

## **Joseph NYAMUTERA's story**

### **1. Family background**

My family is big. I am the sixth of 11, plus 4 who died before my mother gave birth to the one who is supposed to be the firstborn! It is clear that I am one of those middle children who get almost zero attention. I grew up with a sense of worthlessness.

We grew up seeing our father working hard to feed all of us. I am thankful that my father was very caring on the physical side. He did all to provide for this big family. I remember no day when we skipped a meal. I came to learn later in the healing and reconciliation seminar that I was entitled to love, significance or worth and peace (internal) according to God's purposes. I received none.

I grew up in strict, military discipline. I would receive tons of insults, threats and kicks at the smallest mistake. I remember once I lost a small lock of the door and had to spend days in 'exile' in neighbours' homes so that the anger of Dad would cool down. When I came back home, I remember the amount of kicks I got, still very young (12 years), trying my best to escape in vain. I can feel in my back the bang and the pain when I remember.

My mother? Very sophisticated character! She could accuse me to dad in a minute, and when I was being crucified, she was the one to cry 'Let my child alone!' as if she was not the cause! Poor lady, I believe she wanted the best for us but we could not see that then.

It is later, when I did some research to understand why there was so much bitterness and anger in my parents, that I understood that my father's parents' divorce played much in that. He (Grandpa,) a devout Catholic, got rid of her (Grandma) when he discovered she was deeply involved in witchcraft. Indeed she was a witchdoctor helping people but was also believed to bring all kinds of curses on the village. My grandpa remarried but the new grandma was not very kind to my father, who left very young to earn his own living, working for others. In brief, my father is a self-made man who does not believe in weakness, sickness, depending on others, asking for help and rescue. For him, life is so cruel that children have to be prepared for the worst. 'There is no-one for you when you are sick, never try to call for pity or compassion'. I remember one day that I had high fever and could not go to school. He just stood by my bed and threatened to kick me 'if I continued to pretend' I was sick. He counted one, two and I jumped from my bed before receiving a blow. Those were not empty threats I swear to you! He thought the tactic was helpful to raise his children into tough material to face an unjust, uncaring world.

I have never heard my father congratulating me or asking me why I was sad. In fact, we were not allowed to cry, even if we suffered injustice. I have rarely heard my father calling me by name, though my name is the same as his father's (Nyamutera Joseph).

I am not saying this to dishonor my father, because I still remember some signs of kindness in him. Besides this, he was very clever, with visible leadership skills and a character that commanded respect. He was appreciated by all the community. People brought cases of dispute before him to solve. He was very wise, a great man indeed that I admire a lot. But I still suffer the consequences of that tough upbringing in terms of relating to leadership, especially when it is directive, insensitive,

authoritative. God has redeemed some of my family background. Something my wife can enjoy, I am not a demanding person, also my colleagues have fed back to me that I am a very determined guy, not abandoning easily. I can persevere in time of madness when everybody seems hopeless.

As to ethnic prejudices, thank God for my parents! I never heard my dad or mum inciting us to hate, even to think negatively about Tutsis. In fact we got more trouble with Hutu who considered my father a traitor because almost all his friends were Tutsis. I remember my father giving us a huge banana-stick or bag of potatoes to take to the Rugomboka (Tutsi doctor) or the Gaparayi and other Tutsis. We almost got targeted during the Genocide because of his open opposition to the Habyarimana regime and the wicked acts of the Hutu militia, including killing, stealing and raping Tutsi before the Genocide. My dad used to curse the militia and was always prophesying calamities and God's vengeance. This was very dangerous, so dangerous that during the Genocide we felt insecure and blamed him for that.

After my involvement with the reconciliation ministry, hearing other young Hutu confessing all the hatred they swallowed from their parents, I retrospectively thank my dad and mum for not poisoning us. Today I should be in prison for murder of Tutsi or even supporting openly the killings.

