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Race, Ethnicity, and Tribal Conflicts

The roots of conflicts in Africa are multiple and varied. Ethnicity is a powerful reality that has been exploited to devastate Africa. Dr. William Zartman, Professor of International Organization and Conflict Resolution and Director of African Studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, after summarizing six theories of ethnic conflict, argues that purely ethnic conflicts are rare. While ethnic consciousness and dis-ease is common among groups, this consciousness is inert. He suggests that conflict is created by agents who have a certain agenda and who manipulate ethnic consciousness as a mobilization strategy (Zartman 1998).

Conflicts in Africa

At any given time, many conflicts are going on in Africa. Some are boundary wars between nations, such as between Ethiopia and Eritrea or between Eritrea and Djibouti. These are not many. Then there are revolutionary wars that attempt to remove governments that are perceived to have been in power for too long or have become oppressive. These may be characterized as wars of liberation. Sometimes the conflicts are drawn along ethnic lines, when the governing party is generally representative of one ethnic group, while the opposition is generally composed of a different ethnic group. These may take the form of either trying to force the government out of power, or becoming secessionist movements, trying to break away and form a separate state or country. Then there are conflicts between ethnic groups, without the government being involved on either side of the conflict. In addition to all these there are general situations of tension between ethnic groups without open armed conflict. This whole range of situations requires interventions of some kind in order to bring about harmonious co-existence.

In a fifteen year period (1989–2004), seventy-six peace agreements

were signed involving twenty conflicts in Africa. During that same time thirty-one peace agreements were signed in six conflicts in Inter and South America (mainly Guatemala and El Salvador). There were sixteen peace agreements in ten conflicts in Asia, and nine peace agreements in Europe (former Yugoslav republics, Moldova, and Georgia, etc.), and seven peace agreements in the Middle East in the conflict over Palestine (Högbladh 2006:12).

During that period it is evident that there were more conflicts going on in Africa than on any other continent. More recently the picture still has not changed much. So it appears that Africa is a continent in conflict. The conflicts have led to reversals in development. Warring parties destroy infrastructure they cannot afford to rebuild. Capable people move away to serve in other countries where they feel safe and secure. Productive sectors are decimated and young people see no hope for their future. Even the Church loses some of its educated and skilled people as they relocate to safer regions. Table 1 illustrates this variety of conflicts.

Vocabulary of Africa

African people are categorized into tribes. The word tribe is itself neutral in terms of its lexical meaning. But it is immediately infused with new meaning when used by a particular group in a given context. For example, when a non-academic African uses the word tribe, he or she simply means a group of people who share the same identity in language, ancestry, and geographical location. Keith Somerville, a lecturer in journalism at the School of Arts at Brunel University in Uxbridge, London, has spent over thirty years as a journalist at the BBC. He has written widely on Africa. In an article titled "Africa Is Tribal, Europe Is Ethnic: The Power of Words in the Media," he observes about the media's projections of Africa, "I've been researching and reporting Africa for over thirty years. It has always struck me that it is reported differently from the rest of the world. The words used differ, particularly adjectives, and the assumptions behind the use of those words differ hugely."

Somerville reminds us that the word tribe comes from the Latin *tribus*. It originated in Rome where it was originally used to describe people groups whose culture was inferior and were suitable for conquest and subjugation.

Table 1. States with Recent Cases of Civil/Ethnic Resource-Based Conflicts in Africa

