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Patricia Teixeira Santos and Suresh Kumar, *Faith, War, and Slavery: A History of the Colonial Conquest of Sudan (1881-1898)*. Publisher: Delhi and São Paulo: Department of African Studies, 2021. 284 pages. ISBN # 978-81-950221-1-3.

Reviewed by: Aman Nadhiri, Associate Professor, Johnson C. Smith University.

In *Faith, War, and Slavery: A History of the Colonial Conquest of Sudan (1881-1898)* Professors Santos and Kumar detail the history of the Catholic Church's involvement in The Sudan from the development of a program of evangelization in "Central Africa" (1840-1880), through the rise of the Mahdi and the establishment of the Mahdiyyah (1881-1898), to the British (re)conquest of The Sudan and the establishment of the colonial state. The focus of this history is on the involvement of the Catholic missionaries, particularly the leadership, and the ways in which they, and ultimately the Church, responded to both events on the ground and geopolitical realities (i.e., the emergence of England as the dominant colonial power in the region), articulating and then adapting their *raison d'être* and objectives in the region considering the most recent developments.

While ultimately unsuccessful in their initial project of "saving" the souls of the various peoples of The Sudan, or, in subsequent years, of establishing the Catholicism as the dominant form of Christianity, the missionaries' perceptions of the various peoples and the racialized hierarchy they perceived and espoused would be integrated into the British colonial state and remains a salient feature of modern political life in The Sudan. However, while *Faith, War, and Slavery* is superb in its presentation of the missionaries' role in The Sudan and the evolution of their philosophy towards the peoples therein, it misses the opportunity to incorporate these same peoples' perceptions and (with the exception of the Mahdi and the leadership of the Mahdiyyah) the roles they played in the developing drama.

*Faith, War, and Slavery* is divided into four sections. In the first section, readers are presented with a brief history of governance (i.e., the Funj Sultanate) in The Sudan prior to the Ottoman-Egyptian invasion/European intervention, the role of Sufism before and during the onset of foreign interference in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a biographical outline of Muhammad Ahmad (the Mahdi), and the various peoples' experiences of the Ottoman-Egyptian invasion and subsequent regime. The second section covers Catholic Church's program of proselytization in The Sudan, including

the inception of missionary work in the region and the Church and missionaries' approaches toward Muslims in both an abstract and practical, in-the-field sense.

The third section details Catholic missionaries' experience of the rise and subsequent reign of the Mahdi (1881-5) and the system of governance, the Mahdiyyah (1881-98). In particular, it examines the situation of those missionaries who lived within the confines of the Mahdiyyah as "prisoners" who were forced to convert and take spouses as conditions for living within the polity, basing its analysis in part on the written accounts of the missionaries in question. In the fourth section, the focus is on struggles of the Catholic Church, and the missionaries in question, to reframe their mission in the wake of the demise of the Mahdiyyah (and the associated scandal of missionaries converting and ostensibly abandoning vows of celibacy), adapt to the realities of British dominion in the region, compete with an empowered Protestant missionary presence, and situate the Catholic Church within the colonial framework.

At the center are the missionaries who were at the heart of the Church's program of evangelization in The Sudan, and Central Africa in general. In particular, Bishop Antonio Daniele Comboni; Fathers Joseph Ohrwalder, Luigi Bonomi, and Casimino Giacomelli; Teresa Grigolini, Mother Superior of El-Obeid Mission; Sisters Elisabetta Venturini, and Concetta Corsi occupy central positions in the narrative. Bishop Comboni conceptualized the *Plan of Regeneration of Africa through Africa*, which served as an initial guiding principal in the early work of the missionaries. The accounts, correspondence, diaries, letters, and reports of Father Ohrwalder, Mother Superior Grigolini, Sisters Corsi and Venturini, and Father Bonomi present the experiences (more accurately, the plight) of the missionaries living within the confines of the Mahdiyyah from 1881-1898. And the writings of Father Giacomelli provide insight into the Church's new philosophy vis-à-vis proselytizing in the region in the wake of the fall of the Mahdiyyah and British emergence as the regional colonial power.

Moreover, it is through these documents, particularly those of Bishop Comboni and Father Giacomelli, that readers witness the "evolution" of the Catholic Church's approach toward evangelizing the various peoples of the region, including the ways in which race, culture, and religion framed the institutions approach to the task, and its intersection with the larger project of colonization being undertaken by both Catholic and Protestant European powers. In their writings, one sees the identification of certain peoples as "barbaric," "fanatic", "pagan/fetishist" and the like, and the articulation of defining concepts such as the "degraded" position of the African woman and the "innocence" of the non-Muslim peoples of the region (which, for the writers, favorably predisposed them to Christianity), along with justifications for the various ways in which to "discipline" the bodies of those in the process of conversion.

Outside of the missionaries' voices, Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi, and to a lesser extent the Caliph Abdulahi, appear prominently in the work. However, their appearance is largely mediated through the missionaries' accounts, which detail their actions vis-à-vis the imprisoned missionaries and other Christians, their individual and collective policies toward the governance of the various peoples contained therein, the evolving political situation within the Mahdiyyah, and their interactions with the missionaries.

Within this context, the principal focus is on the welfare of the Christian community (including Coptic, Syriac, Greek Orthodox, and Catholic members), and the means employed to preserve physical and spiritual health at a collective and individual level, a task that was exacerbated by the Ahmad's policy of conversion and marriage of Christians and Jews in the Mahdiyyah for the purposes of complete "integration" within the polity, which had disastrous effects on the missionaries. Unfortunately, the historical records emanating from within the Mahdiyyah, including the writings and correspondences of Muhammad Ahmad, are referenced, but not integrated into the discussion.

But lost in the focus on the philosophy and work of the Catholic Church and individual missionaries is the most compelling story: the experiences of the peoples of The Sudan throughout the period in question, encompassing the early evangelizing, the rise and fall of the Mahdiyyah, and the completion of the British conquest, particularly the non-Muslim and non-Christian peoples of the region. The experiences of these groups are largely ignored; they appear only as abstract, simplified constructions instrumentalized to further the individual and collective agendas of the missionaries and the Church.

As such, it is the Dinka convert Father Daniele Sorur Pharim Deng whose voice appears on behalf of the non-Muslim and non-Christian peoples of The Sudan, who would have constituted the majority. The name Daniele Sorur Pharim Deng is revelatory. It is comprised of the name he received at baptism (Daniele), the name his former "owner" gave him, and a name literally translatable into "rescued slave" in Dinka; the name itself as in the reference below, embodies the way in which he is presented to his European audience as devoid of agency outside of what has been granted by the missionaries who rescued him and guided him toward an actualization of his "full", yet subordinate humanity.

While the inherent bias of missionaries, the Church, and the colonial powers at large is identified and acknowledged throughout this work, the focus on these mutually informing and reinforcing perspectives, to the exclusion of the peoples of The Sudan, Muslim, but especially non-Muslim, reifies the colonizers' gaze and misses the opportunity to engage those most able to provide a comprehensive account of both the proselytizing and colonizing work in the region, and the responses of the affected parties. An accompanying work that addresses these

questions would be an excellent companion piece to what is unquestionably a comprehensive, if imbalanced, exploration at the role of the Church in a crucial period in the history of the formation of modern state of The Sudan.

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