

## Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Changing Religious Landscape

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the proliferation of Pentecostal churches and the changing religious landscape of Rwanda. The horrific genocide of 1994, left the country's traditional mainline churches bloodied and the Christian faith seriously challenged. Unlike elsewhere in Africa, prior to the genocide, Pentecostal churches had not got a foot-hold in Rwanda, then referred to as the most Catholic country in Africa. In the aftermath, Rwanda has experienced a spontaneous growth of new churches imported by returnees from far and wide. Though the Catholic Church still retains its dominant position, there has been an upsurge of Protestants and the Rwandan religious landscape is changing considerably. This gospel explosion has been attributed to the enormous challenges of social-economic reconstruction of a fractured society, where reconciliation and healing are of utmost importance. By packaging their messages with hindsight of the disillusionment with the traditional churches and the spiritual as well as the material need to arise from the ashes of genocide and rebuild their lives, these churches have attracted thousands of Rwandans.

### Keywords

Rwanda, Church in Rwanda, Gospel Explosion, Rwandese Genocide

### Introduction

Enormous<sup>1</sup> literature exists on the Pentecostal churches in Africa and the world over; therefore, in this contribution we shall argue that in the context of post genocide Rwanda, faced with the phenomenal tasks of healing, reconciliation

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the Nordic Africa Institute Africa Days Conference, September 30-October 2, 2005.

and reconstruction of the shattered social fabric, political system and the creation of opportunities for economic survival of the impoverished population, 'new' churches and religious movements have emerged. Some of these churches are establishing schools, health facilities in partnership with international agencies through sponsorship and other activities. Through these projects, they create and maintain networks with partners and friends abroad. Also they serve as a conduit for constant flow of exchange of ideas and practices; and the flow of capital and commodities, as well creating transnational social and cultural connections.

Pentecostalism offers people a purpose to live and a strong sense of identity and 'people participate as individuals'.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true in post genocide Rwanda, where the two elements — the purpose to live for survivors and returnees and a sense of identity — are crucial for the creation of a new reconciled society, new national identity to replace ethnic identity.

From a missiological perspective, this paper seeks to examine the proliferation of these churches — the changing religious landscape of Rwanda. In the face of the post genocide challenges with the mainline or traditional churches apparently tainted and even fragmented; and faith seriously challenged by the blood-bath, the relative success and attraction of these 'new' churches is not unconnected with the way they have packaged their religious messages with hindsight of the prevailing situation for the contemporary Rwanda society. Apparently, there is a felt need for a new beginning in Rwanda; and this urge has spurred growth of new religious communities and congregations, while at the same time many other individuals have become disillusioned with the church. This paper will further examine response of these churches to the challenges of reconciliation.

Perhaps it is necessary here to explain the use of the phrase 'new churches' in the Rwandan context. The term 'new' is being used here to refer to churches, which were not present in Rwanda prior to the genocide, even if they belong to the already established Pentecostal, or charismatic churches in other parts of the world, that have now been imported into Rwanda by the returnees. In the actual sense of the word, these churches are not new or different from those found elsewhere in Africa; but because they were not present in Rwanda prior to the genocide, in this sense they can be considered to be new there. Thus the use of 'new' here is relative to the time of their advent in Rwanda vis-à-vis the rest of Africa.

The majority of them could be categorised as Pentecostal. However, it is instructive to note that though some scholars use 'Pentecostalism', still others

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<sup>2</sup> A. Shorter and J. Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2001, 30.

agree that it is 'difficult, if not impossible, to put African churches into types and categories.'<sup>3</sup> It was estimated that these churches that go by a bewildering variety of names, to use the words of Harvey Cox again, would account for a larger population of African Christians than either the Roman Catholic Church or all Protestants put together.

