seemed to have allowed this situation to remain so as to make clear to the Muslim fundamentalists that he had the Copts under control, whilst at the same time preventing fanatical Muslims from abusing religious differences for their own ends.

According to Wessels, it was the current Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak who calmed the tensions between Christians and the government. ⁵⁰ In spite of many efforts, he has not changed much, and Mubarak continues to be able to contain Muslim zealots. He permitted the Coptic patriarch to resume his duties on the 4th January 1985, which also has improved the relations between Christian and the government.

Haines argues that the contemporary state of relations between Christians and Muslims in Egypt is useful to consider. Christian-Muslim relations today are made worse by a variety of factors: the severe economic problems, the Palestinian-Israel conflict, increasing vitality of movements for Islamic renewal, the rejection of Westernisation, and Christian Muslim disputes. 51

To my mind, although the general relations between Christians and Muslims are uncertain, there is a sign for a future positive outcome, because in both communities there are people of good will who seek dialogue and reconciliation for peaceful coexistence. With this potential, the government should also seek to find adequate solutions to questions of justice and equality that are appropriate to Egyptian needs today.

END NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRACTICE OF *DHIMMA* IN THE SUDAN

Christianity is not new in the Sudan, nor did it come with the influx of Western colonizers and missionaries in the 19th century, as some Muslims claim. In fact, it was returning to Sudan when it came with a new name of “Western Christianity.” According to Wessels, Christianity was well established in Egypt and Roman North Africa, not to mention Nubia, in the first three centuries of the church’s existence, perhaps before Western Europe was christianised. ¹ Some characteristic features of the history of the Coptic church is described by great church fathers like Athanasius (299 – 373) and Cyril (died 444).

4.0 THE DECLINE OF THE NUBIAN CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS

Although the rise of Islam and its expansion was responsible for the eradication of most of the Christian presence in North Africa, Christianity never left Africa completely. Till today, authentic African Christianity survives in the Egyptian Coptic church. Likewise, Christianity also survived in the Nubian church for almost nine centuries from the 6th to 15th century, under the constant barrage of Muslim and Arab pressure from the surrounding region, namely from Egypt and Saudi Arabia across the Red Sea. ²

There are many reasons that contributed to the decline of Christianity in the Nubian Kingdom: first, Egypt which was the high authority and the supplier of the Nubian church with bishops and clergy was conquered in 641 AD and became an Islamic state. As such, the Nubian church's link with Roman or Byzantine church leadership was cut, so that it remained in isolation until its fall. ³ No sooner had the Muslims settled in their new territory, than the upbeat Islamic forces were pounding at the gates of the Nubian capital, Dunqulah. The Nubians were strong at that time and repulsed them firmly between 641/642.

In the second Muslim campaign, under Abdalla ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh in the year 652 AD, they reached Dunqulah the capital of the Nubian Christian Kingdoms, but were not able to defeat the Nubian army. However, the Islamic forces stepped back and admitted a defeat. So, to stop hostilities between the two parties, the Muslims proposed a treaty of non-aggression known as *Baqt* derived from the Latin word *Pactum* (an agreement between two sovereign states). This truce was agreed upon between the Arabs and the Nubians, and was therefore, a novelty for Islamic law. Both parties agreed on a cease-fire, which became a permanent treaty of non-aggression for about six hundred years. ⁴

According to Werner, the *baqt* included an annual tribute of about 360 slaves to the Muslim governor at Aswan supplied by the Nubians. ⁵ And the Nubians were given some food commodities in return. The slaves could be from the Nubian's own captives from the hunting fields further

south, or if necessary, they should complete the number with individuals from their own people. Failure to bring the number up to date amounted to a breach of the treaty.

The *baqt* treaty, like the *dhimma* status considered in chapter one, was meant to regulate the relationship between the Muslim empire and the Christian Kingdoms of Northern Nubia. Its purposes, according to Werner, were to ensure the safety of the borders between Egypt and Northern Nubia, because part of the agreement was to refrain from raids and not to attack the other. ⁶ Other components of the treaty were that Muslims were not allowed to settle in the Christian land, and vice versa, but Muslims could travel inland for trade purposes only.

