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# Listening to Ordinary Rwandans searching for a new theology after genocide



## *Preliminary statement*

The following article is based on a lecture that I gave at the "Reinventing Theology in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Challenges and Hopes" conference that took place at Centre Christus, Kigali in June 2019. It was supposed to be published in the conference proceedings; however, the Editorial Board asked for substantial changes which I could not accept. Those changes related mainly to three points: my way of portraying the Twa, my statement on "others" who "have lost family members in killings and human violations that occurred in the aftermath of the genocide" and had "no public space for mourning", and my position that post-genocide theology should stand up to any form of human rights violations and to a one-sided identity policy. As a consequence, the Board refused to publish my contribution.

That is why I decided to publish the article in the open access online journal *theologie.geschichte*. To engage in transparent scientific discussion, I opted for open peer review.

## *1. Introduction*

25 years ago Rwanda was devastated by genocide.[1] During three months, an estimated 800,000 – 1,000,000 Tutsis plus

[1] This work was supported by the German Research Foundation in the context of the project »Ordinary Theology in the Rwandan Peace and

some Hutus trying to save them were murdered. During genocide, Christian faith was seriously challenged: Many priests, monks, nuns and laypersons were directly involved in killings, church buildings turned from sanctuaries into slaughterhouses and the attitude of the Christian Churches as institutions can only be described as standing on the sidelines.[2] But there were at least some Church members who protected people regardless of their ethnic group, risking their own lives. After the genocide, the Rwandan society embarked on a journey of reconciliation.[3] The Rwandan government under current president Paul Kagame implemented a "National Policy of Unity and Reconciliation"[4]. As important players of civil society, the Christian Churches play also a role in the quest for peace and reconciliation, but they also need to face their involvement in the genocide.[5] Today Rwanda is seen by many as a success story in terms of economic growth and peaceful, reconciled coexistence. Others focus more on the lasting challenges to the reconciliation process – either nationwide or on a grassroots level.[6]

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Reconciliation Process« (PE 2312/1-1).

2 See Longman, Timothy: Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda, in: Journal of Religion in Africa 31/2, 2001, 163–186; and Carney, J. J.: 'Far from having unity, we are tending towards total disunity': The Catholic Major Seminary in Rwanda, 1950–62, in: Studies in World Christianity 18/1, 2012, 82–102.

3 See for the Catholic reconciliation efforts Carney, J. J.: A Generation After Genocide: Catholic Reconciliation in Rwanda, in: Theological Studies 76/4, 2015, 785–812; or in regard to the protestant denominations van't Spijker, Gerard: Focused on reconciliation: Rwandan protestant theology after the genocide, in: Transformation 2016, 1–9.

4 See Schliesser, Christine: From "a Theology of Genocide" to a "Theology of Reconciliation"? On the Role of Christian Churches in the Nexus of Religion and Genocide in Rwanda, in: Religions 9/31, 2018, 1–14, here 3.

5 See Kubai, Anne N: *Being church in post-genocide Rwanda. The challenges of forgiveness and reconciliation*, Life & Peace Institute, Upsala, 2005.

6 See Silva-Leander, Sebastian: On the Danger and Necessity of Democratisation: trade-offs between short-term stability and long-term peace

In this paper, my starting point will be the people who make reconciliation possible in the first place: the ordinary Rwandans living at the grassroots. I will show that many ordinary Rwandans are vulnerable because of their experiences in the past or in their everyday life. In addition, there are all kinds, forms and levels of vulnerabilities in present-day Rwanda's society. Generally speaking, vulnerable people are not forever frozen in passive endurance of experiences of violence. Many of them try to use different kinds of resources in order to transform and live with those experiences. Those resources may be social or religious, individual or shared, material or immaterial.[7] Against this background, I will reflect in a next step on an important religious resource that genocide survivors, released prisoners and their children use in order to deal with their genocidal experiences: ordinary theology. Ordinary theology as Jeff Astley defines it means the theological beliefs of people with no formal theological education.[8] Finally, I will present my thoughts on how the search for new and creative ways of doing theology after genocide can be enriched from the perspective of ordinary theologies in terms of both content and form.

## *2. Looking at ordinary Rwandans*

Among the people involved in reconciliation processes at the grassroots level, there are first and foremost the genocide survivors. They have suffered genocidal violence and in most cases their individual processes of overcoming trauma are still ongoing. Many survivors express a feeling that the genocide

in post-genocide Rwanda, in: Third World Quarterly 29/8, 2008, 1601–1620.

