

## *From Canada*

### **RWANDA DISPATCHES:**

**MAY 18 – JULY 12, 2018**

---

by **Wayne Northey**

The idea of “Rwanda Dispatches” came from my friend **Flyn Ritchie**, editor of the online journal, *Church for Vancouver*, who asked me to reflect a bit on our trip to Rwanda. (Flyn eventually published excerpts.)

#### **Introduction**

Once we decided to attend the 2018 International CURE Conference described in my first reflection below, we thought that a 25-hour trip from Vancouver Canada warranted not returning almost immediately at the conclusion of the Conference.

The details of our stay unfolded from the initial choice to fly to Kigali:

- Stay until July 12.
- Contact three Church-based agencies in Rwanda that work with the poor and marginalized of which two responded: Good News of Peace and Development for Rwanda (GNPDR), and Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR).
- Offer our volunteer services even if significantly circumscribed by language. (*Kinyarwanda* is the language spoken by all Rwandans. *Swahili* is an international trade language (*lingua franca*) spoken by 50 to 100 millions in the Great Lakes region of east/southeast Africa, namely Rwanda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Somalia, Mozambique (mostly Mwanzi), Burundi, Uganda, Comoros, Mayotte, Zambia, Malawi, and Madagascar. Before the 1994 genocide, *French* was taught in all the schools, and I have used it widely enough with older people. But post-genocide schools have compulsory *English* classes - language immersion therefore. Of interest is a very widespread use of French first names for children born, a practice that continues into the present.
- Attempt to see through the eyes of the agencies, and in turn see through the eyes of the poor and marginalized to whom the agencies reach out.

As it turned out, we did in fact become involved with one other Church-based ministry, Transformational Ministries, subject of the first reflection below, “Rwanda Bound”.

Before continuing, it is worth airing dirty laundry first, by quoting top Irish literary critic Terry Eagleton, that

Religion has wrought untold misery in human affairs. For the most part, it has been a squalid tale of bigotry, superstition, wishful thinking, and oppressive ideology (Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate, Terry Eagleton, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. xi).

If one disputes this (well, maybe legitimately “for the most part”), one is hopelessly naïve and uninformed. Or just plain doctrinaire.

On the other hand (*there is always a dialectic*) one can cite award-winning, retired Canadian journalist Brian Stewart of the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC), who in “On The Front Lines” remarks:

”I’ve found there is NO movement, or force, closer to the raw truth of war, famines, crises, and the vast human predicament, than organized Christianity in Action.”;

and again:

”I don’t slight any of the hard work done by other religions or those wonderful secular NGO’s I’ve dealt with so much over the years... But no, so often in desperate areas it is Christian groups there first, that labour heroically during the crisis and continue on long after all the media, and the visiting celebrities have left.

It seems that “religion” when it is bad can be as evil as it gets. When it is good however, it produces towering saints as good as they get, such as Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa - to choose some 20th-century examples. There are myriad others, one of whom you will meet if you read on, is retired Anglican **Bishop John Rucyahana of Rwanda**; and a vast multitude of the self-deprecating unsung to whom Brian Stewart alludes.

It is of course ludicrous to dismiss the Bible/Christianity or any other holy book/religion based on its worst exemplars, as Eagleton observes:

Besides, critics of the most enduring form of popular culture in human history [i.e. religion] have a moral obligation to confront

that case at its most persuasive, rather than grabbing themselves a victory on the cheap by savaging it as so much garbage and gobbledygook. The mainstream Christian theology I have outlined here may well be false; but anyone who holds to it is in my view deserving of respect... Ditchkins [*conflation of atheists Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, whose writings he playfully lampoons repeatedly*], by contrast, considers that no religious belief, anywhere or anytime, is worthy of any respect whatsoever. And this, one might note, is the opinion of a man deeply averse to dogmatism.

Insofar as the faith I have described is neither stupid nor vicious, then I believe it is worth putting in a word for it against the enormous condescension of those like Ditchkins, who in a fine equipoise of arrogance and ignorance assert that all religious belief is repulsive (pp. 33 & 34).

Religion has wrought untold misery in human affairs. For the most part, it has been a squalid tale of bigotry, superstition, wishful thinking, and oppressive ideology.

I thought to get that out of the way first.

*To the point then:* my wife and I have been profoundly impacted by the dedication, creativity, and as Brian Stewart paraphrased puts it, sheer “*love in action*” of the Church-based agencies with which we work here in Rwanda. Stewart said this just before the above quote:

For many years I’ve been struck by the rather blithe notion, spread in many circles including the media, and taken up by a rather large section of our younger population that organized, mainstream Christianity has been reduced to a musty, dimly lit backwater of contemporary life, a fading force. Well, I’m here to tell you from what I’ve seen from my “ring-side seat” at events over decades that there is nothing that is further from the truth. That notion is a serious distortion of reality.

And freelance Canadian Columnist Barbara Kay wrote this on June 22, 2005 in Canada’s *National Post*:

The Christian faith, uniquely among the world’s religions, has inspired an awesome tradition of ministering to the lepers most of us cannot bear to look at.

Again, in an April 21, 2005 article in the *National Post*, in response to the wilfully and woefully ignorant (of academic studies about CoSAs (*see below*) immense success) Harper government decision to discontinue what was shoe-string funding anyway, she wrote:

Most CoSA volunteers are Christian and see their work as a religious calling, although they scrupulously avoid evangelizing in their work with offenders.

What struck me about CoSA when I first ran across it some 10 years ago is the fact it is work only people of religious faith would do. There are some forms of public service that are so difficult they can only be motivated by the sincere belief that within all of us - even paedophiles - there is some divine grace that deserves forgiveness and nurturing. Many progressives wish religion would disappear utterly from the public forum. But I daresay there are precious few secular progressives who would commit to “walk with” (as CoSA puts it) the men in the CoSA program for hours every week, year after year, to ensure they do not reoffend.

I make no claim about the accuracy of her first statement with reference to other religions, nor do only religious people work with such offenders. Many now with the programs she was commenting on in Canada and around the world belie that.

Kay was writing about a program first developed in Canada, designed to work with Canada’s still current ultimate pariahs - *released high risk sex offenders* - when rape and murder accomplice Karla Homolka, had asked for such a Circle. I can nonetheless vouch for the profoundly Christian origins of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in Canada, a highly successful Restorative Justice program (Restorative Justice in its use of mediation worldwide is another Canadian first, and also has profoundly Christian origins - long since with worldwide impact), based on numerous evidence-based studies in Canada and elsewhere.

I in fact sit on the national Board that last year received \$7.5 million from Public Safety Canada for five years, to assist in the operation of 14 such programs spread out across Canada. Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale in speaking at the national program’s official launch November 2017, cited those studies in part for his Department’s (through National Crime Prevention

Strategy) granting that funding. A high percentage of those currently active in CoSA Canada and its related sites are “religious”: specifically are motivated by Christian faith.

And yet I have friends to whom I have directed attention to the above (such) articles, not to mention having had many discussions with them over the years on this, who like the worst of religious fundamentalists, dogmatically dismiss the institutional Church. Perhaps they should read Terry Eagleton’s book (or my review/interactions with it <sup>1</sup>) to see how rigidly and one-sidedly doctrinaire they sound, sadly (and all unawares) worthy indeed of Eagleton’s playfully conflated epithet about Hitchens and Dawkins: Ditchkins - that is to say in the end on this matter (my interpretation) brittle *bumpkins*.

Charles Dickens began his famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Surely this speaks to the nature of human history and to the human condition! Universities and the brightest scientists split the atom, thereby unleashing on humanity and the planet permanent threat of utter annihilation... And with *madman Trump*, we came perilously close, remain so with him at the helm of the US stockpile of nuclear weapons capable of destroying all sentient life on the planet many times over. Hell, not just *madman Trump*, but *madman Uncle Sam*, and all other states prepared to use such beyond-the-pale evil weaponry.

