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## The Troubled Promised Land

In the 60s and 70s, our elders knew and called themselves by names but today we refer to each other as Lado the Barri [*sic*], Chol the Dinka, Duoth the Nuer, etc. We are digressing in thinking instead of progressing. When are we going to stop this Stone Age behaviour so that once again South Sudan becomes a place of milk and honey and not multiple grave yards?

—Jimmy Onge Aremo, *Sudan Tribune*, February 19, 2015

The book of Exodus chronicles the story of the Hebrew leader Moses. As an infant, Moses was placed in a basket and sent down the Nile after all Jewish baby boys in Egypt were ordered to be killed. Seen by Pharaoh's daughter and retrieved by her slave, Moses was subsequently reared in luxury. One day Moses, now a grown man, became incensed at the sight of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses slayed the abuser and fled to Midian, presumably to spend the rest of his days in obscurity. God, however, had other plans. He appeared to Moses from a burning bush and commissioned the stutterer to lead his people out of bondage. After a series of plagues and the providential killing of every firstborn son in Egypt, Pharaoh—whose own son had been killed in the purge—acceded to Moses's request. After the Hebrew flight from Egypt had already commenced, Pharaoh had a change of heart and pursued the Israelites. In what is perhaps the Old Testament's most iconic scene, God parted the Red Sea before the fleeing host so that they could escape over dry land. When God unbridled the floodgates, Pharaoh's

army was annihilated.<sup>1</sup> After forty years in the wilderness, Moses's successor Joshua led the chosen people into their promised land.

Ridley Scott's Hollywood adaptation *Exodus: Gods and Kings* debuted in 2014. Toward the end of the film, Moses—played by Christian Bale—sits down and talks to Joshua. Having just crossed the Red Sea with the rest of the Children of Israel, Moses acknowledged that they were as big as a nation of tribes. This concerned him. When Joshua questioned him about this, Moses looked at his comrade and retorted, “You have to ask?” “But we all have the same goal,” responded Joshua. “We do now,” said Moses. “What happens when we stop running?”<sup>2</sup> While that particular scene is rooted in creative license and is not found in the biblical account, it nevertheless points to the internal Israelite squabbling that the Bible does record following the Exodus. Despite the romantic Exodus narrative, the Pentateuch frames the Israelites as a grumbling, unfaithful people throughout their journey to Canaan. At the sight of the Egyptian pursuit, the Israelites derisively asked Moses if he had led them out to the desert because there were no graves in Egypt (Ex. 14:11). After entering the promised land, the Israelites experienced the period of the Judges, arguably the darkest era of their history before the Babylonian exile. Throughout the Old Testament are numerous reminders for the Israelites to remember God's liberating acts during the Exodus. These admonitions were not enough to make or keep them obedient.

Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni was the chief guest at the first anniversary of South Sudanese independence celebrations in Juba in July 2012. Recounting the history of the fight for independence and paying tribute to the SPLM, Museveni lamented the tendency among black people to be prone to division. He urged President Salva Kiir to reach a deal with the Sudanese government and used the Israelite example as a cautionary tale for South Sudanese: “Museveni has called on the people of South Sudan not to be like the Biblical children of Israel who were about to back-track to Egypt when faced with challenges. ‘You should stand firm and make sure that judgment is attained. Be strong, the modern world doesn't have a place for the weak hearted,’ he said.”<sup>3</sup> Less than three years into independence—or, to use the Exodus idiom, three years after southerners had “stopped running”—the nation found itself at war again. In December 2013, a conflagration drawn heavily by ethnic lines (primarily Nuer v. Dinka) was kindled. What became of the rhetoric that the “Joshua” Kiir had led the nation into the promised land? What of all the flowery invocations of Cush and claims that Isaiah's ancient prophecy had been realized?

This chapter begins with a description of developments since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Division and enmity between southern factions persisted during the postwar years, and independence was not sufficient to keep some from recognizing serious challenges facing the country. Matters came to a head in December 2013, when violence broke out between members of the presidential guard, precipitating violence throughout the country between forces led by Salva Kiir and Riek Machar. Between then and 2018, tens of thousands died, more than two million fled to neighboring countries, and nearly two million more became internally displaced.<sup>4</sup>

The war debunked any notion that southerners felt a sense of pan-Christian solidarity strong enough to subsume ethnicity or prevent ethnic tension. And yet, the war produced a dynamic crucible of religious thought. As with earlier periods, Christian political imagination was not limited to ordained clergy but was formulated by lay politicians and civilians alike. The post-CPA period is distinct, however, for the efflorescence of ideas that appeared online. No longer limited to physical print media, online venues like the *Sudan Tribune* were spaces where those throughout the diaspora could make their expressions known. A second observation gleaned from this period is the endurance of an idea expressed during the condominium era—that intergroup fighting was a spiritual “evil” and that uniting under God was the solution to this problem. Unlike Fr. Attiyah’s contention that all ethnicities were one in Christ, however, two bishops affirmed God’s handiwork in diversity. Finally, the church’s evolving but consistent proximity to political happenings mirrored the way in which political theology similarly evolved but remained consistently present. Various intellectuals found it fit to relate particular scriptures and theologies to the situation. Religious thought still functioned as a political technology despite the fundamentally changed scope of who and what constituted us and them, good and evil, heroes and villains.

