"One Nation from Every Tribe, Tongue, and People": The Church and Strategic Peacebuilding in South Sudan

John Ashworth and Maura Ryan

Introduction

When South Sudan celebrated independence on July 9, 2011, Ken Hackett, then CEO of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), was invited to join the United States delegation. That CRS was the only non-governmental organization represented was a testament to CRS's longstanding commitment to humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding in South Sudan. But even more, Hackett's presence recognized the fidelity of the church—a broadly ecumenical Christian church—in the liberation struggle of the people of South Sudan. During 22 years of civil war in South Sudan, the church was the only institution that remained on the ground with the people. There was no functioning government, no civil society, no United Nations, no secular NGOs, and even the authority of the local chiefs was eroded by the young "comrades" with guns. But wherever there were people, the church was there, providing many of the services that one would normally expect from a government: health care, education, emergency relief, food, shelter, and even security and protection. People of all religions looked to the church for leadership.[1] The church therefore gained a remarkable degree of credibility and moral authority, which places it in a unique position in the

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[1] The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), the ecumenical "voice" of the church in Sudan and South Sudan, has been instrumental in providing such leadership in peacebuilding initiatives. Founded in 1965, it includes Roman Catholic, Episcopal (Anglican), Protestant, Orthodox and Coptic member churches. In 1989, when the civil war made it impossible to reach people in much of the South and in marginalized areas of Sudan, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) was formed. The two councils continued to work together locally and, through the Sudan Ecumenical Forum,

JOURNAL OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT – 10:1, 2013, 47-67.

new nation of South Sudan. It is widely expected, including by representatives of the new government in Juba, that the church will continue to have a prominent public role, particularly in peace and reconciliation.

This essay focuses, in particular, on the church's role as peacebuilder. Long a key player in conflict resolution, both directly at the local level and indirectly at the national and international level, the work of the South Sudanese church also illustrates well what has come to be called "strategic peacebuilding." Drawing on the work of peace studies scholars such as John Paul Lederach, strategic peacebuilding acknowledges the often complex and multi-layered character of interstate and intrastate conflict, recognizes the importance of multiple actors and strategies of transformation, and looks beyond the cessation of hostilities or the achievement of a peace accord to the creation of conditions for long-term healing and social reconstruction. Using two examples of inter-communal peace processes, one which took place in the late 1990s and the other which is still underway in 2012, we show how the South Sudanese church leveraged its resources—spiritual, moral, political and ecclesial—to build capacity and create spaces for the painstaking work of peace. Looking briefly at the role of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF) between 1995 and 2005, we also explore the promise and potential obstacles to international ecumenical advocacy.

Building Peace in South Sudan

Since gaining independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, the Sudan has experienced almost constant conflict. The first civil war between rebels based in the south and the Government of Sudan in Khartoum began in 1955 and lasted until 1972. Repeated violations of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, which promised the south a measure of political autonomy, led to a second civil war lasting from 1983 until the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on January 9, 2005. The twenty-two year second civil war is said to have claimed two

internationally to promote peace and justice. The New Sudan Council of Churches and the Sudan Council of Churches merged in May 2007 into the present Sudan Council of Churches. According to Paul Nantulya, technical advisor for peacebuilding in Sudan for CRS, the Sudanese church mediated thirty local peace agreements during the second civil war and laid the foundation for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Nantulya, Paul. "Sudanese Church Commits to Promoting Peace in Sudan," *CRS Voices* 1 April 2010 <http://crs-blog.org/sudanese-church-commits-to-promoting-peace-in-sudan/>.

million lives and displaced another four million people. According to the terms of the CPA, a referendum was held in 2011. Close to ninety-nine percent of Southern Sudanese voted to secede.

Despite South Sudan's independence, conflict between Sudan and South Sudan continues with disputes over the shared border, control of oil and oil revenues, the failure to implement the terms of the CPA in the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile (in Sudan) and the disputed region of Abyei (all of which border South Sudan), and the status of South Sudanese in Sudan. Sudan has long suffered from simultaneous macro-conflict (between north and south) and micro-conflict (south-south conflicts over ethnicity, cattle, resources such as grazing land and water, and political power, as well as north-north civil wars such as Darfur, the Eastern Front, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile).[2] Elsewhere, John Ashworth identifies two broad causes at the root of both levels of conflict. The first is *identity:*

> Sudan was a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country. . . But over a long period one identity grouping, which happened to be "Arab" and Islamic, dominated. It defined itself as the Sudanese identity, and at various times oppressed, assimilated, disenfranchised, marginalized and tried to destroy all other identities.[3]

The second is what he calls the *"centre-periphery dynamic"*:

> Power, resources, and development were concentrated in a small geographic area and amongst a small number of ethnic groups in the centre of Sudan. All peripheral areas were marginalised.[4]

Today, intrastate conflicts are exacerbated by the availability and flow of guns into the South as well as longstanding "divide and conquer" practices whereby the government in Khartoum gives money and arms to certain leaders within one ethnic group or another in order to encourage war with each other.[5]

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[2] For a discussion of the root causes of conflict in the old Sudan see Ruth Iyob and Gilbert M. Khadiagala. *Sudan: The Elusive Quest for Peace.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2006.

