# Healing and reconciliation of trauma – the role of the Church in Rwanda

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## Biography and Theme Introduction

- Rev. Maurice Rukimbira works with the Anglican Diocese of Rwanda as a pastor. He has been involved in social ministry of the church since the 1994 genocide.
- He shares how the church raises awareness over 3-5 day seminars, teaching about forgiveness both for victims and perpetrators – emphasizing that to heal, it is important to forget and to forgive. It is a methodology of discipleship training 30 people at a time who in turn give training of trainers of other groups

For people suffering trauma, a direct negative impact is on production. People do not see why to engage in productive work like farming or trades when they have lost all their family members. They think of revenge and so the security organs have to be involved. The Church is left to decide, 'What can we do?'

**CONTENT:** We understand that we need to help Rwandans to envisage what sort of Rwanda they want to see for themselves and their children. We explore what is common among the divided people who were once at one, but now have been given ethnic identities which are basically myths and stereotypes which have no link to reality. Traditionally Rwandans venerated one God, lived in mixed communities of Hutus, Tutsis and Twa who were hard to differentiate before the colonial era. They had one language and a sense of community before

we taught about our differences and given identity cards. Our identity was described by what we owned, and some inconsistent physical characteristics. This teaching prepared people for conflict and confusion. We need now to dispel the stereotypes and myth. We need to stop believing what we were taught – the lie which we respect which we received from our colonizers. We need to discuss about knowing God according to our own culture. We need to reconcile to God. When we do this we start to understand how to use freedom, not to kill or blame God for not preventing the machete from its terrible havoc on our families. People know the role of God in family conflicts. God understands human suffering. People, too, need to understand other people's suffering – that of their neighbors. People need to learn forgiveness. I can forgive you but I can tell you what you did to me, not feeling guilty for revealing the criminal acts. Imprisonment can be to protect the perpetrator from retribution, or to protect society from more injustice.

We need to see reconciliation not as a project but a process of long-term. "Do not even believe what people say about you." We can re-engage in intermarriage. My son was asked by someone, are you a Tutsi or a Hutu, and he said, "That was before, history – but now we are Rwandans."

**METHODOLOGY:** We undertake to raise awareness over 3-5 day seminars teaching about forgiveness both for victims and perpetrators – emphasizing that to heal, it is important to forget and to forgive. It is a methodology of discipleship. We train 30 people and give them to form groups of 3 to train another group of 30. We later give advanced

training to the first 30 to give them skills of facilitation how to be trainers. We give them to understand to listen, and try to understand, and not to have a conclusion about the way training should be done in all places. We call this capacity building.

**TESTIMONIES:** 'Mal partage' = a shared problem is well digested, in other words, sharing of the suffering of others heals you. There is hope of healing as people share experiences and testimonies so others have hope of healing.

**CHALLENGES:** Logistics to organize training can be expensive. We try to minimize them by using church buildings or sitting on the grass. We encounter people who do not want to heal. Some think that if they consider forgetting and forgiving, they will betray themselves and/or their families' memory. If people do not want to invest in healing, they cannot move on.

**Q – How do you help the victim and the perpetrator to re-enter into community life?**

It depends; if the community identifies with the victim, they may not want to forgive the perpetrator. If the community identifies with the perpetrator, they may sense betrayal in the process, as their common deeds might become known. It is only when they see forgiveness in action, and working together, that the fruit of their cooperation is seen and others desire it. For example, should a victim leave children with a perpetrator, in order to go to town to attend to business?

**Q – Where is the cross in this? Do not people need to realize their mistake, admit it, say sorry, take action such as an apology, which leads to forgiveness?**

This is what has happened in the gacaca (traditional) courts. However, this may not be enough for forgiveness to happen. Some hearts are of stone. During the genocide the attempt was to kill all so that no one would remain to reveal the story. If there were no survivors, it is difficult for this approach to occur. If the victims have fled to refugee camps or are not present, it cannot happen; as if your dead father should be forgiven…you can be in trouble with a dead person. So Jesus comes in; we remind people that Joseph forgave his brothers and Stephen his persecutors. The work of Jesus on the cross was also evident in how he prayed for his persecutors. As an exercise, we bind people together with a rope, a victim and a perpetrator. They must move around in a role play, to market, to church, to school, to bed; people realize that they hurt themselves by being roped to these people. Bring your problems to the cross, cut the ropes, and leave these people there. Bring your memory to the cross, the technique to put it in a container and lock it, or burn it.