

CONTEXTUALIZATION: THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE IN RWANDA

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0. Introduction

- Rwanda is a country that existed for more than 5 centuries as a monarch, colonised in 19th century by the Germans later on a protectorate of Belgium and at the independence in 1962 was turned into a modern state.
- It is 26,340 square kilometres with a population of 8 million. It is the most densely populated country in Africa with 303 persons per square kilometre. Life expectancy is 41 years.
- 70% of the adults can read and write and 60% are under poverty line
- 50% of the population are Catholics 27% protestants 12% Adventists and 2% Muslims
- The role the Catholic Church can play in peacebuilding in Rwanda
- The factors that influence the ability of the Catholic Church to promote peace in Rwanda and in the great lakes region in general.
- The opportunities that the Catholic Church has in peacebuilding in Rwanda.
- The challenges of peace building in Rwanda.

1. The Nature of the Problem of Peace in Rwanda

- The basic cause of the lack of peace in Rwanda is the **ethnic division** and conflict that leads to hatred and violence.
- In Rwanda, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are not real ethnic groups or tribes. Normally an ethnic group or a tribe has its own language, culture and a territory which is not the case in Rwanda. Hutu and Twa have the same language the same culture and they live side by side in all parts of the country. There is no region for Hutu or Tutsi or Twa. The ethnic group or tribe in Rwanda should be Banyarwanda as we have Baganda, Batoro, Banyankore or Banyoro in Uganda. It is a one tribe nation
- Originally the grouping and identification of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa was based on different trades in the society that were complementary. The Hutu were cultivators, the Tutsi were cattle keepers and the Twa were pot makers,

hunters and artists. They completed one another economically, culturally, religiously and politically for several centuries in building the Rwandan nation.

- History shows that belonging to an ethnic group was flexible, when a Hutu could acquire a good number of cows he could become a recognized cattle keeper and therefore a Tutsi. When a Tutsi could lose cows and shifts to cultivating he could little by little be identified with the cultivators and therefore a Hutu. The ethnic identity was flexible and often could go with the change of social status and trade.
- This flexibility of ethnic identity was changed by the introduction of the identity card by the Belgians in 1932 which included ethnic identification. From then the ethnic identity was fixed definitively for the generations to come. Even in case of mixed marriages the children would be given the ethnic identity of the father.
- With the coming of the politics of modern states in Africa and the introduction of political parties and ideologies, the ethnic groups were manipulated and became political differences or political adversaries. So since then **the real conflict in Rwanda is not ethnical but political.**
- When African countries started asking for independence, the Belgian colonialists were not happy with the Tutsi who were in power they supported the Hutu and in a bloody revolution the Hutu came to power and many Tutsi went in exile and the others were killed.
- A series of violent ethnic clashes followed 1959 and human lives were lost and many refugees run to neighbouring countries in 1963, 1973, 1990 and the climax was the genocide in 1994.
- After the genocide in 1994 we have a society with many complex problems. The genocide was not committed against strangers but very closely related people
- Neighbours killing neighbours, people who have lived together for years, colleagues of school and work, mixed marriages and children from these marriages and the in-laws Children and parents or uncles and aunts
- Christians and parishioners who prayed together
- God fathers and mothers and their children in baptism
- Pastors and their parishioners

As a consequence we have

- The most intimate natural and Christian relations of people destroyed or injured
- The survivors of genocide who are deeply injured physically, morally, psychologically and spiritually

- Thousands of prisoners and thousands who are free but suspected or even accused
- The families of the accused and the survivors living side by side at work, in schools in church etc...
- Thousands who do not know where their people died without a decent burial

2. The Catholic Church in Rwanda

- The Catholic Church was the first new religion to come to Rwanda and to be well received by Rwandans.
- It has had significant influence in the development of Rwanda into a modern state. It was the Catholic Church that started schools, health centres, hospitals and had a leading role in socio-economic development.
- 50% of the population of Rwanda are Catholics and practicing Catholics. In some areas Catholics are even more than 60% of the population.
- The Catholic Church has structures that reach each and every corner of the country- Dioceses, parishes, sub-parishes and basic Christian communities (15-20 families). It is a structure that no other organisation has except the state.
- There is a commission of justice and peace in each of these structures of organisation
- People trust the church and in general listen to it willingly
- As a leading institution in the country for education, the Catholic church has the opportunity to transmit the Christian values of peacebuilding

3. The Efforts and Challenges of the Catholic Church

- After the genocide we have community of people who were deeply wounded morally, spiritually, traumatised and others physically handicapped
- The Catholic Church itself, as any other institution and community in Rwanda, was also deeply affected by the genocide and requires physical, moral and spiritual reconstruction
- The first things to do was the reconstruction of the basic structures and providing the basic necessities – the time of emergency
- The efforts to find a way of pacifying the bitter hearts, the traumatised people with a lot of fear and anger accumulated for so long
- To find the ways of reconciliation by a **special synod** and active participation in **Gacaca courts**
- The courage to ask for forgiveness and to forgive

4. The Challenges in the Catholic Church

- An adapted post-genocide pastoral work for peacebuilding rooted in the basic moral values, the memory purification and reconciliation with our past
- Researches in Catholic theology to develop the means that can make relations of Rwandans stronger in baptism and the Eucharist than ethnic relations
- The use of the sacrament of penance for reconciliation and healing of ethnic hatred
- The reconciliation with oneself, with God and with the others
- To develop a faith characterised by trust that overcomes the fear of the other

Conclusion

- The Catholic Church has an opportunity for Peacebuilding in Rwanda but it requires research and creativity nourished by faith and prayer