

Mirror to the Church is a book about Katongole's experience with identifying his own Christian identity. Throughout the book, Katongole discusses historical events that occurred and helps the readers understand that our identity as Christians can be reflected and seen through these historical events. The Christian that we are and we believe to be can be seen through the mirror and reflection that we can observe from such tragic events. Our viewpoints and ways we identify ourselves can be questioned and needs to be further developed. As a Christian, we need to be able to form an identity that restates and rebuilds who we are and what we are for our community and society.

Katongole claims that "Christianity is meant to shape a new identity within us by creating a new sense of we — a new community that defies our usual categories of anthropology¹". Our identity that we hold and believe about ourselves must be radically changed and we must make sure that our Christian identity is the one and only identity that we identify with. As a Christian, we must make sure that our minds are fully transformed and we see ourselves and the world around us through the Lord's perspective². Throughout the book, Katongole stresses this importance and explains to his readers how this is relevant and can be seen not only in our current society but also throughout our history.

Katongole's deep dive into the history of the Rwandan event is crucial to show the readers that our identities as civilians and citizens of a specific environment and society may affect our judgement and poor identity development as people of God. With the devotion and motivation to be disciples of God means that we must identify ourselves as a separate category entirely. Christianity in itself and being a Christian is the identity that we must live by. Yes, we have our own ethnicities and backgrounds. However, as Christians and because of the fact that

¹Katongole, Emmanuel and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*.

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the Lord created us all in His image, we do not need to shape our identity based on our ethnicities. For example, as a Korean, I categorize myself as a Korean American. However, my Christian faith and beliefs do not need to be identified as a Korean Christian. Being a Christian for me means I am able to identify myself as a Christian and Christian only without the concerns or worries of trying to identify myself with my ethnic background.

“The church’s mission, then, is not so much rooted in some future that we’ve yet to achieve as it is in remembering God’s new creation, which Jesus embodied when he rose from the dead. Our mission is to be a new community that bears witness to the fact that in Christ there is a new identity. It is only by being such a unique people from ‘every tribe and language and people and nation’ (Revelation 5:9) that we can both name and resist the spells that would have us live as tribalized people³”. This quote from the text explains the overall meaning and theme of the book. It explains to us in the most simple terms and words how our identity in Christ should be what we embody ourselves as and identify ourselves as.

As a person of God, our goal and mission should not be something that we have based on our surroundings and environment. Instead, it should be something that is built upon what is needed in our Christian society as a whole. “And that is what the Christian story is about — offering a fresh lens through which to see ourselves, others, and the world. In the process, Christianity is meant to shape a new identity within us by creating a new sense of we — a new community that defies our usual categories of anthropology⁴”. Christians should have a new identity they identify themselves with after deciding to dedicate their lives to the Lord. The amount of sacrifice and motivation it takes to get there can be challenging. However, it is important to note that with this new identity comes great responsibility.

³Katongole, Emmanuel and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*.

⁴Katongole, Emmanuel and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*.

Our identity in Christ and as Christians are not limited to just living a faithful life. In fact, our goal and mission should be to make sure that the events that occurred in our history do not repeat itself. We can not make promises that they will not happen again but we can use those experiences to build upon our character and learn from the past. As a Christian, it is important that we are able to live life with God's intentions in mind and live for the greater mission. Through our reflection on our past events and history, we can make sure that our new identities are not tainted with the possibilities for the past to reoccur (at least not with the intention for it to reoccur).

The most interesting issue of importance I found in the book was Katongole's statement about the fact that the Rwandans were betrayed by the church. The Rwandans were betrayed and attacked by their neighbors and their community⁵. However, the most shocking fact was that they were betrayed by their own church. Whether it was their local church or Western churches in the area, these churches turned over the Christian community and broke their trust.

I found this very disturbing and extremely sad. I began to wonder how someone of the same religion could do such a thing. It goes beyond what one would expect for a Christian to do. In fact, it is just immoral in general to have to experience something like this. The fact that this is a true event and part of our Christian history is extremely depressing. It makes me meditate on how this might affect our identity as Christians and how others in the world view us due to these past events.

As a Christian, I truly believe that our actions and behavior needs to be taken seriously and carefully measured. A recent event that comes to mind is the Korean churches in Korea at one point continued to worship in large numbers secretly during the pandemic and lockdown. These actions portrayed Christians in such a negative spotlight that for a brief second, I was

⁵Katongole, Emmanuel and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*.

embarrassed to be associated as one. This event is not as tragic as the example that Katongole uses in his book. However, it made me realize that no matter how small and insignificant it is, any action that portrays Christians in a negative way can shape our identity as a Christian. Not only that, but it can create an identity that others view us as.

Katongole's specific example of Christians abandoning and betraying other Christians also made me remember about a pastor who stole our church's offering for months on end. Historical events shape us to become a better Christian and allow us to try to not associate ourselves with those negative events. However, personal tragedies like my story makes us hold a specific idea of Christians and this betrayal creates a sense of abandonment that we continue to carry throughout our lives. This makes it difficult for us to transform our identity as Christians, something that should be done. It makes us layer our identity on top of one another rather than living and transforming our identity completely.

It was interesting to see that my perception of identity was completely different from what Katongole explains it to be. Today, our goal should not be just to overlook historical tragedies and events. Our goal as Christians should be to use our experiences and these events to create a new identity for ourselves, an identity that celebrates a renewal of our lives and the beginning of our walk and journey with the Lord. As a Christian, I grew up not realizing that I piled on my hate and anger towards my experiences instead of overcoming them and evolving my identity for the better.

My goal and my opinion on what a Christian's motivation should be is the fact that our identity as Christians should be different from the life that we lived before we met Christ. Does that mean we should overlook and ignore the tragic and historical events that occurred and will occur? No, in fact those experiences and happenings should be used to mold and shape the

identity that we create for ourselves and for the Lord. We have to remember how Christianity creates our identity today and how the past events help shape those identities that we create for ourselves today.

Instead of holding on to the grudges and negative experiences that we may have experienced, we have to move on from them and grieve the past before letting them go. After proper grieving and forgiving the past, we must be able to create a new identity for ourselves that praises and celebrates our relationship with the Lord. Ultimately, our identities should be created and formed through not only our past but also by our dedication and promise to be a disciple of the Lord. With our new identities, we can create a better path and future for ourselves and the future generations to come.

In conclusion, my experience with this book was overall positive. The book opened my eyes to certain events that have happened throughout history, events that I never really looked into in such detail. It made me realize that I was oblivious to these historical events due to being so focused on my own life and my own identity. These historical events, I realized, allow us to learn deeper about how to reflect and use the experiences to mold our identity as Christians. The book helped me to learn more about the importance of identity and how common it is for someone to struggle with finding their identity. Following Katongole's message and overall growth in his own identity through these events allowed me to really see and notice the importance of what it means to be a Christian. As a Christian, I realized how crucial it is to be able to create and build a new identity based on my promise and willingness to walk the rest of my future with the Lord. I also learned that our growth and development in our identity with the Lord can be shaped with historical events that occurred and will occur in the future. Overall, this

book was an eye opening experience for many reasons and it has definitely had a positive effect on me and my life.

Works Cited

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