[7] See Bazuin, Joshua Theodore: *Religion in the remaking of Rwanda*, Nashville, 2013.

[8] See Astley, Jeff: *Ordinary theology: looking, listening, and learning in theology*, Explorations in practical, pastoral, and empirical theology, Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT, 2002.

lives on inside them.[9] It is especially in this respect that the survivors will remain a vulnerable group in Rwandan society. Nonetheless there are many survivors that have empowered themselves through means of trauma healing, by drawing on religious resources or by joining survivors' organizations or reconciliation groups. Another somewhat vulnerable group in Rwandan society are the released prisoners. Many of them still have to deal with the fact that they committed genocidal atrocities. Some of them try to ignore their own guilt or do not feel remorse. Others find themselves in a psychological crisis as they have to deal with the reality of their crimes during the genocide. This crisis can be described as moral injury, a specific form of trauma, that some persons develop after they have violated their own moral beliefs. Spiritual and existential conflicts, loss of trust, feelings of guilt and shame can be identified as core symptoms of moral injury.[10] The children of survivors and former perpetrators are another vulnerable group. Some of them see Rwanda's future as bright and their own country as united and reconciled, while others suffer from the heavy silence in their own families.[11] The children of genocide perpetrators feel ensnared in shame. Because of that they want to find an everyday life for themselves that has no past (»trouver une existence sans passé«[12]). In their view, the deeds of their fathers and mothers have diminished their own chances to get a good education and future and they are experiencing that these deeds influence even their most intimate relationships negatively.[13] The children of survivors are vulnerable because of the transgenerational effects of the traumas their parents sustained. For example,



9 See Burnet, Jennie E.: *Genocide lives in us: women, memory, and silence in Rwanda*, Women in Africa and the diaspora, Madison, 2012.

10 See Jinkerson, Jeremy D.: Defining and assessing moral injury: A syndrome perspective., in: Traumatology 22/2, 2016, 122–130, here 122.

11 See Hatzfeld, Jean: *Un papa de sang*, Paris, 2017.

12 Ebd., 203.

13 See ebd., 73.

children of genocide-exposed mothers have higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder and a higher depressive symptom severity than children of non-exposed mothers.[14]

There are also some vulnerable people at the grassroots level that are not in the focus of most reconciliation initiatives. The experiences and sufferings of ethnic Twa during the genocide are largely unknown and often dismissed. Prejudices against Twa people are persistent and one could say that they are the invisible members of the Rwandan society.[15] Others have lost family members in killings and human rights violations that occurred in the aftermath of the genocide. Those people find that there is no public space for the mourning of their losses.[16] Yet others experience oppression because of their divergent political views or are displaced because they cannot afford to buy the expensive roofing material mandatory in some parts of Rwanda's capital. In the dynamics of "unity and reconciliation" there are also those who seemingly do not fit: victims not willing to forgive, perpetrators not willing to feel remorse and deal with their moral injuries, who see themselves as innocent or as a mere passive tool in the hands of Satan or "the bad government".[17] Finally, there are those who have found silent ways of resistance against the official "unity and reconciliation" policy.[18]



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[14] See Rudahindwa, Susan/Mutesa, Léon/Rutembesa, Eugene/u. a.: Transgenerational effects of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda: A posttraumatic stress disorder symptom domain analysis, in: AAS Open Research 1, 2018, 10.

[15] See Thomson, Susan M.: Ethnic Twa and Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Policy, in: Peace Review 21/3, 2009, 313–320, here 313.

[16] See Reyntjens, F.: Constructing the truth, dealing with dissent, domesticating the world: Governance in post-genocide Rwanda, in: African Affairs 110/438, 2011, 1–34, 26–27.

[17] See Peetz, Katharina: Reuelose Täter*innen - Perspektivlose Nachkommen. Zum pastoralen Umgang mit Reue(losigkeit) im postgenozidären Ruanda, in: *Contritio Annäherungen an Schuld, Scham und Reue*, Hrsg. v. Julia Enxing/ Katharina Peetz, Leipzig, 2017, 98–122.

[18] See Thomson, Susan M.: *Resisting Reconciliation. State Power and Everyday Life*, Halifax, 2009.

