

Religious Peacebuilding Interventions in Sudan:  
A Comparison of Intrareligious and Interreligious Conflict Resolution Initiatives

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, who spent their early years together in the Horn of Africa,  
and who have supported me from the beginning

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Historical Context.....	5
<i>Sudanese Early History</i> .....	6
<i>Foreign Empires</i> .....	8
<i>Conflict in Sudan since Independence</i> .....	12
<i>Patterns of Conflict</i> .....	20
<i>Conflict Resolution Attempts</i> .....	24
Lessons from Conflict Resolution Theory.....	25
<i>Conflict Resolution and Analysis</i> .....	25
<i>Definitions of Conflict and Peace</i> .....	26
<i>Conflict Theory</i> .....	27
<i>Identity Conflict</i> .....	29
<i>Conflict Resolution Methods</i> .....	30
<i>Religious Peacebuilding</i> .....	33
<i>Christianity and Peacebuilding</i> .....	35
CHAPTER 3: DOUGLAS JOHNSTON AND THE ICRD.....	37
Facilitator: Douglas Johnston.....	37
Context of the Intervention.....	43
<i>Religion, Coexistence, and Conflict in Sudan</i> .....	44
<i>Government Policies toward Majority and Minority Religions</i> .....	48
<i>Regional and International Relations</i> .....	50
Intervention: Faith-based Diplomacy.....	52
<i>Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace (2000)</i> .....	53
<i>Sudan Reconciliation Training</i> .....	57
<i>Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace (2002)</i> .....	60
<i>Sustained Relational Engagement</i> .....	64
<i>Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC)</i> .....	64
<i>Committee for the Protection of Religious Freedom (CPRF)</i> .....	66
<i>Impact on Peacebuilding in Sudan</i> .....	68

CHAPTER 4: WILLIAM LOWREY AND THE NSCC .....	71
Facilitator: William Lowrey .....	71
Context of the Intervention.....	78
<i>Southern History and Identities</i> .....	78
<i>Dinka and Nuer Conflict</i> .....	79
<i>Religious and Cultural Shifts during War</i> .....	84
<i>Religious Capacities for Peace</i> .....	86
Intervention: The People to People Process .....	89
<i>Loki Nuer-Dinka Chiefs and Church Leaders Reconciliation Conference</i> .....	90
<i>Wunlit Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference</i> .....	94
<i>Waat Lou Nuer Peace and Governance Conference</i> .....	98
<i>Impact on Peacebuilding in Sudan</i> .....	99
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS .....	101
Religious Conflicts and Religious Peacebuilding .....	102
Nested Conflicts .....	105
Religious Peacebuilding Choices: Words and Actions .....	108
Reconciliation.....	110
Levels of Leadership .....	112
Structural Reform .....	114
Research and Evaluation Limitations .....	117
Motivation of the Religious Peacebuilder .....	118
LIST OF SOURCES .....	120

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
CAPS	Collaborative Analytical Problem-Solving
CCIA	Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPRF	Committee for the Protection of Religious Freedom
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ICRD	International Center for Religion and Diplomacy
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IPFC	International People's Friendship Council
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIF	National Islamic Front
NSCC	New Sudan Council of Churches
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
PCOS	Presbyterian Church of Sudan
SANU	Sudan African Nationalist Union
SCC	Sudan Council of Churches
SIRC	Sudan Inter-Religious Council
SPDF	Sudan People's Democratic Front
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SSDF	South Sudan Defense Force
SSIM/A	South Sudan Independence Movement/Army
SSLM	South Sudan Liberation Movement
SSUM/A	South Sudan Unity Movement/Army
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WCC	World Council of Churches



## ABSTRACT

### RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING INTERVENTIONS IN SUDAN: A COMPARISON OF INTRARELIGIOUS AND INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION INITIATIVES

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This thesis presents a comparative analysis of two different cases of religious peacebuilding in Sudan prior to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The paper integrates concepts and theories of conflict analysis and resolution with a review of the work of two facilitators. Douglas Johnston used faith-based diplomacy to develop working relationships among top Muslim and Christian religious leaders and scholars, leading to formation of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council. William Lowrey cooperated with the New Sudan Council of Churches to engage at the grassroots level with chiefs of the Dinka and Nuer tribes in the People to People process. The thesis investigates the approaches they share and examines how they each creatively adapted intervention methodologies to fit different contexts. The comparison demonstrates the capacity of religion to play a positive role in a variety of conflict situations, promoting sustainable societal relationships through nonviolent conflict resolution.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a comparative analysis of two processes of conflict resolution in Sudan over the last decade. Both of these cases are considered to successfully demonstrate the capacity of religion to play a positive role toward building a more just and peaceful Sudan. Both involve American facilitators, themselves persons of faith, who played key roles in processes leading to significant agreements between parties. While both are cases from Sudan, and the two facilitators share a common faith (Christian), the two cases and the modes of intervention are contrasted and compared in a variety of ways. As such, these case studies demonstrate Appleby's (2000) point, that although religion can be used by extremists to justify violence, it can also serve as inspiration toward nonviolent conflict resolution. This study includes a comparative review of these two different cases, utilizing tools of conflict analysis and religious or "faith-based" peacebuilding, and thereby drawing lessons that may apply to future efforts in Sudan and in the field in general.

The more recent case, as discussed in Chapter 3, involves the work of Dr. Douglas Johnston, who founded the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). Early in its existence, the ICRD, which is based in Washington, D.C., worked with religious and political leaders in Sudan on movement toward resolution of the civil war between the North and South. In November 2000, the ICRD held a meeting of top

Muslim and Christian leaders in the capital Khartoum that served as a catalyst to a breakthrough in communication and interreligious cooperation. That meeting resulted in the establishment of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), which includes Muslim and Christian religious leaders who meet monthly to work out problems. The ICRD also facilitated the subsequent development of a Committee to Protect Religious Freedom (CPRF) as part of SIRC, providing an ongoing accountability forum for the voicing of complaints of religious discrimination.

The facilitator of the second case in this study, which is the subject of Chapter 4, is the Rev. Dr. William O. Lowrey, who is currently the Director of Peacebuilding and Reconciliation for World Vision International, and who was involved in Southern Sudan as a consultant to the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC). The NSCC called on him to serve as facilitator in their People to People process, which was responding to severe factional fighting within Southern Sudan during the 1990s. He had already been connected with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS) in his research on traditional approaches to reconciliation and conflict resolution among the Nuer people. In June 1998, Lowrey facilitated the Nuer-Dinka Chiefs and Church Leaders Reconciliation Conference in Lokichokio, Kenya, which resulted in the Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord. He was also a conference facilitator at the March 1999 Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference at Wunlit, which received support from some of the major military factions that had been fighting each other.

The comparative analysis of the two case studies is based on existing records, including project reports, internal and external articles, organizational materials and

presentations, as well as prior research. While one case is interreligious, the other is intrareligious. One took place at grassroots and middle levels of leadership, and one engaged religious and political elites near the top levels of leadership. In addition to an analysis of the context of each case, and a review of the facilitator's background and work, I discuss the process of the interventions in both cases and the changes that occurred in the relationships between the Christian and Muslim participants in the one case, and between the Dinka and Nuer in the other.

Furthermore, I explore commonalities and differences in methods and engagement between the two cases. How do the nature of the conflict and the structure of party involvement affect decisions about engagement? How does the intervenor handle his personal role as a religious peacebuilder in differing situations? What indications can be taken for future interventions? What recommendations can be made for the context of Sudan's future religious relations and peacebuilding?

In short, the questions that guided my research included the following:

- a. What methods or concepts are facilitators likely to find useful for continued interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives with parties in Sudan? How might the use of ritual, for example, or a discourse of "reconciliation," relate to the North-South conflict on such issues as power-sharing and wealth, majority-minority relations, unity versus independence, and cultural dominance or violence?
- b. How do intrafaith conflict resolution or peacebuilding initiatives compare to interfaith initiatives in terms of the religious peacebuilder's management and

experience of his or her role (particularly when the facilitator may identify more readily with one of the represented faiths)?

- c. On the basis of analyzing prior cases where religion was to some extent a factor, what recommendations can be made for promoting positive peace in the Sudan through religious peacebuilding or “faith-based diplomacy”?

This study demonstrates diversity in modes of religious peacebuilding while in pursuit of similar goals of sustainable societal relationships through nonviolent conflict resolution. Given the tendency in the U.S. to oversimplify both the problems of the African continent and the scope of solutions, the results and recommendations convey the need for and the promise of a range of approaches, urging adaptability and creativity on the part of intervenors. As such, the thesis contributes to the production of a “critical mass of case studies and nuanced comparative statements that might provide a reliable basis for a comprehensive typology of religious conflict transformation” (Appleby 2000, 360n10).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Historical Context**

Sudan today is the largest country in Africa, about the size of Western Europe or the United States east of the Mississippi River. More than 450 ethnic groups speak more than 100 languages in its population of over 30 million, some 22 million of which live in the North, where most of the urban centers are. Sudan's vast and complex composition defies easy characterization of its conflicts, although they often have been labeled as either the result of religious or ethnic hatred, or of a brutal regime. Most writers on conflict in Sudan begin a review of Sudan's history in the nineteenth century. Some characterize the division between North and South as a recurring pattern of domination of the latter by successive colonial regimes, beginning with the Turks and carrying on through the present, with its earlier beginnings in Islamic conquest and Arabization of the North from the seventh century onwards (Kebbede 1999, 10). However, a few (Deng 1995, Beswick 2004, Petterson 2003) look even further back to close historical and anthropological sources. This is appropriate given the religious and cultural dimensions of the modern conflict, as a broad contextual understanding helps to give a sense of the patchwork of multiple tensions that attended peoples of the Sudan even prior to the unprecedented level of hostile developments under the pressures of the modern era.

### *Sudanese Early History*

Sudan's ancient history, before the influx of non-African peoples, is highly regarded in the country, especially by the Southern Sudanese. In ancient times, Egypt tended to dominate the area along the Nile to its south known as Nubia. The civilization of one of Nubia's regions, Cush, is said to have reached a high point around 1700 B.C. In the eighth century B.C., a Cushite dynasty conquered Egypt and ruled for a century. Not long after, however, Assyria invaded Egypt in 671 B.C. Pushed back, Cush remained centered in today's north central Sudan, with the kingdom of Meroe continuing to rule the middle Nile until 350 A.D. Then it was completely defeated by Abyssinian (Ethiopian) invaders (Pettersen 2003, 8; Rolandsen 2005, 22-23; Beswick 2004, 13).

In the sixth century, Byzantine Christian missionaries traveled to northern Sudan, and Christianity became well established in the area for several hundred years. Among the Nubian kingdoms, Alwa was the regional power until its decline in the thirteenth century. Although Arab armies conquered Egypt in the seventh century, incursions into Nubian territory drew heavy military losses. As a result, the Arabs and Nubians arrived at an agreement that neither would settle on the other's land, an understanding that operated for centuries (Pettersen 2003, 8; Beswick 2004, 30).

Over the last millennium, the demographics of the Sudanese territory have changed such that the vast majority of the population in the North is Muslim today and many claim Arab ancestry. Although traditionalist beliefs and Christianity have greater representation in the South, there are Muslims as well, and a significant degree of syncretism in religious practice. In the North, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

Mameluke sultans in Egypt sent military expeditions that weakened Nubia's military capacity. Over time, Arabs migrated southward. They intermarried and traded with the Nubian peoples, and along with the work of Muslim missionaries, Islam eventually supplanted Christianity as the predominant religion (Pettersen 2003, 8-9). By 1504, the Funj people constituted a Muslim African dynasty, and their Sultanate of Sinnar ruled in central Sudan until 1821 (Deng 1995, 40; Beswick 2004, 13, 18).

Stephanie Beswick's research on the history of South Sudan concentrates on the Dinka, covering their migrations beginning around the time of the decline of the Nubian kingdom of Alwa. Leading up through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Dinka moved south and southwest from around the confluence of the Blue and White Niles (now Khartoum), as suggested by oral histories and songs and other anthropological evidence (Beswick 2004, 15-26). The principal reasons for the migration include the increasing practice of slave raiding and the effects of drought. As they migrated into their present homelands in South Sudan, they warred with numerous tribal groups, including the Funj in the thirteenth century, the Shilluk between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Murle. Today the Padang or "Northern" Dinka, and the Bor Dinka to the south and east of the White Nile, live in areas of these clashes (Beswick 2004, 29-37).

Indeed, far from being a homogenous society set simply against the North, South Sudan is itself a place of diversity and conflict. A third Dinka group later moved across the Nile toward the western area of South Sudan. The Luel tribe had a longer history there but was definitively displaced northward by the Dinka, such that by the early



eighteenth century the Malwal Dinka predominated in that area now known as Bahr el Ghazal (Beswick 2004, 37-42). However, later that century, the Luel saw an influx from the western Islamic Wadai kingdom (in present-day Chad) of a pastoral and slave-raiding group, the Baggara. The Luel desire to return to their previous homeland led them to ally with the horse-riding Baggara in raiding Dinka areas for slaves and cattle, and opened up a long-standing instability in the northern Bahr el Ghazal river region, in addition to the southern Nuba Mountains (Beswick 2004, 154-7).

### *Foreign Empires*

In the early nineteenth century, Sudan's political mix was overpowered by the advent of foreign, modern empires. In 1820 Muhammad Ali, the Albanian governor of Ottoman Egypt, initiated a war of conquest against Sudan. Ali defeated the Funj kingdom in 1824 at Sinnar, which was then a hub of slave trading. Further south during this period, the Dinka and Nuer were loosely organized in federations of tribes and sub-tribes, while the Azande kingdom and Shilluk *Reth* functioned as central authorities among their peoples (Rolandsen 2005, 23). However, over several decades, as exploration and trading posts extended up the Nile, the boundaries of the Turkish-Egyptian administration expanded as far as the present-day border of Uganda. As peoples in Sudanese lands were subjected to varying degrees under the empire, the numbers and scope of the slavery increased markedly, and Muslims and Arabic-speakers found that they had some relative benefits over non-Muslim populations. Thus, as Johnson (2003, 4-6) argues, regionalized economic exploitation between North and South set in, paving the way for patterns of racially and religiously based discrimination.

Eventually, administrative difficulties led to unrest in the expanding empire. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah, claiming to be descended from Muhammad, proclaimed himself to be the prophesied Mahdi (Guided One). Rallying a force against the now Egyptian/British regime, he captured Khartoum in 1885, and a former British governor general of Sudan, Charles George Gordon, was killed. Religious distinctions had affected economic and political standing previously, but now the Mahdiyya injected a militant and expansionist element of jihad into the milieu, aimed against both non-Muslims and Muslims outside the Mahdist camp (Johnson 2000, 45). Through an oath of loyalty to al-Mahdi as the state's Imam, religious identity became particularly politicized, and localized tribal and hereditary leadership was undermined in the push to 'purify' Islam in Sudan (Johnson 2003, 6-7).

The 1886 Congress of Berlin outlined the boundaries of modern Sudan, and Britain's influence became dominant as the colonial power from the end of the century until independence. A military campaign launched in 1896 avenged Gordon's death and sought to protect Britain's colonial interests in Africa. General Kitchener took Khartoum in 1898, and the Mahdist army, led by Khalifa Abdullah (the Mahdi's successor), was defeated at nearby Karari. An Anglo-Egyptian Condominium was proclaimed in 1899 and remained in effect until independence in 1956.

Although technically an Egyptian colony, Britain controlled the administration of Sudan until after World War II. British administrative policy continued a pattern whereby interaction between the North and South of Sudan was restricted. Under the Condominium, as was the case under Turkish and Mahdist rule, peripheral areas of Sudan

received little attention for development. The South resisted outside rule more fiercely than other areas, and it was not “pacified” until 1918 (Rolandsen 2005, 23). In the North, Arabic and Islamic values were shielded while modernization was encouraged, and an educated Sudanese political and economic elite developed, particularly in Khartoum. Meanwhile, however, the Closed District Ordinance implemented in the mid-1920s restricted the movement and settlement of Northerners in the South, where Arabic education and language and Arab-influenced dress were forbidden (Pettersen 2003, 10; Rolandsen 2005, 24; Johnson 2003, 12).

Socially, another result has been that, to the present day, Southerners have little sense of a Sudanese national identity. Under the Condominium, Southern Sudan had a “Native Administration” system as enunciated in the 1930 “Southern Policy.” In many pastoralist areas of the South (apart from the already established hereditary systems of the Shilluk and Azande kingdoms), a hierarchy of chiefs was established, with responsibility for judicial cases (mostly civil), taxation, labor mobilization for public works, and administering relief aid. A paramount chief answered to the British District Commissioner, with an executive chief under him for each village, and headmen under him. The system of “indirect rule” has continued to function today in some places (Rolandsen 2005, 72; Johnson 2003, 12-13).

The Native Administration policy also tended to discourage rather than encourage education in the South, leaving Southern Sudan with less capacity to engage in nationalized politics later (Johnson 2003, 14-15). What little development of the South’s economy, education and health systems actually did occur was largely due to the work of

Christian missionaries and a few colonial officials (Petterson 2003, 9-10; Kebede 1999, 12). While Islamic and Arab influence was restrained, Christian missions were somewhat grudgingly allowed into the South, with zones allotted to Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians. Prior Catholic attempts at missions work did not survive the Mahdist era, so new missionaries were starting over under the British. However, the policy that kept the South separate was abandoned in the period up to and after independence, and foreign missionaries were eventually expelled in 1964 (Rolandsen 2005, 75).

The separation between North and South continued to have effects through the period of independence and beyond. Britain started to move Sudan toward self-determination and independence in 1946, not so much due to pressure from a homegrown nationalist movement (which might have fostered unity) as from a desire to keep Egypt from extending its sovereignty. At the behest of both Egypt and interests in the North, Southern Sudan was to be integrated into the political and administrative structures based in Khartoum, rather than prior possibilities of aligning with other parts of British East Africa. This sudden decision was not made by any Southern representative consultation, and it soon led to consternation both before and after Sudan's independence on January 1, 1956. Such expedient circumventions of democratic process in the pre-independence period established a pattern that has repeated itself numerous times in Sudan's post-colonial politics. Sudan has been embroiled in a conflict that has attained the status of one the longest civil wars in the world. The following section reviews the nature of the conflict as it has progressed over half a century.

### *Conflict in Sudan since Independence*

Some say that the first civil war began at a low level even before independence, as Southerners became increasingly convinced that the North intended to dominate them in the new state. Although a 1947 conference in Juba had increased Southern expectations that the colonial government would protect their interests in an integrated Sudanese government, Britain was all the more anxious to exit Sudan after 1955. By then, it appeared that the more highly educated Northerners would dominate nearly all the top positions in the administration, and Southern soldiers were similarly concerned about Arab military leadership and being posted to the North. In Equatoria, the South's main economic center, several garrisons mutinied in August, but this mutiny begun at Torit failed to gather momentum. Britain, having little control on the ground at this point, initiated a process by which independence was brought forward to January 1, 1956, before constitutional issues had been settled through a previously agreed schedule<sup>1</sup> (Johnson 2003, 25-29; Petterson 2003, 10; O'Ballance 2000, 7-9; Mitchell 1989, 4).

As Johnson (2000, 47) notes, the constitutional failures of the 1950s contributed to political turmoil and full-blown civil war throughout the 1960s and remain key to the Sudanese problem today. Shortly after independence, Northern politicians reneged on a pre-independence guarantee to consider federalism instead of a centralized government. As the Federal Party in parliament began to draw some support from other undeveloped regions, the government turned over power to the military in 1958. With public debate

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson (2003, 29) notes that this circumvention set a precedent of taking the consent of the people for granted in the nation's politics rather than following democratic procedures, citing the 1958 dissolution of the first post-independence Constituent Assembly prior to a decision on federalism, the abortion of the 1982 Southern referendum on subdivision of their region, and the 1989 coup averting government compromise over the issue of the Islamic state.

curtailed, General Abboud followed a policy of Islamization and Arabization that focused on nationalizing the education system as a key to unifying the country, and meanwhile suppressed indigenous culture. Southerners in exile, mostly Equatorian, formed the Sudan African Nationalist Union (SANU), and the *AnyaNya* guerilla movement began to form. After unrest in Khartoum caused Abboud to step down in 1964, the return of multiparty government gave rise to divisions between “outside” and “inside” Southern politicians, somewhat along ethnic lines, between separatists and those still willing to press for a federal solution. However, as several national ruling coalitions came and went, it became increasingly clear to Southerners that the federalists’ aims of home rule and a secular constitution were not attracting sufficient political will in the parliament, and military attacks in the South escalated throughout the decade (Johnson 2003, 30-34; 2000, 47-48; Kebede 1999, 13).