#### COMPREHENSIVE PEACE TO CIVIL WAR

The end of the Second Civil War did not mask the realities of internal divisions and simmering problems. Since its founding, the SPLM struggled to maintain legitimate internal democratic practices and was forced to rely on tenuous alliances to maintain stability. The CPA was negotiated between the SPLM/A and Sudan’s ruling National Congress Party; other opposition groups were excluded. Many southern groups were absorbed into

the SPLM/A in the years that followed, but a joint platform reflecting the interests of an increasingly diverse membership was never adopted. Furthermore, divisions between combatants and communities following the 1991 Nasir split were not reconciled during the CPA period. The massive Nuer South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) was, like all other armed groups, required during the interim period to ally with the Sudan Alliance Forces (SAF) or SPLA, and violence between the SPLA and other southern armed groups continued. The 2006 Juba Declaration—which Kiir announced in his attempt to manage divisions—led to the SSDF’s incorporation into the SPLA and other security services, as well as the creation of a more unified military front leading up to the referendum.<sup>5</sup>

In 2007 Rebecca Garang—widow of John Garang and minister of roads and transport for the government of South Sudan (GOSS)—called on people to support the CPA, calling it “the Bible of the marginalized communities.” Despite accusations against senior government ministers (herself included), she encouraged people to have confidence in the GOSS’s capacity to deliver expected services and emphasized the need for construction, public works, and the development of mass media to improve communication.<sup>6</sup> The following year, continued frustration at corruption and lack of development led journalist Roba Gibia to write a scathing editorial in the *Sudan Tribune*. Founded in 2003, the *Tribune* is a Paris-based nonprofit website that is run by independent Sudanese and international journalists and editors. Gibia compared GOSS members to the Jewish scribes during the time of Christ. The GOSS officials and leaders, Gibia contended, were behaving like the scribes and priests who claimed to be pure “but are the very people responsible for the suffering of their people, because they have cut off themselves from their own people and do not know their . . . day-to-day problems.”<sup>7</sup> Gibia also noted that some southern ethnicities saw themselves as superior to other groups: “Tribalism and nepotism has infested GOSS which breeds corruption, and has become the definite enemy of South Sudanese.”<sup>8</sup>

Gibia was joined a year later by Mawut Guarak, who also used the Bible in his antigovernment critique. Guarak had spent time as a child soldier and several years in a refugee camp before arriving in Syracuse, New York, as a Lost Boy in 2001. After attending Onondaga Community College, he earned a master’s degree from SUNY-Binghamton.<sup>9</sup> In February 2009, the *Tribune* published his piece “Conflict of Interest?” in which he cited the fact that top government officials had been taking jobs as executives in oil and other mining companies. Many of these politicians, Guarak claimed, condemned corruption in the media. He noted that Jesus, as a teacher in

Jerusalem and Judea, asked his disciples how Satan could cast out Satan. Just as a house divided against itself cannot stand, a divided Satan cannot stand either (Mark 3:23–26). “Based on interpretation of the above verses,” he argued, “it is hard . . . for a government official to serve public purposes in Juba and be [an] executive in major oil companies and expect to not be corrupted. How can regional officials . . . fight corruption when they are lobbying against government (as executive[s] in the oil companies)?”<sup>10</sup>

South Sudan faced manifold issues. While all children were supposed to have access to formal or informal education by 2010 (with a new curriculum), education continued to suffer from untrained teachers, inadequate school buildings, overcrowded classes, and lack of educational materials. Healthcare facilities were unevenly distributed. Economic recovery and progress occurred primarily in urban areas. One study found that in 2009 alone, intra-South violence had resulted in 2,500 deaths and 350,000 displaced people. Another study noted three uprisings by dissident SPLM/A members. Following the conclusion of the electoral process in April 2010, General George Deng—a former independent candidate for the Jonglei state governorship and former SPLA deputy chief of general staff—left Bor with his soldiers and clashed with SPLA troops. Human Rights Watch documented rights violations during the elections and reported growing instability in the central Equatoria, Jonglei, Unity, and western Bahr el-Ghazal states.<sup>11</sup>

Amid frustration at the national leadership and overall state of affairs, a national anthem was drafted that highlighted the continued salience of Christian symbolism. By late summer 2010, the government, along with some individuals, began to brainstorm ideas for the anthem. The task was officially entrusted to the 2011 Machar-chaired taskforce. After conducting an anthem workshop, Col. Malaak Ayuen—who led the information and public relations desk at SPLA’s general headquarters—appeared on South Sudan TV to report the outcome of his group’s efforts. Ayuen explained that the group preferred to refer to South Sudan as the “Land of Cush.”<sup>12</sup> An early draft of the anthem—written by forty-nine poets—followed guidelines set by the government and army and included the following lyrics:

Oh God! We praise and glorify you / For your grace upon Cush, / The land of great warriors. . . / Lord bless South Sudan! / Oh black warriors! / Let’s stand up in silence and respect, / Saluting millions of martyrs whose / Blood cemented our national foundation. . . / Oh Eden! / Land of milk and honey and hard-working people, / Uphold us united in peace and harmony.<sup>13</sup>

The seven elements to be considered in the anthem would include History, Land, People, Struggle, Sacrifices, Destination, and Flag. The religious components dealt most specifically with History, People, and Land. According to Ayuen, God was the architect of ancient world civilization and the glory, ethics, and values of South Sudanese history. The land was the Garden of Eden blessed with riches like oil, abundant water, mountains, and the people who loved their land. The South Sudanese, furthermore, “are Biblical Africans as revealed in Isaiah 18; have unity in diversity [and are] people with determination, commitment to hard work and nation building.”<sup>14</sup>

