

# WARNINGS FROM RWANDAN CHURCHES

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*Political Identity Encourages Imitation, Extinguishes Imagination,  
and Destroys Sanctuary—Oral Histories from Adventist Survivors*

BY CARMEN LAU

Unlike the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide featured systemic violent imitation, mostly occurring in churches and public spaces. Some say it was the fastest, most efficient genocide with an estimated 800,000 people killed in ninety days, but it had been planned for years, with a sustained propaganda message that Christian churches did little to counteract. In Rwanda, a Christian nation, religion did not create “ties that bind.” Instead, Christians killed other Christians. In 1994, Rwanda was 90% Christian, with 62% of the country identified as Catholic, 18% Protestant, and 8.6% Seventh-day Adventist.<sup>1</sup> The literature states that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa belonged to all of these Christian groups. Although in late 1994, J. J. Nortey, president of the African Indian Ocean Division of Adven-

tists, asserted that 90–95% of the Adventists in Rwanda had been Hutu.<sup>2</sup>

German and Belgian colonial powers had effectively destroyed stable societal function in Rwanda, where three groups had lived relatively peacefully for hundreds of years. Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa had spoken the same language, honored the same religion, and intermarried.

Hutu, known to be farmers, were shorter with darker skin and formed the majority group of about 80%. Taller and lighter skinned, Tutsi, who were traditionally pastoralists, made up approximately 19% of the population. Twa, featuring a pygmoid body habitus, did not play a prominent role in recent Rwandan conflict. Ethnicity had fluid boundaries, with some scholars noting that wealth impacted the

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ethnic group to which people would identify. My research has shown that the institutional church—Catholic, Protestant, and Adventist—seemed to adopt the opinion on ethnicity that was held by those in governmental power.<sup>3</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe fully the political situation. With humility, I offer a brief summary of the church's interactions in the context of ethnic groups in Rwanda. References to the "church" mainly refer to the Catholic Church, but all Christian groups seemed to act in tandem in the context of church/state/ethnic relationships.

Under the leadership of Bishop Classe, the Morthan Law of 1926 officially granted privilege to Tutsi, setting the stage for issuance of identity cards that would categorize people by ethnicity. In the tumultuous 1950's as colonialism waned on the African continent, Tutsi were concerned about losing power. A new class of Hutu elites, educated in Catholic seminaries, gave voice to grievances and critiqued Tutsi-dominated leadership. Liberation Theology influenced Hutu seminarians who wrote the Bahuto Manifesto. After initially favoring Tutsi, the church shifted in the era of the Hutu Revolution to favor Hutu. This kept Rwanda/Burundi in a state of racialized dichotomy suitable for colonial control. Democratic majority ideology ignored the civil rights of the previously privileged Tutsi. Religion remained wedded to political power.

After being one country until 1960, Rwanda/Burundi was divided so that Burundi featured a situation of ethnic societal interaction that was a mirror image of what happened in Rwanda. In Rwanda, Hutus, in control after 1960, enacted ethnic purges against Tutsi. In Burundi, Tutsi were in control in the mid-twentieth century and orchestrated violence against Hutu. The situation produced thousands of displaced people who sought refuge.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1960s, most Tutsi had left Rwanda, living in surrounding countries. Through decades of societal turmoil, people could count on sanctuaries to provide safety.

## Framing

Living in Alabama with a long-standing interest in how Christians have had the capacity to be blind to the evil at hand, I collected stories from Adventist genocide survivors. In particular, I wanted to hear what they remembered being said in the churches. There are varied reasons that explain why people did, and did not, choose to participate in violence in Rwanda. My thesis assumed that those who participated used some sort of rationale, or deep narrative, to give support for the decision. Stories heard in Rwandan churches can be seen as influencing society in both directions: 1) top down, in light of the fact that powerful entities created narratives, and 2) bottom

up, when one considers that stories add justification or synergy to individual choices.