### **The Spontaneous Growth of New Churches in Rwanda**

It is instructive here to allude to the familiar and well-documented<sup>4</sup> phenomenon of the emergence of numerous churches and new religious movements in Africa in the last century. Many scholars of African Christianity would agree with Allan Anderson's assertion that

One of the most significant expressions of Christianity in Africa is the movement of revival and renewal that has arisen at the close of the twentieth century, especially in the cities. We cannot understand African Christianity today without also understanding this form of African Pentecostalism.<sup>5</sup>

A host of reasons for this phenomenon have been given and a number of case studies show that the mushrooming of churches and religious movements, especially the 'wealth and health' and 'faith' gospel types can be attributed to the failure of the economic systems of these countries in the last quarter of the 20th century. In his study on new Pentecostalism in Cameroon, Mbe suggests that Pentecostalism 'carries with it a clear economic message of individual prosperity and enrichment within a local-global context.'<sup>6</sup> He argues that the economic crisis in Cameroon has contributed to the proliferation of these churches; and a clear shift of emphasis from Biblical verses that exalt poverty: 'Blessed are the poor...' (Matth 5:3) to those that advocate prosperity: 'Jesus came to bring abundant life.'<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Allan Anderson, 'The Globalization of Pentecostalism', Paper read at the Churches' Commission on Mission Annual Meeting, University of Wales, Bangor, September 2002, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See U Kalu Ogbu, 'The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1/2 (1988), 3-16; P. Gifford, *New Dimensions in African Christianity*, 1992; Allan Anderson, 'Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa', Paper read at the Africa Forum, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, April 11, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, 'Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa', 2.

<sup>6</sup> A.R. Mbe, 'New Pentecostalism in the Wake of Economic Crisis in Cameroon', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 11/3 (2002), 359-379, especially p. 359.

<sup>7</sup> Mbe. 369.

Nigeria has an abundance of these churches and as Mbe informs us, in Cameroon 'the phenomenon has a clear Nigerian element.'<sup>8</sup> Like elsewhere in Africa, the proliferation of new churches and religious movements occurred at a time when Nigeria was experiencing a social, political and economic crisis. Suddenly the country experienced a wave of Pentecostalization and charismaticization of its Christian religious landscape.

Also, as some of the scholars of African Islam attributed the spread of Islam in Africa to its cultural affinity to the African culture, so do some missiologists attribute the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa, at least partially, to certain African 'cultural factors', such as orality and active community participation. This thesis suggests that the encounter between Pentecostalism and the African traditional religious heritage enables people to lift certain elements of their culture, which they consider necessary for integration in their Christian faith. Allan Anderson aptly sums it up thus:

In Africa, Pentecostal-like movements manifested in thousands of indigenous churches have changed so radically the face of Christianity there, simply because they have proclaimed a holistic gospel of salvation that includes deliverance from all types of oppression like sickness, sorcery, evil spirits and poverty. This has met the needs of Africans more fundamentally than the rather spiritualized and intellectualized gospel that was mostly the legacy of European and North American missionaries. The good news in Africa, Pentecostal preachers declare, is that God meets all the needs of people, including their spiritual salvation, physical healing, and other material necessities. The phenomenon of mass urbanization results in Pentecostal churches providing places of spiritual security and personal communities for people unsettled by rapid social change. The more relevant the church becomes to its cultural and social context, the more prepared it will be to serve the wider society.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the factors for the proliferation of churches and religious movements in Africa, 'many Christian movements in Africa have begun as movements' of the hitherto marginalized 'youth and women, giving opportunities not afforded them by patriarchal and gerontocratic religions that have lost their charismatic power'; and that the older independent churches and the 'newer (...) churches and 'ministries' have all responded to the existential needs of the African worldview', to quote Anderson yet again.<sup>10</sup> For Rwanda, one can evidently argue that, it is the post-genocide challenges that have propelled the first growth rate of new churches in this hitherto predominantly Roman Catholic country.

<sup>8</sup> Mbe, 366.

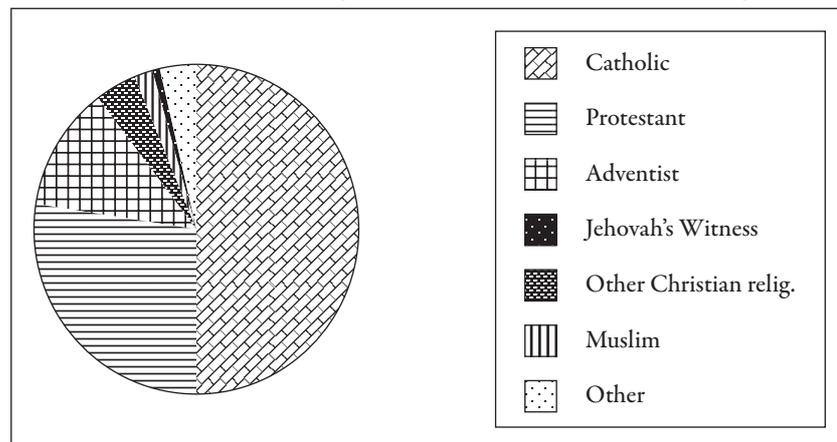
<sup>9</sup> Anderson, 'Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa', 7.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, 'The Globalization of Pentecostalism', 3.