The anthem was met with criticism over what was perceived to be a flawed, even dangerous use of religious idioms. Gordon Buay, a signatory of the 2008 Washington Declaration that merged the SPLM and SSDL, wrote an editorial arguing for the removal of military officers from the anthem committee. Buay noted that neither Major General Kuol Deim Kuol nor Colonel Malaak—the two men who came up with the “Land of Cush” idea—were biblical historians who could defend the claim that southern ethnic groups were the only Cushitic people in the Horn of Africa. The question in the minds of educated southerners, Buay continued, was why those officers would title the anthem “Land of Cush” if South Sudanese were not Africa’s only Cushitic people. He argued that the idea to use Cush was rooted in John Garang, who used the Good News Bible (which references Cush as “Sudan” in its version of Isaiah 18) as propaganda to support his argument for the creation of a New Sudan. Buay asserted that since “the SPLA officers do not read books on biblical history, they think Dr. John Garang was a religious expert although most educated Southerners know that John Garang was [an] Agro-economist, not biblical historian.”<sup>15</sup> Buay’s sentiments were echoed by Deng Riak Khoryoam, who argued in the *Tribune* that South Sudan was the best name for the new nation. Khoryoam argued against the use of Cush because of its ambiguities: “Kush” simply meant “black” like *Sudan*, and southerners were not the only black peoples in the Sudan or Africa. He also noted that Cush was not appropriate because people had historically taken up arms to liberate Sudan, not Cush.<sup>16</sup> In the end, Cush was not chosen as the country’s official name, and many of the religious idioms in the anthem’s early draft form were removed. Only the mention of God remained in the anthem’s first and last lines.<sup>17</sup>

The independence referendum took place between January 9 and 15, 2011. Toward the end of the referendum, Benjamin Mkapa, chair of the UN secretary general’s Panel on the Referenda in the Sudan, stated that it had gone quite smoothly and even exceeded expectations. His briefing was followed

by that of Haile Menkerios, special representative of the secretary general and head of the UN's Mission in the Sudan, who reported that the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission would announce final results on February 7 and any appeals a week later. In the end, 98.3 percent of participants voted for independence. Despite the elimination of Cush from the national anthem, the Isaiah 18 prophecy continued to hold great weight. In February 2012, the *Tribune* reported that southern Christians were planning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and to present gifts on Mount Zion. Vice President Machar's press secretary conveyed that church leaders had explained to him that the pilgrimage had been promised by God in Isaiah's prophecy three millennia ago.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly—and perhaps not coincidentally—Kiir chose Israel as one of the sites for his first presidential visits. Israel had been one of the first nations to recognize South Sudan's independence. Though his December 20, 2011, trip lasted less than twenty-four hours, Kiir met with Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, and Defense Minister Ehud Barak. In addition to sharing that South Sudan and Israel “shared values” and conquered “similar struggles,” Kiir made sure to note his enthusiasm to—representing all South Sudanese—“set foot in the Promised Land.”<sup>19</sup>

#### DESCENT TO WAR

Despite the thrill of independence, dissatisfaction increased. Many blamed the national leadership for failing to deliver on important services.<sup>20</sup> On the first independence anniversary, the *Tribune* published a piece by Jacob K. Lupai that listed corruption, illiteracy, insecurity, and tribalism/nepotism as the country's categories of challenges. Lupai paid most attention to tribalism and nepotism, noting that one ethnic group controlled about 43 percent of ministerial positions, even though more than fifty groups may have participated in the liberation struggle. He concluded, “It is an open question whether it is tribalism/nepotism that influences appointments or [whether] they are made on merit.”<sup>21</sup> In a disagreement with Khartoum over how much the new nation should pay to export oil using Sudan's infrastructure and port, South Sudan decided to shut off its oil production six months after independence. Allegations of corruption were legitimated when President Kiir admitted that more than seventy officials had stolen \$4 billion. When southern troops entered a contested oil field, clashes began that spurred fear of war. After threats from the United States, troops pulled out and oil was turned back on eighteen months later.<sup>22</sup>

In October 2012, Zechariah Manyok Biar heard a message in his church that “sent chilly air” through his bones, something that made him fearful about the country’s future.<sup>23</sup> Biar’s life points to the influential role of Christian networks and infrastructure. As a twelve-year-old, Biar signed up to join the army and walked hundreds of miles to an SPLA camp in Ethiopia. United Nations aid brought some gospel-bearing teachers, and Biar was baptized in 1989. He became an army chaplain in 1994 and, five years later, was offered a chance to continue his education by his battalion commander. He enrolled in a two-year Bible college and subsequently earned a theology diploma from a three-year Bible college (Timothy Training Institute). Biar eventually encountered Kansas native Mike Smith, who was doing medical mission work in Sudan. Smith asked Biar to help him learn Dinka and Arabic, and as a result of their connection, Biar earned a bachelor’s degree from Kampala International University. Smith used his contacts with Abilene Christian University (ACU) to help Biar acquire a scholarship to cover his graduate school costs there. In the process of earning his master’s from ACU’s Graduate School of Theology, Biar wrote columns on governance for Sudanese newspapers. He graduated in 2010 and later became executive director in South Sudan’s Interior Ministry.<sup>24</sup>

On the last Sunday of October 2012, Biar wrote that many people had called his pastor, asking him to advise other preachers to refrain from criticizing the government from the pulpit. Most recently, he had been called by the president’s office, which asked him to do the same. Earlier that month, a journalist from a popular Juba radio program had told Biar that he had been repeatedly called by security officials and told that discussion topics must first be licensed by National Security. This led Biar to state his belief that

[Kiir] would be the last person to do this. However, I could be wrong if his Office can call pastors to stop them from preaching biblical chapters which criticize leaders. The Bible . . . talks about good and bad leadership . . . why are preachers prevented from talking about good governance today when we know they were encouraged by the same leaders to talk about it during the North-South civil war? Or is it because the leaders then were in Khartoum and not in Juba?<sup>25</sup>

The church, to be sure, did collaborate with the South Sudanese government during the CPA period; pulpits were used to encourage people to participate in the 2008 census, the 2010 elections, and the 2011 referendum. The South Sudan Council of Churches, founded in 1990 by the region’s



Christian churches, actually led efforts that proved quite influential in the CPA and was involved in the process that led to the referendum. It was not the first time that the government had had direct contact with the church regarding the nature of disseminated messages. In 2009, a government minister had asked churches to assist the government in preaching a message of peace and in holding reconciliation initiatives to foster unity in the lead-up to the referendum.<sup>26</sup> Yet, this particular attempt to influence pulpit messages appeared to compel Biar to lament that “I am now [more] afraid than before that Juba is going back to Khartoum.”<sup>27</sup>