Stories are heard in a particular context. Newbury sees rural grievances as the most powerful piece of the context that fed bouts of violence in Rwanda in the 1959 Hutu uprising, and again in 1990 when violence escalated.<sup>5</sup> When I decided to study Rwanda, I had a sense that people in my context, one of American Adventism, could learn from Rwandans. I believed

hearing genocide survivors' memories about what was said in churches would allow a person to reflect on what is being said in one's own culture. Exiled Russian poet Joseph Brodsky said, "You think evil is going to come into your houses wearing big black boots? It doesn't come like that. Look at the language. It begins in the language."

Cultures have a repertoire of frames on which to create meaning, values, and appraisals. Certain words or phrases become triggers to stimulate emotions of fear, anger, and resentment. Emotions are contagious, or imitative, spreading through groups of people and with potential to create mobs who act irrationally toward an "out group," or those with a different identity.<sup>6</sup> The effect can be diagrammed this way:

**Frames -> meanings/appraisals -> emotions & social psychological forces -> actions/behaviours**

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Framing can lead to the three steps necessary for genocide:

- 1) Deepened demarcation of groups and broadening divisions.
- 2) Generation of fear, anger, contempt, resentment, and hate.
- 3) Rationalization of acts in an ends/means argument, for self-defense or a grand cause.

The narrative of Tutsi as usurpers, in place since 1960, deepened and became more real in 1990 with the propaganda newspaper, *Kangura*, which adopted biblical themes to propagate violence. Famously, the Hutu Ten Commandments urged zero tolerance for the notion that a Tutsi could have any redeeming attribute. Also, RTLM, known as “killer’s radio,” used jingles and a call-in talk radio format to normalize violent ideology.<sup>7</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of machetes and other weapons had been purchased and stored throughout the country in late 1993 and early 1994. Young people were indoctrinated and energized in a militia, *interahamwe*. Complicated by history, the genocide occurred because extremists adopted a scarcity-based, fearful narrative that labeled Tutsi as wily, impure usurpers who must be removed to purify the country for democracy. If moderates had been in a majority, it would not have happened. The extreme violence in April 1994 was triggered by a double assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, both of whom were Hutu.<sup>8</sup>

Like all Christian groups, Adventists featured both heroes and villains. Carl Wilkens, the only American who stayed during the three-month genocidal period, was employed by Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, an Adventist ad-

ministrator in Mugonero, became the first pastor to be convicted of genocide at the United Nations Tribunal in 2004. Seven Adventist pastors were among the Tutsi who sought refuge in the Mugonero Church and complex, and these pastors became leaders for the flock of people who had sought sanctuary. Initially, it had been calm, with the Tutsi pastors collecting money for the police who guarded them. Toward evening on Friday night, April 15, the police guards left, saying, “Tomorrow you will be killed.” Thus, the title for Gourevitch’s book, “We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapter Two of the book gives a detailed description of the Mugonero incident. Those Tutsi pastors, on Friday night, wrote three letters, one of which was to the Adventist president, Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, with a reference to the Bible story of Queen Esther’s advocacy for Israel, saying, “Your intervention will be highly appreciated, the same as the Jews were saved by Esther.” The chilling response from the church leader was, “You must be eliminated. God no longer wants you.”

With no set plan to find participants, my quest to understand the context started when I did favors for friends of friends by delivering supplies and money to people in Rwanda. Then, connections and reciprocity led me to find fourteen Adventists who met demographic guidelines and were willing to speak on the topic of what was said in churches before the genocide. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the promise of anonymity. However, I spoke to others who did not meet the demographic guidelines, and for this paper, I draw from the words of all Rwandan Adventists to whom I spoke.





Photo by maxime niyomwungeri on Unsplash

## Story from the Daughter of a Tutsi Pastor Killed at Mugonero

*My Father was an Adventist pastor at Mugonero. When at church school, Tutsi were asked to stand up, and there might be three out of fifty in the class. I was not allowed to continue secondary schools in Adventist schools or public schools. I had to go to DRC for school—this was ten years before [the] genocide. Father had a Hutu friend, also a pastor, who wanted to help me get opportunities in school and the friend was killed for this in a northern province in an area called Ruhengeri. They killed [him] because they said he was a spy. My brother tried to go to school in Gitwe (one of the first Adventist missions) He was #1 in class and was not allowed to go. This same Hutu friend of father advocated for my brother also, and that is part of why this friend was killed.*