This short, non-conclusive overview highlights, firstly, the complexities of reconciliation processes at the Rwandan grassroots. Secondly, it illustrates that there is no easy path to sustainable reconciliation. There are many kinds of wounds that still need to be transformed: spiritual, environmental, social, intellectual or psychological ones. People need to re-invent their fractured identities and lives and revivify their shattered hopes.[19] Thirdly, it shows that if one wants to promote sustainable reconciliation, different degrees and kinds of vulnerabilities need to be taken into consideration carefully. As Marcel Uwineza rightfully states: "Every Rwandan was wounded, regardless of one's ethnic affiliation, though wounds varied by degree."[20]

*3. Listening to Ordinary Theologies*

Even though people on the grassroots level have received little or no theological education of a systematic, academic or scholarly kind, they are theologizing and therefore subjects of their own theology. This ordinary theology, according to Jeff Astley, can be defined as "the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people's articulations of their religious understanding"[21]. During the eight months I spent in Rwanda, I tried to listen closely to ordinary theologies of genocide survivors, former perpetrators and their children[22]. Sometimes listening was easy as people shared with me their thoughts on how God had saved them from death and despair or gave them the power to confess their guilt. Sometimes it was a borderline experience for me, especially when survivors told me how



[19] See Uwinzea, Marcel: Memory: A Theological Imperative in Post-Genocide Rwanda, 11.

[20] Uwineza, Marcel: On Christian Hope, in: America. The Jesuit Review 2016, 24–27, 24.

[21] Astley, Jeff: Ordinary Theology as Lay Theology, in: INTAMS review /2, 2014, 182–190, here 182.

[22] In total, I spoke with 33 Rwandans of different denominational and religious backgrounds.

their family members were killed. More often than not the people I spoke with made clear that they appreciated our conversations. Rose Chantal, a survivor, described herself as a common Christian at the end of our first conversation. She told me that she was not used to discuss with someone about her faith. In her eyes she benefitted from our conversation because my questions stimulated her to make a kind of self-assessment.

> "Usually it is not a common practice to call a Christian and sit down and discuss like this. But when you are asked questions and when you feel you have to answer them, this helps you to make a kind of self-assessment, self-evaluation"[23].

Rose-Chantal's statement shows that ordinary theologies often remain hidden as people are not sitting down and discussing these. Our conversation was a chance for Rose-Chantal to articulate and reflect on her faith and her understanding of God. I tried to encourage her reflections by listening to her in an active and non-judgmental way. Listening to people shows them that they matter as persons and that their thoughts, feelings and longings also matter. Therefore, listening can be seen as a "crucial act of love for which human beings long"[24]. But listening is also a challenging task because it requires us to give up our role as experts. Rather we need to become learners again.[25] So what did I learn while listening to the ordinary theologies of Rwandans at the grassroots?

### *3.1. Enriching ordinary images of God*

I expected that people at the grassroots would ask frequently "Where was God during the genocide?" and would focus on the question of theodicy. This was indeed an initial reaction



[23] Interview with Rose-Chantal, 16th November 2016.

[24] Moschella, Mary Clark: *Ethnography as a pastoral practice: an introduction*, Cleveland, Ohio, 2008, 254.

[25] See ebd., 142.

during and immediately after the genocide[26] but nowadays for most ordinary Rwandans the presence of God in their lives is self-evident. The survivors I talked with do not blame God for the genocide. Instead, they interpret their own survival as the result of God's actions. Therefore, they interact with God in a posture of thankfulness.

For Marguérite, a Catholic survivor, it is clear that it was the hand of God that protected her during the genocide. A friend of her father's hid her, her siblings and her mother in a hole in the ground. He covered the hole with wood and earth and planted young banana shrubs on it. For this Hutu, genocidal propaganda was not more important than the Christian commandment to love your neighbor. Marguérite and her family stayed in this dark, narrow and oppressive place for over a week. It was difficult to breathe but in this life-threatening situation she felt close to God. Coming out of that hole is a key moment in Marguérite's life that she associates with the power of God. One can interpret her experiences as a kind of resurrection: coming from a dark, life-threating place into the light. She believes in a God that protects and liberates people and whose power surpasses everything.