My research into the past of my parents revealed that my paternal Grandpa was given to a Tutsi young prince called Gatanazi to escort him to his constituency, the Kingogo, at the border with Gitarama. As the prince was young, my Grandpa almost ruled for him though he was Hutu. He had Hutu slaves himself. He was the favorite of Gatanazi and received large gifts of land and cows from his boss. In the end his manner (noble) became so Tutsi that in 1959, when the Tutsi monarch was overthrown, my Grandpa also had to flee because he was hunted by other Hutu who considered him to be a traitor. My Grandpa came back later, dispossessed of his lands and cows. He grew up with bitterness, a Hutu hating the Hutu. Not surprisingly, my father picked that up when he was very young.

Does it mean that I went through the trial of the genocide free of prejudice and hatred?

## **2. Salvation and ethnic prejudices**

I finally got it, the poison of ethnic prejudices when I was in my 18<sup>th</sup> year. The other boys decided to update me with their version of the past. 'The Tutsi are imperialist, they forced us to carry them on our backs, to work for them, they despised us, called us stupid. They were the masters and we the slaves'. Though my Hutu grandpa also benefited from the hard forced labor, I started to believe 'we' were cheated. That was not the end. 'Their female are lazy and immoral, you never get a child because they sleep with their brother when they desire a baby, they will dismiss your family and bring in all their relatives to enjoy the work of your hands'. I think now that many Hutu ladies could spread this because there is always a sense of jealousy. It is acknowledged that the Tutsi ladies are more beautiful physically than their Hutu counterparts. For a young man the last part is terrible poison that affects the choice in case you think of dating.

In 1990, I came to Lord and everything is supposed to be new (II Cor 5:17). I came to learn that God only deal with what we bring to him. Most of the Rwandan Christians have never learnt from their pastors that there is anything wrong about thinking negatively about the other ethnic groups, at least before the genocide. In 1990 the war started when the Tutsi-led army forced their way back from exile after all the attempts to arrange their peaceful repatriation failed, the old demons of 'they come back to lord it over us' was a normal reaction in many Hutus including born-again Christians who prayed fervently that God will deal with 'the enemy'. I was confused! One day I prayed, as everybody else, against the return of Tutsi from exile, the next day I refused to celebrate with many others when a prominent Tutsi commander died on the frontline. My understanding of the Christian love for everybody and my family upbringing could sometimes help me stand 'clean' in the turmoil of the war and hatred propaganda in the media and around. I was confused, and confused everybody even myself. I remember when I was praying that God will give me the wife of my life, I found myself wondering 'what will happen if God gives you a Tutsi wife? What if everything they told you about them is true?' I ended up giving some guidelines to God about the ethnic group of my future partner! I realized I was still carrying the scars or 'pre judgment' within me. Many did not know where to put me. A Tutsi brother came to me recently to remind me that one Sunday in '93, I dared to shock the congregation by asking them to stop calling the Tutsi RPF soldiers 'cockroaches' because one day God will bring them back to their nation, that among them we will hug brothers and sisters in Christ, that some of them will join our choirs, some will preach and lead us as pastors. But, the next day when the radio reported that a group was Hutu were killed in an ambush, I could go back to my prejudices and curse the 'enemy'! It is in this total mix-up that the news reported 'They killed our President, if we Hutu don't defend ourselves, they will kill us all!'

Through the heat of the genocide, I knew that was an excuse, that many young people were only expecting some kind of excuse, because many were already armed and intoxicated at the maximum.

I imagined straight away some Tutsi will be killed but not at the extent of what happened. I know some young Hutu killed because they liked it, the landmine of strong prejudice combined with political propaganda just took them onto the streets in mobs, in collective fear and hatred to kill man, woman, children in the most unmatched creativity in cruelty.

Some young Hutu were forced to follow unwillingly, some were even threatened to pay with their lives in case they refused. I did not want to be among those caught up in the collective madness and chose to hide though not hunted.

Things became complicated when the radio announced that whoever hide a Tutsi will be killed as accomplice. Some Hutu were killed in acts of heroism trying to help a Tutsi friend in hiding to escape or only providing food.