	Coun-tries	Nature of Conflicts	Major Causes	Status of the Conflicts	Characters/Parties
1	Angola	Civil war	Resources and power struggle	Hot peace and post-conflict reconciliation	Internal and external involvement (Western countries)
2	Demo-cratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Civil/ ethnic	Resources, poor sharing, dictatorship	Ongoing peace process partly resolved	Internal and external involvement (Rwanda, Zimbabwe)
3	Burundi	Civil/ ethnic	Power shar-ing and ethnic inequality and injustices	Partly resolved	Internal and external involvement (Rwanda)
4	Sierra Leone	Intrastate and civil	Resources and political contestation	Partly resolved	Intrastate and external (Liberia)
5	Rwanda	Ethnic/ civil	Political/power and inequality	Hot peace par-tially resolved	Internal and external involvement (DRC)
6	Nigeria	Intrastate multi ethnic conflict	Resources/ political margin-alization	Management through internal mechanism	Internal/recurring
7	Cote D'Ivoire	Intrastate and ethnic	Power sharing/ political factor	Partly resolved	Internal
8	Liberia	Civil war	Political/ resources contestation	Partly resolved but not peace	Internal and external involve-ment (Libya)
9	Somalia	Civil war	Political and poor governance	Ongoing	Collapsed and failed state
10	Eritrea	Interstate	Territorial and resource based	Recurring	
11	Ethiopia	Interstate	Territorial and resource based	Recurring	
12	Zimba-bwe	Interstate	Political power contest	Ongoing	Internal
13	Sudan	Civil/ ethnic	Resources and political contest	Ongoing	Internal
14	Uganda	Civil war	Political power contestation	Ongoing	Internal

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15	Chad	Civil war	Political power contestation	Ongoing	Internal
16	Niger	Civil war	Political power contestation	Ongoing	Internal
17	Congo Brazza-ville	Civil war	Political power contestation	Recurring and ongoing	Internal
18	Morocco	Territorial war	Political independence	Recurring	Internal

Source: Bonnie, Ayodele, 2008, Interrogating the Shifting Theoretical Paradigms of Conflict in Africa: The Ethical and Resource Remittance Theory of Conflict, http://www.africareview.org/events/paxafrica2008/bayodele.php (accessed 11 March 2009).

Among these were Germanic and Gallic groups. Julius Caesar frequently used the term in this sense. The term tribe came to be used as a reference to people considered to be at a lower level of civil and political development—a stage before becoming a kingdom or a state.

Somerville shares how he was powerfully impacted by the language difference in the coverage of the conflicts in Georgia and South Ossetia when compared to the coverage of the post-election violence in Kenya. He observed that "the violence in the Caucasus was nationalism, or perhaps a mix of nationalism and ethnic conflict. Kenya was tribalism. Much of the British media—from the BBC to the Guardian and then to the tabloid press—used the term 'tribalism' widely, giving an impression of primitivism and a violence endemic to Africa." The words that are generally used in reporting on Africa are tribe, tribal, tribalism, and tribalist.

Somerville argues that the term *tribe* was in fact not part of the vocabulary of the different ethnic groups in Africa. Each group labeled itself by its ethnic name (Zulu, Luo, Ashanti, Bemba, Shona, Ndebele, or whatever the specific group). The next group was identified by its name, and not as a tribe. Colonial powers began to use the word tribe to designate the colonized peoples. From its Latin origins the word was given broad currency by colonial usage. The word was even used outside of its original meaning when applied to peoples who belonged to highly structured societies belonging to established kingdoms.

When black peoples of Africa rose up in arms against white colonial governments, those struggles were never described as ethnic conflicts. Yet the clearest divide in the conflicts was ethnic. Such conflicts were more accurately described as liberation struggles or wars of independence. The label used for describing a conflict should arise from the underlying cause of the conflict. The cause is that which when changed will remove the

basis for the conflict. So called *ethnic conflicts* therefore do not arise from ethnicity. Tribal wars do not arise from the identity of tribe. Rather, conflict arises from one party's manipulation of factors or resources to disadvantage another group.

What Is Tribalism or Ethnocentrism?

Tribalism may be defined as a consciousness and loyalty to one tribe, leading to exaltation of that tribe above other peoples. Tribalism leads a person to view only the members of his or her own tribe as people, and disparage all others as inferior. Language or labels used of the other group may be derogatory and dehumanizing. Ethnic conflict is produced by the insecurity that emerges when an actor is unsure of the intentions of another actor and the two are already mutually hostile (Horowitz 1998:57).

Ethnocentrism is the attitude of placing one's own ethnic group at the center of other ethnicities and using one's own culture as the yardstick by which all others will be measured and evaluated. It involves making generalizations concerning the goodness of one's group and the badness of other groups. We are ethnocentric when we think certain positive characteristics are common to our group, while certain other negative characteristics are generally true of other groups. We are ethnocentric when we see other people through the lens of our group and judge them based on our group's yardstick.