The first civil war turned towards resolution after Colonel Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri, with an unstable left-leaning coalition of officers, staged a coup in May 1969. At first, Nimeiri undermined the power of sectarian parties and promulgated “Sudanese socialism;” he also indicated openness toward some degree of autonomy in the South. Then, when a coup staged against him in 1971 by former communist allies was thwarted, Nimeiri responded vengefully, and thereafter turned to new alliances with the West, where there became an interest in containing pro-Soviet Ethiopia. He also negotiated with the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), which had finally formed as an amalgamation of many of the Southern factions, with Colonel Joseph Lagu commanding the *AnyaNya* as its military wing. In March 1972, the two sides agreed to the Addis

Ababa Accord, which brought relative peace to the country for over a decade (Johnson 2000, 48; O'Ballance 2000, 56-67; Kebede 1993, 14-16; Mitchell 1989, 5-6).

Christopher Mitchell (1989, 24-27) has argued that the agreement signed in Addis Ababa represented a good attempt, on paper at least, to resolve two issues that are common to self-determination struggles like that of Southern Sudan, namely the questions of political autonomy and of security. Finding a space between secession and a single unitary government, the Accord instituted a regionally elected Assembly with powers to recommend both a High Executive Council and its President for approval by the national President. Much of the region's affairs could thus be handled closer to home, while representation continued in the central government. The Regional Assembly could also request that the national President exempt the South from enforcement of national legislation. Militarily, the Accord also provided for an integrated "Southern Command," of which at least half of the ranks were to be filled with former *AnyaNya*.

The Addis Ababa Accord may have been "the most important event in the political history of post-independence Sudan" (Kebede 1999, 16), but the relative stability of the country during the 1970s eventually eroded. Analysts agree that the terms of the agreement were never fully implemented, while Johnson argues additionally that it "failed to address, and therefore to resolve, many of the fundamental causes of the war" (2000, 48). The ongoing focus of exploiting resources with benefits mainly for the North is a case in point. During the 1970s, Sudan secured development loans and accumulated debt to Western and multilateral finance institutions, as well as Arab countries, in a doomed investment strategy aimed at making the country the "breadbasket

of the Middle East” (Kebbede 1999, 16). Nearly all implemented funds went toward agricultural schemes in the North, while what did reach the South often came indirectly through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than through a government focused on nation-building. The discovery of oil in 1979, mostly in the South, could have provided tax revenue to the region under the Accord, but Khartoum planned to build a refinery in the North, and even abandoned that idea in favor of a pipeline for rapid exports and revenue. As for the South’s abundance of water, the Jonglei Canal Scheme was devised to provide assistance to the North and to Egypt for agricultural development, but expected returns in the form of development in the South never materialized (Johnson 2000, 49-55; 2003, 43-51; Kebbede 1999, 16-19).

The foregoing economic issues served to heighten political tensions that ultimately culminated in Nimeiri’s abrogation of the Addis Ababa Accord. Recognized problems of boundary demarcation between North and South were exacerbated by the oil’s proximity to the border, and by local conflicts between pastoralist Arabs and Dinka over potential loss of river access. There was also dissatisfaction among sections of Southern troops over the absorption of the *AnyaNya* into the Sudanese army. And while most Southerners had seen Nimeiri as their protector against Northern sectarian parties, he used his strong executive powers of confirmation to regularly intervene in Southern presidential elections and politics. Besides its own problems of corruption, the Juba government was consistently underfunded, and the regional ministries for economic planning and education failed to function independently from Khartoum. As world recession, the global oil crisis, mismanagement and failure of the “breadbasket” scheme



ensued toward the end of the 1970s, Nimeiri's popularity began to decline in the South and in the North. Some have suggested that he underwent a religious transformation, but strengthening his power base was likely a prominent impetus to his "national reconciliation" with the Northern opposition and sectarian parties who had opposed Southern self-determination and the Addis Ababa Accord from the start. Increasingly dictatorial, by June 1983 Nimeiri had decreed the division of the South into the three regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile, and Equatoria, each with less power than the prior government at Juba. Subsequently, in the same year, he again violated the secular 1973 Constitution by introducing the widely hated "September Laws," which imposed *shari'a* law and punishments on the entire country (Johnson 2000, 49-50; 2003, 41-51, 56; Kebede 1999, 17-21; Petterson 2003, 12; O'Ballance 2000, 131).

The subdivision of the South, or "decentralization for development," was not without its proponents there, thus illustrating some of the deep divisions within the region. Growing confrontation between Nilotic groups who had previously been powerless, especially the majority Dinka, and Equatorians, who had the greater experience from having served in the colonial administration, beleaguered the South's first attempt at self-government. Under Nimeiri's direction, the presidency of the region's High Executive Council fluctuated between Abel Alier and Joseph Lagu, such that Lagu lobbied for regionalization in the dashed hope of bringing more power home to Equatoria. After the Bor Garrison mutinied in May 1983, a Dinka colonel based in Khartoum, John Garang, was sent to mediate, but instead he also defected and eventually unified many forces under a combined political-military insurgency, the Sudan People's

Liberation Movement and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A). The new force for change gained support from Marxist Ethiopia, which resented Sudanese support for Eritrean separatism and had in fact been supporting residual insurgent groups (*AnyaNya* 2) since 1976, but the SPLM/A also needed some internal friends, since the United States had not yet suspended its military aid to Khartoum. Cold War dynamics thus contributed to the SPLM/A's adoption of a policy of national liberation rather than of separation, and also to Khartoum's prosecution of the war by increasingly supplying proxy tribal militias in a strategy that would instigate neighborly violence among Southerners. Meanwhile, although the SPLM/A's image was initially one of Dinka dominance, support from Equatorians and other groups grew somewhat over its first decade, largely as a preference to ongoing repression by successive Sudanese governments and the Army (Johnson 2000, 52-65; 2003, 51-55; Rolandsen 2005, 26-27).

In the North, the return of war was also characterized by partisanship after Nimeiri was ousted in 1985 during popular protests, until a military regime took over in 1989. Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the Muslim Brothers party before Nimeiri, had returned from exile under "national reconciliation" and his movement got involved in political and financial halls of power. Emerging as the National Islamic Front (NIF), they finished behind the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in the democratic elections of 1986. Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi reneged on promises to pursue a peaceful end to the war and to repeal the September Laws. With economic and security situations continuing to decline and new elections approaching, the DUP, on the other hand, decided to negotiate a peace agreement with the SPLM/A, which won

widespread support from the public and the Army. In 1989, the Mahdi government finally appeared ready to negotiate an end to the war; however, a group of officers led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir, and backed by the uncompromising NIF, staged a bloodless coup on June 30. The military regime solidly declared Sudan an Islamic state, and vigorously pursued militant resolution of the war as a jihad into the 1990s (Johnson 2000, 60-65; Kebede 1999, 23-29).

Although John Garang's SPLM/A achieved prominence among Southern groups, the tumultuous changes at the end of the Cold War prompted open wounds in the South that bled through much of the 1990s and were not fully healed until the next decade. The SPLM/A lost crucial military support when the Mengistu government in Ethiopia fell in 1991, and as thousands of refugees returned to the South, two leaders, Riek Machar, a Nuer, and Lam Akol, a Shilluk, attempted to oust Garang and put Southern independence back on the table. They soon formed the SPLA-Nasir faction, and ironically became supplied by the NIF regime, just like many militias then and in the past. Often directed against civilian populations, bitter, apparently ethnically based infighting and factionalization continued; Garang's SPLA lost territory, and the predominantly Nuer faction changed names and disintegrated into smaller forces,<sup>2</sup> with civil war among themselves. The challenges of the 1990s forced the SPLM/A to rely more on local populations and on foreign NGOs; it held a National Convention in 1994, which, although not followed by effective implementation of civil administration, did result in a

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<sup>2</sup> The SPLA faction at Nasir was renamed SPLA-United in 1993 as it experienced limited success in attracting more defector segments from around the South. Machar renamed it the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) in 1994, and Akol claimed SPLA-United as the name of his home group.

commitment to the protection of civilians and to democracy. As other factions fluctuated between making peace with the government and defecting, the SPLM/A strengthened its political position and allowed grassroots peace efforts in the South, such as the People to People process in this study. Although by then its significance was mostly symbolic, Machar reconciled with Garang and returned to the SPLM in 2002 (Johnson 2000, 66-69; 2003, 111-126; Hutchison 2001; Rolandsen 2005, 35-42, 124-127, 131, 167, 172-173; Petterson 2003, 232).

The relative peace that South Sudan currently enjoys came after a decade in which the NIF regime came under increasing pressure internationally as well as domestically. Although new oil production at the turn of the century promised increased revenue for the war, the SPLA had managed to regain ground in the mid to late 1990s, with aid from neighboring countries where the Sudanese government was supporting rebels. The SPLM/A also held a conference of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition in Asmara in 1995, at which the Umma Party and the DUP both recognized the right of self-determination and some degree of separation of politics and religion, two key issues of contention; armed rebellions were also pressuring the regime in the North. The government's militia allies, on the other hand, were raiding in the South and taking slaves. Reports of human rights abuses, and the failure to restore democracy, relegated the regime to pariah status in the West, in addition to Sudan's support for Iraq in the Gulf War, which also aggravated its former Arab benefactors. Washington, furthermore, had listed Sudan as a state sponsor of international terrorism in 1993. However, al-Bashir's government sought to avoid becoming an American target, especially after the 9/11

attacks in 2001. Focused involvement from the Bush administration provided a fresh impetus to peace negotiations, which had been ongoing intermittently since 1994, under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Drought and Development (IGADD, later IGAD). In July 2002, the Machakos Protocol was agreed and hailed as a breakthrough on key issues. After continued resolution of issues, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) came into effect in 2005, placing priority on a united Sudan for six years, after which the Southern people are to decide their future in a referendum (Pettersen 2003, 13-17, 238-246; Rolandsen 2005, 125-127, 172-174).

### *Patterns of Conflict*

Francis Deng (1995) describes Sudan's conflict since independence as a "war of visions" in his book of the same name. Deng's treatise portrays at considerable length a basic crisis of national identity, wherein two parallel and not necessarily compatible visions compete for the "soul of the nation" (21). For the dominant political elite in the North, the goal has been continued assimilation of the whole country into their desired Arab-Muslim identity,<sup>3</sup> resulting in unity. Meanwhile, resistance against imposition has become a unifying core for the South, where a sense of African identity mingled with Christian and Western influences has deepened in response (484-485). While Deng reviews a range of issues that have been recognized as needing resolution for the future of Sudan, he sees identity as the one that cuts across all others, including that of the relationship between religion and the state. Deng identifies the role of *shari'a* as the

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<sup>3</sup> Deng (1995, 1-6) and others argue that Northern Sudanese are predominantly African-Arab in their racial heritage, despite their denials, but notes for the purposes of his study that the sociology of self-perception is more important than objective identity.

most intractable issue in the Sudanese conflict, but argues that religion has become as symbolic as it is controversial in the conflict, and cannot properly be separated from the larger underlying political problem of establishing a national identity, whether on an Arab-Islamic or some other basis (489-492).

Deng avoids characterizing the Sudanese conflict as primarily a religious struggle, and other scholars concur. Julia Aker Duany (2003, 198-202) outlines root causes of the war on several levels, and indeed, each can be seen through Deng's lens. Sudan's religious diversity is certainly included, as non-Muslims in the South typically see a pattern of Arab-Muslim migration that has carried an intention to assimilate others under their superior religion and civilization. The racial factor is there also, as a gulf is widely perceived to exist between the identity of Southerners as African, and Northerners, who claim Arab identity with pride and may painfully use a term for slave, *abid*, to refer to Southerners. As to the control of resources and politics, Duany notes that colonial policies helped to institutionalize the issue of differential power, often characterized in Northern politics as "the Southern problem," because separation of the two areas led to both a tradition of identity politics in the North and an expectation of self-rule in the South.

Johnson (2003, 1) points out that conflict in the Sudan is often oversimplified into either of two competing explanations, one emphasizing historical exploitation of the "African" South by the "Arab" North, and another contending that there is no "African" versus "Arab" division under Sudanese Islam except that created artificially through colonialism. In his preface to *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (2003), Johnson

lists ten historical factors which have produced Sudan's recurring wars, and which can nonetheless be summarized in categories as below:

1. *Regions*: historical patterns of exploitation and inequity between the central state power and the marginalized peripheries
2. *Race*: the Arab-Islamic identity of the Northern elite and attempts to establish it as the national identity despite the diversity of the population
3. *Religion*: recurrence of politically and economically powerful groups that have espoused militant brands of Islam, creating divisions between those with and without full legal rights on a sectarian basis
4. *Resources*: the weakened state of the ecological and economic infrastructure, together with the Southern abundance of water and oil.
5. *Relations*: the juxtaposition of internal struggles with regional and global political, military and economic influences, namely foreign investment in development interests as well as Cold War arms proliferation.

Girma Kebede (1999, 2-4) argues that skyrocketing inflation in the North during the 1990s, along with riots and strikes, resulted from the government's economic policy that focused on the war, channeling resources toward the jihadist aims of Islamization and Arabization. In the South, the war devastated the traditional subsistence base of an agricultural economy. Displacement led to diminished cultivation and degradation, and prevailing insecurity undermined the traditional goods exchange system and curtailed transport links to more needy areas.

Mohamed Suliman has also emphasized the ecological aspects of the war, in fact contending that since 1983, the conflict between North and South has been less based on ethnicity and religion than on scarcity of resources. According to Suliman (1993, 105), following Nimeiri's fall-out with communists, the peace of the Addis Ababa Accords was necessary to allow expansion of international cooperative agricultural programs that were intended to make Sudan the "bread-basket" of the Arab world. However, as chronicled by Kebede (1999, 108-127), the rapid expansion and mismanagement of mechanized farming degraded the land and displaced traditional agricultural practices on which the majority of Sudanese depended. The disruption fueled numerous forms of conflict between local farmers and nomadic pastoralists, as well as with the large-farm owners and the state (Suliman 1993, 106). Poverty and drought led to mass internal displacement and famine during the 1980s. Farming schemes then looked southward as land in the North degraded, and tensions also arose over plans to exploit the oil and water resources of the South. Thus, as the second civil war began, the SPLA claimed to fight not for Southern independence, but on behalf of all Sudan's rural poor, and launched its first attacks against the Jonglei Canal scheme, oil exploration sites, and mechanized farms (107-108). As such, under the reality of diminishing resources in the North, the parties in the conflict are seen more on economic terms than ethnic, in which the ruling elite and the *Jellaba* urbanized merchant class have continued a historical pattern of plundering marginal areas, resulting in millions of *shamasa* (homeless), and an internally divided South, where inter-tribal rivalry over resources can be manipulated and exacerbated (Suliman 1999).



### *Conflict Resolution Attempts*

The two cases analyzed in this thesis are two among many attempts to resolve causes of war in the Sudan. The CPA signed in 2005 was the result of over a decade of talks. IGAD mandated a regional committee in 1993, comprising Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, to mediate the conflict, with Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi as the chair. The next year, the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A signed on to its Declaration of Principles as a framework for talks. However, despite numerous meetings over the following years, little substantive progress was achieved until the Machakos Protocol in 2002 (Deng and Khalil 2004, 4-5). Prior to the IGAD process, other high-level involvement had included the former United States President Jimmy Carter, as well as Nigeria during its chairmanship of the Organization of African Unity. Two rounds of talks were held in Abuja, but the negotiations broke down due to entrenchment on both sides (4).

Beyond the current Agreement, the most notable attempt to resolve the war permanently was the Addis Ababa Accord. It relates particularly to this study because of the successful and central involvement of religious actors as intermediaries. The World Council of Churches (WCC) had been concerned about the care of Sudan's refugees since 1965, and the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) was involved with matters of church life in the South. After negotiation and discussion with the Sudanese ambassadors in Kenya and Ethiopia, the WCC and AACC were able to jointly visit Khartoum in May 1971. This tour was ostensibly for purposes of discussing aid, but the focus of "Operation Sudan" turned to reconciliation efforts. A series of points of

agreement from that delegation led to the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) contacting the SSLM later that year. After some meetings between the two parties, with the "observers" acting as mediators, formal agreement was reached at the Addis Ababa meeting in February 1972 (Rees 1977, 126-129). The negotiations, mediated by the AACC secretary-general and the director of the CCIA, had included prayers and sermons, and displays of remorse across Muslim and Christian lines (Sampson 1997, 284-285).

### **Lessons from Conflict Resolution Theory**

#### *Conflict Resolution and Analysis*

Conflict resolution as a field can be understood as having three distinct but interrelated branches of endeavor, namely theory, research, and practice (Cheldelin et al. 2003). Much of the academic work in the field as it has expanded over the last half-century has focused on the generation of a unified theory of conflict and conflict resolution, developed and increasingly supported by research that comports with the experiences of practitioners such as the peacebuilders in the two cases in this study. Assefa (1987, 8-10) provides an example of the intentional focus on theory building in the field through his research of the third party mediation process that led to the 1972 agreement ending the first Sudanese civil war. Likewise, Mitchell (1989, 31-33) in his analysis argues that it was a "model settlement" despite the fact that it was abrogated in the following decade. The aim of achieving a general, integrated theory in the conflict resolution field flows from a basic premise, that effective conflict resolution practice is benefited by good conflict analysis (Cheldelin et al. 2003).

### *Definitions of Conflict and Peace*

Various definitions and descriptions of conflict exist, which usually include the components of parties, goals, and behavior or perceptions. According to Kriesberg (1998, 2), “a social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives.” Mitchell (1994, 16-34) avoids providing a simple definition to encapsulate conflict, but instead provides a triadic analytical structure of conflict situation, conflict attitudes and perceptions, and conflict behavior. The last two of these refer to the psychological states and oppositional actions, respectively, that attend parties in a situation of conflict, which Mitchell defines as “any situation in which two or more social entities or ‘parties’ (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals” (17).

Sandole (1993, 6) uses the term “manifest conflict process,” which he defines as “a situation in which at least two parties, or their representatives, try to pursue their perceptions of mutually incompatible goals by undermining, directly or indirectly, each other’s goal-seeking capability.” Of more concern to Sandole is the progression to an “aggressive manifest conflict process,” which involves pursuit by means of physical or psychological injury to person or property. Sandole’s terms also allow a clear distinction between manifest conflicts and latent conflicts, which are situations in which conflict could be perceived and become manifest, and as such may suggest early intervention.

The idea of latency foresees an insufficiency in defining peace merely as the absence of direct violence. Indeed, even for manifest conflicts, Galtung (1969) distinguishes between direct violence and structural violence, which parallel definitions

of negative and positive peace. In Galtung's view, structural violence, alternately termed social injustice, is indirect in that there is not a person whose action is the immediate cause of its effects; rather, it refers to patterns of alienation and discrimination that can nonetheless damage and destroy. Negative peace describes a situation where direct violence is absent, but underlying issues of conflict may remain unresolved. In turn, positive peace comes about when structural violence has been removed (Galtung 1969; Jeong 2000).

### *Conflict Theory*

Dugan (1996) presents a nested model of conflict, which includes four types of conflict, of increasingly wide significance. All conflicts are issues-specific, but a conflict may also be relational, that is, the parties' behaviors within a conflict may be affected by factors in their pre-existing relationship. Moving to even wider types of conflict of which the conflict situation may be a manifestation, Dugan categorizes structural conflicts on two levels. At the sub-system level, a structural conflict involves inequities between the parties to the conflict. If the inequities reflect a broader pattern in the society, it is a system-level structural conflict. Dugan's hierarchy suggests that social conflicts often go beyond the specific presenting issues, requiring attention to both relational patterns and structural patterns among the parties and in the wider society.

Among the explanations for the sources of social conflict is Gurr's theory of relative deprivation, which he put forth as a corollary to the frustration-aggression theory developed by Dollard in 1939. According to Gurr (1968, 252-253), "the necessary precondition for violent civil conflict is relative deprivation, defined as actors' perception

of discrepancy between their *value expectations* and their environment's apparent *value capabilities*." Both value expectations and value capabilities relate to the perceptions of parties. Gurr defines value expectations as "the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are justifiably entitled," while value capabilities refer to their "perceived chances of getting or keeping the values they legitimately expect to attain" within their social and physical environment (253). Gurr's basic proposition is that the probability of aggressive or violent conflict manifesting itself increases as relative deprivation becomes more severe.