A look at the pre-genocide religious landscape of Rwanda shows why the country was said to be the most Catholic in Africa. Nearly 90% of the population was Christian before the genocide: 62.6% Catholic; 18.8% Protestant and 8.4% Seventh Day Adventist.<sup>11</sup> At a time when most African countries were being rocked by new religious movements in the latter part of the 20th century, Rwanda was still predominantly Catholic and even the main line protestant churches were facing relatively much less competition than their counterparts else where in the continent

Since the genocide the religious demography has been changing, with Protestants surging by nearly 20% in half a decade; while Catholics declined by nearly 8% during the same period. It is estimated that all the protestants put together account for nearly 43%, while the Muslims make up 4.6%; and as we see from the last population census analysis presented in Table 1, the Rwandan society is still relatively quite religious, with the Catholic Church maintaining its traditionally dominant position.

**Table 1: Distribution of Religious affiliation in Rwanda after the genocide**



Source: Centre de Formation et de Documentation, Kigali, cited in Ingrid Samset and Anne Kubai, *Evaluation of the released prisoners' project in Rwanda*, Oslo: Norwegian Church Aid 2005, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Though the Catholic Church retains the majority of the Rwanda Christians, the percentages have changed after the genocide due to a variety of factors, including the emergence of numerous new Churches. See Government of Rwanda, Kigali 1994, 126-128. For the latest statistics of religious affiliation, see the National Office of Population, 2002 National Population Census records, Kigali.

Commenting on Christian faith in post-genocide Rwanda, Rutayisire Antoine, the leader of African Evangelistic Enterprise was reported to have said, 'there is a great turning back to God in Rwanda. The genocide created a great awareness about God.'<sup>12</sup> If they are now turning to God as Rutayisire claims, one wonders why they turned away from God in 1994, or why Rwanda became 'The Land God Forgot'<sup>13</sup> during the genocide. Or still, why the demons/devils were let loose in Rwanda as it is often said, while at the same time Rwandans have traditionally believed that 'God travels around the world during the day, and returns to Rwanda at night'. However, the important point for us is the acknowledgement of the fact that the genocide has contributed largely to changes in the religious landscape of Rwanda.

Gerard van 't Spijker also posits that:

The spontaneous growth of a huge number of new Christian communities is one of the characteristic features in Rwanda after the war that culminated in 1994 in the genocide. The number of such communities was estimated in 1997 at 150 and in 2000 at more than 300. It is noteworthy to mention that African independent churches had never developed in Rwanda, and that neo-Pentecostalism was merely absent before 1994. The growth of the numerous new Christian communities must therefore be related to political developments.<sup>14</sup>

As has been said above, most of these churches were introduced into Rwanda by returnees coming from far and wide. For instance, it was while thousands of refugees lived in camps in northeast Tanzania that they came into contact with the Elim Pentecostal Church. When in 1997, thousands of refugees in the Banaco camp were repatriated, a group of pastors had been ministering to them. This resulted in the establishment of the *L'Église Elim Pentecote au Rwanda* (EEPR) a Pentecostal Church which now numbers over 60 congregations.<sup>15</sup> We can also cite the case of the Evangelical Revival Ministries (ERM) founded by Emmanuel Sitaki, a survivor of the 1994 genocide, is one of numerous

<sup>12</sup> Statement attributed to Rutayisire in 'Rwanda's Evangelical Churches Bring Revival to the Nation' posted by Christianpost, April 24, 2004, website of *Christianpost*, [www.christianpost.com/articla/africa/194/Rwandasevangelical.churches.html](http://www.christianpost.com/articla/africa/194/Rwandasevangelical.churches.html)

<sup>13</sup> Meg Guilleband, *The Land God Forgot*, London: Monarch Books 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard van 't Spijker, 'New Communities in Rwanda after the Genocide', Paper presented at the 11th International Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), Port Dickson, Malaysia 2004, website of *Mission Studies*, [http://www.missionstudies.org/conference/1papers/Gerard\\_spijker.htm](http://www.missionstudies.org/conference/1papers/Gerard_spijker.htm).