*People in churches at that time followed what the government said. The government had slogans, and people in the churches joined in with the same slogans. The government said, “There is some percentage allowed,” and church leaders followed the quotas. That was the story in years before.*

*I left Mugonero for Kigali the day before the massacre. I had a big problem working there as a nurse. I saw that the Tutsi women did not get the same maternity care as the Hutu. I knew that was not right and could not work there any longer.*

*In 1994, it was openly said to kill Tutsi. After worship, Adventists would join the government or political parties that were killing everywhere. Perpetrators justified the killings with the reference that “Israelites also killed their enemies.”*

## Biblical Framework: What Bible Stories are Worthy of Imitation?

Which Bible story do we imitate? Destruction of the Amalekites or Esther saving her people? When I asked one person what texts perpetrators used, he opened his Bible to 1 Samuel 15 which describes the genocide of the Amalekites.

How does one use the Bible to imagine a way of living? How does one decide with which group to identify in scripture? Use of a “holy” book with “holy” language allows people to embrace the zeal of religious fervor when involved in a flurry of imitative violence based on ethnicity.

Eugene Peterson introduces the book of Amos in his biblical paraphrase this way: “Religion is the most dangerous energy source known to humankind. The moment a person (or government or religion or organization) is convinced that God is either ordering or sanctioning a course

or project, anything goes.”<sup>10</sup> As Longman said, “Religious groups can help people accept the unacceptable, and this is what ultimately is necessary for genocide to occur.”<sup>11</sup>

Several Adventist graduate students have added to the discussion. In a master’s thesis for Andrews University, A. Long discussed the problem with teaching a text-based religion to indigenous people. He contended that the idea of contextual understanding of scripture was beyond the general understanding of those in Rwanda. He said that this issue creates difficulty for imagining an identity. His view was that Rwandan spirituality was more social than spiritual, and he pointed to the problems that would come when churches supplanted traditional sources of authority. In a sort of forewarning, he cited examples of Adventists using the Bible to justify a particular course of action without consideration of bigger pieces of the religious faith.<sup>12</sup>

In a dissertation for a DMin at Andrews University, R. Peck, one-time president of the Rwandan Union Mission, wrote about the lack of theological education and pastoral training and called the situation a crisis. This was a long-term problem, as Peck cites a memorandum written by Elder R. E. Watts, division president in 1957, which told leaders in Rwanda not to open any work for at least a year because of the leadership crisis. Peck states, “The poorly trained leaders in Rwanda have been unable to adequately instruct and prepare new adherents from the traditional backgrounds.”<sup>13</sup>

Here is what I heard about the way Adventist perpetrators used scripture:

*God has abandoned the Tutsi and instructed them to be killed in the hands of Hutu.*

I also heard reference to Romans 13 and Daniel 2 as a basis for divine endorsement of governmental order. Thus, Christians in Rwanda were to obey and cooperate with the government, even during the Hutu Revolution when Tutsi were purged from Rwanda, and during the

genocide. Church cooperation with governmental ethnic mandates was implemented and imitated.

Yet, there are positive stories about heroes. Several people mentioned Jonah Barambe at Nyamirambo Adventist Church in Kigali, who visited church members as the genocide began and who spoke on the theme from Genesis 1 that “God created one man and there is one human nature. There are no ethnic groups.”

The idea of a common lineage leading back to Genesis 1 was repeatedly cited as a rationale, frame, or story that could have guided others not to imitate the violent words and actions of the dominant culture. While apparently not said in churches, some people said they heard this in small groups or it was something they held in their own hearts.

*God created man and we are one tribe.*

A few referred to the life of Jesus as the part of the Bible that should be imitated:

*Jesus spoke with [the] Samaritan woman, and that shows ethnicity does not matter.*

### **Story from a Man Whose Entire Family Was Killed at Mugonero Church**

*I started Adventist school here in Mugonero in 1967. Hutu/Tutsi problem has been since that time.*

I asked, “Could the churches protest this?”