And then, one of the biggest challenges of my life was brought by a sister in the Lord of my choir. 'Diane was thrown in the mass grave among many corpses, left for dead, with many sores of machetes, she is hiding in our banana plantation, what do we do for her?' Diane was almost two meters tall, one of these typical Tutsi you can not pretend is a cousin from far away. I had to choose either to betray Diane and die in

shame and regret, or welcome her home and wait to die together because there was no glimpse of when the massacres will come to an end. Diane was still a baby in the Lord who came to Christ through my ministry. There was no question to let her down. But as I and Esther (my wife) were living with parents, they also had to accept to 'die' with us in case Diane was discovered. I am grateful to both my father and mum for the decision that they took.

The brother waited until it was dark and brought Diane in. She was emotionally dead, spiritually stuck. I am grateful to my mum and Esther who were good at traditional medicine who used all kind of leaves to treat her sores until she recovered inner life. We prayed with her, encouraged her until we found a friend who took her through the border, between bloodthirsty patrols of militia, until Diane got safely to Goma in Congo. Diane is now a beautiful mum to 3 wonderful kids. As my father prophesied the unthinkable happened, the tiny Tutsi-led army received from the God of justice wings to win battle after battle until my hometown fell into their hands. As the hatred propaganda turned into the invitation to all the Hutu to flee from the 'cruel cockroaches' who would kill any Hutu in their way, a general fear took all of my family and hundreds of thousands of others to the other side of the border into Congo as many remember the horrible July 1994 into Congo.

### **3. God's promise and faithfulness in the refugee camp;**

Cholera welcomed us and I myself, Esther and most of my extended family almost died. After my father, my own firstborn son Gospel, my sister Alphonsine and ten thousands of men or women were piled up as wood, then taken to mass-graves as rubbish, all the shame and guilt of belonging to a tribe of mass-murderers on the run trying to escape justice, were replaced by anger and pointing the finger of accusation against God and Tutsis.

When life started to normalize, we found refuge in the biggest camp in Goma (1,000,000 people), where God was trying to sort us out with some difficulty. Killers and innocent refugees were crowded together, thus crime was high among those who could not share their spoils fairly, or some young people feeling extremely powerful with their weapons could simply decide to take from the defenceless. The women paid a huge price, as rape became commonplace. Some women chose to 'seek protection' of the less wicked guys before they became 'bins' for all the bandits. The Congolese soldiers made it even worse by partnering with the militia in dispossessing people. It was a lawless jungle, where you prayed for protection to Jehovah Sabaoth in your plastic tent and meant it. The strongest controlled the stock of food from the UN, the rest had to buy from them. When you asked for provision to Jehovah Jireh, it was not just a religious rite, you had to expect the God really answer! Sometimes you had to pray for rain to have water and then remember that many were still laying down under the moon without any shelter. How confusing it was for God!

The book of Exodus became very real suddenly. I do not regret that I spent 2 years in the camp. One of the things I learnt once for all, is that God is Who the Bible says He is. His promises are true. I trust him. My tomorrows are certain with him. The other lesson is that I will always trust Him for direction and move at His pace. I will not give all the details that led me to these helpful conclusions.

The situation became more stable with the take-over of the camp by the UN soldiers, a more organized food-distribution and accessible health-posts. The Lord even went as far as blessing us with more food than others so that we had enough to share with

the poorest members of our congregation, a paid job, Bazungu friends from many nations. Some compassionate British friends raised funds to get us out of the pit and sent my family to a Bible college in Kenya. For us it was like from hell to Heaven! I will not tell the joy, the excitement of leaving, but also the sorrow of leaving behind our dear small congregation. We gave away all our small belongings. I cannot describe the disappointment when the Kenyan immigration at Nairobi airport sent us back to the Congolese military because our travel documents did not match the requirements. Can you see me and Esther the next day back in the camp, friends bringing back the items we gave them! I simply associated God with masochism, cynicism and being a poor comedian. It was so difficult to swallow that I decided to 'punish' God by decreasing the amount of activities that pleased Him. Retrospectively, I thank God because He has redeemed that by positioning me where I am today doing what I am doing. But I got the lesson once for all, I never move when I am not sure God is with me!