This treaty was lopsided because the Muslims were in fact owning and acquiring land in a country which was not theirs in the first place. Their militia did not honour the treaty and continued to raid Christian villages at will to acquire slaves and spread Islam throughout the inner lands. ⁷

In comparison, the *baqt* treaty had some factors of the Capitulations discussed in our previous chapter. Like the Capitulations during the Ottoman Empire, the *baqt* governed political relations between the Nubian chief and the Arabs. The terms of both treaties granted only fiscal privileges for trade to the foreigners and denied it to the local indigeneous people. The Nubian territory, being vast, meant that it was difficult to control the activities of the foreigners and their interactions

with the local population. These were the factors that weakened the Nubian Christian Kingdom in addition to its isolation from the outside Christian world.

4.1 THE RISE OF ISLAM IN THE SUDAN

By the middle of the 15th century, Dunqulah the capital of the Northern Christian Nubian Kingdoms was no longer strong enough to withstand Arab encroachment, and the country was open to Arab immigration. Thus, the nomadic Arabs began to migrate southward, intermarrying with the Nubians and introducing Arab Muslim culture to the Christian inhabitants. The Arabs replaced the Nubian political authority with their own nomadic institutions. ⁸

Werner argues that the destruction of Dunqulah in the 13th century and the fall of the Northern Kingdom in the 14th century were perhaps the most important factors influenced by the rapid spread of Islam. The greatest result of these developments however, was the imposition of head tax *jizya* for every non-Muslim Nubian. ⁹ It can be assumed that many Nubians became Muslims in the following decades to avoid the *jizya*.

After the fall of Dunqulah the nomadic Arabs wandered east and west of the river Nile with their herds; in the south the Nubian Kingdom of Alwah stood as the last indigenous Christian barrier to the Arab

occupation of the Sudan. Alwah, with its capital Soba (where the modern Khartoum stands), retained Christianity as the state religion, but its long isolation from the outside Christian world had probably resulted in bizarre and syncretistic accretions to liturgy and ritual. ¹⁰

According to Werner, Alwah was strong enough to resist the Arab attacks, but the continuous and corrosive raids of the Bedouins throughout the 15th century clearly weakened its power to resist. ¹¹ Thus, when an Arab confederation led by Abd Allah Jamma was at last brought together to assault the last Christian Kingdom; Alwah collapsed in the 16th century. Alwah, as a political entity, had ceased to exist when the Funj tribes, who came down from the Blue Nile, overran the territory of Alwah at the beginning of the 16th century. The Funj were neither Arabs nor Muslims, and their homeland was probably on the upper Blue Nile, on the borderlands between Ethiopia and the Sudan.

In sum, there were many reasons that contributed to the eradication of the Nubian Christian Kingdoms: the authority of the church was under the foreign Egyptian bishops and clergy, there were no indigenous bishops or clergy. With the conquest of Egypt by the Muslim forces, the Nubian church's connection to the authority in Egypt was cut and thus isolated the Nubian Christianity from the outside Christian world.

Some of the reasons were that the Nubian church always remained exotic and never became indigenous in the sense Islam is today; Christianity remained a foreign religion. Thus, the Nubian Christian community was

weak because of no deep roots in Christianity. Also, the church and state were linked together and formed one social-political unit, so that when the state was destroyed the church had no freedom to revolutionise the life of the Christians.¹² Besides these arguments, the *baqt* treaty had changed its meaning from a treaty between two sovereign states into Muslims' domination of the Nubian political affairs. The treaty became more demanding in addition to the head tax or *jizya*, which was introduced at the fall of Dunqulah.

The end of Funj power came in 1820 when the ruler of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, invaded the Sudan and established a Turko-Egyptian administration in Khartoum. The Turks wanted to occupy Sudan to seek slaves to sell or to use for military purposes. In addition, they wanted gold, elephant tusks and trunks, and other wealth. Egyptian interest in the Sudan was to control the waters of the Nile for agricultural schemes.¹³

According to Barsella, the slave trade and slave soldiers were the most influential agents in the propaganda of Islam, because, by breaking up the centres of pagan life, the pagan population tended to decrease and the broken up de-tribalized elements were absorbed into Islam.¹⁴ In this period also, there arose great Islamic reform movements in the Sudan that produced a revivalist spirit among the Sufi Brotherhood. It gave rise to a new order, the *Mirghaniyah* or *Khatimiya*. This sect later became one of the strongest in the modern Sudan and remains the closest ally of the Egyptian administration today.