> "Then when I got out of that pit, that big hole I concluded that it was thanks to God's power and not to man's power."[27]

That God's power is boundless and surpasses man's power is a common conviction for many ordinary Rwandans. It is God's power that gives and takes life. God has the power to intervene in everyday situations. And the power of God can also be seen in human actions as God is able to act through people. An intense relationship to this powerful God can empower human beings. Survivors articulated that it was God's power that helped them to overcome negative emotions such as hatred, shame or anger. They told me that God can see, heal and change the hearts of people. Also, some released



[26] See Uwineza, On Christian Hope, 24. "We all asked ourselves: […] Where has the God of Rwanda gone? (Mana y'u Rwanda wagiye he?)".

[27] Interview with Marguérite, 10th August 2017.

prisoners stated that their courage to confess genocidal crimes and ask for forgiveness was the result of God's powerful and transformative actions in their lives. I think it is especially the survivors who need the image of a powerful, almighty God. Their belief in God's power enables them to abstain from revenge. As God is seen as the almighty ruler of life and death, he is able to save their murdered loved-ones. He can also render the justice that the survivors long for. Almightiness and justice are facets of God that are predominant in regard to the eschatological concepts of the people I spoke with.

In contrast, God's mercy is seen by many ordinary Rwandans as restricted to the span of human earthly life. While we are alive, God's mercy is boundless. He can forgive any sin, even genocidal crimes, when people truly repent and ask for forgiveness. The experience of God's mercy is also a motivation to approach other people in kindness and mercifulness.[28] Change and conversion are possible until life ends, even in the last second of our life. After death, there only remains the judgment of God. At Judgment Day, God's power seems to be restricted by his thirst for justice – at least in the eyes of some respondents. God will execute his punishment, but at the same time people were saying that those who did not repent and had not asked for forgiveness had judged themselves. Some respondents are even convinced that survivors who have not given forgiveness will be punished.

The ordinary image of God as described above has some voids. First of all, their eschatological concepts are restricted to the idea of judgment as a tribunal. Accordingly, man's fate is seen by many respondents either at the right side of Jesus (heaven) or the left side of Jesus (hell). But need this be the only way of thinking about the final destiny of dead victims doubting God in their hour of death, unforgiving survivors and unrepentant perpetrators? The notion of judgment is clearly



[28] Interview with Spéciose, 12th July 2017: "God is merciful. So God had mercy on us then we survived. So because we have survived we should forgive others."

central to Christian faith. In the Bible there is a productive tension between God's thirst for justice and his merciful love towards mankind. God's last Judgment Day could very well be envisioned as a transformative process that the whole creation undergoes in order to become truly new. In this process we all, including genocide victims and perpetrators will have to face each other. The evil people suffered and inflicted would be visible and perceptible to all of us. Without the presence of God and his boundless love and mercy, these encounters would lead to cries for revenge and retribution. Still there is the hope that the divine mercy, love and compassion shown to all would in the end overcome any resistance to forgive one another. It is important to note that the decision to forgive is the right of the victim. God would not be God if he would force people to forgive one another and his divine forgiveness does not supersede the forgiveness that we give to one another. Rather, the experience of divine forgiveness reinforces the motivation for granting inter-human forgiveness. But mere forgiveness is not reconciliation. Reconciliation will take place when we move forward and embrace our former enemies to signify that they belong to the same family of God's children.[29] I think it would be helpful for some ordinary Rwandans to hear that the final judgment could also be understood as a social event that God initiates in order to restore the universal shalom among people.[30] In doing so, it should be made clear that this conception of judgment does not devaluate the daily human efforts and struggles for transformation, change and reconciliation. Rather it can give people hope even when all human efforts for reconciliation fail.

What I also seldom found was the idea that the powerful, almighty God is also a weak and wounded God, a God that died on the cross and bore not only the sins but the wounds of mankind. Only one Catholic survivor compared the sufferings



[29] See Hryniewicz, Wacław: *The challenge of our hope: Christian faith in dialogue*, Cultural heritage and contemporary change v. 32, Washington, D.C, 2007, 75–76.