Now back to the main story, the question among the refugees was how this precarious situation would come to an end?

Back to humiliation, injustice and hopelessness. Some tired refugees chose to go back, despite the continuous propaganda suggesting that the current regime killed whoever went back. Youth, recruited by the former army-commanders started training military envisaging they would fight their way back. Already the Vice-president, Paul Kagame, was threatening to dismantle the refugee camps. Though I didn't believe in violent return, and condemned those who prepared it, I hated secretly Kagame, though I knew my Bible declares whoever hates to be a killer. I wished these suicidal youth could simply disturb his sleep at least! I held him responsible for our misery.

Once while I was sleeping I had a dream (for those who believe God talks through visions and dreams) that we were back in Rwanda, that Paul Kagame was the President. My Pentecostal belief took it for sure that God had appointed Kagame to become President, that He had declared useless all those efforts some Hutu youth were led to believe in that they would take the country back through violence. I called some people in my congregation and revealed to them that whenever the opportunity comes our way, we shall go back. In October 96, the RPF troops invaded Congo, & dismantled the refugee camp. Those who took my advice and others who were discerning, especially those who had no blood on their hands, made their way back to Rwanda.

Though I had heard so much about the RPF, it was the first time I actually saw RPF soldiers. Though the government did its best to guarantee our safety and to make us feel welcome, some angry Tutsi simply kidnapped our brother and killed him. Until today, we do not know where he was buried. All of us were so discouraged that we could not envisage any future. Our only dream was to find a passport and run away. The church was not very encouraging, either, because people who came from long exiles, Tutsi from Congo and Burundi, could not see any difference between militia and any Hutu. The attempts of Hutu militia to take control of the Northern part of Rwanda only exacerbated the tensions and suspicion. Our prayer came down to 'Lord, keep us alive for today!' Our strong conviction was that 'our time is over', there was no future, no blessing, no life at all for the returnees.

I remember, once I placed a job application in a Christian organization, to be told by the Muzungu that someone on her staff advised her not to take returnees if she did not want to get into trouble! Of course I had no clue of what a wounded heart can produce. I am thankful to God that I did not get a job in that organization, because the Lord had a better plan for my family. I just want to mention that later, ethnic tensions arose in that organization, such that the leaders almost had to close it down. Anastase and I were invited to facilitate a reconciliation workshop for the staff. Without going into the details, God dealt deeply with the lady, the cause of tension, and the chief of the opposition until the point that they exploded into tears, asking the team to forgive them for their conflict which brought serious divisions along ethnic lines in the whole team. God was happy that day, the staff rejoiced that there would be bread on the table for their children for some more years (the NGOs have not closed until now), but most of all, I was moved when the lady invited us into her home to give us a treat, thanking us, & calling us wonderful names. I felt a bit like the Joseph of the Bible standing before his brothers who sold him before he revealed himself to them! This is how 'God redeems bad circumstances'. Though I did not bring out into the open that I remembered her, I reiterated my forgiveness to her.

To come back to the story, there was no hope for light, joy, and a future. The church was not a refuge for the returnees at all, as some Tutsi Pastors, (fortunately not all), suspected every Hutu to be a killer. Maybe they were right in that attitude, how should they know who killed and who did not? Some could pour their bitterness on you from the pulpit, distorting Bible verses to make a point or insinuate something.

Have you ever come to the point where everything you knew does not work? The promises of God, the reading of Scripture, even prayer at those moments seems to be powerless, just a lie. God Himself seems so far away that he becomes air. When I talk about being stuck in my spiritual journey, I always say that one day, I was born for the third time, after my physical birth and my second birth in Christ! How did this happen?

