

Reading # 4 – Religion

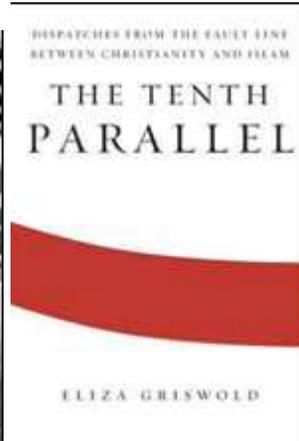
Unlike a history course where one just memorizes the beliefs and origins of religions, geographers study the following themes:

- Why some religions are designed to appeal to people throughout the world, whereas others remain appealing to only people in a small geographic area
- Why religious values are essential to understanding the meaningful ways people organize the physical and cultural landscape (building of monuments, churches, etc.)
- Why, unlike other cultural elements like language, migrants (people who move from one place to another) retain their religion while often abandoning other cultural elements
- How and why certain religions are diffusing (spreading) faster than others, in differing areas of the globe.
- The role the physical environment plays in the development of certain religions
- Conflicts and divisions between and among religious groups

Now, read the prologue from the book “The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam” and answer the questions that follow.



4.) “The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam” (Eliza Griswold: 2010, Prologue)



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“I wanted to see how Christianity and Islam are actually lived every day by huge numbers of vulnerable, marginal believers – individuals who are also part of the global story of poverty, development, climate-change forecasts, and so on...to go where such lives are actually led, where wars in the name of religion are not Internet media campaigns...but actual wars fought from village to village and street corner to street corner.”

Prologue:

The tenth parallel is the horizontal band that rings the earth seven hundred miles north of the equator. If Africa is shaped like a rumpled sock, with South Africa at the toe and Somalia at the heel, then the tenth parallel runs across the ankle. Along the tenth parallel, in Sudan, and in most of inland Africa, two worlds collide: the mostly Muslim, Arab-influenced north meets a black African south inhabited by Christians and those who follow indigenous religions—which include those who venerate ancestors and the spirits of animals, land, and sky.¹ Thirty miles south (at a latitude of 9°43'59"), the village of Todaj marked the divide where these two rival worldviews, their dysfunctional governments and well-armed militaries, vied inch by inch for land. The village belonged to the south's largest ethnic group, the Ngok Dinka. But in 2008, when Roger Winter paid Nyol Paduot a visit, the north was threatening to send its soldiers and Arab militias to attack the village and lay claim to the underground river of light, sweet crude oil running beneath the chief's feet.

Oil was discovered in southern Sudan during the 1970s, and the struggle to control it is one of the long-running war's more recent causes. The fight in Sudan threatened to split Africa's largest country in two, and still does. In 2011, the south is scheduled to vote on whether it wants

to remain part of the north or become its own country, made up of ten states that lie to the south of the tenth parallel and border Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Chad. This looming split—which, if it happens, would likely occur largely along the tenth parallel—meant that Today and the nearby oil boomtown of Abyei, about ten miles south, were vitally important. Whichever side controlled them would control an estimated two billion barrels of oil.

Other than Paduot, and six elders gathered in his hut, the village appeared deserted. Prompted by gunfire and rumors of war, the five hundred families who lived there had fled south, terrified that Today was about to be wiped off the face of the earth. Their fear was well founded: three times in the previous twenty years, soldiers from the north had laid siege to Today, raping women and children, killing and carrying off young men, and burning to the ground the villagers' thatched huts and the Episcopal Church made of hay. It was the end of the dry season, and a breeze stirred the air over this colorless plot of parched earth, bare but for these empty dwellings and a few gaunt cows trawling for loose hay. The cows wandering hungrily around the village didn't belong to the people of Today, but to northern Arab nomads, the Misseriya, who, because of seasonal drought up north, came south at this time of year to graze their cattle. Paduot was afraid that when the rains began a few weeks later, and the nomads could return home to their own greener pastures, there would be nothing to keep the northern soldiers (cousins and sons of the nomads) from attacking Today. "We know when they burn our village, they want the land," said the chief, a Ngok Dinka translator rendering his words into English. These patterns sounded like the ones unfolding less than fifty miles northwest, in the region of Darfur, because they were the same. Three decades ago, while Sudan's current president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, was a military general stationed on this border, the Khartoum-based northern government perfected the methods of attack, using the paramilitary horsemen called the Janjawid, whom it was now deploying in Darfur. Today faced this same threat, but other than Roger Winter, very few knew anything about the impending disaster. On BBC radio, Paduot heard much talk about Darfur. Although the same thing was happening here along the border, it rarely made international news. The two fronts had much in common, since all of Sudan's wars boil down to a central Khartoum-based cabal battling the people at the peripheries. The only differences between Darfur and Abyei, the chief explained, were religion and oil. In Darfur, there was no oil and both sides were Muslim, a confrontation he did not understand. "Why would Muslims fight against Muslims?" he asked aloud. Here, the north had mounted its assaults in the name of jihad, or holy war, claiming that Islam and Arab culture should reign supreme in Sudan.