Infringement on church messaging became a serious issue for Juba’s Bakhita Radio during the 2005–13 period. Founded in 2006, Bakhita Radio was the Catholic Radio Network’s first and central station (the CRN is owned by the Sudan Catholic Bishops’ Conference). Sister Sierra, its first director, described the station as “a significant and vital forum for information and entertainment[, allowing] people to express their views as citizens and as Christians . . . our Radio station engaged on civic education, gender, health, and religious programs, prayer vigils, meetings, and training workshops.”<sup>28</sup> Martin Agwella, the Archdiocese of Juba’s secretary general from 2006 to 2012, noted that the radio project was intended to contribute to the work of peacebuilding and reconciliation following the long civil war: “A community radio that would give ordinary people voice regarding issues”—such as those of a political, sociocultural, or economic nature—“that affect their lives.”<sup>29</sup> And yet, Agwella notes that the station found itself in the crosshairs of security operatives who did not want some programs to be aired. “Our radio staff were frequently harassed, arrested. . . . I was involved in meeting and talking with key security officials and concerned offices at the ministry of information regarding those unfortunate incidences.” He explained that problems were often settled without reaching the offices of the president, the ministers of information and security, or the Catholic archbishop. While Sr. Sierra similarly noted that “Bakhita Radio was often under siege,” she offered that “with a team of Sudanese personnel, most of them women, we stood strong in the face of confrontation, political pressure and harassment from police and other government forces.”<sup>30</sup>

## CIVIL WAR

In time, Kiir’s actions became increasingly sweeping. He reshuffled the army, retired many generals, and stripped Machar of his vice presidential powers in July 2013. Kiir also replaced most of the cabinet, dissolved some

key party institutions, and suspended SPLM secretary general Pagan Amum pending a corruption investigation. Contentious reshuffling of state-level party and national leadership even led in one instance to an armed confrontation between SPLM members in the Upper Nile parliament. Sacked officials tried to fight back. On December 6, 2013, Rebecca Garang, Pagan Amum, and many dismissed cabinet members held a press conference in Juba denouncing the SPLM's lack of direction. On December 14, at a meeting of the SPLM's National Liberation Council, Kiir gained approval for Amum's removal and for future votes to be done by show of hands rather than secret balloting. Dismissed officials and their supporters boycotted the following day's session.<sup>31</sup>

On the evening of December 15, 2013, a fight broke out between Dinka and Nuer soldiers of the presidential guard in a military barracks near Juba's city center. Sporadic fighting continued throughout the night before order was restored the following morning. While the government blamed Machar for planning a coup attempt, he responded that the violence had begun when Dinka (Kiir's ethnic group) soldiers tried to disarm Nuer (Machar's ethnic group) soldiers.<sup>32</sup> That the conflict had the presidential guard at its epicenter presented a saddening irony. Known to Jubans as the Tigers, the guard was a multiethnic unit meant to bind members of various ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup>

"Riek W" was not openly known as a Nuer to his colleagues in the presidential guard. In sharing how the fighting between Nuer and Dinka Tigers developed into anti-Nuer civilian violence throughout the city, he stated that "they took people who were not soldiers and tied their hands and shot them. I saw this with my own eyes, I was there wearing the same uniform as them." Afraid for his life and frightened by civilian murders, he abandoned his post in the presidential compound the weekend after the violence broke out. Stating that the curfew was being used as a period to remove bodies, Riek claimed to have seen "large trucks" towing bodies.<sup>34</sup> Machar's house was bombarded and surrounded. Jickson Gatjang, a distant relative of Machar's who was in the compound that night, stated that the buildings had been destroyed and that members of Machar's bodyguard were executed before more general bloodletting commenced.<sup>35</sup> "When they know you are Nuer they don't have any more questions," he said. "It's just a bullet to your head."<sup>36</sup>

The following day, Kiir—dressed in Tiger battalion uniform—announced on national television that Machar had attempted a coup, that the government was in full control of the security situation in Juba, and that forces

were pursuing the attackers. He also stated that an overnight curfew would be imposed and remain in effect indefinitely. Eleven senior figures were arrested for their alleged involvement within two weeks' time. While Machar escaped and refuted any involvement, he soon declared himself leader of the armed opposition movement, SPLM/A in Opposition (SPLA-IO). The SPLA-IO quickly seized control of significant parts of Jonglei—where fighting between Dinka and Nuer also broke out in a military barracks—as well as the Upper Nile and Unity states. Fighting also spread to other areas.<sup>37</sup> Concomitant with the spread of violence was the increasingly apparent ethnic tenor of the maelstrom. With reports of ethnically targeted killings filtering out from Juba and reaching areas like the Nuer-dominated Unity state, copycat mayhems occurred.<sup>38</sup> By late December, the *Guardian* reported that the UN base in Juba already housed ten thousand people. A handmade sign hung from rolls of razor wire with words of solace: “The lord is our best defender.”<sup>39</sup>

The White Army (WA) emerged as one of the prominent faces of the anti-Dinka violence. Although the WA was not a unified organization, people began referring to Nuer-speaking militias as the WA in 1991. Used when describing groups of armed civilians who were purportedly loyal to Nuer-speaking prophet Wutnyang Gatatek, the *White Army* descriptor has broadened to refer to all Nuer-speaking militias who are not members of a salaried, uniformed army.<sup>40</sup> When in 1991 Machar and Lam Akol broke from the SPLM/A, the WA was involved in the Bor Massacre that year, which claimed the lives of roughly two thousand Dinka civilians. This event led to some of the most ferocious fighting of the Second Civil War, the increasingly ethnic division of southern forces, and the targeting of civilian populations based on ethnicity.<sup>41</sup> In response to the systematic violence levied on Nuer by Dinka elements in the presidential guard and other security forces, the WA targeted Dinka in more than twelve locations. In one instance, a force of two thousand Lou Nuer youths—WA elements—overran a UN base in Jonglei and killed at least twenty people (mainly Dinka government officials and two UN peacekeepers). By late December, an estimated twenty-five thousand members of the WA were reported to be marching toward a contested state capital.<sup>42</sup>

