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REVIEW OF

*Katharina Peetz, LISTENING TO ORDINARY RWANDANS
SEARCHING FOR A NEW THEOLOGY AFTER GENOCIDE*

Preliminary: - “A Theology from Below”

I read this article by Katharina Peetz with a particular interest since I am currently conducting research on peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The article is based on the conference lecture, “*Reinventing Theology after the Genocide in Rwanda. Challenges and Hopes*”.

The issue of theology after the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda raised in this article is a fundamental topic for theology, specifically for African theology, and even more so for the church in Rwanda. The author interviewed ordinary people to gain insights into their faith and to sketch a new way of analysing theology after the genocide. This new theological approach relies on authentic faith experiences. In fact, it is a way of conceptualizing theology from a grassroots level. As a scientific discipline, theology must also borrow from the interdisciplinary methods of other sciences.

Comment

The article makes several important contributions of which I will highlight three:

The Image of God: It is insightful to find that ordinary people, despite the genocide and its consequences, still have a positive image of God. God remains their refuge despite what they have endured. If they are still alive, it is thanks to the hand of God that has guarded and protected them. This positive view of God, despite negative experiences, is nearly common throughout the Great Lakes region. In my interviews with survivors of police violence during the 2015 political

crisis in Burundi, the victims still kept a positive view of God despite the inhuman treatment they had undergone. What about the individuals, including relatives, who, unfortunately, did not survive? How can theology explain the atrocities of genocide in the face of God's omnipotence? Where was God during that time? These are questions of theodicy that remain an enigma. Günter Thomas's notion of '*responsive vulnerability*', as mentioned by the author, along with the idea of a weak God who dies on the cross, seem less convincing to ordinary people, especially those who were victims of genocide. To continue to see God positively, to consider God as the foundation of life and the reason for living in any situation is perhaps a way to remember the past and to cope with the trauma of the genocide.

It could be pointed out that not everything can be explained. The most important thing for ordinary people is to find an anchor for their faith, i.e., reasons to continue to believe.

The question of forgiveness: Katharina Peetz notes that pre-genocide theology emphasized forgiveness under the maxim "*one must forgive*", which the catechism teaches. But she is right to argue that a post-genocide theology, while emphasizing forgiveness must also leave the choice to the victims whether or not to forgive. Again, this idea is somehow similar to the perception of that Burundian refugees that I interviewed. For them, what matters first is justice before forgiveness.¹

A post-genocide theology should stand up to any form of human rights violation: A theology of human rights is, in my opinion, particularly valid in a post-genocide context. It is also legitimate wherever human rights are threatened, especially in the Great Lakes region. Such a theology should

¹ Déogratias Maruhukiro, "Forgiveness first, Justice first" in Klaus Baumann, Rainer Bendel, and Déogratias Maruhukiro (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit, Wahrheitsfindung, Vergebung und Versöhnung/Justice, Verité, Pardon et Réconciliation. Ansätze zur Friedenspolitik in Nachkriegsgebieten/Approches des politiques de paix dans les pays post-conflits*, Berlin: LIT 2021, p. 15.

remind the church of its mission as an advocate for the poor and other marginalised people.² Such a theology shapes the church as a “*prophet in times of crisis*”³ by its courage always to “*proclaim the word in season and out of season*” (2 Tim 4:2). Such a theology should characterise the action of the church and would have been very useful even before the genocide. Indeed, the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda remains a stain on the Catholic Church and a failure of evangelisation in the Great Lakes region.

Unfortunately, this article does not sufficiently develop the points on “*Theology of human rights*” and aspects of „*post-colonial theology*“, which would have been very helpful.

Recommendations

I find this article insightful and worth publishing. It provides a good contribution and a basis for the emergence of a new theology after the genocide. From a methodological and scientific standpoint, this article is part of interdisciplinary study that combines empirical research through interviews with ordinary Rwandans and theological analysis by the author. I find no reason to reject this article and therefore welcome its publication in *theologie.geschichte*.

Author:

Déogratias Maruhukiro, Ph.D., Research assistant, Peace and Reconciliation Studies, Caritas Science and Christian Social Welfare, University of Freiburg

² Klaus Baumann, “Sozialpolitische Anwaltschaft gegen Armut und Ausgrenzung - eine Grundfunktion verbandlicher Caritas”, in Johannes Eulich, Gerhard Wagner, Florian Barth, and Klaus Baumann (eds.), *Kirche aktiv gegen Armut und Ausgrenzung. Theologische Grundlagen und praktische Ansätze für Diakonie und Gemeinde*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2011, p. 445-459.

³ Déogratias Maruhukiro, *Für eine Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur. Sozialpolitische Analyse, ethischer Ansatz und Christlicher Beitrag zur Förderung einer Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur in Burundi*, Berlin: LIT 2020, p. 302-304.