

Restorative Justice Rwanda-Style, Eden Mennonite Church, September 29, 2019

- Rwanda, is a very small country located in central east Africa, just a few degrees south of the equator. Note the red dot.
- It is beautiful, mountainous, temperate and known often as “The Land of a Thousand Hills.”
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- We were fortunate to have attended an international conference there last year and felt that if we travelled such a great distance we would like to stay awhile and volunteer with some Christian organizations involved in post-genocide work. We contacted two such we knew of and ended up volunteering at three.

Wayne has for years been connected to the agency that organized the Conference in Kigali:

CURE International, and serves as the Canadian rep.

- CURE is an acronym for: **Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (namely, offenders)**, and it focuses on **Human Rights and Prison Reform**. A kind of gold standard for its work is the United Nations’ **Nelson Mandela Rules**.
- We have felt privileged to present at these conferences some of the work of the **MCC BC End Abuse Program** that we’re involved with: myself in work with women in abusive relationships in the federal women’s prison as well as at the MCCBC office; and Wayne and I co-facilitate groups of men involved in causing the abuse.
- The first panel of the conference was presented by Rwandans who described for us “**Restorative Justice Rwanda-Style**.” It was excellent and we learned much about what had happened in the 1994 genocide as well as the reconciliation work taking place across Rwanda.

Wayne has been fortunate to have been involved with Restorative Justice work in Canada for the past forty-five years.

Reconciliation

Wayne: Some of that work has been on a Christian understanding of this initiative that began in Canada, and spread worldwide. The name of the first program in fact was the “Victim Offender **Reconciliation** Project,” where Mennonite Christians underscored the centrality of reconciliation in the New Testament.

As we learned from Rob last week, *human alienation* is profoundly part of the *human condition*: a state of being that was triumphantly overcome in Christ. Paul says simply: *Christ **reconciled** us to God.*

➤ Part of the text read last week in Colossians 1:21 and 22 goes: “*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has **reconciled** you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation . . .*”

As Rob noted, the verb used for **reconciled** is a Pauline original: not found anywhere else in ancient Greek, or in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. *For Paul “reconciliation” is simply loaded with enormous significance*, both in terms of what Christ did for us, and what we’re to do in response to others and to God.

We’ll read a few other passages to get more of the idea.

The same verb already mentioned for **reconciled** but in a different tense appears in Ephesians 2:16 where we learn that a “*dividing wall of hostility*” between Jew and Gentile that had existed for centuries, in Christ is actually torn down, for, the writer says in a previous verse (Ephesians 2:14): “*Christ is our peace.*”

➤ Then we read further: “*His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus **making peace**, and in one body to **reconcile** both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away [—the Gentiles—] and peace to those who were near [—the Jews—]. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:15 to 18).*” This **reconciliation** becomes a template for all other hostilities.

Against the backdrop of ancient Greek and Roman culture—that for centuries had been *foundationally* based on the *inequality* of slaves, women and strangers—

➤ Paul exuberantly shouts out in Galatians 3:28: “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are **all one in Christ Jesus**[!]*”

This culturally revolutionary assertion set in motion a centuries-long reversal of ancient Greco-Roman social inequality that we in liberal democracies at their best benefit from today.

Why this *until-Christ-unheard-of unity*? Because the Prince of Peace has opened the way for *peace agreements* across the board, into which arrangements we may fully enter in response to every kind of *enmity and alienation*, over against every kind of *brokenness and conflict*.

A different verb (*katallassó*) including a noun form (*katallagē*), is used in 2 Corinthians 5:17 to 21 to signal similarly the *profound reconciliation work* initiated by Christ. Please note the repeated use here:

➤ “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**: that God was **reconciling** the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of **reconciliation**. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore*

you on Christ's behalf: **Be reconciled to God.** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The same Greek verb and noun as above are found in Romans 5:9 to 11:

➤ “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were **reconciled** to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been **reconciled**, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation**.”

I eventually came to imagine in Rwanda that everyone who lived through the genocide woke up each morning with two thoughts on their minds: *genocide* and **reconciliation**. For Christians, the foundation of Christ's **reconciling work** profoundly undergirds this **peacemaking initiative** all across Rwanda.

Esther

➤ **The Genocide / Genocide Never Again**

In 100 days more than one million victims were murdered!

➤ We had understood before going to Rwanda that one tribal group, the **Hutus**, had slaughtered members of another tribal group, the **Tutsis**. In reality, these were not two tribes, rather they represented class not tribal or ethnic differences, namely:

- the **minority Tutsis** who traditionally were richer and owned cows (which are historically and culturally extremely important);
- and the **majority Hutus** who were poor farmers.

