

THE ASSURANCE OF SOLIDARITY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

The Theological and Pastoral Significance of the Messages of Kibeho
for Healing, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Rwanda Today

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Thesis Statement

In the search for holistic healing conducive to reconciliation among the people of Rwanda, the Church must continue to find ways of making meaning of the tragic sufferings associated with the Genocide against the Tutsi.¹ In this thesis, I argue that theological, ethical, and spiritual attentiveness to the popular religiosity of the people, specifically their devotions to the Cross and the Sorrowful Mother, and their firm belief in the apparitions at Kibeho, is of critical importance for intergenerational healing and reconciliation. Drawing upon the suffering messages of Kibeho that focus *on the assurance of solidarity with the suffering people*, given by both Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, theologians and Church leaders are in a privileged position to assist people, young and old alike, in making connections between the solidarity promised by Jesus and Virgin Mary *and* the human solidarity to which we are called in efforts to foster hope, healing, and reconciliation.

Key words: Assurance, Cross, Genocide, Healing, Jesus Christ, Kibeho Apparitions, Memory, Paschal Mystery, Peacebuilding, Reconciliation, Resurrection, Rwanda, Solidarity, Sorrowful Mother, Suffering, Way of the Cross

¹ The Genocide against the Tutsi had many consequences. Among others are the many victims who died in the country due to the war of liberation (or of stopping the Genocide) and those who tragically died in the refugee camps due mainly to precarious health conditions.

Abstract

Beginning in 1990 and lasting for one decade, in Rwanda and the subregion of Africa where Rwanda is located, violence, wars, genocide, and migrations caused various expressions of suffering. It is said that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared at Kibeho in a sorrowful state almost ten years before and foretold such atrocities and suggested a way out. Failing to pay heed to her prophetic voice, the consequences are devastating and challenging. In the effort to confront such challenges, the Church looks for ways in which she can channel the healing graces needed in the aftermath. Can we talk of the God who heals the broken-hearted in the context of bitter sufferings subsequent to Genocide against the Tutsi? The answer is ‘yes’ and in Rwanda, particularly the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ, give a hint for that possibility. The solidarity shown by them to the suffering people of Rwanda is key to receiving God’s healing and hope in the promises of his Kingdom despite the bitterness of the suffering.

Assured of the solidarity of both the Sorrowful Mother and of Jesus Christ, Rwandans can embark on the long yet necessary journey of healing and reconciliation. The Church in Rwanda ought to lead this urgent imperative with an innovative pastoral approach and at the same time propose a preventative endeavor to deter violence and instill harmonious relationships. This process of healing and reconciliation is informed by God’s example who reconciled humanity through the passion, death, and resurrection of his Son. Practices of solidarity, especially wherever sufferings are still felt, should be a priority. Moreover, a peacebuilding project should be an ecclesial initiative and priority for the sake of generations to come.

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INTRODUCTION

The world of suffering possesses as it were its *own solidarity*. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation, the trial of their destiny, or through their need for understanding and care, and perhaps above all through the persistent question of the meaning of suffering. Thus, although the world of suffering exists "in dispersion", at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge *to communion and solidarity*.² (Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 8)

On orientation day at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (STM), as I was beginning the Fall semester of 2021, a professor said: "Good theological questions come from pastoral challenges."³ Promptly, my memory went back to Rwanda in 2017, where, as a parish priest, on Easter Sunday, I presided over a Liturgy of Christian Burial as more than two-hundred coffins containing the remains of around six thousand bodies of victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi were buried.⁴ We had to reinvent the liturgy so that the experience would respond to questions raised by such an unprecedented event. The questions remain until this day however: *How to announce the resurrection amidst such suffering? How to tell those weeping that Jesus is alive and loves them though God could not save their loved ones whose dead bodies they behold?* An attempt to answer these questions leads us to the heart of suffering and the solidarity manifested by Jesus Christ and his Mother.

In accord with the popular belief of the faithful, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Word and the Mother of Sorrows, first appeared at Kibeho on November 28, 1981, to a young girl, Alphonsine Mumureke, a high school student from Kibeho. In the following months, other young girls and some boys claimed to have visions of Mary and Jesus Christ.⁵ Church

² Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris: Apostolic Letter on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, (St. Paul Editions, 1984), No. 8.

³ The professor was Orfilio Ernesto Valiente (Neto).

⁴ It was a day of burying in a newly constructed memorial grave the victims at Ntarama Memorial Site.

⁵ Gilbert Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word, Theological and Spiritual Meaning of the Title "Mother of the Word" in the Apparitions of Kibeho*. USA, Middletown, 2020.) 21.

leaders immediately paid attention. Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary that were public, not private to the visionaries alone, continued until 1989. Finally, in 2001, the Holy See⁶ confirmed the authenticity of the claims made by three of the young women visionaries. The core messages of the apparitions included the foretelling of many sufferings and gruesome killings, along with a vision of the abyss of evils towards which the world was heading. They also included a call to true conversion and repentance as well as authentic prayers and participation in an ancient devotion known as the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁷ A decade later, some of the messages were thought to have come to fulfillment in the subregion of East Africa, especially in Rwanda.

Beginning in 1990 and continuing for more than a decade, the countries of Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania experienced killings and mass deaths due to civil wars, Genocide, and the precariousness of life in refugee camps. The prophetic warnings attributed to the revelation of Our Lady of Kibeho unfolded in devastating, disastrous, and dehumanizing ways.

As in many other societies torn apart and divided by tragic events, the Rwandan community that continues to live on amidst the dangerous memory of Genocide needs restorative healing from the traumatic experiences of the past and present as well as a vision for the possibility of reconciliation in the future. Though many efforts have been put forth in this noble

⁶ Holy See, the authenticating declaration of Msgr. Augustin Misago, Bishop of Gikongoro, on the apparitions of Kibeho (1982-1989), Rwanda. Monday July 2 (2001). *Osservatore Romano*, English version, on July 11, 2001, 8 (<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/judgement-on-the-apparitions-of-kibeho-5709>)

⁷ The devotion includes seven decades of the Rosary. For additional information on its origins see William George Storey, *A Catholic Book of Hours and Other Devotions* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007), 347-365.

endeavor, the magnitude of the task, given the intergenerational impact of the Genocide, remains a theological, ethical, and spiritual challenge for the Church.

In 2021, while celebrating the 40th anniversary of the first apparition at Kibeho, Church leaders in Rwanda gave voice once again to the importance and necessity of the ministries of healing and reconciliation.⁸ In doing so, they stressed the revelatory character of the apparitions of Our Lady of Kibeho, the prophetic significance of her messages, and the theological, ethical, and spiritual relevance of the assurance of solidarity amidst suffering attributed to both the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, the Crucified One who forever remains in close solidarity with those who suffer, especially innocent victims. Church leaders insisted that this assurance attributed to the Mother of Sorrows continues to speak to the People of God today, not only in Rwanda, but throughout the world. Their belief in her abiding presence, which heralds the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, has not faltered in the midst of suffering and death. Specifically in Rwanda, the solidarity of Jesus Christ and his Mother with the victims of the Genocide, and its aftermath, finds expression in the Paschal Mystery as represented in the dangerous memories of the Crucified One, his anguished Mother, and the history of Genocide in Rwanda.

In this thesis, I explore how this message of the *assurance of solidarity amidst suffering* offers the people of Rwanda a source of inspiration and hope in their efforts to sustain and

⁸ Antoine Cardinal Kambanda, Archbishop of Kigali, *Homily preached during the Mass celebration at Kibeho and interview given after Mass*, on November 28, 2021. He underscored the message of the Blessed Virgin Mary concerning conversion, repentance, and reconciliation: reconciliation with God, with others, with oneself (with one's history) and with the cosmos. He reminded the faithful of the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in accompanying humanity in the midst of suffering. For him, 40 years is a sufficient amount of time for the message of Kibeho to take root in the lives of the people. It is also a sufficient time to make an assessment of what has done with regards to the message of Kibeho and its significance for the Church's mission. He also highlighted the message of suffering, saying that the Kibeho apparitions remind the faithful of the role of the cross in Christian life. Mindful of the trials and tribulations that people encounter, the faithful ought to recognize the centrality of the cross in the lives of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary so as to recognize how our own crosses are the medium of salvation for ourselves and for others. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFxsUFBfJtQ>)

strengthen them in their own participation in diverse processes of healing and reconciliation. I also endeavor to answer two pertinent questions: *What resources are available to enlighten faith, hope, and charity amidst the Rwandans' dangerous memories? How can the Church dare to celebrate the joys of Easter when the entire country and the world are mourning their loved ones for one hundred days, the official commemoration period?*

In Rwanda, where 92.2% of the population is Christian,⁹ people readily identify with the Cross of Jesus Christ, the Crucified One, in the midst of their own personal and communal suffering. Not unlike Auschwitz or the mass killings of innocent victims in El Salvador as Jon Sobrino has noted, the devastating impact of the Genocide on Rwandans and the rest of the world calls for the Church as a whole, and theologians in particular, to do theology and engage in pastoral care both *during the genocide and after the genocide*.¹⁰ For, in fact, the horror of the Genocide continues until the present day. This year alone, from March 17, 2023 to April 26, 2023, one thousand, one hundred and fifty-two (1,152) bodies have been found and given a dignified burial.¹¹ Such suffering often has its origin in the all too familiar and painful memories of the past, but such suffering also continues to influence the present and the future.

Mindful of these realities, I propose to identify and interpret the theological, ethical, and spiritual foundations of the message of Kibeho and the significance of *the assurance of solidarity with all who suffer*, attributed to Jesus Christ and Our Lady of Kibeho, the Mother of Sorrows, for inspiring acts of solidarity. To this end, Chapter One discusses the suffering messages of the Kibeho apparitions and their attribution to the Sorrowful Mother. Chapter Two discusses a

⁹ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022, Main Indicators Report* (February 2023), 11.

¹⁰ John Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator, A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, Trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545. 1993 (1991)), 252.

¹¹ Report from Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA), on ongoing 29th commemoration period, 2023.

Christian perspective on the hermeneutics of suffering. It also discusses the Christian understanding of suffering and identifies the various ways in which Christians deal with suffering. Chapter Three discusses the Paschal Mystery and the crosses of Rwandans. Reflecting upon the violence of the Cross and attending to the cries of all those who suffer, an effort to make meaning of the will of God is undertaken. The chapter highlights the resurrection which redeemed the salvific value of the Cross. The chapter concludes by making connections between the sufferings of the Rwandan people subsequent to the Genocide against the Tutsi and the sufferings of the Crucified One on the Cross.

Chapter Four reflects on the significance of solidarity in suffering as expressed in the messages associated with apparitions of the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ. Particular attention is given to the period of commemoration devoted to the Genocide that coincides with Easter time and the ways in which theological reflection on the events of Holy Week and Easter provides an opportunity for creating the conditions for healing and reconciliation to occur.

Building on Chapter Four, Chapter Five discusses the ways in which the Church can engage in an authentically Christian process of reconciliation within the social context of the ongoing civil processes of reconciliation. At the same time, the Church must come to terms with the fact that while the possibility of reconciliation is part of the curative process for healing the memories of violence and its consequences, present day efforts at reconciliation alone do not constitute a *life-project* for future generations. This is the reason why the chapter concludes with a proposal that the Church must initiate peacebuilding endeavors as a preventive means to eradicate violence and promote perennial social relationships that are harmonious and life-affirming.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MESSAGE OF SUFFERING IN THE KIBEHO APPARITIONS

Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed. As though by a continuation of that motherhood which by the power of the Holy Spirit had given him life, the dying Christ conferred upon the ever Virgin Mary a *new kind of motherhood*—spiritual and universal—towards all human beings, so that every individual, during the pilgrimage of faith, might remain, together with her, closely united to him unto the Cross, and so that every form of suffering, given fresh life by the power of this Cross, should become no longer the weakness of [hu]man but the power of God.¹²

The messages of suffering attributed to Our Lady of Kibeho echo similar messages attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary in other apparitions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as La Salette and Fatima.¹³ Repeatedly, these messages warn the world of impending dangers and threats to humanity and give voice to Mary's solidarity and identification with those who are suffering. It may be said that for many of the faithful, Our Lady of Kibeho has become an icon of fruitful suffering, an icon that witnesses to the redemptive power of Jesus Christ and testifies to the hope that, ultimately, goodness will triumph over the forces of evil.

1.1. The Kibeho Apparitions in the Socio-Political Context of Rwanda

On November 28, 1981, on the premises of *Groupe Scolaire Mère du Verbe*, a high school run by the Benebikira Sisters,¹⁴ the first of the alleged apparitions of Our Lady of Kibeho took place. They ended on November 28, 1989, exactly eight years after they began.¹⁵ The three

¹² Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 26.

¹³ Edouard Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, Trans. N.D. Smith, (Sheed and Ward, New York, 1964), 147.

¹⁴ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 5-7: The school was founded by the State in 1967 and given to Benebikira Sisters for the administration. It was formally called, *Ecole de Lettres de Kibeho*, (Kibeho School of Languages). Until recently, it was an all-girls school. Benebikira Sisters are a Roman Catholic religious institute of women founded in Rwanda in 1919 by Msgr. Jean Joseph Hirth, a Missionary of our Lady of Africa.

¹⁵ Casimir Ruzindaza, *The Fascinating Story of Kibeho. Mary's Prophetic Tears in Rwanda*, (Sanctuaire Notre Dame de Kibeho, 2013), 8.

visionaries were upper-level students and included Alphonsine Mumureke, Nathalie Mukamazimpaka, and Marie Claire Mukangango.¹⁶ Witnesses to the apparitions claim that the visions were both public and private in nature.

According to reports, the apparitions at Kibeho occurred within the context of social upheaval and political crisis. In 1981, the secular world posed many life-threatening challenges to mothers as well as other death-dealing realities that endangered the lives of many, especially the lives of vulnerable girls and women. These realities included hunger, misery, disease, high rates of infant mortality, maternal deaths, lack of access to prenatal care, miscarriages, abortions, both legalized and clandestine, mandatory sterilizations, infertility, forced use of artificial means of birth control, and an overall lack of education and health care for young and old alike. Other realities included a lack of recognition and respect for the dignity and rights of women, especially for those living in extremely precarious circumstances, including poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence, exploitation and abandonment. Specifically in Rwanda, similar to other developing countries, deprivations, violations, and abuses of women were not restrained or mitigated by any laws or institutions.

In 1988, during the Marian Year, Pope John Paul II, in his *Apostolic Letter "On the Dignity of Women,"*¹⁷ highlighted the dignity of women and their vocation and called upon the Church to recognize the dehumanizing conditions under which many women and girls were living. Promulgated on August 15, 1988, the Apostolic Letter appeared during the time of the ongoing apparitions of Kibeho. Viewed through the lens of women and their concerns, it is

¹⁶ Biziyaemye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 3.

¹⁷“Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988) | John Paul II,” N° 19 §6, accessed February 27, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.

possible to understand the ways in which the faithful gave meaning to the sufferings experienced by Mary, the Mother of Sorrows. As a Mother who was no stranger to violence, persecution, and death, it is possible to imagine Virgin Mary's great compassion and solidarity with all vulnerable victims and their loved ones. According to the visionaries, Our Lady of Kibeho presented herself to them as the "Mother of the Word" who wished to awaken the conscience of all people to the plight of women, the precarious conditions under which many live, and the importance of valuing mothers who give life, nurture it, protect it, and offer their own lives for the sake of another's well-being.

Moreover, it is important to remember that during the latter part of the twentieth century, the value and dignity of human life were challenged by bioethical dilemmas such as euthanasia and assisted suicide. A new viral pandemic called AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was rampantly spreading across continents. Violence and civil war hovered over the world in Latin America and the Middle East. The cold war was still an ongoing reality. Coups in Africa were commonplace. Killings and misery had become routine. On March 30, 1981, the U.S. President, Ronald Reagan, was the target of an assassination attempt. A few weeks later, Pope John Paul II also became the target of another assassination attempt on May 13, 1981, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima.¹⁸

Returning to the situation in Rwanda, there were ongoing heinous conflicts and tensions among its citizens. In the aftermath of the *Coup d'Etat* of 1973, many political changes impacted social life. The new regime of Juvénal Habyarimana (March 8, 1937- April 6, 1994), an ethnic Hutu, installed a unique party and a totalitarian regime. Politicians and high cadres (fifty-six in

¹⁸ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 11.

total) were killed, and the politics of regionalism, along with the segregation and oppression of the Tutsi, was reinforced in various sectors of social life, especially in schools and governmental institutions.¹⁹

During this period of political turmoil, there was a significant decline in popular expressions of religious faith and devotion among Catholics in Rwanda was in decline. Lack of respect and reverence for the Church was evident throughout the country and communities of faith were under siege. Biziyaremye described the situation in these words:

[F]rom 1979 to 1981, vandalism was rampant all over the country. Almost all the statues of the Virgin Mary venerated in the churches, at the crossroads or at the entrance of villages were mutilated, destroyed, or stolen [...] [D]evotion to the Blessed Virgin was resisted, almost forgotten, neglected or considered as irrelevant and out of date.²⁰

With such a background, those who continue to have great devotion to the Mother of the Word look back on Rwandan history and make meaningful connections between the apparitions, the messages, and the tragedies that befell Rwanda in subsequent years. Through a faith-filled interpretive lens, it is believed by some that the Mother of the Word did not only come to awaken consciences, but also to bear witness to her solidarity with people whose very lives were under threat, and to bring a salutary message of hope.

1.2. The Main Function of Apparitions in the Life of the Church

There are some traits to consider concerning the value and function of apparitions in the life of the Church and the world. Firstly, they are subordinate to the normal channels of grace in

¹⁹ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 454-64 & https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_finding-identity-grim-revelations-about-1973-rwandan-coup/6201970.html and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Rwandan_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat (visited on May, 5, 2023 at 5pm.)

²⁰ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 11-2.

the moral and religious life of the Church. This should also be highlighted through the preaching of the Church. Secondly, apparitions cannot be part of the infallible, revealed truth which is the object of the Church's faith. Thirdly, the Church does not impose any requirement on the part of the faithful to believe in apparitions. Fourthly, all the activities undertaken by the Church concerning apparitions, like the construction of shrines, the institution of particular devotions and feasts, and the authorizations of visible signs like scapulars and medals, are to be understood as supportive elements of the Church's *living faith*. This entails an objective placement of the content of the apparitions in the structure of public revelation. The Blessed Virgin Mary, though recognized by some members of the faithful as having appeared in a certain place, at a certain time, and for a certain purpose, is nevertheless to be venerated primarily as *the Blessed Mother of God* as determined by the Marian dogmas of the Church. Subsequently, other titles linked with various apparitions should be considered subordinate. For instance, the Sorrowful Mother of Kibeho, Our Lady of La Salette, or Our Lady of Fatima, all of these titles are subordinate to her identity as the Mother of God. Fifthly, authenticated private revelations cannot be ignored altogether, because the living Church does not have the hierarchy as its only driving force, but is also animated by the great blessing of prophetic charisms to which apparitions belong.²¹

In the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church recognizes God's awareness of the difficult times throughout which humanity passes.²² Moreover, the Church perceives the Blessed Virgin Mary's solicitude, solidarity, and active presence in the life of the Church, along with her often perilous pilgrimage in this world to her true homeland, the Heaven.²³ The Church

²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 147-61.

²² Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 147.

²³ Vatican Council II, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New rev. ed. (Collegeville, Ind.: Liturgical Press, 1992), *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

also sees in the Virgin Mary, the *maternal love* with which she cares for her children, the whole of humanity entrusted to her care beneath the Cross (Jn 19:27). As the Blessed Virgin Mary maternally cared for Jesus during his earthly life and ministry, and also for his disciples after his Ascension and the birth of the Church at Pentecost, likewise she continues to care for his brothers and sisters, the members of his Mystical Body, and entreats them to listen to His voice as she did at Cana. (Jn 2:5)

1.3. The Messages of the Kibeho Apparitions

The *messages of Kibeho*²⁴ are enclosed in the dialogues of the visionaries with the Virgin Mary. As mentioned earlier, these dialogues lasted for eight years. However, the core messages were delivered during the first two years, from 1981 to the end of 1983. These include:

(1) *Mary's Divine Motherhood*: At Kibeho, Mary identified herself as the *Mother of the Word* and explicitly emphasized her loving care for her children in the entire world. In this first message, *motherhood* and the *dignity of women* are highlighted. (2) *Our Lady's Profound Sorrow*: The Blessed Virgin Mary came to Kibeho in sorrow and tears. (3) *The Moral State of the World*: The Blessed Virgin Mary showed great concern for the sinful state of the world at Kibeho. (4) *Urgent Call to Repentance*. (5) *The Motherly Appeal to Unwavering and Sincere Faith*. (6) *The Appeal for Sincere and Unceasing Prayer*. (7) *The reality of Salvific Suffering in the daily lives of Christians*. (8) *The promotion of Devotion to Our Lady of Kibeho through the rosary*, the ordinary five-decade rosary as well as the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows. (9) *The expressed desire of Mary that a Chapel be constructed as a visible sign and remembrance of the*

²⁴ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 28-50.

Apparitions. [A chapel was constructed and dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows in 2003.] (10) A motherly appeal to strive for eternal life in which the Blessed Virgin Mary reminded the faithful about the eschatological orientation of their lives and urged everyone to hold this in great concern. (11) *The Blessing of Our Lady of Kibeho upon her "Flowers"* the imagery that was frequently used during the apparitions. One image was the *flowers* which represented the people for whom she cared with much love. Almost at every public apparition, she urged the visionaries to water her flowers which she would like to be evergreen, meaning without spiritual withering. In her statue, flowers were included to crystallize such a metaphor and wish.²⁵

1.4. The Kibeho Apparitions as seen in the Light of Similar Marian Apparitions

The Kibeho apparitions echo other apparitions marked by apocalyptic prophecies. The most pertinent are *La Salette* in France (1846) and *Fatima* in Portugal (1917).

