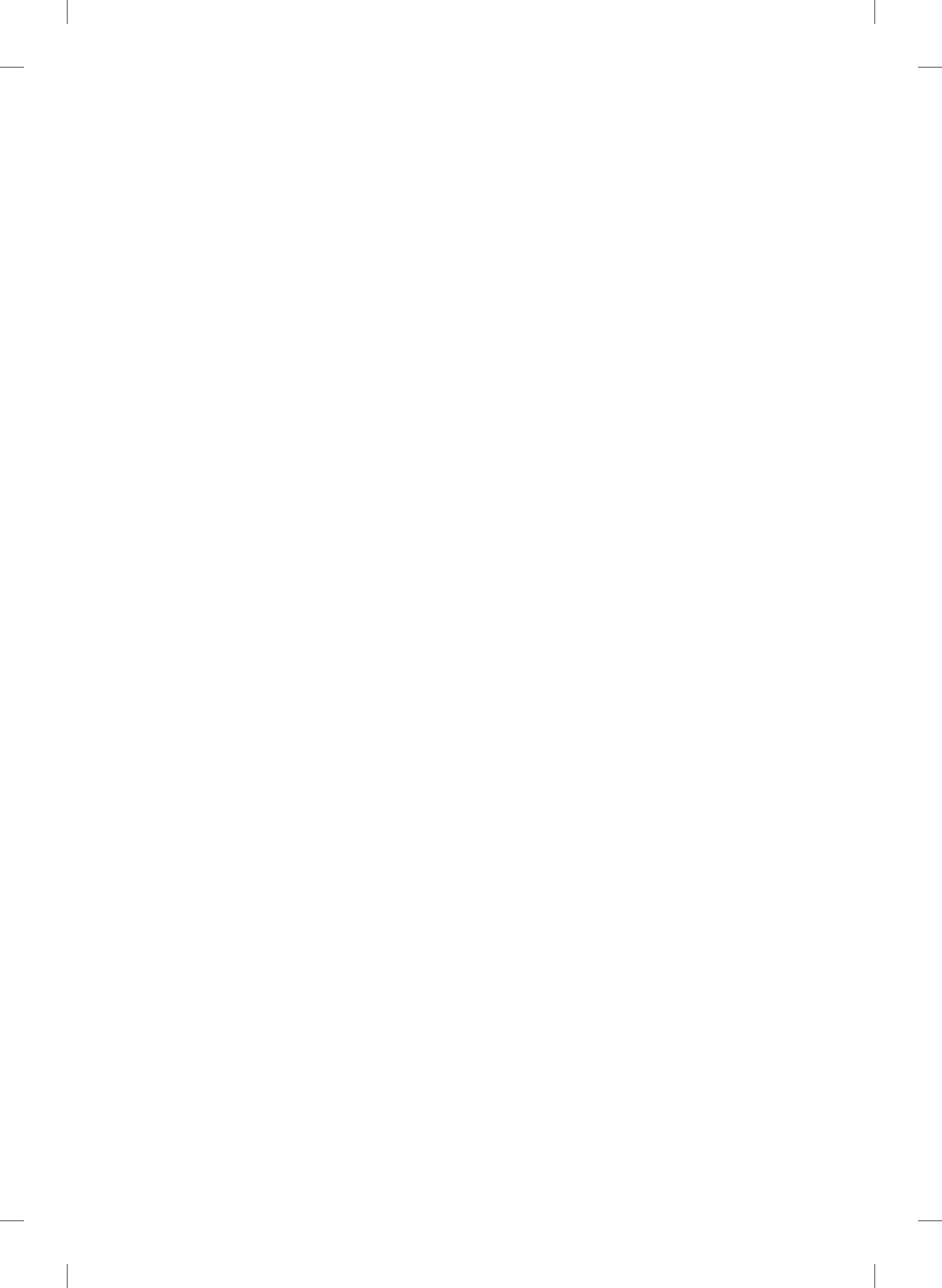


THE GREAT LAKES INITIATIVE
DUKE CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION

Identity, Community and the Gospel of Reconciliation
Christian Resources in the Face of Tribalism

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Introduction:

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

In Africa generally, the Great Lakes Region in particular, Christianity is alive and well. Examples of Christian growth and dynamism are everywhere to be seen: the number of churches and Christian ministries is on the rise, church membership and affiliation is up, Christian services are packed, seminaries are full. In some ways, the growth of Christianity in the region reflects a global trend that has seen the center of gravity of Christianity shift from the North/West, to the global South. With statistics and numbers, missiologists and religious historians have noted this fact. Moreover, it is not only the growth (in numbers) of Christianity in Africa that has been noted, but also the dynamism, deep commitments and lively expression witnessed within many congregations and churches. To be sure, there is a lot to be said about the fervor, energy and hope that this miracle of Christian growth in Africa represents. This is especially true because the gospel in the African Great Lakes region is not simply a “spiritual” (pie in the sky) movement, but a social movement that has much to do with everyday issues and possibilities of health, education, jobs and welfare. All is to say, if there is any hope in the region, Christianity is part and parcel of that story of hope.