In May 2014 the UN Security Council shifted the mission's mandate from nation building to civilian protection, granting UN troops the right to use force. Two months later, the Security Council declared that South Sudan's food crisis was the worst in the world (violence had prevented farmers from planting or harvesting crops). In February 2017 a famine was declared in

South Sudan, the world's first since 2011. Armed conflict, low harvests, and skyrocketing food prices were blamed for the crisis. While the country was declared to no longer be in a state of famine by June 2017, a UN-backed report noted that the situation was still extreme.<sup>43</sup>

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Peace talks began in January 2014. Responding quickly to the conflict, three envoys (Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin of Ethiopia, General Lazarus Sumbeiywo of Kenya, and Sudan's General Mohammad Ahmed Mustafa al-Dhabi) shuttled between Juba, opposition-controlled territory, and Addis Ababa, where peace talks were held. Negotiations produced a ceasefire in January 2014 that was violated almost immediately with the partial recapture of Malakal. Mediation efforts were handicapped by the presence of Ugandan troops supporting Salva Kiir's side. Peace deals continued to materialize and evaporate, with Kiir and Machar reaching four agreements by early July 2014 that each fell through in a matter of days. Both parties and other splinter groups violated the ceasefires on multiple occasions. March 5, 2015, was set as a deadline for Kiir and Machar to sign a comprehensive peace agreement, but they could not agree on issues like power sharing and security arrangement. The 2015 national elections were postponed, and in late March 2015, MPs passed Constitutional Amendment Bill 2015, extending President Kiir's term until 2018.<sup>44</sup>

Kiir and Machar signed a peace agreement on August 26, 2015, following several rounds of negotiations supported by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and under threat of international sanctions. As the first step toward ending the conflict, Machar returned to Juba on April 26, 2016, and was sworn in as vice president. Violence between the government and opposition groups broke out yet again just months later. Scores of people were again displaced, Machar fled the country, and Kiir installed a new vice president, General Taban Deng Gai (one of Machar's deputies, who now claimed to lead the SPLA-IO).<sup>45</sup> While yet another ceasefire was signed on December 21, 2017, US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley stated that Salva Kiir had violated the agreement days later by preventing millions from receiving aid despite a pledge of unencumbered access and by promoting three generals sanctioned by the Security Council for massacring civilians. In January 2018, Haley stated that the United States was stopping its support for Kiir, calling him "an unfit partner." She urged the

Security Council to support an arms embargo, which the United States established by early February.<sup>46</sup>

In June 2018, Kiir and Machar participated in negotiations that were mediated by bordering states Sudan and Uganda. The following month the two belligerents signed the Khartoum Declaration of Agreement, a settlement that included a ceasefire and promise to negotiate a power-sharing agreement to conclude the conflict. In August and at long last, Kiir and Machar signed one last ceasefire and power-sharing agreement. This agreement was followed by the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan—an arrangement signed by the government, Machar, and other rebel factions. This Revitalized Agreement reinstated Machar to his former VP role and included a new power-sharing structure. Machar returned to the country in October 2018 for a nationwide celebration to commemorate the end of the war.<sup>47</sup>

The war's statistics tell a sordid tale. Less than two weeks after the initial violence, UN special representative for South Sudan Hilde Johnson stated that more than one thousand people had been killed. By early July 2014, the *Economist* reported that there were at least ten thousand dead. Added to those killed are those who sustained violent wounds. By early January 2014, the World Health Organization had documented 2,566 cases of gunshot wounds across six of the country's ten states, and by early February, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs counted 4,895 patients who had been treated for gunshot wounds since December 15. By early January 2014, more than two thousand people were fleeing to Uganda per day, while more than thirty thousand had already fled to neighboring countries like Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan. This number was dwarfed by the more than two hundred thousand internally displaced, including sixty thousand at UN compounds. By mid-July 2014 one million were said to have fled their homes, with the number housed at UN compounds having risen to one hundred thousand. As of late February 2018—a little over four years after the first shots were fired—the Council on Foreign Relations estimated that more than fifty thousand had been killed and four million displaced.<sup>48</sup>

#### WARTIME RELIGIOUS POLITICS

In April 2014, people flocked to churches to celebrate Easter. President Kiir, a Catholic, marked Good Friday at Juba's Kator Cathedral. The service was attended by several government ministers and foreign diplomats. In his

remarks, Kiir called for forgiveness and the burying of political differences. “As Christians and people of God,” he said, “we should pray hard that this country celebrate the next Easter in peace.” Paulino Lukudu Loro, the archbishop of Juba Diocese, conducted a prayer service at the cathedral that day.<sup>49</sup> Three years earlier, Loro had co-led the October 2011 symposium “One Church from Every Tribe, Tongue and People” at Juba’s Nyakuron Cultural Centre. The title was borrowed from Revelation 7:9, where John describes his apocalyptic vision of an innumerable multitude from every tribe, tongue, and people dressed in white, holding palms, and standing before the throne and the Lamb. Organized by the Catholic Church, Loro led the symposium with Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako.<sup>50</sup> In the symposium’s opening address, Loro delivered a powerful argument concerning diversity and unity in the new nation:

We cannot—and must not—be afraid of our tribes. Unless we recognise and believe in our tribes first of all as gifts of God, we will have a problem, and we may fight because of our tribal background. . . . We must recognise ourselves indeed as a part of our tribe, so that we will be able to be together in honesty. It is useless for us to deny ourselves, “Oh, let us not mention our tribe and background.” Wrong! We are then hiding something. We are what we are. . . . If I realise myself, and each one of you in your tribe, that you are what you are and that we can be together, then we can make one nation from every tribe, tongue and people.<sup>51</sup>