<sup>15</sup> See Anna Kubai, 'Being Church in Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Challenges of Forgiveness and Reconciliation', *Journal of Constructive Theology* 10/1 (2004), 57-84.

indigenous religious movements that claim to 'bring healing, hope, and new life in Jesus to the nation'. From a humble beginning, the vision for ERM has grown with an international community of partners such as Central Bible Team and the Multnomah Bible College Teams from the United States of America joining the team in Rwanda in supporting orphans and widows, spreading the gospel through evangelism and church leadership training, micro finance programs, and the long term goal of the 'Hope for The City' centre in Kigali.

It is instructive to point out that even those smaller church denominations which were unable to gain foot-hold in Rwanda prior to the 1994 catastrophe, in spite of the fact that they were present in other parts of Africa, are thriving in Rwanda today and their worship services are flooded with members. Hence the claim that:

Rwandans are again flocking to Churches, this time seeking spiritual instead of physical refuge. But the religious landscape, at least from outward appearance, has changed considerably. Dozens of new, so-called charismatic Churches have emerged across Rwanda, many funded by European and North American sponsors.<sup>16</sup>

#### **'Gospel Explosion': Response to the Post genocide Challenges?**

One of the reasons why many Rwandans are turning to the new churches is a feeling of betrayal and disillusionment with the 'official' church and as we would expect, some have confessed that they left the mainline churches because they did not try to protect the people who sought refuge in the churches. The churches of Rwanda were bloodied and desecrated by the horrific massacres, which took place in the sanctuaries where the victims sought refuge, believing that the clergy would protect them. Some have never returned to the churches to which they belonged before the genocide and others say that they would not go to church for any reason, because of what they saw and heard during the genocide. Some survivors say that it is difficult for them to pray side by side with those accused of killing their loved ones, sometimes in the same church buildings where they were raped. And some of the clergy go about their pastoral work as if nothing ever

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<sup>16</sup> See Government of Rwanda, 'Provisional Population Census Report', National Office of Population, Kigali (August 2004). The statistics however change each year. Cf. De Sam Lazaro, 'Reconciliation in Rwanda', *Religion and Ethics Weekly News* 429 (March 16, 2001), website of *Afrol News*, <http://www.afrol.com/articles/13884>, consulted January 15, 2005.

happened to some members of the congregation on the very altars they call them to partake of the Holy Communion. The role of the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in the genocide is still being debated and accusations of complicity still persist.

Others say that they are going to the new churches because these churches employ a rather personal approach to individual members. In the face of grinding poverty, some of these churches are said to support their members not only spiritually but also socially and even materially. They encourage their members to participate in the national reconciliation and political process. They preach forgiveness and impress on its importance as a religious imperative. Preachers' sermons to congregations on Sundays often urge the members to seek God's face through forgiveness, stressing that Christians must forgive those who have hurt them as they promise to do whenever they say the Lord's Prayer.<sup>17</sup>

Members of these churches claim to experience a sense of belonging and fellowship in contrast to the routine of going to the traditional formal Sunday services that are characteristic of the mainline churches. They say 'there is a different type of Church where people help each other and another type where people are just bored, going to Church every Sunday when they do not even greet one another.'<sup>18</sup> The leadership pays a great deal of attention to members of their congregations and outreach activities are accorded a prominent place in the ministry. For instance, some of them occasionally go out to AIDS clinics to take care of women victims of genocide who were infected through rape, widows, wives and relatives of prisoners as well as child-headed households<sup>19</sup> to give both material and spiritual support.

Thus there may be good reason to suggest that the fast growth of these smaller fellowship groups is due to their appropriation of hope, healing and reconciliation rhetoric and being more readily available to individual members (providing spiritually therapeutic support for grieving genocide survivors, for instance) than the larger and more traditional Churches. It must be remembered that the new churches are inspired by the past and coloured by the present local reality and this explains why they grow in different places. They are growing because they

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<sup>17</sup> Sermon heard by the author in a Sunday service at Christian Life Assembly, Kigali, April 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, the author and a woman pastor, Calvary Temple, Kigali, October 27, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> There are thousands of child-headed households in Rwanda as a result of the genocide. This was a new phenomenon when orphaned children were left on their own in the absence of the traditional family structures after the social fabric was crushed.

help people to apply religious resources in a bewildering context, to use the words of Harvey Cox.