Chief Paduot, who had survived several such conflagrations, had come to see Islam as a tool of oppression, one the northerners were using to erase his culture and undo his people's claim to the land and its oil. "People hate Islam now," he said. Having stepped into the hut behind Winter, I glanced around to see if any of the elders was startled by the chief's remark. If they were, no sign of it crossed their faces, which showed only dread and exhaustion. To defy the north, most of the villagers had been baptized as Episcopalians—they prayed daily, attended church on Sunday, and had cast off loose, long-sleeved Islamic dress in favor of short-sleeved Western-style button-down shirts, or brilliant batiks. For them, *Islam* was now simply a catchall term for the

government, people, and policies of the north. Race, like religion, was a rallying cry in this complicated war.

The paler-skinned Arab northerners looked down on the darker-skinned people of the south, Paduot explained slowly. He seemed tired of giving tutorials to outsiders. What good were earnest, well-meaning people like us, who came with our water bottles and notebooks to record the details of a situation but could do nothing to stop it? The divisions between north and south along the tenth parallel date back centuries, and colonial rule simply reinforced them. One hundred years earlier, the British colonialists who governed Sudan had virtually handed this swath of land south of the tenth parallel to the Roman Catholic Church. Daniel Comboni, a beloved nineteenth-century Italian missionary who was canonized as a saint in 2003, headed Catholic efforts in Central Africa with the expressed aim to “save Africa through Africans.” Under Comboni’s direction, the Catholic Church ran all schools and hospitals (and forbade Protestant missionaries from proselytizing), until, in 1964, the northern government, employing Islam as a form of nationalism, expelled all missionaries from the country. African Christians not Westerners—were left to lead the local church, which was then, as now, under fire from the north as an alien, infidel institution.

This attitude has not changed, the local Catholic priest, Father Peter Suleiman, told me. “Every day we experience the misery of the south. You still hear the promise of death.” And oil has made things worse. “The north believes that oil is a gift from God for the Muslim people,” he said. Although the Catholic Church still held some sway along this border, Father Suleiman told me that an influx of more charismatic Protestant churches was gaining ground. In the village of Todaj, many of the villagers were convinced that they were still alive solely because they had prayed to Jesus Christ for protection.

Born into a family that prayed to ancestral gods, Chief Paduot became a nominal Muslim in order to gain admission to school (a practice begun by Christian missionaries and now emulated by Khartoum). Through a process of forced Islamization, the north had made it compulsory for people to declare themselves Muslims by saying the Shahada—“I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Mohammed is his messenger”—and adopting Muslim names in order to attend school, get a job, or avoid jail or violent death. In his forties, Paduot, chief by birth, decided that he wanted to leave Islam and become a Catholic. But the northern security forces threatened the local Catholic priest, one Father Marco, saying they would torture him if he baptized the chief. (They told Paduot they’d stone him if he became “a backslider from Islam.”) He refrained from converting to Catholicism to safeguard his village from further trouble. “I kept Islam to protect my people,” he said, but, to show his independence, he had returned to the indigenous practices of his youth—called the noble spiritual beliefs. Christians and Muslims alike disparaged the local indigenous religion on the ground that it didn’t teach adherents to follow the one, true God. That was ignorance on their part, Paduot said. “We worship one Creator God, too, then smaller gods.”