At the Easter 2014 service, approximately two-and-a-half years after his comments (and months after violent ethnic conflict had exploded in Juba), Archbishop Loro applied elements of the resurrection story to the contemporary situation. “The message of Easter is a message of man finally returning to the love and care that he used to enjoy with his Father before he sinned,” he shared. “If all of us can remember that the Lord has freed us, being reconciled with God and with one another but as long as we are missing out on that fact, we will continue being alienated from each other and from our God.” Claiming that politicians seemed to be losing sight of the fact that they had only one country, Loro observed that the conflict showed that politicians lacked tolerance and respect for human rights: “There are some selfish individuals in our midst [who] have got power and money . . . young people, unfortunately, who are not having anything to do, are easily bought and they start to engage in violence . . . if we blow [the country] up . . . we will have no place to run to.”<sup>52</sup>

Despite conflicting reports regarding the new nation’s religious composition, Christianity is South Sudan’s primary faith; a 2012 Pew Research

Center report estimated that approximately 60 percent of the country was Christian, followed by 33 percent who followed African traditional religions, 6 percent Muslim, and the remainder unaffiliated.<sup>53</sup> The remarks made by President Kiir and Archbishop Loro at the Easter service are but one example of efforts made by the government, church officials, and laypeople to inject Christian thought into comments concerning the conflict. Ranging from outright condemnations (of Kiir, Machar, and the government more broadly) to pleas for peace, these episodes illustrate the continued utility that South Sudanese have found in using the Bible and theology to levy political messages. Those who have opined that God is central to any chance of peace in this ethnically driven conflict subliminally hearken back to the days of the Nugent School, when officials there similarly expressed the need for God to achieve transethnic amity. Thus, not only has politicized Christian thought been unrestricted to the two civil wars with Khartoum, it has also continued to dovetail with the pre-1956 issue of intrasouthern relations.

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Church leaders—at least within the conflict’s first year—were hitherto unable to seriously influence politicians and generals. The warring groups refused church participation in peace negotiations until June 2014 (six months into the conflict), and the parties repeatedly boycotted subsequent talks to avoid participation from religious groups and other non-armed actors. Anglican bishop Enoch Tombe said, “The political leaders think that their side of the story is always correct. [They ask us], why do you speak as if you are with the rebels?” Jason Patinkin reported that some believed that top politicians’ disrespect for the church reflected a deeper problem that hit at the core of South Sudan’s traditionally accepted history—one that posited the independence struggle as a fight for religious freedom for the primarily Christian South against Khartoum’s Islamist government. This, however, was inaccurate—the SPLA was initially backed by Ethiopian Communists and began as a Marxist-influenced movement. Bishop Tombe opined that the war’s atrocities destroyed the myth that the SPLA were Christian liberators. Noting that the politicians could not claim to be Christian, Tombe stated, “Even if they go to church on Sunday they are not guided by Christian values only. They may be Christian by name, but Christian values have not really penetrated.”<sup>54</sup>

Patinkin, reporting for the *Christian Science Monitor* in December 2014, noted that churches or clergy were attacked in Juba, Bor, and Malakal—locations that witnessed some of the most vicious fighting. Priests were murdered, and civilians were occasionally slaughtered in the very churches where they had sought safety. Catholic radio stations in government-controlled areas were censored and shut down (along with staff being imprisoned), and government security agents attempted to quell a December 2014 peace march in Juba led by the Catholic Church to mark the war's one-year anniversary. Rebel hardliners reportedly threatened or attacked pastors who preached moderation in their areas.<sup>55</sup> Four years later Vice President James Wani Igga accused priests of promoting violence, while others have accused the church of being inactive during the conflict.<sup>56</sup>

These criticisms notwithstanding, some members of the warring parties (and, postconflict, formerly warring parties) reached out to or worked with the church. In 2016 Nadia Arop, national minister of youth and sport, called on churches to pray for peace in the country. Accompanying Arop's call that year was a report that Kiir, first VP Machar, and second VP Wani Igga were expected to attend a special prayer function for peace and healing that May. Organized by the South Sudan Council of Churches, a source close to the SSCC shared that the event would be held in Juba and presided over by church leaders, including Catholic archbishop Loro and the Anglican Church's Daniel Deng Bul. A source familiar with the program disclosed that prayers would usher in the new cabinet and scriptures would be employed to lessen mistrust between political leaders.<sup>57</sup> The report concerning the aforementioned prayer breakfast was published in the *Christian Times*, a South Sudanese fortnightly newspaper that Anglican priest John Daau launched in 2004. Printed in Nairobi and with offices in Juba, it is also published online.<sup>58</sup>

The following year Rev. General Mabil de Awar Yuot, the head of the National Police Chaplaincy Service, visited the Juba office of Samaritan's Purse (an evangelically minded organization that, as of 2018, operated relief projects from five primary bases in the country). Yuot wanted Samaritan's Purse to train his chaplains. The first training was held months later in Aweil state, and others were later held in Juba and Mundri. In the latter two sessions, Samaritan's team trained more than one hundred government leaders, including officials, members of the military, police chaplains, and others. The Reverend Moses Telar, director general of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, stated, "Let us take the Bible instead of the gun," and "Our country needs to change, even our minds need to change. As chaplains, it is



your role. Let us disarm the heart. God is with us.”<sup>59</sup> In 2018, the warring parties negotiating in Addis Ababa called on the SSCC to help them overcome their differences (something the IGAD, working as mediator, had failed to accomplish).<sup>60</sup>