And the same kinds of “honourable” family-loving and cultured scientists, like Nazi guards who committed horrors by day and came home, hugged their kids and went off to the Opera by night with their wives, have developed the most diabolical weapons known to humanity... I could go on and on... One need only read historian Alfred McCoy’s newest book about the witch’s brew of cyber horrors being concocted by those same

kinds of Nazi-like scientists under the watchful eyes of the Nazi-like US government (that currently is dropping bombs on all manner of innocents somewhere outside America - *so far* - every 12 minutes) to get it about the leading current “democracy” (and we in the West deeply embedded with it) blithely carrying out mass slaughter on a scale beyond diabolical - if that’s possible!

One should rightly rail against all Nazi Doctors of Death, and the brutal tens of thousands of Rwandan killers (and worse). Do we also then rail against all doctors, against all scientists? Against all universities? Against all governments? The point could be made in any number of ways.

*Here is one more:* Were a Martian to visit our Planet to study humanity, his report back home might be that humanity is hopelessly given to perpetual and horrific violence. And he would be right - as far as it goes.

But he of course would be wrong if he stopped there - beyond-the-pale wrong!

The Church and all religions participate in the human condition equally with the best and the worst of us, and of humanity’s institutions. Of course there are exclusionary dynamics present in the Church! What human institution/collective/society/government does not have such?! Boundaries are the very stuff of the human enterprise. However, in the case of the Story of Jesus, anthropologist René Girard asserts that the human condition is across Time and Planet ubiquitously mimetic in its violence and scapegoating, *to which the Jesus Narrative provides the Way out*. In that Way, Jesus taught his followers (*should-be imitators*) to draw a Circle of Inclusion around enemy and friend/family alike, and ceaselessly (like God in Christ’s Atonement - see Romans 5:6 - 11; Ephesians 5:1 & 2) invite everyone in. *Now that is world-shaking Good News!*

Has the Church since Christ across all times and societies lived up to that? Hardly - emphatically No! Has anyone/religion/political party/you-name-it lived up to whatever ideals espoused? Hardly - emphatically No! So where does that leave one? Siding after all with that imaginary Martian? Hardly - emphatically No! It leaves one rather not a little humbled at the prospect before us of a long way to go before one could declare “*Kingdom Come*”. That’s why Jesus taught us ever to pray *Thy Kingdom Come...*

*So back to the Church.* 20th-century mystic Simone Weil, who never joined the institutional Church, wrote that

*”The Church is a great totalitarian Beast with an irreducible kernel of Truth.”*

And there is an African proverb that goes:

*”The Church is hopeless. The Church is the only Hope.”*

I can go with that too, thereby acknowledging the dialectic of human experience, not least of the very human institution - in often enough not-so-healthy myriad shards - called Church.

Caroline Casey (host of the “Visionary Activist” radio program on [www.kpfa.org](http://www.kpfa.org)) remarked:

*”The church is an ordeal - Take the sacraments and run! “*

I understand that sentiment too!

Maybe that is a sufficiently far-afield introduction to the Rwandan reflections below: glimpses indeed of believers caught up in the messy Story called Church; and seeing through Church-ministry eyes something of God’s amazing Grace at work in a land that is haunted everywhere by horror and tragedy - and will remain so for a long time to come.

§§§

### **Reflections on a Joyful Journey: Rwanda Bound**

June 1, 2018

Last year we learned that the 2018 International CURE Conference (to encourage human rights and prison reform worldwide) was to be held in Kigali Rwanda. (A CURE 2018 International Conference Resolution was sent at Conference end to the United Nations and to the media.)

We wondered if the invitation from 2017 attendee Pius Nyakayiro (I will tell some of his story in Dispatch 4) would have the support and means of pulling it off - not for lack of ability but of funds and time. Pius did! And what an outstanding Conference in every way it turned out to be!

In that we had for the first time attended that Conference the year before in Costa Rica and loved it, in that we still had enough Aeroplane mileage points to pay for our trip, in that in particular Esther has had a yearning to travel (for the first time for us both) to somewhere on the continent of Africa, it seemed the perfect opportunity!

To get to our point of departure at Vancouver Airport Wednesday May 16 at 1:30 p.m., we had to:

- get immunized (lots - and lots of fun!);
- prepare a joint presentation on the End Abuse Program of Mennonite Central Committee of British Columbia: specifically Esther shared on the trauma recovery facilitation she and her co-facilitator Kathy Moodie, a professional counsellor, have done in Fraser Valley Institution, with women who have been in abusive relationships. The institution is one of five federal women's prisons located in the five Correctional Services Canada regions. (This is the only such program.) And we shared as well about the 15-session "Home Improvement" work we do for men causing the abuse;
- read as much as possible about Rwanda, in particular about the 1994 genocide. (In that regard, we recommend three outstanding of many publications: Road Trip Rwanda: A Journey Into the New Heart of Africa by Canadian Will Ferguson; As We Forgive: Stories of Reconciliation from Rwanda by American Prison Fellowship staff person (based on a movie of the same title) Catherine Claire Larson; and A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide by British journalist Linda Melvern.)

We knew from the outset that we *did not wish* to visit Rwanda as tourists, who tend to see from on high distant countries through eyes of wealth and privilege, but in that we were travelling such a vast distance (25 hours on three flights: Vancouver to Frankfurt, to Istanbul, to Kigali), we offered as volunteers rather to see the country through the eyes of two Christian service agencies: Prison Fellowship Rwanda; and Good News of Peace and Development for Rwanda. We however cannot kid ourselves: *we are here in any event because of (comparative) wealth and privilege!*<sup>2</sup> Or as our Canadian indigenous peoples tell us: *Just because you are in time living downstream from the brutality of your European ancestors does not mean you do not continue to be beneficiaries.*

We are in Africa therefore as "Mzungus" (Kiswahili for whites of European descent) who have been beneficiaries of European colonization (read again brutal Empire-building), where evangelism was done too often in the wake of "gunboat diplomacy" that "pacified" (murdered) resistant locals.

As many knowledgeable Christians here will quietly assert: *the gift of the Gospel was mixed with the blood not only of Christian martyrs (there were indeed some!), but also with far too much blood of chiefs, other leaders, and their people. (May God have mercy!)* This apart from the barbaric slave-trade... Though Rwanda thankfully was not directly impacted by it, situated at the heart of Africa just below the equator, unreached by any Europeans until 1894 - after (in law but not in practice) slavery was abolished in Europe and North America. Colonization however meant embracing a track of slavery's first cousin: *brutal subjugation and oppression of a people to maximize domination to extract maximum wealth.* This was *modus operandi* the world over by Europeans and too often with Christian missionaries' consent (and that of their converts): in direct contradiction of Jesus:

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20: 25 - 28)

I will end this dispatch with brief mention (more to follow) of an outstanding Anglican Bishop, John Rucyahana, a 72-year-old man who has given his life in ministry to and love for people in Uganda and in Rwanda, and by extension throughout the continent and world, and who since retirement continues to do so! To us, after spending many hours with him, *he exemplifies Jesus' challenge above.*

He founded (amongst many other church enterprises) with others, Transformational Ministries, based in the city of Musanze, about two hours north of Kigali, in the country of "a thousand hills", near the Virunga volcanoes mountain range, and near the border of Uganda. (We loved the beautiful bus ride there!) We had known nothing of this four-year-old ministry before arriving. You can hear the Bishop tell of the ministry on this website, and also read about his longstanding servant career. Two biographies about him have also been written: *The Bishop of Rwanda* by John Rucyahana and James Riordan, and *Jesus: Hope of the Nations* by Mary Weeks Millard.

One of the many needs of this ministry is: supplying a cow to each family of the poorest and most marginalized/rejected of Rwandan Society - the Batwa (or Twa), the pygmies/bushmen/hunters and gatherers of Rwanda.

The deal is: each family who receives the gift of a cow must build a shelter for the cow, care well for the cow, and pass on any calf to another Twa family, thereby making the gift multiply like the five-and-two miracle Jesus performed. *This so far has been fifteen and four!*

Many in their prejudice predicted that the Twa would likely sell or butcher the cow for quick food or cash, and never comply with the requirements. *They have been totally proven wrong!* Esther and I were privileged to visit many cow-recipient families (otherwise visited in remote places twice a week by staff), and hear expressions of gratitude each time for this amazing ministry. The recipients are also being integrated into wider Rwandan society, and are being sponsored to send their kids to school as well: an uphill struggle, since so many older kids stay home to care for the younger ones, and because of chronic hunger... One Twa recipient later sang a simple song of gratitude for Bishop John and this ministry.