[30] See ibd., 76–77.

of genocide victims with "Jesus' afflictions when he was about to crucified"[31], but she did not state whether this comparison was helpful to her. So it is hard to determine how common the notion of a weak and vulnerable God is on the grassroots. That the accentuation of God's brokenness can be helpful to genocide survivors was experienced by Jesuit father Marcel Uwineza. At Centre Christus in Kigali he heard that God's power was manifested through his vulnerability on the cross. This idea was giving him hope and strength.[32]

Günther Thomas has used the term *responsive vulnerability* to describe the relationship between God and his creation. As God is in a caring and compassionate relationship with his creation, he can be affected and moved by its fate. There is also a deep resonance between God's actions and the actions of the world, but yet God is not determined by worldly actions. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ is the highlight of the intense resonance between the divine life and the life of the world. His incarnation results in an intimate closeness to the world that God chose out of compassion and love. Jesus Christ's life is characterized by a perilous vulnerability as he suffered fear, shame, exclusion, physical and psychological violence and death. The most powerful image of Jesus' vulnerability is his exposure on the cross: naked, thirsty, dirty, wounded, fearful, utterly powerless. In Thomas' view, Jesus' death is an event of divine passion in three different regards. First of all, his death on the cross is the moment of utter divine suffering and passivity. Secondly, the son's death is also stirring and calling forth the divine passion, leading not into divine wrath but into divine transformative engagement. Thus lastly, the resurrection of Jesus becomes an outstanding event of passionate creativity: God is overcoming death ultimately.[33]



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31 Interview with Marguérite, 10th August 2017.

32 See Uwineza, On Christian Hope, 24.

33 See Thomas, Günter: Divine Vulnearbility, Passion and Power, in: *Exploring vulnerability*, Hrsg. v. Heike Springhart/ Günter Thomas, Göttingen Bristol, CT, U.S.A, 2017, 35–58, 55–56.

*3.2. Taking forgiveness as a gift seriously*

Many ordinary Rwandans I interviewed saw forgiveness as a precondition for reconciliation. Forgiveness was mainly associated with healing, inner peace and liberation. To ask for forgiveness was also seen as a requirement for individual salvation. It was a view shared by all interviewees that God would not save unrepentant perpetrators, and a few respondents were even doubting the possibility of salvation for unforgiving survivors. The ability for inter-human forgiveness was commonly seen as the result of God's actions. God is thought of as an initiator and companion in processes of inter-human forgiveness. Joséphine, a genocide survivor, indicated that she forgave the perpetrators in order to receive forgiveness. The need to forgive in order to receive forgiveness is a message she also conveys to survivors who have not yet forgiven and to unrepentant perpetrators. It seems that Joséphine's motivation to forgive was at least partly the result of her concern for her salvation. She is clearly convinced that God will only forgive her in the end after she has forgiven. However, making forgiveness a precondition for salvation would question the character of forgiveness as a gift. The same is true when one makes forgiveness an essential element of Christian identity by stating that to be Christian means to forgive.[34]

Conceptualizing inter-human forgiveness as a divine gift was rather common in my sample. Nadine told me that people who have received God's mercy, forgiveness and love, are motivated to share their experience with others. According to her, this leads people on a journey of forgiveness.[35] To conceptualize forgiveness as a divine gift can be a relief for the survivors. The horrors of genocide are immense and the wounds deep. The thought that you do not have to find the strength to forgive what is unforgiveable by yourself might be liberating. While respondents were stating that you cannot



[34] See Carney, A Generation After Genocide, 800.
[35] Interview with Nadine, 18th November 2016.

rush a person to forgive and that forgiveness needs time, I found no answers in which non-forgiveness was considered a legitimate response in the face of genocide. Rather there were some cynical positions that shifted the burden from the perpetrator to the unforgiving survivor. The Pentecostal Christian Christophe who sees himself as a bystander explained that the refusal of forgiveness transfers the burden from the offender to the offended.

> For instance, if someone asks you for forgiveness and if you don't give him forgiveness, that's your problem, it's not his. Because he has put down his burden and you who don't give forgiveness, you take up that burden.[36]

Christophe negates that there might be legitimate reasons not to forgive. The survivors might not be convinced that the plea for forgiveness they hear comes from the bottom of the heart of the offenders. Apart from that there might also be some survivors not capable of forgiving genocide. It is important to accept such positions rather than to answer them with the request to forgive (finally). In the Christian context, to refuse forgiveness is seldom seen as a legitimate permanent posture. "Forgivers" tend to be privileged as examples of "ideal Christians", "civic virtue" or "moral characters". Forgiveness is also needed in order to reach reconciliation. In such an atmosphere the moral pressure to forgive is high.[37] By contrast, genocide survivor Esther Mujawayo refuses to forgive:

> "[T]he more I think about that, the more I ignore what forgiving means, except this mini-settlement that I make with myself to hold out[] for a pretended moral appeasement, to 'win' against hatred […] Today, as the years go, I accept better, I finally accept that, no, I will not forgive."38



[36] Interview with Christophe, 2th December 2016.