During Mohammed Ali's rule, the interests of Christian missionaries in the Sudan arose from the desire to spread the Gospel not only there, but also from the Sudan to other parts of Africa. Mohammed Ali, having a liberal attitude towards them, opened the way to Catholic missionaries to Sudan. In 1858 the first group of missionaries from the Mazza Institute of Verona, under father Daniel Comboni left Italy to reach the Holy Cross mission station on the 14th February 1858. ¹⁵ This was the beginning of Christianity at the heartland of the Southern Sudan. Both Nubian Christianity and Islam failed to reach the South because of their search for slaves and other riches. They were resisted and seen by the Southerners as enemies or slave raiders.

The Turko-Egyptian rulers (1821 – 1885) introduced *Sharia* courts and *qadis* (Islamic jurists) in the Sudan, who were more tractable than *turuq* leaders (traditional leaders). And yet, Turkish rule ended up with corruption, incompetence and internal unrests. The Turks were hated for their corrupt administration for levying heavy taxation on poor people, bribery and the evils of slavery. ¹⁶

The above reasons fuelled the revolution of Mohammed Ahmed al-Mahdi that used religion to unite the Sudanese people, and which led to the foundation of the Mahdist Islamic State in 1885. Al-Mahdi and his followers the Ansar eliminated the ruling Turko-Egyptian elite, together with all the missionaries and Christian administrators, but never

succeeded in actually subduing the South. He was strongly resisted by the Southerners because he revolted against the Turks for the evils of slavery, but his followers did not quite shift away from it. ¹⁷ As an Islamic system of government, he also brought to a halt the work of the Christian missionaries.

4.2 CHRISTIANITY UNDER ANGLO-EGYPTIAN CONDOMINIUM RULE

For about 400 years since Sudan was last a Christian nation, it had become a robust Islamic State under al-Mahdi's rule. It was during this time that many northern Sudanese and Nubian tribes became Muslims. It should be noted that the predominance of Mahdiya in the Sudan coincided with the British occupation of Egypt in 1887. And the end of the Mahdist State came about when the British decided to reconquer the Sudan.

After victory at the battle of Omdurman, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule was established in the Sudan (1899 – 1956). It was considered that the new rule would bring an end to fighting, slaving and barbarism. Secondly, it would bring changes and development to the whole land. This was also the time the missionaries applied to return to Sudan to re-open their missions. ¹⁸

The British administration was first reluctant to allow the missionaries to return to the Sudan. However, through diplomatic and political pressure

from the European powers, the missionaries were allowed freedom of action in the Southern Sudan and certain concessions were made to the North. The British wanted the missionaries to go south for two main reasons: they feared the possible spread of Islam in the south, as well as the prospect that Christianity being preached in the north would provoke a new Mahdi rebellion and might enlist the support of a newly Islamicised Sudan.¹⁹

To ensure that these practices were effectively stopped, borders between the North and South were closed, and the movement of the people and goods were controlled and regulated. Secondly, the Gospel was not to be preached in Muslim majority areas. And to avoid conflict among Christian denominations, a system of spheres of influence was devised in the Southern Sudan.²⁰

The British policy was to provide the North with services, e.g., schools, hospitals and developmental projects to show their Christian love and also to dissuade the Muslims from rebelling. In the South the missionaries provided little education, as the British were in no hurry to educate and develop the South.²¹ They assumed that Southern Sudan would be the next colony when the Condominium rule expired.

As regards Sudanese politics, Barsella argues that the Condominium administration was first worried about the role of Islam in the Sudanese politics. Eventually, both partners in the Condominium rule came to

encourage the role of Islamic movements: the Ansar of Mahdi collaborating with the British, and with the pro-Egyptian *Khatmiya*. Motivated by this action, the Nationalists and Islamists were also determined to open the South to Muslim activity. 22

4.3 POST-INDEPENDENCE AND IMPOSITION OF THE ISLAMIC LAW

Before the day of independence of the Sudan from the Anglo-Egyptian rule, many committees were formed among which, was the “Sudanisation” committee set up on 20 February 1954. Its purpose was to prepare and replace all foreigners in responsible government and military posts by nationals. It later became a process of nationalisation of other institutions in the country including the churches. The first results were that Muslims dominated the senior positions and a few junior positions were given to Christians. 23