[3] John Ashworth, "New Nationalism and Nation Healing – the case of South Sudan." *Sudan Tribune* 11 April 2012. http://www.sudantribune.com/New-Nationalism-and-Nation-healing, 42206.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Paul Jeffrey, "Free at Last: How Catholics in South Sudan are Helping to Build a New Nation." *U.S. Catholic* December 2011: 28-32. See a description of "divide and

Much more could be said about the nature and history of war in the old and new Sudan. But it is enough to see that to take full account of the complex character of sustained conflict in this region any approach to peacebuilding must address the structural conditions that generate and sustain conflict, build constructive relationships across multiple communities and spheres, and ultimately ground sustainable peace in "a reconstituted public space and new social contract."[6] In other words, it must be both *comprehensive* and *strategic*.

As developed by peace scholars at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, strategic peacebuilding

> [w]orks over the long run and at all levels of society to establish and maintain relationships among people locally and globally. Strategic peacebuilding connects people and groups "on the ground" (community and religious groups, grassroots organizations, etc.) with policymakers and powerbrokers (governments, the United Nations, corporations, banks, etc.). It aims not only to resolve conflicts, but to build societies, institutions, policies and relationships that are better able to sustain peace and justice.[7]

Understood this way, peacebuilding aims beyond "negative peace" or the end of violence toward what is often called "justpeace", peace built on the pursuit of social justice, the protection of civil and human rights, the healing of trauma, the restoration of communities and shared human security.[8] Strategic peacebuilding assumes the importance and interdependence of multiple actors– local, regional, national and international—while at the same time recognizing the indispensable role of grassroots peacebuilders, particularly for complex and long-standing conflicts.[9] In its 1999 field manual, Caritas Internationalis underscored the need to draw on local knowledge and engage as a critical resource those who will live out the terms of any peace agreement.[10] *Working for Reconciliation: A Caritas Handbook* called for the development of

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conquer" practices by Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala of the Tombura-Uambio diocese, at 28-29.

[6] John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby. "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview." *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World.* Eds. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers. New York: Oxford University Press. 2010, 33.

[7] <http://kroc.nd.edu/about-us/what-peace-studies/what-strategic-peacebuilding>.

[8] See World Council of Churches, An Ecumenical Call to Justpeace (2011); see also Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. Intercourse, Penn.: Good Books, 2004.

[9] Naomi Roht-Arriaza, "Human Rights and Strategic Peacebulding: The Roles of Local, National, and International Actors," in Philpott and Powers, 231-246 at 232; 239.

[10] Headquartered in Rome, Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of 165 Catholic organisations working in international humanitarian aid and development.

"cohorts of indigenous peacebuilders—agents for nonviolent change who, as members of the society experiencing strife, have a vested and long-term interest in applying their irreplaceable local knowledge to the tasks of social transformation and hoped-for reconciliation."[11] Caritas recognizes that engaging local actors and building alliances across spheres or levels of influence is necessary precisely because "peace settlements do not bring about the required change of heart, which is the crux of peace, particularly in complex internal conflicts."[12] As an element of strategic peacebuilding, the challenge is not only to identify the peacemakers or conflict resolvers within the local community, but to create opportunities to see the conflict through the eyes of that community and for the community's own resources for addressing or transforming conflict, as well as for healing trauma and reconstituting relationships, to be identified and validated.

Lederach employs a pyramid to describe three levels of actors and strategies in peacebuilding.[13] Level One includes the highly visible, top-level military, political, and religious leaders who engage in high-level negotiations and whose goals tend to be limited and short-range (e.g., securing a cease-fire agreement). Level Two includes middle-range leadership: ethnic and religious leaders, academics, intellectuals, and well-respected humanitarian leaders and NGO personnel. Middle-level leaders engage, over a much longer period, in the whole range of capacity building, including conflict resolution training, human rights education and advocacy, aid and development for human security, and securing conditions for meaningful political participation. Middle-level leaders often have both "top" and "bottom" connections and networks of relationship that cut across the lines of identity at the heart of the conflict. At the base, the grassroots level, are local community leaders, leaders of indigenous NGOs, community development and health

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[11] As summarized by Lederach and Appleby, 43, n. 11.

[12] *Working for Reconciliation: A Caritas Handbook*. Ed. Brian Starken. Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis, 1999, 4. Lederach describes this attention to local resources under the "principle of indigenous empowerment." This principle "suggests that conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily 'see' the setting and the people in it as the 'problem' and the outsider as the answer. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting." See Lederach, "Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework", in *Conflict Transformation* Ed. Kumar Rupesinghe. New York: St Martin's Press, 1995, pp. 201-22. See also, Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

[13] See Lederach. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, 39.

workers, and refugee camp leaders. Leaders at this level have the greatest stake in the outcome of a peace process as well as an intimate knowledge both of the community's suffering and its resources. Although internationally visible, high-level negotiations are sometimes critical for changing the direction of a conflict, experience shows that sustainable peace depends more in the long run on coordinating leadership and resources on the mid and lower levels.

