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lar, daily activities that peacemaking takes place; it is in these ways that the world of violence is stripped of its façade and its falseness is overcome by the truth of the gospel.

Our church has a girls' choir in that same part of town from which the family had to flee. The teenager who flirted with the brother of a drug lord was friends with the girls in our choir. Two years ago, within a matter of hours, three members of the church had to load up a small truck with the meagre belongings of an entire family (elderly grandmother, mother, aunt, uncle and five children, ages 2-17) and move them to another place for fear they would be murdered if they stayed. It was our hope and prayer that at this new place they would be brought into a new community and begin to learn a new sense

of peace and of belonging. The girls' choir is a new gang for about 40 children between ages 7 and 19. It is peacemaking in practice, giving them tools not only for music, but for a new life with one another and with God.

In Romans 5:1ff. Paul talks about the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ. Through this peace we stand in grace and are given the hope of sharing in God's glory. This grace in which we stand is our new gang. It is the peace given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and with which we are called to encounter the world of violence. It is a sense of belonging to a new people, a new gang, that is different and takes precedence above any other loyalty, whether of family or country, gang or cartel.

The gospel amidst ethnic violence in Burundi

Emmanuel Ndikumana (Burundi)

1. Burundi: Beautiful but in pain

Burundi is known as the 'Heart of Africa', not only because of its location near the centre of Africa, but also because the country itself is shaped like a heart. It has been described as the Switzerland of Africa because of its beautiful lakes and Mountains. Together with Rwanda and Uganda, it is known in the history of Christian missions as the locus of the historic East African Revival of the 1930s and 1940s. Together with its 'twin',

Rwanda, Burundi was considered one of the world's most evangelized countries; the very model of successful evangelism with more than ninety-three percent of its population considering themselves to be Christians.

Despite the apparent successful evangelism, however, the country has been experiencing recurring bloody ethnic violence for decades, resulting in widespread poverty, the spread of HIV-AIDS, and other problems. This case study illustrates, through the writer's personal story and experience

in the context of ethnic violence and social injustices, the limits of a gospel that tries to address spiritual and individual needs without paying equal attention to political, social and economic structures.

2. Ethnic Violence

May and June 1972 are dark months in the collective memory of many Burundians. A revolt—some talk about a coup attempt—by Hutu insurgents was crushed in blood by Tutsis and followed by massive killings that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, mainly among the Hutus. My own father, grandfather and all my adult uncles were victims of these pogroms. Deeply seated fear, hatred, mistrust and feelings of revenge characterized the relationship between Hutus and Tutsis and have been shaping Burundi political, social and economic structures ever since.

Even though everyone knew that things were wrong, people did not want to talk about it. Any reference to Hutu or Tutsi was considered divisive and subversive and, therefore, a serious and reprehensible offence. People were not allowed to mourn for their beloved ones. No one ever told me who killed my siblings or why. My mother and grandmother would not talk about it in anyone's hearing. The imposed silence controlled by fear was very destructive. Fearing the truth might be known one day, perpetrators did everything in their power to cover it up. Although the survivors would have wished to know the truth about their killed relatives, they had to remain silent as long as the perpetrators controlled the state machine.

Consequently, hundreds of thousands of orphans grew up knowing their fathers had been killed but incapable of knowing who killed them, for what reason or even where they were buried. When experiencing ill treatment or in the village, they were told that they were 'traitors' children. Unequal and unfair treatment at school (for those who were lucky enough to attend one) and unequal job opportunities for equal or even higher qualifications were daily unquestionable realities, a constant reminder that some were Hutus and others Tutsis.

3. A Thriving Church Despite Injustice

Faith is very important in the midst of such despair. It is to believers an anchor that stabilizes the lives shipwrecking in the storm of uncertainties. It gives hope for a better life; if not in this life, at least in a better world—heaven. One can even hope to meet his or her beloved there.¹ Hope can be what a painkiller is to an aching body or a revitalizer to a weakened one. When badly administered however, hope can act as a sleeping drug; rare are the oppressive regimes that can forbid its use.

The church was already thriving before the 1972 massacres. Contrary to what one might have expected, these massacres did not stop churches from growing. If anything, they boosted them. My own denomination

¹ The last word for some of those who were lucky enough to say goodbye to their beloved ones before going to be slaughtered was: 'see you in heaven'.

grew so quickly that it became the largest among all the Protestant denominations. It spread all over the country, drawing its membership from both Hutus and Tutsis. Interestingly, its makeup and structures mirrored those of the larger society. For example, although its membership was predominantly Hutu, its leadership remained predominantly Tutsi² as it was in both politics and administration. Besides, not only was the church leadership predominantly Tutsi but also nearly all the senior leaders came from the southern region of the country (Bururi) as indeed did most senior political and administrative leaders.

Some of us did not notice such unbalanced roles and power distribution and those who did never dared to question it. To do so would have been interpreted as being inhabited by a spirit of rebellion and division. Given the politically explosive context, anyone believed to be possessed by such a spirit would have been dangerous not only to the church but also to the political establishment. Not many church authorities would therefore hesitate to collaborate with political authorities to 'exorcise' such demonic power. In the rare case of denominations whose leadership was predominantly Hutu, it was their duty to prove their innocence to anyone who might suspect them of harbouring pockets of 'rebellion'.

To safeguard the sensitive relationship with the political and administrative authorities, church leaders were

expected to be 'neutral' both in the content of their teaching and in their leadership. Meddling with politics would not be tolerated. Giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Mt. 22:21) was the expected norm for everyone. Unconditional obedience to government officials by their church members would be one of the proofs that their teachings were not subversive.