On September 19, 1846, at *La Salette*, the Blessed Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared in a sorrowful state to two young shepherds, Maximin Giraud, and Melanie Calvat, as Melanie described it: "The Holy Virgin was crying nearly the whole time she was speaking to us. Her tears flowed gently, one by one, down to her knees, then, like sparks of light, they disappeared. They were glittering and full of love. I would have liked to comfort her and stop her tears."²⁶

At La Salette, as in the case of Kibeho, the core message delivered in tears, was to forsake sin and to do penance in order to avoid terrible sufferings. The signs of the fulfillment of

²⁵ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 50-2.

²⁶ Roy Abraham Varghese, *God -Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary*, (The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2000), 99.

her message did not delay. In December of that same year (1846), already most of the common crops were ravaged by disease. In the following year, 1847, a subsequent severe famine struck Europe causing one million deaths, one-tenth of which was recorded in France alone. Another dangerous side effect of the severe famine was the cholera epidemic which ravaged France and subsequently killed many infants and children. The Message of La Salette also was comprised of secrets.²⁷

At Fatima, from May 13, 1917 to October 13, 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared, six consecutive times, to three children, Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia. In the context of the First World War, she predicted its end, announced the Second World War, and expressed spiritual concerns regarding the spread of communism by Russia. At the same time, “She asked them [visionaries] if they wanted to offer themselves to God and suffer for the reparation of sin and the conversion of sinners. When they said yes, she told them they would suffer a lot but be strengthened by God's grace.”²⁸ At the center of her plea were prayers for the conversion and salvation of souls. These included the rosary and acts of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In addition, the explicit consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart was announced as one of the remedies to cut short the spreading of errors and persecutions, and the sufferings that would occur subsequent to them. It is worth remembering that on March 25, 1984, Pope John Paul II consecrated Russia once again to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A few years later, on November 9, 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred and the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with communism, were thought to be in line

²⁷ Varghese, *God-sent*, 100-1.

²⁸ Varghese, *God-sent*, 109.

with the prophecies of Our Lady of Fatima. Similar to La Salette, the apparitions at Fatima included secrets as well.²⁹

From La Salette to Fatima to Kibeho, it is evident that the messages of the Blessed Virgin Mary are contextual. Though the apparition messages of the Blessed Virgin Mary may concern the entire world in general, their time and geographical placement are quite particular. In the La Salette apparitions, the entire context is placed within the aftermath of the Revolution of France, of threats to European Christianity, the forthcoming wars, and outbreaks of violence starting in Europe and spreading throughout the entire world. Similarly, at Fatima, the messages of the Blessed Virgin Mary occur within the context of World War I, its aftermath, the rise of Hitler, World War II, and the aftermath of the Cold War. Starting in Europe, wars and devastation spread throughout the world. As such, the apparitions at Kibeho may be thought to be in continuity with those of La Salette and Fatima.

1.5. The Significance of Suffering in the Messages given during the Kibeho Apparitions

In the messages of the apparitions of Kibeho, suffering stands out as a significant focus. More than one-quarter of the messages concern suffering. Out of eleven crystallized messages, four deal directly with concerns related to suffering: (1) *Our Lady's Profound Sorrow*, (2) *Salvific suffering in the daily life of Christians*, (3) *Devotional practices to Our Lady of Kibeho through the usual Rosary and the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows*, and (4) *Mary's Desire for a Chapel as a visible sign of the apparitions, a chapel that was dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows*.

²⁹ Varghese, *God-sent*, 107-114.

Moreover, the personal mission entrusted to each visionary testifies to the suffering character of the messages of Kibeho.

According to the visionaries, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who appeared at Kibeho, identified herself as the *Mother of the Word* and, at the same time, as the *Sorrowful Mother*. She was suffering because of the people's failure to recognize and acknowledge evil - the *mysterium iniquitatis* - and the lack of repentance for sin that was prevalent throughout the world. She asked the visionaries to join her in combatting the evils of the world through expiatory suffering. She reminded the world of the need for prayer and taught the visionaries the Rosary of her Seven Sorrows. She predicted imminent bitter suffering if sincere conversions did not take place, and she urged Christians to embrace suffering as a reality of the Christian life.

1.5.1. The Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho and Devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary

Devotion to the Sorrowful Mother has a long history. The roots of the devotion are to be found in the prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:35). The fulfillment of this prophecy was thought to occur during the passion of Jesus Christ at the foot of the Cross. The prophecy of the sword that would pierce the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary is foundational to the development of the Servite Order founded in 1233.³⁰

Though devotion to the Sorrowful Mother can be traced to the Gospel of Luke, it was not until the Middle Ages that a structured form of the devotion³¹ appears. Beginning with the 8th

³⁰ Giuseppe Corradi, O.S.M., "*The Historical Evolution of the Marian Ideal of the Order of the Servants of Mary*", (S.T.D. diss., Marian Library - International Marian Research Institute University of Dayton 300 College Park, 2019), 207. (ProQuest Number: 27929881)

³¹ "Devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows became a standard devotion in the Church around the 14th century. It was revealed to St. Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) that devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary's Seven Sorrows would bring great graces. The devotion consists in praying seven Hail Mary's while meditating on the Seven Sorrows of Mary. Mary, in a unique way, willingly suffered alongside her Divine Son as he gave his life to save the world, and she felt the bitterness of his passion as only a mother can. This devotion is

century, devotion to the Sorrowful Mother emphasized the compassion of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who suffered with her Crucified Son. In the 11th century, the devotion was coupled with devotions to the five joys of the Virgin Mary and the five wounds (*dolors*) of Jesus Christ. From the 13th century, given the influence of the Servite Order, devotion to the Sorrowful Mother extended the events in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary to include the classical Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Needless to say, the iconography showing her with seven swords appeared during the 15th century under the influence of the Servite Order also.³² The influence of the Servites is remarkable and recognized in the universal liturgical calendar as well, which, after Vatican Council II, shifted the feast of the Our Lady of Compassion from the Lenten period to merge with the Sorrowful Mother on September 15, after the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14th.³³ Recognized at Kibeho, in her classical sorrows, as the Blessed Virgin Mary, encourages prayer in the devotional form of the Rosary of Seven Sorrows.

The image of the Sorrowful Mother and the message of suffering dominate the apparitions of Kibeho. The profound sorrow and the climax of the suffering message of Kibeho were manifested on August 15, 1982, the day of the longest apparition. The Blessed Virgin Mary, the visionaries, and the crowd of witnesses participated in the experience of suffering. All of them experienced afflictions for about 8 hours. One of the visionaries, Alphonsine, describes the Virgin Mary's mood as follows:

The Virgin Mary appeared in an unusual way. She came with a lot of sadness; and when I started to sing for her, I could not continue the song, because she immediately forbade me to do so. What caused more pain to me, was to see her weeping ... Tears could not cease to

especially remembered during September, the Month of Our Lady of Sorrows (the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows is September 15th), and during the season of Lent.

³² Corradi, *The Historical Evolution of the Marian Ideal of the Order of the Servants of Mary*, 368.

³³ Corradi, *The Historical Evolution of the Marian Ideal of the Order of the Servants of Mary*, 127-8.

abundantly flow from her eyes; I could clearly see them streaming in her visage. Her sigh was full of sadness.³⁴

In the conversations with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the visionaries, the core message and catechesis on suffering were given. The message responded to two main questions: *Why suffering?* and *How to suffer?*

1.5.2. Why Does the Blessed Mother Suffer and What Does her Example Teach Us about the Place of Suffering in the Lives of Christians?

The causes of the suffering of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the apparitions of Kibeho can be summarized as follows: The people whom the Blessed Virgin Mary wanted to help were reluctant to accept her or her message. They continued to offend God and the neighbor through their actions, and they did not care about the consequences. There were boundless proliferation of sin and people continued to harden their hearts to the messages that would bring them salvation. They were heading into an abyss.³⁵ The Virgin Mary's tears and sadness revealed a tender attitude of a loving Mother who is about to behold the loss of her children. In the face of free will, the Blessed Virgin Mary proposed salutary means of conversion, but she could not impose them. She was heavily grieved because of the recklessness of human beings advancing toward a wide-open abyss of destruction. However, the suffering message of the Blessed Virgin Mary remained a mystery whose contours were far from being fully understood.

Commenting on the apparitions at La Salette, Carlo Maria Martini explains briefly how to approach such a message hidden in the suffering of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

We should sufficiently reflect on the suffering of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she had not only suffered during her earthly existence but suffers again and continues to suffer. Today

³⁴ Augustin Misago, *Les Apparitions de Kibeho au Rwanda*, (Faculté Catholique de Kinshasa, 1991), 147. (Free translation from French to English).

³⁵ Edouard Sinayobye, *Mère du Verbe à Kibeho. Un Charisme de Renouveau Spirituel pour notre Temps*. (Editions du Sanctuaire Notre Dame de Kibeho, 2015), 305-7.

she is suffering for the sins of humanity, in compassion with my weaknesses, with my fragilities, with my fear. It is a profound mystery because it allows us to understand, to some extent, the suffering of God for our evil deeds. It is a mystery that theology fails to elucidate because of the negative concept we hold of suffering as an imperfection that can neither be applied to God nor Mary. However, the message of La Salette invites us to go beyond the truth of the very perfect God and of the Happy (Blessed) Mary in glory. The divine felicity, the felicity of the saints, is not so perfect so as to be unconcerned with the troubles of human beings. With human words, we call it suffering, but it should rather be named the passion of love, passionate and tender love, a love full of compassion.³⁶

The insistence on suffering because of compassionate love brings us to consider the ways in which the message of suffering, in the context of these apparitions, should be received and lived because the Blessed Virgin Mary does not only suffer but also asks to be joined in her suffering.

The Blessed Virgin Mary taught the visionaries at Kibeho the positive side of suffering and hence how to benefit from it. According to messages of Kibeho, everyone in the world undergoes an experience of suffering. Because it is part of the human condition, the Blessed Virgin Mary urges the visionaries to accept suffering as part of their earthly pilgrimage, and unite their sufferings with the redemptive suffering of Christ. The Blessed Virgin Mary goes on to say that suffering is part of the Christian life.³⁷ To enter through the narrow gate (Matt 7:13-14) requires sacrifice. The exigencies of discipleship require one to take up his/her own cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (Matt 16:24-26). The Blessed Virgin Mary exhorts one to accept suffering that bears fruit, suffering that is endured in compassionate love for the sake of another's salvation.³⁸ As Sobrino observes “the only suffering that has any meaning is the suffering we accept in the fight against suffering.”³⁹

³⁶ Carlo Maria Martini, *Marie Souffre Encore*, Trad. Philippe Baillet, (Editions Saint-Paul, Versailles, 1998) 31. (Free translation from French)

³⁷ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*. 40.

³⁸ Sinayobye, *Mère du Verbe à Kibeho*, 308-9.

³⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 241.

1.5.3. Communion with the Sufferings of Christ: The Theological Foundation for the Suffering Pleas of the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho

The catechesis on suffering delivered at Kibeho has a theological foundation in the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ.

Redemption is an act of the saving God, who is himself salvation and redemption. It is an exclusive divine act of salvation. It takes the concrete form of a saving act of God in his humanity -of Jesus Christ, who was both God and man. God became [hu]man in order that his divine activity of redemption should be accomplished in humanity.⁴⁰

Through Christ's saving activity, the entire human race is redeemed; and through Christ's humanity, the whole of the human race, the members of his Mystical Body, is also redeemed. In fact, as Adam represents humanity in his Fall, likewise, Jesus Christ represents the entire redeemed humanity by his incarnation into a human flesh. This objective redemption was manifested by his passion, death, and resurrection. However, our union with Christ actualizes the grace of redemption in our lives. It is the subjective redemption that needs acceptance and cooperation to be effective in our lives. In fact, God created us without our consent, but our personal redemption requires our consent and cooperation.⁴¹

The Blessed Virgin Mary perfectly cooperated in her personal redemption in such a way that she became the model of subjective redemption required of everyone. Redeemed by exemption, she lived a faith-filled life, gradually accepting and cooperating in God's activities of redemption until she ultimately consented and cooperated in Christ's Passion for humanity's salvation. In freedom, she accepted and appropriated objective grace. Because everyone is a co-redeemer in his/her own redemption, the Blessed Mary achieved it universally by virtue of her sublime communion with Christ which found its fulness with her assumption, a state of

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 36.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 36-9

redemption's completeness. However, this cooperation does not mean any contribution to Christ's redemption or sign of insufficiency. It is the receptivity of the graces availed by the Cross of Christ which found in the Blessed Virgin Mary a perfect subject, thus making her the model for each personal redemption and that of the Church as a whole.

The subjective redemption of the Blessed Virgin Mary corresponded perfectly with the meaning and orientation of objective redemption.⁴² This is the reason for her plea to strive for personal redemption through a co-redemption by faith, hope, and charity channeled in self-giving love. Nonetheless, in modeling the Blessed Virgin Mary's sacrificial love, our personal redemption also has a communal dimension. Personal acceptance of the grace, which is Christ Himself, has a direct impact on our brothers' and sisters' own redemption.

1.5.4. The Significance of Expiatory Suffering in the Apparitions of Kibeho

The apparitions of Kibeho offer bold teachings on expiatory suffering, exemplified by three stages of spiritual practice:

- The visionary Nathalie was entrusted with a special mission of suffering for the world's salvation, requiring her to leave school and engage in expiatory suffering for the remission of the sins of others for the remainder of her life.
- The Virgin Mary often required the visionaries to undergo various practices of mortification during the apparitions, such as prolonged kneeling, carrying a weighted cross, and prohibition from singing or gazing at her.

⁴² Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 26.72.77-9.

- The visionaries were asked to practice acts of mortification in their daily lives, including physical pain, enduring painful diseases, prolonged fasting, and sleeping on the bare floor in light dresses without a comforter.

Despite these various sufferings, the visionaries were asked to live joyfully.⁴³

In this school of suffering, the Sorrowful Mother taught by example. When she introduced the visionaries to the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows,⁴⁴ she wished to highlight that her entire earthly life never departed from suffering. Her experience of suffering was part of the mystery of salvation. Therefore, this underscored her role and the degree of her participation in the mystery of our redemption through suffering. Seven hallmarks mark her classical sorrows: “1) the prophecy of Simeon, 2) the flight into Egypt, 3) the loss of Jesus in the temple, 4) Mary meeting Jesus on the way to Calvary, 5) Jesus dies on the Cross, 6) Mary receives the dead body of Jesus in her arms, and 7) Jesus is placed in the tomb.”⁴⁵

According to the visionaries, when the Virgin Mary presented the devotional practice of praying the Rosary of her Seven Sorrows, she insisted that the devotion should not take precedence over prayer and adoration to the Holy Trinity. She told Nathalie the following: “You must not adore me because I am not God but a creature. Invoke me.”⁴⁶ By this, she disclosed her concern for the distinction of the prayers of the pilgrim Church. There are three distinct *cults* that spiritual life demands: *cultus latría*, *cultus hyperdulia*, and *cultus dulia*. *Cultus Latría* is the worship that is due to God alone and to each one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity (Ex 20:1-5).

⁴³ Sinayobye, *Mère du Verbe à Kibeho*, 310-3.

⁴⁴ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 16.

⁴⁵ Corradi, *The Historical Evolution of the Marian Ideal of the Order of the Servants of Mary*, 135-6.

⁴⁶ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 42.

Hyperdulia is the special respect and veneration due to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk 1:48), who cooperated uniquely in the work of redemption. *Dulia* is an act of respect due to saints (2Tm 4:7-8; 1 Cor 9:24-25; Rm 13:7).⁴⁷

How does one begin to understand the messages of suffering in the context of the suffering people of the world in general and of the suffering people of Rwanda in particular? The following chapter will contribute to an understanding of the Christian perspective on the hermeneutics of suffering and how the Christian tradition deals with suffering.

CHAPTER TWO: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUFFERING

Even though in its subjective dimension, as a personal fact contained within [hu]man's concrete and unrepeatable interior, suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable, perhaps at the same time nothing else requires as much as does suffering, *in its 'objective reality,'* to be dealt with, meditated upon, and conceived as an explicit problem; and that therefore basic questions be asked about it and the answers sought.⁴⁸

Suffering is an integral part of human existence. It also bears a connection to the mystery of evil.⁴⁹ While focusing on the experience of believers within the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is important to observe that both believers and non-believers are confronted with the phenomena of evil and suffering.⁵⁰ Individuals and communities in every generation reflect on the question: *why* is there suffering? Whether framed as a problem or a mystery, it remains enigmatic.⁵¹ Many

⁴⁷ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Vol.1 *From the Beginning to the Eve of the Reformation* (Sheed and Ward, New York, 1963), 283.

⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 5.

⁴⁹ Richard Sparks, C.S.P., "Suffering", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 950.

⁵⁰ Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, Issues in Religious Studies (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), 14.

⁵¹ Wesley Morriston, "The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands" in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, Eds. Justin P. McBrayer, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Wiley InterScience, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 144-58.

past and current attempts to comprehend evil, especially as it relates to human suffering, reveal that there is a mysterious dimension to suffering that can sometimes be described as “gratuitous suffering.”⁵² Nothing can justify the suffering of an innocent child or the suffering of a vulnerable elder, no matter what good may come out of the experience.⁵³

According to the visionaries of Kibeho, the Sorrowful Mother tried to explain the *Why* of suffering and even provided advice on *How* to avoid suffering.⁵⁴ The so-called catechesis on suffering attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary at Kibeho focused on the *why* of suffering and the *how* of suffering positively. However, it did not respond to human questions regarding the mystery of suffering. When considering *the justice of God*, any effort to explain the suffering of innocents and the righteous as in the biblical case of Job, “seems to trivialize and impoverish *the concept of justice* which we encounter in Revelation.”⁵⁵ Making meaning of such realities is a most difficult task.

2.1. The Hermeneutics of Human Suffering

Suffering may be defined as any experience that impinges on an individual's or community's sense of well-being. Synonymous include pain, grief, distress, disruption, affliction, imposition, discrimination, and any sense of loss or being victimized. The negative experience may be physical, psychological, interpersonal, or spiritual, though in most instances it involves a combination of these. Suffering, then, is one's consciousness of life's dark side, the human experience that is not peaceful and harmonious in our bodies, in our souls, in our relationships, in the cosmos.⁵⁶

⁵² Michael C. Rea, “Skeptical Theism and the “Too Much Skepticism” Objection”, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, Eds. Justin P. McBrayer, Daniel Howard-Snyder, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 483.

⁵³ Rea, “Skeptical Theism and the “Too Much Skepticism” Objection”, 483.

⁵⁴ Roy Abraham Varghese, *God -Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary*, (The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2000), 97-100.

⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, No. 11.

⁵⁶ Sparks, “Suffering”. 950.

The above definition summarizes almost all of the sufferings of humanity. While evil's consequences result in suffering, all suffering does not originate from evil. The human experience of suffering has many dimensions.⁵⁷ For example,

- There are sufferings, physical or mental, that are the result of human wickedness.
- There are sufferings that are the result of natural human conditions such as dementia, all categories of diseases, and death itself from all causes.
- There are sufferings that are the result of natural disasters, such as famine, epidemics, pandemics, floods, storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other calamities.
- There are sufferings that are the result of structural moral evil associated with human sinfulness that leads to oppression, injustice, violence, wars, genocides, and all sorts of abuses.

In the following section, an effort is made to understand the contours of a Christian understanding of suffering and how Christians make meaning of suffering.

2.1.1. A Christian Understanding of Suffering

Given the parameters of suffering, efforts to understand its origin stand out as a crucial interest of concern. From a biblical perspective, the Genesis narrative depicts the fall of human beings and reveals that the disobedience of Adam and Eve resulted in punishment for their sin (Gen 3:13-24). From a theological perspective, a believer's faith in a loving and all-powerful God, who created heaven and earth, remains a challenge for those who are led to question how a good God can allow innocent and vulnerable people to suffer. The horror of innocent suffering, particularly at the hands of wicked people in the presence of a loving and powerful God, remains

⁵⁷ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 2-3.

inexplicable.⁵⁸ Theodicy, which justifies God in the face of evil and suffering, has attempted to provide explanations throughout history, but the efforts have been largely unsatisfactory.⁵⁹ In order to draw upon some insights from the tradition, the following section, focuses on Saint Thomas Aquinas and his attempt to understand and provide some perspective on the ontological problem of evil as the primary origin of suffering.

2.1.1.1. A Thomistic Account of Evil

Following Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas does not ascribe any existential reality to evil. It has only a relational reality. Evil is not an objective reality but rather a subjective conception. Treating the distinction between *good* and *evil*, Aquinas provides a glimpse into some possible answers to important questions. According to Aquinas, evil is known only from the nature of good. “Therefore it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good. [...] evil is neither a being nor a good.”⁶⁰ Because of imperfections found in created things and hence susceptible to corruption, evil can be said to exist in things because corruptibility is also evil. (Ia Q.48 a.2) Moreover, evil cannot totally absorb good. (Ia Q.48 a.4)

Concerning the cause of evil and hence its subsequent defectiveness that includes suffering, Aquinas places it in the *good* itself. In whatever happens, evil that is found in actions has its cause in the defectiveness of some principle of operation or in the principle of the agent. (Ia Q.49 a.1) However, since in the supreme good, God himself, there are no defects, God cannot be the direct cause of the evil (Ia Q.49 a.2). It follows that various sufferings cannot have God as their direct cause; their cause must be searched for in the defectiveness of principles governing

⁵⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 6-7.

⁵⁹ Michael W. Hickson, “A Brief History of Problem of Evil”, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, Eds. Justin P. McBrayer, Daniel Howard-Snyder, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3.

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (Ia Q. 48 a.1)

the constituents of the universe and in the failure of principles of instrumental agents. Moreover, evil and suffering do not have a first founding principle that would be eternal as in the case of good (Ia Q.49 a.3). This implies that evil and subsequent sufferings are doomed to finitude.