The Distressing Factors

However, there is another story in our Christian region which is not so positive—in fact, it’s distressing. It is the story of poverty, corruption, bad governance, civil unrest and violence that haunts the region. From Rwanda to Burundi to Congo to Southern Sudan to Uganda to Kenya . . . the growth of Christianity has not necessarily meant the reduction in widespread poverty, corruption, violence, and civil unrest. On the contrary, in some places we have seen these social ills intensify.

This is what causes anyone concerned about the future of Christianity and the good of our region to pause, and even ask difficult questions: What is going on? How can this region that is so densely Christian continue to be mired in such intractable violence, unrest and unbridled corruption? Does Christianity make any difference? What kind of difference? Why doesn’t there seem to be any visible and sustainable signs of their getting better when it comes to the history of war and ethnic violence in the region?

The issues of ethnic rivalry, hatred, and the outright violence require special and urgent attention as they threaten to undermine the basic fabric of social existence, let alone development in the region. In fact, over the last twenty years, we have witnessed in all the countries in the region an increase in civil unrest and violence associated with

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claims of ethnicity and tribalism. Rwanda's story in 1994 provides a watershed event and in many ways a mirror to the region. For within less than 100 days, over 800,000 Rwandans were killed by other Rwandans in the name of "ethnicity." Here was one of the most Christianized countries in the region (in Africa); but here we witnessed Christians killing other Christians, often in the same churches where they had prayed together, sung Christian hymns together, held hands and prayed together "Our Father . . ."

There may be (and have been) many attempts to explain the reasons behind such madness. Whatever explanations we may have, the one undeniable fact is that the Rwanda genocide both reveals and confirms the depth of tribal/ethnic madness lurking below the surface in this region where Christianity seems to be alive and well. For what happened in Rwanda has happened and continues to happen, if not on the same scale, nevertheless with similar intensity in Uganda, Kenya, Congo, Burundi . . .

Asking the Hard Questions

That is why we need to seriously ponder the question posed by Cardinal Etchegaray of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace. When he visited Rwanda as the Pope's representative soon after the genocide in the summer of 1994 he asked the assembled church leaders: "Are you saying that the blood of tribalism is deeper than the waters of baptism?" One of the leaders present honestly answered: "Yes, it is."

That is the question we want to grapple with. And hopefully, we can come to the same honesty as that church leader who responded to the Cardinal, and thus admit and lament the extent to which this is the case: the blood of tribalism runs deeper than the waters of baptism.

We hope that this practice and discipline of lament will at least force us to revisit the notions and practices we have so often taken for granted or ways of living that we have assumed to be natural. What is ethnicity anyway? What is tribe? Why does it have such a powerful grip on us—so powerful that the waters of baptism do not seem to have any effect at all? Is it "natural" or are there other factors that lie behind the guise of ethnicity, which make it even difficult for us to see the lies that ideas like "ethnicity" cover up? In the final analysis of the issue of ethnicity, identity, and belonging, ask yourself: Who am I? What's my primary identity? How does my being a Christian relate to the associations and communities where I belong? Who is my "we?"

THREE MOVEMENTS

In thinking about these things, we have found it effective to refer to tribal or ethnic identity as *spells*. For spells are difficult to discern or name. They are either invisible or disguise themselves well. And yet, a crucial first step to move into a new future is

to name the spells that haunt one's present existence. Only by naming those spells and setting out to exorcise them in protracted ways does one hope to live into a new future. Christianity and the Gospel are about offering the gift of a new future. Accordingly, at the end of our time together we would like to be able to imagine the future in hopeful ways; we would like to think about and explore the gifts that Christianity can offer in the face of ethnicity and tribalism; we would like to look at lives and other experiments that offer us hopeful ways to "interrupt" the spell of ethnicity and tribalism.

Our aim is to engage the issue of ethnicity and tribalism in the region in three movements:

1. Lament: hear stories of what is going on. Lament the extent to which the blood of tribalism has become deeper than the waters of baptism.
2. Learn: gain a deeper understanding of tribalism and ethnicity that create such an enduring problem in our region: explore historical, sociological & theological analysis.
3. Live out: dream and explore possibilities, stories, experiments, initiatives for living out a hopeful future—a new future in Africa, which Christianity nurtures and therefore makes possible.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the Gathering, we will adopt a methodology that we refer to in short form as "Word Made Flesh." It is a methodology that seeks to engage the topic in a way that is at once theological, contextual and practical.