§§§

## **Dispatch 2: Reconciliation Rwanda Style**

### **Introduction**

It is almost impossible to know where to begin in discussing the exceedingly complex reality of Rwandan reconciliation work post-genocide...

Consider:

A people in pre-colonial times with three distinct groups of inhabitants: Tutsi, Hutu, Batwa (Twa - also known as “Historically Marginalized People” - HMP). They are further known as pygmies and bushmen. However, the same culture and language overall were shared, with predominantly fluid distinctions related to relative wealth.

The main Rwandan cultural distinction was between the Batwa, as primarily hunter-gatherers, and the others who either kept cattle or farmed. The Batwa are the oldest known inhabitants of the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa and are found also in Burundi, Uganda, and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are not unlike North American indigenous people, except they have no distinct physical differences apart from generally smaller stature.

The estimated number of HMP living in Rwanda lies between 33,000 and 35,000, i.e. around 0.4% of Rwanda's population. I wrote an earlier dispatch about the amazing four-year-old "Transformational Ministries", begun by retired **Anglican Bishop John Rucyahana**: a great man of prayer, a great man of God, a great man.

In pre-colonial times, Rwanda occupied a much larger land mass, and had had a monarchical government which was divided up under colonial rule, thereby reducing significantly the size of the country, and concomitantly lessening the power of the king to amass a force to resist the colonizers: a classic colonial strategy of "Divide and Conquer". There had been a sophisticated system of governance that had worked well for centuries. Quoting from a Wikipedia article:

A traditional local justice system called *Gacaca* predominated in much of the region as an institution for resolving conflict, rendering justice and reconciliation. The Tutsi king was the ultimate judge and arbiter for those cases that reached him. Despite the traditional nature of the system, harmony and cohesion had been established among Rwandans and within the kingdom since the beginning of Rwanda.

The distinction between the three ethnic groups was somewhat fluid, in that Tutsi who lost their cattle due to a disease epidemic, such as Rinderpest, sometimes would be considered Hutu. Likewise Hutu who obtained cattle would come to be considered Tutsi, thus climbing the ladder of the social strata. This social mobility ended abruptly with the onset of colonial administration.

More will follow about the Gacaca.

The final phrase "colonial administration", though likely not intentional, is euphemistic ruse for "*Empire-building*" - the primary goal of all colonization - throughout human history. And Empire is invariably about two things, the former leading to the latter: *domination* and *maximally amassing wealth*. The former is ultimately amoral and brutal, the latter deeply rapacious: colonization "red in tooth and claw" - Tennyson in different context. Two outstanding theological studies on Empire, one by a noted Jewish Christian theologian **Wes Howard-Brook**, the other by a noted Palestinian Christian theologian **Mitri Raheb** are:

"Come Out My People!": God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond and Faith in the Face of Empire. The website I keep since retirement that you are on is dedicated to the *Gospel as Counter-Narrative to Empire*.

Bishop John notes that under colonial rule, Rwandans were reduced to slavery or worse, through forced conscription, for instance to build roads - public works that were harshly enforced. He writes:

Like all colonial masters, the Belgians exploited African resources. There was very little regard for Africans as human beings. The colonizing nations believed the African brain did not function like their own brains, and saw them as second-class beings, somewhere between themselves and the animals in the jungle... It's not a great loss to lose ten thousand or even a million of these subhuman people to build the road. They have to serve the superior humans. (Rucyahana, John. *The Bishop of Rwanda*, Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition, pp. 11 & 12, & 16).

In 1894 the first European, a German Count, set foot in Rwanda, and by 1897 it was a German colony - even if the Rwandan people did not know it at the time! One hundred years later, in 1994, genocide horror engulfed the nation. Very briefly below is some of the back story.

### **The Road to Genocide**

At the end of World War I, the newly-formed League of Nations assigned rule of Rwanda to Belgium. Deep racial bias based on completely specious "science" attributed the minority Tutsi with superior human traits, because, it was claimed, of their presupposed naturally superior Caucasian ancestry. This same "science" was introduced by the Nazis in 1931, and the horror of Holocaust began...

The Belgians issued identity cards to differentiate Tutsi from Hutus in 1933. Jump ahead to April 1994, and Tutsi identity cards had become death warrants, when in 100 days upwards of one million Tutsi were mercilessly and gruesomely slaughtered - at five times the rate the Nazis massacred the Jews. Many church denominations had priests and pastors, nuns and lay persons and others, betraying their flocks and fellow congregants, luring them to their churches with promises of protection, aiding and abetting the killers, participating directly in the killings. Priests bulldozed their churches to crush to death the Tutsi who had fled there for safety. Nuns provided gasoline to burn churches and those sheltered inside. *Some said of this horror that "the blood of [false] ethnicity was thicker than the water of baptism."*

In fact, Princeton University scholar Mahmood Mamdani writes:

Let us recall that there was no single institutional home, no mortuary, bigger than the Church for the multiple massacres that marked the Rwandan horror. After all, but for the army and the Church, the two prime movers, the two organizing and leading forces, one located in the state and the other in society, there would have been no genocide (When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda”, Mahmood Mamdani, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 232-33; quoted in “Implication of Religious Leaders in Mimetic Structures of Violence: The Case of Rwanda”, Vern Neufeld Redekop and Oscar Gasana, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Journal of Religion & Society Supplement Series 2, The Kripke Center 2007, pp. 117 - 137).

Mamdani writes elsewhere:

Rather than a passive mirror reflecting tensions, the Church was more of an epicenter radiating tensions” (p. 226).

Neufeld’s and Gasana’s paper states:

Rakiya Omaar, Director of African Rights, sent an open letter to Pope John Paul II, listing the most shocking instances of clergy organizing massacres, and summed up participation of the Church in the genocide:

”Christians who slay other Christians before the altar, bishops who remain silent in the fact of genocide and fail to protect their own clergy, priests who participate in the murder of their parishioners and nuns who hand people over to be killed cannot leave the Church indifferent” (Mamdani, p. 227).

With reference to Mamdani’s book, the publisher notes:

”When we captured Kigali, we thought we would face criminals in the state; instead, we faced a criminal population.” So a political commissar in the Rwanda Patriotic Front reflected after the 1994 massacre of as many as one million Tutsis in Rwanda. Underlying his statement is the realization that, though ordered by a minority of state functionaries, the slaughter was performed by hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens, including even judges, human rights activists, and doctors, nurses, priests, friends, and spouses of the victims. Indeed, it is its very popularity that makes the Rwandan genocide so unthinkable. This book makes it thinkable.

This perversion was widespread through years of teaching Hutu superiority by the government from 1959 on, and by the churches, too many in lockstep with the Belgian colonizers. And, one might add, the Prince of Peace and with it peace theology (*the heart of the Gospel*) were nowhere to be found... Too many churches, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, had identified with majority “Hutu Power” and The Hutu Ten Commandments, first published in a Hutu newspaper in 1990: racist and xenophobic to the core. And of course it was not “just” genocide - singular, it was murders committed well over a million times. The earlier Wikipedia article notes:

A history of Rwanda that justified the existence of these racial distinctions was written [by the Belgians first]. No historical, archaeological, or above all linguistic traces have been found to date that confirm this official history. The observed differences between the Tutsi and the Hutus are about the same as those evident between the different French social classes in the 1950s. The way people nourished themselves explains a large part of the differences: the Tutsi, since they raised cattle, traditionally drank more milk than the Hutu, who were farmers.

The 1994 genocide also left Rwanda in complete ruins politically, physically, socially, psychologically, sociologically, spiritually, and more. That like a Phoenix Rwanda has arisen from the ashes is a widely acknowledged “miracle” on multiple fronts. For instance, the capital city, Kigali, is today a modern, spacious city with wide boulevards, an excellent road system, and many modern buildings. From health care to education to social welfare, and so on (the list is long), Rwanda has positively exploded with resolve, creativity and incredible success. There is both a “Vision 2020” and a “Vision 2050” set of ambitious goals, not least to encourage growth of an expanding middle class. And there I leave the story. More of that recounting is in the Wikipedia article cited above. The continuing story is so much more complicated, begs so many questions, and I am far from competent to tell it. Though many have - which an online search will copiously reveal.