Thomas Aquinas distinguishes three sorts of evils: metaphysical evil (*malum naturae*), the moral evil (*malum culpae*), and the physical evil (*malum paenae*) (Ia, Q.48 a.5, a.6) The nature of all created beings, including rational beings, is the cause of their being imperfect in themselves and this status makes them susceptible to being the subject of evil. This accounts for metaphysical evil. It includes all limitations, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and natural disasters. Moral evil results in transgressing the law concerning the perfect action involving the voluntary acts and use of will (Ia Q.48 a.5). Physical evil is simply reduced to the resulting pain from moral evils and some sorts of metaphysical evils. (Ia Q.48 a.5, a.6)

Understanding evil and suffering in this world proves to be a huge endeavor. For the believer who holds his/her existence in a just and loving God and awaits all good from Him, some form of suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent, can appear meaningless and a contradiction to God's love and justice. For this reason, it is important and necessary to examine Christian approaches to theodicy that endeavor to reconcile the mysterious realities of evil and suffering with a God of love, justice and mercy.

2.1.1.2. Suffering and Christian Approaches to Theodicy

Christian approaches to theodicy recognize four main characteristics that constitute a distinctive understanding of suffering in the face of the loving God.⁶¹ Firstly, suffering is considered to be a milieu of religious experience. In the midst of suffering, some people tend to

⁶¹ Laura W. Ekstrom, "A Christian Theodicy," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, Eds. Justin P. McBrayer, Daniel Howard-Snyder, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 269-278.

feel the nearness of God and they may even claim to have visions of the divine which brings a sense of comfort and consolation. In addition to that, suffering itself can be a religious experience when the suffering person identifies with the suffering of Jesus Christ, who came for the salvation of the world, suffered his passion, and died on the Cross. Secondly, despite so many theodicies that claim the impassibility of God, there is a divine passibility. Out of love, God suffers as the love of human beings draws the lover to suffer compassionately for the beloved. “Hence, it would seem that a being who is more loving than any of us, who is the most loving that anyone can be, would experience profound sadness.”⁶² Thirdly, to be morally attuned to the good equals taking part in the sorrows of others. Hence, God, who is a morally perfect being, sorrows over the pains of his loved creatures and shares in their grief. “This sorrow is arguably not a defect, but a perfection, a strength, or an asset, an aspect of being supremely good.”⁶³ Fourthly, God can still reveal Himself uniquely to a suffering person in ways that allow an individual to come to love God and to develop an intimate relationship through suffering, an experience described as a divine intimacy theodicy.

This presupposes that God is not cruel, nor is God inflicting suffering for some greater good or finding joy in the suffering of his creatures, so as to suggest that such sufferings are intended to facilitate divine intimacy. Moreover, it presupposes that suffering is never understood as a means for participating in a religious experience that is an end in itself. Lastly, a divine intimacy theodicy presupposes that the experience of suffering contributes to a sense of closeness to God rather than a rejection of God. In fact, while suffering may draw closer to God, at the same time,

⁶² Ekstrom, “A Christian Theodicy”, 274.

⁶³ Ekstrom, “A Christian Theodicy”, 274.

it must be acknowledged that some who suffer have found in their experience an occasion to deny the very existence of God.

While all theodicies endeavor to justify the goodness of God in the face of suffering and evil, the problem remains unexplained. Nevertheless, there are three points to retain from the insights expressed in the foregoing paragraphs. Firstly, suffering provides a context for experiencing God's closeness. In fact, amidst suffering, one experiences the existential finitude of human nature, its vulnerability, and its bodily weaknesses. At the same time, he/she may acquire a more acute insight into his/her destiny, develop greater attentiveness to the spiritual dimension of life, and grow in personal maturity. Secondly, for some people, the development of the spiritual dimension of life allows them to mature in wisdom. That is why the *good* that comes out of the experiences of suffering contributes to the process of making meaning of suffering. God does not permit evil, but out of it, God's grace can predispose a person to recognize the *good* that arises from suffering. Thirdly, even when suffering is reflected upon in its entirety, it still remains a mystery. There simply is no way to make meaning of the atrocities experienced by innocent children for whom a deeper relationship with God or any other greater *good* is not a particular need to be served.

Christian theodicy has the merit of giving meaning to suffering, at least partly, by allowing those who undergo some sort of suffering to experience, out of a feeling of love, that they do have a share in the very suffering of Jesus Christ. Because the Christian tradition appreciates the sufferings and Passion of Christ, whatever can facilitate a sharing in God's experience of love, particularly when it includes suffering, is equally appreciated as well. On the one hand, this is fostered by the quality of love that characterizes the relationship between those

who suffer and God. On the other hand, it is such connectedness that makes one feel the presence of God amidst suffering.⁶⁴

The self-revelation of the loving God, which culminated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, established a close relationship between God and humanity. From the time when humanity recognized that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for its salvation (Jn 3:16), suffering ceased to be understood solely in terms of justice. Suffering was no longer understood only as a consequence of moral evil, as suggested in the case Job. Through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the meaning of suffering found its best expression in the salvific love manifested to humanity overwhelmed by evil. In experiencing humanity's condition and in attending to humanity's misery, Jesus Christ demonstrated the compassionate love in the face of suffering. When he accepted to die on the Cross and rose for the sake of the salvation of humanity, the innocent Jesus Christ experienced the climax of evil and suffering, but at the same time conquered evil and death through love manifested in his redemptive suffering. Hence, He opened to humanity the way to life eternal. Therefore, worst evil and suffering became the status of being *cut off from God's communion*, a situation that may persist even beyond the death, normally considered as the end of suffering.⁶⁵ It is in the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ that all suffering finds meaning. Christians, through their faith, have found many ways to cope with suffering, even suffering "*unto God*."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ekstrom, "A Christian Theodicy", 272.

⁶⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 14-19.

⁶⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical – Political Dimension of Christianity*. Translated by J. Matthew Ashley, (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, N.J. trans. 1998.), 33.

2.2. Christian Attitudes and Actions in the Face of Suffering

Brian Hebblethwaite⁶⁷ explored evil and suffering in world religions and in the process, identified what he describes as the essential elements necessary for dealing with suffering in Christian tradition. According to Hebblethwaite, there are five ways of dealing with suffering. These include: renunciation, mysticism, devotion, charitable deeds, and sacrifice.⁶⁸

(1) *Renunciation*, also known as *asceticism*, was thought to be the best way to confront evil, the source of a major part of suffering. In Christian monasticism, renunciation places limits on certain aspects of life and also demands repentance for the service of God and ministry to human needs, including the elimination of human sufferings.⁶⁹ Through renunciation, the ascetic person acquires a more acute knowledge of the real causes of human suffering, the role of divine intercession, and a deeper sense of his/her own responsibility before God.

(2) *Mysticism* also shows itself to be the response to evil in the world and its subsequent suffering. Among other forms, it can take communion with nature to alleviate the pain, but for Christians, without negating a union with nature, mysticism focuses on union with God. By this union, a mystic is immersed in the infinite being of God, raising his/her own being out of the reach of suffering. The mystical experience then imparts a conviction that greatly allows mystics to confess, like Saint Paul, that: "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Ga 2:20). The life of mystics becomes the very life of God, and since God knows no sufferings other than compassionate love, mystics too, cease to suffer in a usual way and enter into a new way of compassionate love. The limit of this way is that mysticism is not for everyone, but for a few

⁶⁷ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, vii.

⁶⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 17-21.

⁶⁹ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 23.

religious mystics. However, for these few mystics, responsibility is entrusted to them for the others by the principle of “*contemplate aliis tradere.*” (IIIa, Q.40, a.1, ad.2). The mystical experiences of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross and many other saints testified to such truth.⁷⁰

(3) The next way to deal with suffering is through *devotional practices*. They help to develop a deep sense of righteousness and holiness of God. The logical consequence is that they foster the *awareness of human sin* conducive to repentance. In Christian tradition, the powerful devotion for such purpose is the Cross which constitutes the core of the meaning of suffering as Hebblethwaite put it well:

Christianity draws much of its power to enable men and women to cope with the world's evil from its central focus, the Cross of Christ. As is the case with Judaism and Islam, Christianity has much to say about repentance, atonement and forgiveness; but its distinctive belief and resource over against evil and suffering is its conviction that God has himself, without ceasing to be God, entered into the depths of human suffering and taken it upon himself. Thus Christian devotion is devotion to Christ crucified, and the strength Christianity claims to provide for coping with evil is drawn from communion with the one whom the philosopher A.N. Whitehead (A.D. 1861-1947) called 'the fellow sufferer who understands'. Christians have been taught to regard this communion as something involving a share in the sufferings of Christ. By such spiritual identification they are held to be enabled to bear pain and suffering creatively.⁷¹

With *devotional practices*, believers who turn to God in times of evil and suffering have a great conviction by their faith and hope that their almighty God will comfort and sustain them. Various forms of prayer – the Psalms and/or liturgical ritual – can also inform us that, with hope in God, not only is suffering demystified and coped with, but more than that, even death can be vanquished as we place our trust in God.⁷²

⁷⁰ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 28.

⁷¹ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 31-2.

⁷² Pope Paul VI (revision and direction of Pope John Paul II), “Preface I of the Ascension of the Lord.” In *The Roman Missal*, English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition, 2008.

The strength of this hope and the assurance of such comfort are founded in the past experience of the Saving and Loving God, who promised to stand by those who invoke him. The Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ are the proof of such unfailing solidarity with suffering humanity. This solidarity can also be a way of discipleship as people may dedicate themselves to comforting the needy according to their vocations and their possibilities. This leads to the fourth way of coping with suffering, *charitable actions*.

(4) The way of *charitable works* as a remedy to evil and suffering is also a privileged path in the Christian tradition. Far from being merely an ethical demand of evangelical precepts to attend to the ones in need -considered as a way of perfection- (Matt 25:31-40), this way expresses itself genuinely in the self-giving love. For Christians, charitable actions should not be seen as the means of salvation but rather as a faith response to human needs, especially those who suffer from all sorts of misery. It may include specific religious vocations, like in the case of Saint Teresa of Calcutta and her Congregation, or the form of a charitable organization, formal or informal.⁷³

(5) The final way, in this series of ways to deal with evil and suffering, is that of *sacrifice*. Christians acknowledge sacrificial rituals as part of worship. However, Christ, in the kenotic and sacrificial offering of himself, took on all the evils and sufferings of humanity (1 Pet 2:24). A belief, stemming from the Judeo-Christian tradition, is that one person can bear the sufferings of others. The Suffering Servant of God is a striking example that came to be applied to Christ Himself (Is 42.49.50.52-53). It is through the redemptive suffering of Christ that Christians have assurance of the Risen One's victory over sin and death. Therefore, Jesus,

⁷³ Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 36.

through the Paschal Mystery, empowers Christians morally and spiritually to deal valiantly with their own sufferings as well as to suffer for the sake of others.

Though this redemptive suffering was highlighted in the apparitions of Kibeho, it should not be singled out as an isolated way of dealing with suffering. In the context of the messages of the Kibeho apparitions, one should see the interpenetrations of the five ways of dealing with suffering, especially the foretelling of the need for conversion and necessity of changing attitudes and behaviors that could have prevented or at least mitigated the tragic sufferings of countless Rwandans. In fact, the Sorrowful Mother was proactive in finding the ways in which the evil hovering over the subregion could be deterred, and her children spared from preventable sufferings. At the same time, she confirmed that there also are various types of suffering that are part of the human condition that need to be integrated into the life of every Christian and united with the sufferings of Christ.

2.3. Discipleship and the Integration of Suffering into Christian Life

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, suffering is often understood to be part of a faithful person's life. The experiences of biblical persons and narratives of their relationships with God often involve hardships and sufferings, violence, and martyrdom. Over the course of centuries, the embrace of such hardships and sufferings has given Christianity a distinctive character especially when it comes to the call of discipleship.

Jesus warned his disciples to prepare for suffering in this world: "*In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*" (Jn 16:33b). This uniqueness of Christian suffering appears in the New Testament as a "must" for Jesus and those who will follow in his footsteps as it explicitly appears in some texts: "*... the Son of Man must undergo*

great suffering..." (Mk 8:31; Lk 24: 46); *"It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Act 14:21; Jas 1:2-3; Jas 1:2-3); This "*must suffer*" does not come from God, because God does not impose suffering on us, nor does God impose prior exigences in order for us to receive his blessing. This "*must suffer*" required of Jesus and his disciples is a necessary reality that will be inherent in the lives of Christians as long as humanity continues to refuse and reject God's grace. "Must suffer" refers to the inevitable fierce opposition that will be encountered by authentic Christian disciples for as long as the world persists in turning away from the true love, justice, solidarity and peace that are inspired by God and part of God's design for creation. As long as evil exists and humanity gives itself over to the forces of evil, suffering inevitably will remain a part of human experience and Christian witness.

Jesus Christ became the faithful witness of this reality through his redemptive suffering (Rev 1:5). Christian discipleship also calls upon every Christian to live such a faithful witness. The following chapter will contribute to an understanding of Jesus Christ's Paschal Mystery and the sufferings experienced by the people of Rwanda.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PASCHAL MYSTERY AND THE CROSSES OF RWANDANS

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this *weakness* there is accomplished his *lifting up*, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, *to suffer* means to become particularly *susceptible*, particularly *open to the working of the salvific powers of God*, offered to humanity in Christ.⁷⁴

The Paschal Mystery embraces and encapsulates the entire salvific plan of God for humanity. At its center is the Cross which not only signifies the love of God for humanity but at the same time becomes the manifestation of the solidarity of Jesus Christ with the various sufferings of humanity. In fact, through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the various crosses borne by humanity take on a deeper meaning when interpreted as sharing in the Cross of the Crucified One. Though the sufferings of humanity remain a mystery, sharing in the promise of the Resurrection, the Risen One offers hope to those who believe “If we have died with him, we shall also live with him.” (2 Tm 2:11; Rom 6:8)

3.1. The Cross of Jesus Christ and the Mystery of Suffering

That Jesus died on a Cross can be taken as a historical fact. But the symbol of the Cross for Christians portrays considerably more meaning than what can be reconstructed by the historian. It contains layer upon layer of meaning, and for some it penetrates to the heart of being a Christian. It is only with great care that one should approach what is frequently referred to as the mystery of the Cross.⁷⁵

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Cross has been a source for theological reflection and spiritual inspiration. However, the violent death of Jesus Christ on the Cross

⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 23.

⁷⁵ Roger Haight, S.J., *The Future for Christology*, (Continuum, New York London. 2005), 75.

remains a scandal (1 Cor 1:18-31).⁷⁶ Viewed in the light of the scandalously violent death of Jesus Christ, the scandalous violence present in the crosses of all those who suffer takes on added meaning and significance. Indeed, for Christians, it is precisely through our identification with the suffering and death of the Crucified One, that the Cross has become a symbol of God's solidarity with all those who suffer.

It is very hard to reconcile the goodness of God and the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, especially when the Gospel of Mark reveals that such a death was necessary in order to fulfill God's will. Given the anguished prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani (Mk 14:36), questions arise: "Who is this God to whom Jesus prays? And how exactly are we to understand God's will? And why is such a scandalous means of violence allowed to unfold? As Christians, we believe that "for us and for our salvation" Jesus took on our humanity through the mystery of the Incarnation and redeemed us through the mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection. This is the foundation of our Christian faith. Yet, the dangerous memory of the murderous brutality of the crucifixion remains a problematic paradox when we think of God being merciful and loving, a source of peace and justice and life-giving. A reflection on the violent death of Jesus paralleled with the salvation it won will help us to give meaning to the Cross and the suffering of the innocents. However, only the resurrection of Jesus Christ gave value to his Cross and underpinned the Church's faith and the Cross' saving capacity.

3.1.1. An Alternative Approach to the Reading of the Scriptures

Christians called to follow Christ in discipleship, have reduced his life and ministry to a derivative of the 'Cross event.' Certainly, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus constitute

⁷⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 233-5.

the nucleus of the Christian faith, but neither Christ's life nor ministry should be considered a long prelude to the crucifixion.⁷⁷ In fact, the history of salvation, which is the 'Merciful and Loving God' who revealed himself to humanity, attains its fullest manifestation on the Cross in the revelation of the true identity of Jesus Christ: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mk 15:39). This revelatory Cross held the attention of the first Christians who were occupied with understanding the mystery of salvation and the Cross in the line with the messianic promises to Israel. Yet, though they lived in faithful discipleship to the teachings of Jesus, their theological understandings tended to reproduce some of the violent and vengeful images of God depicted in the Old Testament. Given this background, we find a multiplicity of images of God, not all of which are helpful when it comes decrying violence and advancing the image of a loving and merciful God of peace and reconciliation. At this point, a question arises: "Is it possible to read the Scriptures otherwise?"

3.1.1.1. The Issue of Violence in the Scriptures

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is not the only event where the violence of God seems to be revealed as God's will. The history of revelation as portrayed in the Scriptures is permeated with explicit references to a God of violence and killings. In fact, the Old Testament self-revelation of God (Heb 1: 1-3), is paved with blood-shedding narratives. The God of the Old Testament is often portrayed as violent, blood-shedding, and even the commander of genocides.⁷⁸ The striking down of the firstborns of Egypt (Ex 12:29-30), the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Ex 14:23-27), the command to annihilate the Hittites, Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and Jebusites without mercy (Dt 20:17), the destruction of

⁷⁷ Daly, "Images of God and the Imitation of God," 43.

⁷⁸ Morriston, "The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands", 148-154.

Jericho (Josh 6), the blotting out of the Amalekites (1Sam 15:1-3), and other wars (of Gideon, Samson, and David...) that portray direct violent actions of the hand of God, all of which provide evidence of God's violence and its justification. Indeed, the violence depicted in the Old Testament by the God of Israel has inspired and served as a justification for so many evils and persecutions throughout history.⁷⁹ The killing of Jesus Christ and other presumed messiahs (Act 5:34-39), and the first Christians persecutions (Act 5-9) were directly linked with the Mosaic Law which does not conceal violence and God's direct involvement. In addition to that, as Eric Seibert argues, the "violent biblical texts [] have been used to do enormous harm to countless individuals. People have justified violence against women, children, indigenous populations, gays and lesbians, and many others by appealing to these troubling texts."⁸⁰

Similarly, though the life and ministry of Jesus reveal a nonviolent, loving, and forgiving God, the eschatological image of a justified vengeful God reveals the opposite (Matt 25:30; Lk 19:27). At the same time, some images of the God of the Old Testament are not different from the One revealed by Jesus Christ as the Holy One (Matt 5:48), who is perfectly Loving (Jn 3:15). When close attention is paid to the degree to which divine images of violence permeate the theological imagination of Christians, the emergence of the idea that God would will the crucifixion and be pleased with sacrificial transactional relations in order to ransom humanity, is not only a social construct derived from feudalism, but also intrinsically linked to scriptural accounts of the violence of God.

⁷⁹ Eric Seibert, "Recent research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspective)," in *Currents in Biblical Research* 2016, Vol. 15(1), (Messiah College, USA), 10.

⁸⁰ Seibert, "Recent research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament." 10.

Hermeneutical studies of the Old Testament require us to consider certain texts as a mixture of history and the ideology of grandeur.⁸¹ How God is depicted in the Old Testament requires careful and critical interpretation. In fact, “[I]f God is perfectly good, then the biblical record sometimes misrepresents him.”⁸² In addition to that, the reader has the responsibility of evaluating and assessing the Old Testament's claims. The concern of the hagiographers of the Old Testament was to testify to the existence of a powerful God, transcendent and immanent, who does not tolerate evil, which was primarily idolatry. Amid many populations with their respective gods who seek violence and chaos within a warlike socio-political context,⁸³ motivated by multiple imperialistic and geopolitical conquests, the God of Israel was portrayed to be superior in *power*, the only language the people would understand.

This power was understood primarily as physical and social which is translated into violence. As far as Israel is concerned, it learned to progressively acknowledge that God exercises his power in love, compassion, forgiveness, and salvation. Violence will be the side effect of this pedagogical and adaptive revelation of God whose full rationale fails human limitation and can fall even into the categories of inscrutable reasons of God.⁸⁴ Israel also learned progressively how to forsake violence even to the love of enemies (explicitly in the New Testament) in imitation of its God, who is full of mercy because the God of the Old Testament is primarily nonviolent.⁸⁵ A symbolic, allegoric,⁸⁶ and typological reading of the Old Testament

⁸¹ J. John Collins, *The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimization of Violence*, (Yale University, New Haven, CT 06511. 2003), 10-12.

⁸² Morriston, “The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands”, 157.

⁸³ Seibert, “Recent research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament,” 16.22.

⁸⁴ Morriston, “The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands”, 154-7.

⁸⁵ Weaver, J. Denny, *The Nonviolent God*, (Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K. 2013), 104-119.

⁸⁶ Morriston, “The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands”, 146-7: Some of the Scholars are against this interpretation that was introduced in the Church Tradition by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. (See for example Eleonore Stump)

can also help one to get the essential message of the relationship of God to humanity throughout the history of the Jews.⁸⁷

In the same way, in contrast to the nonviolent earthly Jesus, the vindictive and violent figure of the eschatological Jesus helped Christian communities “to cope with their many crises and their growing sense of alienation.”⁸⁸ The true image of God revealed in Jesus Christ was manifested specifically through his ministry: he preached the Kingdom of God, and he lived what he preached even when it resulted in his death on a Cross.

The teachings of Jesus concerned the arrival of the Kingdom of God, intended to establish an inclusive community of reconciliation and nonviolence. The message of Jesus, when placed in its concrete historical, political, economic, and religious circumstances, shows that the Kingdom of God symbolizes social renewal.⁸⁹ In his characteristic Sermon on the Mount (Matt5:1-16), Jesus envisions a society where the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers are among the blessed. He leaves no room for coercive behavior and violence normally expected for social revolution. Pacifism, non-retaliation, forgiveness, reconciliation, resistance to evil, nonviolence as the response to violence, resistance to temptations of anger and coyness, and love of enemies, all are placed at the heart of the new Reign of God to be embraced, lived out and proclaimed by the disciples.⁹⁰ This Reign of God reverses expectations: it breaks social and religious boundaries and makes room for the poor, outcasts, sinners, and even enemies. Jesus'

⁸⁷ Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement: the origins of, and controversy about, atonement doctrine*, (A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. 2005), 29-31.