Ethnocentric thinking results in our making incorrect assumptions about our group and other groups. We generalize the weaknesses of a few to characterize the whole group, and we exaggerate their evil. We compare the weakest points of that group to our strongest points.

Theories of Ethnic Violence

Political scientists have debated the underlying causes of ethnic conflict. Three basic schools of thought seem to dominate the schools of discussion. These have been labeled as *primordialist, instrumentalist*, and *constructivist*.

Primordialist School

The Primordinalist School believes that ethnic groups exist because "there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological features and especially territorial location" (Grosby 1994:168). Donald Horowitz postulates that ethnic groups exist based on a kinship system that "makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances" (Horowitz 1985:57). These biological and territorial bonds are used as the basis of identifying friend and enemy.

There seems to be some validity to this theory as an explanation of eth-

nicity. However, when used as a basis for explaining the causes of ethnic conflict, it falls short. A primordialist causation for ethnic conflict makes conflict unavoidable. As long as biology and geography exist as differentiating factors, conflict is inevitable. This fails to account for why certain ethnic groups live side by side harmoniously while others are in conflict. Opponents to this view argue that ethnic conflicts are really the result of political, economic, and institutional issues. Ethnicity only becomes a rallying and mobilization point.

Instrumentalist School

A second theory posits that ethnic conflict is the product of community leaders "who used their cultural groups as sites of mass mobilization and as constituencies in their competition for power and resources, because they found them more effective than social classes" (Smith 2001:54-55). In this approach ethnicity and ethnic identification "are viewed as instrumental identities, organized as a means to particular ends" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998:59). In the recent violence in Kenya, many participants were asked by the news media why they were fighting. Some gave answers that reflected the words of leading politicians. A number of them said they did not know. One man said he was fighting because everyone was fighting. Another said that he was fighting because he wanted to protect his family from the enemies. This theory seems to be the most plausible. It seems to be supported by the demonstrable reality that most ethnic conflicts involve certain leaders, and peace and reconciliation negotiations will only succeed if these leaders are involved.

Constructivist School

The constructivist theory proposes that ethnic conflict is the result of a social construct based on experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of one group as they interpret another. This knowledge may be a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of certain events, and there is a selectiveness in the retained knowledge. So what results may not be a true reflection of reality, but a construction pieced together from the perceptions and knowledge of many in the group.

The experience of Rwanda reveals the results of ethnic constructivism. Hutus and Tutsis had coexisted peacefully for a long time. When the Belgians came they found it convenient to pit one group against the other so as to forestall a united resistance and possible rebellion. All citizens were required to have national identification cards that indicated their ethnic group. Thus the ethnic designation became part of the identity. Over the years Tutsis were given opportunities and promotions that were not readily given to the Hutus. Thus began a process of profiling each other based

on observable experiences, knowledge, and shared perceptions. Ethnic distinctions were minimal. Decades of intermarriage blurred the biological boundaries, and they shared the same language and culture. They shared the same geographical location. On the surface, this is a population that should not have had any conflicts. But years of constructivism had created images of an enemy in the mind. And what happened is history. Those national ID cards had an important role in the targeting of victims in the genocide (Mamdani 2001).

Precipitation of Violence

In more recent times, social scientists have begun to develop theoretical models of ethnic conflict and civil wars that draw on multiple theories as a way to understand causation. An example of this approach is Monica Duffy Toft in *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*. She demonstrates that a variety of issues like ethnic group settlement patterns, socially constructed identities, charismatic leaders, etc., may precipitate violent escalation of a dispute even when the violent parties know full well that the violence will leave them worse off (Toft 2003). The surprising factor is that other groups under similar circumstances do not become violent.

Mediators are persons who undertake to talk to the conflicting parties with a view to creating a suitable atmosphere for dialogue between the parties themselves. Ideally, the mediators should not come from one of the aggrieved entities, nor should they be seen to be sympathetic to, or be in some way aligned with one of the parties. Negotiators are persons who have the trust and confidence of their group and are authorized and empowered to speak on behalf of the group.