### **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation grew out of the Rwandan horror, at once Christian-based, government-promoted, business-blessed, with aspects generically Rwandan. We learn in Willard Swartley’s exhaustive and peerless study of peace (eirene) in the New Testament, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in*

New Testament Theology and Ethics, that peace, peacemaking and peace-building are central to the New Testament witness, the heart of the Gospel, and the ground of the New Testament's unity. For example, over against others' readings of Paul, Swartley argues persuasively that this is especially so of the great Apostle. The word "reconciliation" captures this central peace/*eirene/shalom* dynamic.

One way to understand humanity's primordial loss of relationship to God described in the Book of Genesis is as a *profound break in relationship with God*. Flowing from that original break (*theological*) were further breaks:

- **with oneself** (*psychological*)
- **with others** (*sociological*);
- **with the Good Creation** (*ecological/cosmological*)

For humanity ever to live fully freely, meaningfully, joyfully and abundantly, all these breaks need mending and tending, must undergo radical healing, as surely as broken bones needs crucial medical attention. One could say even that as with crime which is also defined most simply as a *break in relationship*, so in all these breakdowns of relationship (in the "old creation"), what is so centrally needed is a process of "*restorative justice*" to realign, readjust, bring restoration and healing to, all the related brokenness.

The recent Bible translation The Voice repeatedly translates Paul's term for justice (*dikaiosisune*) in the book of Romans as "*restorative justice*", to highlight that Paul's justice is ever dynamically about healing broken relationships. And Paul's challenge to all who are "*in Christ*" and a "*new creation*" (II Corinthians 5:17 - 21) is to be *ambassadors of reconciliation*. Dr. Swartley underscores the action component of New Testament peacemaking: not those merely "ready for peace" (Martin Luther's *status quo* German translation), rather the active, creative, risking, persistent, etc., of peacemakers who continually put body and soul on the line to draw others into a restored circle of friendship, just like God in the atonement that is to be emulated - according to Romans 5:6 - 11 and Ephesians 5:1 & 2.

A succinct article, "Paul and Christian Social Responsibility" by New Testament scholar Chris Marshall, captures this admirably. (Along this same line, reviews of his outstanding comprehensive publications on Restorative Justice can be found on my website.) One can argue that post-genocide Rwanda took a page directly from the New Testament, in particular from

Paul the Apostle in its approach to the profound need for the healing of Rwandans, of the nation of Rwanda. And in fact, Bishop John Rucyahana was one of those who invariably referenced Jesus and Paul in his outstanding contributions to the work towards rebuilding/reuniting the people of Rwanda. In 1995 Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) began its post-genocide work. Its then and continuing Board Chair has been Bishop John. In 1999 the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was founded by the government to promote what the name indicates. Bishop John Rucyahana is its current President too. PFR's mission statement is:

*Prison Fellowship Rwanda's goal is to facilitate victims and perpetrators to reach a frame of mind where forgiveness and reconciliation [are] genuinely embraced.*

NURC's Mission Statement is:

*To Promote Unity, Reconciliation, and social cohesion among Rwandans and build a country in which everyone has equal rights and [is] contributing to good governance.*

The Vision Statement is by President Paul Kagame:

*"My vision of Rwanda is a united country that feels itself integrated into the Sub[-Saharan] region [East Africa] Family of Nations, a country that is developed and has eradicated poverty, a country that is democratic, and above all, a stable country at peace with itself as well as with its neighbors."*

I shall return to the work of both entities in another dispatch.

### **Gacaca Courts**

The first panel of the International CURE Conference, May 21 - 25, 2018, that brought us to Rwanda was named "The Journey to Restorative Justice - Rwandan Experience", and featured **Bishop John**, (Brigadier General) George Rwigamba, a member of NURC, and an Anglican priest, **Rev. Antoine Rutaysire**, former Vice President of NURC. Panelists indicated that between 2002 and 2012, when discontinued, the Gacaca Court way of doing justice was reprised from pre-colonial times due to the overwhelming numbers of persons in prison for perpetrating the genocide (130,000 by 2000), who, if tried by Western legal standards, would languish in prison an impossible 200 years or more! There were over 12,000 such Courts established nationwide, designed to promote communal healing and rebuilding in the wake of the Rwandan Genocide. Over 1.2 million cases were tried nationally.

The Wikipedia article highlighted above states:

Because Gacaca's original purpose was not to handle crimes at the level of severity as those committed during the genocide, the punishments associated with determination of guilt often do not fit the crime and require further proximity and intimacy between the perpetrator and victim. Despite its restorative nature, Gacaca is a legal process and with this in mind punishment constitutes a major element of the Gacaca courts. Perpetrators found guilty are sentenced to some form of punishment, but it is important to note that this rarely takes the form of a jail sentence and instead demands tasks such as the rebuilding of victims' homes, working in their fields or other variations of community service. *Thus, despite Gacaca's clear punitive and legal elements, in many ways the nature of punishment remains within a restorative framework of repairing the harm done through practical measures.* (emphasis added)

There are however many challenges to the government's claims of overall success, including:

no right to a lawyer, no right to be presumed innocent until proven otherwise, no right to be informed of charges being brought against you, no right to case/defense preparation time, no right to be present at one's own trial, no right to confront witnesses, no right against self incrimination, no right against double jeopardy, no right against arbitrary arrest and detention, and furthermore, there is vast evidence of corruption among officials. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gacaca\\_court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gacaca_court), (last accessed June 16, 2018))

Furthermore, crimes committed by advancing RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) forces under the current government were exempted from the Courts, with consequent impunity drawing obvious criticism for such inconsistencies. That said, during and in the aftermath of the chaotic horror of genocide, and continuing for some years, the RPF in liberating the country (**Liberation Day** celebrated on July 4, and **Independence Day** July 2 this year) often did not even know who the enemy was. Raiders from the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) repeatedly spewed their savage hatred across the border in continuing sorties of unspeakable brutality.

Were there revenge killings by the RPF? No doubt, concludes Human Rights Watch. They also conclude that given their not knowing who the enemy was, as many as 30,000 (conservative estimate) may have been murdered by the RPF; that these (too often indiscriminate) murders were at minimum tolerated up the chain of command; and that the U.N. and the U.S. in particular suppressed this information for highly questionable reasons, not least to continue to protect, as the saying goes, “their own asses” - for the dismal failure of the international community, in particular in the West, to intervene before, during, and after the genocide.

Where does that leave one? Without question, *war is ever and invariably about commission of atrocious acts of mayhem and murder on a vast scale.* And the RPF typically did its share. (How the brilliant St. Augustine could have imagined a “Christian Army” fighting for the Roman Empire that would kill “*christianly*” with love in its collective heart for the enemy is beyond comprehension. One need only read about the scientific study of Killology to appreciate that sheer impossibility!)

The United States of all nations, addicted to the twin myths of *American Exceptionalism* and *Manifest Destiny*, and perpetuated to this day by Christian leaders of all stripes, since its founding has regularly perpetrated crimes against humanity. In its Holocaust against Indigenous People early on, as well its slave trade and slavery that initially (and ever subsequently against their descendants) brutalized as many as 11 million Africans, and has also ever since on a great variety of fronts and ways been savagely ruthless in its quest for domination and wealth, it has committed vast *lèse majesté against and inversion of the teachings of Jesus*. Historian Peter Kuznick for instance discusses this with reference to such crimes by the U.S. during WWII and since.

Canadian veterans successfully saw removed from the War Memorial in Ottawa all reference to the deliberate carpet bombing of civilians in more than 40 German cities as much to destroy infrastructure as **precisely to incite terror amongst civilians, including fleeing refugees** (according to military historian **Tami Biddle**. The promotion of “terror attacks” in Germany was a direct order from **Sir Arthur Travers (known as both “Bomber” and “Butcher”)** **Harris** and **Sir Winston Churchill**.) And of course the U.S. carpet bombed over 80 Japanese cities, killing indiscriminately up to 50% of citizens, then dropped two atomic bombs inside 3 days that committed instant mass slaughter of almost 200,000 civilians...