⁸⁸ David C. Sim, “The Pacifist Jesus and the Violent Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* (67(1), Art. #860, 6pages. (2011)), 5. Doi: 10.4102/hts.v67i1.860

⁸⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Jesus: The Reality of God’s Reign and the Possibility of Peace.” In *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding*, 37–70. (1517 Media, 2019), 37-39.46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9b2ww5.5>.

⁹⁰ Cahill, “Jesus: The Reality of God’s Reign and the Possibility of Peace,” 54-57.62-63.

words and deeds threatened the oppressive structures which pursued him to death. In his persecution, he practiced what he preached, demonstrating his pacificism in meekness, mercy, and forgiveness even on the Cross.⁹¹ It is this revelation of the perfect and exact imprint of God (Heb 1:3), manifested by the Incarnation, life, and ministry of Jesus, which is made known to humanity by the Cross event. Another approach to the Scriptures with new lenses towards sacrifice, primarily grasped in terms of *violence and blood*, can also foster the essential interpretation of the Cross as a sacrificial offering of love and solidarity.

3.1.1.2. The Issue of Bloody Sacrifice in the Scriptures

Prominent theological teachings that have informed and influenced the Church's tradition in terms of soteriological claims have understood the violent death of Jesus Christ on the Cross to be the perfect sacrifice due to God. God the Father was the One to sacrifice his Only Son as prefigured by Abraham sacrificing his only son, Isaac (Gen 22:1-19; Heb 11: 17-19).⁹² Viewed from this perspective, the connotation conveyed by this understanding of sacrifice tends to eliminate the abhorring violence it manifests, especially when the victim is a human being. In addition to that, God is directly involved in this violent sacrifice. Once again questions arise: "Is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ a fulfillment of God's will? Is God really appeased by the violent death of his Son?" An alternative approach to the understanding of sacrifice in the Scriptures can shed light on this seeming violence found in God.

⁹¹ Cahill, "Jesus: The Reality of God's Reign and the Possibility of Peace," 47. 54.

⁹² Pope Paul VI (revision and direction of Pope John Paul II), "Eucharistic Prayer I." In *The Roman Missal*, English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition, 2008.

The Cross event has not only perfectly revealed God's true image but also the true nature of the human person. A “non-sacrificial reading of the Gospel”⁹³ reveals the pedagogical attitude of God toward Israel of the Old Testament. At the same time, it also reveals that when humanity is permeated by the matrix of violence, it cannot help but project violence on to God. To think of the crucifixion of Jesus in terms other than sacrificial is difficult, considering how the notion of *sacrifice* is embedded in the liturgical worship of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions. In fact, Israel was saved from Egypt by the sacrifice of the firstborn (Ex 11-12); its becoming a *people of God* (Ex 20; 29:10-46) and its patterns of worship (Lev 1-7) were immersed in bloody sacrificial dynamics. Though strictly forbidden by Mosaic law (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5), the sacrifice of human persons happened in Israel (Jgs 11:29-40). However, this *sacrificial cult* often became disconnected from its first intention which was *communion with God*. That is why many prophets spoke against sacrificial worship devoid of righteousness (Is 1:11). They progressively revealed the God who does not tolerate the killing of animals to appease him; instead of sacrifice, God desires that the Israelites become humble, contrite of heart, merciful, obedient to his word (Is 66: 1-3; Ps 39; Hos 6:6). In Psalm 51 (50), it is made clear that God is not interested in any sacrificial offerings other than a converted and reconciled humanity. In fact, sacrificial offerings are a functional means to express concretely a relationship between humanity and God; they are not ontological to the worship due to Him.⁹⁴

The New Testament, specifically the Gospel, discloses the earthly life of Jesus as being immersed in Judaism. Sacrifices hold a prominent place in their worship as it was in the Old Testament. The Gospel of Luke mentions that the Holy Family was compliant with the law of

⁹³ René Girard, *The Girard Reader*. Ed. James G. Williams, (A Crossroad Herder Book. The Cross Road Publishing Company, New York. November 1, 1996), 176-188.

⁹⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 223-4.

ritual and sacrifices, which they followed according to tradition (Lk 2:21-40). In the Gospel, Jesus does not openly suppress sacrificial offerings, but he does oppose idolatrous offerings within a cultic practice that is devoid of righteousness. To those whose love and mercy are obfuscated by the rigoristic exigencies of the worship, he presented the prototype of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Again, for Jesus, reconciliation and good relationships among people always hold precedence over sacrificial offerings (Matt 5:23-24). Obviously, Jesus exhorts his followers to value mercy over sacrificial offerings (Matt 9:13).⁹⁵ However, this does not mean that sacrifices do not have functional value. It means that the emphasis should be put on the correct interpretation of the cults of sacrifice.

The violence which permeates humanity⁹⁶ in every age is revealed on the Cross in the crucifixion of the victim *par excellence*, a victim “that owes it nothing - that pays it no homage and threatens its kingship in the only way possible.”⁹⁷ According to René Girard, the interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in terms of the *sacrifice that pleases God* is influenced by this violent matrix of humanity which is present even in the holiest of institutions,⁹⁸ such as the Church.

This revelation of the violence of humanity cannot be dissociated from our interpretation of the sacrifice of Golgotha. Partly, the understanding of God willing the brutal death of his Son as atonement is substantiated by this culture of violence and sacrifice. However, it should be noted that what is criticized here is “the violent victimary side of the sacrifice,”⁹⁹ as it influences our understanding of God's will in the brutal crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of

⁹⁵ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 176-188.

⁹⁶ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 159.

⁹⁷ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 183.

⁹⁸ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 175-178.

⁹⁹ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 177

humanity. A subsequent appreciation of the positive effects and connotations of sacrifice should be maintained. In fact, Girard sums it up well:

In the derived sense of the loving willingness to give of oneself, even one's very life, for the sake of the other, it has an appropriate usage in the language of Christian liturgy, fellowship, and theology. Likewise Jesus' willingness to give his life and to suffer an execution which was, historically considered, a kind of public or civic sacrifice, could appropriately be described as sacrifice. So from the standpoint of historical background and context of Jesus' death, as well as the derived positive connotations of sacrifice, the language of sacrifice cannot be dismissed from the language of faith. But sacrifice, even if retained in these senses, must be redefined on the basis of faith in a God of love who does not make a secret pact with his Son that calls for his murder in order to satisfy God's wrath. The suffering and death of the Son, the Word, are inevitable because of the inability of the world to receive God or his Son, not because God's justice demands violence or the Son relishes the prospect of a horrible execution.¹⁰⁰

Another argument against the blood-seeking God in sacrificial cultic worship would be the pedagogical revelation of the priesthood itself in Israel. Certainly, the sacrificial offerings in Israel (as described in the Scriptures) are linked to the priesthood and are ascribed to Levi's tribe solely (Num 18:1-7; Josh 13:33). In this view, no one in Israel would be accepted as a priest if not of the tribe of Levi; and there was a set of rules and regulations for their sacrificial services (Ex 28-31). However, in Ancient Israel, we come across another type of priesthood linked with non-bloody sacrifice and hence nonviolent, and immersed in justice and peace. It was the sacrifice of a certain Melchizedek, king of Salem (Gen 14:16-20), who offered bread and wine and was recognized as a priest by Abram. Melchizedek will be mentioned again in the Old Testament in Psalm 109. As *Marie-Noëlle Thabut* argues,¹⁰¹ this was, first of all, a revelatory proof that there was a possibility of another priesthood accepted in ancient Israel, which was not necessarily of Levi's tribe, but of the Melchizedek line. And it was a prefiguration of a promised

¹⁰⁰ Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 177-178

¹⁰¹ *Marie-Noëlle Thabut*: Commentaries on the liturgy of the word on Sunday of the Solemnity of the Holy Sacrament (*Corpus Christi*), year C (KTO), June 19, 2019.

messiah, a king from the tribe of Judah, who also would be a priest in the line of Melchizedek (Heb 7). In this, we perceive God, who must be worshipped in peace and justice, hence no place for violence. We also see the sacrificial offerings (*sacrum-facere*),¹⁰² which are not basically animals and hence non-bloody sacrifices. And lastly, this worship in sacrificial offering is open to all of humanity because it is no longer confined to the Levites within Israel.

Jesus Christ, during the Last Supper, recalls these offerings of bread and wine, common in the worship of Israel, but he makes them the basic carriers of the sacrificial worship due to God; this time, however, immersing them in a *new commandment of love and servanthood*. He then enjoined the disciples, and thereafter the Church, to do so in remembrance of him.

Certainly, this faith in a nonviolent and loving God, full of mercy and compassion, can help in reading, with an alternative lens, the sacrificial suffering of Jesus on the Cross. The priesthood linked necessarily to sacrifice supportively can help in thinking about worship and sacrifice in a new way, especially in a nonviolent environment. All converge in confirming that the Cross and its violent brutality are rather the sign of the love of God, who wished to reveal his love, forgiveness, and salvation at whatever cost. This being said, the following section takes as its focus the spiritual interpretation of the Cross, the reality of the resurrection and the fruits of the faith.

3.2. The Resurrection: The Mystical Dimension of the Cross and its Redemptive Value

In the event of Golgotha, certainly, “something immensely positive”¹⁰³ happened. The aftershock of the violent crucifixion and death of Jesus, three days later, was replaced by the

¹⁰² Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 223.

¹⁰³ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 219.

ineffable joy of the resurrection. The apostles and disciples, once disappointed by the ignominious death of their Master, regained the hope of their promises (Act 1: 6; Lk 24:13-35; Jn 20:1-18). Faith was born, not faith in the Cross, but faith in Him who was crucified on the Cross and was now alive and living among them. The Risen Lord was transmitting joy and the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:19-23). He was reassuring the doubtful disciples and apostles and preserving their faith in Him (Jn 20: 24-29). At that time, the Cross could be demystified and proclaimed as a tree of blessing because it had been incorporated into the history of salvation. Faith in Him who was crucified on the Cross could give meaning to Golgotha because “both the explanation Christians offered for the Cross and the meaning they assigned to it are, in the last resort, products of faith.”¹⁰⁴

3.2.1. Only the Resurrection Gives Value to the Cross

Positive value was given to the Cross through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In light of the resurrection, the disciples could only engage in a retrospective reading of the Old Testament as they recalled all of the teachings of their Master regarding his crucifixion and death. The Risen Lord helped them to arrive at a new understanding as the New Testament reveals: *"Then he opened their mind to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, 'Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...' (Lk 24: 45-46)."* From the vantage point of today, we see how the resurrection of Jesus Christ legitimates two important dimensions in the life of the Church.

Firstly, the resurrection gives life to the faith of the Church. Starting with the first witnesses of the resurrection up to multiple Christian communities founded within a span of

¹⁰⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 219.

three decades (Act 2-20), their *raison d'être* was the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Their faith was founded on the salvific events, which are given their value precisely because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul speaks with clarity when he writes to community at Corinth: “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.*” (1Cor 15:17) The resurrection of Jesus redeemed the salvific value of the Cross, as Roger Haight puts it: “Without God's raising Jesus from death, the Cross in the end or ultimately would not have been or be salvific.”¹⁰⁶

Secondly, the resurrection reclaims and gives value to the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. The presumed messiahs, Theudas and Judah (Act 5:33-39), though followed by a significant number of disciples, after being killed, their disciples scattered, and their endeavors came to an end. The Sanhedrin came to realize that the case of Jesus was a unique one. This uniqueness was due to his resurrection from the dead, as seen in contrast to the other violent killings of God's prophets that were done in the name of religion (Matt 23:34-36). In fact, “[w]ithout the final action of resurrecting Jesus, God's action in Jesus as Word and Spirit would have been annihilated and drained of ultimate meaning, as distinct from finite and temporal meaning.”¹⁰⁷

3.2.2. The Resurrection Gives the Cross the Victory over Sin and Death

In the event of the Cross at Golgotha, the seeming defeat of Jesus was reversed into a victory by the resurrection. Thanks to the resurrection, the victory of the Cross is established as a remedy for humanity's original *Fall*.¹⁰⁸ The disobedience linked with humanity's fall was canceled by the obedience of the Son of God by his *kenosis*, which climaxed on the Cross (Phil.

¹⁰⁵ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 43-4.

¹⁰⁶ Haight, *The Future of Christology*, 97.

¹⁰⁷ Haight, *The Future of Christology*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ Anselm, “Cur Deus Homo,” (Why God Became Man), Book I, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*. Trans. and ed. Eugene R. Fairweather, The Macmillan Company, 1970. I,3 (104-05.)

2:5-8). “Since the devil, when he tempted [hu]man , conquered him by the tasting of a tree, it was fitting for him to be conquered by [hu]man's bearing of suffering on a tree.”¹⁰⁹ However, the resurrection and its subsequent victory over sin and death, on the Cross softened the scandalous dimension of the Passion as Sobrino warns: “[there is a danger of] dulling the edge of the scandal of the Cross in itself: there is now nothing scandalous in God's letting his Son die because only in that way could he have achieved the greater good of salvation.”¹¹⁰ Such a balance should be kept in order to avoid a victory that might forget the violence of the Cross and hence project this violence on to the will of God.

3.2.3. The Resurrection Transforms the Cross into a Source of Glory

It is quite astonishing to figure out that as the time of his passion and death approaches, Jesus speaks about glory (Jn 12: 23-;8; 13:31-32; 17:1-10) because he sees resurrection beyond crucifixion and that his resurrection is also *his glorification*. Jesus Christ stated that he had to suffer in order to enter into his glory (Lk 24:25-26), but also the first witnesses of the resurrection confirmed that truth. “... the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected [...] whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” (Act 3:13.15) However, while it was clear to Jesus Christ from the beginning, this glory only became manifest for his disciples after the resurrection.

The exaltation of Christ passed through the ignominious crucifixion, and because of this torturous suffering was endured in fidelity, the glory of his exaltation became more brilliant (Phil. 2:5-11). The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that his faithfulness to the exigencies of

¹⁰⁹ Anselm, “Cur Deus Homo,” I,3

¹¹⁰ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 223.

the Reign of God, even if it leads through suffering, as a test of enduring fidelity,¹¹¹ is the way of glory. These exigencies are *unconditional love for* and *servanthood to* one's brothers and sisters (Matt 20:28; Lk 22:27; Jn 13: 1-20). Only by way of his exemplary life of love, which includes the Cross, can we understand the significance of what it means to carry one's cross as an act of discipleship (Matt 16:24-25). Inasmuch as discipleship is understood in the light of the resurrection, the way of suffering for the sake of the Reign of God will be embraced by many disciples knowing that it is the way of Jesus, but also the only way, should fidelity require it, of acquiring the glory of blessedness. Now through the suffering of the Cross, we can discern the glory of the Lord thanks to the resurrection of the Crucified One who made it trustworthy through his rising from the dead.

3.2.4. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Made the Cross a Perpetual Venerable Mystery

One of the marvelous works of the resurrection of Jesus was to convert the Cross, ordinarily an object reserved for the cursed (Gal 3:13), into an extraordinary object of veneration and blessing. The celebration of Good Friday's liturgy reminds us of this fact. Indeed, during the entire liturgy, though immersed in suffering and sadness, the joy of the resurrection is at the heart of the liturgy. This stanza from the prayers of Good Friday reminds us that, had not been for the resurrection, the Cross would have remained an object reserved for the cursed. Instead, the Church prays: "We adore your Cross, O Lord, we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection, for behold, because of the wood of a tree joy has come to the whole world."¹¹²

¹¹¹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 228.

¹¹² Pope Paul VI (revision and direction of Pope John Paul II), "Friday of the Passion of the Lord, The Adoration of the Holy Cross." In *The Roman Missal*, English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition, 2008.

The resurrection also came to reveal the mystery of God's love manifested on the Cross. The explanation of the reasons behind the crucifixion of Jesus are part of the mystery of God, yet it is this very mystery that has urged Christians from the very beginning of the Church to consider the Cross as the mystery that encapsulates all the wisdom of God; a wisdom hidden to the rulers of the world, but a wisdom revealed to those who, in the light of the resurrection, have faith in the One hung on the Cross (1Cor 2:7-8). That mystery, simply recounted, is that God loved humanity so much that any suffering, even that of death on a Cross, could not diminish God's great love (Jn 3:16). Moreover, his love manifested on the Cross and substantiated by the resurrection culminates in his will to dwell with those he loved so much. Every celebration of the Paschal Mystery as experienced in every Eucharist testifies to that truth.

In fact, in the light of the resurrection, Golgotha manifests the reality of God's love, who, at any cost, is pleased to dwell amidst humanity and save them. Effectively, the Eucharistic celebration is, at the same time, the expression of this perpetual presence of God and the perpetual actualization of his saving love. It is for humanity a way to live the new commandment of the new era: "love as I loved you," in service and offering one's life for others that they may have life (Jn 13:1-17; 15:12-13). The way of the Cross becomes then an inspiring way of true discipleship. It becomes, thanks to the resurrection, a mystery to ponder so as to discover the profundity of its spiritual riches.

In the light of the resurrection, the Cross became an emblematic sign of Christianity because through it, the entire history of salvation is grasped and can, by the Cross, be meditated upon. At the heart of the liturgy of Good Friday, the Cross is at the center, but it is salvation through the Cross, as *a sign of a greater love* that is celebrated. Indeed, through the resurrection, the Cross came to symbolize Christ Himself, the Word Incarnate, as the hymn to the Cross

dedicated to the mystery of salvation highlights: “*Faithful Cross the Saints rely on, / Noble tree beyond compare! /Never was there such a scion, /Never leaf or flower so rare. /Sweet the timber, sweet the iron, / the burden that they bear!*”¹¹³

Viewed from this perspective, the Cross, ordinarily a symbol of suffering, can be a sign of hope and healing for people whose existential crosses are still burdensome and painful. In the next chapter the crosses borne by Rwandans as a result of the Genocide and its aftermath are the focus of attention, along with the ways in which the Cross of Jesus Christ subsumed them, thereby taking on new significance for them. But before moving on to Chapter Three, it is important to consider the realities from which, the crosses of the suffering Rwandans took their genesis and how those who suffer can find refuge and relief through the solidarity in suffering that they recognize in the *sacramental cross of life* borne by the Sorrowful Mother and the Crucified Christ who rose from the dead, our Risen Lord.

3.3. The Suffering of Rwandans as Expressed in the Symbolism of the Cross

“After Auschwitz there can no longer be any poetry.”¹¹⁴

In this quotation, Johann Baptist Metz, following Theodore Adorno, announced that there is a *before and an after* in a horror like Auschwitz. Likewise, the Genocide against the Tutsi created an interruption in the course of Rwandan history. There is a *before the Genocide* and an *after Genocide* that climaxed in 1994 in Rwanda. A new time reference has dawned, and in most of the activities, discourses, and narratives, people do not hesitate to refer back to this *1994 interruption in the life of Rwanda*. However, there is a privileged moment for mentioning this

¹¹³ Pope Paul VI, The Roman Missal, “Friday of the Passion of the Lord, The Adoration of the Holy Cross.”

¹¹⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical – Political Dimension of Christianity*. Trans. J. Matthew Ashley, (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, N.J. trans. 1998.), 122.

reality. It is during *the Genocide against the Tutsi Commemoration period*,¹¹⁵ a period of one hundred days, every year, set aside to remember that historical and horrific event.

During this commemoration period, the narratives of Rwandese survivors of Genocide, who often refer back to 1994 as an unprecedented historical moment in human history, emphasize the brutality of the Genocide as it unfolded during that period. The imagery that comes to the fore to describe such atrocities is the Passion of Jesus Christ, encompassed by the Cross. The symbolism of the *Cross* is the recurrent image used to describe especially the sufferings of the Tutsi, but also the sufferings of anyone who would be identified as an innocent victim. The symbolism is used either as *the Cross* only or, in most cases, the “*Way of the Cross*.”¹¹⁶ Sometimes the Genocide itself is referred to as “the cross”¹¹⁷ of Rwanda.

A simple analysis of this symbolism gives us three main reasons to pay close attention to the significance of the Cross. Firstly, in Rwanda, being a country, whose great majority is made up of Christian (92,2%), the Cross of Jesus and his sufferings are the most common factors used to understand and interpret extreme suffering. Secondly, the death of the Tutsi during the Genocide was preceded by a long suffering, not unlike that of Jesus himself. Thirdly, there is a

¹¹⁵ Since 1994, there is a commemoration of the Genocide starting on April 7th and ending April 13th of each year. It is an entire week of mourning; however, mourning continues informally until July 3rd, the eve of the day of Rwanda’s liberation. (Dr. Jean Damascène BIZIMANA, Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement in “Guidelines for the 29th of commemoration of 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.”

¹¹⁶ These are some newly posted examples of “The Way of the Cross” testimonies of the survivors:

- “The way of the cross of Dr. Odette Nyiramilimo during the Genocide,” YouTube video, April 13, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmyOx8jrOAE>
- “The way of the Cross of Sibomana Jean Népomuscène,” YouTube video, April 8, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D2QG0xQoZA>
- “The way of the Cross: 20 days in the toilet and the resurrection of Murebwayi,” YouTube video, April 8, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEGlz66-Tc8>
- “The way of the Cross of princes and princesses of Rwanda,” YouTube video, April 15, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPmiKpzovB0>

¹¹⁷ Kizito Mihigo, “Twanze Gutoberwa Amateka,” *Song: at the 3:00’. 5:17’-24’* (with English subtitle), YouTube video, April 3, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPmiKpzovB0>

tendency to draw a parallel between the victims of the Genocide and the *innocent Jesus*. Each of them was sentenced to death though guiltless. However, questions arise when one thinks about this how the use of such imagery is embedded in the collective memory of Rwandans. Why is *the way of the Cross* crystalized in the memory of Rwandans and especially in what ways is it commensurable with the sufferings of survivors? And, why is it so quickly grasped and made meaningful? A very brief review of the historical background of the Genocide provides some limited though insightful information.