- Word: "In the beginning was the word." This is the key conviction that **reconciliation is God's gift**. The journey of reconciliation begins with remembering God—and whatever we are about must be connected to and placed within God's wider story. Our conversations and discussions are both informed by and engage scripture in a lively fashion. The spirit of our Gathering is shaped and sustained through worship.
- Made Flesh: The moment of incarnation. At a particular time in history, **God became man** and was born of a woman in the village of Bethlehem. History and geography matter. Our conversations and discussions must be placed within a specific context that considers the geography and history of our region, of each country, and of each of our lives.

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- Dwelt Among Us: Christ dwelt among us. We saw him, touched him, ate with him. What does it mean for God to dwell among us here and now? To dwell here means developing patterns and skills that sustain Christian life over the long haul. This is the practical angle which points to stories, practices, examples and experiments that help to shape and sustain both the imagination and our lives.

The fact that each framework (theological, contextual and practical) can be identified does not mean that we will engage them sequentially. We will seek to weave them together; we will move back and forth through these frameworks in a way that fosters a deep practical conversation around the issue of identity.

First Movement: LAMENT

The blood of tribalism runs deeper
than the waters of baptism

Scripture: Galatians 3:1–6: “You stupid Galatians . . . ”

Session One: Christianity and tribalism in the Great Lakes Region

On living under a spell

Read Galatians 3:1–6: “You stupid Galatians—who has bewitched you? . . . ”

As you read this section of the letter to the Galatians, pay special attention to Paul’s angry words. “You stupid Galatians,” he addresses his audience. Paul had preached and converted the Galatians during his second missionary journey. He had preached to them a gospel that highlighted the new life and the freedom that God has made possible by the invitation to them to become, through baptism, part of God’s household, part of God’s “new creation.”

Shortly after Paul’s departure from Galatia, some Jewish Christians arrived in the region teaching that Gentile Christians were obliged to observe the Mosaic law, including the requirement of circumcision (5:2); the keeping of Jewish dietary laws (2:11–14); and the observance of special days (4:10). The Jewish Christians insisted that these observances were not only necessary—they mark one as a member of God’s household. When all this was reported to Paul he was enraged. In his view, the teaching of the Judaisers amounted to saying that in order to belong to the household of God, one must belong to the “tribe” of Israel. Paul writes to the Galatians this angry letter, showing why associating salvation with belonging to the “tribe” of Israel is tantamount to saying that Christ died for nothing: (2:21) . . . In the end, Paul writes, “neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a *new creation*.”

But it is telling that Paul uses the language of “bewitching” and spell—in referring to the false teachings. For spells are not easy to see. They appear as “natural” and “normal” and even beautiful. For the Galatians such was the false assurance of the law.

When I was young, some of the most dreadful stories we heard involved very innocent and beautiful creatures who were often helpless: an old woman, a young child (lukokobe). They would ask a favor, say a drink or to be carried to the next home; once you stopped to carry them, they would dig their claws in and would not let go. They suck your blood and begin to feed on you. They take you over completely.

Tribe and ethnicity seem to have become a sort of “lukokobe” for us in the Great Lakes Region. They have completely taken over our vision of who we are or what society looks like. It is as if we cannot imagine identity or community except in tribal or ethnic terms. We seem to be living under a spell. That is why Paul’s words to the Galatians apply very fittingly to us: “You stupid Africans, who has cast a spell over you?”

Use this space to take notes and reflect on what you’re reading.

There are many stories that confirm we are indeed under the spell of ethnicity and tribalism is obvious from the following stories.

- The first story is one I heard from Bishop Mbala Levy of the Congo. Bishop Mbala told this eye-witness account during a small group sharing at the First Gathering in Kampala in November 2006. The story has stayed with me (and haunted me) since then:

In 2004 in Bunia, a Lendu woman had been married to a Hema husband, and both were members of a local church. During the fighting, the Lendu militia killed a number of people in the village and abducted many children. The couple took refuge in a house where other church leaders were hiding. In the evening, the members killed her Hema husband and forced the wife to roast his flesh. In the morning, they sent away the woman, but as she was leaving, they took her son and roasted him in her presence. She now had only one child left, a girl. A few days later, the bishop found the woman and her daughter and asked her to come with him to the church. During worship, the woman broke down and started crying. When the bishop asked her why she was crying, she pointed to the presiding elder and said that he was one of those who had killed her husband and her son. She asked the bishop to help her

get away from Bunia to Goma, as she felt she could not live in Bunia anymore. The bishop went to town to get her a bus ticket to Goma, but when he returned he found that she had been killed—she and her daughter—and buried. The elders and deacons of the church had killed them both!!!

