

African Traditional Religion in South Sudan

1. Dinka Christianity (based on Mark Nickel's book)

1.1 categories of spiritual powers are loose creative associations rather than dogmatic entities:

JAK -general name for spiritual powers, can have a good or evil influence

NHIALIC- Supreme being. (from the word Nhial = "above", sky). Creator God, sometimes called "God of my grandfather". personal and masculine, omnipotent, just, manifest through natural forces like thunder, brings blessing but also suffering.

GOD IS ONE, but there are lesser spirit forces created by him.

1.2. **YEETH** - important class of Jak, can be clan divinities or Free divinities

CLAN DIVINITIES - represented by a token or emblem, often an animal or plant (which then will not be taken for food). Important for the clan identity.

FREE DIVINITIES - Powers related to people, manifest through dreams, trances, illnesses. Effects shown in men, but from above.

1.3 PRIMAL ANCESTORS AND FREE DIVINITIES

The primal ancestors are **ABUK (mother), DENG (son), GERANG (Father)** - but unlike in the genesis story these are also free divinities, still active spirits.

ABUK is associated with harvest, home, water, rivers

GERANG is associated with the affairs of men

DENG - natural phenomena - lightening, thunder, first rains. "Great Deng is Nhialic itself". Also a clan divinity.

1.4 For BOR DINKA, the most powerful divinity is LIRPIOU, the spear, which fell from the sky 6 generations ago.

1.5 THE BREATH OF LIFE

A powerful bull has an abundance of WEI, the breath of life, which ascends to NHIALIC when released in sacrifice for the benefit of the community.

1.6 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

BENY BITH are masters of the fishing spear. Hereditary specialists, have allegiance to Nhialic and clan divinities. Seen as sources of wisdom, mediators between men and Nhialic, and reconcilers. Good rather than destructive "priests"

TUT (sing TIET) - diviners or healers. have occult knowledge and power, can diagnose and heal illness, and counteract witchcraft, usually for a fee. Some intercede to Nhialic, but most to clan divinities.

RAN WAL "person of medicine", use fetish bundles for healing.

ACOR - diviner and magician

APETH - malign witch who possesses the evil eye and can inflict injury.

PROPHETS - small number of Beny Bith who have prophetic powers and are mouthpieces for Nhialic.

BENY JOK - masters of JOK, clan divinities.

1.7. ORAL TRADITION AND THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Remarkable similarities - ? indicates contact with ancient Judaism, Islam , and Christianity (Theodora 6CAD and Nubian Christian culture)

God created man, and woman from his rib, the forbidden tree, death through her disobedience, snake made to crawl on his belly, punishment was hard work.

First child of man and woman will die, but in after 15 days will return to life.

People build a tower to reach God.

A divine leader separates water to allow people to cross. A virgin birth of a prophet, who performs miracles, including changing pots of water to beer when it is transferred to new pots.

2. The JUR people (Central South Sudan)

2.1 ANCESTORS. The spirit of ancestors mediate between man and God the creator.

The dead are called BOBERTI, "people of the earth". No belief in heaven or hell.

Spirits can enter the dead, MARINYI, and can cause sickness in the living if sacrifices are not offered. Sins of the ancestors can cause sickness in the living.

2.2 BOKO'BA, the creator god, made heaven and earth, and heavenly beings called BOMITARO which are superior to the BOBERTI

2.3. Villages have SHRINES to spirit divinities. Most common is Shrine to ALA, god of the harvest and hunting, consisting of a tall pole with a vine around it. Offerings made to SARI BA ALA, the shrine of ALA for success.

BARIJOKO and YADA deal in health and peace.

Shrine has 3 poles representing Father, Son, mother, and is guardian of the rules of good conduct -don't covet, steal, disrespect parents. If the rules are broken, BARIJOKO may allow ancestral spirits to cause sickness.

3. MURLE people

Have 4 special chiefs, called RED CHIEFS, who intercede for the people with TAMMU the high God

TAMMU created the world, man from clay, woman from man, and cattle and crops for man's use. God and man visit each other along a highway until woman disobeyed God and carried a grinding stone along the road which she dropped and the road was broken. TAMMU is now remote from the people.

NGARI - religious healers, work through the spirit of JOOK.

4. NUER PEOPLE

KUOTH the creator God is in Covenantal relationship with his people. A person who does wrong disrupts family, community, KUOTH and SPIRITS. Need for NGOT =cut, meaning cutting a covenant with offended people to re-establish relationship, sealed with the sacrifice of a bull.

The KUAT MUOK = "priest" is responsible for mediating between persons in conflict to bring peace.

Also believe in **PROPHETS**.