3.4. The Genocide against the Tutsi: A Long Historical Journey of Suffering

Though the 1994 Genocide has divided the history of Rwanda into two parts, its surface roots go back to 1959, and its deeper roots go back even further, to the beginnings of colonialism. As noted, the beginning of what can be referred to as *the way of the Cross* for the Rwandans in general, and especially for the Tutsi, can easily be traced to the events of 1959.

The *Tutsi* are one of the three social classes that existed in Rwanda before colonialism.¹¹⁸ The two others are the *Hutu* and the *Twa*. Rwanda was a strong semi-feudal structured monarchy.¹¹⁹ Other than the economy, theories suggest a possible distinction among the classes. When the Belgians arrived,¹²⁰ theories of a superior race, originating from Nazi ideology, were applied to the peoples of Rwanda. In 1933, *identity cards* were arbitrarily issued, crystallizing

¹¹⁸ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 241-2. (The colonial period constitutes a reference in historical resources. The narratives of the history of Rwanda shift from oral tradition to integrate written tradition. Colonialism will play a pertinent role in this new era. However, the oral tradition's narratives of prior to colonial period, testify to the harmonious relationships between the social strata (Tutsi, Hutu and Twa) of Rwandans for around nine centuries.)

¹¹⁹ Kimberly Fornace, "The Rwanda Genocide" in *Beyond intractability*, April 2009. (Accessed April 13, 2022). <https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/fornace-rwandan>.

¹²⁰ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 229-415. Belgians did not colonize Rwanda in usual sense: they were occupants (1916-1926), then mandates (1926-1946), and lastly, tutors (1946-1962).

the social stratification into distinct ethnicities, hence creating divisions among the population.¹²¹ By favoritism, Belgians forced the ruling *Tutsi* to be directly involved in implementing the violent colonial methods of oppression.¹²² ‘*To divide for ruling and to rule for exploiting*’¹²³ was the operating ideology behind their authority. The great majority of Rwandans suffered colonial violence at the hands of a few Tutsi elites.

After the Second World War, African countries started to claim their independence, a plea reinforced by the United Nations as described well by Aïchatou Mindaoudou:

Following the establishment of the United Nations and the adoption of the Charter in 1945, various peoples in Africa gained awareness of their fundamental rights and felt empowered in their respective struggles for self-determination. [...] The United Nations General Assembly gave them a forum in which their political aspirations could find voice and support.¹²⁴

The Rwandan monarch, *Charles Léon Pierre Mutara III Rudahigwa (1931-59)*, claimed Rwandan independence, which did not please the Belgians. They played their divisionism card in order to remain in Rwanda. It is in this view that the favored elite, the Tutsi, became the authors of a great part of the colonial evils happening in Rwanda. Ideologically, this fueled the Hutu hatred against the Tutsi who were considered wrongly as their oppressors.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Heike Becker. <https://theconversation.com/auschwitz-to-rwanda-the-link-between-science-colonialism-and-genocide-71730>. (Accessed May 2, 2022): “The Nazi genocides have gone down in history as unique. [...] The connection of science, racial policy and genocide, however, has a strong international dimension. Rwanda is a horrid example. In central Africa, the Belgians drew on craniology specifically, the “scientific” study of the shape and size of the skulls of different human “races”. With additional differences in height and skin tone, the colonial administration fixed earlier social stratification between Tutsi, Hutu and Twa - all identified as Banyarwanda - into racial categories. From 1933 onwards, those were included in Rwandan ID cards.”

¹²² Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 240-1. 268-98. 353-60.

¹²³ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 165.

¹²⁴ Aïchatou Mindaoudou, *From Independence to Long-term stability: United Nations Efforts in Africa* in UN Chronicle, September 2015, Nos. 1 & 2 Vol. LII, The United Nations at 70.

¹²⁵ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 360-6.

By 1959, the political problem of a colony (Rwanda) under oppression and without progress became the problem of ethnicity between the *Tutsi and Hutu*.¹²⁶ Tensions between the Tutsi and the Hutu grew rampantly and worsened when the monarch was suspected of being assassinated and passed away mysteriously at the hands of the Belgians. Another King, Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, was crowned against the will of the Belgians, the missionaries, and the Hutu, who hoped for an end to the long Tutsi reign.¹²⁷ The violence started, which created a chaotic environment. In this atmosphere, political parties were formed, and a social revolution was conducted whereby the Tutsi became the enemy of the country. Subsequently, thousands of Tutsis were killed, their houses burned, and their cattle looted and slaughtered. Others were forced to flee Rwanda to neighboring countries. The King was forced into exile as well. At least 336,000 Rwandans became refugees.¹²⁸ In addition, these persecutions of the Tutsi included the banishment of many families of the elite Tutsi within the country. This was the picture of Rwanda in 1959.¹²⁹

In the early 1960s, refugees living in neighboring countries tried to come back to Rwanda and they were armed with weapons. They conducted many attacks on the different borders of Rwanda but without results and provoked reprisals against the Tutsi in the interior of the country. The famous killings linked with those attacks lasted more than a month (December 1963-January 1964). These Tutsi killings could have been called a genocide but were not, as is well stated in the following report:

The militias conducted systematic reprisals against Tutsis, with the most intense violence occurring in the prefecture of Gikongoro. Killings lasted into January 1964, with estimates of

¹²⁶ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 360.

¹²⁷ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 388.

¹²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_Revolution (Accessed May 17, 2022)

¹²⁹ “Nyamata Memorial Site,” <https://cnlg.gov.rw/index.php?id=118> (Accessed May 17, 2022)

the death toll reaching as high as 20,000 Tutsi killed. Thousands more fled the country. The massacres provoked international outcry and accusations of genocide, which were denied by the Rwandan government.¹³⁰

In 1962 Rwanda became independent, and in the following decades, there were authentic sufferings for both the Tutsis in the country and those in exile. Those in the country underwent oppression, segregation, injustice, and sporadic killings. Specifically, in 1973,¹³¹ they experienced expulsion from public institutions of work and schools and systematic killings. At that time, another contingent of the Tutsi had to escape and flee into exile.

When the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)¹³² started a civil war on October 1, 1990, a series of persecutions, oppression, violence, and killings resumed targeting the Tutsi in the country.¹³³ The hatred of the Hutu extremists against the Tutsis continued to rise, and the subsequent violence never declined. In 1994, on April 6th, there began a well-planned generalized, and systematic Genocide. Beginning on April 7th through July 17th (the date of the overall control of the country), survivors were progressively saved by the RPF-Inkotanyi armed forces. Though they saved many, more than one million were brutally slaughtered. With this history, *the way of the Cross* for survivors or the death of their loved ones, can be viewed as a long journey that included much violence, suffering and death.

In prior years (1959, 1960, 1963-1964, 1967, 1973), those who managed to reach the churches hid in relative safety. However, in 1994, the same scenario proved to be in vain. In the

¹³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bugesera_invasion (Accessed May 17, 2022)

¹³¹ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 447-49.

¹³² Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF-Inkotanyi) was constituted in 1987 replacing RANU (Rwandese Alliance for National Unity) founded in 1976.

¹³³ Beside the torturing and/or killings of the so called 'Ibyitso' (RPF' spies), "several killings occurred before 1994, led by both civil and military officials: Kibirira in 1990, Murambi in 1990, Mutara in 1990, Bigogwe in 1991, Nasho 1990-1991, Bugesera in 1992, Kibuye in 1992, Gisenyi in 1993, ..." (<https://cnlg.gov.rw/index.php?id=80>) (Accessed May 17, 2022)

face of genocidal evil within a Christian country, so many questions have been raised about God. Songs have been sung to ask God where He was when the Tutsi were being brutally slaughtered, if indeed He is mightier and loving.¹³⁴ Such are the questions raised as people endeavor to reconcile the love of God and his omnipotence in the face of evil, especially when evil prevails. This is the recurring theodicy question which has been contextualized within Rwanda.

Nonetheless, this narrative does not constitute a critical historical overview of all the reasons that led to the consolidation of such extreme hatred for the Tutsi on the part of the Hutu, specifically given the weaknesses within the social fabric of Rwanda. Many parameters explain a rapid change in the social patterns in Rwanda during the colonial period, and a significant responsibility for these falls to the colonialists and the missionaries. Certainly, they played a major role in the social structuring of society given the power they held and the resources they administered. However, the contribution of Rwandans to the problems underlying the roots of the Genocide must be critically assessed and analyzed to demonstrate the roles and responsibilities of Rwandese protagonists and instigators. Though quite limited in terms of depth and breadth, this minimal background nevertheless provides some important details to aid the reader in connecting some of the theological, ecclesial, social, historical, cultural and political dots.

The following Chapter highlights the ways in which the Paschal Mystery provides a means for understanding and making meaning of the crosses experienced by God's people. Solidarity with the Suffering, as manifested by the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ, in the

¹³⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAUtnhAPJAU & <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x365ed> (Accessed April 8, 2023)

apparitions at Kibeho, gives hope and life to those overwhelmed by the wounds and burdens of the dangerous memories of their various crosses.

CHAPTER FOUR: HEALING THROUGH SOLIDARITY IN SUFFERING AND RECONCILING THROUGH THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

And again, after the events of her Son's hidden and public life, events which she must have shared with acute sensitivity, it was on Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world.¹³⁵

According to Metz, “solidarity is a category of assistance, of supporting and encouraging the subject in the face of that which threatens him or her most acutely and in the face of his or her suffering.”¹³⁶ Solidarity, as a term, “refers to the empathetic foundation of Christian love. In order to truly serve the neighbor, that love must be borne out of identification or solidarity with the neighbor in his or her joys, suffering, and struggles.”¹³⁷ In a special way, both the Sorrowful Mother of Kibeho and Jesus Christ, through the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, manifested their solidarity to the suffering Rwandans. It is a solidarity that brings comfort and healing that is conducive to reconciliation. Their attitude towards the suffering in solidarity with others serves as model to be emulated by all who identify themselves as Christian.

4.1. The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s Solidarity with Those Who Suffer

Indeed, the figure of Mary, who endures suffering and comforts those who suffer, has inspired theological imagination throughout the history of Christianity. Yet, while this belief has been present since the beginning of the Church, it was in the Middle Ages that devotion to the

¹³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 25.

¹³⁶ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 208.

¹³⁷ Roberto S. Goizueta, “Solidarity” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1993), 906.

Mater Dolorosa developed, and the image of the Sorrowful Mother became identified as an exemplar of solidarity with those who suffer.¹³⁸

The social and political realities of the Middle Ages had a significant impact on the rise of popular piety and devotion to the *Mater Dolorosa*. Frequent wars, plagues and natural disasters led to countless deaths and disabilities. This resulted in faithful Christians seeking refuge under the mantle of a beloved Mother who could empathize with their pain, suffering, loss and grief. Unlike Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary was venerated and recognized the Mother of Mercy *and* the Mother of Compassion. In this period, frequent life-taking realities caused widespread suffering. They included famines, mass deaths, epidemics, and plagues, especially the Black Death.¹³⁹ In their sufferings, people often turned to the Queen of Mercy rather than the King of Justice for accompaniment.¹⁴⁰ Though, during this period, popular piety sometimes characterized the Sorrowful Mother in a rather subjective way, she remained ever-faithful to the vocation to which she was called as the Mother of Mercy. In fact, one of the predominant images in which she was portrayed was as a woman devastated by the suffering and Passion of her Son to the point of hysteria, collapsing, and shedding tears of blood. These depictions are visceral images that provide an interpretive lens through which to see her capacity to be in profound solidarity with those who suffer.¹⁴¹ It is through these portrayals of her closeness to those who endure unspeakable human suffering that she was and continues to be invoked by the Church as the patroness and protectress of missionary activity.

¹³⁸ Flynn M. Fernandes, *Mary: Co-redemptrix, mediatrix of all graces, and advocate of the people of God: An interdisciplinary exposition and evaluation of the proposed fifth Marian dogma*, Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2015 (Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:105006>), 77.

¹³⁹ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (Oxford University Press USA – OSO. 2016), 218.

¹⁴⁰ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 268-9.

¹⁴¹ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 260-4.

Early on, after the arrival of missionaries to territories in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Rwanda,¹⁴² those converting to Christianity intuitively recognized the important role of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was presented to Rwandans as the Mother of Christ, the King of Kings,¹⁴³ and her role resonated with the traditional Rwandan reverence for queens and queen-mothers.¹⁴⁴ Within the colonial context, the Sorrowful Mother became associated with the multifaceted miseries experienced by Rwandans, culminating in her apparitions at Kibeho, which confirmed once again her solidarity with the suffering people.

4.2. The Sorrowful Mother of Kibeho and her Assurance of Solidarity with the Rwandans Who Suffer

According to the visionaries who witnessed the apparitions at Kibeho, the Sorrowful Mother communicated powerful messages, not the least of which were the non-verbal messages of her abiding presence and ongoing solicitude for all those in the world who were endangered, especially Rwandans. While the suffering she embodied and the prophetic tears that she shed in no way diminished her blessed status in heaven, her identification with those who suffer gives evidence of her compassionate love. Viewed from the perspective of her devotees, the Sorrowful Mother's apparitions, over the course of eight years, provided an assurance of her solidarity with those suffering in Rwanda and throughout the entire world. Her presence and solicitude also served as signs to all Christians that they were to emulate her example and become more

¹⁴² Out of forty (40) missions founded by Missionaries in Rwanda until 1952, year of canonical erection of the Church in Rwanda, thirty-one (31, i.e., 77.5%) are explicitly dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. (<https://www.eglisecatholiquerwanda.org/spip.php?rubrique38>) (Accessed May 11, 2023)

¹⁴³ This portrayal of Jesus Christ as King of kings, substantiating the value of his Mother, matured and manifested its fruits in 1946. The Rwandan monarch, Charles Leon Pierre Mutara III Rudahigwa consecrated Rwanda to 'Christ the King' and His Mother, the Queen-Mother of heaven and earth. (<https://www.ktpress.rw/2020/10/rwanda-74-years-later-the-story-of-a-country-dedicated-to-christ-the-king/>) (Accessed April 11, 2023)

¹⁴⁴ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 238.

attentive to the suffering of others, mindful of the fact that her presence extends far beyond the confines of human suffering alone. Among the reminders given to the visionaries by the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho, five are of particular importance: 1) the need to uphold the Faith in fidelity, 2) the need to perfect Love by laying down one's life for others, 3) the need to be a bearer of Hope, 4) the need to imitate God's compassion, and 5) the need to live in authentic solidarity with all people of goodwill. The core insights of these five messages of the Sorrowful Mother are identified and explained below.

4.2.1. Uphold the Faith in Fidelity

Every Eucharistic celebration is a concentrated experience of the mystery of Golgotha and the actualization of the unique self-sacrificial dimension of Christ's love for us and for our salvation. As the "the source and summit of the Christian life" (LG 11), the mystery of the Incarnation and the outpouring of Trinitarian Love are manifested through the Cross at Golgotha, where the Sorrowful Mother remained a witness and the living memory of the Crucifixion. Through her motherly embrace of the Crucified One, Christians have come to learn what it means to dive deeply into the ocean of the mystery of faith. Just as the Kibeho apparitions affirmed that the Sorrowful Mother is at the same time the Mother of the Incarnate Christ, the Mother of the Suffering Christ, and the Mother of the Crucified Christ, they also affirmed that she is the Mother of the Resurrected Christ, the Mother of the Glorified Christ, and the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. In each of these characterizations of Our Lady of Kibeho, she revealed to the people something profound about the significance of their faith and the need for ongoing and true conversion.

4.2.2. Perfect Love Involves Laying Down One's Life for Others

The mystery of faith is inseparable from the mystery of love. The new commandment of love (Jn 13: 34), both Jesus Christ and his Mother interpreted it as service: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (Jn 15: 13). While Jesus Christ suffered his Passion, her Mother was compassionately united to Him.¹⁴⁵ The presence of the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho reminds us of the cost of love and its perfect accomplishment.

4.2.3. Be a Bearer of Hope

According to the visionaries, when the Sorrowful Mother appeared in Kibeho, she was preoccupied with the future of Rwandans and more than anything else sought to awaken the conscience and consciousness of the people. What was at stake regarding the future of Rwanda that the Sorrowful Mother sought to underscore by her presence? In effect, it may be said that her presence had a twofold meaning. Firstly, her messages were a repudiation of the worldly vision of a godless future devoid of hope, and secondly, the messages emphasized the responsibility of faith-filled Christians to contribute to the construction of a future full of hope.

The Sorrowful Mother's presence at Kibeho was a reminder to humanity of the values that must be upheld if life is to flourish (Jn 10:10). Like "the thief that comes only to steal and kill and destroy," in the view of today's world, the future is grasped in terms of technological and economic laws where there is no room for God because God has been declared dead by this technocratic society in which the "death of the [hu]man" is on the horizon. As Metz rightly argues:

¹⁴⁵ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*. 222.

We are coming to an ever-clearer consciousness of the dangers and antagonisms that arise when technological and economic processes are left to their own autonomous laws and when our political navigation systems break down [...]. Add to this the concrete threat to identity and freedom of human persons raised by the growing potential for psychological and genetic manipulation. [...] [There should be voices who], following Nietzsche's proclamation of "the death of God," now also announce "the death of [hu]man," the shutting down of human being's spontaneity, and the person burial in the grave of technological-economic structuralism. [...] As I see in this situation we cannot talk about the future using subjectless categories: development, progress or even "process". The question, rather, is this: development, progress, process – for whom? Development, progress, process -going where?¹⁴⁶

Obviously, the messages of the Sorrowful Mother who suffers raise questions of ethics amid the techno-economical abyss in which humanity risks sinking if the well-being, dignity and integrity of humanity is not given priority. Assessing the current moral state of the world, with multiple ethical values in danger, especially those evangelical values pertaining to family and social life, the weeping and tears of the Sorrowful Mother become an alarming signal. In the light of her presence, humanity's memory of the past must be stirred to remember that it has been marked once and for all by the redemptive suffering of *a God* who willed a hope-filled future for humanity, for which He gave His life. It is this future, full of brotherly and sisterly love, peace, communion, compassion, solidarity, happiness, and holiness, that discloses all that God has promised to humanity, encapsulated in the memory of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which the Sorrowful Mother participated in a unique way. Viewed from this perspective the universal dimension of the apparitions and messages of Kibeho must be understood.

Specifically, the sufferings of the Sorrowful Mother as manifested in history, constitute an incontestable sign of an urgent need for readjusting our present and resetting our hope for the

¹⁴⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, Trans. J. Matthew Ashley, (A Helder & Herer Book, The Crossroad Publishing Company (New York), 1977 (trans. 2007). 97-98.

future according to God's will. It is a message of true conversion with reference to the Truth (John 8:31-32). It is the hope that presupposes faith because the "Christian faith articulates itself as a *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. The memory of the crucified Lord stands at the heart of this faith, a *specific memoria passionis*, which forms the basis of the promise of freedom that will come for everyone."¹⁴⁷

However, in reminding us to embrace the hope that has been promised (1 Pt 1:3-6), the Sorrowful Mother reveals, at the same time, the mission of *purification of memory*¹⁴⁸ both individually and collectively. It is true that traumatized and unreconciled memory distorts the present and endangers the future. It is a task that is more urgent for the effectiveness of evangelization. In fact, three decades after the Rwandan Genocide, it is imperative to ponder, in a broader way, the collective and individual memories of the diverse crucified people of Rwanda, from the colonial period until the present day.

4.2.4. Imitate God's Compassion

When the Sorrowful Mother appeared to the visionaries in Kibeho, she revealed to humanity that God is never indifferent to those who suffer. God cannot remain passive (Ex 3: 7-8) in the face of his people's suffering. "God suffers because he loves, because 'God is love.' [...His] suffering is not ontological but functionary and free for the sake of human salvation."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 107.

¹⁴⁸ "The Church has always experienced a re-reading of history in order to understand and to re-direct her actions as she journeys on in the world." The *purification of the memory* signals that "there are times when particular incidents need to be revisited, re-interpreted, and sometimes even corrected, including asking for pardon when necessary." (<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/06/22/cardinal-turkson-on-reconciliation-and-the-purification-of-memory/>).

¹⁴⁹ Biziyaremye, *Mary Mother of the Word*, 166.

Similarly, Christians are called to imitate God's compassionate love mindful of the fact that love entails suffering.

4.2.5. Live in Authentic Solidarity with All People of Goodwill

As noted previously, the visionaries attested to the Sorrowful Mother's assurance of solidarity with all peoples who experience trials and sufferings, but her solidarity with the historical suffering of Rwandans was special. The following *Table I* traces the events in the earthly life of the Sorrowful Mother and identifies the specific wounds that she experienced, thereby making it possible for Christians to see the connections between the historical wounds of Rwandans and Mary's response to their suffering in solidarity and compassion.

Table I

The Sufferings of the Sorrowful Mother	The Common Wounds Shared in Solidarity	The Sufferings of the People of Rwanda
<i>The Roman Empire's impact on the Holy Family</i>	Living among the poor and those made poor by those who hold power	Long-lasting effects of various forms of colonial oppression
<i>Simeon's prophecy of misfortune and tragedy</i>	Human hearts pondering the eventuality of forthcoming sufferings	Since 1959, the Tutsi heard over and over again the utterance that they 'have to be slaughtered'
<i>Flight into Egypt</i> ¹⁵⁰	Fleeing to another country from one day to the next to avoid the threat of slaughter	Experience of various hardships linked with refuge's realities. Seeking hospitality and the precariousness of life were among the main threats.
<i>Jesus is lost in Jerusalem</i>	Loss and separation from loved ones	During the Genocide and in its aftermath, there were many family separations from loved ones
<i>The Sorrowful Mother of the Via Crucis</i>	Beholding loved ones being tortured without the possibility of assisting them	Witnessing loved ones being brutally killed was commonplace
<i>The Stabat Mater (Jn 19: 25)</i>	Waiting the sure death of a 'loved one in agony'	Many experienced the atrocious agony of their loved ones
<i>The Sorrowful Mother of the Pietà</i>	Experience of holding and beholding the dead body of loved ones in a devastated state	Many have traumatic memories of horrendous scenes of beholding the dead and decomposing bodies of loved ones
<i>The Burial of Jesus</i> ¹⁵¹	Burying a loved one in hurry without appropriate ritual and due dignity	Many victims of the Genocide have not been buried and others were buried without decency and dignity

¹⁵⁰ This will be discussed in the following Chapter dealing with the solidarity of Jesus Christ with those who suffer.