The council’s work points to other work that the church conducted during the war. From the outset priests, pastors, and nuns protected civilians from extremists on both sides and occasionally stood up to armed men while unarmed themselves. Bishop Emmanuel Murye of the Anglican Diocese of Kajo Keji acknowledged that several partners had supported them in education, trauma-healing workshops, empowerment for girls who had dropped out of school, and other areas. The SSCC—which, according to John Ashworth, “took a breather to rebuild and repair” after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement—had a renewed impetus that included implementing an Action Plan for Peace, recognizing the need for a long-term peace process to resolve both the current conflict and unresolved effects of previous conflicts. The SSCC shared that this plan could continue for as long as twenty years.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most compelling actions taken by clerical figures occurred in the arena of discourse. Clergy urged civilians not to blindly follow the warlords, lamented politicians’ disregard for those who had died, called the nation’s leaders “dry bones” that required spiritual renewal, and termed the fighting “evil.”<sup>62</sup> The decision to spiritualize the violence in a negative light is particularly significant given a similar strategy employed by Llewellyn Gwynne decades earlier with respect to ethnic conflict. In December 2016, Bishop Isaiah Dau of the Pentecostal Church of Sudan spoke during a Christmas celebration organized by the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Hai Jalaba, Juba. Warning South Sudanese and politicians to cease all violence, Bishop Dau told a cheering congregation, “Shedding blood is the work of the devil and anybody who is killing people is doing the work of the devil.” Peace, he declared, could not be achieved through donors but only if people reconciled with God and one another. “Men and women who do not have peace with God try to make peace[;] that is why there is no peace.” He identified love of God as the medicine for the nation’s tribalism. The same *Christian Times* piece that reported Dau’s fiery sermon noted that Awien Mawien, deputy speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, said that South Sudan was suffering because of its people’s sins.<sup>63</sup>

Dau was joined in his condemnation of violence by a seminarian whose piece, “‘No More of This!’ Jesus’ Condemnation of Violence and the War,” appeared in the *Christian Times* in March 2018. The writer referenced the Gospel passage in which political and religious leaders sent armed men to

arrest Christ on Holy Thursday (Mark 14:43). After recounting the facts that Jesus was found in the garden, Judas identified him with a kiss, and the soldiers subsequently led him away, the writer opined:

This is similar to what is happening in South Sudan today. Leaders are seeking to protect their power or gain power by shedding innocent blood. Soldiers are arresting and targeting people in the nighttime. Though they call Jesus “teacher,” they honor his name falsely, just as Judas did. They have robbed hungry villagers, raped innocent schoolgirls, forced boys to commit atrocities . . . such brutal violence is not from God. On the contrary, it is from the devil who “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Further on, the seminarian referred to the episode when Peter attempted to protect Christ by cutting off the ear of one of Jesus’s arresting soldiers. Noting Jesus’s command for Peter to put his sword away, the writer offered that “in this, South Sudan’s hour of darkness, we must trust in God, not in weapons. Our example is Jesus, a healer and a peacemaker—not a killer. Though the darkness may last for ‘an hour,’ Jesus will shatter it and conquer death.”<sup>64</sup> Three years later, none other than Salva Kiir would make a public declaration of forgiveness in the postwar state. During the fall of 2018, thousands of people cheered around Juba’s John Garang Memorial Park celebrating a new peace deal. Machar, returned from exile, took the stage with Kiir. After the president reiterated that the war had ended, Kiir promised that he had forgiven his rival and that Machar had returned the favor. “To forgive,” Kiir told the crowd, “is not an act of cowardice. It is a Christian obligation.”<sup>65</sup>

In Daniel Deng’s 2015 Christmas message, the Anglican archbishop explained that peace was needed in Sudan and South Sudan and that it simply was not possible without God. “We need to liberate this country spiritually from the moral decay. . . . It is better to be peace builders and makers than being destroyers of God given peace. . . . God will heal our land and us. . . . We are hostile against each other. Time has come to rediscover love of God[,] the source of our healing.” By asking for God’s forgiveness, Deng stated, they opened themselves for his love, compassion, and grace. He, like Fr. Attiyah during the second war against Khartoum, used Galatians 3:28 to state that Christ broke down the barriers that divided them “racially, tribally and ethnically; no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female[,] all are one in Christ.” Later on in the message, however, Deng commented on ethnicity’s relationship with the divine in a way that echoed Archbishop Loro’s words four years earlier. “Let us celebrate our diversity,” he said, “by

honoring one another. Our diversity is a God given thing; we did not make ourselves to be who we are in our various ethnic groups.”<sup>66</sup> In this way, Deng used Galatians to confirm the overarching unity of faith that transcended ethnicity while affirming that none other than God had created diversity, diversity should be celebrated, and such celebration is done by honoring one another.

#### PARTISAN READINGS

Kong Tut used scripture to levy his displeasure with the president in “Theological Reflections on Juba Nuer Massacre.” Posted shortly after Christmas 2014, Tut’s essay cited Herod’s killing of infant boys as an occasion to draw a direct parallel to the ethnic killings in Juba that had initiated the conflict. While Herod ordered the infanticides to kill Jesus, Kiir—according to Tut—ordered the killing of innocent Nuer out of hatred and as a means to hunt down “the democratic reformer” Machar. Tut added that the book of Revelation stated that while Christ was in the desert, the beast attempted to destroy Jesus with his messenger but to no avail. Machar, according to Tut’s logic, represented the baby Jesus, while Kiir was the beast, and Museveni the messenger. To this end, the Egyptian desert was analogous to Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile. While Jesus began his ministry in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke by proclaiming the nearness of God’s Kingdom and removing all oppression, “reflections have it that Riek Machar’s address of Pagak Conference marks the road forward to the end.”<sup>67</sup> There are moments, to be sure, where the accuracy of Tut’s biblical references must be called into question; namely, Christ’s appearance in the desert in the book of Revelation and the appearance of the beast and messenger in the Nativity story. Nevertheless, it is useful to recognize his attempt to provide spiritual strength behind his benevolent presentation of Machar and villainous portrayal of Kiir.