*These were in sheer numbers gargantuan crimes against humanity on a scale that makes RPF killings pale by contrast - though no less reprehensible. And two (multiple) wrongs never make a right...*

The above however is incomplete without mention of what one reads in noted historian Alfred McCoy's description of what is being developed by the American Empire, almost as if this latest Empire as it unravels across the globe is determined to take the entire Planet with it - to destroy the Earth in order to save it...

Furthermore, with reference to the *gacaca* courts, the Western legal system so often favours the wealthy elites over against the other-ethnic and poor, such that it is a truism that there is one law for the rich, another for the poor: *justice being largely what one can afford.*<sup>3</sup>

Western law too often is like a cobweb: it catches the little bugs but the big ones tend to get away! Further, *Western law generically in fact is not about any kind of meaningful doing of justice (which biblically invariably is restorative)*, one that lifts up the victimized and punishes then re-integrates into society those who do wrong. Rather, as American Justice Wendell Holmes observed a century ago, our system is not about doing justice, rather it is *about playing the game according to the rules*. And of course it is wealthy elite interests that make the laws in the first place, above which the elites themselves so often fly. And the best players at the game called justice are the best paid/are in the employ of the wealthy elites. Finally, the Western criminal justice systems historically are generically punitive/retributive with sole concern about perpetrators, not restorative/transformatory for those victimized and those who did wrong.

Perhaps then we in the West should be careful about casting the first stone, about pointing out the mote in the other eyes before dealing with the beam in ours... ***Further, it is widely acknowledged that in the extreme exigencies of post-genocide Rwanda, there was no remotely viable alternative.*** As one author notes:

Based on these discrepancies a definite answer about the success of *gacaca* courts cannot be provided. This, however, does not indicate a failure of the *gacaca* courts. The courts addressed several issues and without this approach the large numbers of prisoners could not have been dealt with. Justice has been exercised as well as possible in a post-genocidal society. The *gacaca* courts have

also empowered victims by listening to their narratives. Further, victims had the power to grant forgiveness which increased the likelihood of recognition of the perpetrators by their societies. In addition, the culture of impunity has been eradicated [except sadly for RPF government forces] which decreases the risk of long-term security threats. According to surveys the degree of cooperation and therefore the need for recognition enjoys a high degree of fulfilment. However, many Hutus and Tutsi still distrust each other. The results of this dissertation point towards a limited fulfilment of the basic human needs of Rwandans. Undoubtedly, negative peace is still preferable to open violence, however, positive peace is necessary for a stable future for all Rwandans. Finally, one should remember that the genocide happened only 18 years ago - less than a generation - and reconciliation takes place in the hearts and minds of individuals and cannot be orchestrated or even dictated. Gacaca courts have led the Rwandans on the right path, but there is still a long way to go. (Gacaca Courts and Restorative Justice in Rwanda, E-International Relations, Thomas Hauschildt, July 15 2012. (last accessed June 17, 2018) ).

## **Conclusion**

We have heard repeatedly that modern-day Rwanda is a fragile work in progress. But we have heard repeatedly about *Hope* as well - one that the Apostle Paul says “*does not disappoint*” when anchored in Christ. “*Hope*” in Greek Tragedies was ever the Trickster like the North American indigenous Raven or Coyote. Just as there emerged Hope that all seemed to be turning towards the good, disaster would strike and Hope would be dashed. *Not so says Paul is the Christian Hope!* This is reminiscent of J.R.R. Tolkien’s neologism: *eucaastrophe*. In the Epilogue to his philological essay On Fairy-Stories, we read that the Gospels contain a “fairy-story” with all the trappings of that genre. Only, Tolkien asserts, this Story just this once entered the stream of real human history. He writes:

In [a true fairy-story] when the sudden ‘turn’ [Tolkien calls this a eucaastrophe - promise of “the happy ending”] comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart’s desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through... [Singer/poet Leonard Cohen says in

*Anthem* “There is a crack, a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in”: in this context *The Light of the world!*] The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels... and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable *eucaastrophe*. But this story has entered history and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the *eucaastrophe* of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the *eucaastrophe* of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality’. There is no tale ever told that [people] would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical [people] have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath (emphasis added).

So in that Hope, captured in the biography of Bishop John by the title, Jesus: Hope of the Nations, Rwanda may continue to strive towards national resurrection. With no one left behind! Amen.

§§§

### **Dispatch 3: Reconciliation Mandate**

#### **Introduction**

There is indeed a vigorous and pervasive “Reconciliation Mandate” in Rwanda, from the government, the churches, and the NGOs. Below, some experienced highlights.

#### **Sociotherapy Circles**

The sun was already in its downward arc as we approached the group of Rwandan women seated in a circle on the grass above their village. Here in Rwanda, just south of the equator, it is dark every day by 6:30 p.m. We had arrived later than expected, after a bumpy ride over a country road of deep crisscrossing fissures carved by the pounding rains of the previous long Wet Season. But since early June we have basked in sunny skies and balmy mid-20s Celsius temperatures: the Dry Season norm. We had driven to the southern province of Rwanda, escorted by PFR worker **Jeannette Kangabe**. It was in this region in the city of **Muhanga**, that detailed plans for genocide had been developed. We were late, but this was African time... *Delightful!*

We eventually continued by foot down the goat trail towards the women, a path traversed about two hours later by school children returning home in the soon gathering dusk.

As we neared, the women stood up as One, burst into a song of praise (we later learned) and invited us thereby into the Circle. We were caught as much by surprise as by tingling gratitude at their joyful display of heartfelt welcome.

### ***The back story?***

Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) in concert with the government body called National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) both mentioned in the second Dispatch above, involving as well the Anglican Church (Diocese of Byumba), and the Rwandan agency Duhumurizanye Iwacu Rwanda ("*Comfort Each Other in One's Neighbourhood*"), began implementation of the **Community Based Sociotherapy Program** (CBSP), that ran from 2013 to 2016, and spread over eight districts - two programs per province. (There were earlier very successful pilot projects). Ten to fifteen persons per Group participated, two trained facilitators leading each. The Program was funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Groups lasted fifteen weeks.

It was in fact a further development and adaptation to Rwanda of the work of **Cora Dekker** - a Dutch sociotherapist with years of experience in practicing sociotherapy among traumatized refugees in clinical settings in the Netherlands. She was also the technical advisor.

There were six phases each group was guided through:

- Safety
- Trust
- Care
- Respect
- New rules
- Memories

There were as well six principles:

- Interest
- Equality
- Democracy
- Participation
- Responsibility
- Learning-by-doing

The CBSP was designed to not only fill relational gaps after the gacaca courts process terminated in 2012, but to both continue and in many ways improve upon the outcomes of same.

At project conclusion, there had been 26,730 participants and 1,823 sociotherapy groups. There had also been a total of at least 512 trained community member facilitators, 8 prisoner member facilitators, and 46 trained community members to work in Congolese refugee camps.

A succinct summation of the groups came from one of the participants:

*Mvura Nkuvere* (Kinyarwanda) meaning, *You heal me, I heal you.*

Further, many sociotherapy groups decided to continue to meet after they had finished the fifteen weeks of training. Some groups organized continuing group discussions, while others engaged in income generating activities. 68.4% of the socio-groups that started between March 2014 and June 2016 continued to meet either on a weekly or a bi-weekly basis. 57% of all the groups have started a joint cooperative or saving association (N=1294).

The cooperatives and saving associations indicate that sociotherapists and participants at a grassroots level gradually took responsibility for and ownership of the sociotherapy activities and outcomes. It is CBSP's belief that this level of ownership and the degree of mutual trust that has been built in the groups make socio-economic development more sustainable. In addition, there is a spin-off to the wider community. In numerous cases, community members join the socio-economic initiatives of the sociotherapy groups. Local authorities support the group initiatives. In a number of districts, they assist the groups by providing financial means to invest in for example livestock.

In one district outside Muhanga in the southern province, the entire community committed time, money and labour towards a genocide memorial and research centre. We toured the not-yet-completed facility, which includes a museum and genocide research capabilities. It is at once deeply disturbing yet hopeful with full community investment.