Although it was not easy to minister in such a context, many seemed to have adapted well. One was safe as long as one focused on personal salvation and sanctification and the afterlife with no reference to the implications of the gospel here and now, apart from 'interceding for' and submitting to 'all those in authority' (1 Tim. 2:1-2; Rom. 13:1-2). Those who felt something was still missing (such as Pentecostals), could add 'power encounter'. This was another gray and politically neutral area. People delivered from the fear of demonic powers improved their family well-being. They stopped drinking alcohol as well as practising witchcraft. Their economy increased and they could send their children to school if there was one in the area.

These indirect benefits from the gospel were enough to convince authorities about the social contribution of churches although they increased the alert level by offering equal chances to people from both ethnic groups. To minimize these side effects, denominational leaders needed to be wise in the way they appointed supervisors in every area of church life: those who raised no suspicion (essentially Tutsis). It was in the interest of both churches and Hutu Christians that the latter stay away from power.

² It is believed that Hutus make up 85% and Tutsis 14% of the population of Burundi. The remaining 1% is made up of the Twas.

To hold everything together while avoiding the potential frustrations, Christians needed to focus on spiritual benefits of salvation and not on earthly material benefits. A promise of a place for everyone in heaven (Jn. 14:2-3), the certainty of another 'citizenship' in heaven from where we 'eagerly await a Saviour' (Philp. 3:20) and, most importantly, the imminence of his coming (Rev. 3:11) were sources of encouragement to be heavenly minded. When someone living in constant unexpressed fear of death compares the certainties of these promises with the uncertainties of this life, chances are high that he or she will do all it will take not to miss heaven.

4. The Limits of an Individualistic Gospel

As long as the social and political context remained unchallenged, the teaching based on individualistic salvation, personal sanctification and the life to come stood. However, this teaching quickly showed its limits as soon as that context was challenged by the wind of democracy to the disappointment, frustration and confusion of many among those of us who had put all our trust in it as the only gospel. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent pressure from capitalistic Western countries on African nations to 'democratize' themselves, a new constitution that consecrated a multi-party democracy was adopted. The liberalization that ensued turned the world of both areas, that is, politics and church, upside down to such a point that many churches are yet to recover.

Once the possibilities of a better world, while waiting for the one to come, began to show up, ethnic communities began to take precedence over individuals. The old establishment (essentially Tutsi) tried to remake itself by preaching 'change in continuity' while the newly formed political opposition (essentially Hutu) advocated 'a new Burundi'. Once restrictions on freedom of speech and association were lifted, people finally expressed their feelings freely. The promulgated freedom of association meant they were now able to organize themselves in the way they saw fit in either new churches or other political or civil associations. Christians began to split less on doctrinal and ways of Christian expression but more on political allegiances and convictions which in turn followed ethnic identities.

Accustomed to aligning its teaching and practices to the political and social establishment (as long as this was homogenous) the church establishment was trapped, victim of its own teaching and conduct. With Christians now going in different directions, the church not only had no message for them but it also lost its credibility and together with that, the possibility of being a prophetic voice. Some still tried in vain to advocate for political non-involvement based on 1 Peter 2:9; but they found themselves preaching in the wilderness as they were accused of being mere advocates of the status quo.

In the end most church leaders conceded the impossibility and naiveté of the non-involvement policy. They realized that however they tried to shut politics out of church life, politics had inevitably involved itself in church life through the members of the churches

who, logically, were also (official and unofficial) members of political parties.

In June 1993, we finally had presidential and parliamentary elections. A Hutu President was elected for the very first time in the history of the country. To many Hutus, this was a dream becoming a reality, but to many Tutsis it was simply a nightmare. To others still, this was something totally unacceptable. On October 21st, the newly elected president was assassinated in a military coup and the descent to hell began once again. Tens of thousands of Tutsi were killed by Hutus in revenge for the assassinated president. The then Tutsi-dominated army reacted by killing thousands of Hutus. A horrendous ethnic bloody war started and went on for nearly fifteen years.

The social and economic consequences were catastrophic. Hundreds of thousands of Hutus sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, joining those who had left in 1972. Others, mainly Tutsi, sought refuge in displaced camps under army protection. Orphans, widows, elderly and disabled people were in such numbers that the dislocated communities could not handle them. Basic social and economic infrastructures such as schools and health centres were destroyed. The fertile country used to produce enough food for its entire population, but now depended on humanitarian aid to feed the survivors as there were neither enough people nor security to grow food. The downfall was such that Burundi is now ranked the third poorest country on the planet

5. Conclusion

This case clearly shows, one hopes, that a high number of converts should not be confused with successful evangelism. The blood of tribalism can still be running deeper than the waters of baptism even after there is a church in every corner. A gospel that limits its claims to individual salvation and personal sanctification with promises for the life to come while neglecting its implications in all the dimensions of this life is at best inefficient and at worst wrong and misleading. Those who, for whatsoever reason, do not allow the gospel of Christ to permeate and engage all the dimensions of life: spiritual, political, social and economic find themselves soon or later unable to live out the very gospel they preach.

The love of God and one's neighbour in the context of violence, particularly ethnic violence, calls for an intentional confrontation with all forms of structural injustices. The gospel that has no power to confront them is not gospel, particularly for the victims of those injustices. The scandalous message of the cross sees wrongs in both the victims and their offenders before offering both of them the possibility to repent and to be reconciled with God and with one another. That is, the gospel which is relevant for countries such as Burundi deeply affected by violence is (and has to be) highly subversive politically, socially and ethnically. One can preach authentically biblical reconciliation in a context of ethnic violence of genocidal dimensions only if he or she is prepared to allow this message to go as far and as deep as the violence has gone: in all areas of life in all its dimensions. The Whole Gospel is for the Whole World.