Because of what Lederach calls its "verticality," the Catholic Church is uniquely positioned to contribute to peacebuilding. The Church's global presence and hierarchical structure ensures networks of potential allies at each level of society. Cardinals, Archbishops and wealthy lay Catholics can be found among the elites around the world. Catholic NGOs, academics and other religious leaders play an important mid-level role in civil society, while lay and religious leaders and educators in the parishes cultivate the basic moral and religious sensibilities of peace, reconciliation and justice that grow into grassroots movements. As Appleby points out, a shared Catholic identity does not automatically translate into a shared strategic vision for peace and justice. But "these potential partners are natural allies because they are committed in principle both to social justice and to peacemaking."[14]

In addition to sharing a religious identity, Catholic peacebuilders draw from the common language of Catholic social teaching (CST). Although it only began to articulate its mission within the framework of CST in the 1990s, after the Rwandan genocide, the influence of CST is evident, for example, in CRS's approach to peacebuilding and development. Eight tenets of CST serve as guiding principles for CRS: the sacredness and dignity of the human person; the reciprocity of rights and responsibilities; the social nature of humanity and the corresponding emphasis on justice as participation and integral human development; the common good as the minimum conditions for individuals and groups to achieve their own fulfilment; subsidiarity, solidarity, preferential option for the poor and stewardship.[15] As a vision of a just society,

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[14] R. Scott Appleby. "Disciples of the Prince of Peace? Christian Resources for Nonviolent Peacebuilding." In *Beyond Violence: Religious Resources for Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Ed. James L. Heft, S.M. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, 136.

[15] See <http://crs.org/about/guiding-principles.cfm>. For an account of the turn to CST in CRS see Christine Tucker. "Integration of Catholic Social Teaching at CRS." *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 9:2 (2012) 315-324; also William R. Headley, CSSp and Reina C. Neufeldt. "Catholic Relief Services: Catholic Peacebuilding in Practice." *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis.* Eds. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books (2010), 125-154.

CST here provides both an overarching framework for determining how to address crisis and conflict on the ground and a lens for focusing efforts and assessing programs. William Headley and Reina Neufeldt describe how the decision to self-consciously reflect on its mission in the context of Catholic social teaching led CRS to rethink some of its programs and foci.[16] For instance, attention to the preferential option for the poor resulted in more targeted efforts to address the most vulnerable populations globally; reflection on the common good and the rich discussion in social encyclical tradition of the conditions for integral human development lent a vision for integrating social, spiritual, and cultural development with economic and political development; the call to solidarity led CRS to think programmatically about how to cultivate genuine, healthy international partnerships; subsidiarity renewed commitments to developing local partnerships driven by locally-defined needs and goals. Rooted in Scripture and the Catholic intellectual tradition, CST has proven to be an important resource for building ecclesial alliances. But it is more than a powerful intra-ecclesial language. As peacebuilding efforts around the globe have shown, CST provides an image of peace as ultimately born of right relationships that resonates with the values and convictions of many others outside the Catholic community who also work for peace and justice.

As a "grammar" of justpeace, the influence of CST extends beyond the level of applied principles. In South Sudan, CST has provided (and continues to provide) both a road map for nation-building and an exhortatory vision. As a way of preparing for independence, the Southern Sudanese Bishops launched a national pastoral program in May 2011 with the theme "One Nation from Every Tribe, Tongue and People."[17] It included a Eucharistic Procession, a Mass of Thanksgiving, a day of reconciliation and times for fasting and prayer. The heart of the program was a nine-day novena, each day focusing on a principle of CST. A comprehensive pastoral approach such as this, just as the 101 Days of Prayer leading up to the Referendum, is a powerful reminder that the church's work of peace begins with the transformation of hearts and minds. It is also an example of how religious communities can create spaces for transformation within the gathered ecclesial community and within its common prayer and shared rituals.

It is fair to say that the church's potential to contribute to strategic peacebuilding has hardly been fully tapped. But three "moments" in the

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[16] Headley and Neufeldt, 129.

[17] Sara Angle. "Southern Sudanese Bishops Begin Novena." *Idaho Catholic Register*. Friday, June 3, 2011, 15.

peace process in South Sudan provide a glimpse of the role religious leaders can play, working on multiple levels, patiently and over a long period, all the time honouring and building on local values and practices.

The People to People Peace and Reconciliation Process[18]

In 1991 the liberation movement split. The split was disastrous for the liberation struggle. Before long, the new offshoot had joined with the Khartoum government to fight against the mainstream Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and SPLA lost most of the territory which it had gained. Ethnicity was only one of the reasons for the split, but nevertheless it became a major issue which led to massacres of tens of thousands of civilians in the two main ethnic groups, the Dinka of Dr John Garang de Mabior and the Nuer of Dr Riek Machar Teny Durgeon.[19] From an early stage the church attempted to mediate between Dr John and Dr Riek. At times it appeared that they were very close to reconciliation, but ultimately it failed. They were not prepared to reconcile.

In 1994, partly as a result of the split, the mainstream SPLA convened the Chukudum Convention, which brought together several hundred people from all over South Sudan. This was the beginning of change within the movement to make it more democratic and accountable, to improve its human rights record, to create a political wing–the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)–and to institute a civil administration in the "liberated areas" controlled by the movement. This was followed in July 1997 by a meeting in Kajiko, near Yei, to iron out differences which had developed between the church and the movement. It was a fiery meeting, but ended well. The SPLM/A mandated the church to handle peace and reconciliation, as well as other issues such as the provision of chaplains to the armed forces.[20]

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[18] Unless otherwise indicated, this narrative is based on personal experience. For an analysis of the People to People Peace and Reconciliation process by Maryknoll's Center for Mission Research and Study see Julia Aker Duany. "People-to-People Peacemaking: A Local Solution to Local Problems." *Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking among Christian Communities.* Eds. Mary Ann Cejka and Thomas Bamat. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003, 196-225.