The sun's downward slide was nearing its end as the circle of women prayed and sang us on our way back up the trail. Stories of deep pain, healing and hope had been spontaneously shared. Since this group's initial training in 2015, it continues to meet every Thursday for about three hours. Wishes were expressed that Jeannette would visit them more frequently... Part of us, the first Mzungu to ever visit, will somehow keep going back...

*After all, we're part of the circle now.*

## **Reconciliation Villages: Prison Fellowship Rwanda <sup>4</sup>**

Rain falls gently as **Frederick**, standing just outside our covered shelter, gives his barebones testimony. He was 26 when the genocide started. The roads to escape the village were blocked. He found victims hiding in the sorghum fields and killed them. "I was in prison for 9 years. Two pastors came into prison and took us through a journey to know the value of a human and journey of repentance. First to God, then victims, then the country as a whole. The President released us. Then we went in front of victims and admitted and repented. It was very hard."

**Jeannette** speaks next:

April 8th they killed my parents; I was 16. I lost all my relatives. We went into exile for two months to hide. I hid in the toilet (bathroom). After we were freed I wanted to die. When the president released the prisoners, we were so afraid. Pastor came and told us [that the men who had been released would be coming back to our village.] When we saw them, we were in great pain, a day of tears. We sat across from each other. The time came when they confessed and showed us where the bodies were. We took time to pray and get close to God. Now I am not afraid. When I have to go away I leave my children with him. The wives of those who [did the killing] didn't believe it. We weave these baskets together and talk. Now they believe. We have come back to life. We are not worried. Please communicate what happened, that it was real.

Then it is **Claudine**'s turn:

I was born of those who were victims. I asked why they survived. They hid, and then fled to Burundi. Those who committed the crimes confessed to my parents. Now the wives weave together. As kids we also meet in clubs and play games together. We thank our government.

And finally, another teen explains

Every day my mother was taking food to a place I didn't know. Finally, she explained that my dad was in prison. She explained that he killed Tutsi. I asked her why. She explained that Tutsi have long noses....(ethnic differences). My father came back. Now we don't have any Tutsi and Hutu, we are in clubs and we dance together.

These were the witness statements we heard on a visit during the International CURE Conference to **Mbyo Unity and Reconciliation Village**, one of eight such in existence established by PFR. What began as experiment in a pilot project in 2003, now houses over 4,000 families in both categories of survivors and perpetrators. <sup>5</sup>

We visited them as a group during the Conference, and Esther and I in staying on visited them a few more times. We in fact toured 20 new homes just constructed at one village. (Esther did a training on hygiene and sanitation for the families about to move in). We visited. We conversed. We observed... *To our awareness, there is nothing of its kind elsewhere.* The pilot project of fifteen years ago was an incredible success, and has given rise to ever-expanding initiatives. Other countries have sent delegations to learn and possibly replicate.

In “A Post-Genocidal Justice of Blessing as an Alternative to a Justice of Violence: The Case of Rwanda” (published in Barry Hart (ed.), *Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2008, pp. 205- 241.), scholar and friend Vern Redekop juxtaposes a “**Justice of Blessing**” with a “**Justice of Violence**”. He draws on his doctoral thesis-turned-book (introduced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict Can Open Paths to Reconciliation* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2009).

Vern, drawing in turn on the groundbreaking work of anthropologist (and so much more!) **René Girard**, states concerning a “**Justice of Blessing**”:

Expressed simply, a justice of blessing is a structured way in which perpetrators commit themselves to take action diachronically [over the long haul] for the well-being of the survivors of their genocidal actions.

... when mimetic [imitative/imitated] structures of blessing infuse a relational system, people work toward the mutual well-being of one another. I am told of how [in pre-colonial times], at the village level in Rwanda, this was often the case; Hutus and Tutsis lived together with little regard for distinctions between them.

He contrasts this with a “**Justice of Violence**”:

*The story is told of someone who went on to the afterlife and wanted a tour of the premises. She wanted to see hell first. She found grumbling, unhappy people who looked as though they*

*were starving. There were tables of food in front of them but their forks were longer than their arms so they could not get the food in. She went on to heaven where she found happy, well-fed people. The tables of food were the same as in hell as were the long forks. The only difference was-they were feeding each other...*

This story illustrates the difference between **mimetic structures of blessing** and **mimetic structures of violence**. In this fictional heaven people were contributing to each other's well-being;... (emphasis added)

Vern is describing exactly what is happening in these amazing villages. Of course "Hell" is the direct inversion. Theologically: if "*God is Love*", *Hell is the Expulsion of Love*.<sup>6</sup>

At one point in Vern's superb paper - *that I encourage all to read!* - he emphasizes that there are three overarching prerequisites to building and buttressing a **Justice of Blessing**, one of which is that

in the face of large scale violent events, the various sub-processes need to take place within institutions that could include Truth and Reconciliation commissions. If there is to be a justice of blessing, this could demand an institution within which there is on-going follow-up.

In a prolonged discussion with Bishop John Rucyahana (I've mentioned him often in earlier "Dispatches"), I compared post-genocide reconciliation work in Rwanda to post-apartheid reconciliation work in South Africa. The Bishop indicated he was indeed respectful of the work done in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

However he then commented that no new institutions had arisen there to foster racial integration, apart from the soon-enough terminated Truth and Reconciliation Commission. By contrast, in Rwanda, government, churches and NGOs established many institutions through which there has indeed been attempted to create a "**Justice of Blessing**" culture/society over the long haul. And these initiatives continue.

**Bishop John's insight is certainly so *à propos* in Canada!**

## Conclusion

One of these **Justice of Blessing** initiatives is of course the Socioterapy work described above, which as also mentioned, is intentional supplement to the shortcomings of the gacaca courts. These groups also work in the prisons. And PFR as well as GNPDR work in the prisons, to encourage génocidaires towards truth-telling, repentance, asking forgiveness, and commitment indeed to follow an ongoing Path of **Justice as Blessing**. A key component for the above agencies, one must add, *is evangelism that has pointed many new converts to this new Way*.

Vern indicates that such a System of Justice combines the most positive of other approaches, including now worldwide Restorative Justice, which phenomenon has a website page full of resources and elsewhere on my website.

**Justice as Healing** as modelled in Rwanda (only some highlights of which are described above - *and so much more as evidence-based follow-up work is being done and planned!*) stands out as a (albeit of course flawed) **Shining Light for the World**.

After all: what on Earth is more desperately needed for humanity and nations than

*Mvura Nkuverere - You heal me, I heal you.?*

§§§

## Dispatch 4: Reconciliation Up Close - The Riveting Story of Pius Nyakayiro

### Introduction

At the end of the 2017 International CURE Conference in Costa Rica, the notably best-dressed man at the Conference being **Pius Nyakayiro** from Rwanda, we received an invitation to hold the next Conference in Kigali, in part to learn more about the work of Reconciliation in that country.

Pius made good on that invitation! He said at Conference conclusion:

I am so pleased with the outcomes of the conference. Everyone seemed to get a lot from their time together, and the feedback from all was very positive. It is so good to share experiences with

other countries, and to learn from each other, and I pray that much good will come from this conference in the areas of Human Rights and Prison Reform.

This was understatement. In fact, in the words of CURE co-founder **Charlie Sullivan**, the Costa Rica Conference was “*good*”, but the Rwanda Conference was “*great!*” I doubt anyone at this year’s Conference would disagree. In our view, they were both great!

The schedule included plenary speakers and break-out groups, as well as visits to a Rwandan prison; to the genocide memorial in Kigali; to another memorial in **Nyamata** at a church where thousands who sought refuge had grenades, machetes and all manner of other instruments used against them until the killers were satisfied all were dead. (This lasted at times days. The churches were no longer places of refuge: they had become death traps facilitating (too often with clergy participants) mass slaughter.)

We were also taken to a Village of Reconciliation nearby - a picture of it above as well - to learn about the post-genocide reparations process.

This was all thanks in large part to the skills and tireless work in particular of **Pius** and Good News of Peace and Development for Rwanda (GNPDR), a part-time colleague from that same organization **Joshua Magaba**, and **Heidi Cerneka**, a lay Catholic Sister working in Kenya. Heidi was also the Moderator throughout, with Pius welcoming us the first day. Pius acknowledged to us later that the work done to pull off that Conference was “brutal”. At its completion all the bills were paid, and we attendees went on our ways rejoicing. We’ll never know the extent of the gruelling work they undertook to make it seem so effortless and feel so outstanding.

