

South Sudan and Rwanda

The Sudan has been much in the news this week with the mass demonstrations against its President Omar al-Bashir who has been in power for the nearly thirty years. He has now been ousted by the military and arrested.

However, there has been little or nothing about the continuing problems in its neighbour South Sudan. South Sudan gained its independence from the Sudan in 2011 is the most recent internationally recognised country in the world. However, throughout its eight year existence it has been in a state of civil war.

This week a spiritual retreat was held in the Vatican led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Francis. This was proposed by the Archbishop and attended by both political leaders, including the President and four of the five Vice-Presidents, and by religious leaders, including the Anglican and Roman Catholic Archbishops. The retreat was described by a Vatican spokesman as a “propitious occasion for reflection and prayer, as well as an occasion for encounter and reconciliation, in a spirit of respect and trust, to those who in this moment have the mission and the responsibility to work for a future of peace and prosperity for the South Sudanese people.”

What the outcome will be of course remains to be seen. But this is an important step, a high-level attempt at dialogue and reconciliation.

This week also marks the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide which took place during the civil war in that country between 7th April and 15th July 1994. During this time an estimated half a million to a million Rwandans were killed.

On Wednesday the Archbishop of Canterbury issued the following statement:

“In this season of Lent, as we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Genocide, we join in prayer with the people of Rwanda, walking again the way of the cross, in remembrance.

The genocide in Rwanda witnesses to the continuing global threat of identity-based hostility and violence. There are no grounds for complacency. As we work together to preserve the memory of all those who died, so we are also called to live in peace, to work together for reconciliation and to uphold our common humanity.

Today, we stand with the people of Rwanda, at the foot of the cross, and we see God’s reconciling love in action; sustaining us with the hope of the resurrection and calling us to support healing and overcome fear.”

Very appropriate words as we approach Holy Week. In both countries much work of reconciliation remains to be done, but with God’s help we hope that will in time be achieved.

Kingsley Boulton
12th April 2019