¹⁵¹ The last classical suffering of the Sorrowful Mother is the burying of her Son. This wound powerfully resonates with Rwandans and is a subject that is explored later when attention is focused on the Passion of Jesus Christ.

In intervening in the suffering of her children on earth, the Sorrowful Mother reveals the need for people to turn to Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. During the apparitions in Kibeho, she did not only reveal the *Stabat Mater* and exhort people to behold the Passion of Christ but also prefigured Jesus Christ's solidarity with the suffering peoples in general, and especially with Rwandans. She was a perfect herald of the *Cross* by which Jesus Christ identified with all who suffer, but especially with the victims of the Genocide and other atrocities subsequent to it. It is through his Cross that meaning may be made of the suffering endured during the hardships of the Genocide and its aftermath. The *Cross* and the *way of the Cross* resonate, in meaning and timing, with the annual commemoration of the Genocide in Rwanda. By the mystery of his Cross, Jesus Christ could not be closer to Rwandans who have endured their own *way of the Cross*.

4.3. Finding Meaning in the Cross: The Solidarity of Jesus Christ with the Suffering People of Rwanda

For around three decades now, the narratives of survivors frequently refer to the symbol of the Cross, and more specifically, to *the Way of the Cross* (*Via Crucis*). They do so in order to make sense of the sufferings that they or their loved ones underwent during the Genocide itself and the preceding period. The *symbol of the Cross* highlights the atrocity of the sufferings they endured, not unlike the passion of Jesus Christ. It is an analogy that has great significance for the healing of dangerous memories that Rwandans carry in their hearts and minds. Amidst their multiple sufferings, they must discover in the Cross of Jesus Christ not only a symbol of suffering, but also a sign of hope in the present and for the future. The *symbol of the Cross*, understood entirely as a mystery, includes suffering and death but also resurrection. Understood

in this sense, the Cross is a most powerful symbol that can serve as a stimulus for the healing and reconciling of dangerous and painful memories that are both individual and collective.

4.3.1. The Cross: A Symbol of Hope and Healing for a Suffering People

Suffering is an integral and inevitable part of human existence. Similarly, the mechanisms to do away with it, or at least to alleviate it, are also a part of human experience.¹⁵² As the time of his passion drew near, Jesus presented his disciples with a vision of the tribulations that they were about to face. He shared with them a warning of what was to come, but also word of hope and encouragement regarding what would follow: “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (Jn16:33b). In the messages of Kibeho, the Sorrowful Mother spoke about redemptive and expiatory suffering in the context of human suffering and the mystery of evil.¹⁵³ In an effort to make meaning of what later became the *via Crucis* of Rwandans, namely, the sufferings brought about by the Genocide and its multiple consequences, it became necessary to understand the unfolding of these tragic realities in and through the mystery of the suffering of God himself. Seeing the Cross of Jesus Christ, implanted amid the fierce suffering of Rwandans and made visible during annual commemorations of the Genocide, became one symbolic way for Christians to give meaning to such suffering. Consequently, each year during or nearby Holy Week, as the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery and Jesus Christ’s salvific victory over darkness, sin, evil, and death coincides with the annual commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwandan Christians, overwhelmed by the consequences of the Genocide, are called forth to recognize in

¹⁵² Hickson, “A Brief History of Problem of Evil”, 3.

¹⁵³ See chapter 1

the symbol of the Cross a sign of God's compassionate love and ongoing solidarity with their suffering, along with the promise of hope revealed in the Resurrection.

4.3.1.1. The Genocide Constitutes an Interruption in Rwanda's History

A horror like a genocide always constitutes an interruption in the normal course of Christian life and human history that can be taken as a *sign of times*. Viewed from this perspective, the Genocide in Rwanda should have constituted *the sign of times* for Rwandans' hope, for which hope the Church ought to bear a great responsibility. However, considering the ways in which a *Christian country* (Rwanda) still struggles to find the connection between Christ's Paschal Mystery and the Genocide commemoration, I am skeptical as was Metz with regard to Auschwitz:

Since the last council there has been a great deal of discussion in the Catholic Church about the so-called signs of the times that have to be understood in the light of faith and processed with the power of hope. [...] Would "Auschwitz" be among them? I doubt it. Do ecclesial pronouncements on the signs of the times talk about Auschwitz? Not to my knowledge.¹⁵⁴

Nonetheless, all the ingredients for *the signs of time* to be recognized in the *Genocide against the Tutsi* seem to be obvious. In a country like Rwanda, with 92,2% Christians, how does one explain that more than one million people were slaughtered within on hundred days, including the reality of Christians killing Christians? How does one explain that almost all the churches in Rwanda where the Tutsi attempted to hide became the slaughtering theaters? Since 1994, the question of theodicy – “Where was God?” - has become a recurring question in the hearts and minds of Rwandans who long for healing. Is it possible for healing to be found in the mystery of God? Or is the solution of the dilemma posed by theodicy only resolved *unto God*?¹⁵⁵ Or, is a similarity to be found between Rwandan Christians and the three erudite and pious rabbis who

¹⁵⁴ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 121.

¹⁵⁵ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 69-71.

put God on trial due to his passivity in the face of the massacres of the Jews. They found Him guilty and condemned Him. However, when the time to pray arrived, they all prayed to the same God they had condemned.¹⁵⁶

As noted previously, one striking indicator of such *signs of the times* is that the yearly commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi always occurs around the time of the celebrations of the Paschal Mystery. More often, the great part of the national commemoration cannot but immerse itself within the events of Holy Week. Sometimes it becomes a conflictual time between both the state and the Church, concerning the ways in which the joys of Easter events converge with the mourning that comes with remembrances of the Genocide.¹⁵⁷ However, for Christians, there is no better time to commemorate the sufferings and deaths of our loved ones than in the context of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁸ In this view, the Genocide against the Tutsi becomes an interruption event, but at the same time, it can be considered a *sign of the times* for Christians - a sign of hope in a future that promises us light over darkness, life over death, truth over lies, love over hatred, communion over division, righteousness over wickedness, and life eternal over damnation. Indeed, Jesus Christ willed to heal the wounds and burdens of Rwandans by drawing His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection nearer to their unreconciled memories.

¹⁵⁶ Video: Clip from “God on Trial” ----- Beginning at 1:01:10

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD7v9phroGM>) (Accessed March 19, 2022)

¹⁵⁷ The joyful celebration of Easter time and sacraments’ festivities were normally shut down (See for example the Archbishop of Kigali, Antoine Cardinal Kambanda’s letter for directives of the Easter of this year, 2023)

¹⁵⁸ Pope Paul VI, “Masses for the Dead.”

4.3.1.2. The Unreconciled Memories of Wounds and Sufferings

Considered from the perspective of its Hebrew origin, the concept of memory¹⁵⁹ does not merely mean 'remembering,' but more than that, it signifies to 'actualize by repeating.' This would be 'to bring the past into the present.'¹⁶⁰ During the Last Supper, Jesus Christ enjoined to his disciples a command of *memoria*. He gave them the power to do what He had accomplished sacramentally at the Last Supper and would accomplish in reality on Golgotha: to actualize His Passion, Death, and Resurrection by *memoria* because "Christian faith articulates itself as a *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*."¹⁶¹ In these circumstances, the new covenant was sealed in the sufferings of Jesus Christ out of love (Jn 15:13). Likewise, the command of *memoria* was given (Ex 12:1-28) to Israel, not only to remember the past but also to make present the past. "If it is true that memory constitutes the womb of history and theology, in a violent world, theology must start precisely from the wounds."¹⁶² Introducing wounds here means to introduce suffering, and memory connects the wound to the suffering.¹⁶³

Past suffering, which is the cause of the wounds, continues to be suffering in the present and the future if its memory is deprived of its liberating character. Metz, in addressing the problem of *The Future from the Remembrance of Suffering* denounces a tendency of the bourgeois to denature the memory so that the past becomes only an untroubled paradise, where the memories of the past are only good memories that do not engage the present nor challenge the hope of the future:

¹⁵⁹ For more hermeneutics of the *Memory*, see: Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 169-185.

¹⁶⁰ Marcel Uwineza, S.J., "A Theology of Memory in Response to Clerical Sexual Abuse." in *La Civiltà Cattolica: Reflecting the Mind of the Vatican since 1850*. (Church Life), November 3, 2021.

¹⁶¹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 107.

¹⁶² Uwineza, "A Theology of Memory in Response to Clerical Sexual Abuse."

¹⁶³ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 179.

Here memory bathes everything in the past in a mild, conciliatory light. [...] The past passes through a filter of harmlessness; everything dangerous and haunting, everything challenging has vanished from it; it seems robbed of any future. This is how memory easily turns into a 'false consciousness' of the past, an opium for the present.¹⁶⁴

Such a memory is an unreconciled one. In contrast, Metz proposes a *dangerous memory of freedom*. Taking the *memoria Jesu Christi* as the model, he argues that such memory

holds a particular anticipation of the future as a future for the hopeless, the shattered and the oppressed. In this way it is a dangerous and liberating memory, which badgers the present and calls it into question, since it does not remember just any open future, but precisely this future, and because it compels believers to be in a continual state of transformation in order to take this future into account.¹⁶⁵

It is this kind of dangerous and liberating memory that can help to address the issue of the *way of the Cross* for Rwandans, resulting from the Genocide and its aftermath. In this case, liberation is needed by those who are hopeless due to the Genocide. They were shattered by it and continue to be oppressed by its remembrance. Reconciling their memories will positively impact their present and secure a future that holds their promises of hope.

Here, unreconciled memory refers to all the wounds of survivors as far as their sufferings of the past keep them raising the theodicy cries of God's absence during their suffering. Their memory stagnates on losses caused by the Genocide and the hopes that it destroyed. They always accuse the past because they keep thinking that their present and future could be different had the Genocide not happened. This situation is itself a suffering that alienates their present and endangers their future.

Unreconciled memory also refers to the consciousness of the perpetrators in as much as their past evil deeds have caused such unspeakable consequences. In the following section, the

¹⁶⁴ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 105.

¹⁶⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 89.

memoria passionis Christi will shed light on the unreconciled memories and also help in recognizing that Jesus Christ Himself preceded Rwandans in their sufferings. In the coincidence of the pascal mysteries' celebration and the Rwandan commemoration of the Genocide, Jesus Christ wants to show how He understands the sufferings caused by the Genocide against the Tutsi and stands in solidarity with all those suffered people. More than that, however, he willed to teach them how his resurrection should be inspiring for their present and future endangered by the memory of the atrocities of that Genocide. Indeed, beyond darkness, suffering, and death, there are light, consolation, resurrection and life eternal.

4.3.2. Solidarity through the Cross: Healing the Memories of Suffering Rwandans

The Genocide has become a sign of the times and demands that as Christians we say never *again* to such atrocities in our world. It's commemoration coinciding with the Paschal Mystery in a Christian country calls for the Church to convey a message of healing, hope, and reconciliation for those affected by that Genocide. In the Easter, the Resurrection healed and reconciled Jesus Christ's first disciples and kept alive their hope in the community of believers and the experience of Pentecost that has sustained the Church's faith throughout centuries.

In reflecting on this process, it is important to keep in mind the two types of memories discussed by Metz: *the unreconciled memories* and *the dangerous memories of liberation, understood as the memoria Jesu Christi*. In an effort to advance on the journey of healing and reconciliation, reflecting on selected events in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ may serve as potential source for binding and healing the diverse wounds of victims of the Genocide as well as the perpetrators.

4.3.2.1. “By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24): Healing the Wounds of Victims and their Memories of the Genocide as Solidarity in Suffering

The repeated use of the symbol of the Cross as found in narratives and discourses of survivors of the Genocide in Rwanda is very revelatory because the symbol of the Cross encapsulates the whole reality of their suffering just as the Cross of Jesus Christ encompasses his entire earthly life. At every stage of his earthly life, Jesus experienced hardship and suffering. Acutely aware of the countless wounds inflicted on innocent victims through suffering and violence of every kind, his mission of healing and reconciliation, as revealed in the Gospel narratives, extended to all those in need. Identified with the Suffering Servant (Is 52:13 - 53:12), the woundedness of Jesus Christ remains an ongoing source of revelation of his solidarity with all those who suffer innocently in a world permeated by the mystery of evil.

In the following three Tables [Table II, Table III and Table IV], identify distinctive wounds, memories and/or Christian virtues that are associated with a *life leading to the Cross*, the *Way of the Cross*, and the *Last Seven Statements of Jesus*. The three Tables are helpful because they capture in a succinct format the common wounds shared by Jesus and survivors of the Genocide and its consequences. Each of the Tables reveals in its own way, the correspondence between their respective experiences, the deep significance of solidarity in suffering, and its potential for healing the memories of suffering.

Table II

A Life Leading to the Cross

Life Events Leading to the Cross	Common Wounds	Solidarity in Suffering as a Means for Healing Memories
The problem of the divine origin of Jesus Christ (Mk 4:41)	Identity crisis	Ethnic-based persecution (in elementary school) Children born of raping and of different ethnic parents. All sorts of frustration linked with identity.
The problem with Nazareth, the home village of Jesus (Matt 2:23)	Aversion towards one home village	For many reasons, Rwandans changed their places of residence
The poverty of Jesus Christ (Lk 2,1-7).	Lack of necessities	Those who, due to the Genocide and its aftermath, experienced the hardship of poverty.
Flight into Egypt (Matt 2:13-15)	Insecurity and the search for hospitality	Almost all Rwandans had the experience of becoming refugees
Losing a parent or a spouse: at the Cross, Joseph, the foster father and spouse of Mary is not present (Jn 19:25-27)	Becoming orphans and widows	Many young people in Rwanda lost their parents and the people who cared for them. Others became widows. The consequences of this situations are innumerable.
Jesus Christ is called Beelzebub (Matt 10:25)	Dehumanization	The Tutsi were dehumanized and nicknamed <i>snakes</i> and <i>cock roaches</i>
Jesus Christ was betrayed by his disciple and the same crowds who sang Hosanna clamored for his crucifixion (Lk 22:54-62; Matt 21:9; 27:23)	Betrayal	Friends betrayed friends and relatives, even Christians (and a few religious) did the same
The Last Supper (Mk 14:22-26)	Last gathering of the family	Some had this chance other missed it; both memories are painful
In Gethsemane Jesus did not have the support of his disciples (Matt 26:38)	Abandonment	The persecuted Tutsi experienced abandonment, from local authorities to international communities.
Judas leads a crowd to arrest Jesus Christ (Mk 14:43)	The vigilante crowds	The most devastating memory is the advancing and assailing of crowds, led by familiar figures, with machetes, clubs (mounted with big nails), staff, guns, and other traditional arms

Table III
The Way of the Cross

The Way of the Cross	Common Wounds and/or Shared Memories	Solidarity in Suffering as a Means for Healing Memories
Jesus is denied by the first of his disciples, Peter. (Lk 22:54-62)	Denial	The denial of Peter refers to the denial of every person who denied support to the persecuted Tutsi
Jesus is humiliated before the religious leaders and Pilate (Lk 22:63-23:25)	Humiliation	Those possessing power to kill or to save sometimes played with the lives of persecuted Tutsis handing them over to one another in humiliation and torture
Jesus is flogged and crowned with thorns. (Mk 15:15-17)	Hidden wounds	Some of the worst wounds of survivors will remain hidden due to various reasons including reticence and modesty
Pilate washes his hands of the case of Jesus. (Matt 27:24)	Unnecessary cowardice	Leaders and security institutions who were supposed to protect the persecuted Tutsi and the passive watching.
Jesus carries his Cross. (Jn 19:17)	Digging one's own grave	Many Tutsis were forced to dig their own grave. Some were killed in those pits and others buried alive
Jesus falls three times, get up three times and continues ¹⁶⁶	Useless efforts	To those who still struggle with memories of the uselessness of their efforts, life has value until the last breath, life is sacred, it must be defended, fought for and preserved at whatever cost
Jesus meets his Sorrowful Mother ¹⁶⁷	Powerlessness in the face of one's martyrdom	To all those who, during the Genocide, witnessed the sufferings of their loved ones powerlessly.
Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus Christ to carry the Cross (Lk 23:26)	Recognition of received kindness	God himself manifested his presence in the kindness and courage of persons (or any other creature) ¹⁶⁸ who help some victims to keep on hoping or facilitated their survival. Many Tutsi survivors were helped by Hutus.

¹⁶⁶ The Christian tradition has kept this detail of *the way of the Cross*: 3rd, 7th and 9th Stations (See the devotion to the Cross: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/348170.Benedict_XVI_or_The_Way_of_the_Cross_with_text_from_the_Scriptures. Published by Barton-Cotton, Inc. 1045 Parker Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21227. *Imprimatur*: Celestine J. Damiano, D.D., Archbishop-Bishop of Camden, October 15, 1965.)

¹⁶⁷ The Christian tradition has kept this detail of *the way of the Cross*, a well: 4th Station.

¹⁶⁸ A few people have been saved by animal. For example, Mukagakwerere Martha (a 14-year-old girl), after being severely injured and raped was saved by two leopards who secured her for 12 days. (Rwanda Broadcasting Agency, April 27, 2023: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JE2aACHvvAI>)

Jesus is stripped of his garments and crucified naked (Jn 19:23-25)	Humiliation by nakedness	Many have been humiliated by exposing publicly their nakedness, especially parents in front of their children.
Jesus Christ is being nailed to the Cross (Jn 19:18)	Visible scars due to violent torture, recognizable wounds	Some survivors have marks of the Genocide atrocities integrated into their very being. They are now recognizable by their wounds.
Jesus Christ is crucified. (Lk 23:33)	Slow but sure death	Some of the victims of the Genocide underwent torture and received deadly wounds that signified only a matter of time before they would die.
“They took his clothes and divided them into four parts...” (Jn 19:23)	Taking or destroying of belongings	Taking clothes was commonplace and sometimes the victims were stripped while still alive or dead.
“One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.” (Jn 19:34)	Torture and dehumanization	Some victims and even some survivors were lanced with a spear. But worst, some other victims were pierced by sharpened blades and tools, especially women who were penetrated from their genital parts through their torsos to their heads.
“Taking down the body” (Mk 15:46)	Scenes of dead bodies mixed with tortured persons who were still alive	Many rescued survivors looked for loved ones in the midst of dead bodies, children trying to awaken their dead parents, infants trying to breast feed from their deceased mothers.
“Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, [...] they laid Jesus there.” (Jn 19:41-42)	The need for a place to bury the body of a loved one and someone to assist with the burial or entombment	Many Rwandans, throughout the preparations, execution, and aftermath of the Genocide of Tutsi, did not mourn or bury their loved ones.
“The linen and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head” ¹⁶⁹ (Jn 20: 6-8)	One of the recognition proofs of the resurrection	Clothes and other items worn by the Genocide's victims are among the recognition proofs of the deceased loved ones. Now that time has passed, those proofs are the main identification facts of loved ones.
Lie about the resurrection reality (Matt 28: 11-15)	The denial of the resurrection	Some perpetrators denied the Genocide. ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ This fact came after the resurrection, but it resonates with some wounds of the Genocide.

¹⁷⁰ The denial is the last struggle against the genocide: “Background” (Accessed May 22, 2022), <https://cnlg.gov.rw/index.php?id=80>

Table IV

Last Seven Sentences of Jesus Christ

The Last Words of Jesus	Common Wounds, Shared Memories and Virtues	Solidarity in Suffering as a Means for Healing Memories
<i>"I am thirsty."</i> (Jn 19:28).	Thirst and hunger	Some people drank unclean water sometimes mixed with blood.
<i>"Woman here is your son. [...] Here is your mother."</i> (Jn 19:26-27)	Ultimate separation from a parent and entrusting the care of a loved one to someone else who is worthy of trust	Fathers and mothers entrusted the care of their children to whoever they thought would care for them if they happened to survive.
<i>"My God, my God, why have forsaken me?"</i> (Mk 15:34)	The silence of God, the suffering of the innocent, a sense of abandonment	People hid in churches, believing that they were in the house of God and would be protected, but even there, they did not receive the protection they expected.
<i>"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."</i> (Lk 23: 43)	Hope and trust in God	Many people hold the memories of their loved ones, who <i>hoped against hope</i> , and to their last breath commended their spirits into God.
<i>"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do."</i> (Lk 23:34)	Unconditional forgiveness	Forgiveness that breaks violence chain does not require the end of violence.
<i>"Truly I tell, today you will be with me in Paradise."</i> (Lk 23:43)	Giving a second chance to a wrongdoer mindful of the preeminence of reconciliation as salvation	Remembering that everyone is created in God's image, repentance is the source of true freedom for those who have participated in wrongdoing; reconciliation reestablishes broken relationships
<i>"It is finished"</i> (Jn 19:30)	Witnessing, or lack of witnessing, the death of a loved one	Many survivors still await the truth about the death of their loved one; Christ's death is a source of comfort for them: whether alive or dead they believe they belong to God

4.3.2.2. “Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19): The Risen Lord Heals the Wounds in the Aftermath of Suffering and Death

As a consequence of the Resurrection, Jesus, the Risen Lord, triumphs over death and heals the wounds and dangerous memories caused by the event of the Cross. In the process, the Risen Lord also discloses the hidden wounds that remain in the aftermath of suffering and death. After the Resurrection, the Risen Lord appears to many of his disciples in order to heal the wounds of traumatic memories that remained in the aftermath of his passion and death. As the Gospels reveal to us, the Risen Lord sought them out, sometimes individually and sometimes collectively. He consoles Mary Magdalene near the tomb and calls her by name (Jn 20:11-18), He joins the two disappointed disciples on the road heading towards Emmaus (Lk 24), He appears to the disciples hiding in the upper room and shares with them the gift of peace (Jn 20:19-29), He returns to awaken the faith of Thomas, who had wandered away from the community of disciples, by inviting him to touch the wounds that could still be seen and felt (Jn 20:24-29), and He invites the seven disciples who had returned to fishing to share breakfast with him at the seashore (Jn 21:1-14). Though the Gospels are silent about the disciples' response to the suicide of Judas (Matt 27: 3-5), it no doubt remains a dangerous memory, and yet another wound to be healed in the aftermath of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. As with the disciples of Jesus, so too with the survivors of the Genocide, who in the aftermath of the suffering and death of loved ones, must continue to live. But to do so, a process of healing and reconciliation is necessary. In this regard, two figures from the Gospel narratives stand out - Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter. Not only do they provide insight into the solicitude of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, and His concern for the well-being of the brokenhearted, but they also offer insights into the attitudes and experiences of survivors and perpetrators alike.