Conflicting parties typically focus on the past. They recall the hurts of the past and count their scars. These are then projected into the future as the perceived reality. The goal of the mediator is to help conflicting parties begin to focus away from the past in order to look to the future.

Biblical Models for Addressing Ethnicity

There are several biblical models that suggest principles to follow when addressing ethnic issues facing the church today.

Neglected Widows

In the history of the New Testament Church, Acts 6 records a situation that was beginning to generate tension and animosity along more or less ethnic lines. Jews from a Hellenistic background felt that widows from their group were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. They felt that Palestinian Jews were treating their group unfairly. "The Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because

their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them'" (Acts 6:1-3).

The apostles did not sweep this issue under the carpet or treat it as petty. The aggrieved party was involved in the creation of a solution. The Church came out of the situation stronger. Leadership had the courage to admit that there was a problem and the wisdom to engage others in solving it.

The Church at Antioch

The church at Antioch was as close to being a model as one gets in its ability to understand and constructively deal with multi-ethnic situations. The city of Antioch, built by Seleucus I Nicator, and named in honor of his father, Antiochus, was the third largest metropolis (after Rome and Alexandria) in the Roman Empire. It had a population of between 500,000 and 800,000 inhabitants. Encircled by an external wall, Antioch was also subdivided into ethnic quarters. Ray Bakke observes that "the city, like the old city of Jerusalem today, was divided into Greek, Syrian, Jewish, Latin and African sectors" (Bakke 1997:145, 146).

So evident were these internal divisions along ethnic lines that the city was nicknamed "tetrapolis." Apparently, walls were built in an attempt to ensure minimal ethnic conflict. We may label this as peace by physical separation. If you did not like those who were different from you, all you had to do was retreat into your own quarters. Strabo informs us that the city of Antioch had a large library, but it was divided. The city was Hellenized and had north-south and east-west highways passing through it connecting to major parts of the Roman Empire, but it was divided. In 47 BC Julius Caesar conferred on Antioch the status of a "free city," but it was divided. Later, Augustus made Antioch the imperial capital of Syria, but it was divided. It was a leading center of trade and commerce, but it was divided (Bakke 1997:145).

When Greek speaking believers who were mainly Jewish were driven by persecution out of Jerusalem and Judea, some of them went and settled in Antioch. There they shared the good news of salvation in Christ, resulting in reconciliation between people and God, and between different peoples. As differences were put into the background, people from different ethnicities found a common attraction to Jesus Christ and were drawn together to worship and serve him. Different ethnicities scaled the walls that had divided them and came into one fellowship. The common citi-

zens were taken aback by this flagrant disregard of long-standing socio-cultural norms. In cultural shock and consternation, they hurled scorn at the believers, mockingly referring to them as *Christians*, people without boundaries. So daring was the disregard for convention and so scornfully fitting was the derisive label that it stuck.

If one visited the Antioch church on a Sabbath morning, one would be confronted with a mosaic, not a monoculture. Luke's profile of the church leadership team is revealing. "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul" (Act 13:1, emphasis mine). The leaders included Barnabas (a Jewish Levite from Cyprus), Simeon who was called Niger (a black African), Lucius of Cyrene (from North Africa), Manaen (a former slave of Herod the tetrarch) and Paul (a former Pharisee from Tarsus). The diversity of this leadership team was reflective of the spectrum of the society they represented. The Church was intentional about integration of different ethnic groups into the one body of Christ. There was no mere tokenism.

It is no surprise that this church became the new center for missions. Rising above the divisions of the society around them, they modeled the reality of a new creation. The Antioch church became the sponsors of the greatest missionary enterprise of that time. They were an outward looking church. From the agenda of the Judaizers that emanated from Jerusalem, it is clear that the Jerusalem church was an inward-looking church, concerned about preserving its cultural heritage, and afraid that people from out there might change the status quo. They saw Peter's mission to Cornelius as a threat that had to be investigated and cautioned against. Antioch received missionary reports with joy and encouraged the apostles.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, talked about a church without walls. He described the mission of Christ as having resulted in the breaking down of the walls that separated Jew and Gentile—indeed all people—and bringing peace between them. After slaying the enmity, Christ proceeded to create one new person from the former conflicting parties. And using these reconciled persons, he proceeds to build with them a holy temple which is the dwelling place of God. These are powerful symbols of the Church—a new building made of different ethnicities who are now one in Christ Jesus.