While relative deprivation theory utilizes a psychological and structural approach to explain functionally how conflict arises, other theories such as needs theory have sought to address possible root causes of conflicts. In a world where large-scale conflicts involving identity-based groups have often appeared both protracted and impervious to classic negotiation and collective bargaining strategies, Burton (1990) places a focus on characteristics of the individual human person. The theory holds that there are basic human needs, which are fundamental and universal, and that at the heart of such deep-rooted social conflicts lies a lack of satisfaction of basic needs of groups of individuals. Numerous lists of basic human needs that have been proposed; Galtung (1990) organizes his into a typology that includes categories of security and welfare (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) covering material needs, as well as non-material needs of freedom and identity.

### *Identity Conflict*

In deep-rooted conflicts, social identities (such as ethnicity, race, religion, class, kinship, nation, or caste) often lie at the core of party identification. Black defines social identity as “the social use of cultural markers to claim, achieve, or ascribe group membership” (Black 2003, 120). According to Black, the causal direction between social identity and deep-rooted conflict is two-way. By contrast, primordialism tends to assume that social identities are stagnant, and thus, that development of conflict can be traced to differences between identity groups. Black, however, argues that conflict processes themselves also contribute to the formation and maintenance of social identities (122). Although cultural markers are significant in many deep-rooted identity conflicts, the relationship that culture has to conflict is sometimes conflated with closely related concepts of social identity such as ethnicity and religion.

Ethnic conflict is one among various forms of identity conflict, and in conflict resolution it is salient to delineate differences between ethnicity and culture. Ethnicity is a category of social identification that has arisen historically in relation to the politics of the modern state, in which groups are differentiated and come to be identified based on certain chosen cultural markers in individuals (125). Avruch discusses culture as an anthropological term that describes connections between individual and group identity and how meaning is ascribed. On the other hand, “when conceived of as a component of a total social identity, ethnicity is also invested by individuals with affect, and can thus motivate social action,” sometimes against other groups or entities (Avruch 2003, 146). For example, in Sudan the social identity factor of ethnicity, along with race and religion,

is routinely used to characterize the parties to civil war. Yet Deng (1995, 1-6) argues that the self-perception of many Northerners as Arabs is a constructed identity that ignores historically objective cultural realities indicating mixed African-Arab heritage among most of that population.

Seul (1999, 564) has argued that religious identity is not merely a facet of ethnicity in conflicts that display religious divisions. Neither is religion the cause of religious conflicts, but rather, elements of religious belief and practice are particularly capable of serving individual identity needs of meaning, well-being and belonging while also fostering a strong identification with the group. As such, it is not uncommon in conflicts that erupt between religious identity groups for cultural components of religion to become symbols and markers that rally adherents to the cause of the group.

#### *Conflict Resolution Methods*

Particularly since the end of the Cold War, the prevalence of ethnic and other identity conflicts has led to increased research on conflict intervention methods that go beyond traditional negotiation strategies used between state actors. Giving attention to the complexity of human interactions, many strategies of intervention operate outside of government, often called Track Two approaches (Diamond and McDonald 1996).

Lederach (1997) suggests three levels of leadership, using a triangle to illustrate that the top level, comprising highly visible leaders such as key military, political or religious figures, represents only a fraction of actors compared to the lower levels. Middle-range leadership is made up of respected leaders from various sectors of the society, whereas the grassroots leadership, typically having local influence, comprises the largest group.

As a term itself, conflict resolution is sometimes used to refer to the broad range of intervention methods, but in a more specific sense, it refers to strategies that seek to resolve the underlying, or root, causes. One such method is that of the collaborative analytical problem-solving (CAPS) approach devised by Mitchell and Banks. In a CAPS workshop, a team of facilitators works with representatives of the parties and provides “a safe venue in which productive discussions might take place, maximizing the chances of a genuine exchange of ideas, of free-ranging analysis and of the non-committing exploration of options” (Mitchell and Banks 1996, 5). By maintaining an academic tone and steering clear of bargaining on interests and positions, a CAPS exercise creates an initial forum in which the perceptions, values, and goals of each side can be aired and the participants can search for possible solutions that might be acceptable to both sides of the conflict.

While the CAPS approach to conflict resolution, as its name implies, remains focused on solutions to problems in order to resolve deep-rooted conflict, some other strategies aim at conflict transformation, marked by the additional goal of long-term relational and structural change away from the combativeness among the parties. In *A Public Peace Process*, Saunders (1989) lays out a framework for a facilitated process of sustained dialogue, which he describes as more formal than a discussion, but less formal than mediation or negotiation. As an option to move beyond impasses in deepening the dialogue, Saunders draws upon Montville’s idea of the “walk through history,” in which participants share, and listen to, each other’s descriptions of key events from their shared traumatic history, possibly opening the door to psychological healing (Saunders 1989,



117). After a positive experience of relational change within the dialogue group, the aim of a systematic sustained dialogue is to take its transformational insights to the larger community (87).

In *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Lederach (1997) also places relationship at the center of conflict transformation, through his discussion of reconciliation as a focus. Lederach also views reconciliation as a paradigm functioning as a locus, a space where the parties can encounter each other. In that place four concepts meet, which are truth and mercy, justice and peace. Expanding on each of these concepts in turn, Lederach explains reconciliation as a place where there is transparency of pains and wrongs in a conflict, coupled with a dynamic of acceptance and healing; thirdly, there is also room for restitution and rights to be recognized, yet finally, a realization of interdependence, respect and well-being (24-31). Lederach's paradigm of reconciliation for social conflicts is one among various conceptions of the term, many of which focus on sustained improvement in relationships previously marked by conflict. However, some scholars warn that there can be a danger that the rhetoric of reconciliation may be used to cloud issues of justice and the necessity of rooting out structural violence, particularly in discussions of "national reconciliation" after violent civil conflict (Jeong 2002). Reconciliation has become a popular concept in conflict resolution studies, and especially in religious contexts, yet its definition and application remain topics of broad discussion (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004).

### *Religious Peacebuilding*

As a set of practices including conflict transformation, Appleby (2000, 211-212) defines *religious peacebuilding* as “the various phases, levels, and types of activity, by religious actors and others, that strengthen religion’s role in creating tolerant and nonviolent societies.” In *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, he makes the case that the violent practices of religious extremists, and the peacebuilding efforts of “nonviolent religious militants,” are both identifiable religious behaviors, responses to the sacred. Just as “religious garb” often cloaks violent conflict, Appleby argues that religious beliefs and practice also have the potential to be manifested in peacebuilding (2000, 4, 11-13, 19).

Many varieties of religious peacebuilding have been put into practice in religious and other identity based conflicts. Appleby classifies religious peacebuilding as having three dimensions: conflict management, conflict resolution, and structural reform (212-221). According to a second typology, religious peacebuilders can also engage a conflict through different modes, including mobilization during a crisis, longer-term homegrown saturation in the society (exemplified by the case of Northern Ireland), and interventions (229-243). Yet another typology classifies grassroots religious peacebuilding efforts by their timing in relation to the progression of violent conflict (Bamat and Cejka 2003, 12-13).

One common practice in religious peacebuilding has been interfaith dialogue (Smock 2002). These dialogues take various forms, but can involve participants representing different religions within a conflict situation that is religiously charged. The

“walk through history” method of storytelling may be used to promote acknowledgment of injuries and healing, as in nonreligious dialogues. According to Abu-Nimer (2002, 16-21) spirituality is often seen as being at the center of religious identity and change, and interfaith dialogue also incorporates discussion about ritual, scripture and sacred texts, and utilizes secondary and universal languages of peace. Smock (2002, 128-129) concludes that interfaith dialogue needs to have a clear purpose, although it may serve different ends, such as either preparing a joint declaration, or improving relationships among participants.

Gopin, however, cautions against the assumption that deep change in conflicted relationships is best effected through verbal dialogue alone. According to Gopin, words and dialogue in religious conflict, including statements of reconciliation and forgiveness, ought not to be overemphasized among the variety of paths to better relationships. Rather, religion is especially replete with significant resources that carry deep cultural meaning. As such, the use of religious symbols and deeds can communicate powerfully to affect relationship among masses of people (Gopin 2000, 41-44; 2002, 144-159).

Gopin argues for an understanding in religious peacebuilding that “myth matters,” by which he refers to the potential of key stories and frames that convey existential truth and address deep human problems to unite masses of people through religious culture (2000, 198; 2002, 8). He urges “a constructive engagement with myth, with culture, and with its principal emissaries, ritual and sacred deed” (2000, 199). When working with religious actors in the Middle East, for example, an elicitive process that draws from the culture might utilize concepts like that of the Other, the stranger or *ger* (in the Hebrew

Bible). It would also be aware of significant differences in understandings and uses of reconciliation among Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, in relation both to the divine and to human interaction (2002, 108-143). By meeting religious actors within their own cultural frames, the religious peacebuilder can promote “prosocial” expressions of religion in human relationships (2000, 6-8).

### *Christianity and Peacebuilding*

Within Christianity, broadly speaking, rituals, the cross, and biblical texts figure prominently among religious cultural resources for peace, each tying in to concepts of reconciliation. Assefa (1993) points to reconciliation as a central theme in Christian theology. He outlines four layers in a Christian model, with spiritual reconciliation, or harmony with God, at the core, followed by reconciliation with self, with one’s “neighbors” in the human community, and with the natural environment. As the dimensions are interrelated, one of the implications Assefa draws for Christian peacemaking is that personal spirituality can be brought into the arena of building relationships, while conversely, peace with self and peace with God partly draw upon the pursuit of social peace (Assefa 1993, 9-18).

Schreiter (1992) also explores reconciliation as a theme in Christian theology, drawing attention to the church’s resources. Both the ritual of the Eucharist, or communion, and the symbol of the cross, point with great significance to the crucifixion of Jesus. This cultural marker is invested with an understanding of the forgiveness and reconciliation of God in the midst of violence. Biblical texts such as the story of the Prodigal Son also speak to the renewal of relationship between estranged people

(Schreiter 1992, 74-79). In *An Ethic for Enemies*, Shriver (1995) explores applications of the Christian understanding of forgiveness in politics.

Just as there is variety among different religions in the area of religious peacebuilding, there are also distinctions within Christianity. From his experience with Mennonite communities, Gopin (2000, 139-166) has characterized peacebuilders in these historic “peace churches” as exhibiting traits of self-doubt, humility, and listening that contribute to building of relationships as well their focus on the tensions between peace and justice. Catholic social doctrine has reflected a shift since the Second Vatican Council toward ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, with “mission” taking on less of a focus on conversion and more of a progressive sense of sharing across cultures (Appleby 2000, 267-269; Kimball 1991). By contrast to Catholic Relief Services, however, Appleby (2000, 273) describes the broadly evangelical relief organization World Vision as “more unapologetically confessional in its approach, seeing proselytism of a kind—witness to Gospel values through its humanitarian work as well as through explicit faith formation in some Christian communities—as central to its identity and vision.” To see some of the distinctions in the application of religious peacebuilding, we now turn to the case studies in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER 3: DOUGLAS JOHNSTON AND THE ICRD

### **Facilitator: Douglas Johnston**

Dr. Douglas Johnston founded the ICRD in July 1999, after having led research in religion and conflict resolution for a decade at a Washington think tank. He decided to start what he has called a “do tank,” to put the research to practice in conjunction with his diplomatic background (Hayes 2005).

Before founding the ICRD, Johnston’s career took him through military and public service as well as research. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Harvard and is a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, from which he went on to qualify for command of a nuclear submarine during the 1960s. He has worked in the President’s Office of Emergency Preparedness, as Director of Policy Planning and Management for the Secretary of Defense, and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy. From 1987 to 1999, Johnston served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a think tank in Washington. While at CSIS, Johnston developed a research project in Religion and Conflict Resolution, which after seven years culminated in the publication of his flagship book, *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, co-edited with conflict resolution scholar Cynthia Sampson (Hayes 2005; Chick 2007). The 1994 book presents seven cases studies in which religious peacemaking has helped to prevent or resolve

conflict in the post-World War II world, and in turn draws implications both for the arena of international diplomacy and for religious communities.

Johnston's research led to the founding of the ICRD because of what he saw as a need for new tools in a post-Cold War world. During the 1990s, the dominance of Western ideals of democracy and modernity had not produced a flourishing of peace in many places around the world. Among Westerners in the diplomatic arena, Johnston also noted a commonplace avoidance of the import of religion in political negotiations, often due to engrained concerns over the separation of religion and state. However, the secular drive among American diplomats was often not reflected overseas, where culturally there is often more openness toward discussions of applying faith in the midst of politics. In Johnston's analysis, the "Christian West" speaks the language of secularism, meaning freedom of worship, but Muslims hear it as "Godless," because Islam speaks the language of integration of religion and politics (ICRD 2002). Accordingly, the ICRD was founded to address as its core business what Johnston calls the practice of "faith-based diplomacy, a form of intervention that brings the transcendent aspects of personal religious faith to bear in overcoming the secular obstacles to peace" (Bouta et al. 2005, 77).

In the West, Johnston typically addresses the need for faith-based diplomacy in terms of *realpolitik*, arguing that security can no longer be based on a mere competition of armaments but will increasingly be a function of relationships. Johnston presents faith-based diplomacy as a more robust form of diplomacy than the traditionally secular rational-actor model. "It is no small irony that this historical exclusion was never itself

the product of rational analysis but rather a predictable outgrowth of dogmatic secularism. The question then becomes: which of these two positions comes closest to the “real” meaning of realpolitik, dogmatic self-limitation or a rational willingness to see the world whole?” (Johnston 2003e). He calls on the need in the West to build up diplomatic capacity, as so many contemporary conflicts have a religious element, to deal with previously ignored or excluded “irrational” cultural factors including religion and ethnicity. Particularly in the wake of September 11, when the eyes of the world became focused on the role of religion in geopolitical conflict, Johnston called for “an enlightened and continuing commitment to cultural engagement in which we in the West make a concerted effort to understand (and respond to as best we can) the cultural imperatives that drive others to see the world as they do” (ICRD 2002).

Operationally, the ICRD applies the concept of faith-based diplomacy through the functions of mediation and facilitation, education and training, and dialogue, especially interfaith dialogue. On its website, the ICRD states that its mission is “to address identity-based conflicts that exceed the reach of traditional diplomacy by incorporating religion as part of the solution,” usually in situations of ethnic, tribal, or religious conflict (ICRD, About ICRD). Johnston’s research led to the establishment of four operational objectives for the ICRD, which have remained constant over its first decade of existence and include:

1. providing a bridge between politics and religion in support of peacemaking,
2. deploying multi-skilled interreligious teams to spots where conflict threatens or has already broken out,



3. training religious clergy and laity in peacemaking, and
4. providing feedback to theologians and clergy on interpretations of their teachings that may be contributing to strife and misunderstanding (ICRD 2002).

Johnston sees this approach, of bringing religious concerns and religious resources to bear on the search for solutions to intractable conflicts, as one that conveys more than mere tolerance for the role of differing religious faiths in the parties. Rather, it conveys respect through readily recognizing our common humanity and appreciating what Johnston has called the “spark of the Creator” in each person (Johnston 2003e). In each of these four objectives related to religion, faith-based diplomacy aims not at conversion, but rather at conversation among people with deeply held beliefs (Hayes 2005).

As the ICRD was founded in 1999, Johnston’s engagement in Sudan became the first major testing ground for its approach. The emphasis on relational engagement is reflected in the multinational and multireligious composition of the ICRD’s Advisory Council, of which several Sudanese officials and scholars have been members. Dr. al-Tayib Zain al-Abdin now serves as the secretary-general of the SIRC and was formerly Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Islamic University in Islamabad. H.E. Sadiq al-Mahdi is a former prime minister of Sudan and the leader of the Umma, the major party of the opposition. Dr. Abdul-Rahim Ali M. Ibrahim has chaired the Shura Council of the government’s National Congress Party in Sudan and has served as director of the International Institute of Arabic Language in Khartoum (ICRD, Advisory Council). The relationships Johnston formed with these three leaders and others helped to shape and

solidify the ICRD's accomplishments under its four objectives in Sudan, as described below.

Although Sudan was the first major undertaking for the ICRD, it has engaged identity-based conflicts affecting several other places around the world, including Pakistan, Kashmir, and Iran. The conflict dynamics and form of intervention have varied as the ICRD adapts its teams and training to fit the needs and context of each situation, whether working with top-level leaders and scholars in Sudan, or with local and regional levels of leadership. Partly due to its limited budget and staff, the ICRD has been selective in where it gets involved, using four criteria to determine where to concentrate resources. Seeking to maximize impact, the ICRD looks at where it can do the most good for the most people, and secondly, focuses on places where other similar organizations are not already involved. A third factor reflects the ICRD's emphasis on relational engagement, in that situations are chosen where existing relationships of trust hold promise for creating positive change. Fourthly, the ICRD tends to choose to engage situations that have strategic significance to the United States (Bouta et al. 2005, 77).

The ICRD's focus in places of interest to the United States has less to do with shoring up American influence that it does with forging a new pathway in American diplomacy. Indeed, the ICRD has been active not only abroad, but has also engaged domestically, making the case through training and publications for building a capacity for faith-based diplomacy in the military and the State Department (Johnston 2002b). The sequel to Johnston's now-acclaimed first book was published in 2003, titled *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*. Following as it did after the September 11,

2001, terrorist attacks, the more recent work further examines peacemaking possibilities in the world's major religions, arguing that faith-based diplomacy is a workable idea whose time has come. The case of Sudan reflects, both through the ICRD's choice to engage there and its inclusion in the book, a need for a successful model of nonviolent resolution in an Islamic context on the post-9/11 geopolitical scene. Johnston says that the strategic focus on American interests is not necessarily permanent, but is useful at present as a way "to build U.S. support for our work and to develop an enhanced awareness among U.S. policymakers of the potential utility of religious intervention in identity-based conflicts" (ICRD 2004). The strategy seems to have paid off for the ICRD, for just as the Bush administration changed course to invest heavily in the Sudanese peace process, by 2003 the State Department had expressed "outright enthusiasm" for the ICRD's work (ICRD 2003b).

On a number of occasions, Johnston has spoken of his personal outlook on the role he plays in his work. Professionally, he sees himself primarily as a diplomat. Within that role, he applies his national allegiance and his religious faith (Johnston 2003c). His background in national service identifies Johnston unmistakably as a patriotic American, though not without criticism of his country's actions at times.<sup>4</sup> With respect to his faith, *The Washington Times* has described Johnston as an evangelical Christian who walks in step with one of the biblical sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Chick 2007). The Christian roots of his work with the ICRD are reflected in that, although it has a multireligious Advisory Council, whose members assist

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Johnston's discussion of the 1998 U.S. bombing of a Khartoum pharmaceutical plant (2003f).

in the formulation of teams that are representative of the religious faiths in the areas in which projects work, the ICRD Board is “Christ-centered” (Johnston 2003c). Johnston himself says that striving to be open-minded, seeking to understand the roots of the problem and how to resolve a conflict, are applications of Jesus’ command to love our enemies (CBN News 2001). He also says that people he has worked with from each of the world’s major religions have recognized and appreciated the figure of Jesus as an example of a reconciler (2003c).

Accordingly, Johnston sees his work in faith-based diplomacy as “something of a calling,” and the culmination of 15 jobs in several career fields over the decades (Chick 2007). However, the work of combining peacemaking with religious engagement is not easy, but rather he calls it “formidable and not for the faint of heart” (Johnston 2003a, xii). He describes it as “intellectually and emotionally draining” as well as risky, pointing to the ultimate price paid by religiously inspired peacemakers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Anwar Sadat (Johnston 2003a, xiii; 2003e).

### **Context of the Intervention**

The ICRD intervention in Sudan worked with religious leaders at the highest levels. Johnston engaged leaders from both the Muslim and Christian communities, especially in the North, in support of peace in the country. In analyzing the case further, a deeper understanding of the religious communities in the Sudan bears relevance to the study. By understanding the parties in his intervention, including both the leaders and the communities they represent, and also the government and outside parties, we can make more sense of the intervention and its impact. Also, to engage the role of religious

leadership in supporting peace, it is important to have a deeper appreciation for the context of the conflict with regards to religion. A fuller view of the parties and the situation is particularly relevant considering that the specific matters involving religious groups that have been addressed by the ICRD intervention and its results tend to be nested within larger systemic problems related to religion in Sudan.