As indicated above, we stayed on (from May 18 to July 12). We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Pius therefore for that invitation just over a year ago. Esther and I have said it to each other so many times now: *our lives have been greatly enriched by our Rwandan sojourn*. We simply cannot imagine being more thankful... We have expressed that more than once to Pius. He typically demurs, and returns a compliment.

Some of our time was spent with him in the field, where we visited a Hope Project (poultry egg production) for genocide widows, to which a well dug by GNPDR pumps water hundreds of metres uphill for the project; and a primary school (Catch-Up Education Program) for street kids and others. They also have a community-based Literacy Program for adults.

At the school, we met the Principal and its founder. It had begun as a ministry to street kids. There were an estimated 300,000 orphans created within the 100 days of the piranha-like savagery.

We had the privilege of visiting each class. There was always a chorus of “Good morning, visitors”, then after introductions Esther and I said something about our family, about Canada and what part of Canada we were from. In that all classes are now taught in English throughout Rwanda, as we went to the higher levels, the kids needed less translation. We sometimes asked questions of them, including the knowledge-testing kind like: *Where is Canada?* Someone invariably knew.

When it was their turn to ask us questions, one was a constant: *How old are you?* The first time asked, Esther remonstrated a bit, but gave the answer. That first time, the Principal was the most surprised! (We look of course so young...) The average life-expectancy age in Rwanda is 51, with (typically) women outliving men; including far more post-genocide widows than vice versa. One worker even asked us how to explain the longevity of *Mzungus*...

Pius founded the agency in 2006 after for many years serving as Director of Chaplaincy for Rwandan Correctional Services. At the time, he had no idea of the existence of any other prison ministry, including Prison Fellowship Rwanda.

How he came to that point necessitates yet again a back-story.

### ***Back-Story***

Pius in conversation with us more than once had alluded to his experiences during the genocide. He told us he would tell us his story in full at an opportune time. We knew in advance that we were never permitted to ask anyone for their story. The occasion to hear Pius’ genocide experiences was Saturday, July 7 in his home, just days before our planned departure from Kigali.

We were treated to a delicious Rwandan supper prepared by his lovely wife, Angélique. We also took delight in his three young sons - who in turn had great fun with our iPhones! (Rwanda is very high tech with ubiquitous cell phones, and quite advanced digitally in many ways.) A daughter was away at boarding school. They would be visiting her the next day.

And so the story began in the privacy of that space.

Pius was born in 1969 and raised in a Catholic family in the eastern province of Rwanda. He eventually developed evangelical leanings, and in 1992 was forced to leave the Church. Recall that the Roman Catholic Church was then extremely powerful religiously and politically and dominated the Rwandan scene. He and several others formed their own house church. But the Church did not approve, and had him arrested and jailed for a week. Upon release, he was sternly told to discontinue his teaching. He typically notwithstanding continued teaching and trusted God for safety. He is made of sterling stuff. He eventually joined the **Apostolic Church for Revival in Rwanda**, to which he still belongs today. But there was much more to come between now and then. (Our first Sunday at church in Rwanda was with Pius - a short distance away. *It was an experience!* It revealed definitively that we two Mzungus had no rhythm at all! - as not only the choir, but the whole congregation swayed and jived to the exuberant music. It was like the great “conversion” scene from *The Blues Brothers* movie! - if you have seen it.)

In April 1994, Pius’ father gave him money to travel to Kigali and board a plane for Nairobi Kenya. He was to wait out the fever-pitch turmoil in his own country, a period of havoc for the Tutsis who had been driven already to many other neighbouring countries, while many more had been killed. As earlier recounted, this ratcheting up of hatred and attacks on the Tutsis had begun in 1959.

With four other Tutsis, he boarded a bus for the Kigali airport. Half way there, in the town of **Rwamagara**, the bus driver, having heard of trouble in Kigali, refused to go further. Pius knew one woman in town through the church, who took them in for the night. They had hoped to continue on to Kigali the next day. Had they done so the day before, almost certainly they would have been murdered when the genocide began there on that day, April 7, 1994.

What made them remain in town was the news they had heard that morning that the President of Rwanda, together with the President of Burundi, and of course the crew, as the airplane came in to land exploded in the air from two missiles launched from near the airport. Though that President had been a brutal dictator towards the Tutsis, even greater extremists in the government wanted him out of the way for the meticulously planned genocide to go ahead. There is little doubt the extremists fired the missiles, though the Tutsis were immediately blamed, justifying the commencement of the bloodletting.

I have deliberately not included any of the extremists' names which deserve no mention at all. The international best seller by Canadian General **Roméo Dallaire** (now an appointed Canadian Senator), head of the UN peacekeepers in Rwanda during the genocide, *Shake Hands With the Devil*, references the extremist ringleader and others. The former was convicted in 2008 and sentenced to life imprisonment. He's an old man now. A Canadian-made movie by the same title, filmed in Kigali, came out in 2007.<sup>7</sup>

Pius and friends spent two weeks in the same house. One with them, a journalist connected to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF - see an earlier Dispatch), was convinced they would all die. They could hear gunshots around them, and the screams of those dragged from their houses and murdered. Then, in the evening after two weeks, the deadly **Interahamwe** found them. They were the "Hitler Youth" of the genocide. They asked what they were doing there. No one answered. They told the occupants that they had to be killed. The woman with them said to her fellow house occupants it was up to God whether they would live or die. They were told to lie down; did so and expected the worst. Pius suddenly remembered he had the money for his flight, and offered it to them. He also boldly told them not to defile themselves with their blood, and if they abstained, God would have mercy on them.

The soldiers took the money, told them they should really die, but said as they left that they would honour the agreement made in receiving the money. They returned however within minutes. Again all expected to die. Instead, to everyone's shock, the soldiers asked them if they knew of a better hiding place! No one had any idea. Instead, the youth took them to a local pastor's home, charged him with protecting and taking care of them, saying that he was to tell no one about their hiding place, and that they would return to be sure his charges were still alive. *The soldiers never returned.*

They were kept in a darkened room for two weeks with minimal food and water. They heard death all around them.

After that time, there were suddenly sounds of a military convoy travelling towards them. It was the RPF! The army, under the leadership of the current President, **Paul Kagame**, would eventually stop the genocide - without assistance from any outside source. They moved the group to a refugee camp behind their lines. Pius heard many stories there of mass murder. But he found out nothing of his family's fate.

So before the country had been “stabilized” by the RPF, with many killers still on the loose, he took his chances and travelled back to his village. It was in utter ruins and a ghost town with bodies everywhere. He proceeded to a nearby refugee camp, and learned that there were only three survivors from his church family, and that many from the town had fled to Tanzania. He found out nothing about his own kin.

On his return one evening to a nearby refugee camp he had gone to, still in search of his family, he met one of the killers on the road. Pius was overpowered and dragged into the forest where the man began beating Pius mercilessly with a large stick. The man said he was going to kill Pius. Pius prayed that God would receive his soul. The man suddenly stopped, and Pius heard a voice telling him to get up and run away. He was not pursued. Though Pius was in a very weakened condition, he managed to crawl to a banana plantation to hide. He waited and listened through the night, bleeding and in very bad shape. He could hear hyenas and dogs in the distance. They had lost all fear of humans, feeding on the corpses. He wondered whether wild animals might find him. He prayed. He never knew the source of the voice. But there were yet to come encounters with his attacker.

Pius exerted the next morning what little strength he had left to make it to an RPF compound where he was immediately hospitalized. While spending a week there, he learned the fate of his family: 12 immediate members had been gruesomely murdered.

When he left the hospital, he found Rwanda in ruins physically, and in every other way imaginable. It matched his own tattered spirit. He like millions of others was angry at God, broken, devastated, hateful, bitter - including against himself. Life had become meaningless. He had lost the will to live. I am told that Africans do not become atheists. That is a colonial thing! But they can lose all hope in God. (Some suggest Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross was a kind of “atheistic” utterance.)