In the words of Jurgen Moltmann, "It is the task of Christians in the existing world conflicts in which they live, to proclaim the Gospel of justification, to live the liberating faith, to exercise the ministry of reconciliation and to give in their congregations a demonstration of a reconciled humanity in the fellowship of men and women, Jews and gentiles, slaves

and freemen (Gal 3.28)" (Moltmann). The Church is a demonstration— showing forth an alien community—one that is founded upon different principles.

Moltmann emphasizes the centrality of Christian engagement in its struggles as part of Christian mission. "It is especially when Christians fulfill these specifically Christian tasks, that they serve the realization of humanity of all people. By proclaiming God's justifying justice they proclaim the dignity of human beings. By practising the right of grace they practise basic human rights. The Christian faith therefore does not excuse us from the struggle for the recognition and realization of human rights, but leads us into this very struggle" (Moltmann).

Pride and Prejudice

As the saying goes, "Give the dog a bad name, and hang him." When people develop a certain perception about another group, there is so much that happens to prove or demonstrate the perception. As human beings we have a penchant for organizing things into categories, placing them in boxes, placing a lid on the boxes, and then labeling them for future reference. When we categorize, box, and label, we save ourselves from having to reexamine things every time in order to establish where they belong. Obviously, this is fine and commendable when we are dealing with things. It is, however, tragic when we are dealing with people and people groups. We classify. We judge. We limit. We destroy. We alienate.

Triggers of Ethnic Violence

When ethnic conflicts arise, it appears that the issues are not primarily differences of ethnic identity. But, is it really so? Five weeks ago I listened to a BBC Radio News report as I drove home from the city of Nairobi. The report touched on a community in northern Kenya that is experiencing severe drought. Cattle are dying and people do not have enough to eat. The report indicated that thirty-one people had been killed in ethnic conflicts in that area. When there are normal rains, and the communities have adequate pastures, there is no problem. The two ethnic groups live together side-by-side peacefully. However, when water is scarce and pastures are limited, ethnic violence flares up. Is this ethnic violence or is it pasture conflicts?

Ethnic conflicts flare up at certain times and die down at other times. What are the trigger points for ethnic violence? What is it that sparks conflict between two groups that have been living together peacefully? May I propose that the common triggers are scarcity or dwindling resources, imbalances or shifts in power structures, and manipulation of or inadequate representation in institutions, structures or managerial processes of the

community. As Bonnie Ayodele has pointed out,

In a state with an unjust system of distribution, politics of exclusion, social injustice, deprivation, human rights violation, oppression, intimidation and domination, the issue of resource remittance would always constitute a volatile contestation. The likelihood for the constituting groups to demand for equitable accommodation, distribution of power and resources; and the struggle to bring about changes in the oppressive system by redressing power imbalances would always be at the fore of their politics. (Ayodele 2008)

Variety of Responses to Ethnic Tension

In all conflicts there are God's children who are merely victims, caught in the realities of a cruel fallen world. The Church needs to go in and stand by their side, to comfort them and to give them relief and hope. Then there are those of God's family who are caught up with the attitudes of this world. They are partners with the perpetrators of violence. Their hands are drenched in the blood of their victims. Having perhaps inadvertently taken their eyes away from Jesus, or having never really known him, they have descended into the works of darkness. What should the Church do with these? It is much easier for me to pontificate some answers in this sanitized setting of a mission conference, away from the heart-wrenching realities of the pain of those who have been stabbed in the back by a known brother or sister. Such should not simply be kicked out or ignored as if they do not exist.

Paul the missionary wrote to the Corinthians—a church in the mission field, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:18-20). Notice the progression of his teaching. First, he reminds the believers that we have been reconciled to God. This was accomplished through Christ by God's initiative. He then gave to those he had reconciled a ministry—a work to do for others who have not yet experienced the same.