He had also married an Episcopalian. Now he led us out of the hut— its thick, round walls like a muddy mushroom stem—and pointed to a line of what looked like tiny corn-husk scarecrows

along the roofs of his and other huts. “They are crosses,” the chief said. Their frayed edges glowed in the afternoon’s pewter light; they were symbols marking the beginning of the south, and visual reminders to anyone entering the village that it was a Christian place, the chief explained. Squinting into the overcast sky to look at them, I thought the threadbare totems were also bids for divine protection. Yet the crosses seemed to be proving as ineffective as the chief’s satellite phone, which hung by its power cord from two portable solar panels on the thatched roof of his hut. There was no one left for him to call for help. Though his cousin, Francis Deng, was serving as the United Nations Special Representative for the Prevention of Genocide, and though Paduot met regularly with local UN officials, representatives of the southern government, and visitors such as Roger Winter (a longtime head of the U.S. Committee for Refugees who had lobbied hard for the south in Washington and Khartoum), no one could do anything to stop the impending assault.

On the surface of this conflict, two groups, northern and southern, Muslim and Christian, were competing for land and water. Yet at a deeper level, the people were now pawns of their respective governments, and Paduot knew it. He produced a worn map softened with use and pointed to three annotations in English: PUMP 1, PUMP 2, PUMP 3. These indicated the oil fields of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company—a consortium of Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, and Sudanese interests operating in Sudan with the blessing of President Bashir. At the same time, Bashir was exhorting his holy soldiers, or Mujahideen—whom he called “the legitimate sons of the soil”—to reup for jihad. Once again, he was making use of race and religion to safeguard oil interests before the country faced the impending split.

Some of his soldiers were stationed two hundred yards away, acting as sentries on the north-south border, the location of which was determined by whoever was strong enough to push it a few inches one way or another. Around their makeshift barracks, camps of nomads were springing up, as if preparing for war. Over the past few weeks, as Paduot looked on, the soldiers had received shipments of automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. If a full-scale rift between north and south occurred, it would begin right here with these weapons, Paduot warned. A village sentry came in and whispered in his ear. Abruptly, he stopped talking: soldiers were slouching against the hut’s outside wall, listening to his every word.

In Africa, the space between the tenth parallel and the equator marks the end of the continent’s arid north and the beginning of sub-Saharan jungle. Wind, other weather, and centuries of human migrations have brought the two religions to converge here. Christianity and Islam share a fifteen hundred-year history in Africa. It began in 615 when Mohammed, his life at risk at home on the Arabian Peninsula, sent a dozen of his followers and family members to find refuge at the court of an African Christian king in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). Within a decade of Mohammed’s death (in 632), the first Muslim armies landed in Africa, proceeding south from Egypt to today’s Sudan. There they made a peace pact—the first of its kind—with the ancient Nubian Christian kingdoms along the Nile River.

The pact lasted for six centuries. Then religious wars broke out. By 1504, the last of the Christian kingdoms in Sudan had fallen to Muslim armies. From the seventh century to the twentieth,

Muslim traders and missionaries carried Islam inland over the northernmost third of Africa, carving trade routes from the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia to the West African kingdom of Timbuktu. Away from the coasts, crossing the landlocked region south of the tenth parallel proved difficult; the pale, grassy savanna thickened to bush, and the bush gave way to a mire of emerald swamp and jungle. Along the tenth parallel, the tsetse fly belt begins: and these blood-sucking insects, each the size of a housefly and carrying African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness),³ virtually stopped Islam's southern spread.

To the east, five thousand miles off the African coast and over the Indian Ocean, natural forces also shaped the encounter of Christianity and Islam in the Southeast Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The trade winds—high-pressure air currents that move steadily from either pole toward the equator—filled the sails of both Muslim and Christian merchants from the northern hemisphere beginning in the eighth century. These reliable winds propelled Christian and Muslim ships to the same islands, beaches, and ports, then returned them either to Europe or to the Arabian Peninsula, their ships heavy with cargoes of cinnamon and cloves.