In the midst of all this, the man who had beaten him was captured. One day later on, soldiers brought him to Pius, asking what should they do with him? Would Pius forgive him? Pius had no answer. He knew however that in his heart there was no forgiveness. The Commander told the soldiers to each pick up a stick, and hit the attacker as hard as he would demonstrate, until he told them to stop. The Commander took one of the sticks from a

soldier, and suddenly whacked the soldier hard! That “whack” modelled, the attacker was beaten in front of Pius to within an inch of his life. Pius remained mute and affectless.

In August 1994, Pius moved to Kigali to try to kick start his life. The devastation was beyond imagining. Pius knew in his Christian faith that he needed to forgive, but still could not muster up forgiveness in his heart. Then one day the penny dropped, the dam waters broke, and Pius suddenly could find that latent forgiveness, exercise it, and be immediately freed of acrimony and bleakness of spirit. He took further spiritual and practical steps when he began finding new ministry legs in pursuing ways to contribute to rebuilding Rwanda.

In an Internet search, he came across an international American organization called Good News Jail and Prison Ministry. In 2006 he founded in consort with them Good News of Peace and Development for Rwanda (GNPDR). He had become a prison chaplain in 1996, and had gone on to become country director of chaplains for all Rwanda: a huge task. The international ministry remains supportive of the program in Rwanda. Pius continues to be a man of boundless energy, fully dedicated to his work.

In Kigali one day, Pius saw the man who had beaten him. Pius quickly ran after him, but the man, driven likely by fear of denunciation, ran away. Pius was not however chasing him to take the man to the authorities, rather to tell him that he had forgiven him, and why. Instead of that opportunity being taken however, Pius has since had occasion hundreds of times to tell génocidaires that he has forgiven them, and why; that God too can forgive them.

This brings one to a mystery: **Just what *why* motivates people to forgive? Just what *why* drives mass murderers to ask forgiveness?**

Cynicism would preclude authenticity in the perpetrators, who simply may be hoping that a confession and asking forgiveness might be their “Get out of jail FREE” card. It has been so multiple thousands of times. And the cynics are doubtless right - some of the time! But by no means always. It is in this regard that I mention again *Survivors* by Gregory R. Moffatt - who teaches psychology at a Christian University, and is nationally and internationally known. In a chapter telling Pius’ story, he indicates that in his writings he usually studiously avoids “religion”.

Moffatt avers:

But I've interviewed dozens of survivors and as much as it might be distasteful to those in the secular world, for most victims of trauma whom I've studied, religion was indispensable (p. 142).

He states that in particular, *forgiveness is exceedingly difficult without a religious motivator*. And he indicates that forgiveness is central to Christian faith. This is reminiscent of journalist Brian Stewart's comments in the preamble to the Dispatches about the ubiquity and humility of the organized Church in far-flung places of need. It is also suggestive of some of Barbara Kay's comments above. But of course there are fine humanitarians in every religion and in none.

For Pius, comments Moffatt, he moved from a sense of Christian *duty* to forgive, to a deliberate *choice* to enact it. And once he began, he never looked back... And by continuing acts of forgiving, Moffatt observes - like the 70 times 7 in Jesus' mandate (i.e. limitlessly) - Pius thereby released "the chains of memory that bound him to the past and the pain that resided there (Moffatt, *ibid*, p. 143)". Moffatt cites psychiatrist Gordon Livingston:

Widely confused with forgetting or reconciliation, forgiveness is neither. It is not something we do for others; it is a **gift to ourselves** (p. 143, emphasis added).

This has been corroborated repeatedly by people who have been victimized, whom I have known or read about over the 45 years and counting of work in the criminal justice system.

## **Conclusion**

The evening was far spent as we said our good-nights to Pius' wife and kids. The back-story had been straightforwardly told. Pius drove us then to our lovely Airbnb and superb hosts. We had been blessed again by being allowed in on something very sacred: the journey from profound trauma to healing and hope, fruits of which are love for even the perpetrators who repeatedly committed obscene acts of immense brutality... Now that, in my friend Vern Redekop's words, is the "**Justice of Blessing**"!

§§§

## Final Words

There was a Greek saying at the time of Jesus: *mathein pathein*. It could be stated in an English phrase that gets close to the idea, and matches even its sound and cadence: *no pain, no gain*. Literally: *to learn is to suffer*. This was perhaps back of the writer of Hebrews, who wrote of Jesus:

“...*he learned obedience from what he suffered* (Hebrews 5:8).”

And that “**obedience**” was to the **Way of Love** that ultimately took Christ to a cross. And we in turn if would-be followers of Christ, must be people of that Way too.

*In that light, Rwanda indeed has something precious, fragile, unique, and beautiful to offer the world.*

Amen!

## References

- Dallaire, Roméo (2004). *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Toronto: Vintage.
- Eagleton, Terry (2009). *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Mamdani, Mahmood (2002). *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McCoy, Alfred (2017). *IN THE SHADOWS OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF U.S. GLOBAL POWER*, Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Millard, Mary Weeks (2015). *Jesus: Hope of the Nations*, Preston: Zaccmedia.
- Moffatt, Gregory R. (2010). *Survivors* Westport: Praeger Publishers.
- Newfeld, Vern and Oscar Gasana (2007). “Implication of Religious Leaders in Mimetic Structures of Violence: The Case of Rwanda”, Ottawa: Saint Paul University, *Journal of Religion & Society* Supplement Series 2, The Kripke Center.
- Rucyahana, John, with James Riordan (2007). *The Bishop of Rwanda*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson.

*Wayne Northey was Director of Man-to-Man/Woman-to-Woman - Restorative Christian Ministries (M2/W2) in British Columbia, Canada from 1998 to 2014, when he retired. He has been active in the criminal justice arena and a keen promoter of Restorative Justice since 1974. He has published widely on peacemaking and justice themes. You will find more about that on this website: a work in progress. You will find more about that on his website, [www.waynenorthey.com](http://www.waynenorthey.com)*

*You may also find more about the series *Justice That Transforms* at: <https://waynenorthey.com/justice/justice-that-transforms/>.*

## Notes

- 1 Due to be published in my next series on Peace/Peacemaking, provisionally titled: *Justice That Yields Peace*.
- 2 Readers are encouraged to view this superb reflection on wealth, gratitude, and generosity, with link to full text:  
**Vulnerability, Shame, and Courage – The Path to Gratitude and Generosity** (<http://inwardoutward.org/vulnerability-shame-and-courage-the-path-to-gratitude-and-generosity/>).
- 3 “Please also see the chapter in this volume: “War, Police and Prisons: Cross-Examining State-Sanctioned Violence”.
- 4 The above was written by fellow 2018 International CURE Conference attendee, Chaplain Hans Hallundbaek, UN NGO representative for CURE international and the International Prison Chaplains Association (IPCA - see also here), together with Rev. Cathy Surgenor of the Hudson River Presbytery, for the Horizons national magazine of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and granted permission to use here.)
- 5 From 2003 to 2018 PFR has built eight Reconciliation Villages in Rwanda’s countryside and these villages are comprised of clusters of homes built for genocide offenders and victims. Members of these reconciliation villages have chosen to step beyond forgiveness and embrace reconciliation. They have committed to living together, working together, and caring for one another.  
  
Over eight hundred and twenty houses were constructed in eight villages for both genocide survivors and offenders located in four districts; the exercises were not easy but PFR considers it a fair accomplishment that houses have been built and accommodate nearly 4000 affected families who live side by side.
- 6 See elsewhere in this *Volume* reflections on hell.
- 7 The movie “HOTEL RWANDA” which covers the same period, and is an engaging tale, sadly is fabrication when it comes to the role of the opportunistic then Hotel Manager of MILLE COLLINES, whom some say was even a co-conspirator. What saved those at the hotel was the regular presence of Dallaire’s UN troops. The Manager and family moved to Holland later, and began from there raising unknown amounts of money for a non-existent orphanage in Kigali. This information is from several sources, one of which is the outstanding book *Survivors* by Gregory Moffatt (see p. 135 of his book). I’ll cite this book and say more about it below. Many have been subsequently honoured for heroic acts in the face of the genocide. No one ever even nominated the Hotel Manager as one such hero.