Paul uses a rare New Testament word to describe our mission. He describes the believers as ambassadors (*presbeuo*). The word denotes someone who is elder or senior and is commissioned on the basis of this seniority to function in a particular representative capacity. The word came to be used of making a petition as a senior representative. It is clear from Paul's teaching that we have received from Jesus the ministry of reconciliation and are to urge offenders in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. The

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primary function of the Church is to bring about reconciliation. We are not well equipped to judge, but we are eminently equipped to minister reconciliation. We are commissioned with instruments of grace to act on God's behalf.

Then there are those of God's children who hold up the standard of truth. They take great personal risks in service to victims. And when they or their families are victims, they respond with active forgiveness. They know who has hurt them and they are ready to forgive. This is not the passive forgiveness of someone who is powerless and has no control. This is active forgiveness of one who chooses to walk the higher road of grace and reconciliation. Such have looked into the face of Jesus and have become captivated by his grace. The Church should affirm them and encourage others to emulate their example. By giving them opportunities to share their testimonies, they can become an inspiration to others to make similar choices.

An Example of the Church's Response

During the period of the post-election violence in Kenya I saw the response of the Adventist Church and it made me feel proud and humble to belong to this family. The East-Central Africa Division (ECD) administration went into action almost immediately. At first there were intervention trips that took supplies and other assistance to the camps where displaced people were being gathered. Church members were invited to go along and meet the victims and just encourage them. These activities were significant enough to have been featured on the national television, radio, and print media.

The ECD then organized a meeting for pastors and church leaders to listen to their stories, to help them step back and see the larger picture beyond their particular location, and to give them training on how to go back to their church and communities and become agents of reconciliation. I sat in most of the sessions with the pastors. Sometimes it was hard to restrain tears as pastors shared their own experiences or those of their church members. At other times we laughed as we listened to some reactions that only become humorous when observed from the safe position hindsight affords. The sessions themselves produced healing as people came to realize that they were not alone in their fears and struggles.

What Lessons Have We Learned?

From South Africa the setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is very suggestive. While other nations have had their Truth Commissions, the South African commission has some unique features. The

chairman, the deputy chairman, and four or five of the commissioners were leading and influential churchmen. This gave this national commission a very strong religious or spiritual foundation. The commission insisted on the whole truth being told as a condition for amnesty. The chairman emphasized the central importance of forgiveness and reconciliation throughout the process. I think this is a model that may be helpful in dealing with situations of clear discrimination and deep hurt. Perhaps the Adventist Church often does not want to investigate the conflicts and hurts of God's people. It is easier to let one hurt or disgruntled brother or sister go away with the hope that he or she may find another church family than to begin dealing with dirty linen. It seems to me that South Africa may have a valuable lesson for us. Deep, full reconciliation requires the truth. It requires time. It requires patience. It requires hearing and understanding.

From Kenya it is clear that the involvement of third parties who are not seen to have any alignments is of crucial significance. This resulted in a cessation of hostilities. However, fundamental issues of past imbalances have not yet been addressed. It is clear that cessation of hostilities is an easier part, but peace building requires deep commitment and real changes. This calls for continuing engagement. The parties have to be held accountable for meeting the terms of the agreement. This is the case in Zimbabwe, in Sudan, and in a number of other countries. Communities of faith have a role—a public role to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. I question whether there can be such a thing as a private, secret demonstration. By its very nature a demonstration is public. It is intended to be seen, and its message is to be heard publicly.

I was in Rwanda at the beginning of July 2009 and had the privilege of being guided in a tour of the Genocide Memorial Museum. I was struck by the reality of a situation I had always read about. Something went wrong—very badly wrong in Rwanda. I was baffled by how deep the hostility must have been, for something of this magnitude to happen. But what was more troubling to me was, Where was the world when Rwanda happened? How could we—the rest of the world—wake up each morning and go about our pointless duties and preoccupations while Rwanda was happening. For 100 days we watched our TV screens and went to our places of work. Where was the Church? I am not just talking about the Church in Rwanda. There were sad stories of complicity, and heart-warming stories of courage and grace. But where was the rest of the Church? I came away from that museum visit feeling dirty and guilty. I was not my brother's keeper. I stood at a safe distance and watched, and then looked the other way.