The trade winds are part of the intertropical convergence zone, a weather system that moves to the north or south of the equator, depending on the season. In this zone, wind currents from the northern hemisphere run into those from the southern hemisphere. As the two cycles meet head-on, they generate cataclysmic storms. In Asia, these storms begin during monsoon season and generally spin west to Africa, where the most tempestuous of them move west off the African coast at Cape Verde, across the Atlantic Ocean, and become America's hurricanes. Within this band, Asia, Africa, and America are part of a single weather system.⁴ (A dangerous year of monsoons in Asia and storms in Africa's catastrophe belt, for instance, can mean a disastrous year of hurricanes for the U.S. eastern seaboard.)

As the earth grows warmer, preexisting cycles of flooding and drought around the tenth parallel grow increasingly unpredictable, making it impossible for African nomads, most of whom are Muslims, and farmers (Christians, Muslims, and indigenous believers) to rely on centuries-old patterns of migration, planting, and harvesting. They must move into new territory to grow food and graze their livestock. Consequently, between the equator and the tenth parallel two groups with distinctly different cultures and cosmologies unavoidably face off against each other—as they do in the Sudanese village of Today.

Growing populations intensify these competitions. Due to the explosive growth of Christianity over the past fifty years, there are now 493 million Christians living south of the tenth parallel—nearly a fourth of the world's Christian population of 2 billion. To the north live the majority of the continent's 367 million Muslims; they represent nearly one quarter of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims. These figures are an effective reminder that four out of five Muslims live outside the Middle East. Indonesia, with 240 million people, is the most populous Muslim country in the world. Malaysia is its tiny, rich neighbor; the Philippines, its larger, poorer one. Together, the three countries have a population of 250 million Muslims and 110 million Christians. Indonesia and Malaysia are predominantly Muslim countries, with vocal Christian minorities. The Philippines— with a powerful Catholic majority (population 92 million) mostly to the north of

the tenth parallel and a Muslim minority (population 5 million) to the south—is the opposite. It has been a strongly Christian country ever since Ferdinand Magellan planted a cross on an island hilltop there in 1521.

Yet Islam, which arrived hundreds of years earlier, has remained a source of identity and rebellion in the south for the past five hundred years. Africa's and Asia's populations are expanding, on average, faster than those in the rest of the world. While the global population of 6.8 billion people increases by 1.2 percent every year, in Asia the rate is 1.4 percent, and in Africa it doubles to 2.4 percent. In this fragile zone where the two religions meet, the pressures wrought by growing numbers of people and an increasingly vulnerable environment are sharpening the tensions between Christians and Muslims over land, food, oil, and water, over practices and hardening worldviews.

The particular strain of religion that's growing the fastest also intensifies these problems. Christianity and Islam are in the throes of decades-long revolutions: reawakenings. Believers adopt outward signs of devotion—praying, eating, dressing, and other social customs—that call attention to the ways they differ from the unbelievers around them. Yet these movements are not simply about exhibiting devotion. They begin with a direct encounter with God. For Sufi s, who make up the majority of African Muslims, and for Pentecostals, who account for more than one quarter of African Christians, worship begins with ecstatic experience. Sufi s follow a mystical strain of Islam that begins with inviting God into the human heart. Pentecostals urge their members to encounter the Holy Spirit viscerally, as Jesus's followers did during the feast of Pentecost when they spoke in tongues. Such reawakenings demand an individual's total surrender, and promise, in return, an exclusive path to the one true God. "These movements aren't about converting to a better version of self," Lamin Sanneh, a theologian at Yale and the author of *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, told me. "They are about converting to God." They say the believer can know God now in this life and forever in the next. In return, they expect the believer to proselytize—to gain new converts—from either among other religions or their own less ardent believers, which creates new frictions.

These movements are already reshaping Africa, Asia, and Latin America—the region we used to call *the third world*, or even *the developing world*. Nowadays, liberal and conservative Western analysts, and many of the region's inhabitants as well, use the term *Global South* instead. This somewhat clunky moniker is intended to cast off the legacy of the West, to challenge the assumption that the entire world is developing within a Western context. It is also meant to highlight a marked shift in demographics and influence among the world's Christians and Muslims. Today's typical Protestant is an African woman, not a white American man. In many of the weak states along the tenth parallel, the power of these religious movements is compounded by the fact that the "state" means very little here; governments are alien structures that offer their people almost nothing in the way of services or political rights. This lack is especially pronounced where present-day national borders began as nothing more than lines sketched onto colonial maps. Other kinds of identity, consequently, come to the fore: religion above everything—even race or ethnicity—becomes a means to safeguard individual and collective security in this world and the next one.

