

Course: CS 502 – Church as a Social and Cultural Institution Date: 02/27/23

Instructor: Professor Stanley John Name of Student: Mark Ampah

Topic: Book Review: Katongole's *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*

This book written by Katongole is about the genocide in Rwanda how the church failed the people cccccccc. The perception of the church and its role in the world is crucial and Katongole's book *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* exposes how the church has failed to unify people but rather fanned divisions, tribalism and promoted racism and discrimination. That is the church has failed to promote love and unity.

Using the 1994 genocide in Rwanda where Christians in Rwanda took up machetes and looked in the faces of fellow Christians and hacked their bodies to pieces.¹ Incidentally, these gruesome murders started during Easter and claimed the lives of some 800,000 people in a country that is largely Christian. Over a period of hundred days, Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed throughout Rwanda in their homes, at roadblocks and in churches by their fellow Hutus. The question is why would Christians who have been worshipping in the same church rise up against fellow Christians and murder them? Katongale pointed out that Rwanda, the most Christianized country in Africa became the site of the worst genocide.²

The church failed the vulnerable people, mainly Tutsis who had ran to the church to seek shelter. The church which they expected to protect them allowed her premises to be used as slaughterhouses.³ In one account, he stated that the killers entered the church, full of people who

¹ Katongole, Emmanuel and Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 19

² Ibid., 19

³ Ibid., 35

had sought shelter there and killed everyone inside by hand. Small children were pounded to death with hammers. Adults were dismembered with machetes. The building was not damaged, but the church was slaughtered. Four years after the massacre the bodies still lay there as they had fallen, a memorial to the dead.⁴ These people thought that God was their only hope but the church in Rwanda gave them up. Katongole pointed out in his book that during this period of “darkness” in Rwanda, the world sat and watched this carnage without intervening to help. He argued that tribal sentiments existed in pre-colonial Rwanda as roles that determined people’s place in society.⁵ However, when Europeans settled in Rwanda, they ascribed biblical explanations to these roles, insisting that they could see Tutsis’ physical features as descendants of Semites while the Hutus were the lineage of Ham, the cursed race. Using racial categories, these Europeans defined the Tutsi minority as superior and the Hutu majority as inferior.⁶ Thus, they played on the story that had formed them as a people.

When Belgium took over Rwanda after the World War I, they developed the nation, educated mostly Tutsi children and invited them to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and receive the light of education.⁷ The Belgians deepened the tribal sentiments in Rwanda thereby nurturing hate and resentment among Rwandans. On the contrary, what was not a problem in pre-colonial Rwanda now became a problem. Katongole argued that there are tribes in Europe and among the whites, so why should tribe be a label reserved exclusively for non-western people?⁸ The result, therefore was that Rwanda became a people who were willing to kill one another because of the

⁴ Ibid., 35

⁵ Ibid., 57

⁶ Ibid., 57-58

⁷ Ibid., 60

⁸ Ibid., 51

story they were first told by Europeans and later learned to tell themselves.⁹

In examining this assertion, I would like to differ from the view of Katongole and point out that the Europeans did not put new structures in place. What they really did was to use the existing structure that existed in pre-colonial Rwanda. However, the missionaries and the church failed to point out to Rwandans that both the Hutus and Tutsis are one in Christ. Using Speke's view of Africa that Africans are the descendants of Ham who was cursed in the book of Genesis and for that reason were inferior and primitive, the missionaries advanced their agenda of evangelism and education.¹⁰ It was this same concept that the missionaries used to justify that the Tutsis were superior because they had physical features typical of Semites and not Hamites.¹¹ This is what sowed the seed of division that Hutus and Tutsis are not one. Hays in his book *From Every People and Nation – A Biblical Theology of Race*, pointed out that the curse on Canaan does not appear to be pronounced so that Canaan will be punished for Ham's sin, but the curse is a prophetic curse against the future enemy of Israel, a descendant of Ham who will be like Ham in this regard.¹² Hays argued that the curse on Canaan should be interpreted within the Old Testament context and identified with the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites inhabitants of the Promised Land. Therefore, it is incorrect to call this the 'curse of Ham' or identify it with Black Africa or Africans in any way.¹³ Thus, the church failed to unite the Hutus and Tutsis, to engage the social, economic, and political systems to make a real difference in the lives of people.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid., 52

¹⁰ Ibid., 56-57

¹¹ Ibid., 57

¹² Hays, Daniel J. *From Every People and Nation – A Biblical Theology of Race From Every People and Nation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 55

¹³ Ibid., 56

It is heart warming to say that in Katongole's book, he revealed that a minority Muslim community in Nyamirambo stuck together and refused to divide themselves between Hutus and Tutsis to protect their Tutsi members from the violence that threatened their lives.¹⁵ They refused to give up their Tutsi members to be slaughtered. Unfortunately, this is what the church in Rwanda failed to do. The church betrayed their Tutsi members and gave them up to be slaughtered. This is heart breaking because scripture says in Galatians 3:28 that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ It is clear from the foregoing that the church in Rwanda did not have renewal of mind. Scripture points out in Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will"¹⁷. Katongole pointed out that the renewal of our minds is crucial if we are to worship God in spirit and truth. He remarked that the renewal of our minds is not enough, because worship is work that we do with our bodies and our bodies, like our minds, have been shaped by the stories we live by.¹⁸

Consequently, whatever the missionaries did was influenced by the categories of race and tribe, primitive and advanced which were already formed in their minds.¹⁹ Hutus and Tutsis did not see themselves as one in Christ because the church failed to teach them that.

¹⁴ Katongole, Emmanuel and Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 94

¹⁵ Ibid., 122

¹⁶ *Life Application Bible Study Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 1968

¹⁷ Ibid., 1898

¹⁸ Katongole, Emmanuel and Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 72

¹⁹ Ibid., 71-72

Using the story of the Hutu boy who fled with the Tutsis to hide in the bush for about two to three weeks is typical of one who did not see division or differences in tribe, ethnicity, or nationality. This is what Christian identity must be. It must be devoid of differences whatsoever. Therefore, the church failed in her missional activity. Jesus mentioned in John 17:20-23 that “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me²⁰.”

It is unfortunate that Rwandans lost hope in the church after the genocide.²¹

Notwithstanding, with God all things are possible. God is able to heal the land and raise a church that will see themselves as one.

The tragic incident in Rwanda has serious missional implications for the church today. The church has a huge responsibility to proclaim the unity in Christ Jesus and teach the congregation that our tribal, ethnic, and national identities are not meant to divide us for who we are but to see ourselves as one in Christ Jesus. It is sad that the issue of race is pervasive in the Western culture to the point that people are categorized and treated according to the color of their skin even in the church. Among Black churches, ethnicity is prominent, and it is sometimes nurtured in the

²⁰ *Life Application Bible Study Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 1775

²¹ Katongole, Emmanuel and Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 16

church than promoting unity in Christ. Unfortunately, the categorization in the Rwandan church is present today and this is what the church needs to watch out and fight against it. We as a people live in a polarized world of nationality, racism, tribalism, and ethnicity but in Christ, Christians could be one if we pay more allegiance to Christ than our nationality, race, tribe, and ethnicity.

In conclusion, the tragic experience of the Church in Rwanda is indeed a lesson for the universal church but there is hope for the church if only she learns from it.

Reference

1. Hays, Daniel J. *From Every People and Nation – A Biblical Theology of Race From Every People and Nation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003)
2. Katongole, Emmanuel and Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan *Mirror to the Church – Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009)
3. *Life Application Bible Study Bible, NIV* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011)