

Book Review

*Mirror to the Church*

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Identity is the distinguishing element in which one's motivation, actions, and beliefs are understood. Contributing factors of one's identity are also important to understand as the context of each person may vary. Emmanuel Katongole begins his book, *Mirror to the Church*, by introducing this concept through a gruesome description of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and expands upon the history of Christianity in Rwanda leading up to the genocide to show how the genocide is a mirror to the Western church. Not many people know about the Rwandan genocide because the rest of the world was reluctant to name it one, though nearly 800,000 Tutsis were killed within 100 days (Katongole 39). This genocide was initially not considered to be a genocide because it was Hutu Rwandans killing Tutsi Rwandans: an inside war in which the West did not want to be a part of. However, the Rwandan genocide in 1994 is deeply relevant for our current Western society, and Katongole examines the state of Rwanda from its social, cultural, and political past up to the moment of all the killings and uses it to reflect the systematic flaws to the Western church through the lens of a mirror, memory, and mission. In this paper, I will critically engage with Emmanuel Katongole's analysis of the Rwandan genocide, by drawing out key points and connecting them to the issues that we have today, and then I will discuss Katongole's missional implications for today, especially in regards to issue of race and how it relates to the current social justice movements and the church.

The argument of this book is the question of identity in relation to others, national identity, and Jesus Christ and of what difference Christianity makes in the form of social engagement. This forces people to look into their past, contributing/outside forces that may strongly define the norm, the church's present impact on society, and the future that is shaped by their current decisions, which is exactly what Emmanuel Katongole does by leveling the history and identity of the Rwandan genocide with that of the West. Katongole points out how the

Rwandan's body politic was one that was shaped by Christian missions (12). The genocide did not happen between Christians and non-Christians, but it was Rwandan Hutu killing their Rwandan Tutsi brothers and sisters (19). Disregarding their identity in relation to Christ and His body, Christian Hutus, including priests, still participated in killing their Christian Tutsi brothers and sisters (19). Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, the former president of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, visited Rwanda in 1994 and asked the assembled church leaders, "Are you saying that the blood of tribalism is deeper than the waters of baptism?" and one leader answered, "Yes it is" (22). Throughout his book, Katongole questions what difference does Christianity make? In the case of the genocide of 1994, it did not make a difference.

Africa is a hotspot for American missionaries, who go to do mission work, yet many of the Western missionaries and churches in Rwanda in 1994 fled when violence bled throughout the country. Most missionaries go to "educate people about AIDS, dig wells, teach children, and help start small businesses" (23). Identity plays a part in this context as American missionaries may go with an assumption they are going to "save Africa," missing the point that Christian mission is not "so much about delivering aid or services as it is about the transformation of identity" (23). This assumption is similar to Western ideology that "promotes freedom and justice for the good of all humanity" (43). The missed point of transformation of identity through Christian faith is proven in the very nature of the genocide. In the context of the genocide, Christian missionary and church organizations, with one or two exceptions, disconnected with their identity to Christ, who commands us to "lay your life down for your friends," and they fled the country to save themselves, making them no different from the businesspeople who also fled (Jn. 15:13-14; Katongole 42). The question Katongole poses for the Western Christians in 1994

is what is the difference between Western humanitarians and themselves as they faced the genocide?

In many ways, the tribalism of the West that bleeds through Western Christianity contributed to the hostility between Tutsi and Hutu identity in Rwanda from 1897 onwards. In the pre-colonial kingdom of Rwanda, there was no history of violence between Hutus and Tutsis (55). G.W.F. Hegel, a German philosopher, taught that “human progress was the result of the Spirit’s actualization in history” (55). Therefore, a place “like Germany” was considered to be advanced, whereas a place like Africa, divergent from the norms of European life, was primitive (56). In his logic, the Spirit had not yet touched Africa because of its “primitiveness.” Another “Christian” European, John Speke, saw Africans as a “primitive people in need of evangelism and education by Europeans” (56). However, when he crossed paths with Africans, who seemed to be more advanced, Tutsis, he reasoned that they had to be “the descendants of Christians who had come south centuries before” and that even their physical features were a sign of it (57). The West introduced the concept of race to Africa, and the fluidity of complex relations among Africans turned into “simplistic racial categories that defined the Tutsi minority as superior and the Hutu majority as inferior” (57). This division between two bodies of people was never reconciled or revised even throughout a powerful revival that swept through this region from 1930 onwards (62). The renewed identity as one body in Christ was never restored, but instead the identity in modernity and progress was amplified.