[37] See Brudholm, Thomas/Rosoux, Valérie: The Unforgiving: Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness After Atrocity, in: Law and Contemporary Problems 73, 2009, 33–50, 35–36.

[38] Ester Mujawayo cited in ebd., 44–45.

For Mujawayo forgiveness is not possible because she cannot bring herself to feel empathy towards the offenders that killed many of her family members. In addition, she does not have the experience that the perpetrators feel remorse. Even though she cannot forgive, Mujawayo is not opposed to the project of reconciliation "because there is no other possible choice."[39] It seems to me that this lack of the idea of legitimate non-forgiveness in ordinary theologies should be reflected in the enterprise of doing theology after genocide.

### *3.3. Locating evil outside of God*

It is a shared view in my sample that God is goodness itself and the source of all good things. Evil is thus attributed to external forces such as Satan or bad human behavior. Perpetrators tend to shift their personal responsibility to external factors. Common are the views that perpetrators were misled by the authorities that planned genocide or that they are ensnared by Satan. Satan is seen as the dark force and source of temptations that is present in the everyday lives of ordinary Rwandans. Genocide survivor Joséphine states that Satan prevents people from doing good things. Satan rejoices in the hold he has over human beings and prevents them from conversion. The only way to resist Satan for Joséphine is to believe in God and to have a deep, faithful and fruitful relationship to him. In your life you are between God and Satan according to her. While Satan is using his destructive and alluring force, God is using his power to pull people gently to him. It is interesting to see that Joséphine describes God's force as gentle and loving as this enriches the concept of God's power. In her mind, to be in a good relationship with God helps to avoid sin and evil deeds. Conversely, the perpetrators of the genocide did not have enough relationship with God to prevent them from becoming killers. In Joséphine's eyes, to depart from Satan is



[39] Mujawaya cited in ebd., 48.

an active decision that liberates people and re-connects them firmly to God.[40]

Theologically speaking, the talk of Satan might be a tool to avoid locating responsibility for the genocide and Evil in God. While many ordinary Rwandans see Satan as the creature of God and God as more powerful than Satan, they do not think that God is responsible for evil. In this line of thinking, everything that is horrific, tragic, and lamentable is ultimately Satan's doing. Hence, God is not the one that needs to be accused or blamed. The avoidance of blaming God is a coping mechanism for survivors as they can rely on their exclusive good, loving and protecting God. It is remarkable that by contrast many respondents were formulating the theodicy question in cases of everyday suffering. If one argues that God is not responsible for evil as he has given his creatures the ability and freedom to differentiate between good and evil, a postgenocidal theology should emphasize human responsibility. This would mean to theologically criticize attempts to minimize individual responsibility. Satan would then be mostly a metaphor for the fundamental incomprehensibility of genocide.

### *3.4. A more inclusive way of thinking about the (religious) other*

The ordinary theologies I found also highlight the repression of traditional religious notions, conceptions and practices during the Christian mission in the colonial era. For example, the notion that Jesus Christ might be considered as an elder brother or ancestor was only mentioned in a few conversations. Pagan practices such as sorcery, ancestor worship or traditional healing were described as evil and dangerous by Christophe, a member of the Rwandan Pentecost Church:

> For instance, when you don't have faith and if you fall sick, there are people who go to the sorcerers. And those sorcerers lie

[40] Interview with Joséphine, 17th November 2016.

> to them, telling them they would treat their disease, treat them. And then you spend so much money over that. So, faith is very important.[41]

Christophe sees his faith as a shield against sickness and evil forces. According to him, consulting a traditional healer is not only costly but dangerous as this form of treatment does not help at all. Christophe's narrative is structured by the sharp distinction between what is allowed, good and Christian and what is evil, forbidden and non-Christian. In his case, those distinctions are accompanied with exclusivist conceptions of salvation and with narrow views in regard to the religious other: Only those people who have the right kind of faith and have done good deeds will be saved and go to heaven. Such exclusive views on salvation are frequent in my sample.