In many cases, then, gains for one side imply losses for the other. Revival provides not only a pattern for daily life but also a form of communal defense, bringing people together, giving them a shared goal or purpose, and inviting them to risk their lives in the pursuit of it. Often the end is liberation, and the means to liberation include martyrdom and holy war. With Islam, it is perhaps easier to understand how believers could see a return to religious law as undoing the corruption sown by colonialism. Yet in Christianity, too, religion has become a means of political emancipation, especially between the equator and the tenth parallel, where Christianity and Islam meet. Many Christians living in these states belong to non-Muslim ethnic minorities who share the experience of being enslaved by northern Muslims, and perceive themselves as living on Christianity's front line in the battle against Islamic domination. In Nigeria, Sudan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and elsewhere, Christians have lost churches, homes, and family members to violent struggle. At the same time, they, like their Muslim adversaries, see the developed West as a godless place that has forsaken its Christian heritage.

I began investigating this faith-based fault line as a journalist in December 2003, when I traveled with Franklin Graham—Billy Graham's son, and head of a prosperous evangelical empire—to Khartoum, to meet his nemesis, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, whose regime was waging the world's most violent modern jihad against Christians and Muslims alike in southern Sudan. Bashir was also beginning the genocidal campaign in Darfur. (In 2009, the International Criminal Court at The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity.) In Bashir's palaces sepulchral marble reception room, the two men argued pointedly over who would convert whom. Each adhered to a very different worldview: theirs were opposing fundamentalisms based on the belief that there was one—and only one—way to believe in God. At the same time, their religious politics spilled over into a fight between cultures, and represented the way in which the world's Muslims and the West have come to misunderstand each other. Being a witness to this conversation was like watching emissaries from two different civilizations square off over a plate of pistachios. Soon afterward, I started to travel in the band between the equator and the tenth parallel. I visited places where the two religions often clash: Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, and the Horn of Africa; Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Over the past decade, there has been much theorizing about religion and politics, religion and poverty, conflicts and accommodation between Christianity and Islam. I wanted to see how Christianity and Islam are actually lived every day by huge numbers of vulnerable, marginal believers—individuals who are also part of the global story of poverty, development strategy, climate-change forecasts, and so on.

No theory of religious politics or religious violence in our time can possibly be complete without accounting for the four-fifths of Muslims who live outside the Middle East or for the swelling populations of evangelical Christians whose faith is bound up with their struggle for resources and survival. I wanted to go where such lives are actually led, where wars in the name of religion are not Internet media campaigns to "control a global narrative" but actual wars fought from village to village and street corner to street corner. Most of all, I wanted to record the interwoven stories of those who inhabit this territory, and whose religious beliefs pattern their daily perseverance.

Although it's easy to see Christianity and Islam as vast and static forces, they are perpetually in flux. Over time, each religion has shaped the other. Religion is dynamic and fluid. The most often overlooked fact of religious revivals, of the kind now unfolding between the equator and the tenth parallel, is that they give rise to divisions within the religions themselves. They are about a struggle over who speaks for God—a confrontation that takes place not simply between rival religions, but inside them. This is as true in the West as it is in the Global South. Religions, like the weather, link us to one another, whether we like it or not.

Questions:

1. Based on the descriptions, how would you define (your own words) what the 10th Parallel is, both physically and culturally?
2. Based on what she describes, how would you classify the relationship between Muslims and Christians along the 10th parallel? Support this with evidence from the piece.
3. The author states that “Christianity and Islam share a fifteen-hundred-year history in Africa” – briefly describe what this history is (main points here – please don't recopy whole sections)
4. She also attributes the interaction of, and conflicts between Muslims and Christians to the physical geographic patterns of the region. What are these patterns, and how does she claim they have impacted Muslim/Christian interaction?
5. What role does she claim that population issues have in fueling the conflict between Muslims and Christians?