*For the church, it did not complain. For them, no problem. Could not do it. During that time, Tutsi pastor got nice place only if [he] bribed a leader to allow this.*

*When the President’s plane crashed, we were informed the next day just with a warning to stay at home. We did not know what had happened. My cousin said that the President of the Union [Elizaphan Ntakirutimana] called all to come to the hospital for safety and told them the president of [the] country had died. Ever since 1959, we knew we could go to churches for safety and thought Adventists would be protected. We thought we would not face a problem here. It had not happened before. “It’s an Adventist area, it’s protected.”*

*In 1994, I was working with an American medical director*

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*here in Mugonero. I and my family went to that person's home. While there, I could see from afar that my own home was being burned. We stayed with [the] medical director's family for about a week. Then a US Ambassador came and took that American back to go to US. The director said, "You can have my home." So, I stayed there and had been given the keys to the home. People came to the medical director's home and threw grenades. At that point, I decided to send my family to the church for safe keeping (with others), and I would stay at the medical director's home to watch over the property.*

He showed me an injured index finger from the grenade.

*I spent three months in the hills. I was shot in the leg. I lost all of my family.*

*Perpetrators said "God is not with you. You are no longer in the hands of God. You are now the people to die."*

*During the genocide, I went in one church and spent a little time. I saw people sing and set down the hymnals, and some killing happened and then people prayed again. From that church I just ran and jumped and exited. Maybe angels gathered me away.*

I asked, "How has the church helped with peace after genocide?"

*There is not help for peace now in the church. The church just wants people. There was no teaching in the church, it was like a political party.*

I asked, "What message would you want to send to Adventists in the US?"

*It is this: that the church is in a person's heart not in a building. I hear a voice of God but not in church. I hear God outside the church. Even now I go to church and do not hear God. It is not a goal to be saved by God but to express God. Maybe the Adventist members in the US are different. We are not to see God as saving but to try to express God. During Jesus Christ time, the church was love. But in Rwanda before genocide, the church leader can feed his family and*

*forget the people who have nothing to eat or wear.*

*The church and politicians work together.*

### **More Mugonero Stories**

*If I were not a Christian, I would be in prison. I would have killed those who killed my family. Because I know them. I see them in church now. According to what I have learned in church, I must forgive. No one comes to ask for this. I just do it. Actually, now I feel free. Those others are burdened but for me, I am free. Because the leader in genocide was [the] Adventist president. Not one of the leaders would save one person, even a baby. The people who tried to save were not Adventist but indigenous, and not Christian.*

*There was an indigenous Hutu near Lake Kivu. He told his children they could not kill anyone in his house because if they did he would curse them. At night he took people across the lake to Congo. That man is well-known. After genocide, he decided he wanted to be baptized. But, he baptized himself, because he said, "the pastor's hands all have blood on them."*

In testimony from Ntakirutimana's trial in 2004, survivors outside the Mugonero Church reported hearing perpetrators on Sabbath morning singing "I'm in the Lord's Army."<sup>14</sup>

### **Gitwe Stories: We're Marching to Zion**

One person told me that during the genocide at Gitwe, one of the oldest Adventist mission stations, fellow Adventists sang the hymn, "We are Marching to Zion," as they swung machetes, claiming to do *umuganda*, a term still used in Rwanda to describe the monthly day of mandatory community service when streets are closed to be cleaned.

Another person described the tragedy of losing her mother and all of her children at Gitwe.

*The Union President in charge of mission listed my mom as a*



“refugee.” She was not a refugee. She had lived in Rwanda a long time. She was later killed with all five of my children, who had left the big city to stay with her for safety. The Church did not warn Adventists who were on the “list.” In Gitwe, that is the case. Instead, they brought them together. They should have said “guys, disperse.” That would have been a warning. That’s the Seventh-day Adventists in Gitwe. They should have warned them and said “guys, take care of yourselves” and not bring them together. To bring them together means you are part of it. They brought outsiders to do it. People they didn’t know.