The 'Gospel Explosion' in Rwanda, as it was dubbed, manifests itself in the presence of many Evangelists and Bible Teachers from different parts of the world that conduct large international 'Revival Conferences' or 'Crusades'. They all claim to bring hope to a broken country. Just to mention a few, Book of Hope International, an organization with the mission to take the 'word of God into the hands of children and youth around the world' facilitated a mission to Rwanda 'to bring hope and comfort to the children of a country suffering from painful memories.'<sup>20</sup> Hope Rwanda, founded by Mark and Darlene Zschech of Hillsong Church in Australia brings together a number of churches and ministries: Book of Hope International, Hillsong Australia, Joyce Meyer Ministries, Saddleback Church, Willow Creek Church, Operation Open Heart, and the Rwanda for Jesus Revival Centre. This group project was planned to coincide with the country's 12th anniversary of 100 days of genocide from April 7 till July 15, 2006.

Similarly when Sammy Tippit travelled from the USA to Rwanda in 1995, conducting countrywide Conferences and Crusades for 'the healing of a Nation', his preaching conferences were greeted with tremendous response by thousands of people, and the resultant Restoration Church has continued to grow. Zion Temple Pentecostal Church too, has continued to thrive in Kigali and one of its pastors says, 'This is where people can start again. The Catholics and others come here with wounded hearts, and here they can heal. They know they are safe here.'<sup>21</sup> Whether people are able to start again anew is a question that merits deeper research, however, the need to start again is irrefutable. As already said, some of the churches or religious communities do not seem to espouse any new theologies or even the established theological trends; but whatever the nature of the revival, it is evidently impacting heavily upon Rwanda's post genocide religious landscape. To be able to 'start again', is a great motivation in Rwanda and people are going out in search of promise for prospects of starting life again, wherever such promise may be made.

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<sup>20</sup> Michelle Vu, *Christianpost*, <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20051122/22463.htm>, consulted November 22, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> African Rights Files, Kigali.

### Dynamic Intersections Between the Local and the Global<sup>22</sup>

Gifford, who has become an expert on the subject of Pentecostal churches in Africa, asserts that these churches owe their emergence largely to failure of African economies in the 1980s; and that it is the American rather than the African factor, that is responsible for their rapid growth. Though we do not intend to argue with his thesis here, in the case of Rwanda, it is the peculiar local situation that has opened the floodgates of churches which are in one way or another, directly or indirectly, linked to international networks or 'partners'. It can also be argued that, besides the desire to offer spiritual nourishment, the other factor (again linked to the genocide) is the international community's sense of guilt for not having intervened in 1994.<sup>23</sup> This has led to a kind of rush of NGOs as well as church groups.

An international evangelist asserted that his church group was motivated to be in Rwanda because Christians should not be left behind when others go where there is poverty and human suffering. Also the combined effort of Ambassadors for Christ, Restore Africa and Africa New Life ministry was conceived as an initiative that was 'so badly needed in this war-torn country'. Thus there is a humanitarian element in the emergence of new churches and religious movements as well.

Why is this so? Obviously, these churches, though they do not seem to espouse new theologies or dogma (with many of them even not consciously adhering to the established theological trends) apparently see the need not only for their relevance to this specific situation; but also for a holistic mission, one that caters for the 'whole person' — a 'sound mind in a sound body'. It is also to be remembered that for new churches in many places, the emphasis is on the conversion experience; giving of personal testimony and witness; and preaching personal salvation, rather than on doctrinal faith.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The American Baptist churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) in their endeavour to fulfil the 'Great Commission' have to 'Go Global' and hence they have extended their 'friendship' to the churches in Rwanda. ABCNJ has joined with International Ministries, ABC/USA in a creative mission partnership to empower local churches to engage in global mission. See the website of the *American Baptist Churches of New Jersey*, <http://www.abcnj.org/ministries/missions.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Linda Melvin, in her illuminating book, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed 2000), documents the failure and betray of the international community during the Rwanda genocide, while General Romeo Dallaire, (then in charge of UNAMIR) gives a moving account of his personal experience and struggle in his *Shake Hands With the Devil* (Toronto: Random House 2003)

<sup>24</sup> Shorter and Njiru, 20-21.