### **Journey to healing**

When I joined volunteers at my church that day, my intention was to help, cleaning the participants' dormitories where 'a seminar on trauma healing' was going to happen. I could not at all imagine that God was attracting me into his divine loving trap! As the attendance was low, my pastor invited me to fill the gap, just to encourage the 'muzungu' facilitator and her Tutsi interpreter.

I sat in the room, not very interested in what this little British lady, (Rhiannon), was saying, whose stature doesn't impress you at once! I immediately knew that the whole event was a parade to please the government or to spy out us, Hutu from the camp. I simply decided not to fall in the trap. I was the only participant understanding English, but I knew the tall Tutsi guy (Anastase) did not know this. My attention rose when some virulent Hutu shared their pain and suffering at the hands of some bitter Tutsi genocide survivors. I was simply shocked to hear Anastase literally interpreting to Rhiannon every bad thing Tutsis did to Hutu. How could Anastase 'betray' his ethnic group by telling all the truth these people were bringing into light? He could lie or change facts without fearing he would be understood by any other participants! This was the beginning of a long journey that gave birth to this book. My world of prejudices was shaken from the foundation. 'If this Tutsi can be honest, not a hypocrite, maybe there are other hundreds, maybe thousands'.

I will not give all the details about the workshop but the most interesting bit was about discovering God as a father. This had nothing to do with ethnicity, so I really received much healing from my harsh upbringing, and could forgive my father who did not receive love himself. My wife Esther and our 5 kids should be very grateful that I have chosen to be a father after God's image, loving, patient, caring. I will not hide from you that sometimes my own father's character can still 'overtake' me, meaning that healing is a long journey.

The last thing I could expect occurred the last day, when suddenly Dr Rhiannon, after sharing some teachings about confessing the sins of our people, took me by surprise. This is exactly what she declared: 'I want to stand before you as a representative of Europeans who came to Africa, stole your wealth, turned you into slaves who had to be taken to foreign lands on terrible ships to be sold as things. I want also to confess the sin of exploitation during the colonial time; you were also deprived of your dignity. Your culture was considered rubbish. I want also to stand as a missionary in need of your forgiveness because though missionaries came with good intentions, they still conveyed a lie, that we bazungu are superior. In the end I want to apologize for the role of Europe in planting the seed of divisions which led to the terrible genocide which plunged Rwanda into terrible suffering'.

As if that was not enough, then came Anastase who stood before us to ask our forgiveness: 'I am here in need of your forgiveness for the sin of my forefathers during the Tutsi monarchy. We have mistreated your people. We took you for granted. We were masters and you were slaves. We despised you, we insulted your dignity as human beings. I stand before you to ask your forgiveness on behalf of my people'.

The Hutu in the room couldn't stand this! Everybody was moved. Some were in tears. No Hutu could expect to be asked for forgiveness after the terrible genocide perpetrated by our people!

People went forward to extend forgiveness. A lot of hugging, crying, asking for forgiveness culminated into worship, praise, singing and dancing together.

I left the place with my whole world challenged. I have not been the same since then.

#### **4. Called to ministry**

When Dr Rhiannon organized the Training Of Trainers for people who would carry on with the ministry of healing and reconciliation, bringing together 10 people from each province, I found myself on the list of invitees. To tell you the truth, I was not interested in attending, because my heart was not burning with a passion for reconciliation. If God had asked me then the greatest need of my heart, I know what I would have told Him! My dream was to get passports for my family and leave Rwanda to go wherever. I will confess that I agreed to attend because of the narrow benefit of the first seminar and the warmth of the little Muzungu (Dr Rhiannon) and the uncommon tall Tutsi translator.

As I had to present the invitation letter to my Tutsi pastor, I almost abandoned everything when he sarcastically asked me 'What on earth I can tell the widows in the

church, knowing that you are responsible for the death of their husbands?’ Shamefully, that affirmation was echoing what I was telling myself, that I was the wrong person, from the wrong area, the wrong ethnic group, freshly back from a refugee camp which had the reputation of being the nest of militia operations!