Someone else told me this story:

One Friday night, Tutsi met in church and at 3 a.m. scattered to bush saying church members won’t look in the bushes on Sabbath. At 8 a.m. one Tutsi hid in a room (sort of a storage closet) of the church and was found by a deaconess. (He is still alive.) That deaconess was a neighbor. I know her. When she came early to the church, she found that man, and she went away to find killers. When she returned with killers, he was gone. So, they started searching around the church in the bush for all of us. One of us they hurt with a swinging machete. That was on a Sabbath morning

### Identity and Imitation

Genocide is an act that rips apart the connectedness of humanity. Genocidal societies say, “The world is better without you.” Can we relate to that? Political turmoil is tearing the United States apart. Rwanda, viewed as a trophy of the African “mission field” by many in Western Christianity, shocked onlookers in the period during and after the genocide when it became obvious that Christians had killed Christians.

Now that we live in an information age, a manipulative elite can create narratives and conditions that make genocide possible. Baum states that low ethical standards and strong nationalism are often character traits of those who imitate group violence. Resisters can be characterized as having emotional maturity and the ability to disobey. In Rwanda, stories mandating a duty to extinguish evil Tutsi, *inyenzi*/cockroaches, had permeated the culture.<sup>15</sup>

**“We never thought it would lead to genocide.”**

### What About Propaganda Radio?

The Rwandan Genocide was made possible by societal leaders’ sustained propaganda campaign that created urgency and fear with a backdrop of a smoldering civil war, precipitated by an invading army. Propaganda radio in Rwanda stimulated emotions of outrage, resentment, and fear, especially fear of the impure, and it worked by appealing to biblical themes. Apparently this impacted how the Rwandan church carried out the concept of “religious liberty.” I heard no description of people in churches contesting the loyalty to an identity that had been advocated by propaganda radio.

Asked whether the churches said it was evil or wrong, the answer was this:

*No, the churches said nothing about it, that would be political.*

Several interviewees remembered tunes and slogans from RTLM, saying:

*One of the main voices in RTLM was an Adventist. It was difficult in the years before genocide because, for Adventists, one of our own was a powerful voice.*

*We had leaders very involved with political parties—the RTLM divided the church into two parties.*

*Propaganda radio in Rwanda stimulated emotions of outrage, resentment, and fear, especially fear of the impure, and it worked by appealing to biblical themes.*

### “That would be political.” What Does Separation of Church and State Mean?

Would it have been possible for the institutional church to resist the cultural norm of mandated quotas, with a claim that this would be against religious beliefs? In Africa, the identity of Christian schools and public schools had been merged for decades. It had been common in Africa for Christian administrators to collaborate with governmental leaders with a willingness to make concessions to political forces for what was hoped to be a greater good of providing education to more people. Scholars say Rwanda was the one place on the African continent where Christianity and politics were most closely enmeshed.<sup>16</sup>

I asked whether or not the churches were places where in public settings it would have been possible to call

the polarized culture “evil.”

Everyone replied that,

*No, the church could not speak of the evil of propaganda radio, that would have been political.*

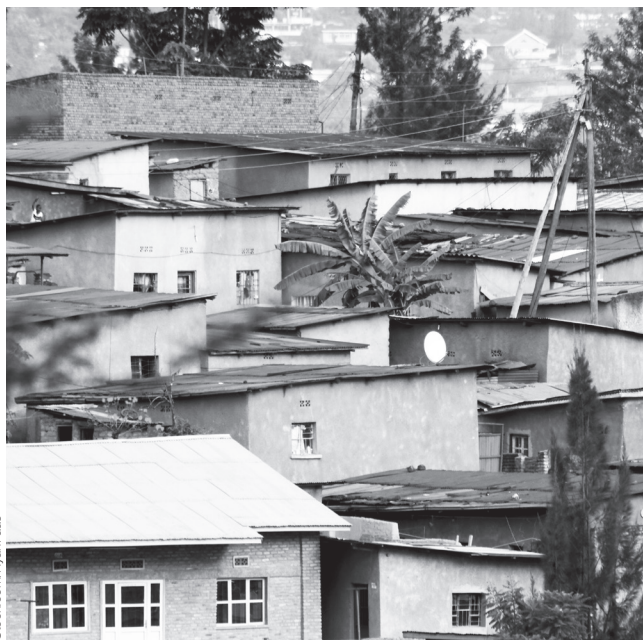
Some assert that the church’s hesitancy to speak against violence immediately and forcefully in 1994 validated the option for Christians to participate in genocide.<sup>17</sup> Fein’s research on the Holocaust would support this assumption. Looking at the tepid response of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe prior to World War II, Fein saw a weak association between early church protest against deportation of Jews and the number of Jews saved in a particular region. For example, in three non-Roman Catholic states (Bulgaria, France, and Romania) where protest occurred, the majority of Jews were saved from death.<sup>18</sup>

In the Rwandan context, a large number of Adventist members, apparently, kept a political identity, which trumped other commonalities that could have been a basis for peacemaking.