The 1994 genocide was meticulously planned by the Hutu government, but for the first time, the scale became country-wide. The goal was elimination of all Tutsis; and the killing was ended

only when the **Rwandan Patriotic Front** army that had been trained in Uganda, took control from the Hutus.

A new government was formed and all known perpetrators were imprisoned. 132,000 people ended up in prison under terrible conditions. For example, a prison for 400 prisoners held 7000, with each person given ½ square metre of space.

➤ The new Rwandan government could not possibly bring all the perpetrators to trial through a Western style of justice (an estimated 300 years would be needed!); so instead a pre-colonial traditional court system, the **Gacaca** courts, were resorted to, beginning in 2005. The only other alternative was vigilante revenge. Gacaca means “go to the grass”: which is what villagers did, sitting in a circle, to resolve conflict.

These trials also served to promote reconciliation by providing a means for victims to learn the truth about the death of their family members and relatives. They also gave perpetrators the opportunity to confess their crimes, show remorse and ask for forgiveness in front of their home communities. Though seriously lacking the many safe-guards in Western justice systems, these traditional courts nonetheless overall were widely praised by post-genocide Rwandans. More than 12,000 community-based sessions tried more than 1.2 million cases throughout the country.

Prison Visitation

During the conference we were able to visit a prison. We were first met by a group of men who performed an amazing dance for us, then we were taken to a multi-tiered courtyard

➤ and were greeted by 5000 men standing on three levels all around us, all dressed in orange or pink, as you see in the photo (though the photo was not taken at that time). They waved and smiled warmly at us as we waved back at them. It was a bit overwhelming. The prison director then gave us information about the prisons in Rwanda:

- Initially 132,000 murderers landed in prison—anyone who was seen murdering or even with a group of Hutus was imprisoned.
- By last year, that number had been dramatically reduced to 57,000.

Genocide Memorials

- We also toured several genocide memorials: hugely sobering as we heard videotaped stories, read testimonials, and saw some of the images . . .
- There are mass graves,
- and countless numbers of victims’ names listed on panels.

Agencies

Now for a look at the three agencies and the work we were exposed to.

The first organization we spent time with was Transformational Ministries, located in the northern part of Rwanda. Tourism is now a huge government revenue source, and mountain gorillas in their natural habitat are the prized superstars.

- They live in the beautiful Virunga Mountains, on the border of Rwanda and Uganda, and tourists come from all over the world to see them.
- These mountains have been home to the Pygmies or Bushmen of Rwanda—known as the **Batwa**. (The short man in the center is Batwa.) For centuries, they had been hunters and gatherers. However, when tourism became a huge money-maker for the country, the Batwa were kicked out of their mountain homes. This resulted in many flocking to urban areas where they began to beg and steal in order to survive. Incidentally: it costs \$1,500 USD for a day’s guided visit.
- In their rural homes, their children weren’t attending school despite no cost.
- In 2011 retired Bishop **John Rucyahana (Roo Chee a Hana)** (pictured with his wife **Harriet**), a well-known and influential Anglican churchman, realizing the need of these poverty-stricken

marginalized people, founded this ministry to care for them. He also heads the **National Unity and Reconciliation Commission** that oversees reconciliation initiatives throughout the country.

- We were privileged to spend a week with them and the Batwa people. (Staff in the photo stand with Wayne in front of their office.)

This ministry has three main areas of focus, as well as doing evangelism:

- They have organized co-operatives for the Batwa people to work in agricultural activities, such as growing potatoes and vegetables, which they then receive produce according to the number of days they have worked. They can also sell what they harvest over and above their needs.
- A second part of their ministry is to give a family a cow. Owning a cow in Rwanda gives the family a sense of dignity as cows are traditionally highly prized.
- A cow also allows them to have milk for their children; to sell milk they don't need and also use and sell the dung as fertilizer and fuel. It costs \$500 USD to give a family a cow and the building materials needed to build a shelter. To date, Transformational Ministries has given 18 families cows. We visited numerous of these families and they are so very grateful.
- The third focus of Transformational Ministries is helping marginalized children get into schools. Schooling is free in Rwanda, but families need to provide their uniforms, school books and backpacks. Batwa children are often ostracized by others if they don't have uniforms, so they won't go to school. So for \$86 USD a year these children can get uniforms, books and backpacks;
- as well as have a hot lunch served to them;

- they are so poor and often hungry, so the food is a real incentive for them to attend school. By January of this year, Transformational Ministries has helped 168 children attend school.