Prorebel supporters like Akol and Tut were countered by Joseph de Tuombuk and Elhag Paul, who have each been published in online venues, including the *Sudan Tribune*, *Pachodo.org*, *Gurtong*, and *South Sudan News Agency*.<sup>68</sup> Tuombuk wrote a piece, “Tribalism in South Sudan: Let’s Read from Matthew 7:1–5,” published on *Gurtong* in January 2015, in response to an article by Machar spokesperson James Gatdet Dak. Tuombuk stated that tribalism in South Sudan was a fact of life and that everyone hailed from some tribe; indeed, “even the Israelites had twelve tribes.” The problem, according to Tuombuk, begins “when highly educated people like Riek Machar . . . try to use our cherished diversity as a way to short-circuit

the democratic process and access power through illegal means.” He cited the fact that the rebellion’s top command was 92 percent Nuer and that Machar had relied heavily on anti-Dinka sentiment to rally a Nuer section “to his unholy cause.” On the other hand, Kiir had an administration that was unprecedented for its diversity. As Machar and his supporters had killed Nuer who stood up for their country rather than their ethnic group, Tuombuk returned to the Matthew scripture and charged that “Riek has lost the moral high ground to call Kiir’s administration some kind of a tribal entity led by corrupt ‘Dinka clan.’ Riek has demonstrated that he can use tribal politics as a means to an end: destroying our nascent democracy.”<sup>69</sup>

Tuombuk was joined in his anti-Machar criticism by Elhag Paul. Paul accused Machar of wearing layers of disguise, which were gradually being peeled off to reveal his true character. Though Machar offered hope by embracing democracy and federalism, Paul noted that he was now out for his own personal gain, used dictatorial approaches, and had no intention to deliver on promises to some of the country’s oppressed people. “The saying that a leopard can not change its spots,” Paul contended, “seems to be true in the case of Machar and the SPLM leaders. . . . Machar can not change. . . . He has once again squandered a golden opportunity for him to wash himself clean from his controversial past to emerge as a true leader.”<sup>70</sup> Paul informed me that the leopard phrase was a common expression that was suitable for his article and not necessarily used because of any biblical roots.<sup>71</sup> However, the leopard-spot idiom is found in the book of Jeremiah 13:23 (NIV): “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

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“The blood of the tribe,” remarked Bishop Tombe in 2014, “has become thicker than the blood of the Christ.”<sup>72</sup> After five decades of racial and religious conflict with North Sudanese, South Sudan’s early independence years were wracked by internal violence rent along ethnic lines. Any notion that southerners felt a sense of pan-Christian solidarity strong enough to subsume ethnicity or prevent ethnic tension was violently debunked. And yet, the war—rather than spurring widespread disavowals of Christianity—produced a dynamic crucible of religious thought. From contextual interpretations of specific scriptures to more general theological applications to fit the situation, a diverse array of lay and clerical figures used similarly varied media to make their expressions known. As one sign of the differing

opinions that emerged from the war, Tombe's aforementioned comment contrasts with Bishop Murye's message, that "though we are a multi-tribal nation, we are one in Christ," and Bishop Deng's 2015 Christmas plea:

Christ welcome[s] every tribe and nation because God has purchased us all with His blood. . . . God created and placed us here in South Sudan to live together in peace and harmony. . . . [W]e have been prisoners of our own ethnic violence and wars. . . . Let pride of tribe or clan or class . . . not obscure[sic] our focus on the future for this nation. . . . As we celebrate the birth of Christ, let us celebrate one another, as one family of God. . . . Let us celebrate our diversity by honoring one another. Our diversity is a God given thing; we did not make ourselves to be who we are in our various ethnic groups.<sup>73</sup>

While the independence years have been largely destructive, the period has nevertheless witnessed a vibrant environment for religious discourse.

The religious thought examined in this chapter contains elements that illustrate not only the post-CPA period's unique nature but also its constituent position within the region's longer train of political theology. As with earlier periods, Christian political imagination was not limited to ordained clergy but was formulated by lay politicians and civilians alike. What makes the post-CPA period different in this respect, however, was the efflorescence of ideas that could be found online. No longer limited to physical print spaces like personal correspondences or newspapers, venues like the *Sudan Tribune* and *Christian Times* continued online in the tradition of the *SPLA Update* as spaces where those throughout the Sudanese diaspora could make their expressions known (though to a potentially wider audience than the *Update* ever could).

A second observation gleaned from this period is the endurance of an idea expressed by Gwynne and Nugent School staff during the condominium era: that intergroup fighting was a spiritual "evil" and that uniting under God was the solution to this problem. Yet, unlike the move that Thomas Attiyah previously made in the *Update* (that, borrowing from 1 Corinthians, there was no more Dinka or Nuer but simply those in Christ), Bishops Deng and Loro affirmed the value of ethnicity as a God-given identity even as tribalism was tearing the young nation apart. Rather than approaching Christian identity as one meant to completely subsume ethnic identity, they instead presented it as a pan-ethnic framework that not only can but must accommodate ethnic diversity. South Sudanese Christians, in this paradigm, were a chosen people religiously and chosen peoples ethnically, a venerable "mixed multitude" like their figurative predecessors.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the church's evolving but consistent proximity to political happenings mirrored the way in which political theology similarly evolved but remained consistent. As South Sudan's internal conflict was not racialized or religionized in the oppositional manner that the wars against Khartoum were (Arab v. Black, Christian v. Muslim), various intellectuals related particular scriptures and theologies to the situation. While Arabs, Muslims, and the Sudanese government were no longer the targets of religiously infused language, Kiir, Machar, and the South Sudanese government filled this void in some respects. The Exodus narrative so previously lionized was replaced by far more references to the New Testament. Despite a framework that differed from the twentieth-century civil wars, religious thought still operated as a political technology.