### *Religion, Coexistence, and Conflict in Sudan*

As already discussed, the civil war in the Sudan cannot be properly labeled as a conflict of religion alone, but there can likewise be no doubt that religious issues have played a significant role in the longevity of Sudan's struggles. Johnston has said that religion really is not a main reason for the fighting at all, but that the conflict situation was inherited from colonial times (CBN News 2001). Professor al-Tayib, the first Secretary General of the SIRC, has argued the same point for the post-independence period. In discussing the conflict between the South and the Muslim-dominated Khartoum government in the North, he argues that it is not a confrontation of religious communities that is focused on their differing identities, pointing to the fact that many of the two million displaced persons from the South took refuge around Khartoum in the North (al-Tayib 2006, 8). The implication is that the controversial process of Islamization and Arabization of the South has been propagated via central government policy, particularly under authoritarian regimes, rather than being a touch-point of communal conflict.

That said, al-Tayib (2006), Deng (1995), and others recognize the significance of the religious factor in Sudan's political history, particularly regarding *shari'a* law.

Indeed, the role of *shari'a* in Sudan was one of the primary issues related to religion that was considered intractable during the peace negotiations. However, although the subjugation of the non-Muslim population to Islamic law as the law of the land is unpalatable to them, the issue has not been simply an interreligious one. Rather, the role of *shari'a* in Sudan has been an issue in Northern Sudan at least as early as the Ottoman conquest in 1820-21. An understanding of dynamics over time among the holders of religious and political power illustrates the unique blend of diverse modes of practice of Islam in Sudan's heritage. It suggests the potential for diverse opinions among Muslim leaders in the contemporary context, as well as the ongoing possibility of negotiation of religious identity and practice, which can be seen as an operating assumption of Johnston's intervention.

Deng (1995, 40-57) describes the interaction between Sufi Islam in Sudan and orthodox Islam, which has slowly been inculcated over the past two centuries. Before the nineteenth century, Sufi orders dominated the Islamic landscape in Sudan. Its emphasis on personal and miraculous experiences of God and God's blessings, brought about through rituals such as chants, and passed on to subsequent generations of the Sufi leader's family, melded well with African traditionalist beliefs about the spiritual world. With the advent of the Turko-Egyptian administration came a greater emphasis on *shari'a*. A hierarchy of religious courts was established, mosques were built and training was provided to develop a class of *ulama*, men trained in orthodox doctrines.

As the foreign colonial administration began to patronize local Sufist leaders as a link to the grassroots, the traditional religious leadership gained unprecedented influence

in politics. Two families still represented in politics today have their roots in Sufi orders, namely the Khatimiyya order formed by Mirghani, and the Samaniyya order, of which al-Mahdi was a follower before his revolution in 1881. The Mirghani and Mahdi families vied for power both during the Mahdist revolution and also during the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. Eventually they became the patrons of two major parties following independence, the DUP and the Umma party respectively, which continued as opposition parties after the military coup in 1989 that brought al-Bashir to power, with his National Congress Party.

Although Sudan's sectarian parties find their heritage in the traditional religious lineage system, it would be particularly ironic if the endurance of Sufism, known for its eclecticism and relative tolerance, were the only legacy remaining from the Mahdist era. As discussed above in Chapter 2, al-Mahdi was militantly committed to orthodox 'purification' of Sudanese Islam and he intended to eradicate Sufism, even though his revolution against Turko-Egyptian rule received widespread grassroots support. In contemporary politics, the leading figure drawing on al-Mahdi's nationalistic vision of a universal orthodoxy for Islamic rule has been al-Turabi, whose NIF backed the 1989 coup led by al-Bashir (Deng 1995, 57-66).

The diversity and competition among various groups in Northern Sudan since independence, up to and including the period of the NIF regime, reflects on how intractable religious issues like the role of *shari'a* have been treated in the country. Ajawin and de Waal (2002, 263-285) point out that the NIF's fundamentalist brand of political Islam, with its stress on Islamic legalities, has been imposed by non-indigenous

elitists. In analyzing three alternate views on the role of Islam and the state in Sudan, they argue that a secular constitution is needed which recognizes individual fundamental human rights. At the same time, they suggest a third way drawing on the political philosophy of the Republican Brothers, which was an earlier indigenous movement that respected the local Sudanese culture and its spirituality expressed traditionally in Sufi Islam. Kebede (1999, 42-43) likewise discusses the variety of opinions in the North, including those who favor separation from the South so that an Islamic state could more easily be established, and the probably great majority of Northern Muslims who favor coexistence under a secular constitution without the discrimination and conflicting interpretations experienced through attempts to apply *shari'a* laws everywhere. As an example of the application of *shari'a* used for political ends, even against other Muslim parties, one can refer back to the Republican Brothers and their founder Mahmud Muhammad Taha, who was executed in 1984 on grounds of apostasy, as defined by Nimeiri's regime (Johnson 2003, 129).

Under the NIF military regime in the early 1990s, religion continued to be manipulated by powers in the political sphere, as the government imposed *shari'a* by force rather than by the will of the majority (Deng 1995, 497-498). According to Johnson (2003, 128-129), under the Public Order Act and Sudanese Penal Code of 1991, which provided the legal basis for *shari'a*, most targets of government oppression have in fact been Muslims. Women were relegated to a status as legal minors, restricting their social and economic activities, and political opposition carried the risk of being judged apostate, a capital offense. Meanwhile, the military pursued the war with the South with



renewed vigor as a holy war, aiming to Islamize and Arabize the South as a matter of mission to the African continent (Kebbede 1999, 42-43; Johnson 2003, 175; Nyang and Johnston 2003, 221-222). Thus, it is the public zeal with which the NIF pursued their fundamentalist vision, rather than the enduring issue of *shari'a* itself, which serves as a key to explaining why the North-South war came to be characterized increasingly as a conflict between religions (Deng 1995, 497).

#### *Government Policies toward Majority and Minority Religions*

While the foregoing analysis illustrates internal battles among Muslim parties in the North, and contextualizes the issue of *shari'a* within the national conflict, this is not to say that differences between religions have been insignificant. As stated above, the issue of *shari'a* was recognized as one of the most intractable during the IGAD-sponsored peace process. It is in the context of the NIF's fundamentalist regime that the ICRD engaged religious leaders in Sudan, with the SIRC being created in order to address grievances held by Christians and traditionalists in the North. Despite their differences and the rivalry among sectarian and fundamentalist parties, Muslim leaders in the North have the advantage of being able to negotiate their views on Islam among the dominant sector of society. For Christians in the North, however, and in the country as a whole, their leaders always speak from the standpoint of representing a minority identity.

Despite the tensions between them, political players in the North have historically tended to view the South as a place needing to be brought into unity with the Arab-leaning North, or in religious terms, in need of salvation, rather than self-determination. This was not always the case, recalling the Sufi heritage of Islam in Sudan. During the

Turko-Egyptian rule, Coptic and Catholic mission personnel and establishments were not only tolerated, but in some cases even given financial support by the administration. Then after the Mahdist revolt, European missionaries were banned, but the Christian churches in Sudan were allowed to coexist peacefully. The Anglo-Egyptian period brought a resurgence of new Christian mission works in areas of the South, but it also institutionalized a division in the country with regard to religious influences, under which Islamic *shari'a* was legally regulated in the North beneath a British secular system, and Muslim presence in the South was strongly restrained (al-Abdin 2006, 4-6).

After independence, successive governments abandoned the principle of separation of religion from the state, and to a greater or lesser extent pursued a national identity through Arabization and Islamization. This policy affected the Christian minority significantly at times, leading up to the NIF with its project of complete Islamization during the 1990s. General Abboud's military government changed the Sunday holiday to Friday in 1960, and focused on reform in the South via the educational system, such that, by 1964, all the schools were nationalized and all foreign Christian missionaries were expelled (Johnson 2003, 30; O'Ballance 2000, 16). Ironically, the crackdown on foreign Christian influence led to dramatic increases in conversions to Christianity. The churches became more popular since they were no longer in cooperation with the government, as they had been under the British administration. A similar pattern of indigenous church growth concurrent with government repression repeated later in the century (Johnson 2003, 31, 35). On January 1, 1995, al-Bashir called

for a jihad against unbelievers in the South, focused on the SPLA with its Christian influences (O'Ballance 2000, 184).

### *Regional and International Relations*

The work of Johnston and the ICRD in Sudan was of course impacted by the history of the country's Christian community, which was represented in the intervention. Additionally, considering the Sudanese governmental reactions to outside Christian influences in particular, the intervention by an American team should also be set in the context of wider regional and international relations, which affect both the Sudanese parties and the intervenors themselves as well as issues of religion in the conflict. At the regional level, Sudan has had tense relationships with neighboring states at times. For example, in June 1995, at a conference hosted in the Eritrean capital Asmara, the SPLA and various Northern opposition groups, including the sectarian DUP and the Umma Party, agreed that religion should be separated from politics in Sudan; they also agreed to an eventual referendum to be held in the South on the question of secession (O'Ballance 2000, 185). The concord of the Asmara Declaration is significantly, though not fully, reflected in the CPA eventually enacted between the Sudanese government and the SPLA in 2005.

In the international arena, U.S. involvement in pressing for a peace agreement was perhaps the single greatest factor in the IGAD mediation process moving forward, and Johnston can be seen as a forerunner of renewed American constructive engagement in Khartoum. As Johnston points out, the ICRD began to develop relationships of trust with Sudanese political and religious leaders at a time when U.S. policy was bent on

demonizing Sudan because of its totalitarian regime that had upset a democracy, and that was demonstrating tacit support or hospitality toward extremists like Osama bin Laden in the mid-1990s. The ICRD faith-based engagement contrasts with the Clinton administration's isolationist strategy toward diplomacy with Sudan, which Johnston saw as largely fruitless because it yielded an absence of any significant leverage or shared respect (Johnston 2003c).

While Johnston's approach was progressive, it was not a mainstream American view. Although American diplomats have countered the Sudanese contention that antagonistic policy toward Sudan arose from an anti-Islam bias (Pettersen 2003, 167-170), Johnston views the U.S.-Sudan relationship in the context of a greater relationship in need of reconciliation, that of America with the Arab Muslim world generally. As an example of the need for greater understanding on both sides, he points to narrow conceptions of terms that cause tension. For instance, Muslims often hear the term "crusade" in the same way as an American might hear the term "jihad," with a tone of triumph or violence, whereas both terms have a variety of meanings and usages in their linguistic contexts. According to Johnston, both sides need to demonstrate more humility, pointing to the 1998 cruise missile attack on a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, which the U.S. claimed was being used for chemical weapons manufacturing even though no material evidence was found to support the claim (Johnston 2003c). Soon after the attack, Johnston was convinced it was a mistaken target when he toured the plant's grounds himself, and the U.S. vetoed Sudan's request for the UN to investigate the situation first-hand (Johnston 2003f). Still, although Sudan denounced the

attack and other Western nations questioned it as well, the Sudanese opposition coalition NDA cited the presence of extraordinary armed protection at the plant in support of the U.S. claim (Kebbede 1999, 30-31).

Although American-Sudanese relations were at a low point at the end of the twentieth century, and might have stayed there according to the wishes of some religious lobbyists, official diplomacy under the Bush administration took a turn that coincided with the Track Two diplomacy of Johnston. Indeed, given the rhetoric of a jihad against the largely Christian Southern Sudanese, anti-slavery groups and several leaders of religious right who were supporters of Bush pressed for further isolation of the regime in Sudan. However, Bush opted to focus on an end to the war in Sudan, which translated into an ongoing personal interest and sustained dialogue; he appointed Senator John Danforth as special envoy just before September 11 attacks, after which Sudan quickly moved to commit to cooperation with the U.S. against terrorism. Thus, at the same time as the ICRD initiative worked with religious issues at the national level, U.S. governmental diplomacy was urging along the IGAD process that eventually resulted in the Machakos Protocol and the CPA (Petterson 2003, 238-243).

### **Intervention: Faith-based Diplomacy**

The intervention of Johnston and the ICRD in Sudan has been characterized from the beginning by a long-term commitment to building relationships. Before any public event, Johnston engaged in unofficial diplomacy for two years. In 1999, he went to see whether “recent conciliatory gestures” by the government, and the aftermath of the U.S. pharmaceutical plant attack, might open the door to talks (Witham 1999). Johnston was

invited to go by a former political advisor to the Sudanese President, who happened to be attending a weekly Prayer Breakfast group that Johnston attended. In Sudan he met with the foreign minister Mustapha Osman, and also with al-Turabi. It was after this trip that Johnston first sent a letter to Osman, proposing a conference of religious leaders in Khartoum to discuss religious freedom and an end to the second-class status of non-Muslims (Johnston 2001a, 124-125; 2003c; Witham 1999).

*Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace (2000)*

The ICRD's intervention in Sudan has resulted in several landmark developments that have built upon each other, beginning a positive momentum that Johnston says has exceeded all expectations (ICRD 2006). The first major event that transpired was the Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace, held on November 12-16, 2000, and described by Johnston as a breakthrough in communication between Muslim and Christian leaders in Sudan (Johnston 2003a, 8).

This first Khartoum Forum brought together approximately 30 Sudanese and international high-level religious leaders and scholars to discuss religious tensions in Sudan, both in the ongoing conflict and as they contribute to social tensions more generally. The exercise was co-sponsored by the ICRD and two of its Sudanese partners, the Council for International People's Friendship (IPFC) and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). The government hosted the meeting as a signal of its goodwill, while it otherwise stayed out of the proceedings, other than to explain its own official policy (Johnston 2001b). According to Johnston, one purpose of the forum was to take religion off the table of the official mediation efforts of the IGAD, which had been going on since

1996. Redirecting the religious component to religious experts was seen as removing a roadblock in the IGAD process, allowing it to make progress on other fronts (ICRD 2001).

Johnston (2001b) describes the format of the Khartoum Forum as an academic exercise engineered to produce recommendations on a number of specific issues that were identified and agreed to in advance. From this angle, the forum resembled other, secular interactive conflict intervention methods such as the CAPS workshop. The sessions that took place over the course of four days allowed for the airing of different views on each of the issues. For each session, a qualified scholar had been asked to write a paper on the issue, which was summarized, and followed by a counterpoint by a discussant, and then a period of discussion and debate among the participants. Each of the sessions ended with distribution of draft recommendations on the issue, giving time for review and reflection before discussion and amendment on the final day. In the end, the Khartoum Forum produced 17 consensus recommendations for increased interreligious collaboration in Sudan in the areas of human rights, education, employment, and humanitarian assistance.<sup>5</sup> Several of these recommendations served as a concrete roadmap by becoming foci of the ICRD's continued involvement in the years following.

In addition to the substantive recommendations emanating from the meetings, another significant result of the Khartoum Forum in 2000 lies in the careful selection of participants (and presenters) and the positive change begun in the working relationship

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete list, see Johnston (2001b).

among them. One factor in the selection of participants was to ascertain the influence of various religious leaders in Sudanese society. Among the Muslim community, Johnston opted to include Muslim scholars rather than focusing on imams, as the former have the capacity for a wider impact (McKenzie 2006). Johnston also had to work to convince skeptical Christian leaders to come to the table.<sup>6</sup> Interaction with them brought out grievances from past experiences with interreligious dialogue conferences (in 1991, 1993, and 1994), with resultant concerns that had to be allayed by the intervenor. The co-sponsoring role of the SCC, smaller size (around 30 participants, evenly balanced), and the practical focus of the forum sought to ensure that the Christians' voices would be heard and that specific action recommendations were the goal. The event was also to be shrouded from publicity so that it could not be used by the government merely to boost public relations (Johnston 2001b). Johnston also used his growing place of trust, and fellow Christian commitment, to suggest to the Christian leaders to view this opportunity as a response to biblical commands to seek peace (CBN News 2001).

A skeptical view towards participation in such a conference can be held both by internal parties and by external actors. Johnston himself recognized that the undertaking had the potential to seriously backfire. Some activists, such as Nina Shea of Freedom House, have taken the view that efforts at dialogue such as Johnston's are a fruitless endeavor. "You can't negotiate with someone who is an architect of genocide," Shea said in 1999, referring to Dr. al-Turabi as being "very sophisticated" in gaining Western

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<sup>6</sup> Despite repeated attempts, ICRD was unable to get any English-speaking African traditionalist to participate in the Forum meeting. Instead, one of the Southern participants provided some insight on a surrogate basis (Johnston 2001b).



sympathy using religious language (Witham 1999). In fact, however, al-Turabi was one among three of the top-level political figures who addressed the Khartoum Forum in evening presentations; Abel Alier, a former President of the Southern region's High Executive Council during the Nimeiri era, was another. Throughout the conference there were efforts to bring both balance and weight to the proceedings. Each of the discussion sessions during the day was co-moderated by three representatives, including Johnston, the Muslim director of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Society, and a member of the executive committee of the SCC. Additionally, each session "was chaired by a figure of significant stature" (Johnston 2001b).

Judging by response of the participants and reaction of the government (Johnston 2001b), the 2000 Khartoum Forum bore some success as a dialogue in altering views toward each other and the process of building peace. Some of the local Christian leaders said it was the first time that they had been heard, while one Islamic scholar and imam said that he heard about some of the problems for the first time. A Muslim elder statesman said it was first time Northerners and Southerners had spoken to one another from the heart. At the government level, the First Vice President of Sudan, Dr. Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, quickly gave a favorable response to the forum and committed to reviewing the recommendations. A report was also forwarded to the IGAD Summit the following week, where it was decided in principle to act on several of the recommendations at the regional level.

In addition to its structure as a dialogue exercise, the 2000 Khartoum Forum included several components that gave it a faith-based nature, or what Johnston (2003a)

also calls the creation of a “transcendent dimension that helped inspire the participants to rise above their personal and religious differences and work together for the common good” (8). A strong emphasis on prayer appears to have been central in Johnston’s list of factors, along with the inclusion of readings of sacred texts from each tradition (Bouta 2005, 79):

- prayer and readings from the Bible and the Qur’an each morning
- “an informal prayer breakfast for the international participants and local Muslim and Christian religious leaders (on a rotating basis)” earlier each morning
- breaks during the meetings to accommodate Muslim prayers
- a team of observers who prayed and fasted on the sidelines

The last of these components, a prayer team from California that the ICRD brought to the intervention, is considered perhaps the most significant (Bouta 2005, 79). Led by the Rev. F. Brian Cox, the prayer team was solely devoted to praying and fasting during the course of the meeting. Cox is the Senior Vice President of the ICRD, and rector of Christ the King Episcopal Church in Santa Barbara, California, where he founded the Reconciliation Institute between 1992 and 1996. Members of the prayer team sat in on the deliberations occasionally, and then left to pray for success in the meetings. Johnston says that the visible support had the effect of inspiring the participants to rise above themselves, marking the discussions both with “brutal” honesty and with cordiality (Johnston 2003b).

### *Sudan Reconciliation Training*

As the ICRD continued its involvement following the first Khartoum Forum, one of the recommendations (#13) that it cooperated to implement was “a joint reconciliation training program for religious leaders, scholars and others” (Johnston 2001b). During

January 27-30, 2002, thirty religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, met in Khartoum (ICRD 2002). Cox led the training, and Johnston co-chaired the seminar, but the ICRD shared the sponsorship with its two local partnering organizations. Both of these supplied a co-chair, including the Rev. Enock Tombe, the Secretary General of the SCC, and Dr. Abdul-Rahim Ali of the IPFC, also chairman of the Shura Council of the National Congress Party and director of the Khartoum International Institute of Arabic Language.

Johnston (2002a) considers this event a milestone in the ICRD's work. It was the first time the ICRD has presented a reconciliation seminar to participants from both sides of a conflict together, and it was clearly appreciated as contributing to "an atmosphere of reconciliation." The 13 Muslim participants in the training included two influential imams and two professors in addition to current and former government officials, advisors, and members of parliament. Meanwhile, the 18 Christian participants represented a broad spectrum of Sudanese denominations and ecumenical organizations.

In his ICRD report, Johnston notes an example of how participants from different religions can establish a basis for positive interaction by drawing on concurrent convictions: "The strong commitment of both faith communities to submitting oneself to God provides significant common ground for faith-based reconciliation." Johnston also sees the tone established during the seminar as having both short-term and long-term impact. The day after the seminar ended, a "stimulating meeting" was held with the Sudanese Vice President, Moses Machar. The seminar also increased the potential for

future implementation of more of the 17 recommendations from the Khartoum Forum (Johnston 2002a).