The identity of the Western church has similarly been compromised with silence of talking about the system that provides and is fueled upon the luxuries of comfort, choice, and money, which are all forms of greed. Democracy and capitalism in America only work because of the greed, or self-interest, that is natural to our hearts. We are in an economic institution that

no longer endorses a community or body that has everything in common and shares (Acts 2:44), but celebrates individuality and mutual beneficial agreements. We are in a social and political institution that endorses national sovereignty that “runs deeper than any bonds that Christians in one country share with Christians of another country” (82). We have become so complacent in the renewal of our minds that we have given into these ideologies and institutions without giving much thought to it. The church has “learned and practiced ways of reading Scripture and worshiping God that prevents the gospel from making a difference in our lives” (89). At the same time, we need to know where and how our ways of reading Scripture are “held captive by the pattern of this world if we are to experience the freedom of another way “ (89). By realizing the deep cracks in the foundations of American Christianity, we can begin to understand that what happened in Rwanda could happen to us and that it is not as foreign as we may be taught to think. The question of identity in American Christianity remains the same: what difference does the gospel make in people’s lives?

Up to this point, it may seem like there is no hope for change, as it has been shown that through the past and present, Christianity has not seemed to make a significant difference in the broken system we are in; it is as if we are trapped between a rock and a hard place. However, Katongole does not leave his readers without hope as he promotes the significance of realigning the posture Christians take regarding social engagement. We have been directed toward the issue of “making a difference,” and it is as much of an external change as it is an internal one. Katongole suggests that we take a “prophetic posture” instead of the pious, political, and pastoral postures that have not been effective to see long-term, fruitful change. Katongole says, “Those who assume pious posture value obedience, but they need not be meek. They are often bold in their faith, using social influence to invite political leaders to experience a personal relationship

with Jesus” (100). Those who take on the political posture are loyal to the “tenets of democracy” and ensure the spread of democratic capitalism for the good of the whole world (103). Those in this position say that the church’s role is “to help shape national political dialogue, while remaining a neutral party that can mediate between various political positions to achieve the best possible synthesis” (103). Those who assume the pastoral position are often called to play the role of the Good Samaritan, being sacrificial and tending to the needs of those who are marginalized. Katongole suggests that there is another way to position ourselves as the prophetic posture is one that interrupts all norms and social, political, economic assumptions (116). It is a costly position because it goes against the relevance of our current age and looks to the reality of the Kingdom of God.

Racism is an important issue that we as Christians need to address because it is not an issue of our skin tones and heritage, but an issue of sin. If racism was about skin color, Hutus would not have murdered 800,000 of their Rwandan Tutsi brothers and sisters. When we look into the mirror of the Rwandan genocide, we see the reflection of our current socio-political climate as injustice against the Black community remains challenged and hate-crimes against Asians rise. The issue is not color, but it is the idea that those who look different do not have the same worth or dignity. Those who assume a pious posture may engage with this social injustice by “reposting” Instagram or Facebook posts to stand by the victims in solidarity. Those who assume a political posture may have reasoned that their vote for a particular president or party would be an advocate against the issue of systematic racism or that God had chosen a certain man over the other to do His will. Those in pastoral postures may have gone out to pray for the people at BLM protests and praised in the streets. People who take up these postures are not un-Christian or unbiblical, but is there another way to interrupt the issue of division between races?

The missional implication toward the issue of racism would be to open up a wild space where all different people would take up a prophetic posture of serving God together and worshipping as one body and know that we are all created in the image of God. In Revelations 7:9 it says, "Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." This prophetic vision proclaims that we are one body, that we are to worship God together without discrimination, and that we are citizens of Heaven. As a multi-ethnic culture, we must take on the prophetic posture of humility and meekness. Our fallen society will always target our differences, especially by skin color or economic status. Because racism is not a skin color issue, it will always exist in this age. When one group is targeted, for instance the Black community, a church in its prophetic posture can surround, love, and even repent on behalf of the aggressors. And then the Black community on their end can bless and release forgiveness and grace. All of these actions would only be possible by an internal change and realization that we are not citizens of this world, but citizens of heaven. Those in the prophetic posture must always take Jesus at his word and live the kingdom life he taught us now (154). From the culture we set within our churches, believers will have glimpses of heaven through prophetic communities.

Christianity cannot just be stamped onto our current system, but there must be an internal and external change of believers. These changes will be costly especially when it is the most dangerous or disruptive to choose God. Our identities must no longer be formed as American, Rwandan, Korean, or Mexican, but sons and daughters of God and citizens of his kingdom. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 is a mirror to the church, so we must take on the humility, meekness, and skin of Jesus and disarm the power of differences we see in one another.

Bibliography

Katongole, Emmanuel, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.