It took me much courage to leave my poor Esther with our two kids during a time of clashes, & shooting between the militia and soldiers. When I got to the Scripture Union, where the TOT was taking place, I could not believe the warm welcome I was given! I felt I was special. Dr Rhiannon took me aside and told me that they had been praying for someone capable on the team. She kept on saying that when she met me the first day, she straight away knew I was the answer to their prayers. She encouraged me to try to understand the material because they wanted me to join their team and work with African Evangelistic Enterprise as a facilitator. I could not believe my ears! Two thoughts came to my mind. Joining the ministry will be for our family a source of income. Great! But I was frightened by the idea of moving out of my region to venture into other parts of the country where Northern people were perceived as inherently wicked. I could not blame those who thought that way, because most of the militia who excelled in cruelty came from my home area.

Dr Rhiannon encouraged me to really pay attention and benefit from all the teachings, & understand the material before I could take the workshops to others. I can say for me, this was the first time to go deep into the material. Meeting people from other regions, sharing with them my shame & fears, and being accepted by them opened for me the way to other parts of the country.

This time I had already dealt with my ethnic prejudices, but I did not know if Anastase would welcome me on the team, because the Europeans had to go back and Anastase and I had to stay behind. When I called my wife to tell her that I ‘almost’ got a job, I also added ‘if this other tall guy allows that to happen’. This was the proof that healing takes some time! It is also tested. Sometimes you think you have overcome, just to find that you are halfway.

Anastase, with his heart of a pastor, proved he would be a strong help to me. He gave me 10,000Frw ( 5 \$ then) as a contribution to our family, because I shared with him how destitute we were. With his pastoral heart, he encouraged me to take heart and give myself to the ministry. At least I was straightaway sure that he believed in me!

My first seminar as a facilitator happened in Cyangugu. It was very hard for me to tell people my home area. As I was still under coaching, I was not very confident. I was amazed by the impact of the message on the people.

Before Dr Rhiannon left, she asked me to join African Evangelistic Enterprise headquarters in Kigali where I was supposed to be added onto the staff.

I will not take long to describe the cold reception by the staff. Everybody was asking what I was doing in their premises. Later I came to understand that the procedure about staff recruitment was not respected. I went to Antoine Rutayisire to ask what would happen and he told me that I had to go through tests, interviews, filling in all the documents before they could consider my application.

The bell inside me rang once again! 'Remember the Tutsi guy will never give you a chance, you are out!' This was the like a chorus of a popular song! I did not want to think that way.

Some days later, Antoine came into the staff-meeting and declared that he did not know me, but that he would not bother me with going through the normal procedures because it was not my fault if I joined the team "through the back-door". Something he said, I will never forget, was that Jesus did not consult Peter before recruiting Paul as an apostle. He compared that to the Holy Spirit bringing me in without respecting the procedures!

This was how I joined AEE! I had to go back in my home-town to move Esther and the kids to the capital-city. I will not describe the joy of being in a proper house after 3 years in plastic sheeting and the hole we had to fit in, after we came back from the camp to find our house occupied by a returnee.

Since 1997, Anastase and I have had to sit down and contextualize the message. We have conducted more than 300 workshops, follow-up seminars and trainings, sometimes with Rhiannon sometimes by ourselves. We have gone around the country from North to South and from East to West. We have brought together pastors, students, women, orphans, social workers, soldiers, youth, children,..... We have ministered inside and outside Rwanda, among Rwandan exiles, Congolese, Burundians, South Africans, Europeans,...

From all the material of the workshop, there are 3 topics I like to handle which have deeply impacted my life: Root-causes of our prejudices, (to help renew people's mind and get rid of their prejudices); the Father-heart of God, (to help people heal from dysfunctional families); and the Holy Nation of God's people, (to help people understand the God's ideal for human relationships). But what I have found the most effective role in my ministry is the "confession in the gap". I don't bargain, I don't justify, I simply say: 'Forgive us!'