[19] The original split was between SPLA mainstream and SPLA-Nasir. The reasons for the split included a power struggle between individuals; ethnicity; a poor human rights record and lack of democracy within the movement; and disagreement over whether the main aim of the liberation struggle was independence for South Sudan or a new, democratic, secular dispensation for the whole of a united Sudan.

[20] Some would argue that the church does not need to be "mandated" to do this, as it already has its own mandate from God. Nevertheless, it is useful to have the clear go-ahead from the de facto authority on the ground.

At that time the ecumenical body in the liberated parts of South Sudan was the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC). (Recall that the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) no longer had access to these areas, as it was impossible to cross the front lines.) The two bodies worked closely together at a strategic level, meeting occasionally outside the country for coordination, but on a practical day to day level each worked independently within their own territory. Unusually, the Catholic Church was a founding member (and full member) of both bodies. After much deliberation, NSCC decided that since it had failed to bring together the two principles, Dr John and Dr Riek, it would start at the other extreme, from the grassroots. Consequently, in June 1998, a meeting was held in Lokichoggio, northern Kenya, of influential chiefs and elders from the two communities, the Dinka and Nuer from the west bank of the Nile, along with church leaders from the area.[21] This was the first time in almost ten years that they had been able to meet together, and was a first step in building trust, which was to become one of the key elements of the People to People Peace Process (PPP). They did this through telling their stories, the second key element.

At the Lokichoggio Chiefs Peace Meeting, "the leaders began to recall how they and their ancestors had historically dealt with conflicts and restored peace".[22] Thus emerged the third key element: the use of traditional peacebuilding techniques. The fourth element followed quickly: "We are capable of making reconciliation even if Garang and Riek are not present. Don't blame them – we are capable of making peace. We are responsible". This reflects the principle that community is the primary actor in peacebuilding. It must take responsibility; it must be ready and willing to make peace. At one point the elderly Episcopal (Anglican) Bishop Nathaniel Garang, a co-founder of NSCC, held a heavy wooden chair above his head, clearly suffering from the effort to do so, and cried, "Who will help me with this burden?" A chief rushed forwards to help him, and the fifth element, symbolism and imagery, came into play.[23]

A great deal of practical preparation then ensued. Not only the local people but also the military factions controlling the area had to be mobilised. There were major logistical problems to be resolved. Perhaps the most important, and emotionally powerful, were the exchange visits

[21] Both communities are also found elsewhere in South Sudan, but the process began on the west bank.

[22] See *The Story of People-to-People Peacemaking in Southern Sudan*, NSCC, October 2002, 50-51.

[23] Ibid.

in which five chiefs and a women's representative from each community, accompanied by church leaders, visited the other community. Again traditional rituals were performed. There was great fear, but also great courage, joy, hospitality and reciprocity. At one point, chiefs from one community offered to act as hostages to guarantee the safety of the others; the offer strengthened the resolve of the others and was graciously declined. "'Ancestors took risks for peace, and so must we; being a chief means being ready to lead, even to die... so let us go in pursuit of peace, this is required of us'... The commitment, and the words and deeds of honour among the chiefs spread rapidly throughout all the communities."[24] People were now convinced that a real peace process was underway.

A site was chosen for the first main peace conference in February-March 1999, a relatively obscure Dinka area called Wunlit. A whole new village of 150 mud and thatch houses, plus a conference hall, had to be built from scratch, boreholes drilled, latrines dug, the dirt road repaired, an airstrip created, and much more. Hundreds of delegates (of whom one third were women) and hundreds more support staff congregated there, a total community of up to 2,000 people, all in the centre of an active war zone, with security guaranteed by the SPLA. It was a community effort.

It is difficult to capture the atmosphere of such a meeting.[25] One of the high spots was the slaughter of a white bull ("Mabior" in the local language). "Mabior is the Bull of Peace that will be sacrificed for reconciliation and peace... Anyone who breaks this commitment to peace will follow the way of Mabior... The elders are making a peace and are taking an oath not to repeat atrocities previously committed. A curse is placed on any who partake of the Mabior sacrifice and later break the oath... It is a very serious curse; it is a curse of death."[26]

Most of the meeting was taken up with the sixth element, truth. In the Nilotic tradition, peace can only be achieved when everyone knows fully what wrongs were committed. The two communities each have a chance to tell their story, to "vomit out" all the suffering and bitterness. It is a painful time for all. There is also an opportunity for rebuttal, but often there is no rebuttal. Both sides acknowledge the truth of the accusations, but also recognise that they have both suffered in a similar

[24] Ibid, 55.
[25] See *The Story of People-to-People Peacemaking in Southern Sudan,* 59-61 for a credible attempt to do so.
[26] Ibid., 60.

way at the hands of the other. This leads to agreements including practical actions for peace, followed by the signing of a covenant. Finally, the peace has to be taken home and acted upon. Peace committees were formed to follow up, and to date there has been no major breach of the peace accord on the west bank.

The process then moved to the east bank. Meetings were held in Waat (October 1999) and Liliir (May 2000). The situation on the east bank was complicated by various factors, including the number of different ethnic groups involved and various political considerations, so there was not such a clear-cut resolution as in Wunlit. Nevertheless, progress was made. As is often the case, peacebuilding in South Sudan is not based on one-off peace conferences which are a "success" or otherwise, but on a long process which has its ups and downs but constantly chips away at the conflict.