Even though the marginalized Muslim minority was able to protect many people who were being hunted down during genocide, resisted the genocidal propaganda and is active in the reconciliation process[42], some of my Christian respondents were not interacting with Muslims in their everyday lives and simultaneously stated that Jesus is the only way to God. Pascal, an Anglican English teacher, is prejudiced against Islam. For example, he is convinced that in Muslim countries, killing someone who offended you would not be considered as a sin.[43] The negative views on Islam are especially pointed in the case of a Sébastien, a young man from an interethnic family. Sébastien is convinced that members of Islam "may be destroyed"[44], that is to say that they will go to hell. Stéphanie told me that heaven is closed for other religions like Islam or Hinduism because "they don't want to believe in God".[45] This is somewhat surprising as a continuous topic



41 Interview with Christophe, 2th December 2016.

42 See Kubai, Anne: Walking a Tightrope: Christians and Muslims in Post-Genocide Rwanda, in: Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations 18/2, 2007, 219–235.

43 Interview with Pascal, 7th November 2016.

44 Interview with Sébastien, 22th November 2016.

45 Interview with Stéphanie, 24th November 2016.

in the conversations with people at the grassroots was the postgenocidal insight that all people are children of God and therefore of the same value.

Yet there are other persons in my sample that advocated a more or less decided inclusivism. Two respondents stated that God is the only judge so he will know how to deal with Non-Christians.[46] Thaciana, a Presbyterian survivor, was convinced that Jesus does not "want any person to be perished". According to her, they [the Muslim] too can be saved and be called children of God."[47] Ubald, a Pastor in the Apostolic Church of Rwanda, told me about his engagement in the campaign "Rwanda, thank God!" that connects all Churches and religions. He told me that he sees Muslims as children of God, who "wear different clothes" and that they are different but "our God is the same"[48]. The ambivalent talk about the religious other shows that interreligious dialogue and practice are an essential for doing theology after genocide.

### *3.5 Taking conversion stories into consideration*

What I found striking are the many cases of conversions I found in my sample. There were people who converted from paganism to Christian faith prior to the genocide as well as people who changed denominations after genocide. Rose-Chantal was Catholic before 1994 but converted to the Rwandan Pentecost Church in 1999. She explained that she needed another religious space as she had suffered trauma during genocide and her relationship with God was suffering because of that. In addition, she could not stand to be Catholic anymore because her parents were killed inside a Catholic church. She later converted to the Rwandan Anglican Church

[46] "What I think about them is that we all have been created in the image of God. And the God who has created us had a mission. So, he has a way he reserves for himself to fulfill his mission. He knows how he will deal with those people." Interview with Frédéric, 11th January 2017.

[47] Interview with Thaciana, 12th December 2016.

[48] Interview with Pastor Ubald, 11th January 2017.

because her fiancé was Anglican.[49] Rose-Chantal hence has had spiritual and practical experiences in at least three different spiritual communities. Her consecutive multiple religious affiliation has coined her ordinary theology and shaped the resources of her coping with her genocidal experiences.

Joséphine's case indicates not a consecutive but a concurrent multiple religious affiliation. In terms of spiritual practice Joséphine sees herself as a convert. She departed from the Catholic Church to the Pentecostal Church after genocide. This was caused by a spiritual crisis and the death of her beloved son. Her conversion helped Joséphine to work on her traumatic experiences. At the same time Joséphine is a member of a grassroots reconciliation group monitored and accompanied by Catholic clerics. The pastoral care she received from Catholic clerics helped Joséphine immensely by her own account. At the same time Joséphine was doing joint activities with released prisoners. They rebuild destroyed houses or plant and harvest together. Those activities were essential as Joséphine came to view the perpetrators as fellow human beings again. For me the case of Joséphine also shows that survivors of genocide will go where they find resources for overcoming and transforming their traumatic experiences – be it in their original denomination or religion, be it in a new denomination or religion.[50] The multiple religious backgrounds that many ordinary Rwandans have might be reflected as a resource for sustainable reconciliation within the framework of a theology after genocide.



[49] Interview with Rose-Chantal, 16the November 2016.

[50] While there were many people converting to Islam directly after genocide, today it is especially the New Churches that attract people. See Kubai, Anne: Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Changing Religious Landscape, in: Exchange 36/2, 2007, 198–214.