Upon our return to Canada, we were often asked, “Did you see the gorillas?” Well yes . . .

- And here is the photo to prove it!

But we learned a lot about the marginally displaced poor people pushed out by and living near the gorillas; and the Batwa stole our hearts. We also committed to support their ministry for five years. Next June we will host Bishop John to promote this ministry.

What a story of Restorative Justice this is: working with and accepting the poorest of the poor, rejected by most, and building human dignity and value amongst them. We saw so much appreciation expressed by these wonderful people!

Good News for Peace and Development Rwanda

- The second organization we spent time with was **Good News for Peace and Development Rwanda**; founded and directed by **Pius Nyakayiro (Nee a KI Yeero)**. They work with people in various ways:

- getting street kids into schools;
- helping widows make a living by having hens and selling their eggs (**Odette**, a widow pictured here, was in charge of the egg production.);
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- and also by digging wells so people can have access to water much closer to home. Most in Rwanda have to walk quite a distance to get their water at a public community water source.

We soon realized that everyone in Rwanda has been impacted by the genocide, even young children today. We were told we shouldn't ask anyone questions about their story of survival so we didn't know Pius' story until a couple of nights before we left the country.

- He and his wife **Angélique** had invited us to dinner at their place and it was then that he told us his long and tragic story.

He was 25 years old in 1994 and his dad, realizing something terrible was about to happen, sent Pius off on a bus to Kigali where he was to catch a flight to Nairobi Kenya. When on his way news reached them that the genocide had broken out in Kigali. A Christian woman known to Pius hid him and four other Tutsi friends for two weeks. When eventually found by the deadly **Interahamwe (inter a ham way)** youth, they were told they must die. They were ordered to lie down; did so and expected the worst. Pius suddenly remembered he had the money for his flight, and offered it to them. He also boldly told them not to defile themselves with blood, and if they abstained, God would have mercy on them. Without giving further details, that for Pius included another near-death experience, Pius and his friends survived the ordeal. However, upon returning to his hometown much later after the genocide, he learned that all his family members had been murdered. (The full riveting story is on Wayne's website, under the title "Rwanda Dispatches.")

In August 1994, Pius moved to Kigali to try to kick start his life. The devastation was beyond imagining. Pius knew in his Christian faith that he needed to forgive, but still could not muster up forgiveness in his heart. Then one day the penny dropped, the dam waters broke, and Pius suddenly could find that latent forgiveness, exercise it, and be immediately freed of acrimony and bleakness of spirit.

Restorative Justice indeed first must happen within oneself before it can be extended to anyone else.

And of course one wonders how do people continue on with their lives after such overwhelming horror? This leads to a discussion of the biblical concepts of peace and justice.

Peace and Justice

Wayne: From Ephesians chapter two, we have already learned that *Christ is our peace*. But hear again what Jesus says about *peace*—and about a word in close biblical association: *justice*. We see this in *The Beatitudes*, Matthew 5:6 to 10, reading from the *New Living Translation*:

➤ “*God blesses those who hunger and thirst for **justice**,
for they will be satisfied.*

God blesses those who are merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,

for they will see God.

*God blesses those who work for **peace**,*

for they will be called the children of God.

*God blesses those who are persecuted for **doing [justice]**,*

for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

First then, as noted before, and again in this passage, there is this close association of *peace* and *justice* in the Bible. One Psalm beautifully states the Old Testament case:

- “*Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed* (85:10, Douay-Rheims Bible).” James in the New Testament puts it this way: “*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of [justice]* (3:18.)”
- In the finest (and quite massive) New Testament study on *peace* published ten years ago, entitled *Covenant of Peace*, Mennonite theologian **Willard Swartley** concludes that *peace is the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament's unity.*
- *Second*, two words are used in English to translate just one single Greek term, *dikaiosynē*, with consequent confusion for us English-speaking readers.

Why is this significant? Biblically, to be *righteous* or *just* in a *dikaiosynē* way is not so much to be pious or religious, as to actively work at bringing about harmony and well-being in *all* one’s relationships, towards one’s enemies and the Good Creation, and especially by defending the poor and the oppressed. Such righteousness/justice above all is centrally concerned with *right relationships*—as much towards others as with God—and the Good Creation.