The Case of Mary Magdalene

The tearful Mary Magdalene could not recognize Jesus Christ (Jn 20: 11-15). Given their relationship, it is very surprising to see Mary Magdalene failing to recognize Jesus! The weeping of Mary Magdalene stands for all survivors who weep for their loved ones, and because of this, they develop blindness in front of what is potentially their salvation. Their anguish is worsened if they have not yet found the remains of their loved ones and thus, are unable to give them a dignified burial. It is a wound that is deep and long-lasting. However, the Risen Lord, who knows every corner of a heart that has been broken due to Genocide's way of the Cross, does not remain passive to our tears. He reaches out, reveals Himself and offers consolation and healing. Just as Mary Magdalene's emotions prevented her from listening to the angels who announce to her the resurrection, so too, her emotions caused her to fix her attention on one intention only: to find the Body of Jesus, to take the body of Jesus, and bury the body of Jesus with dignity. The Risen Lord, however, in His encounter with Mary, knew exactly the *word* that would pull her out of her devastating emotions. After her healing from the wound of traumatic and inconsolable grief, she is immediately sent as the first eyewitness of the Risen Lord to announce the news to the other disciples (Jn 20:17-18).

It is in this way that Jesus Christ wants to extend his healing care to each survivor of the Genocide. Yet a question remains: *Will every survivor be able to experience the solidarity and solicitude of Jesus Christ so as to respond to the exact word (or gesture) that will enable a survivor to convert from a vulnerable into a missionary protagonist of the Gospel of Life and Joy?* The answer to this question depends, at least in part, on the role of Church leaders in helping survivors to recognize the great responsibility that is theirs as a witness to the solidarity in suffering that they share with Jesus Christ and the healing of wounds.

The Case of Simon Peter

Turning attention to Simon Peter, it is possible to understand how the healing process might unfold for perpetrators of the Genocide. Since his three denials of Jesus around the fire outside the Sanhedrin before the cock crowed (Lk 22:54-62), Peter is haunted by bitter guilt and shame. Around another fire, however, Jesus heals Peter of the wound and memory of his three denials and thus begins the process of reconciliation. On the seashore, in response to Jesus' questioning, Peter confesses his love for Jesus three times and in response, Jesus once again calls Simon Peter to follow Him (Jn 21:1-19). Similarly, perpetrators of the Genocide, at least those who seek healing, remain haunted and shamed by their crimes, even if they have completed their sentences, until such time as they meet face to face with survivors and asked for forgiveness. Without such encounters, the process of healing cannot occur, and their own human dignity and identity as Christian hangs in the balance.

In the encounter between Simon Peter and the Risen Lord, Jesus communicates a clear message: after a lapse, when given a second chance, one can start afresh. Human people are not defined by their mistakes. However, for perpetrators, forgiveness and healing, offered and received, are the pre-conditions necessary for renewed lives and authentic new beginnings. What is required by the Risen Lord, knowing that He does not count on our perfection, is recognizing that he does count on ongoing cooperation with His grace for daily conversion.

Certainly, understanding the solidarity of both Jesus Christ and the Sorrowful Mother is a key feature in the healing and reconciliation of wounded Rwandans. However, the awareness of such pertinent solidarity must instill in the Church a new awakening to the concerns of the various crosses of Rwandans. Church leaders must take up the challenge of not only making their

messages heard, but also taking action to guarantee that solidarity in suffering is actually felt in experiential ways. For Rwandans to enter into authentic processes of healing, experiences of the real presence of Jesus Christ and of the Blessed Virgin Mary must be mediated by persons who accept the call to be channels of the graces of consolation, healing and reconciliation in everyday life.

4.4. Kibeho Today: Forty Years after the Messages of the Sorrowful Mother

After the Genocide, many activities were aimed at reconstructing the country, among them, the provision of necessary healthcare in all dimensions was included. However, despite the many efforts that have been made over the years, and subsequent success stories registered, the harmful effects of the Genocide and its aftermath still remain, similar to those effects seen in earlier times. This is because the Genocide's wounds and memories are intergenerational.¹⁷¹ Echoing the voices of Church leaders in Rwanda, I argue that the messages of Kibeho still speak to Rwandans today, especially to the Church in Rwanda. What is greatly needed is a pastoral ministry of hope which constitutes the springboard for holistic healing and integral human development that is conducive to authentic reconciliation. The messages of Kibeho, especially the suffering messages, are relevant today in three main ways.

Firstly, the messages attributed to the Sorrowful Mother and to Jesus Christ remind Rwandans of the importance of engaging in processes of conscientiousness raising, especially among Christians. The call is to look back on Rwandan history and recognize that the people must pay heed to the reality of the mystery of evil as expressed in the messages of Kibeho. While

¹⁷¹Veroni Eichelsheim et al., "Before My Time? Addressing the Intergenerational Legacies of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda," *Intervention* 17, no. 1 (2019): 31, <https://doi.org/10.4103/1571-8883.239711>.

evil cannot be completely uprooted in this world, the devastation caused by the Genocide was preventable. The messages of the Sorrowful Mother of Kibeho offer important lessons regarding what was a preventable and horrendous historical event. It is time for the Church in Rwanda to reimagine more effective ways of advancing the proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis, new evangelization, and a renewed commitment to discipleship. The leaders and the members of the Church in Rwanda need to rethink the adequacy and appropriateness of their ecclesial structures and theologies in light of the lessons learned from the Genocide, which became a real sign of the times. In fact, given the involvement of Christians in the Genocide, the Church must recognize that Christians are being put to a challenging test of their faith, hope, and love. In the aftermath of the Genocide, a renewed commitment to authentic discipleship is urgently needed.

Secondly, the messages of the Sorrowful Mother remind all Rwandans, especially Christians, to identify the challenges that the Genocide places before the country and the Church at this point in time. Providing the assurance of solidarity to all people who suffer is the responsibility of every Christian as is the fostering of healing and reconciliation. These commitments concern all Rwandans, both in the country and also those who are outside of it. For different reason, these commitments are important not only for those who directly experienced the atrocities of the Genocide, but new generations as well.

Thirdly, the messages of the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho remind Rwandans of the need to be proactive. This proactivity has the potential to heal memories, deal with the present, and anticipate whatever threatens a future full of hope. Building on the insights of the previous three chapters, the next chapter examines the elements of a Christian approach to reconciliation as understood in light of the messages of Kibeho.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION AND PEACEBUILDING¹⁷²

If, amid difficulties, we can practice this kind of intergenerational dialogue, ‘we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another.’ (Pope Francis, 55th World Day of Peace, January 1, 2022)

Christian reconciliation is not the only approach to the process of reconciliation. In the secular world, political relationships and broken societal relationships are addressed with a secular approach to reconciliation processes which can be simply called *political reconciliation*.¹⁷³ Whether carried out by a state or a mandated non-governmental institution like *Truth Commissions*,¹⁷⁴ such a process of reconciliation needs to be carefully carried out. Certainly, the configuration of patterns of such processes cannot be identical in each situation. Some factors and dynamics that come into play in such a process cannot always be predicted or controlled.¹⁷⁵ However, there are common issues to consider, no matter how different one process of reconciliation may be from another. They can be grouped into three broad categories: *end of violence and its threats, justice, and healing*.¹⁷⁶

Similar to secular approaches to reconciliation processes, a Christian approach to a process of reconciliation also makes use of strategies. However, in addition to strategies, it is inspired by a spirituality that allows God to be the leading actor in the process.

¹⁷² Some of the materials have been taken from the paper of the same author (Emmanuel Nsengiyumva), submitted for the requirements in the class of ‘Violence in a World of Conflict’ (TMST8564) taught by Olfilio Ernesto Valiente, *Fall Semester 2022*, Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry.

¹⁷³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reconciliation/#TypImp> (Accessed on May 14, 2023)

¹⁷⁴ Hyner, *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. (New York, Routledge, 2002)

¹⁷⁵ Hyner, *Unspeakable Truths*. 165.

¹⁷⁶ Hyner, *Unspeakable Truths*. 1-49.

5.1. Understanding the Christian Process of Reconciliation through the Lens of the Paschal Mystery

Both the attitude toward Christian reconciliation and the Church's ministries of Christian reconciliation must follow God's way of proceeding. Moved by love, through the *mystery of the incarnation*, God chose to be one with creation. Moved by a desire to redeem humanity from the consequences of original sin, God willed to redeem humanity in order to restore it to its original blessing. The climax of this mystery of salvation is the *passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ* by which God reconciles the world and commissions to the Church the ministry of reconciliation. (1 Cor 5:18) Throughout the history of salvation, God has longed to reconcile humanity to Himself, and through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, that reconciliation, which is salvation, was achieved. However, the fullness of salvation cannot be achieved during this earthly existence. It is always provisional. By bringing in a *theological component (the grace)*, Christian processes of reconciliation offer an understanding and a ministry that encourages people to allow God's grace to permeate their lives. It follows that with the grace of God being present in history, the reconciliation process for a particular community does not start by ending violence or its threats. But rather, it goes before them and goes beyond every structure and strategy in order to make present God's grace. With a few additions, the following section discusses Robert Schreiter's basic features¹⁷⁷ for understanding the Christian approach to reconciliation.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, (New York, Orbis Press, 2004), 13-9.

5.1.1. The Main Characteristics of Schreiter's Christian Approach to Reconciliation

Mindful of the many ways that God's action speaks to the hearts of those who suffer, it is important to remember the following points regarding reconciliation.

a) Reconciliation is the work of God: Even if every action that contributes to integral human development acquires an eternal dimension, reconciliation contributes to that purpose in a special way. Being a process through which God wishes to continue his saving work and hence complete his reconciliation through Christ,¹⁷⁸ reconciliation reveals itself to be an endeavor of God. The rebuilding of broken human relations is a huge task that surpasses human capacity. Thinking about reconciliation should always bring recognition and openness to the action of God's grace.

b) The process of reconciliation starts with the victims. Christian reconciliation has this particular character of being modeled after God, who reconciles himself to humanity. In the God-human relationships, God remains faithful, unlike human beings. Yet he is the one who takes the initiative to offer forgiveness to human beings in order to restore damaged relationships. In the perfect victim, who is Jesus Christ, God accomplished this paradoxical logic: to be offended and yet to be the first to offer forgiveness. This same procedure applies when an individual seeks to reconcile with God. He/she knows already that the offended Victim is always ready to offer forgiveness.

c) A Christian process of reconciliation does not require the end of violence before it can begin. Understood as the grace of God poured out upon victims of violence, which likens them to God, especially to the Victim par excellence, who is Jesus, then reconciliation cannot wait for the

¹⁷⁸ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*. 14.

end of violence or abuse. This can be understood in two stages. Firstly, Christian reconciliation recognizes the presence of God amidst atrocities of violence and abuse. God's grace is present in every victim who, despite the absence of reasons to hope in life for himself/herself or his/her loved ones, he/she continues to hold on to life, care for his/her family, and hope against all hope: this is the revelation of God. Secondly, amidst these sufferings, victims can be drawn to reconsider their relationship with their perpetrators. Empowered by victimization itself, they can have feelings of empathy, words of forgiveness, or a prayer for the conversion of their perpetrators. This is the grace of God already in action in the reconciliation process. Church tradition is recognized with such witnesses in the martyrs' experiences. Rwanda, during the Genocide, had experienced such witnesses and has been a springboard to talk about the grace of forgiveness after the Genocide.¹⁷⁹ Such forgiveness and reconciliation amidst suffering are once again exemplified by God in Jesus Christ on the Cross when he said: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). In fact, when victims grow aware that in every victim, God Himself is suffering, then it becomes easier for them to let the power of God accomplish the work of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, it is only the grace of God that can do that because it lies beyond human capacity.

*d) "Reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy."*¹⁸⁰ With spirituality, reconciliation becomes a way of life inspired by the Spirit of God and allows God to complete his saving action in humanity. The ministers of reconciliation, as well as institutions of reconciliation, should become channels for facilitating good relationships with God, which allow

¹⁷⁹ The Family of Cyprien and Daphrose Rugamba in the process of beatification and canonization is a striking example (they are now "the Servants of God") (<https://archindy.org/criterion/local/2022/02-25/s-rwanda.html>) (Accesse April 20, 2023)

¹⁸⁰ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 16.

reconciliation to happen. The inner lives of both victims and offenders become the first concern. Reconciliation, then, becomes a process of allowing God to encounter each one's heart and to bring about the necessary conversion. This conversion leads to healing and becomes a channel for others' healing and conversion. This attitude cannot be effective until spiritual practices are put in place.

In fact, a spirituality of reconciliation is a spirituality that invites everyone to the building of a community and its sustaining. Understood as a space for sharing the experiences of their lives, the community of those engaged in reconciliation begins with a true spiritual journey together. The spirituality that takes the lead in reconciliation becomes both an individual healing process and the formation of a healing community. The task is to create a safe community that becomes a community of healing and, later, a healed community. The mission of such a community determines its importance and the ways in which it is necessary for the reconciliation process to go forward.

Reconciliation is not only a sketched-out strategy for healing broken relationships; the reconciliation process requires people to be open to God's action by which He wishes to reach his people through his grace and ministries of reconciliation. It is a mystery that involves the recreation of humanity, which is facilitated by spiritual practices inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ himself.

However, the process of reconciliation is dependent upon concrete strategies to achieve its goals. Three main dimensions must be considered in sketching out the strategies. Firstly, there is the matter of ascertaining an environment that allows individuals, families, and the entire community to be engaged in the reconciliation process and to feel God presence drawing near

and thus awakening their hope in a brighter future. This includes, among others, the socio-political conditions. Questions that are key to such strategies and ought to be answered favorably within the framework of reconciliation include the following: Is the government supportive of such an endeavor? Will there be no interference with the prosecution's institutions and the security services? Is the reconciliation process an occasion to dig more deeply into the perpetrators' history and to reveal new crimes and hence be an occasion for prosecution once again? What is at stake if the process does not take place? Does the entire community understand the need for that reconciliation? What is the socio-political impact of reconciliation? In responding to such questions, the leadership in the ministry of reconciliation comes to recognize the daunting initial task. The main strategic actions will then focus on sensitization and mobilization in order to allow the community to prepare for the process.

Secondly, the process of reconciliation includes ritual practices and gestures of communion to promote communal bonds and demystify mutual repulsion among individuals. Where possible, there might be common worship, reflection, and silent prayer together, as well as a meditation on specifically purposely chosen *biblical verses* or *wisdom quotes* that might resonate with the action taking place. Multiplying moments of sharing meals and drinking together without judgment tends to contribute to an encounter with new individuals which always brings new insights and positive attitudes towards the *other*. There should be strategies to lead such heterogeneous groups, and the principles of group dynamics can also be applied.

Lastly, the strategies of encounter at an individual level and a family level proved to be efficacious. In this domain, cultural patterns play a tremendous role. In some cases, intermediary persons and families might be needed as facilitators. The encounter cannot be planned only as a festive event. Accordingly, it may include encounters at working places like a farm for one to

three days working together. The reconciliation ministers should be very vigilant and adopt preemptive strategies because a small mistake could ruin or delay the process. They should be aware of the challenges involved in such encounters and be armed with courage and patience. Most of the time, hospitality is the main challenge but, at the same time, the springboard for the way forward in such a reconciliation process. Strategies should include an understanding of the habits and customs of the localities and the people involved in the process.

The proper balance¹⁸¹ of spirituality and strategies in the reconciliation process is highly recommended in the reconciliation process. A spirituality that brackets strategies cannot achieve the intended goals and readily leads to the disengagement of ministers. It leads to shifting responsibility to God alone. On the other hand, when reconciliation focuses only on strategies, it misses the essential constituent, i.e., God's grace. Reconciliation is a holistic re-creation of a human person, and this cannot be reduced to mere technical skills. Being a mystery known only by his Creator, the human person cannot bypass the grace of God in the process of reconciliation lest it thwarts its ultimate objective.

e) Reconciliation is the re-creation of both the victim and the wrongdoer. A successful reconciliation does not consist only in giving justice to the victims. Nor is it the process that will end up with the condemnation of the wrongdoers. Neither does it re-establish the situation before the occurrence of the crime or the wrong deed. Reconciliation does not erase the past nor delete the memory. Rather it is a matter of transformation of the past for both the victims and wrongdoers. Being a work of God's grace, the process of reconciliation must consist of the holistic transformation of both victims and perpetrators. This will require the ability to confront

¹⁸¹ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 17.

their past, which is, at the same time, the past of their community. It is not a matter of truth-telling but, more than that, a healing truth. It is not an occasion for exposing and condemning the wrong deeds of the perpetrators, but rather an opportunity to restore their humanity through which the evil thwarted their vocation *to be God's children*. It is a process that integrates individual and collective memories into their lives. These memories are not bracketed but are addressed adequately because they are part of the present. In this sense, the deceased, the lost and destroyed properties, the loss of cherished values as well as the loss of past hopes become components of those memories. In this view, both victims and wrongdoers acquire a strong conviction about living for a purpose. It empowers them with a strong desire to go forward and to bear witness to the new possibilities through their transformed humanities. *Surviving* (in the hope that one day one will thrive) ceases to be a chance and instead becomes a vocation. In the same way, the wrongdoers' new life restores their responsibilities to the community. Once again, God's grace allows both victims and wrongdoers to receive a new call for commitment to the community. Their lives help others to see the presence of God, and they can inspire others. They become missionaries of reconciliation, testifying to the fact that healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not unattainable ideals but lived possibilities. Thus, they can invite and help others to work on their own version of the reconciliation experience.

f) The Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ: The paradigm and the actualization of the reconciliation process. It is also very surprising to see how in the Paschal mysteries, God subverts a seeming victory of evil, on the Cross, into a history of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The narratives of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute ultimate violence and brutality, the ultimate event of forgiveness, and the ultimate scenes of healing and reconciliation. Jesus was the most innocent victim of violence and

was also subjected to all sorts of abuse. The narratives of the resurrection show the Risen Lord taking care of the broken-hearted community of his disciples. He did everything to heal them, he reconciled them with their painful memories, resuscitated and strengthened their hope, and confirmed their mission and vocation in the aftermath. Jesus had to adjust himself to their slow pace and listen to each one as well as listen to the community as a whole, with compassion and love. He made them a community of reconciled people ready to go forward with a mission for the world. (Matt 28:19-20) This testifies to the fact that, through Jesus Christ, God reconciled humanity to himself, and yet, God took the lead in this reconciliation process. He helped people to enter into a new, as bearers of hope and God's promise of complete reconciliation. It is in this way that the reconciliation process of humanity with God through the paschal mysteries can be proposed as a paradigm of every Christian reconciliation.

Moreover, because in every innocent victim, it is Jesus Christ who is persecuted and violated, the process of reconciliation needs to take hold of that stand and become an actualization of the reconciliation of God himself with a particular community or individual. Jesus would like, through the victims, to revive the same experience of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation that create new individuals and communities for a particular time and locality. It is the imitation of God's way of proceeding, and at the same time, it is the actualization of the very process of God's reconciliation through the members of Christ's Mystical Body, a process that remains incomplete until the whole of humanity attains its eternal life.

g) The process of Christian reconciliation remains provisional. Christian reconciliation cannot reach its fulfillment in this world. Being a process of re-creating humanity fully reconciled with its God, it is the completion of salvation. Considering the brokenness of humanity in every period and place, whether past or present and how the future of humanity is

dependent on both, we are brought to humility before the huge task of reconciliation. It is a work of God through a human agency with many contingent parameters that are hard to predict and master. This makes reconciliation a continual and a provisional reality that will be only fulfilled at the end-time. The imperfection and finitude of the reality of our world always prevent humanity alone from fully receiving salvation. However, we are required to work in such conditions but, at the same time, are convinced of the completeness of the process of reconciliation at the consummation of the world by God in Christ. In the meantime, while reconciliation acts as a curative process, our efforts also can be oriented towards a preemptive endeavor that would not only deter the violence but also tentatively foster the installation of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus Christ. The Church is well positioned for such a noble mission.

In fact, the best way to address violence and its subsequent devastations would be to achieve the absence of violence and conflicts. In the effort to look for the perennial solution to the problem of violence, the idea of preemptive strategies becomes imperative. The project of peace to replace violence in a world of conflicts would be the *life-project* desired by all nations. Though evil cannot be eliminated, violence can still be reduced and even anticipated and hence taken care of beforehand. That is why the *culture of peace* is proposed in order to deter evil and work as an antidote to violence.