Johnston's report on the training indicates several lessons learned, which can bear on both the planning and implementation of such workshops. For instance, timing, location, and participant selection all present issues that affect the level of participation. In this case, the event had been planned for the previous summer with a slightly larger participant group,<sup>7</sup> and was postponed several times due to logistical problems on both sides. Especially for some of the high-ranking Muslim participants, competing obligations also resulted in variations in attendance during the seminar. While a retreat location might have made attendance more consistent, it may also have restricted some of the influential attendees from being able to participate at all. Johnston (2002a) also alludes to impact of the balance of power between parties in conflict. He notes that it is usually more difficult to sustain consistent participation on the side that seems to have less to gain from involvement in peacebuilding activities.

Nonetheless, according to Johnston (2002a), the problems encountered in terms of attendance at the seminar did not reflect a withdrawal from engagement. Johnston notes the willingness and enthusiasm of the participants, particularly as they solved problems together in small group simulation exercises. The Christians had been more hesitant in the planning of the seminar, perhaps for the same reasons encountered in bringing them to the table at the 2000 Khartoum Forum. However, during the training, they appeared to increasingly appreciate the opportunity for deeply personal interaction with the Muslim

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<sup>7</sup> According to the 2001 Annual Report (ICRD 2001), a June reconciliation training was scheduled for 40 participants.

participants. Also, the involvement of the parties in planning the seminar, particularly from the Muslim side, led to the inclusion of a Sudanese response to the ICRD presentations. Their insistence on this aspect allowed the training to be analyzed in terms of practice in Sudan rather than theory alone, and demonstrates how inclusion of the parties at multiple steps in an intervention process can reap benefits in terms of contextualization and application.

*Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace (2002)*

In July 2002, the ICRD co-sponsored a second Khartoum International Forum for Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace, again with the IPFC and SCC. While the reconciliation training a few months earlier implemented one of the 17 recommendations from the original meeting of the Forum in 2000, this second convention gave attention to three more of the recommendations. Its main purpose was to “address three war-related issues of direct concern and relevance to the religious communities in Sudan” (Cox 2002). Once again, the meeting included a mix of about thirty Muslim and Christian religious leaders and scholars, but the participant list also included several government representatives and civil society representatives from women’s associations and human rights groups.

The meeting’s format included a series of resolutions-based working sessions over the course of one day, after which a committee formulated specific recommendations based on the discussion and presented them on the following evening. The three war-related topics of concern to the religious communities included:

1. Involvement of religious leaders in the peace process,

2. Freedom of movement for religious leaders to perform their duties in conflict zones, and
3. Protection and preservation of holy sites and places of worship in the conflict zones. (Johnston 2001b; Cox 2002)

In the first session, Professor al-Tayib Zain al-Abdin presented a working paper that argued for several significant roles religious leaders should play to bring a moral and spiritual outlook to bear on producing peace. Leaders can teach and encourage coexistence and cooperation in their own religious communities, they can address and seek to alleviate poverty and social problems in society generally and without discrimination, and they can play a diplomatic role in clarifying and advising on religious issues that arise in politics and in the resolution of the conflict, especially in its religious dimension.

After two discussants responded to the paper and various others commented, a second session attempted to address the other two topics on a legal and constitutional level. The working paper, given by the Director General of the Khartoum Center for Human Rights, Dr. Ahmed al Mufti, laid out the historical evolution of freedom of religion both under international law and in recent Sudanese law. One of the discussants stressed the importance of clear definitions in establishing legal parameters for who and what constitute religious leaders and places of worship. Interestingly, the Christian discussant, Reverend Enock Tombe, responded to the paper on religious freedom by raising the issue of the illegality of a Muslim changing his religion under the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991.

The third session included a general discussion of recommendations, which had the effect in turn of promoting continued collaboration of Muslim and Christian religious

leaders. As summarized by Cox (2002), the recommendations were offered by a number of the participants, including one from Johnston that called for one Muslim leader and one Christian leader to be brought into the peace negotiations by the conflict parties. These two religious representatives would be chosen by national religious organizations (the Sudan Ulama Council along with the Sufi orders, and the SCC), and the Khartoum Forum would appoint an advisory group. Johnston's recommendation essentially represents an elaboration, with specific details for implementation, of the recommendation from the 2000 meeting of Forum, which had simply stated to "involve religious leaders in the peace process" (Johnston 2001b). A second recommendation called for a revamping of the state of Christian education in the public schools, with more cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the SCC, and encouragement of theological training. Thirdly, the IPFC Secretary General noted that their Council received many reports of alleged religious freedom violations, and proposed the establishment of an interfaith committee that would investigate and report on such allegations. In addition to agreeing to the foregoing three items for progress, the Forum also decided to establish a committee to monitor progress on the implementation of its recommendations, and to report to the Forum's sponsoring groups each quarter.

In the 2002 meeting, the Khartoum Forum was once again marked by the incorporation of religious texts and leadership that represented the two major faith communities. The first act in the morning as the meeting began was a reading from portions of the Qur'an and the Bible. This was followed by welcoming remarks from the co-chairs and other Muslim and Christian leaders. Professor Abdalla Ahmed Abdalla (a

former governor and ambassador to the United States) and the Rev. Taban Elonai (chairman of the SCC) served as the co-chairs, but previous co-chairs also spoke. Professor Abdul-Rahim Ali now spoke as a representative (chairman) of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Society, and the Rev. Enock Tombe (SCC Secretary General) both focused remarks on the importance of dialogue that involved both religious communities. In addition to the representatives from the SCC, two other Christians both gave opening remarks at this meeting, representing archbishops of the Catholic and Episcopal churches. Near the end of the opening exercises, Johnston also summarized the ICRD's continued commitment to assist in implementing the previous Forum's recommendations.

Beyond the increase in visible religious diversity at this Khartoum Forum meeting, the participation of several government authorities on the stage reflects a growing momentum of interaction between the religious community and government. At the Forum, lectures were given on both evenings by government representatives, with indications of an accompanying impact that the interreligious dialogue began to have on policy formation. In the first lecture, a Ministry of Religious Affairs representative spoke on the policies and procedures related to two of the topics taken up by the Forum, specifically the movement of religious leaders and the establishment of churches. On the closing evening, the Peace Advisor to the President of Sudan, Dr. Gazi Salahul Din, provided a summary of the peace negotiations that were being held in Nairobi between the government and the SPLA. The recommendations of the Forum were also presented that evening, and he promised the government's cooperation in implementing them, including the involvement of religious leaders in the peace process (Cox 2002).



### *Sustained Relational Engagement*

Johnston's relational engagement has been characterized by continued commitment, and involved not only his trips to Sudan, but the ICRD also invited Sudanese leaders to the United States. At the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington in 2002, the ICRD hosted four leaders representing the government, the opposition, and the religious communities, including Sudan's foreign minister, a former prime minister and current head of leading opposition party, the Secretary General of the IPFC (co-sponsor of the ICRD's Sudan work), and a former Secretary General of the SCC (also a co-sponsor). The two-way experience of hospitality and dialogue made a positive impression on these leaders, as they began to see in America an interest, similar to their own, for religious faith in the midst of politics. Along with two guests from the ICRD's work in Kashmir, all the Muslims were surprised with how the Prayer Breakfast indicated a root of religious faith lying under the democratic process in the United States, according to Johnston (ICRD 2002). Yet, for Johnston, operating with a "faith-based realism" as he calls it, "inter-religious dialogue in and of itself is overrated, unless it can lead to building relationships and, in turn, trust—at which point all things become possible" (ICRD 2003a; Johnston 2003b). Thus we now turn to several significant results of the ICRD intervention in Sudan.

### *Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC)*

After the commitments made at 2002 meeting of the Khartoum International Forum, the work of the ICRD over four years and through more than a dozen trips began to bear fruit in the form of new institutions. One of these, the SIRC, was specifically

called for in the original recommendations of the Forum, and was registered as an independent NGO in November 2002 (SIRC 2004a, 1). Early in 2003, a General Assembly of religious leaders (again approximately 30) met to approve a constitution for the SIRC, and in May the first meeting of its 12-member Executive Bureau took place. The membership of the Executive Bureau is equally shared by Muslims and Christians, and the major religious groups are represented, including the Ansar and the Khatmiyya sects, the Ulama Council, member churches of the SCC, and other prominent religious leaders, scholars and churches. Dr. al-Tayib headed up the SIRC as its first Secretary General (ICRD 2003a; Johnston 2003b).

According to Johnston and the ICRD, the SIRC was the first forum in Sudanese history in which Muslims and Christians would cooperatively address problems between their communities. It was to work to strengthen religious freedom in Sudan and promote the treatment of non-Muslims as equal citizens. Accordingly, it would serve as a point of religious expertise and sensitivity toward all religions in Sudan, advising the government and organizations on policy issues in the areas of human rights, employment, education, media access and land allocation (ICRD 2003a). Johnston said that it would “serve as an important instrument of reconciliation in re-establishing a culture of peace once the guns are silenced” (Johnston 2003d; ICRD 2003b).

Indeed, the SIRC soon showed that it was not only going to meet monthly as a regular forum for addressing issues of concern to the religious communities, but that it would also act to promote peaceful relations in the country. Johnston extolled its efforts early on, saying that in its first few months of existence, it “has already advanced the

interests of non-Muslims [for more equitable treatment] beyond what the churches were able to achieve over the previous 15 years” (ICRD 2004; Johnston 2003e). In 2003, SIRC secured a promise, which was delivered on the next year, for the government to compensate the Catholic Church for the confiscation of the Catholic Club, which had been turned into headquarters for the governing party. The First Vice President of Sudan directed that a new plot of land be awarded to the Church, and that financial compensation be supplied for the buildings and furniture. This case was of particular interest to SIRC because the Catholic Church had been vocal about the property seizure, and the issue had been standing in the way of Muslim-Catholic cooperation and Catholic involvement with SIRC. Another real estate issue, which responded to an immediate tension and also set a rule for the future, was a decision by the Khartoum governor to protect the sanctity of Christian cemeteries by banning the building of commercial enterprises next to or in them. SIRC also negotiated to increase Christian programming on state-owned television stations (Johnston 2003g; SIRC 2004a, 2-3).

*Committee for the Protection of Religious Freedom (CPRF)*

A second institution created with the encouragement of the ICRD actually operates as a subsidiary of the SIRC, and followed up on the cases just mentioned. Johnston had secured startup funds from the British Embassy in Khartoum for a Committee for the Protection of Religious Freedom (CPRF). It was launched by SIRC in March 2004 under the motto of “No Compulsion in Religion,” having had its constitution approved by the Executive Bureau of SIRC the previous month. As a focused six-member interreligious committee, CPRF brings accountability to a highly sensitive area

where in the past there had been little or no way to investigate alleged violations of religious freedom. CPRF functions through fact-finding teams to make recommendations, which are then relayed to the concerned parties in a situation as well as to the governmental authorities (SIRC 2004a, 1-2; Johnston 2004a).

Not surprisingly, the cases CPRF deals with tend to respond to concerns from the Christian community. In addition to those mentioned above, the new Committee soon investigated several more cases related to land properties and education. One of these involved a school of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, which was to be demolished during a road-building project. The local authority in Renk had already provided a new plot of land, but CPRF mediation clarified how there had been lapses in communication and negotiated with government ministries to pay for new school construction. Other complaints, such as the forced eviction of the Episcopal Guest House in al-Magran, the cancellation of university-level courses in Christian theology, and the shortage of teachers of Christian religion in the schools, were all ameliorated through the investigative work of the Committee and its recommendations for immediate improvements as well as its research work toward systematic changes (SIRC 2004a, 1-8). In all, according to Johnston, the Sudanese government has paid out more than \$500,000 in real estate and construction funds as restitution for previously seized church properties (ICRD 2006; Johnston 2006b). Furthermore, according to the ICRD website, it granted permission for the first new churches to be built in Khartoum in 25 years, giving land to the Catholic Church, Coptic Church, and the Sudanese Church of Christ (ICRD, Accomplishments of the SIRC). CPRF also began in 2004 to address international

reports on religious freedom in the Sudan by writing to government departments for responses, and by looking into allegations itself (SIRC 2004a, 1-8). It investigated reports of forced conversions of children to Islam, and the denial of religious counseling to prisoners who are Christian rather than Muslim (Johnston 2004b).

### *Impact on Peacebuilding in Sudan*

A third important result of the ICRD's intervention in Sudan, with the development of the SIRC and its CPRF, was the assistance provided in bringing the civil war between North and South to an end by involving religious leaders in the process, as had been recommended by the Khartoum Forum. Johnston mentions that the ICRD worked behind the scenes during the peace process that led to the signing of the CPA (ICRD 2005). Senator Jack Danforth, the U.S. Special Envoy at the talks, publicly supported the ICRD and SIRC's work. As an Episcopal rector himself, he also served as an example of the positive impact of religious leaders, according to the head Imam of the Ansar sect, who credited his religious role with making Muslim leaders aware of the need to reach out to Christians (Johnston 2003h).

Indeed, the development of an interreligious body in Sudan allowed the governmental-level IGAD process to table the religious questions and make progress on other issues. Soon after SIRC began its operations, it took the lead in addressing the key religious issues necessary to secure a peace agreement, such as the role *shari'a* was to play in Sudan, and it also helped to address the questions of resettlement and rehabilitation, beginning a project of on-the-ground coordination among Muslim and Christian humanitarian organizations. In the end, the CPA included several provisions

regarding freedom of religious and religious activities, and the South was to be exempted from *shari'a* law, while non-Muslims in Khartoum were to be exempted from *shari'a* penalties. Following the signing of the CPA in January 2005, SIRC published parts of it relating to religion, language and the judiciary as a measure to educate the public and to further the implementation of the provisions in the peace agreement (SIRC 2005a).

After the signing of the peace agreement of 2005, SIRC continued to work and cooperate on religious peacebuilding in the country beyond the role of its CPRF. In July of that year, SIRC held a Khartoum workshop in cooperation with the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), entitled “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peace-Building in Sudan.” Forty Muslim and Christian leaders discussed four papers that explored two main focuses: the role of religious leadership in making and supporting peace policies, and the role of religious people in relieving the bitterness of war and healing the wounds of victims in conflict areas. Recommendations were proffered under both areas, especially in the second regarding religious teachings and leaders calling for mutual reconciliation and forgiveness (SIRC 2005b).

SIRC’s growing capacity for action in support of peace has been demonstrated not only in educational settings but also in crisis situations. When the leader of the SPLM, John Garang, died in a helicopter crash following the signing of the CPA and his accession to the seat of First Vice President, SIRC acted quickly to stave off the rioting that followed. SIRC arranged for national leaders of the Catholic, Episcopal and Coptic Churches to give televised addresses, which SIRC also published in leading newspapers. A member of the SIRC Executive Bureau, as Secretary General of the Ulama

organization, also made statements to Muslims, urging calm and respect for the law, and SIRC successfully requested that the government's Ministry of Religious Affairs encourage imams in all the mosques to promote peace during their Friday messages. SIRC's coordination of its network of religious leaders and government connections contributed to the rapid diminishing of the riots within three days (Johnston 2005b).

SIRC has also acted on the crisis in Darfur, which continues today. In November 2004, shortly after the situation ignited, SIRC organized a workshop in Khartoum, along with two universities and the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights, which analyzed the situation in Darfur and made wide-ranging recommendations (SIRC 2004b). What is particularly notable about SIRC stepping out to address the newly flared crisis is that it did so against the wishes of the government, but was still allowed to continue (ICRD 2005). In 2006, SIRC began to work with USIP funding to mobilize religious leaders in outlying areas of the country, including Darfur, in support of a lasting peace. Johnston continued to visit Sudan to support SIRC activities, and interestingly, the current U.S. Special Envoy, Andrew Natsios, was an ICRD board member (Johnston 2006a). By 2008, SIRC had established a Regional Peace Committee of religious leaders that was seeking to address critical issues in Darfur (ICRD 2008).

## CHAPTER 4: WILLIAM LOWREY AND THE NSCC

### **Facilitator: William Lowrey**

The Rev. Dr. William O. Lowrey worked as a consultant with the NSCC during 1998-2000, facilitating conferences of the People to People peace process. Previously he had served as a Presbyterian missionary focused on cross-border relief work in Southern Sudan, and he now directs the Peacebuilding and Reconciliation division of World Vision International.

Lowrey's long-held interest in cross-cultural reconciliation began in the United States and gradually expanded to his overseas work in Sudan and now globally. After getting involved in racial reconciliation among Christians during college in the 1960s, he went on to work with a Christian campus ministry and later went to seminary and helped to start a new congregation focused on integration and economic justice. As an ordained Presbyterian pastor and Minister of Missions, Lowrey's involvement with economic and racial reconciliation issues grew beyond interpersonal relationships as he moved on to work in denominational institutions and also began to travel abroad. At home, he campaigned for regulation of the pulpwood industry aimed at fair treatment of workers (both black and white), and he joined the Presbyterian Hunger Program Committee, which dispensed funds for hunger relief projects around the world. Eventually, with a deepening interest in international relief and development, he and his family agreed to



move to Africa as mission workers with the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Southern Sudan (Little 2007, 195-197).

From 1991-1993 Lowrey served as the Projects Director for ACROSS, the Association of Christian Resource Organizations Serving Sudan, based in Kenya. During those years of relief and church ministry work, he developed close relationships with church leaders, local officials, and rebel leaders in Southern Sudan, especially among the Nuer and the PCOS in the Upper Nile and Western Upper Nile regions. Together with building trust with local leaders, he became a student of the Nuer culture and the people, observing and learning about their history and their experience of suffering, and also their traditional peacemaking methodologies. Within this capacity, he was drawn into reconciliation work among the Nuer. After a conflict over land and water access between the Jikany and Lou groups of the Nuer broke out in early 1993, Lowrey conducted a training workshop on conflict management in Nairobi that summer, which was attended by Sudanese Presbyterian church leaders who chose to focus on the intra-ethnic conflict. “Capitalizing on the role of leaders in the traditional Nuer religion as well as the Christian churches, Lowrey’s strategy was to integrate indigenous peacemaking methods with modern theories of conflict resolution” (Little 2007, 197-198; also Lowrey 1996, 12-14).

After a move back to the Washington, D.C. area, Lowrey took up a new role in 1994 as the Sudan desk associate in the Presbyterian Washington Office. From there, he facilitated advocacy, peace research, and relief efforts in conjunction with various partner agencies, and also worked on a Ph.D. in Intercultural Organizational Behavior and

Development, which he completed in 1996. His dissertation is a case study of the indigenous peacemaking process during the 1993-1994 conflict between the Jikany and the Lou. Lowrey traveled in Sudan to conduct his research among the Nuer. Completed in 1996, his dissertation is titled, “Passing the Peace from People to People: The Role of Religion in an Indigenous Peace Process Among the Nuer People of Sudan.” (Little 2007, 198).

Lowrey’s dissertation investigates the religious dimension in the Akobo Peace Conference in 1994, and his research laid a foundation for his future interventions as a facilitator of peace conferences. He observed that international diplomats were strikingly absent from the peace process in Akobo, even though the Nuer Commander Riek Machar asked leaders of the PCOS to be involved in a formal sense, and leaders of Nuer traditional religion also played key roles, albeit less formally. This led Lowrey to conduct “a careful documentation of the process, analysis of the role of religion, and reflection on the learning to see what could be applicable to other settings” (Lowrey 1996, 16). He concludes that “traditional systems and indigenous religious organizations have inherent capacities that offer potential for effectiveness in peacemaking and reconciliation even in turbulent societies and during complex emergencies” (194).

Indeed, the local religious beliefs, rituals, and organizational and leadership capacities that Lowrey identifies as significant from the Akobo Peace Process (Lowrey 1996, 156-193) are reflected in the processes he later facilitated. In his recommendations section, Lowrey writes that one of the opportunities of the churches is their potential to demonstrate unity across divisions within ethnic groups and between ethnic groups. He

specifically suggests that the NSCC was in the best position to undertake the churches' task of building bridges between the SPLM/A and the SSIM/A, and between the Dinka and the Nuer (212-213). In fact, it was the NSCC that contacted Lowrey to facilitate the first Nuer-Dinka peace conference in 1998.

The NSCC had been organized in 1990 as a counterpart to the SCC. The two organizations stressed that they were not in competition but were two expressions of the same body, one in the government-controlled areas and the other in rebel-controlled areas of Sudan, but operating out of Nairobi, Kenya. Churches in the NSCC included the Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the PCOS, the Africa Inland Church, and, as an affiliate member, the Sudanese Pentecostal Church (Lowrey 1996, 143; Jenner 2000, 11). In 1998, when the NSCC looked to begin a "People to People" peace process involving the Nuer with the Dinka, they called on Lowrey, due to his established connections with the Nuer commander Riek Machar, the PCOS (the predominant Christian denomination in Nuer lands), and church networks in the United States, and because of his research and experience with traditional approaches to conflict resolution (Jenner 2000, 19). As such, Lowrey does not see himself as an insider-partial (the term John Paul Lederach uses for those who come from within a culture and have a uniquely strong ability to serve as peacemakers), but rather as "an outsider who is nevertheless linked with the insiders" (Little 2007, 206-207).