By November 2000 it was time to take stock and evaluate the process. A meeting called "Strategic Linkages" was held in the small village of Wulu, on the west bank, bringing together representatives from all the other conferences. Their basic message was: "We have made peace, but it is our sons who continue to encourage conflict" (referring of course to Dr John and Dr Riek). It highlighted a dynamic mentioned earlier and of which the church had always been aware, that while ethnic conflict often has its own roots, it is manipulated and exacerbated by political and military interests. This led to "Strategic Linkages 2," held in the Kenyan city of Kisumu in June 2001, bringing together traditional leaders, elders and women from the grassroots with civil society, politicians, intellectuals, diaspora and representatives of the various factions of the liberation movements. The failure of the SPLM to fully endorse the conference made church leaders aware of a final important element of the process: empowerment. They had originally set out to make peace, not to empower people, but the latter was an inevitable result of the process. SPLM may have felt challenged by this dynamic, which was not what they had expected when giving the church a mandate to bring peace and reconciliation. Nevertheless, a number of important SPLM figures attended "unofficially." The clear message from the conference to both Dr John and Dr Riek was "We fully support the liberation struggle and Dr John's leadership of it, but it is unacceptable that you continue the conflict between yourselves and your factions; you must unite". While it is impossible to know exactly what caused the two "doctors" to reconcile soon afterwards, the Kisumu conference was clearly a major factor.

The reunion of the two main factions significantly reduced the suffering of the people on the ground and hastened the end of the civil

war. Negotiations sponsored by the African regional grouping IGAD, resulted in the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), ultimately leading to the referendum in January 2011 and independence for South Sudan in July 2011. The IGAD negotiations were strictly between the two warring parties, but the church "shadowed" them with a series of three meetings in Entebbe, Uganda, bringing together individuals, parties, militia, movements and others from both north and south Sudan, and thus influenced the IGAD process from the sidelines.

Peace from the Roots in Jonglei State

Fast forward a few years to independent South Sudan, and to the largest and probably least developed of its ten states, Jonglei. There has always been cattle raiding between the six pastoralist communities (Dinka, Nuer, Murle, Anuak, Kajipo and Jie), but since about 2009 it had escalated to a new level of brutality, with women, children and the elderly being killed and mutilated, and villages and administrative centres burned. The death toll ran into thousands. Many factors contribute to this escalation: the trauma of decades of war, made worse by the legacy of the split in the SPLA; the failure to adapt to the new situation of peace; weak governance and policing; lack of development coupled with a perception of unequal development across the state; an abundance of modern weapons; political interests in the run-up to the 2010 elections; and efforts from Khartoum to destabilise the new nation of South Sudan using the tried and tested "divide and rule" methods mentioned earlier. A botched attempt at disarmament of civilians in 2006 only led to more violence and distrust.

The Sudan Council of Churches (which had merged with NSCC since the end of the war) began to address the issue in 2011, following some earlier personal efforts by Episcopal (Anglican) Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul, himself a native of Jonglei State. An SCC peace committee was formed under the chairmanship of the archbishop, and a series of fact-finding missions and consultations began across the state. At this point the main conflict appeared to be between the Lou section of the Nuer and the Murle, so peace between these two communities was the necessary first step, to be followed by a broader process to include other communities. A limited cease-fire was negotiated and simultaneous conferences were held in Waat for the Nuer and Pibor for the Murle. While the results of the conferences appeared to bode well for a joint conference scheduled to be held in December 2011, and while facilitators from both communities were trained together by the church, the

situation on the ground deteriorated rapidly. Small-scale attacks had continued despite the cease-fire, some local politicians may have had reservations about the peace process, and chiefs were finding it difficult to hold back their armed youth. The Lou Nuer mobilised a force of around 6,000 heavily armed and well organised youth and began moving against the Murle. The archbishop and other church leaders made several visits to both areas to try to calm the situation but eventually accepted the inevitable and withdrew, calling on the government and the UN peacekeeping force (UNMISS) to provide security. Fighting ensued over Christmas and New Year and several hundred people were killed. The response of the SPLA and UNMISS was probably too little too late, but nevertheless, the conflict would have been worse without their efforts.

Assessing the situation in January 2012, the SCC concluded that in this case it could not bring about peace without the assistance of the government. There is no military solution to conflict, but sometimes the military are needed to provide a window of opportunity for peace by creating a buffer zone and providing a level of protection and deterrence. SCC called for a two-track peace process, with the government taking responsibility for Track 1, the higher level process, and the church concentrating on Track 2, the grassroots process.

The government responded by committing itself to a new comprehensive disarmament process in Jonglei State, and by setting up a Presidential Committee for Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance in Jonglei State under the chairmanship of the archbishop. Meanwhile, SCC developed its own "Peace from the Roots" grassroots process. Teams from the presidential committee were sent to the four "greater" areas of Jonglei State for fact-finding and mobilisation, followed by four simultaneous conferences, one in each area.[27] The preliminary work done by SCC in 2011 proved invaluable here. Finally, there was a large conference in Bor, the state capital, in May 2012. A major part of it was allowing delegates to tell their stories. Most of the resolutions and recommendations had already emerged in earlier conferences. An agreement was signed by the paramount chiefs of the six communities in the presence of President Salva Kiir Mayardiit. Members of the committee then travelled to all eleven counties and all six communities to disseminate the peace agreement.