5.2. The Fostering of a *Culture of Peace* as an Antidote to Violence and Prevention

All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers. [] Everyone can be an artisan of peace. (*Pope Francis, Fiftieth World Day of Peace, January 1, 2017, No.7*)

Peacebuilding is considered an urgent life-project aimed at deterring evil and violence which permeate humanity's reality around the globe. Reconciliation, understood as a curative solution that calls upon everyone's effort to address the harm caused by violence and the violation of human rights, is praiseworthy, but better than that, a preventive alternative should be sought. Peacebuilding can be understood as efforts and willingness to seek “to address the underlying causes of conflict, helping people to resolve their differences peacefully and lay the foundations to prevent future violence.”¹⁸² It is thought to be a suitable alternative to other endeavors of deterring violence and its devastations. When we consider the potential for violence by warfare and especially nuclear warfare, the urgency of fostering peacebuilding comes to the fore. Today this should be the foremost concern for every country.¹⁸³ An understanding of peace in the Church's view is necessary to be aware of what Catholic peacebuilding demands.

5.2.1. The Christian View of Peace¹⁸⁴

The mission of peacebuilding requires a proper understanding of the concept of peace. Peace can be apprehended as the 'state prevailing during the absence of war.' It can also be understood as 'harmonious relationships.' Peace is often described as 'the general security of public places.' At an individual level, peace can also signify, 'the absence of mental stress or anxiety.' Sometimes peace is said to be achieved when *a treaty to cease hostilities* is signed.

¹⁸² <https://www.c-r.org/who-we-are/why-peacebuilding/what-peacebuilding> (February 22, 2023, at 7:30 am)

¹⁸³ Monsignor Daniel F. Hoye, General Secretary NCCB/USCC, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response. A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, May 3, 1983. No. 122-161

¹⁸⁴ Conference of Latin American Bishops, “Peace.” In *Excerpts on justice, peace and poverty from final document*, (Medellín, Colombia, 6 September 1968), No.14.

Christian peace embraces all of these, but it is not only that. The Christian understanding of peace is a work of justice, a permanent task, and a fruit of love.

To seek peace means to seek to bring about *justice*. Understood as the establishment of a just order, peace is an environment where human dignity is recognized and respected. It allows human persons to fulfill themselves as they strive to satisfy their legitimate aspirations wholistically. It is a social order where personal freedom is guaranteed, and responsibility is exercised to attain integral development to transform a person into an authentic agent of his/her own history. Therefore, any disturbance to such order constitutes an obstacle to peace. However, the crucial issue is not to prevent such disturbances but rather to create and install new world order, given the fact that it is rare to find a nation where a just social order is perfectly provided for the entire community in holistic ways.

Peace is also a constant effort to maintain such a social order. It involves the permanent task of informing, forming, and transforming humanity's attitude and mindset as well as working towards the conversion of hearts to meet the real challenges of a society that threatens the just order. It is also a matter of changing structures so that the integral development of both men and women of every walk of life finds support and protection by rights that are upheld and not through sporadic and random privileges. Given this perspective, the installation and sustainability of just order and hence peace can neither be brought about through passivity nor conformity. It is not a static achievement nor an acquisition, gained once and for all. It is the fruit of sustained efforts and ingenuity to adapt oneself to new conditions and challenges of history marked with rapid and profound mutations. Achieving authentic peace always entails struggles, innovation, and creativity, as well as constant success. Hence, peace is not something that we can

find but a reality that must be built. Therefore, the Christian person can be justly called an artisan of peace.

Lastly, the true essence of peace is love, both vertical and horizontal; love of God and love of fellow human persons. We cannot have genuine peace unless love inhabits the hearts of human persons. The interesting fact is that all human persons, because of the imprint of God's image upon them, are capable of such love irrespective of their religions or philosophies of life. However, for Christians, Revelation places the reference of this love and its subsequent fruit in Jesus Christ, who embodies the perfection for which they strive and invites all persons to imitate Him. He is the Prince of peace, and through his death and resurrection, he reconciled all of humanity and indeed all of creation to God and manifested, *ipso facto*, his fraternity and solidarity for humanity. Therefore, peace is the expression of true fraternity among persons. Authentic solidarity cannot be effective if it is not inspired by Christ, who gives us peace that the world can neither give nor take from us. He, himself, is the Peace for which the world is longing. As artisans of peace, Christians should always be working to cultivate peace, remembering that the peace and love required are to be found in Jesus Christ. As artisans of peace, they must strive to cultivate peace and love in their hearts and then become missionaries of peace and love in the world, most importantly, by the witness of their own lives. Receiving the love and peace of God in one's heart and becoming reconciled with God is the foundation of inner and social peace. It is, therefore, noteworthy to see that true peace is subordinated to God's relations. Rejection of God implies a rejection of the peace of God and subsequently condemns society to experience the absence of true peace.

Though the complete, true peace of God for all of humanity may only be found in the eschaton, efforts to bring about the culture of peace are needed for temporal needs. Three areas

are key factors to peacebuilding, and they need to be owned and adapted to the different realities of various nations.

5.2.2. Urgent Areas that Need Special Attention for a Peacebuilding¹⁸⁵ Endeavor

Though all nations need to achieve peacebuilding because the world is interconnected, the efforts to invest in different localities are not equal in magnitude. Depending on the historical background and the current situation of countries, their respective needs to reach a satisfactory social order are different. However, there are some salient features common to countries of the same category. The developing countries, which will be our main concern, share almost the same past challenges, live similar struggles to develop, and to some extent, they have common prospects. The country of our interest is Rwanda; however, most so-called third-world countries find themselves in a similar situation. Hence the three main areas that need serious consideration might be of interest to all of them. Those areas are the *purification of memory*, *leadership issues*, and *education*.

5.2.2.1. Peacebuilding and the *Purification of Memory*¹⁸⁶ of a Community

The great majority of so-called third-world countries share the colonial period as their immediate past. This period left several problems that need serious attention to move on with a smooth pace to integral development of each country's citizens. The colonial period caused inner wounds, handicapped the economy, and caused existential anxiety that kept persons and nations

¹⁸⁵ In this thesis, Peacebuilding is touched on in general. However, there is a distinctiveness of Catholic Peacebuilding informed by Catholic Tradition and teachings and it is not a particular concern in this thesis. For more on this distinctiveness, one can see: Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers, (Eds.) *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010).

¹⁸⁶ What I hope to do in future is to take what I have done in this thesis and contribute to an articulation of a theology of purification of memory.

below their fullest potential. In addition to that, neo-colonialism seems to be a rampant reality in these countries. The practices of peacebuilding should consider the immediate challenges of their violent histories, starting with the colonial devastations and dealing with their multifaceted evil effects. The steps taken toward the purification of memory of a community, (or precisely of a country) must also include the process of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the unity of the community where the social fabric has been frayed. This entails restorative justice and even readiness to face moral dilemmas.¹⁸⁷ Those moral dilemmas include national realities as well as international issues.

On a national level, the purification of memory cannot bypass the entanglement of the roles of all the intervenors in the problems (impairing the collective memory) of the country and their subsequent effects. For instance, the purification of memory in Rwanda would entail addressing the following main issues: the problem of colonialism and religious missions, the problem of identity and belonging, the problem of oppression and persecution, the problem of violence and killings, the problem of the Genocide and its consequences, and the problem of refugees and citizenship. Rwandans experienced various effects of these problems during the colonial period through the 1994 Genocide. Now that national unity and reconciliation is the concern of the country, it is necessary to confront such history and recognize each protagonist's role: colonialists, missionaries and the Church in Rwanda, and finally Rwandans themselves through their leaders as well as the roles of individual persons. A systematic process of purification of such painful and pain-inducing memory would include healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Practically speaking, there should be individuals who would stand on behalf of all

¹⁸⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Peacebuilding, A Practical Strategy of Hope." In *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding*, 325-363. (1517 Media: Media Fortress Press, 2019), 326-57.

protagonists of the wrongdoing that caused such transgenerational harm and recognize their past faults and crimes. Subsequent appropriate steps might be taken as well.

On the international level, three steps are very important in the purification of memory. Firstly, there should be an end to harmful interferences in the governing of third-world countries, commonly known as neo-colonialism.¹⁸⁸ Such countries need equal respect in international politics and economics. The developed countries, especially the former Western colonizers, ought to recognize the sovereignty of the developing countries and intervene in bilateral relations, by trying to help them without an indirect motive of selfishness. This selfishness ends up most of the time by extorting the wealth of poor countries, hence getting rich at their expense. It leads to extreme poverty and an endless struggle in the development journey.

Secondly, colonialism and even slavery are among the worst of the crimes that have caused human misery, especially in Africa and other developing countries. Their devastation is still felt, with great magnitude. As long as nothing is done by the superpower countries, at least by way of acknowledgment, there always will be unreconciled memories. Asking for an account of the perpetrators of the evils committed during those periods is a huge moral and judicial dilemma. However, recognition and asking for forgiveness by the pertinent authorities would be a springboard for fostering the process of healing and reconciliation for the painful memories. In this regard, restorative justice would bring a significant contribution to such a process. In fact, “restorative justice requires, at minimum, that we address the harms and needs of those harmed, hold those causing harm accountable to ‘put right’ those harms, and involve both of these parties

¹⁸⁸With Globalization, this phenomenon is taking on another dimension with the suppression of direct boundaries and of clear identification the colonizers. (Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., “Globalization and Reconciliation. Challenges to Mission.” In *Mission in The Third Millenium*, Ed. Robert Schreiter, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 132-4.)

as well as relevant communities in this process.”¹⁸⁹ It would be the best approach that may keep the dignity of each intervenor as the persons involved are mostly representative of the generations that inherited such historical realities and do not have any direct involvement in them. The crucial problem would be to find leaders who would hold this concern as a priority in developing countries. On the other hand, finding the required authorities to stand on behalf of the offenders remains a diplomatic issue that needs to be addressed. Thirdly, there should be a kind of reparations that benefits victims and tangibly impacts their lives positively.

5.2.2.2. Leadership as a Key Factor to Peacebuilding

Many developing countries move on at a slow pace, not because of a lack of resources, but instead because of the lack of sound leadership, specifically in terms of their heads of state and the need for stable governmental structures. Those countries have a high potential for material and human resources but lack coordinating leadership. Peacebuilding is not an exception. It cannot bypass sound leadership. As Richards & Engle state, “[l]eadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating an environment within which things can be accomplished.”¹⁹⁰ In this regard, a sound leader would be “a visionary, an educator, an innovator, a motivator, a communicator, a facilitator, and an advisor.”¹⁹¹

Installing a culture of peace requires a leader who can assess the situation of a nation, critically analyze its past, shortlist its priorities, set objectives, generate strategies, and facilitate the implementation of such a life-project. Good leadership will not only implement peacebuilding, but it will also set up structures and systems that will guarantee the sustainability

¹⁸⁹ Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice, Revised and Updated*. (Good Books, 2015), 35.

¹⁹⁰ [https://www.bing.com/video/what is leadership](https://www.bing.com/video/what%20is%20leadership) (Accessed on May 1, 2022)

¹⁹¹ [https://www.bing.com/video/ Pallas Athena](https://www.bing.com/video/Pallas+Athena) (Accessed on May 1, 2022)

of every initiative aimed at creating a culture peace. It is in this way that formative and re-formative social practices can help in changing the mindset and opening new horizons for new approaches. Two categories of protagonists in this endeavor should be taken into consideration because of their great contribution to peacebuilding: those are women (at all levels) and religious leaders.¹⁹² However, nothing can guarantee the growth of a culture of peace more than an increased awareness and ownership by the young generation. This normally will be achieved through education.

5.2.2.3. Education and Human Formation as the Backbone of the Culture of Peace

Peace and peacebuilding in developing countries and specifically in Rwanda should permeate the whole being of our people and our future generations. *"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."* (Nelson Mandela, July 16, 2003). All the ideals for peace lie in education, as Pope Francis also has confirmed.¹⁹³ Educational programs and the continuous formation of consciences about the priority of peace must be on the agenda for religious and governmental leaders. The educational system, formal and informal, must include compulsory peace programs. Peacebuilding should not be an initiative of some activists nor be left to optional clubs at schools. God, as the source of peace and all that is good, must also have a place in this peacebuilding process.¹⁹⁴ Hence, such education will aid in the integral development of humanity. This point is reinforced in accord with Pope Francis in his message of 55th World Day of Peace.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Cahill, *Peacebuilding A Practical Strategy of Hope*, 333-341.

¹⁹³ "LV World Day of Peace 2022 - Dialogue Between Generations, Education and Work: Tools for Building Lasting Peace | Francis," accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20211208-messaggio-55giornatamondiale-pace2022.html>.

¹⁹⁴ Hoye, General Secretary NCCB/USCC, *The Challenge of Peace*, No. 280-300.

¹⁹⁵ Pope Francis, *Dialogue Between Generations, Education and Work: Tools for Building Lasting Peace*.

This chapter has shown the ways in which reconciliation is a noble endeavor that ought to be carried out in the aftermath of violence or torn-apart relationships within a community. The secular approach to reconciliation presents laudable achievements in terms of justice, healing and elimination of violence's threats. In complementing this secular approach, the Christian approach to reconciliation has a broader vision and a wide range of resources. Taking the model of God Himself in reconciling the sinful humanity, it aims at holistic healing and integral development of humanity. Though it is very difficult to implement such an approach in every context, specifically in non-Christian milieu, the Christian approach to reconciliation can be a model to aptly adapt for different religious traditions because it follows naturally God paradigm, the source of all that is good. However, peacebuilding as an endeavor to eradicate violence and conflicts, ought to be at the heart of every nation in order to prepare a better future for generations to come. The Church needs to take this as a new way of evangelization that would advance the Kingdom of God, the Reign of peace.

CONCLUSION

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.¹⁹⁶

This opening statement from *Gaudium et Spes* gives expression to “the assurance of solidarity in suffering with all humanity” as attributed to the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ in the messages revealed during the apparitions at Kibeho. The messages take on even greater significance in light of suffering that is predictable and hence avoidable, like the cases of violence and conflicts in Rwanda, where the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ could not passively stand by and watch their children heading to their ruin. According to the visionaries and countless witnesses, this why, as a token of their solicitude for the fate of humanity, the Sorrowful Mother appeared at Kibeho in Rwanda for eight years (1981-1989). For the faithful in Rwanda and other regions of the world, these apparitions are believed to be a trustworthy confirmation that heaven commits to work with humanity, by proposing the sure means for advancing the Reign of God on earth. Therein lies the rationale for the unwavering solidarity manifested to humanity at Kibeho.

On account of the unprecedented suffering that has taken place in Rwanda and its subregion, culminating in a unique Genocide and its aftermath, the subsequent suffering was met with tremendous solidarity on the part of the Sorrowful Mother and the Crucified Christ. The apparitions at Kibeho also became a means for addressing the entire world with salutary messages that hopefully would prove to be a source for conversion and transformation for a world torn apart by violence and human sinfulness. However, the messages of Kibeho, when

¹⁹⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

considered in the historical context of Rwanda, constitute an authentic *sign of the times*¹⁹⁷ whereby humanity is challenged to think seriously about the meaning of true happiness and the ways to preserve such happiness by confronting the mystery of evil and the mystery of suffering.

Since the colonial period, suffering and death hovered over Rwanda and climaxed with the Genocide in 1994.¹⁹⁸ These realities left a lot of unanswered questions in the hearts of those who entreated God to give a clearer response to their anguished pleas as they lived in the hope of being saved by a loving and mighty God. The theodicy question, rising from the Genocide and its aftermath, found a loud echo amidst the dangerous memories of Rwandans. One of the motives ascribed to the presence of the Sorrowful Mother in the midst of such suffering was to provide an answer to the lingering question of theodicy. At a time when the silence of God could only be understood by God himself, the Sorrowful Mother manifested a compassionate presence by bringing a confirming assurance that God was silently present in all of trials and sufferings of humanity through various visible signs of His compassionate love. However, in the case of Rwanda and the Genocide that happened therein, more than a visible sign was given, as God himself was present, in *his true imprint*, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3), through his ever-actual passion, death, and resurrection.

As various apparitions throughout history attest, whenever the Blessed Virgin Mary reveals herself to the People of God, she reveals her Son. This is the reason why, throughout the messages of the Kibeho apparitions, where suffering holds a paramount role, the Sorrowful Mother made the Passion of her Son, to be the core stimulus for the desperately needed

¹⁹⁷ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Byanafashe et Rutayisire, dir., *Histoire du Rwanda*, 161-4. (In fact, prior to colonial period, Rwandans were in a satisfactory social cohesion).

conversion from evil to good. Christ himself, aware of humanity's reluctance to fully enter into the mystery of salvation, could not abandon those who succumbed to the devastations of evil and endured the consequential sufferings associated with that Genocide. That is why, through the Paschal Mystery, as captured in the symbol of the *Cross*, was a curative means for healing the wounds of Rwandans. Among victims and offenders alike, Jesus Christ meticulously identified himself with them through his life and ministry. United with each person in their suffering, Jesus himself was sharing in their suffering. As members of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, the tremendous solidarity of the head with its members, is also shared by the Sorrowful Mother who appeared in Kibeho to highlight the importance of faith and its implementation, especially in times of uncertainty, violence and suffering.

Viewed from the perspective expressed above, Kibeho remains a source of inspiration for the Church, which needs to proclaim the mystery of redemption with urgency and solicitude. Jesus Christ, for whom the coincidence of his Paschal Mystery and the suffering of Rwandans, especially during the Genocide's commemoration period each year, has a pertinent message for the entire suffering people of God that has been accentuated because of that Genocide. For the many people who long for a much-needed reorientation and a new interpretation of such striking coincidences, juxtaposing the convergence of Holy Week and/or Easter time with the commemoration of the Genocide, has been a source of consolation. However, for others it has been a source of conflict within the Paschal liturgies, especially when mourning overshadows the resurrection joys and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.¹⁹⁹ For instance, in 2023, the

¹⁹⁹ The liturgical celebrations of paschal feasts so many times conflicted with the mourning of the commemoration week of the genocide against the Tutsi. In some instances, the Church needed to celebrated sacraments as required (mostly involving festive environment) while the commemoration organization wanted it shut down.

commemoration day coincided with Good Friday, and there could not be a better sign of healing and hope for the crucified people of God than to have their suffering likened to the suffering of the Son of God. So far, the message of the Church regarding Rwanda bears hopes in the Paschal Mystery,²⁰⁰ but it still needs to generate and engage spiritual and solidarity practices conducive to holistic healing. It is here where theology needs to intervene and help people to encounter God in the midst of their sufferings. For theologians in Rwanda and beyond, the case of Rwanda discloses the urgent need for further reflection on the real pastoral questions, and for this purpose, they need to think alternately if the usual means seem unfruitful.

The usual discourse, which in many ways could be termed a victors' theology or the theology of the bourgeois - to borrow the terms of Metz-²⁰¹ is one of the theologies offered to the people, but not in ways that are satisfying to those in mourning. Such a theology seems to take the mystery of Good Friday as a transitional moment to celebrate the Paschal joys of the resurrection. Predictably, conflicts arise when Church leaders fail to adequately make connections between the *crucified people* of Rwanda and the Crucified Son of God. To this end, there needs to be an awareness and a willingness on the part of the leaders and members of the Church to meet the hopes and needs of the people across generations. It is in this way that the messages of Kibeho will continue to remind Rwandans of their ongoing need for healing and reconciliation. Indeed, the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ suffer again in the sufferings of the Rwandans.

²⁰⁰ Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, *The message from the Bishops of Catholic Church in Rwanda intended for the Christians on the Paschal Feast*. 2.

²⁰¹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 48-59.

As long as Rwandans are heavily leaden by the dangerous memory of the Genocide along with its preceding context as well as its aftermath, the Sorrowful Mother and Jesus Christ will continue to offer their assurance of solidarity in suffering. For them, there are no survivors or offenders, for everyone is in need of healing and reconciliation. The Sorrowful Mother's message calls upon adults and the aged, whether in Rwanda or outside Rwanda, to purify their memories, heal their wounds, and live in the promise of hope that the Paschal Mystery offers. To the younger generation, the Sorrowful Mother's message is one of invitation, that they may remember the past correctly and cherish the hopes for the future that are entrusted to their care. To all, the Sorrowful Mother calls for a renewed life for a reconciled people, where the Gospel of peace and justice becomes a real experience for everyone. As the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho gave voice to the “the Gospel of the Cross,”²⁰² today, her messages give voice to the same Gospel but this time with an emphasis on the dimensions of healing, reconciliation, and peace.

For the Church to embrace and implement such a mission, she needs only to emulate the example of Jesus Christ, who, in all aspects, became Incarnate²⁰³ and one with the people, especially those who suffer in any way. Likewise, the Sorrowful Mother at Kibeho reveals her solidarity with all of her children, especially when they find themselves in the most crucial circumstances of life. Following the example of Jesus Christ and the Sorrowful Mother, a commitment to pastoral solicitude is urgently needed, along with an awareness on the part of priests and lay leaders that their ministries must focus not only on curative ministerial practices but also investments of time and energy in a life-project of cooperating with the social order to eradicate evil and violence and all other sources of suffering.

²⁰² Sinayobye, *Mère du Verbe à Kibeho*, 403.

²⁰³ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 32.

Despite the numerous themes addressed in this thesis, it is far from being exhaustive in its scope. In response to an invitation to rethink the relevance of our theologies in the face of immediate pastoral challenges, especially those requiring alternative visions and solutions, I have been mindful of my own context of Rwanda. The suffering of Rwandans who have inherited various crosses as a consequence of the Genocide is but one example. The thesis also is a theological reflection on the ways in which the Paschal Mystery can be understood and interpreted so that in the midst of their various experiences of anguish and sorrow, the people will come to a deeper realization of the meaning of their salvation in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. Given the ecclesial and social challenges of Rwanda, this thesis also examined the significance of the annual civil commemoration of the Genocide in light of the Paschal Mystery and the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, through which every experience of human life can find some resonance. In conclusion, the final chapter builds on the various theological issues and historical realities presented in the first four chapters, and takes as its focus the subject of peacebuilding and its significance, not only for the Church, her ministers and the people of God, but also for civil society. Practically speaking, and mindful of the exigencies of today and of the future, the Church must lead the way in creating and sustaining a culture of peacebuilding in union with the Queen of Peace and the Prince of Peace. To this end, the Church must be a visible sign of peace on earth, building the Kingdom of God which is the Kingdom of Peace.

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