Lowrey's intervention, taking the form of a series of facilitated peace conferences between the Dinka and Nuer in 1998 and 1999, can be seen as the extension of his previous work and research in the intra-ethnic Nuer conflict. Lowrey sees reconciliation

of relationships as a large part of the type of peacemaking in which he engages, and that this relational work begins first with those closest to us culturally, and then with other groups. However, he also points out that a relational people-to-people process must also eventually be complemented by institutional improvements to secure sustained peace. Part of engaged peacemaking is the goal to relieve suffering, showing partiality proportionally to those who are suffering on both sides, but it also searches and advocates for institutional and systemic improvements that are needed for sustainable peace (Little 2007, 206-207).

Lowrey's intervention in the Dinka-Nuer conflict also serves as an application of his dissertation research and philosophical approach in that he focuses on developing the capacity for groups to solve their own conflicts by drawing on their own cultural resources, rather than acting as a single expert mediating between two opposing sides. For Lowrey, the goal is to provide a process and a support structure. Mediation can play a useful part in intervening as an aid to preparing parties, especially when there is long-standing bitterness or active political interests at play, but then the goal is still to facilitate local solutions. Before the peace conferences, Lowrey spent hours listening to Dinka and Nuer stories told around the fires (Little 2007, 204-5). He then added his ability to organize and help with logistics to "bridge the tribal world with the modern world" (205).

Since leaving Sudan again in 2000, Lowrey's work has expanded in scope again, as he has taken his regional expertise to a global level. He now serves as Director of Peacebuilding and Reconciliation at World Vision International, which is a Christian relief, development and advocacy NGO. At World Vision, Lowrey has worked on

integrating peacebuilding with relief and development work in crisis situations around the world, as well as linking advocacy to the process. Lowrey has helped with the formation of regional networks of peace in more than thirty countries. He also oversees a network of World Vision constituents called PAXnet (Peacebuilding and Advocacy Network), which links peace programs with global advocacy (Little 2007, 210).

At the core of Lowrey's approach to peacemaking is a respect for other peoples and cultures, and this respect emanates from theological principles that Lowrey maintains. As an evangelical Christian, Lowrey draws on numerous places in the Bible when describing his spiritual basis for engagement. Referring to the view from Genesis of human nature as being in the "image of God," Lowrey believes that in any intervention it is possible to search for the wisdom that is resident among the local people and their culture. Fundamental to peacebuilding is an aim to draw out the "fair fighter" in each person. Finding and tapping that which fights for the good rather than for personal desires alone, according to Lowrey, involves a search that the intervenor pursues by listening to the people (Little 2007, 204-205).

Scriptures inspires and informs not only Lowrey's peacemaking strategy but also his personal sense of mission and his reflections on intervention. Another verse from the Hebrew Bible, Micah 6:8, links together three concepts – justice, mercy and humility – that Lowrey cites as formative for his understanding of himself and his work: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" Lowrey also draws upon the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians in the Christian New Testament. He sees people as the instruments of God's

mission of reconciliation in the world, and as a Christian he felt called to minister reconciliation as an ambassador of Jesus. Lowrey also reflects on aspects of his intervention in Southern Sudan with reference to Scripture. He recalls one of the rituals near the end of a peace conference, saying, “I was reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah: ‘How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring peace and good news’” (Little 2007, 207-208).

Lastly, this intertwining of mission and Scripture can be seen in Lowrey’s family relationships and friendships, both in Sudan and at earlier points in his life. Having been raised by a mother who taught in Sunday School that God does not regard people according to their socioeconomic differences, Lowrey extended the principle to racial divisions he saw among Christians. Attending the University of Southern Mississippi in the 1960s, he co-founded the first multiracial Christian organization there while he was also freshman class president. After becoming friends with the first black students to attend the University, he found that his own church was not willing to allow them to come to services. Lowrey thus developed an interest in cross-cultural reconciliation that grew out of his understanding of the teaching concerning partiality in the Epistle of James (Little 2007, 195-196). Later in his career, while serving with him in Sudan, his wife and second daughter survived an aerial bombing attack while working on a women’s tailoring cooperative project. Lowrey notes that Linda and their three children have embraced his call to work for peace and also made sacrifices themselves (197).

## **Context of the Intervention**

### *Southern History and Identities*

Southern Sudan is a place of great ethnic and religious diversity. In addition to the need for sustainable peace with the Khartoum government, the South continues to need to develop internal unity among its peoples if it is to avoid the violent fragmentation that occurred in the 1990s, largely along tribal lines. The people of the South speak over a hundred different languages, and belong to several major ethnic groupings. The Dinka and the Nuer, focused on in this case study, are both Nilotic peoples, as well as the Shilluk. The region is also home to Nilo-Hamitic peoples such as the Bari, Latuko, Toposa, and Murle, and Sudanic groups such as the Madi, Belanda, and Azande. In modern history, the Dinka have comprised the majority tribal group, having moved into Southern Sudan and displaced other groups prior to the colonial era. The Dinka dominated the autonomous regional government of the 1970s following the first civil war, and many of the Southern tribes have histories of hostilities and suspicion toward the Dinka (Kebbede 1999, 132).

This disunity within the South is part of the complex reality Southern peoples have faced as they have been subjected for centuries to rule from outside themselves. Under the Egyptian/Ottoman occupation of Sudan, slave raiding in the South became more common, partly due to heavy taxation of the North. When the Mahdists secured Southern Sudan in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Southern peoples soon began to see the Mahdiyya as another foreign power exerting control over their indigenous practices. In the 1920s, the Closed District Ordinance enacted by the British aimed at reviving and

preserving the indigenous culture of the South, but at the same time it separated the region from agricultural development, and institutionalized economic and cultural divisions in the country. Sudan's regions were reunified in 1947, paving the way for a single independent country in 1956. However, by this point, the South was vulnerable to exploitation by the politically stronger North, and was skeptical of the union as a result. Civil war erupted and continued until the Addis Ababa Accord in 1972, which created a Southern region. However, Nimeiri's September Laws in 1983 and his division of the South into three provinces heightened tensions once again and war broke out a second time (Little 2007, 189-192).

Decades of war and waves of international attention and aid have undermined traditional culture in many respects, yet tribal identity remains strong in the South as it is expressed in family and clan relationships. Religious identity generally takes an independent role; it is not synonymous with tribal identity, but neither does it compete with the latter. Rather, syncretism of religion is common in the South, as the people have blended ancestral traditionalist customs with Christian, and to a lesser extent Islamic, rituals and beliefs. In the context of the war, it has been noted that religious identification also sometimes shifts. While privately practicing their own mix of religion, individuals have often aligned with the religion of the nearest militia or army unit, thus sometimes making religious identity a reflection of political and military factions (Little 2007, 188).

#### *Dinka and Nuer Conflict*

The groups that Lowrey worked with during the People to People process were from the Dinka and the Nuer, which are the two largest tribal groups in Southern Sudan.



The Dinka, around 1.35 million people, comprise about forty percent of the South and live primarily in southwestern region of Bahr el Ghazal, in the savanna lands of the Nile basin on the west. To the northeast of the Dinka, the Nuer, around 750,000, occupy part of the Upper Nile region. The Dinka and the Nuer are both Nilotic groups, they share a similar language, and traditionally they have both engaged in cattle herding (Little 2007, 193-195). Some scholars believe that the Nuer were originally Dinka themselves, although it is more likely that the Nuer were formerly a Luo group that was displaced by the migration of Dinka from central Sudan into the Bahr el Ghazal four centuries ago. In the violent upheaval of the early Baggara slave raids in the late eighteenth century, the Nuer fled eastward across the Nile, and in the Upper Nile region they expanded. For a time they even reversed the trend of Dinka amalgamation. However, this period was a violent one that is still remembered in the oral histories of both Dinka and Nuer (Beswick 2004, 164-174, 191).

According to Beswick, these “blood memories” helped to feed the intense ethnic violence of the late twentieth century. Given their proximity to each other, the Dinka and Nuer have had a long-standing history of feuds, often over issues related to cattle stealing and rights of access to grazing land and fishing ponds, but never on a scale seen during the 1990s. Even by 1993, approximately 1.3 million people had died in the first decade of the civil war, many from the intra-South conflict. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, and women, children and the elderly have not been spared from the brutality as they generally were in the past. Factors that contributed to the Dinka-Nuer conflict included famine, which was partly caused by the ongoing civil war, as well as the

existence of a large fertile area west of the Nile that became a “no man’s land” between the two groups and impeded famine relief. The increased availability of advanced weapons from the war with the North also helped to quickly escalate the ethnic conflict, and even more so as Khartoum began shipping arms to one or both sides. Dinka and Nuer commanders, rather than calling on chiefs to apply customary law and resolve conflict by traditional means, instead manipulated ethnic identity and the historic rivalry between the groups, sometimes in order to obtain support and weapons from Khartoum (Bewsick 2004, 215-219; Little 2007, 193-195).

Hutchison (2001), writing from the standpoint of the Nuer in the Western Upper Nile Province, divides the era of the second civil war into four periods, beginning before the 1983 outbreak and ending with the late 1990s at the time of the Dinka-Nuer peace initiatives. First, in the years immediately preceding the war, some lingering secessionist rebels in the South, mostly Nuer, coalesced as the *Anyanya 2*. Although they were overpowered by SPLA forces as Dr. John Garang’s majority Dinka movement emerged as the main rebel group across the South, the heavy-handedness of the latter left disgruntlement that resurfaced in the following decade. From 1983-1991, the SPLM/A was supported by the Mengistu government in Ethiopia, and concomitantly espoused political liberation of all of Sudan, rather than a goal of Southern independence. Dr. Riek Machar, a Nuer, became the SPLA Commander responsible for the entire northern front by 1991.

Despite internal tensions continuing during this second period, in some areas Machar eventually staved off government-supported raids and attacks by Baggara militias

from the North, which had led to mass displacement of the civilian population. As the Cold War ended and Mengistu's regime fell in May 1991, the SPLA lost a major base of support, and some 350,000 South Sudanese refugees fled from Ethiopia, only to be bombed by the government upon returning to eastern Sudan. The time was ripe for a revival of secessionist aims, and in August 1991 Machar and a few other leaders mounted a coup against Garang's autocratic leadership of the SPLA.

The following period of splintering saw an escalation of internal violence within the South that soon overshadowed the civil war on the national level and allowed the Khartoum government to both capitalize on the divisions and portray the "Southern problem" as a matter of tribalism rather than political and economic inequities. Indeed, what started as a political disagreement between the two "Doctors" over the direction of the Southern movement found no quick resolution and it soon became an entrenched power struggle that enflamed tribal tensions (Little 2007, 192). Despite initial grassroots bewilderment, the conflict on the ground did escalate quickly into a mutual fight for self-preservation once a few brutal raids on towns were exchanged between Garang's SPLA-Mainstream, made up of majority Dinka, and the Nuer-dominant SPLA-Nasir faction, later called the South Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A). As Hutchison (2001) notes,

Unlike a 'homeland war', the violent confrontations unleashed by Garang and Machar appeared endless. Whereas earlier conflicts between Nuer and Dinka communities rarely lasted more than a few days before local chiefs stepped forward to restore the peace, 'the war of the educated' proved impervious to numerous international and regional mediation attempts. And unlike a 'government war', 'the war of the educated' seemed to have no overarching political objective, other than personal struggles for power. (320-321)

As Lowrey (1996) researched in his dissertation, the violence between factions in the South was by no means exclusively between the Dinka and Nuer tribes; in particular, the Nuer splintered and various clans fought against each other. One example is the bloody conflict that between the Lou Nuer and Jikany Nuer in 1993-1994. Partly as a result of the larger wars around them, the Nuer had been unable to meet in tribal meetings since 1972, and estranged Nuer groups were now being pushed closer together by war displacement. What began as a small-scale conflict over a fishing area escalated quickly as the Jikany refused access to the bodies of some Lou who had been shot, after which the Lou retaliated with greater force. Although the Dinka-based SPLM/A tried to intervene to curb the rising violence, it only aggravated the situation further. Meanwhile, Khartoum began to ship weapons to both sides of the intra-tribal conflict (Little 2007, 194).

Disunity in the South also led to the Sudanese government making alliances with factions that opposed Garang and the SPLM/A. As well as countering the development of a unified rebel movement in the South, one of Khartoum's major objectives was to regain military control over oil fields in the South. Paulino Matiep, a Nuer commander, was instrumental in this task for years in the disputed territory of Western Upper Nile Province, but eventually the government also curried favor with Machar. In April 1997, Machar and other SPLM/A opponents signed onto the Khartoum Peace Agreement, under which his SSIM/A was renamed the South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF). Machar was given position in the government, and eventually become the chairman of a South Sudan Coordinating Council, which gave him authority over all government-controlled areas of

the South. However, many Southern Sudanese felt that he had surrendered, and in fact Khartoum soon began to undercut his power. In 1998, Matiep split off from Machar's group to form the government-supported South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A), bringing renewed fighting between two Nuer factions (Little 2007, 192-193; Hutchinson 2001, 321-324).

#### *Religious and Cultural Shifts during War*

The political and ethnic tensions that contributed to the violence of the 1990s occurred along with religious and cultural adaptations among Southern tribes (Hutchinson 2001). Some religious changes among the Nuer coincided directly with the increase in military influence and erosion of traditional power structures and conflict resolution measures. Historically, many of the Southern tribes had no central authority, but were governed by groups of elders or custodians, each of whom might resolve a particular type of dispute. This older pattern has been blurred by the colonial record, which saw more centralizing of power, sometimes in the form of one chief becoming paramount over others. One of the effects of recent war has been the toll that the rule of military chiefs and of the gun has taken on traditional leadership patterns (Little 2007, 193).

An example of the interplay between religion and militarization lies in the distinction between "homeland wars" and "government wars," introduced by Machar in the late 1980s. At the same time, the SPLA's supply of modern weaponry increasingly displaced spear warfare and made killing more impersonal. Already, with the multitude of deaths resulting from attacks on civilians, the Western Nuer population had begun to

respond spiritually by considering the disaster as coming from God (*kuoth*), and by equating “bullet victims” with God-ordained “lightning victims,” subsequently categorizing the victim as a guardian spirit or *col wic* (Hutchinson 2001, 312-313). Machar, however, argued that this categorization would cheapen the previously rare designation of *col wic*. Moreover, he sought to legitimate SPLA authority and solidify the loyalty of his troops.

Concurrent with the dispersion of modern firearms, Machar propagated a novel dichotomy between localized wars previously fought with homemade spears, and “government wars.” In the former, a killer customarily would have borne a personal responsibility and been accountable to arbitration by chiefs. One Nuer belief held that someone who killed another would have to immediately visit a priest before eating or drinking, in order to have the dead person’s blood drained out from his own arm and avoid being haunted by the deceased. Now, however, army recruits were supplied with guns and taught accountability only as it concerned following orders, with an individual soldier often not even knowing whether or not he had caused a death, or how many (Hutchinson 2001, 314-316; Little 2007, 194-5).

The secularizing of violence, inasmuch as it disrupted traditional thinking about death, may have also contributed to the mass conversions to Christianity that occurred in the 1980s. This major development in religious identification was closely related to politics, as it represents one means that people of the South used to resist central government policies of forced Islamization. When control of the mission churches passed to indigenous leaders following the expulsion of foreign missionaries in 1963-64,

and subsequently came under attack, the churches actually began to grow faster than before. After the 1983 outbreak of the second civil war, conversions multiplied rapidly (Beswick 2004, 204-205).

### *Religious Capacities for Peace*

While the expanding capacity of the churches has increased the Christian leadership's institutional influence compared to that of traditional religious priests and prophets, it has by no means displaced the traditionalist beliefs of many Southern Sudanese. While some convert fully, and others reject the newly introduced religion, many follow a blend of practices. Neither this religious syncretism nor the interfacing of different worldviews appears to have led to irreconcilable conflicts in the South (Beswick 2004, 205; Jenner 2000, 36). In fact, according to Lowrey, the Presbyterian missionaries who were assigned under the British colonial rule to the Upper Nile region brought views that lined up with the Nuer moral world.

Although apparently not by design, the representative form of church government in Presbyterian polity, and its covenantal theology drawing from both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, both share similarities with the broadly acephalous system of government among the Nuer and its own covenantal understanding of the world (Lowrey 1996, 129-135). The Nuer are not animistic in their beliefs but rather they believe in a Creator God/Spirit, *kuoth*, who is a personal spiritual being. There is a sense of equality and responsibility under *kuoth*, and Nuer customary laws uphold the idea of right and wrong action. As such, the Nuer have a covenantal view of the spiritual

world and of their relationships with one another that informs traditional approaches to resolving conflict (119-121).

Jenner (2000, 7-10) uses the term “African cosmology” to sum up this covenantal outlook that, in a broad sense, describes the heart of not only the Nuer traditional worldview but indeed that of many peoples across the continent. Beswick’s research of traditional Dinka religion highlights the importance placed on observing powers of nature and totems. These animals, plants, objects, or even ancestor spirits are considered symbols of protection of a particular clan or family line, revealing the connectedness felt between people and the natural world. Ritual human sacrifice of a prominent priest continues to be practiced in some areas. More commonly, the killing of a ram or bull is often practiced along with prayers (Beswick 2004, 98-107, 205). Cattle are central to the economy and culture of the Dinka and other Southern groups, and vital community events, including the peace conferences Lowrey facilitated, are often marked by the ritual sacrifice of a white bull. The bull represents God’s creation, its blood indicates life, and the restoring of life is signified communally through eating the meat (Duany 2003, 213).

In the midst of the diversity of Southern Sudan, religious leaders representing different belief systems, traditionalist and Christian, have participated in peace conferences together and performed their covenantal roles alongside each other with deep respect (Lowrey 1996, 142-146). The process that Lowrey facilitated was initiated by the NSCC, which for several years was the only institution of civil society with representation spanning Southern Sudan, other than the traditional leadership structures. Given that chiefs and custodians were experiencing diminished influence compared to



military leaders, it became apparent that a viable alternative to the violent resolution of conflicts in Southern Sudan would require engaging whole communities in support of peace (Little 2007, 193). However, it took several years following the 1991 split in the SPLM/A before the peace stance adopted by the NSCC bore fruit through the People to People process.

The NSCC was formed in 1990 with the encouragement of the SPLM/A, even though there was tension and mistrust between the two. From the onset of the second civil war, the SPLM/A had controlled the South administratively via local chiefs using the British indirect rule system, and it was skeptical of independent civil society organizations and the churches as political counterweights and possible havens of dissent. Following the 1988 famine that killed a quarter of a million people, the UN humanitarian scheme Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was launched successfully, but after 1989 its effectiveness diminished. The SPLM/A hoped that the NSCC would serve as a convenient way of channeling this foreign aid, as well as demonstrating to international donors a measure of tolerance, and also strengthening a religious identity in the South that would counter the fundamentalist Islamic vision of the new NIF regime in Khartoum (Rolandsen 2005, 30, 75-79).

In 1997, the most significant action that the SPLM/A took to improve its image was to engage in a dialogue with the NSCC, which paved the way for the People to People process to move forward. In the years following the 1991 coup attempt, the SPLM/A had begun to present somewhat more of a democratic face, a highlight of which was holding the 1994 National Convention, but it was still viewed as a brutal occupying

force in some areas. Meanwhile, the NSCC was developing its organizational capacity and a commitment to attempting to reconcile various factions within Southern Sudan. Increasing tensions between the army and the organization of churches were addressed at the dialogue held in Yei from July 21-24, 1997. The resulting Yei Declaration endorsed the NSCC's role as a mediator between conflicting groups in Southern Sudan. The NSCC then moved to engage Dinka and Nuer factions in dialogue, in particular seeking a connection to Riek Machar (then in Khartoum) through the PCOS, which had been involved in the earlier Akobo Peace Process between the Jikany and Lou Nuer. This link came in the form of Lowrey, who then traveled back to Sudan and led in the facilitation of conferences in the People to People process (Rolandsen 2005, 130-142; Jenner 2000, 17-19).