Many observers and many within the church were very sceptical of the disarmament process, but in fact it went remarkably well. People on

[27] The four areas are Greater Akobo (Nuer, Anuak), Greater Bor (Dinka), Greater Fangak (Dinka, Nuer), and Greater Pibor (Murle, Jie, Kajipo, Anuak).

the ground welcomed it but insisted that it must be comprehensive and on-going. Chief after chief stood up and told the commanding general, who attended the entire peace conference, "If you see one of my youth with a gun and he refuses to hand it over, shoot him!" Disarmament is seen as a symbolic turning point, with communities willing to waive compensation for events that took place before disarmament, but insisting that there will be no such waiver for crimes committed after. This is a new chapter. The SPLA's promise to remain in Jonglei State with 15,000 troops for two years also encouraged the people. Some attacks have still occurred, but the people see the army trying to protect them, and pursuing attackers to retrieve stolen cattle, and this gives them confidence.

Meanwhile the SCC has identified and trained grassroots peace mobilisers from each of the communities. They have returned to their homes to spread the message of peace, monitor events on the ground, provide early warning of potential problems, network with each other, and identify new mobilisers for training later. They have gained access to the armed cattle camp youth, who are key protagonists in any conflict. Later these youth will be taken for an exposure visit to Holy Trinity Peace Village, Kuron, in neighbouring Eastern Equatoria State.[28]

The peace village is the brainchild of retired Catholic Bishop Paride Taban, an iconic figure in South Sudan, a co-founder of NSCC, whose personal history of struggle, suffering and leadership has made him a champion of peace and reconciliation. He created a peace village in the midst of warring tribes, not dissimilar to the warring communities in Jonglei State, offering them a model of living together in peace and harmony and demonstrating how development can come if there is peace. Kuron now has a school, a clinic, an agricultural project, a youth centre, a guinea worm eradication project, a bridge across the seasonal river, an internet cafe and more.

The Jonglei peace process is still a work in progress, and there are many threats to it. Young men, particularly from the Murle community, are still conducting guerilla-style raids, although there seems to be a growing recognition amongst others that you cannot blame a whole community for the actions of a small number of "criminals." All communities identified the lack of development, including roads as well as schools, clinics, water and food security, as a major factor in the conflict, and the government and the aid community must provide a peace

[28] <http://www.kuronvillage.net/>.

dividend quickly. But there are also many positive signs: the desire for peace, the identification and return of abducted women and children, the on-going disarmament and the provision of security by government forces, and the presence and actions of the SCC peace mobilisers on the ground, coordinated by a committee of church leaders not in the distant national capital in Juba but in the state capital, Bor. At a follow-up workshop for Church leaders held in Bor in July 2012, the overwhelming feeling was that, while there were still challenges, there was now peace: "It is not as it was before".

Comparisons

The People to People Peace Process has been held up as a model of grassroots peace-making. Many secular NGOs in South Sudan have tried to copy it, usually without much success. To begin with, they lack the credibility and moral authority of the church. In addition, they usually focus on the highly-visible conferences, forgetting all the years of patient preparation that must take place before any major conferences are held, and they neglect the key elements which under-pinned the People to People process: the need to foster trust; telling of stories; the use of traditional reconciliation methods; acknowledgment that the community is the primary actor and must be ready to take responsibility for making peace; the importance of symbolism and imagery; a commitment to truth; a peace agreement that has practical measures for implementation and follow-up; and empowerment. Perhaps "patient preparation" should be underscored as well. It must also be recognised that a conference of several hundred people who need to tell their stories and acknowledge the "truth" that is accepted by both sides cannot be tightly time-tabled, finished and agreed within three days. These conferences must be allowed to continue as long as is necessary, even for many days.

Conversely, the church's entry into the Jonglei conflict was not under ideal circumstances. It was initially a "fire-fighting" intervention, an urgent attempt to halt on-going conflict and prevent the imminent outbreak of further violence. It developed into a process which was inextricably linked to higher-level government processes, including disarmament and provision of security. Nevertheless, the church tried to inject many of the key elements into the process: building trust; telling stories; insisting that the community is the primary actor, and listening to them; a commitment to truth; a workable agreement; and, to some extent, empowerment in helping the community to engage with their government and political leaders. Through Peace from the

Roots, the church is also ensuring that the process maintains its grassroots credentials.

There is talk of founding a peace village within Jonglei State. The peace village model does not depend on a peace process as such (although it uses some of the same elements), but rather brings peace mainly by the simple witness of peace-minded people living together in a community which also offers basic services and the prospect of development. It will be interesting to see whether a peace village can flourish through techniques and models which can be learned from other peace villages, or whether the presence of a wise and holy man of peace such as Bishop Paride is an essential ingredient.

International Advocacy for Peace

The church also played a major role in bringing Sudan's "forgotten war" to the attention of the international community and in building international support for the rights of the South Sudanese to political self-determination. In the early 1990s there were rumblings from the international ecumenical community that the Sudanese Church should "get its act together" on international advocacy for peace. Bishop Paride Taban is said to have responded, "Well, if you get your act together, maybe we can get ours together". From this humble beginning arose the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF), a network bringing together the Sudanese Church with its international ecumenical partners to do advocacy for peace, under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, with the Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches at its heart. As with the two councils of churches, the Catholic Church was a full and founder member and played a very active role.