Global networking is an inherent characteristic of the whole enterprise of the new churches in Rwanda. The 'dynamic intersections between the local and the global' to use the words of Ronald Bueno,<sup>25</sup> become manifest firstly, as these churches bring together people from far and wide, be they sponsors from North America, Europe or returnees from neighbouring countries coming in with a network of ties and links with the outside world; and secondly, because some of these initiatives are made with a deliberate intention to appropriate the phenomenon of globalization for religious work. We can illustrate this with the case of the American Baptists who established a 'covenant' with a Baptist Church in Rwanda, which was seen as an example of 'mission explosion', the "explosive action", being "that of the Holy Spirit guiding local churches in global mission."<sup>26</sup> This mission was planned after a group of multidisciplinary professionals visited Rwanda in May 2001 and saw the needs of the people there.

A look at the activities of one of the fastest growing churches in Kigali, which is sponsored by Canadian churches, reveals the same trend. It describes itself as

'An English speaking church' with many 'people of different races and nationalities and backgrounds that come together to worship (...) It is a freely chosen association of a group of diverse individuals from the national and international community whose aim is to contribute to the healing and development of Rwanda.'<sup>27</sup>

The church administration has a vision of what needs to be done in Rwanda and it has situated the identified needs well within its mission. In the words of one of the pastors, the church desires to fulfil its mandate, and in so doing, respond to the mandate given to civil society to stand up and build the nation. Indeed this particular church is doing a tremendous job of building the nation. It has several large projects in Kigali that are clearly described in its project vision:<sup>28</sup> the first one is a large church building, which is described as a meeting place for the members,

<sup>25</sup> See Ronald N. Bueno, 'Listening to the Margins: Re-historicizing Pentecostal Experiences and Identities', in: M.W. Dempster, B.D. Klaus, and D. Petersen (eds.), *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion made to Travel*, Oxford: Regnum 1999.

<sup>26</sup> 'American Baptists Catalysts for Medical Mission to Rwanda', website of *World Relief News*, May 2001, [http://www.abc-oghs.org/may\\_world\\_relief\\_news.htm](http://www.abc-oghs.org/may_world_relief_news.htm), consulted on May 28, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> See the Mission Statement of the Christian Life Assembly and the description of the project vision at the newly built church in Kigali.

<sup>28</sup> In the project vision each project is described. There are five projects in total and the document is available from the church administration on request.

where strong ethical and moral teachings and respect for God, authority and fellow men will be freely taught. (It will) be instrumental in bringing healing to the lives of hurting people as love, forgiveness, reconciliation (...) will be learned and lived out by the cross-cultural, cross generational group of believers (...) The 2000 seat podium and associated dining, class room and office facilities will also be one of the most excellent meeting places within the country.<sup>29</sup>

The school will 'be of great benefit to the growing English-speaking populace of Kigali, and ultimately the nation as graduates are prepared to work in the increasingly interconnected world of commerce and services.' The skills training centre is also described as a project that will give the youth 'a fair chance at life', equip the youth with skills 'to contribute to social-economic well-being of Rwanda (...) lead to capacity building and the possibility of self-employment and further job creation thereby easing some pressure on the scarce resources (...) and in so doing, enhance peaceful co-existence.'<sup>30</sup>

The community health and wellness centre will provide 'desperately needed AIDS awareness and prevention, water and sanitation (...) and other related health education', as well as immediate access to health services. The sporting facilities 'will be some of the very best facilities available to the public in Rwanda'; and the gardens 'will be an example of organization, cleanliness and beauty.' Thus these facilities are planned as projects to fill important gaps in health care and leisure.

These facilities are a sign of a new culture of leisure, new ideas about fitness and well being in a new perspective for a 'new nation'. These are new attitudes to leisure — gardens in a capital city without a park for recreation! Again, around these facilities a class of people will emerge, the well-to do, educated Christians as they meet there regularly. Eventually, there will be a flow of commodities, as the facilities have to generate income and provide job opportunities for some of the unemployed members of the church. This element completes the circuit because members will also benefit economically, their standard of living will improve hopefully in tandem with their spiritual nourishment.

