

BUILDING THE REIGN OF GOD IN SOUTH SUDAN

by Cecilia Nya, SHCJ

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Prelude

“...incarnation does not refer simply to the birth of Jesus, but to the whole event of the Word of God becoming flesh, to every aspect of Jesus’s material and bodily existence, and to his whole life and ministry that culminates in his death and resurrection.”

From *Deep Incarnation* by Denis Edwards, Orbis Books, 2019, p. xvii

“The core of the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth is NOT himself nor the establishment of a church; it is the reign or kingdom of God, which is described by Catholic theologian Monika Hellwig as a kingdom of right relationships. Her description affirms that human endeavor, our efforts to bring about right relationships, is a vital and essential part of a process of the radical re-ordering in our world – a reordering of relationships, of the distribution of material goods, of the availability of opportunity.... The reign of God ... will not come about without human effort. **In other words, we are in the process of coming to the fullness of the third moment of Incarnation: the reign of God.** We are partners with God in the building of the kingdom ... remember: we are made in the image of God, and we are invited to participate in God’s project that extends from creation until the kingdom of right relationships is fully realized.”

From *Incarnation as Worldview*, a class on Incarnation for SHCJ novices, tertians and silver jubilarians presented by Tobie Tondi, SHCJ, 2017-2023

Building the reign of God in South Sudan: a reflection on the ecumenical visit of Pope Francis, February 3-5, 2023 by Cecilia Nya, SHCJ, volunteer at Solidarity with South Sudan, based at the Good Shepherd Peace Center in Kit, South Sudan

South Sudan is the world’s youngest country. It gained its independence only in 2011. Despite its oil wealth and fertile land, the country suffers from a low GDP and is rated to be **one of the poorest countries in the world.** Since 2013, the young country has been ravaged by political and ethnic conflicts, leaving its people facing one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the region that rarely makes headlines. As a result of these constant politically and ethnically motivated conflicts, thousands of South Sudanese today live as refugees in IDP camps within the country as well as in the neighbouring countries.

It is important to note that Christianity is the country’s major religion. with over 61% of the population affiliated with the Catholic, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches respectively.

At the **Good Shepherd Peace Centre in Kit**, we run a hospitality centre where different groups of people come to hold various programs – e.g. trauma healing, formators’ forum, assemblies, retreats, training sessions for staff -- all within a peaceful environment such that GSPC exists to offer.

.... At the RSASS (Religious Superiors’ Association of South Sudan) Assembly that also took place here, last year, 2022, I was deeply struck by how many of these courageous men and women religious, working mostly with people at the grassroots, expressed the feeling of helplessness and indeed almost hopelessness over any possibility of change in the government and in lives of the people, despite their hard work. **Regularly, people are being killed, maimed, raped, made homeless** as they move around the country to dodge the ever-shifting mosaic of violence, with the spirit of vengeance deeply embedded within.



.... In the light of the above, the historic visit of Pope Francis, joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace Dr Justin Welby and the Presbyterian Head of the Church of Scotland, the Rt. Rev. Dr Iain Greenshields, is a strong statement to this young country that Christians worldwide stand solidly with them in their struggles against political or ethnic conflicts, corruption, injustices of all kinds, violence, particularly violence against women and the untold suffering many face having to live as

refugees, far away from their farmlands, far away from their kith and kin.

.... as the three visitors arrived at the jam-packed stadium, two Biblical story scenes that came to mind were the Visitation of Elizabeth by Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Just as the child leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's greetings, so was there a thunderous and joyful outburst of songs of welcome, interspersed with high-pitched ululations, dancing and waving of the Vatican flag and their national flag. The visit had brought the country 'A Present of PRESENCE, a Presence that brings renewed HOPE and BELIEF in the never-ending Love, Care, Faithfulness and Companionship and Compassion of God, the Father of us all.'

.... The epoch-making visit was also a clear learning for us all that conflicts, gun battles and show of force can never restore absolute peace among any warring groups. **Only Non- Violence is the Supreme law of life!** This takes courage, strength to forgive, humility, obedience and great maturity, and done in the spirit of justice and with a renewed sense of solidarity and care for one another.



Cecilia Nya, SHCJ, in an interview with Association for Catholic Information in Africa (ACI)

CLICK <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZiCsl8sbb0> – to view Cecilia's interview with ACI Africa, February 10, 2023