As with many initiatives in Sudan, it took several years for SEF to find its feet. From an early stage it created a Sudan Focal Point based in Europe, acting as a channel for information and analysis coming out of Sudan at a time when security concerns made it impossible for that task to be undertaken in country.[29] In Nairobi a Sudan Working Group was formed under SEF, which was replaced by another Sudan Focal Point for Africa in 1999.[30] While it remained under the auspices of WCC,

[29] The Sudan Focal Point was based first in Denmark, then with a change of staff from 1997 in Germany.

[30] This was based first in Kenya, then from 2001 in South Africa. From 2005 with a change of staff it returned to Kenya for about a year, when the position fell vacant and has never been filled again.

around the turn of the millennium management shifted from WCC to a Core Group made up of Sudanese and international organisations.

SEF played a major role in bringing the situation in Sudan to the attention of the international community, but it was not until 1999 that things really began to gel. Three advocacy priorities were identified – the aerial bombing of civilians, oil exploitation, and the right of self-determination for the people of South Sudan and other marginalized areas– and all stakeholders committed themselves to working on these issues.

For some time South Sudanese had been accusing the Government of Sudan of deliberately bombing civilians. The international community generally accepted Khartoum's explanation, that any civilians killed were collateral damage during the bombing of legitimate military targets. SEF began collecting information from grassroots sources all over South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, and for several years produced highly detailed and highly credible reports which demonstrated that Khartoum was systematically bombing civilians in areas which had no conceivable military targets. In addition, SEF set up the European Coalition on Oil in Sudan (ECOS) in Europe to conduct research and campaign on oil-related issues. Oil exploitation was exacerbating the war and leading to massive human rights abuses, and the church called for a complete halt until there was a peace agreement. The Canadian church was instrumental in forcing the Talisman oil company to leave Sudan, and the South African church helped to prevent the parastatal oil exploration and production company, Soekor, from entering. Finally, at an SEF assembly in London in 2002 the SEF reaffirmed its commitment to the right of self-determination and produced an influential paper entitled "Let my people choose". Self-determination has always been dear to the hearts of South Sudanese, but international diplomats were convinced that it would never be agreed; indeed many of them were against it. Only a few months later, the right of self-determination appeared as a central pillar of the Machakos Protocol, signed by the Government of Sudan and the SPLM.[31] The SEF also played an important role in the later stages of the People to People Peace Process, particularly the Strategic Linkages conferences and the Entebbe meetings, which had an influence on the CPA.

In 2005 peace came, and this marked the beginning of the decline of SEF. There were three main factors. First, while still maintaining an ecumenical spirit, each Sudanese church began to concentrate on

[31] The right to self-determination was later enshrined in the CPA.

reconstruction (in many cases, *construction*) and had less energy to devote to ecumenical endeavours. Second, SCC and NSCC became embroiled in a long and at times controversial process of merging, which limited their effectiveness. Third, a split developed between the Sudanese Church and the international partners. At that time the conflict in Darfur was attracting a great deal of international attention and money. The international ecumenical partners, many of whom were involved in large humanitarian projects in Darfur, felt that it should be their priority. The Sudanese church, while wishing to help their brothers and sisters in Darfur, nevertheless maintained that the full implementation of the CPA was the key to peace for the whole country and thus this was the priority for advocacy.[32] SEF produced a number of fudged resolutions agreeing to do advocacy for *all* the conflicts in Sudan, but in practice the international partners concentrated on Darfur while the Sudanese Church concentrated on the CPA. Unity of purpose was lost, and the SEF gradually became irrelevant. At one point there were serious proposals that SEF should simply declare that it had achieved its purpose and close down with a celebration, but there appeared to be too much inertia for such a radical move, so it dragged tiredly on.

In 2010 a new dynamic began. Recognising that while the SEF still existed on paper it was actually doing nothing, a number of stakeholders from the Sudanese church and the ecumenical partners got together and organised a high-profile delegation to the USA, led by Episcopal Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul and including two Catholic bishops, Bishop Daniel Adwok and Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban. The delegation met the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, and senior officials in Washington and New York, and played a role in convincing the international community that the referendum on South Sudanese secession had to take place on time in January 2011. The archbishop and a number of other church leaders also went to European capitals in 2010, while three Catholic bishops made an earlier visit to the United States. In 2012 there was another initiative in which the two archbishops in Juba issued a joint message on the first anniversary of the independence of South Sudan, and a loose coalition of ecumenical and secular agencies coordinated its dissemination in the USA, Europe, South Sudan and South Africa.

The Sudan Ecumenical Forum was a model for effective ecumenical action for international advocacy, and achieved a great deal during its "golden years" from 1999 to 2005. Its decline is perhaps not unexpected;

[32] History was to prove them correct.

many initiatives have a natural life span and it can be a mistake to try to prolong them beyond that. But international ecumenical advocacy finds new ways to flourish, and new initiatives constantly spring up, in the end better coordinated by an ad hoc "coalition of the willing" than a network that has become ossified. Christian Aid, CAFOD, CRS, IKV Pax Christi, South Africa's Denis Hurley Peace Institute and others have been at the forefront of this new dynamic, along with the Catholic and Episcopal (Anglican) leadership in South Sudan.