## **5. My brick, forgive us**

*I, Nyamutera Joseph, on behalf of my Hutu people, say sorry before Tutsi who live in exile, because We have refused you the right to live in your country after we dismissed you from power violently. We killed your people, looted your properties and occupied your land. We kept you outside your beloved nation because we thought we cannot fit in together. Before God this is called selfishness.*

*Before Tutsi who lived inside the country, I ask your forgiveness because we denied you the right to enjoy all the blessings God has given us by putting up laws and measures to refuse you access to education and restricted your numbers in government positions. Forgive us because we mistreated you, we killed your people on many occasions.*

*Finally, I ask your forgiveness because of the terrible '94 Genocide, perpetrated by our people with the intention to exterminate your people. Forgiveness not only for the killings but also the cruelty we have demonstrated: rape, torture, use of traditional weapons, mutilation, burying people alive,.....*

*We stand before God condemned and worthy of His curse and terrible judgment. We ask that the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross will cover us and justify us.*

I am aware of different reactions to my confession. Some theologians will speculate and reject it because it is not biblical, some Hutu will bargain and request that Tutsi also repent for their role too, some Tutsi will think I am covering the real perpetrators,...

This is not a theological book, I will not try to explain or defend my decision. I do not oblige anyone else to imitate me. Repentance happens under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. If someone feels the Holy Spirit leading him to confess on behalf of his people he will not negotiate with God. He will simply do it.

Here are some of the benefits of it:

- Healing of those who need to hear Sorry.

Jacqueline is a returnee from Uganda who attended this seminar just to see what would happen. She was resistant to the message from the beginning, and only wanted Anastase to speak, because she knew he grew up in Uganda. Every time I spoke, she would sit by the door, and did not understand why they allowed me to be part! It was only at my confession that God touched her heart. She offered to be a 'daughter' to us and this is what she is today! She is a good friend to our family. She is healed from bitterness, anger, the pain of growing in a settlement in a hostile country where she could not study because she was a refugee.

- Cleansed from long-term prejudices

Kizito, returnee pastor, said after my confession: 'From today on, I realize that not all Hutu are bad, there is at least one I know who is different, it is Joseph'. Later on he agreed to travel to the North of Rwanda in 1998, when the area was still dangerous, to give his testimony, 'because maybe there are other Josephs in that region!' as he put it.

- Forgive us too

A Genocide-survivor soldier came to me after my confession and told me: 'When you shared about the death of your father, son and sister in the refugee-camp I did not feel any compassion in my heart, because I considered you to be the cause of our misery! When you said that your brother was killed by Tutsi when you returned from the camp, I wished they had killed all of you. But now I want to ask your forgiveness too! I am sorry that we too took revenge and killed your people. I am sorry that we don't acknowledge your suffering'.

- Grace on the real killers

One day in Mutara, a Genocide-survivor lady responded to my repentance in these words: 'I was wondering why the government was so merciful to people in prisons who have committed incredible atrocities. Today I understand why. Joseph has been interceding for them wherever he stood!' I don't know if that really is the truth, but we experienced tremendously real repentance in many prisons and believe that in the Spiritual realm, the confession "in the gap" released grace that led the real perpetrators to be convicted by the Holy Spirit and seek the forgiveness of God and the victims.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the case of Rwanda, many victims will never know who really killed their people. But still they need someone who will take responsibility and say: 'Forgive us!' This confession will not take away the need of the real perpetrator to ask his own forgiveness before God and the victim. The confession will not hinder the judicial system to sue the individuals who sinned against the law and make them answerable.

The world is full of impersonal violence. Maybe you belong to a group of people who is responsible for the suffering of another group? What they need to hear from you is not justifications, not reminding the other group of their own wrong, not projecting responsibilities, (thus distancing yourself from those who did it), but the most meaningful thing, the most healing, beneficial thing for yourself and the victim, the most restoring, divinely recommended statement is this: 'Forgive us!'