Another important committee to mention was set up in September 1956 to draft a new constitution for the Sudan. This committee was not equally represented: the majority were Muslims. Consequently the result was unfair: the Arab Muslims drafted a one-sided unitary constitution in which Islam was declared the state religion and Arabic the national language. The Southern proposal of federation for the South was totally rejected. 24

There was, growing unrest as a result between the Mahdist *Umma* Party and the *Khatmiya* Peoples Democratic Party. Both used Islam and Arab Nationalism as their basic ideologies for the unity of the country. ²⁵ Thus, the Sudanisation process (nationalisation) became the Arabisation and Islamisation of the Sudan. A country, which is multi-ethnic, multi-racial and interreligious, was to become Arab-Islamic nation. These were the root causes of the 1955 Torit mutiny in the south and the continuing civil wars in the Sudan today.

This policy of Arabisation and Islamisation had been going on since 1949, but radical new measures were taken after Independence in 1957. It started in the field of education as the new Sudanese government sought to integrate the North and South. Thus, it criticised the missionary educational system in the South as “industrial” rather than academic and in foreign languages. This was a pretext for a Muslim long-term goal—the removal of the missionaries from the South. ²⁶ It seems clear that the Muslims in the Sudan consider that without the protection and support of the missionaries the churches could easily be intimidated and suppressed.

To their surprise, when the missionaries were expelled from the Sudan in 1964, they left behind a planted church which was strong enough to stand on her own feet. Unlike the Nubian Christianity that remained exotic and never became indigenous, the 19th century church in the Sudan had already become indigenous, with local bishops and clergy, especially the Protestant churches. ²⁷

With regard to the imposition of Islamic law in the Sudan, it was the Muslim Brotherhood that sought the renewal and reformation of Islam as the framework for the whole society. It was concerned with the revitalisation of Islam as noted in chapters two and three. Werner argues that the driving force of the Qur'an and Islamic history, is that faith must have political expression. This faith gives birth to a social form, and Islam is therefore concerned with social power. It is concerned with the control and reshaping of society. 28

The tragedy of Sudan since Independence is that the only way, in which successive regimes in Khartoum have been able to perceive national unity, is through the process of Arabisation and Islamisation. Regimes vary only in their repressive severity and the amount of violence they are prepared to use. 29 It seems that we have not had a government in Sudan since Independence, which has been able to think outside this box.

Although the government in Khartoum stated that all religions should be respected and that freedom of worship is guaranteed, the application and implementation of the Islamic law in the country has led non-Muslims being treated as *dhimmis*. Christians in spite of their education and skills find the road blocked in the way of their advancement. In this development according to Werner, non-Muslims or *dhimmis* are not part of the reconstructed Islamic state, they are protected, but occupy subsidiary status within society. 30 The *dhimmis* can be used to fill a post if needed, but can not share in the government as of right. And that is the

background to: restriction of evangelism and the construction of churches; severe penalties for apostasy; the Arabisation of education; the suppression of African cultures; the exclusion of Christians and Southerners from real political power; discrimination in employment and other social activities.

In this situation of turmoil, change and conflict, the churches in the Sudan and international Ecumenical bodies have never been silent since Independence. In response to the Sudanisation process, the Protestant churches accepted the take over from the missionaries and nationalised their churches. The Roman Catholic church rejected the whole process and insisted on her link with the mother church in Rome till today. ³¹

The end of the 1950s strained the relations between Muslims and Christians. They differed on the issues of unity and integration and accused each other of worsening the conflict situation between North and South. Despite these differences and the persecution of the churches, Christianity had succeeded in becoming rooted in the Southern social and cultural context, while Islam had not been able to. ³²

It was with this difficult situation and the first civil war conflict in the Southern Sudan (1955-1972) that the churches in the Sudan were able to draw together and agree to set up the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) in 1966. It was set up to coordinate their activities and give witness of their solidarity and brotherhood. ³³ Following this, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC)

helped to mediate in the conflict and to act as moderators in the Addis Ababa peace talks. The role of these ecumenical bodies was decisive in allowing the two warring parties to contact one another and talk, resulting in the Addis Ababa Peace Accord in 1972. ³⁴

With regard to dialogue in the present situation in the Sudan, ethnic cleansing, religious persecutions, Islamic fanaticism and violation of the human rights in the Sudan concern the international community. Pope John Paul II's visit to the Sudan in 1993 and Dr. George Carey the then Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Southern Sudan (1994), has contributed to new relations between Muslims and Christians in the Sudan today. ³⁵ Consequently, it led to the government of the Sudan to open the way for Interreligious Conferences and sub-committees for Christian-Muslim dialogues in the country, which has lowered the tension between the churches and the government of the Sudan.

