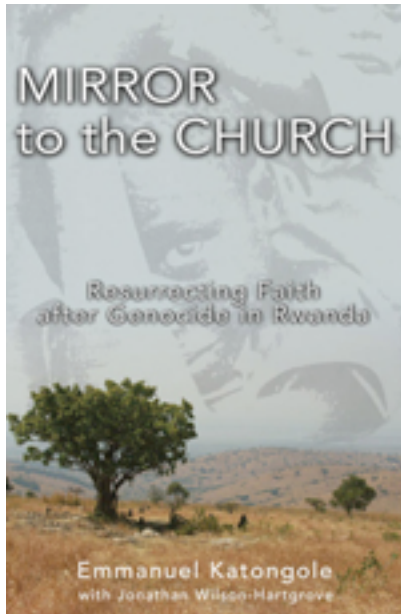


## Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda

By Emmanuel M. Katongole, Associate Professor of Theology and World Christianity, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove D'06 Zondervan, 2009, 176 pages, paperback, \$15.99

*Reviewed by Mark R. Gornik*



In 1994, in the nation of Rwanda, some 800,000 people were killed. Under the labels of Hutu and Tutsi, “Hutu neighbors were told to kill their Tutsi neighbors.” Almost all were given over to death by machete. What makes this story of genocide even more troubling, if that were possible, is that confessed Christians were killing fellow Christians. Indeed, “in a number of instances throughout Rwanda, churches became slaughterhouses.”

The failure of Christianity in Rwanda shines a mirror on all of Christianity. How are we to live in this world as Christ’s ambassadors? How can Christian identity recover its unique identity? How do we face the contradictions

present in our practice of faith?

These challenges are critically engaged with prayer, tears, and hope in Emmanuel Katongole’s *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*, written with the assistance of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Katongole speaks from a unique intersection: He is a Ugandan whose parents were from Rwanda, a Catholic priest, a professor at Duke Divinity School, and a pilgrim in life and faith.

One of the key problems in Rwanda, as Katongole identifies it, is the conflation of Christian commitment with other forms of identity. As a mirror, Rwanda can press us to ask, How deeply are *our* national stories inscribed unknowingly into everyday life and faith? How can the story of Rwanda help us see our captivity to the powers of the age? What story should form us? Such questions are of course deeply connected to our remembering our histories rightly.

“A book about the Rwandan genocide must be a book about bodies,” Katongole offers at the outset. Bodies were physically broken in Rwanda, and the body politic represents a real factor in how events unfolded. It is

not enough therefore, Katongole notes, to ask how Christians can make a “difference.” The challenge becomes, how do we “reposition our bodies?” That is, how do we worship God and embrace new possibilities for discipleship where we are in the world?

Following this emphasis on the body, Katongole speaks of “interruptions”—persons who in bodily form understand that keeping the gospel can also mean refusing to accept the assumptions so many take as given. An example he provides is the saint and martyr Sister Félicité Niyitegeka, who sheltered others with her body, and prayed for her killer in the moments before her death. Sister Félicité’s life and body offered a prophetic interruption, the claiming of her identity in Christ before other identities, at the cost of her life.

Discipleship, indeed mission and what Katongole calls the “prophetic posture,” will be discovered only by immersion in the “deep brokenness of our world.” At the point of crying, “How long, O God?”, the church can be resurrected into a living hope.

With his commitment to the gospel of reconciliation, category-changing ways of describing discipleship, and passion for new creation sprouting from the ground up, Emmanuel Katongole is a theologian for our time. *Mirror to the Church* confirms the power of his voice, life, and insight as a singular one for the church today.

After reading *Mirror to the Church*, I had a vision of a particular use for this book. It is not just for college or seminary courses, although it is very much that. Nor is it just for all persons interested in reconciliation and the work of the church in Africa, although it uniquely fulfills that role. It is a book we should be giving to new Christians and believers in formation, those to whom we want to introduce and deepen what it means to have an identity shaped by the gospel. Read this book with tears of lament, but also as a call to be witnesses to the gospel.

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