Occasionally members of the congregation received testimonies of personal experiences of God's grace through a variety of agents from different places outside the country. Thus some of these links are conduits for the flow of goods as well services, particularly in a situation where the service sector is yet to be fully developed. A case in point is the importation from Canada of the frame of the

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Van 't Spijker.

church building through Mombasa port in 2004. I remember the members of the congregation prayed fervently for the safe arrival of the 'building' and implored God for tax exemption. The church building frame had been procured through fund raising in Canada, and the construction in Kigali was a joint effort of volunteers from Canada and local faithful, who contributed in cash and kind.

### Transcending or Re-inventing Social Cleavages?

After the genocide the population was roughly divided into three broad categories: the returnees, that is, a large proportion that has returned from exile; those who never left the country during the genocide; and finally, the *genocidaires*, that is, those accused of perpetrating the genocide and are either in prison or are yet to be brought to justice. Admittedly, finding a balance between justice and reconciliation or between retribution and forgiveness is a delicate process and a major challenge for the Rwandese society. Justice affirms the survivors and shows that a new moral order, in which there is no fear, has been created. Perpetrators are also wounded and cannot easily accept guilt and shame for their actions, thus healing becomes difficult:

- How do we affirm survivors and at the same time cast out the 'Tutsi' identity of the victims and the 'Hutu' identity of the perpetrators?
- How do we identify the perpetrators, who are also members of community living side by side with the victims, punish them and at the same time bring about reconciliation?

Yet healing must be achieved and justice seen to be done. Again the very nature of reconciliation presents another problem — reconciliation is inherently encumbered with many layers: the national, inter-community, intra-community and the individual, who has to reconcile himself or herself with a life indelibly marked by genocide. Certainly, this multifaceted reconciliation requires a multi-dimensional approach in order to address these layers simultaneously, which is not a mean task by any standards. No doubt, the church has played an important social-political role in the history of Rwanda; and it can still sway the public opinion and influence the social-political trends in the country. But one should bear in mind that people's memories and understanding of events have been clouded by genocide, and therefore, other interpretations are being given to the institution of the church.

Though the churches, both old and new, have appropriated the reconciliation and healing rhetoric, reconciliation itself is a long complex process that is also shaped by structural issues such as poverty and the historical memory. It cannot be achieved through mere rhetoric. The congregations to whom the preachers address their message of salvation are people with a deep sense of pain, trauma and suffering. For such a society, community building and social relations are important and they can only be achieved through a conscious and concerted effort that addresses the crucial issues. However, unlike the mainline churches which have a hierarchical structure and a central source of authority which would make it possible to harmonize and coordinate their approaches, each of the new churches makes its own efforts largely determined by its own means and interest; depending on many factors, chief among them the orientation of its leaders, the affiliations with the place of origin of the members and its own understanding of the concepts of reconciliation, healing and how they can be achieved. First, the very nature of these scattered efforts acts as a militating factor in the common undertaking for reconciliation and healing because there are different understandings and interpretation of reconciliation and healing.

Secondly, these churches do not espouse the same dimension of world-view and they do not integrate the discourse of social structures, the concerns for personal salvation and reconciliation. Therefore, I would argue that since reconciliation and identity are inextricably linked in the case of Rwanda; and since it is not possible to scrub history from collective memory, the search for a new identity that transcends the Tutsi-Hutu identities makes it necessary to systematize and structure the options that are available in the specific context of Rwanda. In other words, for these churches to lead Rwandans in a pilgrimage towards a new national narrative, the salvific concerns must be brought to bear upon the realities of life.

Identity has always been a thorn in the flesh of the Rwandan society. Prior to the genocide, the main identities were Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, but the post genocide society is characterised by an additional layer of identity — returnees who are Anglophone and Francophone. It has been observed that one of the factors influencing the settlement of returnees within Kigali for instance, was the previous group affiliation while in exile. Hence the Francophone and Anglophone identities shape these new social formations. On a micro level, one can even say the Congolese factor can be identified from the Burundi factor. The East African factor looms large and it is evidently at play in the emerging social/community alignments. Apparently, these intricate patterns of formations and relationships reflect the emerging social alignments that have become characteristic of post

genocide Rwandan society. These alignments are mirrored in the majority of the new churches. Members of a congregation tend to identify as a group with a common background, usually on the basis of the place of origin, social ties and trust developed while in exile. It is to be born in mind that mutual distrust is an implicit element of post genocide Rwanda, therefore the bonds created in exile play an important role both in the networks of members and group formation. Thus the churches have wittingly or unwittingly re-invented new layers of identity.