So pulling together some observations from the above texts: *First*, the idea of “original sin” is all about relationships: *broken relationships profoundly in need of healing*. And humanity has suffered from broken relationships throughout human history, summarized by four words:

- - towards God—***theological***
 - towards ourselves—***psychological***
 - towards others—***sociological***
 - towards the Good Creation—***ecological/cosmological***
- In 1 Corinthians 15: 20 to 22 we read: “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since **death came through a man**, the*

resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

- And a few verses later we find: “*So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being;’ the last Adam a life-giving spirit . . .*

And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the likeness of the heavenly man. (1 Corinthians 15:45 to 49.)”

So second, Paul is contrasting the “*original brokenness*” of humanity represented by the *first*—“*earthly man*”—*Adam* in the old Creation... with “*the new Creation*” represented by Christ the *last*—*heavenly man*—*Adam* and *firstfruits* of the “*Re-Creation.*” This is why Paul triumphantly asserts in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we read above: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation...!*”

And *third*, it is precisely this *new* or “*re-creation*” that begins to *heal, to restore and transform, to work towards reconciliation* over against all four areas of humanity’s brokenness: *towards God; self; others; the Good Creation and Cosmos.*

Now that’s incredibly **Good News!** Amen? And we’re all invited to join in!

Prison Fellowship Rwanda

Esther: Our final organization we spent time with was **Prison Fellowship Rwanda**, part of an international agency begun by Chuck Colson. Here we saw so much and were taken all around Rwanda many times by staff.

- The Executive Director is **Bishop Deo Gashagaza (Gosh a goza)**, who visited us here in June; and some of you met and heard his story.

During the genocide he was living in Uganda, and returned afterwards in hopes of searching for his family and relatives. He soon discovered that forty-five family members had been killed. He was initially very angry and felt devastated and couldn't come to terms with it all.

Some time went by and he felt he couldn't continue on so burdened by anger and hate, so he went away on retreat to fast and pray. While there he says he saw a vision and was told he must go into the prisons to preach to the Hutu *génocidaires* (Jh ay no ci daires)—murderers. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt he needed to do that, as hard as it would be. When he went to the largest prison holding Hutus, and said he would like to visit prisoners, the administration said he must be crazy and he would be killed. He insisted and they let him in; well aware of the danger. He asked the inmate leader to let him talk to them. The prisoners conferred, and said he could talk for five minutes, then they would kill him. At the end of five minutes, not knowing what to expect, the inmate leader said he could continue—which he very gratefully did! *Thus began the ministry of Prison Fellowship in Rwanda.*

➤ Over time, the ministry expanded to all the prisons, where numerous programs for the prisoners and their families teach them about forgiveness and reconciliation, first from God, and then how they can learn to offer forgiveness to family survivors. Many have become Christ-followers.

Prison Fellowship now works both in prisons and out in the community through numerous creative programs, such as:

- supporting families where one parent was still in prison;
- training volunteers to work with both survivors and perpetrators of the genocide.

- coordinating multiple sociotherapy groups to work towards social healing. We were warmly welcomed by this group of women—who had never before been visited by *Muzungus* (what Whites are called in Swahili).

In 2003 Prison Fellowship began a pilot project, where *génocidaires* released from prison were to reach out to the family survivors of those they had murdered to confess to those crimes, ask forgiveness, and make appropriate amends. Many of the survivors were widows who couldn't farm their land and were living in poverty. So the perpetrators sought somehow to make amends by planting and harvesting their crops, and also built new homes for them.

- Thus began the first of currently eight “**Reconciliation Villages**”: an experiment where the offenders' and victims' families began living side by side. Fifteen years later, there were 4,000 families living and working together, going to school and social events, even intermarrying, etc.
- We were able to visit numerous villages, and met wonderful people who told their stories. In Wayne's forty-five years of work in Restorative Justice in Canada, such accounts of reconciliation between a murderer and victim family members, though experienced, he can still count on one hand. In this photo, **Jeannette** shared about losing her parents as a 16-year-old, and her journey to forgiveness and reconciliation.

When I think about Jeannette, and the many stories we heard, I have been challenged to work harder at resolving my life's conflicts.

Conclusion

Wayne:

- On the front cover of today's bulletin, we read: “*But now for the good news: God's restorative justice has entered the world, independent of the law.*”

*Both the law and the prophets told us this day would come. This **redeeming justice** comes through the faithfulness of Jesus . . . (Romans 3:21, 22)”*

We are therefore challenged to always work at fully embracing Restorative Justice in all areas of our lives!

Amen!