### **Intervention: The People to People Process**

Lowrey returned to Sudan in 1998 as a peace consultant for the NSCC. Working to facilitate peace between the Nuer and the Dinka, he assisted in planning and carrying out several peace conferences of the NSCC's People to People process. Of particular interest to this study in the intervention summaries that follow is the presence of Christian and traditionalist rituals and symbolic practices together. Rather than acting as a representative of the Presbyterian Church, Lowrey engaged in these meetings on an independent basis, which he saw as strategically affording more flexibility than he may have had if he were an institutional representative (Little 2007, 198-199). Before the first conference that Lowrey facilitated, staff from the NSCC spent months contacting church leaders and chiefs as well as military faction leaders (Lowrey 1998, 4).

### *Loki Nuer-Dinka Chiefs and Church Leaders Reconciliation Conference*

During June 1998, Lowrey convened eight key border chiefs from Dinka and Nuer areas for a peacemaking conference held in the “neutral” location of Lokichokio, Kenya. With about 35 participants in all, it was also attended by 11 church leaders and a representative from each of the two major military factions (headed by Garang and Machar). Everything said was interpreted in Dinka, Nuer, and English, by translators who were participants themselves. The linguistic needs and the context of oral cultures contributed to Lowrey’s decision to utilize visual images extensively, as they could be adapted in each language with different explanations and examples. Funding for the conference came from a \$35,000 grant from the Presbyterian Church (USA). Lowrey gives three specific goals for holding the Loki conference:

1. Reconciliation and rebuilding between Dinka and Nuer chiefs and church leaders
2. Reflection on conflict resolution and peacemaking strategies, both traditional means and modern theories
3. Formation of strategies for peacebuilding at the grassroots and middle levels of society.

A larger goal of the conference was to determine whether a broader reconciliation between Dinka and Nuer communities could be attempted (Lowrey 1998, 4; Jenner 2000, 20).

Relationship. Most of the conferences facilitated by Lowrey began with storytelling, in which the Nuer and Dinka participants spoke about their sufferings caused by each other, including the destruction of life and homes as well as abductions. Each

group was given time to tell its story completely, followed by responsive dialogue back and forth between the participants and comments from observers. The telling of stories, and the listening, rather than stirring up hatred, overwhelmingly affirmed a shared suffering among the communities, and drew the participants to a stronger commitment to seek peace (Little 2007, 201). This initial phase took three days at Loki, and “chiefs who follow their traditional religion and Christian church leaders began to speak of the unfolding conference as nothing less than a gift from God” (Lowrey 1998, 6). The oldest Nuer chief, William Ruaei, said one morning that he could not sleep at all the previous night during the conference; “my body was so happy because my mind could only think about peace” (8).

At Loki, before the storytelling phase, the process began with the creation of a floor map, for which Lowrey provided a rope to represent the Nile, and the participants placed their chairs to represent their home location and proximity to others. This exercise visually tapped into a sense of connectedness as they discussed who were neighbors and how long it would take to walk to each place, and by implication, which relationships would be prioritized for reconciliation. Then, as they each told their stories of suffering in war and famine, participants walked around the map to places where events had occurred (Lowrey 1998, 5).

Traditional peacemaking. After the storytelling about their pain, Lowrey asked the Nuer and Dinka to share stories of how their ancestors resolved conflicts in the past, and also to think about the wisdom they want to impart to their grandchildren. The question drew on Nuer and Dinka traditions that emphasize connectedness across

generations, and thus elicited principles that would start an indigenous collection of peacemaking resources (Little 2007, 201-202).

Lowrey also introduced some used visuals based on modern peacebuilding analysis, such as an adaptation of Lederach's (1997) levels of leadership diagram. He made the triangular roof of a house (*toukel*) a metaphor for the structure of a community, which can be threatened by the lightning bolt of conflict at all levels. The relationships among the participants were at the grassroots and middle levels of leaders, but some also had relationships with the top level (Lowrey 1996, 8).

Accepting responsibility. The participants at Loki agreed that the blame for Dinka-Nuer conflict could not be placed simply on the militia leaders. Instead, they saw that they could break their own destructive cycles and make peace, neighbor with neighbor, even if the top levels of the major warring factions (Garang and Machar) were not involved. One of the older Dinka bishops, the Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Garang, powerfully dramatized the point of reclaiming traditional leadership when he lifted a wooden chair above his head and, staggering around the room with his arthritis, called out asking who would help him to relieve the burden. The senior Nuer, Chief William Ruaei, shouted out the name of his favorite bull and leapt up to help him bring down the chair. At this point, all the participants responded with a standing ovation of clapping and cheering as they witnessed the two elders removing the burden together (Lowrey 1998, 7; Jenner 2000, 38).

During the final three days of the Loki conference, two working groups met separately to plan strategies for building peace in their areas, and on the last day the

Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord was signed. The working group focused on the East Bank of the Nile faced some setbacks because some of the Dinka chiefs had not been able to attend. However, a strategy for the West side of the Nile was planned in detail, including many of the logistics for a longer and significantly larger conference to be held on their lands, which became the Wunlit Peace and Reconciliation Conference. The Loki Accord called for peace among the Nuer and Dinka and included specific resolutions. The chiefs and church leaders demanded that commanders on both sides refrain from hostile acts, local agreements be honored, killing and cattle-raiding stop, abductions of women and children cease and the recently abducted be returned home, freedom of movement be protected, and the burning of homesteads cease (Lowrey 1998, 8-9).

The whole Loki intervention was imbued with Christian as well as traditionalist religious heritage. Symbolic and ritual acts during the process cultivated the renewal of a covenantal peace, drawing on the culture of the Nuer and Dinka peoples. Some of the faith-based resources that had a bearing were more obvious, such as the use of scriptures to encourage the process as well as to celebrate and point to the spiritual dimension of peace. To encourage storytelling at the start of the conference, Lowrey referred to John 20:24-29, the story of Jesus showing his wounds to the doubting disciple Thomas. Lowrey applied the story as an invitation to the Dinka and Nuer to tell their own stories of wounds, to show and speak to each other of the pain that they had caused each other (Lowrey 1998, 5-6). Near the end of the conference, just before the signing ceremony, the Christian church leaders led a service of worship, in which even the followers of traditional religion enthusiastically participated. At the end of the service, Psalm 46:9,

which speaks of God breaking the bow and shattering the spear, was shouted out in each of the languages by all the Nuer and Dinka together, getting louder and more excited with each repetition of the refrain (Little 2007, 208).

The church leaders and chiefs personally sealed the Loki Accord by individually signing and thumb-printing, followed by the opportunity to express commitment. Several mentioned concrete steps they would take to renew cooperation and sharing of the land with the other side. Others spoke of the reconciliation and peace that had been achieved, but also of the difficult yet hopeful path ahead. Some expressed their joy in dancing and song, or by embracing all the participants. Telar Deng, of the NSCC Peace Desk and the South Sudan Law Society, acted as the ceremonial chair of the conference and concluded by warning that it is hatred that destroys a community, not death itself. “I know after this, the practicality on the ground, death will still be there, attacks will still be there. Don’t be discouraged—pursue peace and reconciliation—don’t give up!” (Lowrey 1998, 11). Finally, a Feast of Peace made a ritual end to the conference. The participants shared in the meat of a slaughtered goat to symbolize their new unity before going back to implement the Accord in their own communities (10-11).

#### *Wunlit Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference*

Following the initiative of the chiefs and church leaders in calling for a conference on the West Bank of the Nile, Lowrey continued his consultancy role with the NSCC and acted as a facilitator of this much larger and more ambitious Dinka-Nuer peace conference. A coordinating team in Nairobi was broadly representative, including the NSCC, Dinka and Nuer leaders, and representatives from Garang’s and Machar’s

military factions, the South Sudan Law Society and women's organizations (Lowrey 1998, 11). Lowrey sought a wide consensus for peace among the Nuer and Dinka because of their decentralized leadership structures. The traditional chiefs had also been suffering from declined influence due to the pervasiveness of warfare and modern weapons. Thus, in order to accommodate approximately 2000 delegates who attended the conference, a specially constructed village, with 150 houses and a large meeting hall, was built by 300 people from a youth organization over more than three months (Jenner 2000, 22; Little 2007, 199-200).

The format of the Wunlit conference built upon the successful process Lowrey had utilized at Loki, but was adapted to the larger number of attendees. The participants were not invited directly by the NSCC this time, but the selection of certain numbers of delegates was made locally by the chiefs and church leaders. At Wunlit, the first three and a half days of the ten-day conference were committed to storytelling, again making a space for truth telling to overcome mistrust and begin healing relationships. After the storytelling phase, the conference proceeded with problem-solving meetings and consensus decision-making, complemented by songs, dancing, and rituals (Jenner 2000, 20-21; Little 2007, 201).

A main difference in the format of the conference at Wunlit was that problem solving was initially conducted through several working groups rather than by the whole conference. An elected committee chose six topics that needed to be addressed after the storytelling phase was complete. These included missing persons and marriages to abducted persons, reclaiming the land and rebuilding relationships, institutional



arrangements for conflict resolution, monitoring border control, challenges related to people outside the peace process, and extending the peace to the East Bank of the Nile and the province of Equatoria. Each of the six topics was discussed by a working group, and proposals were made to the large group to be discussed and voted on after a consensus was reached. At times, the committee process resulted in escalation of tensions, such as when one committee head announced a new policy on penalties for abduction that had not been decided by consensus of the committee (Jenner 2000, 21; Little 2007, 202). Thus, in some respects, Lowrey's role occasionally required more of a mediation aspect, since he was not directly facilitating all the discussions and decisions.

The location of the Wunlit conference also presented issues of security, which turned out to be an opportunity for a powerfully symbolic measure of trust building. As far as the safety of everyone at this politically significant gathering, Commander Salva Kiir Mayardit of the SPLA played a key behind-the-scenes role in cooperation with the NSCC, and he spoke at the start of the conference, personally guaranteeing security (Jenner 2000, 22). There was also a key issue of the safety of the Nuer participants in traveling to Dinka territory for the event. This was addressed by an exchange of visits by chiefs from both sides prior to the conference; one Dinka chief had his feet washed by the Nuer and was then picked up and carried overhead by a group of Nuer women (Duany 2003, 219; Jenner 2000, 21). When Nuer Chief Isaac Magok, a formidable warrior, crossed into Dinka territory to attend the conference, it was seen by some Dinka as a clear sign of coming peace. After the conference as well, to reciprocate the willingness to take risks for peace, the Dinka had to visit Nuer territory, despite increased internal

fighting among the Nuer; thus, some Nuer chiefs stayed in Dinkaland, offering their own lives in pledge for the Dinka leaders' safety in Nuerland (Little 2007, 203-204).

The Wunlit conference process demonstrated again that peacemaking between the Dinka and Nuer is advanced through rituals and symbolic actions, even though they maintain differences in practice of traditional religion and even different Christian denominational practices. Both the church leaders and chiefs engaged in rituals acts according to their own traditions while respecting each other. One of the highly symbolic traditional rituals enacted was the sacrificing of a white bull:

In preparation for the opening feast, a white bull was tethered outside. Men danced around the bull, pointing their spears at it and confessing their sins—as a weight to be laid upon the bull for him to take to the spirit world. Finally, using their bare hands, they struggled with the bull and wrestled him to the ground, forcing his open neck to face the sun in preparation for death. Once the bull was dead, all participants stepped over it, thereby indicating their desire to withdraw from conflict and allow peace to begin. After the ritual, the elders warned that anyone violating the covenant would wind up like the white bull. All participants then partook of the bull together. (Little 2007, 202-203)

The covenantal sacrifice of a white bull was reenacted at the close of the ten-day conference, as well as across Dinka and Nuer lands later, after the Wunlit Covenant was signed and thumb-printed by the delegates on March 8, 1999. The Wunlit Covenant called for an end to the tribal war between Nuer and Dinka, and the military leaders of the various factions could not ignore its wide representation from the communities, with an empowered traditional leadership. The covenant also called for specific changes in the areas that were discussed by the working groups, one of which was the sharing of the large fertile *toic* area on the Dinka-Nuer border, which had previously become a no-man's-land. Following the conference, conditions improved in Southern Sudan as the

Dinka and Nuer began to share land and lake access again, and renewed communication also made it possible for the UN and NGOs to return to provide food relief during the famine. A Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace Council was also created at Wunlit, and they met first in September 1999 to discuss implementing the peace through short and long-term planning (Jenner 2000, 22-23; Little 2007, 200, 208-209).

*Waat Lou Nuer Peace and Governance Conference*

The Wunlit conference was supported by the Nuer Commander Riek Machar, who had aligned with the government in 1997, but Nuer communities overall were still splintered in their alignments with numerous factions that were fighting each other. Seeking to diminish Machar's power and counter the growing unity resulting from the People to People process, the government shifted its support to General Paulino Matiep and his rival Nuer group SSUM/A, granting higher positions in government and providing arms. As SSUA attacks increased in 1999, some 20,000 Nuer people from the region of the Bentiu oil fields began to find a refuge in Dinka lands, made possible directly by the Wunlit Covenant (Jenner 2000, 23; Little 2007, 209). Meanwhile, Lowrey was seeking to address the ongoing intra-Nuer conflict. He secured travel funding that helped displaced Nuer leaders who had previously fled to the North of Sudan to come back and help in the reconciliation process to unite different factions.

In November 1999, Lowrey facilitated a conference focused on the Lou Nuer, who had recently experienced severe fragmentation and breakdown of community order at the hands of five youth militias connected with different military factions. Meeting in Waat, one hundred official delegates and around one thousand other additional

participants attended the Lou Nuer Peace and Governance Conference. Again, the chiefs and church leaders were among a broad spectrum of community stakeholders represented. Also, the same religious and traditional methods were utilized as in previous conferences, including a covenant signing, ritually sealed by the sacrifice of a white bull and paired with a Christian worship service. Some 3,000 people attended the closing celebrations and worship (Jenner 2000, 28; Little 2007, 200).

The Waat Lou Nuer Covenant clearly built on the outcomes of prior peace conferences, as it describes extending the peace and reconciliation among Nuer communities and through all of Southern Sudan. It focused primarily on governance issues, including rebuilding a community-based civil administration with a Peace and Governance Council, re-empowering the traditional legal system led by the chiefs, and establishing a police system. Following the Waat Covenant, several military factions gradually realigned themselves together and fighting among the Nuer dropped off. (Jenner 2000, 28-29; Little 2007, 200). The “word of promise” in the Covenant implied a faith basis for peace and was strongly stated:

We will protect this peace against anyone from within our ranks or who would come against us from the outside attempting to destroy our unity and peace. For this peace we are willing to die so that our children may live in peace and enjoy this good land that God has given to us. (Jenner 2000, 28)

#### *Impact on Peacebuilding in Sudan*

The conferences Lowrey facilitated all contributed to building a unity and peace in Southern Sudan as part of the People to People peace process, which also included various other conferences (Jenner 2000; Duany 2003). Not all of the People to People conferences were considered as successful. Hutchinson (2001) mentions the Liliir

conference in May 2000 as failing to extend the peace established at Wunlit to the Nuer, Dinka, Murle and Anyuak groups on the East Bank of the Nile (325). Originally Lowrey had planned to contribute to this conference as well, but it was delayed at first by a series of rapid moves and realignments by various Nuer political leaders resulted in some military tensions, and the SPLM/A criticized the NSCC for not consulting with them prior to the Waat conference. There was also a flaring of tensions between the SPLM/A and the international aid community at the time, which prevented his participation (Lowrey 2000; Jenner 2000, 29). While the conference did go ahead in May, the instability in Nuer territory meant that it was held elsewhere, meaning a missed opportunity for the Dinka to reciprocate by sacrificing a white bull on Nuer lands (Jenner 2000, 30).

Despite ongoing tensions and stumbling blocks in the People to People process, its result made it harder for the military factions in the South to justify continued fighting, and thus contributed to the eventual reconciliation between Garang and Machar (Rolandsen 2005, 131). On October 23, 2002, John Garang's SPLM/A and Riek Machar's faction, now called the Sudan People's Democratic Front (SPDF), signed a joint statement agreeing to integrate their two groups. Concurrently, the SPLM/A was engaged in the IGAD talks which led to the 2005 CPA with the government. Under the CPA, John Garang became Vice President of the government of South Sudan. However, when he died in a helicopter crash after only three weeks in the position, Rick Machar became the leader of the region, and vowed to work for Garang's goals (Little 2007, 209).

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

According to Appleby (2000, 55), “The ambivalence of the sacred gives religious leadership its decisive character.” This statement about the role of religious leaders in relating the symbols and stories of their traditions to contemporary experiences and choices applies well to both of the cases covered in this study. In Johnston’s intervention, engagement with religious leaders from both the Muslim and Christian communities was designed to encourage them to cooperate in building a peaceful and equitable society, as opposed to potentially becoming leaders of a religious identity conflict. Although Lowrey’s work in Southern Sudan differed in several respects relative to the religious context, it also demonstrated the positive and constructive role that religious leaders can play as “militants for peace” (164). This chapter applies concepts and theories from the field of conflict resolution to these two cases, and elaborates on the following conclusions and recommendations drawn from the comparison of intrareligious and interreligious peacebuilding.

At the heart of religious peacebuilding, whether intrareligious or interreligious, is positive change in the dynamics of the relationship between the parties. Relational conflicts are often nested between the specific issues and more deeply rooted structural problems, so religious peacebuilders in Sudan and elsewhere should continue to strategically address this key type of conflict. Their intervention efforts will continue to

be enhanced by authentic and tactful faith-based engagement that utilizes both dialogue and symbolic actions and rituals as means of relational transformation, and that also demonstrates adaptability in eliciting religious and other resources for peace from the cultures of the parties. Religious peacebuilding can strengthen relationships at different levels of leadership; these cases both confirm that the middle range is a strategic focus because of its access to top-level and grassroots leaders (Lederach 1997, 41-42; Appleby 2000, 241). Moreover, this type of engagement importantly results in outcomes that can include structural reform as well as relational change. In order to promote sustainable peace between the North and South in Sudan, the capacity of new trust-building institutions like the SIRC and the CPRF should be bolstered, with government cooperation and adequate funding. Finally, further research and comparative studies of religious peacebuilding are recommended, in Sudan and elsewhere, in order to verify and further substantiate the conclusions drawn here.

### **Religious Conflicts and Religious Peacebuilding**

Although Johnston's interreligious peacebuilding work in Sudan was concentrated on religious issues, the nature of the primary conflict between North and South is better explained in terms of its political and economic roots than as a communal conflict between religious groups. As discussed in Chapter 3, the historical debate *within* the Muslim community in Sudan over the role and application of *shari'a* reflects an internal pluralism (Appleby 2000, 31) on the issue, and shows that the characterization of the Sudanese conflict as religious can be largely attributed to the hard line taken by authoritarian regimes in pursuing complete Islamization and Arabization of the country.

In Appleby's words, "neither religion nor religious militancy per se is a source of deadly conflict: the problem is extremism" (13). That said, the rise in Christian conversions during the civil war exemplifies the point that conflict processes can contribute to the molding and solidification of social identities (Black 2003, 122). It is not surprising, therefore, that tensions would exist between the Muslim and Christian communities in the presence of discriminatory religious policies, and as such, the ICRD engagement in Sudan provided ways to address interreligious concerns, both during the intervention meetings themselves and in an ongoing way through the establishment of the SIRC and the CPRF.

An implication here is that Johnston's faith-based diplomacy with religious leaders and scholars represents an important measure of prevention against the mobilization of a widespread religious identity conflict, in contrast with the identity conflict within Southern Sudan that was already ongoing at the time of Lowrey's involvement. When Lowrey began facilitating peace in the midst of the Dinka-Nuer tribal identity conflict, that conflict could be classified, using terms from Sandole (1993), as an aggressive manifest conflict-in-process, and as such a major focus of the intervention was to reduce direct violence. Meanwhile, looking at the context of Johnston's work, a pervasive identity conflict involving violence between religious communities might be considered latent. On the other hand, religious issues such as discrimination supported by government policy could be seen as already providing what Sandole calls the conflict-as-startup conditions for a manifest conflict process. Indeed, the specific issues and cases tackled by the ICRD intervention, and by the SIRC and



CPRF in their first few years of operation, suggest that interreligious peacebuilding has served to reduce structural violence as well as acting as a means to prevent the escalation of conflicts with a significant religious dimension.

Since the fault lines within Southern Sudan were generally drawn according to tribal identity, the ongoing conflict there might be considered a less likely situation to have approached with religious peacebuilding than Johnston's faith-based engagement in Khartoum with parties who were primarily identified by their religion, whether Muslim or Christian. However, Lowrey's engagement through the People to People process also drew upon "political and mythic interdependencies" (Gopin 2002, 37) in the Dinka and Nuer societies, and was helped in this regard by the lack of a clear separation in their worldviews of religion from politics. The culturally and religiously connected approach to peacemaking proved significant not only during the conferences themselves with the traditional chiefs and church leaders, but also in terms of impacting the military leaderships toward ending the fighting.