Some of the work about the Sudan will be found in the final main chapter which serves to round off the whole dissertation, and in particular to compare Turkish and Egyptian experiences to the Sudan situation.

END NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR.

1. Antonie, Wessels, Arab and Christian? Christians in the Middle East, Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995, p 124.
2. Gino, Barsella, and Guixot, M.Ayuso, Struggling To Be Heard: The Christian Voice in Independent Sudan 1956 – 1996, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998, p 12.
3. Roland, Werner, /William, Anderson and Andrew, Wheeler, Day of Devastation Day of Contentment: The History of the Sudanese Church Across 2000 Years, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa. 2000, pp 40 – 41.
4. Ibid, pp 41 – 42.
5. Ibid, pp 42 – 43.
6. Ibid, p 43.
7. Ibid, p 44.
8. Ancient Nubian History, <http://www.newafrica.com/history/sudan/ancientnubia.asp> 7/19/02, p 1.
9. Werner, Day of Devastation Day of Contentment, pp 91 – 93.
10. Ibid, p 106.
11. Ibid, pp 107 – 108.
12. Ibid, pp 115 – 118.
13. Ibid, pp 123 – 124.
14. Barsella, Struggling To Be Heard, p 13.
15. Ibid, p 13.
16. Ibid, p 13.
17. Ibid, pp 13 – 14.
18. Werner, Day of Devastation Day of Contentment, p 213.
19. Barsella, Struggling To Be Heard, pp 15 – 16.
20. Ibid, p 16.
21. Ibid, p 16.
22. Ibid, p 16 – 17.
23. Ibid, p 17.
24. Ibid, p 22.
25. Ibid, p 23.
26. Werner, Day of Devastation Day of Contentment, p386.
27. Barsella, G. MCCJ and Ayuso, G.M.A. MCCJ, 1998, p 29.
28. Andrew, Wheeler, Christianity and Islam: Lessons from Sudan, http://www.geocities.com/ccom_ctbi/CCOM_documents/wheeler_christianity_islam_sudan.htm 9/3/02, p 3.
29. Barsella, Struggling To Be Heard, p 74.
30. Wheeler, p 4.
31. Barsella, Struggling To Be Heard, p 24.
32. Ibid, p 32.
33. Ibid, p 42.
34. Ibid, pp 48 – 49.
35. Ibid, pp 48, 81 – 85.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROSPECTS FOR THE SUDAN

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers an opening discussion of inter-religious relations and social power in Turkey and Egypt, noting similarities and differences during the twentieth century. Then it will contrast the possibilities and limitations of applying these insights to the Sudanese experience. The chapter concludes by commenting on the future prospects for the Sudan.

5.1 INTER-RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL POWER IN TURKEY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Before the end of the 19th century, the dominant force in the Ottoman Empire's policy-formation and the main advocate of centralist policies had a rigid nucleus leadership consisting of predominant Turkish and Arabic speaking political and religious leaders. However, European interference in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs, strained the relations between the religious leaders and the Ottoman government. It should be noted that in a country where the main authority is at the centre, like in the Islamic states, the personality of the Sultan was of vital importance. As a result, political relations were confined to the top, between Europeans and the Sultan.

Consequently, under the influence and pressure from the Europeans, the Ottoman government introduced the reforms of 1839 and 1856, which granted equality to all Ottomans citizens. These reforms brought about a conflict between the government and various religious circles. As a result the empire broke into nationalist and Islamic movements that led to the decline of the empire.

When the Ottoman Empire reached its absolute low point after World War I, and found that it had no power to resist in the 1920s the Turks opted for territorial nationalhood and relinquishment of their empire. After the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the Sultan decreed the equality of Turkish citizens based on citizenship only, so as to prevent Turkey from further fragmentation. Since the Lausanne treaty, Turkey has gradually moved towards democracy despite, internal problems and external pressures.