The People to People Peace Process, Peace from the Roots, and the work of the SEF are just three snapshots of the extensive peacebuilding work of the church in South Sudan. Many church-based actors are involved in multiple initiatives. In March 2009, in conjunction with the Africa Justice and Peace Working Group, CRS launched a 4 million dollar strategic peacebuilding initiative, the largest and most comprehensive peacebuilding program in the organization's history.[33] The New Sudan Peace Initiative (NSPI) included projects aimed at building community capacity through workshops in conflict mediation and conflict resolution, using media outlets for voter education leading up to the referendum and through other means developing capacity for responsible citizenship; cultivating diocesan resources for civic education and supporting the local peace and justice offices, funding peacebuilding training on various levels; supporting and facilitating high level negotiations between key local, national and international leaders and mobilizing international advocacy. CRS provided and continues to provide multiple resources for the peace processes earlier described. Other groups such as Solidarity for South Sudan (in partnership with CRS and the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference) work in five different communities offering training for teachers and health care workers, agricultural training in community-based farming methods and pastoral support for trauma healing and reconciliation.[34] It would be impossible in one essay to capture all the ways that the church in South Sudan enacts CST in the service of a sustainable and just peace. But even in these brief narratives of peacebuilding, we can glimpse the potential of religious leaders working with the people on multiple levels, from the top down and the ground up, creating "sacred spaces"

[33] <http://crs.org/sudan/push-for-peace/>.

[34] Solidarity with South Sudan is a collaborative venture involving 200 religious communities of men and women. It was initiated in 2005 at the request of the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference for help in addressing the extensive educational, health-related and pastoral needs of the South Sudanese people. See *White Paper on Solidarity with South Sudan* (July 2012) a <http://www.solidarityssudan.org/>.

for the people to tell their stories of suffering and injustice and to turn the longing for peace into lived practices of reconciliation.

Peacebuilding, Nation Building

In a statement issued in September, 2011, the South Sudanese Catholic Bishops acknowledged that the challenge now is nation-building. Urging the people to accept responsibility for becoming "one nation from every tribe, tongue and people," and to participate fully as citizens, the Bishops recommitted the Church to "play[ing] a proactive and prophetic role in public life, insisting on human rights and responsibilities, and the dignity of the individual, as expressed in the gospel values of Catholic Social Teaching."[35] Although positive, the Bishops' message pointed to some of the serious challenges facing the new nation: the continued violence in South Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile in neighbouring Sudan; the massive development and infrastructure needs in South Sudan and essential institutional reforms; simmering ethnic tensions, fueled in part by the perception of exclusionary government hiring and consultation practices along ethnic lines; the absence of a national identity; and on-going disputes with Sudan over oil and the division of the national debt, the demarcation of national boundaries, and the status of Abyei. To those challenges we could add the perception of widespread corruption and nepotism at the government level; increasing resentment and xenophobia toward East Africans (particularly Kenyans) in South Sudan; and a military that is still largely "a patchwork of militias."[36]

The church has much to bring to the task of nation building. The church in South Sudan continues to work through its pastoral, educational and aid efforts to heal trauma, to urge nonviolent resolution of outstanding disputes, and to encourage a sense of national unity regardless of ethnicity or religious belief. In a series of workshops for church and government leaders, David Hollenbach, University Chair in Human Rights and International Development at Boston College, used the principles of Catholic social thought to suggest how the Catholic vision of peace and justice might contribute to the building of a new

[35] Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Statement Addressed to the People of South Sudan,* September 8, 2011.

[36] See Jort Hemmer. "South Sudan's Emergency State." Report of the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, September 2012; Jok Madut Jok. "Diversity, Unity, and Nation Building in South Sudan." Special Report 287, United States Institute of Peace (October 2011).

nation. He argued, for example, that the church should continue its efforts to provide effective civic education to help South Sudanese develop their capacities for responsible citizenship; that citizens should be encouraged to hold the government accountable to use power and resources for the common good; that new political and legal institutions must respect cultural, ethnic and religious diversity and be built on a foundation of inclusion and respect for individual and community rights; that the government should be held accountable for the just distribution of land and appropriate agreements over foreign purchases of land, as well as just use of revenues from oil and other natural resources. In all these ways, the church can help in shaping a new society based on the principles of justice, participation, accountability, and respect for human dignity and diversity.

But the church also faces significant challenges as it renegotiates its role in an independent South Sudan. As Ashworth argued elsewhere, it is likely that the church will become more critical of the government, which is apt to result in tensions.[37] Indeed, a joint statement issued by the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Bishop of Juba, Paulino Lukudu Loro, and the Archbishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan and Bishop of Juba, Daniel Deng Bul, in July of 2012 sharply criticized the culture of corruption in high ranking officials. Experience of other post-colonial nations in Africa suggests that the church also runs the risk of being marginalized when it is no longer the only functioning civic institution or credible authority. There is some hint of this danger in Loro and Bul's criticism that "[t]he review process for the production of a new Permanent Constitution has not been as inclusive as expected, and the Church has not been adequately represented."[38] It will be crucial for the church to determine how to use its moral authority and prophetic presence most constructively for the long run. This includes not only determining how the church-state relationship will be institutionalized, but whether in the end the new nation and the people of South Sudan will be better served by a "watchdog" or a "guide dog."[39]

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[37] Jeffrey, 32.

[38] Paulino Lukudu Loro and Daniel Deng Bul, "Advisory Message to the Citizens of South Sudan During the First Independence Celebrations", July 9, 2012.

[39] Ashworth notes "The church can either be a watchdog or a guide dog. A watchdog barks every time it sees something wrong, while a guide dog tries to lead you in the right direction. A lot of people in the church say they want it to be a guide dog." In Jeffrey, 32.