The case of the English-speaking congregation is a clear example of these dynamics. It is important to note that the church defines itself as English-speaking. It would seem that the choice of English language for this mixed congregation is based on its international character, but a closer look at the interaction of its members, particularly those who are not foreigners, reveals a web of social relations and networks which go beyond the church attendance and Sunday worship. Language here becomes a marker of identity, hence the self-description as 'English-speaking church'. It is an identity group, guild of people who share a common East African, largely Ugandan cultural background. The patterns of social networks are refined; and the identity and character of the church are shaped largely by the Anglophone orientation of the members who are all returnees.

If the illustration with the congregation of this particular church can be taken further, it can be said that it is clearly distinguished by the affluence of its members and thus an implicit class distinction. It is the church of who is who in Kigali — *la crème de la crème*. One needs just to look at the array of the expensive cars competing for a slot in the parking bay on Sundays when people are coming to church for the morning service. The worship is characterized by praise songs written by the choir and projected by an overhead projector on to a large screen for all to see. Usually there are prayers for the nation, among others. At some point the pastor asks the members of the congregation to recognize the presence of a senior government minister or of some other prominent personality. Those attending for the first time are acknowledged during the service and later on provided with the necessary information about membership.

The majority of the congregation members being returnees from East Africa, the overtly Anglophone identity is accentuated by a small but conspicuous mix of international staff of the NGOs and diplomatic missions present in Kigali. Around this church is emerging a faith community as well as an identity group, as has already been said. The members identify through church membership, which is usually strengthened during the regular visits and prayers in the homes of the members and the youth camps and training seminars. Evidently, with this

*modus operandi*, social cleavages are entrenched rather than eradicated and even the much talked about reconciliation becomes more elusive as the interaction of the members of the congregation is intra-group, with group solidarity serving as a cordon around the members.

Therefore, I would argue that the churches are yet to find the means to overcome the prevailing challenges to reconciliation and healing in Rwanda. The appropriation of the rhetoric of reconciliation and evangelisation with the emphasis on forgiveness as a way 'of seeking God's face' and individual salvation, without addressing the complexities of the whole reconciliation enterprise: the different layers, the pain that the survivors have to live with, the social cleavages in this deeply wounded and fractured society, has not yielded the much needed reconciliation. Normally, reconciliation is a long and tedious process; it is unlikely to be achieved simply through orchestrated religious events and preaching 'crusades'.

### Conclusion

Evidently the wave of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity that swept through Africa in the last century seems to have been initially less momentous in Rwanda. The Catholic and some mainline churches held the sway and even the few Pentecostal churches that found their way there did not thrive until after the 1994 genocide. Hence it was the post genocide social and political developments that lead to both the emergence of new churches and religious groups, which were not doctrinally or otherwise different from those in other African countries; and the growth of some of the other churches, which had for a long time remained stunted in Rwanda. Perhaps the explosion of churches that swept across Africa several decades ago might have eventually found its way into Rwanda, but the fact that this did not happen until after the genocide leads to the conclusion that it was the challenges of aftermath of the genocide that catalysed the proliferation of churches/religious groups, resulting in the emerging changing religious landscape.

Having been imported into Rwanda by the returnees from various places, the new churches were formed along group identities of their founders, on the basis of shared cultural experiences while in exile. These churches seem to have confined themselves to group identities and hence they have had little impact on the national process, in spite of their appropriation of the healing and reconciliation rhetoric. Preaching individual salvation and the doctrine of forgiveness needs to be augmented with other means which address the crucial issues

pertinent to the process of community building and reconciliation in a fractured society. In conclusion, the phenomenon of these churches has not only contributed to the entrenchment of the social cleavages, but also reinvented layers of identity, which add to the complexity of the post genocide social realities in Rwanda.

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