Furthermore, for the sake of contrast with Johnston's clearly interreligious engagement, Lowrey's intervention is summarized in this study as intrareligious peacebuilding in that it utilized resources for peace that were drawn from religious sources with which both parties identify. As an initiative organized by the NSCC through its network of churches, the People to People process clearly displayed a strong Christian influence, with one reflection being the inclusion of Christian leaders from both sides as participants. However, although the process was intrareligious in this sense, it did not involve Christianity to the exclusion of other belief systems, but rather drew upon

a mix of Christian and traditional religious resources as found in the culture of the participants. Moreover, intrareligious peacebuilding should not be understood to convey a static religious outlook shared by both parties, nor even necessarily an absence of religious conflict. In the case of Southern Sudan, the lines between Dinka and Nuer largely aligned with denominational differences within Christianity as inherited from the colonial missions. Thus, the People to People process served as a program through which the NSCC functioned to enhance interdenominational cooperation, mediating war-related tensions within the Christian community.

### **Nested Conflicts**

As seen in the history of the country, Sudan's conflicts involve a complex intermingling of issues and dynamics, and another way to analyze them is in terms of nested conflicts. For example, in May 1983, Nimeiri dismissed the regional government of the South, in violation of the Addis Ababa Agreement. His action was not merely at the urging of Northern politicians, who saw that their five administratively devolved regions would have been weaker against a single united Southern region. Rather, Joseph Lagu, in representing Equatoria, was also in favor of re-dividing of the South. Ongoing relation tensions of mistrust between the Equatorians and the Dinka of Bahr el Ghazal were nested in a sub-system conflict, as the Equatorians felt that the Dinka majority in the South were dominating and mismanaging the regional government with corruption. Ultimately Lagu's attempt to bring more power home through devolution to several regions failed, for the Khartoum government subsequently exerted more direct control over the smaller and hence weaker Southern regions. Thus, the politics preceding the

second civil war illustrate that the types of conflict within the South were also all nested in a broader structural conflict involving power imbalances in the country.

Divide-and-conquer policies, used by both colonial and post-independence governments like Nimeiri's, continued to show up as a tactic of structural conflict affecting the Nuer-Dinka violence of the 1990s. On the systemic level, the Khartoum government was manipulating and providing weapons to various factions in the South, putting others at risk and exacerbating the internal conflict. Lowrey and the NSCC could have attempted to resolve the tribal conflict by focusing only on negotiating the specific issues that brought the parties to the table, including the inter-tribal violence and devastation, land and water access issues, and the connected famine. They may have also drawn in relational aspects of the historical conflict between the Dinka and the Nuer tribes. These they did, but the intervenors went even deeper with the People to People process, working on a systemic level in such a way as to build unity in the South so that it later could negotiate peace with Khartoum. Rather than only engaging with the SPLM/A on the issues-specific and relational conflicts, the process also centrally involved the traditional leadership of chiefs and the leadership of the churches. In so doing, they were addressing a structural conflict of the militarized culture head-on, reinvigorating rather than continuing the displacement of the conflict resolution roles of traditional and religious leadership among the people.

In the ICRD intervention, Johnston saw that specific conflicts and complaints involving religious issues in Sudan tended to be related to a larger systemic problem of religious discrimination in the country. As such, a significant part of the work of

Johnston, including the establishment of the SIRC and CPRF and their work, related to addressing structural concerns such as the application of *shari'a* in a Sudan at peace and the second-class status of non-Muslims in the country. And interestingly, even though a mass religious identity conflict had not taken place, the ongoing presence of issues-specific conflicts amidst a pattern of religious discrimination had contributed to the relational tensions between Christian and Muslim leaders. As such, it was on the relational level that Johnston focused his work in Sudan, in order to affect systemic change as well as to resolve specific cases involving religious issues and religious groups.

Indeed, both interventions in this study concentrated a great deal of effort toward healing and enhancing relationships among leaders and stakeholders. Gopin (2002, 36) connects the importance of relationship to repairing injustice and to addressing specific issues of wrongdoing. As a general strategy, a relational focus may be beneficial in religious peacebuilding, as seen through the lens of the nested conflict paradigm, since the relational conflict level is located between and thus closely affecting and being affected by both the issues-specific types of conflict and the system/sub-system structural types of conflict. Long-term relationships need to be addressed in any intervention where they are key to a lasting peace. Otherwise, the specific presenting issues of a conflict may be resolved for a time without addressing ongoing structural conflicts and social injustice. Conversely, change might be effected on the structural level without those changes reaching the issues-specific conflicts to make a difference on the ground.

## **Religious Peacebuilding Choices: Words and Actions**

Appleby (2000, 239) identifies three modes of religious peacebuilding, and calls the interventionist mode the most promising, given that the saturation mode is so rare. The third mode, crisis mobilization, can be seen in the SIRC's quick response to defuse tensions following the death of Garang in 2005, but overall, Johnston's work and Lowrey's work in Sudan both fit the interventionist category. The formats of the two interventions are similar in that both foundationally aimed at bringing the parties together, in a facilitated conference or summit setting, to work on building positive relationships and to solve concrete problems. Both interventions involved a degree of risk in setting up such an encounter, and in both cases the risk posed was addressed beforehand in order to ameliorate it. The Christian participants in the ICRD intervention were concerned about their participation being used by the government to garner positive press, and the Nuer in the South were required to enter Dinka territory in order to attend the peace conference at Wunlit. Furthermore, both interventions drew upon religious resources, in the form of sacred texts and various rituals and actions.

Lowrey and Johnston, both Christians themselves, chose to include significant use of religious scriptures during the course of their interventions. Lowrey drew upon biblical stories as teaching illustrations during some of the proceedings of the conferences he facilitated. He also refers to verses from the Christian Bible naturally as he reflects on the vision and purpose of peacemaking in general. Perhaps Lowrey's frequent use of the Bible is a reflection of his training as an ordained Presbyterian minister, but it also appears that the intrareligious setting of the Nuer-Dinka peace process, with Christians

from both tribes present, easily lent itself to occasional reference to scripture passages that would be meaningful to both sides. In the interreligious context, on the other hand, Johnston introduced sacred texts from both the Christian and Islamic traditions in a more structured manner, using a regular prayer breakfast routine that was open to both sides equally and that was set apart from the rest of the day's proceedings.

Although the use of scripture and dialogue about Jesus is not surprising given that the intervenors were evangelicals, it is clear that they both focused their choices of religious resources in the intervention to connect with all the participants within their own cultural and religious frames of reference. Thus, the methodologies and rituals took a different shape in the two cases, as would be expected from an elicitive approach. In each case, though, the power of symbolic actions and shared experiences beyond dialogue during the conferences contributed to a deeper development of positive relationships, a result anticipated by Gopin (2002, 155) from this sort of religious engagement. In the interreligious case, the continual attention given to prayer, before and alongside the sessions but distinct from them, took on a ritual aspect of regularly reminding both the Muslim and Christian participants to maintain a spiritual focus on their interactions with each other. Similarly, the sacrifice of a white bull during the People to People conferences, along with Christian worship celebrations, engaged the participants in deeply symbolic corporate acts as they moved together from antagonism to a new peace.

## **Reconciliation**

In discussions of religion and peacebuilding, it is common to find a discourse of reconciliation, and this is certainly the case with the NSCC and Lowrey's intrareligious intervention in South Sudan. According to Duany (2003, 220), the Christian teachings of reconciliation and forgiveness contributed significantly to establishing peace and strengthening traditional structures through the People to People process, but people not of the Christian faith still participated in the common reviving of relationships. Indeed, reconciliation is not seen as only a Christian concept in South Sudan, nor in most of Africa (Appleby 2000, 199). Rather, since Nilotic peoples view conflict as a covenantal disruption, they want to see the relationships restored in order to re-establish social cohesion (Duany 2003, 209). The Dinka and Nuer in the grassroots peace process displayed typical elements of reconciliation, experiencing healing as they told the truth of their stories to each other, claimed responsibility to resolve their conflict, and moved to a renewed relationship of interdependence.

Some parts of the People to People process were understandably billed as conferences for "reconciliation" as well as for "peace," but by contrast, the Khartoum Forum's title focuses on interreligious "cooperation and peace." In general, there is a lack of emphasis on the language of reconciliation in the work of the SIRC and in its documents. This might be thought surprising considering that the ICRD presented a reconciliation training seminar to Sudanese religious leaders and since reconciliation has been a salient idea in several of Johnston's interventions around the world. Johnston (2003a, 15) says that faith-based diplomacy is "more about reconciliation than it is

conflict resolution,” because it pursues healthy relationships among parties. However, one explanation may be that, since the time of the ICRD’s initially successful relational intervention, the weight of religious structural conflict in Sudan has appropriately focused the energies of the SIRC and CPRF towards solving concrete problems. This work in itself can be considered an element of a broad reconciliation in that it displays a concern for minority rights and justice as well as peace. A second possibility is perhaps reflected by the response to the ICRD’s reconciliation training, in which the participant religious leaders and scholars stressed having a viewpoint on reconciliation from within the Sudanese context. Paradigms and practices of reconciliation vary between cultures and between religions, so it is not surprising that interreligious peacebuilding would be characterized more by specific results of cooperation than by the use of an ambiguous, or even conflict-inducing, term. As such, any potential for “national reconciliation” in Sudan needs to carefully account for cultural and religious differences in expectations between North and South, and between Muslim and Christian.

These two cases serve to illustrate an argument by Gopin (2002, 143), that parties in conflict “should be allowed to express reconciliation in their own cultural/religious patterns but should open themselves to the possibility of parallel efforts in the other traditions.” Additionally, significant positive change can occur in relationships, including the building of trust and the righting of past wrongs, without necessary recourse to a static terminology of “reconciliation,” or for that matter, “forgiveness” (108). This was shown through the flexibility of the ICRD in making room for Sudanese voices in its training, and also in the mix of symbolic acts in the People to People process. As part of



a peacebuilding discourse, reconciliation is most applicable when it accurately describes a process in which the peacebuilding dialogue is grounded in a common understanding of shared values and shared expectations. Such situations are more likely to develop and to be manageable where gestures can be directly communicated and understood by communities, and thus perhaps more so at the grassroots level than at the representative level of political diplomacy. As a result, religious peacebuilders should adapt their discourse and methods to specific situations, drawing upon culturally understood approaches that are consistent with sustainable improvement in relationships.

### **Levels of Leadership**

The significance of a focus on relationships is further illustrated by the interplay between the different levels of leadership in these two cases in Sudan. Both interventions closely resemble the patterns of engagement identified by Lederach (1997, 44-55), especially at the middle and grassroots levels, but with impact on the top level as well. Among the options of middle-range approaches are problem-solving workshops and conflict resolution training, both of which were reflected in the ICRD intervention through the Khartoum Forums and reconciliation training respectively. Furthermore, the establishment of the SIRC and CPRF to include religious leaders and scholars is similar to the formation of peace commissions as discussed by Lederach in that they constituted an organized infrastructure on the national level that could sustain interreligious peacebuilding work after the ICRD's direct involvement ended. The ICRD's faith-based diplomacy also capitalized on close connections with the top level of leadership, including relationships with al-Turabi and others with direct access to the leaders of the

regime. The interreligious connections between the middle and top levels in the context of the Islamic government were key to the resolution of religious issues that had previously been stalling the IGAD peace negotiations.

The People to People process in the South differed in that it was not simply headed by a regional church organization, but instead focused more on the grassroots leadership in attempting to bring about an end to the Nuer-Dinka conflict. By eventually gathering together many sectors of society in a peace conference setting, Lowrey and the NSCC were utilizing a “bottom-up approach,” prompted in part by grassroots exhaustion from the war, which Lederach points out is often the case (1997, 52-53). The breadth of the grassroots process was aided by the fact that the traditional power structures of the Nuer and Dinka tend to be more acephalous than hierarchical; yet, this social system had been susceptible to being overtaken by the rule of the gun. As such, even moving ahead with the People to People process required support from military leaders. In this regard, it was strategic that the NSCC, as an organization providing middle-level leadership, could leverage its international connections in achieving support for the process. Also, Lowrey first convened area church leaders together with the chiefs from the grassroots level, and broadened the process from there by building on the individual relationships renewed between those leaders.

In looking at the levels of leadership engaged by Johnston and Lowrey, the timing of the two Sudanese interventions relative to each other further suggests that religious peacebuilding holds promise at all levels. Lowrey (1998, 12) indicates that the top-level talks of the IGAD process were receiving attention at the same time as the People to

People process started in the South, but at that point the negotiations at the state level were being stalled by fundamental stumbling blocks such as the role of *shari'a* and the political roadmap of the South. This implies that the grassroots and middle-range levels of leadership in peacebuilding were necessary before there was enough impetus for a national peace agreement. In the South, the grassroots People to People process, with its concern for rebuilding of relationships across tribal lines, did ultimately effect cooperation among top-level military leaders, and thus promoted the unity that allowed the SPLM/A to convey a stronger front in negotiating with Khartoum. Moreover, in writing about the Southern peace process and the challenges for religious leadership, Duany (2003, 223) mentions that “the church as an institution has been shut out of the IGAD peace process.” Yet it was Johnston’s intervention a few years after the People to People process that worked on relationships between Christian and Muslim leaders at the middle and top levels and helped to involve them on the sidelines of the IGAD process to resolve the stumbling block issues of interreligious policy.

### **Structural Reform**

The three dimensions of conflict transformation identified by Appleby are present in the two cases of religious peacebuilding in this study. Lowrey’s engagement fits most easily into the category of conflict resolution, since the primary outcome of the peace conferences that he facilitated was the end of the Dinka-Nuer war. Nonetheless, the decisions and recommendations emerging from the People to People process also brought about various measures of structural reform, including the reopening of shared grazing and fishing areas and the establishment of peace councils, as well as a call for

reinvigoration of conflict management led by the traditional chiefs. While conflict management and conflict resolution can also be seen as dimensions of Johnston's engagement and the ongoing results of the ICRD intervention, the primary outcomes fall under the dimension of structural reform. This is evidenced by attention to the religious policy issues in the IGAD process, and also by the establishment of two new institutions to bridge the gap between the government and religious communities.

The SIRC and CPRF play a middle-range leadership role in Sudan that is not unlike the historic balancing function of the *ulama* class of jurists of Islamic law. El Fadl (2003, 199) discusses the traditional function of the *ulama* as mediators between the ruling classes and the common people in Islamic societies. They built up the legitimacy of rulers by interpreting their actions to the people, but they also served as a moral conscience against tyranny. However, their latter role diminished under the influx of colonial regimes, which often courted the *ulama* mainly in order to shore up their power base among the populace. As discussed previously, a similar pattern occurred in Sudan, where the *ulama* class was developed during the Turko-Egyptian period and served as a bridge to the traditional Sufi leadership. Later, under the Condominium, the British administration carefully catered to the Muslim leadership in some arenas, but also introduced a chiefly secular politics characterized by the uniformity of civil law. Combined with Islamic fundamentalism, the civil law model has worked against the "natural inclusiveness" that Nyang and Johnston (2003, 225) see in Sudanese culture's blend of Arab and African values. However, as a body focused on protecting religious freedom, the CPRF utilizes the power of words significantly to mediate between top-level

decision makers and the grassroots. It functions both to relate governmental policies to parties, and also to speak out on behalf of local people about abuses of power.

This analysis is not meant to detract from the role that the Ulama Council plays in Sudanese society, yet the SIRC plays this role as an interreligious body, which is important for a multi-religious society, especially one with a dominant religion of the majority. More than a Muslim organization can do alone, it reflects to the government the character of the nation. In the opposite direction, support and responsiveness to SIRC provides the government with a way to demonstrate high-level recognition of Sudan's diversity in religious belief and practice. The interreligious functions of SIRC also help the majority leaders, who may also be involved in Muslim circles of power, to continue to be sensitive to the Christian minority, other minorities, and indeed, minority and opposition voices from among the sectarian divisions within Islam. Likewise, it provides an institutional forum through which religious minorities can voice their concerns, work for change, and also gauge the effects of their efforts. Johnston explains the advantages of the newly formed CPRF in his April 2004 update/newsletter:

The timing of [the CPRF] establishment couldn't be better. Once peace is achieved, it will become a critical instrument in ensuring that it is a lasting peace unlike the earlier experience of the 1972 Addis Ababa accords. The failure of that peace was attributable, at least in part, to the fact that nothing was done to cement new understandings at the grassroots level. As subsequently characterized by a notable southern spokesman, it was an agreement among elites. The combined efforts of the new Committee and its parent Inter-religious Council will address that problem by restoring mutual respect and improved relations between Christians, Muslims, and African Traditionalists and by creating trust between the prospective new government and its citizens.

Several of the SIRC and CPRF achievements reflect a top-down solution from the government, but one in which these interreligious bodies first acted as the bridge from

lower levels of leadership to bring complaints and concerns which could then be investigated and explained to the governmental authorities.

### **Research and Evaluation Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study has been a lack of primary data to independently evaluate the results and sustained impact of the interventions and the structural changes that resulted. As a related example, Johnston's early interaction with Muslim leaders such as the fundamentalist al-Turabi indicates the need for ongoing close research regarding the situation and experiences of people in the country. Johnston characterized his first visit to Khartoum and with al-Turabi as surprising, given that he had expected a Taliban-like atmosphere in the North, based on assumptions he had gathered from NGOs working in the South. Rather, what Johnston heard al-Turabi say during hours of conversation about the Prophet Muhammad's treatment of women, and what he saw as far as the lack of veils being worn in the city, indicated a progressive view of Islam (Johnston 2003b; 2001a, 125). However, the view of a more liberal Islam in Khartoum at the time contrasts sharply with the description given by Kebede (1999, 2-3) of the status of Islamization in the city and especially in the universities, where women were facing a strict dress code and social restrictions. Johnston (2003b) acknowledges that many people view the highly educated al-Turabi with great respect but also as a "snake," notwithstanding that the former speaker of parliament has been imprisoned or placed under house arrest numerous times by the NIF government. Regardless of the truth of the situation in this particular matter, a discrepancy in points of view reflects the need for religious peacebuilders to continually rely on substantial

research of any situation in which they are engaged. Ongoing attention to methodology and evaluation is also important, in part to check against the possibility of participation in peacebuilding efforts being used by a party primarily to boost its image in front of the public, donors, or the international community.

### **Motivation of the Religious Peacebuilder**

Both Lowrey and Johnston speak of their approaches to peacebuilding in ways that reflect a basis of motivation that derives from their religious faith. For example, they are both affected similarly in their view of the people with whom they engage by their beliefs about the moral nature of humanity. Lowrey speaks of the potentiality in humans both for evil and for good, as reflected in the Christian doctrines of sin and the incarnation of God in the Christ (Little 2007, 204). Johnston, likewise, believes in speaking to the “angels of their higher nature” (Hayes 2005, 4), believing that a moral common ground can be found even when dealing with actors, like the Sudanese government, who tend to be routinely demonized.

Furthermore, both intervenors reflect on the high and formidable calling of their field, and the risks associated with their choice to be involved in this work. Johnston notes that some renowned religious peacebuilders along the strenuous path have lost their lives in the pursuit of peace for their people. Lowrey, meanwhile, has seen his own family feel consequences of their involvement with him in the field, as his wife and daughter were once in a village during an aerial bombardment. In a world where the interplay of religion, conflict, and martyrdom usually brings to mind suicide bombings, it is the willingness of these and other religious peacebuilders to risk their lives for a new

future that literally embodies Appleby's concept of a radical, nonviolent militancy (2000, 13).



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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jonathan R. Morton received his B.S. in Mathematics-Philosophy and B.A. in Political Science and Music from the University of Pittsburgh in 2001. His interests in conflict analysis and resolution, reconciliation, and religious peacebuilding began to take form while circumnavigating the globe as a participant in the *Semester at Sea* study abroad program. Following his undergraduate studies, he worked with the Mennonite Central Committee in Bangkok, Thailand. There he provided research and documentation support to Burma Issues, an organization focused on educating and empowering grassroots communities in Burma's civil war zones. He has also worked in restorative justice research with the Prison Fellowship International Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, and he provides mediation and individual conflict coaching services. He has been an educator at the college and high school levels in mathematics and currently continues to teach concepts and skills of conflict and peace education in church contexts.