*The story is this. The church became political.*

*In my church there was a small group who participated in activity to prepare for genocide. In other words, they became political.*

*The church was divided and labeled ministers according to their*



Hillside homes in Kigali, Rwanda

*political biases, such as from the north or from the south.*

*At one point there was a division in the northern and southern parts of the country. There was a revolt in 1991 or 1992 when people from the south came storming to the doors of the Adventist Union office and complained that too many administrators were from the north.*

*After the presidential assassination, no one went outside or to church initially. services stopped. Later, some hid in church (in Kigali), but a pastor stood in the way and would not let in killers. People who were not political tried to stop the violence.*

*In our church we had leaders who were very involved with political parties. Those in church who refused to be involved with politics were killed first.*

*Church leaders wore clothing and signs of political parties.*

*People joined the Adventist church in Kigali but kept their ethnic identity.*

*We were taught to kill Tutsi before they killed us. Tutsi were said to be killers. That is the heart of the genocide. People thought their pastors would teach the word of God, but really the pastors still had a deeper identity that they had learned earlier.*

Shaping a national story will shape group identity. Christians, attached to a national story, lose the ability to worship in a place where imagination of something different can take root. The one who controls the story is most powerful. In the years leading up to the 1994 genocide, many in Protestant churches likened national difficulties to “like it was in the time of Noah,” and, then, claimed that the principle of separation of church and state would not allow Protestant churches to speak about ethnicity, because such ideas would be considered political.<sup>19</sup> One cannot always clearly see the implications that come from how one conceptualizes religious liberty. In Rwanda, the denomination did not achieve its goal to maintain a non-political identity.

### **“If the government gives an order, it is an order.” Whose Authority?**

Some strands of Christianity emphasize the development of human agency and the cultivation of discernment that Baum asserted to be key to stopping genocide.<sup>20</sup> However, Christians, typically, have focused on obedience

*“Perpetrators said ‘God is not with you. You are no longer in the hands of God. You are now the people to die.’”*



to God and man. One cannot know in what ways such concepts had been emphasized in Rwanda.

In the context of separation of church and state, one would assume that, as a group, Adventists would choose to honor the authority of God with respect to the day on which to worship, but what about other issues? In reality, these choices may be difficult, particularly when the church has made pragmatic decisions in an effort to achieve a greater good. In my interviews, several people said that the Muslims in Rwanda were the only religious group that uniformly provided safe haven for all without regard to ethnicity.

*I heard in church that it was the correct duty to honor the country and to kill the invaders, which were the Tutsi.*

*The church immediately accepted what the government said to do.*

*The Catholic church could have protested what the government said to do. The Adventist church was too small to make a difference.*

*I believe if an order came to kill today, that many Adventists in Rwanda would do it.*

## **“Imagine all the people, living life in peace.”**

### **What Is Prophetic Imagination?**

Katongole, a Ugandan theologian at Notre Dame, critiques the Rwandan church for not being a “wild space.” This is a reference to a social context where people and roles and values are different than those in the predominant worldly culture.<sup>21</sup>

Brueggemann says generosity of listening must occur to trigger prophetic imagination.<sup>22</sup> Prophetic imagination exposes the fraudulent nature of dominant culture.

Violent language kindles emotions of fear, impurity, and resentment. The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture.

Several cultural narratives provide a seed that can de-

velop into a genocidal frame.

Domination: Us over them

Revolution: Us overthrowing them

Purification: Us excluding them

Isolation: Us separating ourselves from them

Victimization: Us being defined by their injustice

Accumulation: Us with more shiny objects than them

For Brueggemann, prophetic imagination has three steps. First, a lament will pierce cultural numbness and call for shedding of the pretense that things are alright. Christian social justice is anguish, more than anger.