*4. Doing theology after genocide*

Having listened to ordinary theologies, what do we learn for the enterprise of finding new and creative ways of doing theology after genocide? It is my conviction that a postgenocidal theology needs to deal with the complexities and the vulnerability that characterize the Rwandan society. It cannot be a theology that focuses exclusively on the reconciliation between survivors and perpetrators. I think theology after genocide would be enriched by a postcolonial posture. A postcolonial approach would uncover the colonial power structures that have formed and still form Rwanda and would bring out marginalized perspectives. It is important to remember that the Christian mission accompanied and legitimized the colonial rule over Rwanda. It is also important to be vigilant today and to analyze where power structures of today exclude and marginalize people. In the ongoing search for sustainable reconciliation, it is vital to do theology from the perspective of the survivors, the released prisoners, the Twa, the disabled or the politically excluded, in short, to do theology from the margins.[51] Thus it would be problematic to think that there is only one way of doing theology after genocide. Rather, theologians should offer various kinds of theologies and multiple images of God that meet the spiritual needs of people who have been harmed either by genocide, by discrimination, by human rights violations or by social or political exclusion.

It might be productive to advocate God's responsive vulnerability among genocide survivors and to diversify the ordinary understanding of judgment. It might be liberating for people to hear that they could also conceptualize judgement as a social event to bring about universal shalom among people. I also think that doing theology after genocide means



[51] See Postkoloniale Theologien: bibelhermeneutische und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge, ReligionsKulturen Band 11, Hrsg. v. Andreas Nehring/ Simon Tielesch, Stuttgart, 2013.

to accentuate not only the gift character of forgiveness but to reflect also on legitimate postures of non-forgiveness. Even if one does not want to advocate non-forgiveness as legitimate and Christian, a theology after genocide should focus on reducing moral pressure to forgive and on creating spaces of acceptance for people who cannot forgive even 25 years later. The noted minimizing of individual responsibility of ordinary killers is something a theology after genocide needs to tackle. Killers involved in mass killings tend to minimize their own involvement. This was notoriously in the case of Nazi perpetrators who did not consider themselves guilty as they only had "executed orders".[52] So how can we locate individual responsibility adequately in a society that is not as individualistic as western countries nowadays and in which ubuntu[53] is a shared value? And how can we think theologically and productively about the relationship between God and evil after genocide? I think doing theology after genocide could also benefit from the reflection upon the multiple religious experiences many ordinary Rwandans have had. If one sees those experiences as resources, new and creative formats for reconciliation groups might be found. This could also help to promote interdenominational and interreligious cooperation at the grassroots.

It seems to me that there might be a gap between what pastors, priests, nuns and brothers advocate in regard to the salvation of the religious other and what many Rwandans on the grassroots level think. Doing theology after genocide means for me to work on this gap and to initiate more interreligious



[52] See Kellenbach, Katharina von: *The mark of Cain: guilt and denial in the post-war lives of Nazi perpetrators*, Oxford ; New York, 2013.

[53] See Gobodo-Madikizela, Forgiveness is 'the wrong word': Empathic Repair and the Potential for Human Connection in the Aftermath of Historical Trauma, in: Martin Leiner/Christine Schliesser, Alternative Approaches in Conflict Resolution, Palgrave Macmillan US 2017, 111-123. According to Gobodo-Madikizela ubuntu is an interrelational ethic "based on the understanding that one's subjectivity is inextricably intertwined with that of others in one's community", ebd. 120.

reconciliation projects that bring together people in their everyday activities. I think postgenocidal theology should also be a theology that is grounded in the unique Rwandan experience. Therefore, what is needed and has been done already is a constructive engagement in the dialogue between Christian thinking and traditional religious beliefs.

In terms of form, I see theology after genocide as a humbler theology. I understand it as a listening and tentative theology that is concerned with what is going on at the grassroots level and in the minds of ordinary Rwandans. Such a theology engages in the postcolonial request to value and support people who are vulnerable, excluded or oppressed.[54] To value and support the poor, the vulnerable – in short the subaltern –, to give them a voice and to listen to their experiences for me is a deeply Christian concern. Such a theology should also be resistive. Theological resistance is needed where only one way of telling the Rwandan history and one way of remembering is allowed. Resistance is needed where there are no spaces to publicly mourn all victims. Resistance is needed where human rights are abused and abolished. Last but not least, a postgenocidal theology can only be truly postgenocidal if its mode of theological speaking is the mode of hope.[55] As theologians after Auschwitz and the Rwandan genocide, we hope that in the end God will make right the whole Creation.

> "That is a tremendous distinction and gift of Christian hope. This hope is not only for me but is hope for the salvation of others."[56]

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[54] See Nehring/ Tielesch, Postkoloniale Theologien.
[55] See Uwineza, On Christian Hope.
[56] See ebd., 26.