5.2 INTER-RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL POWER IN EGYPT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

From the Muslim conquest in 641, Caliphs who were both civil and religious leaders ruled Egypt. Later, for three centuries between Salim I and Mohammed Ali, it was ruled according to the Ottomans imperial decentralist policies. During this latter period, relations between the government and the religious leaders were good, to the extent that

Mohammed Ali's successor, Sa'id, granted Christians equal citizenship with Muslims.

With the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the introduction of reforms in the 1920's, Egypt also withdrew from the Arab orbit and adopted more liberal policies in line with the modern concept of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians (see page 25 – 26, above).

After the independence from both Turkish and British rule, Egypt has been ruled by successive secular regimes. These regimes (as noted in pages 61 – 62, above), have tried to contain and ignore all the major disputes that have occurred between the government and Islamic brotherhoods, who differed from one another on social issues, economic matters and the role of Islam in the development of a modern nation. This policy of containing or ignoring a conflict is dangerous for the future of the country. It is better to engage in dialogue and to become reconciled than to avoid the reality of the situation. Besides the Islamists issues, Egypt like Turkey, has both internal and external pressures, i. e., severe economic problems, the Palestine-Israel conflict, Christian-Muslim disputes and the increasing vitality of movements for Islamic renewal.

5.3 POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF TURKEY AND EGYPT COMPARING WITH THE SUDAN

As was the case in both Turkey and Egypt, the politicisation of religion is not a new phenomenon in the Sudan. It was practised by the Nubian Christian Kingdoms, the Turko-Egyptian, the Mahdists, the Anglo-Egyptian and more widely and openly in the post-independence Sudanese governments. It was during the 1960's, that the religious factor moved drastically to occupy a central position in current Sudanese politics and conflicts as noted in chapter four, above.

Post-independence Sudanese politics were to a large extent dominated by secular nationalist regimes. Like Egypt, the nationalists left the question of Islam off the political agenda in order to gain support from moderate Muslims and non-Muslims. Yet the issue of the status and future of Islam was very much a part of the political platform, amidst Christian insistence on a secular state as the only means to secure unity and to put an end to the civil war between the North and South.

These matters came to a head in 1983, with the imposition of Islamic law and the arrival of Islamic fundamentalists into power in 1989. This represents a different situation to those obtaining in both Egypt and Turkey. Government by a fundamentalist grouping remains probably the most important challenge for both Muslims and Christians in the Sudan, because they will always focus on the restoration of the Islamic law as

the sole authority for jurisdiction and government in a Muslim society, as noted in chapter two, above. Fundamentalism, though not accepted by the majority of Muslims in the Sudan, has been imposed by military dictatorial regimes, obliging the Sudanese to respect and accept its programme for government. The fundamentalists were also able to mobilise the Muslim sects in the country to surrender to their ideology either under the threat of being persecuted or through the offer of other benefits.

In comparison, Sudan has more internal and external problems than either Turkey or Egypt. It is under pressure from the Arab and Islamic world to execute Arab-Islamic programmes in Africa, and also international pressure, for example, human rights and debt repayment, which lead to social and economic crisis. Internally, there is civil war in the South, which needs a concrete solution to ensure peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance for the future of its citizens.

5.4 FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE SUDAN

Any prospect of a better future for the Sudan can be based only on the establishment of democratic government, which will respect and grant equality to all her citizens based on citizenship rather than rely on, as happened in Turkey and Egypt in the 1920s. By citizenship, one does not mean citizenship according to the definition of Islamic law (found in page 24, above), but citizenship according to international human rights

law. To achieve this goal, it is absolutely necessary to take note of the Turkish or the Egyptian experience of 1923 (as noted in pages 80 – 81, above). Like Turkey and Egypt, Sudan should opt for territorial nationality and if possible relinquish Islamic law, by applying international principles of equal rights for all citizens, and the legitimacy of the nation.

This could be achieved through the involvement of both Muslims and Christians in religious and cultural dialogue. It will also need mutual cooperation between Church and Muslim leaders to pressurise the government to realise the danger we are facing. Dialogue, which would help to diminish mutual distrust, by exploring our learning to understand cultural and religious difference.

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