Then, prophetic imagination will call forth special memories of deliverance that can form a new identity. Consider the role of Negro spirituals in the sustenance of faith for slaves; songs of deliverance from Pharaoh stimulated a saving imagination.

Third, in an ultimate challenge to managed reality from the dominant culture, Brueggemann says praising God is the way to drown out loud cultural jingles.<sup>23</sup>

### **“Did they make space for love?” Has the Prophetic Voice Been Co-Opted by the Culture of the Day?**

The story of enemy-love is the most powerful cultural narrative for peace.

One survivor I spoke with stated

*I don't know what was in their minds. I still ask that question. The only thing I can come up with is love. If it was in their hearts it would not have happened. The problem was no love.*

Church is the conscience of the state, not its servant. When Rwandan Christians did not challenge language and narratives, churches morphed from sanctuaries to prisons of death.

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“After genocide, he decided he wanted to be baptized.

But, he baptized himself, because he said,

‘the pastor’s hands all have blood on them.’”

In Rwanda, power consisted in the ability to make others inhabit a particular story or reality. In the USA, Dr. King said, “I have a dream.” He called for imagination of something different. He did not say, “I have a nightmare.” Such words would have cultivated fearful, identity-based actions. Rwanda did not have a charismatic leader to promote human rights for all.

The story of Rwanda, a Christian nation, can be instructive to Americans who identify as Christian. The Rwandan story illustrates the problem of a Christianity that does not attend to the nurture of human agency and make a space for appropriate defiance of those in authority.

Having a multi-dimensional identity that differs from political labels will yield a greater peace.

Imitation of Jesus will yield a greater peace.

Imagination of church as something different will yield a greater peace.

History shows that when the state or powerful groups coopt religion, that it will be religion that is weakened.<sup>24</sup>

The story of Adventism in Rwanda leaves a person with many questions:

How does the church maneuver in the tension of avoiding politics vs. using free speech as a gift to advocate for the powerless?

Is our list of fundamental beliefs up to the task of nurturing a discipleship and incarnational Christianity that will leave a person with agency and the courage to disobey in areas other than the traditional touchpoint of Sabbath keeping?

What is the responsibility of the official church to “speak up” when culture denigrates the rights of others? Is our definition of religious liberty a robust one that we own? Or is it the definition put in place by political powers in the US?

What are the unintended consequences of collaborating with the government?

As a student of peace, I see churches as part of civil society that nurtures peace. Where were the churches? Where was my church?

To what extent can the church accept the multi-cultural nature of the Bible and the corresponding proposition that a plain reading is dangerous?

Consider the power of calm contemplation to soothe cultures at war. If Sabbath-keeping Creation believers cannot stand *against* identity-based scapegoating and *for* human rights, this might reflect a failure to remember and keep the Sabbath in its original shalom context. If Sabbath-keeping Creation believers do not reject an imitation of the dominant cultural warfare with its adoption of hardened, defensive identities, and speak in favor of each human as created in the image of God, then, I suggest, it is a botched Sabbath-keeping endeavor.

Take time to be holy. Take time to be human. Take time to imagine. Those are true meanings of Sabbath Sanctuary. Theology and Christian beliefs that do not affect culture are meaningless. Take time to imagine a church as more than a mass of people huddled at the airport departure gate, waiting for the Second Coming. Take time to imagine church as more than a tool for power. Take time to imagine a church that is a shelter from the storm.

I was burned out from exhaustion, buried in the hail  
Poisoned in the bushes an’ blown out on the trail  
Hunted like a crocodile, ravaged in the corn  
Come in, she said  
I’ll give ya shelter from the storm. —Bob Dylan

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### Further Reading

Timothy Longman, “Empowering the Weak and Protecting the Powerful: The Contradictory Nature of Churches in Central Africa,” *African Studies Rev.* (1998): 49–72.

Catharine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda 1860–1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

## Endnotes

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17. Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*.
18. Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (New York: Collier McMillan, 1979).
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