From Rwanda we have learned the dangers of looking the other way and losing time when events are unfolding before our eyes. Non-involve-

ment turned out to be very costly in human lives and in other ways. We also learned that we cannot trust ourselves to all live up to the standard of truth. We surprised ourselves by the things we could do if we were not closely watched. We also learned that the grace of God can enable us to offer forgiveness even in the face of the deepest hurt. We can look into the face of an enemy and say, "I forgive you."

Some Fundamental Issues

The Political Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 2008 held a conference on "Mediation in Africa." In preparation for the conference a study was commissioned that investigated the extent of conflicts in Africa. The study underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach in trying to bring about peace and reconciliation. Four areas were identified as needing to be carefully addressed (Mason 2008:11). These are dealt with from the point of view of nations and states. I will address these briefly from the point of view of the Church.

Security

Sometimes physical security is threatened even within the Church, and it needs to be safeguarded. The Church should respond when an individual faces threats of physical harm as a result of ethnic tension. More often, however, in the Church it is other kinds of security like employment and fair advancement within the system. Administration and supervising bodies should ensure that each worker has job security and that any threats are dealt with openly and firmly.

Wealth-Sharing

Wealth-sharing addresses access to the available resources without discrimination. How equitably are human resource development opportunities distributed? Are different ethnic groups being fairly represented in the granting of bursaries and other educational opportunities?

Power-Sharing and Identity

A key contributor to ethnic tension is perceived imbalances in the power structures and decision-making processes of the Church. Some historical imbalances go back to missionary times when the Church was first planted. In some cases institutions were established in one region, and persons from one region were groomed for leadership. The Church should be seen to be addressing these imbalances.

Human Rights and Justice

Questions of unfairness and injustice need to be investigated and rec-

tified. The church should have an open system that gives a sense of fair arbitration and grievance processing procedures. When ethnic issues are alleged in a complaint, the arbitration body should include meaningful representation from the aggrieved ethnic group or at least from another neutral party. Justice and fairness must be seen to be done.

Suggested Strategies

Alvin M. Kibble, Vice President of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sums up his counsel on how to deal with ethnic issues in the Church:

We must break "the silence." A family is dysfunctional when there are some subjects they cannot or will not discuss.

We must find meaningful ways to talk through our differences if we ever hope to have Spirit-filled unity emerge from our diversity.

We must endeavor to listen carefully to one another, especially when we disagree.

We must neither overestimate the ability of the traditionally-privileged, nor underestimate the untapped abilities of our minorities.

We must not change the rules and standards of qualification when faced with the leadership challenges of competing ethnic or gender candidates.

We must fully engage our people, especially our young people, in the on-going mission story of Adventism.

We must refresh and revive the Adventist brand.

We must strive as Seventh-day Adventists to connect with the people of our communities, enlarging our network.

We must not and cannot effectively do evangelism at arm's length.

We must be willing to cross the divides in a collaborative effort that bridges race, culture, gender, and generation, forging new partnerships that multiply our resources.

Conclusion

The Adventist Church in Africa is diverse and growing. It faces many challenges, not least of which is ethnic tension. In some countries these tensions are minimal, while in other places they are significant. Where these ethnic tensions exist, the energy for mission is diverted into non-productive activities both by membership and leadership. We cannot wish away negative ethnic feelings. We need to be intentional about addressing issues and felt needs. The Adventist Church needs to be proactive in addressing these areas of tension. Specific interventions are needed to build peace and harmony. Instructions and training need to be provided to pastors and other church leaders on creating a harmonious atmosphere among different groups in the body of Christ.

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Biography

Dr. Joel Musvosvi was born in Zimbabwe. His educational qualifications include a BTh from Solusi University in Zimbabwe and the MDiv and PhD in New Testament from Andrews University. Dr. Musvosvi's work experience includes being a primary school teacher, a pastor, a college Bible teacher, a division departmental director, and an academic administrator. He is currently Dean at the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. Dr. Musvosvi and his wife Angeline have a son and two daughters.