- Another story is from a man named Adelbert, a perpetrator in the Rwanda genocide as he tells the story of his involvement.

The Sunday after the plane crash was the usual choir rehearsal day at the church in Kibungo. We sang hymns in good feeling with our Tutsi compatriots, our voices still blending in chorus. On Sunday morning we returned at the appointed hour for mass; they did not arrive. They had already fled into the bush in fear of reprisals, driving their goats and cows before them. That disappointed us greatly, especially on a Sunday. Anger hustled us outside the church door. We left the Lord and our prayers inside to rush home. We changed from our Sunday best into our workday clothes, we grabbed clubs and machetes, and we went straight off to killing.

In the marshes, I was appointed killing boss because I gave orders intensely. The same happened in the Congolese camps. In prison I was appointed charismatic leader because I sang intensely. I enjoyed the alleluias. I gladly felt rocked by those joyous verses. I was steadfast in my love of God. Jean Jatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (New York, 2005), p. 140

We can probably tell many more stories like these, all of which not only reveal the horror and depth of violence committed by self-confessed Christians, but confirm the spell that ethnicity and tribalism has cast over God's people.

**Session Two: Placing the “spell” within a wider context
of the Great Lakes Region**

Activity:

- » Have a panel of country representatives, each briefly capturing the role that tribalism plays in their country.
- » Encourage the speakers to be both brief and concrete.
- » After, the plenary participants either sign up for different workshops or meet in their country groups to engage an in-depth look at the ethnic profile, issues and challenges in their respective countries.

Even though the ethnic profile and history of each country might be different, there are some common characteristics which cut across countries. Such common characteristics include:

- The existence of one dominant tribe(s) alongside other tribes, and the significance of this fact during the colonial time.
- The close connection among ethnicity, politics (power) and economics.
- The way “ethnicity” and “tribes” tend to be exploited, especially during the time of struggle for power, or election time: the power contenders appeal to their tribesmen as “one of you.”
- Even though there is a sense in which some tribes have been privileged, the fate of the peasants (mostly in the countryside) is usually the same regardless of what “tribe” they belong to, or who is in power.
- Tribalism seems to be an enduring problem, often lurking below the surface—waiting to happen: Tribes and neighbors co-exist peacefully, until issues of land (economics) and/or power (politics) come up.
- Tribe and ethnicity is connected to a sense of belonging and community. Somehow one feels good to know that the new minister of education/bishop is from one’s tribe: even though there may be no personal advantage. It is all connected to the sense of “my community,” my people.
- Any other common feelings?

Lamenting Tribalism: Resources & Group Exercises

1. Real Life Stories: share a story (stories) that reveal the depth of madness.
2. Scripture: Scripture offers many examples of lament: e.g.: Mt 2:16–18: A voice is heard in Ramah: Rachel crying for her children, refusing to be consoled; or Jer 14:14–21. The virgin daughter of thy people is smitten with a grievous wound. You can use these texts in a bible study setting or for worship.
3. A day of mourning, lament and repentance: see e.g. Joel 1:1–20: For group reflection, the prophet calls for a day of mourning; for fasting. This can be done at a parish, congregation, or national level.
4. Vigils: you can use a text like Mt 2:16–18 above: Rachel crying for her children. Tribalism and ethnicity are real. Do not try to move on too quickly. Take time to name places and people; to remember and mourn loss: victims of ethnic violence.
5. Worship songs of lament: encourage your music ministry and choir to compose and sing not simply songs of “worship and praise” but also songs of lament that clearly name the spell of tribalism. The Psalms are a good place to start.
6. Journeys and Pilgrimages: visit historical places or memorials. Remembering well: the other side of remembering is revenge.

Second Movement: LEARN

How did we get where we are?

Scripture: 1 Cor 1:10–17: What is this I hear? How did you get so low?

Session Three: How did we get into “spell land”?

Read 1 Cor 1:10–17: What is this I hear? How did you get so low?

Paul had a special attachment to the Corinthian church. He had first arrived in Corinth after experiencing both persecution and success in Macedonia and disheartening failure in Athens. He stayed in Corinth for eighteen months during which he founded a large and vibrant Christian community. After Paul left, difficulties, abuses and disputes arose in the Christian communities which were reported to Paul. The church was in danger of splinting into sects. At the same time, he received a letter from Corinth asking for his guidance on a number of issues that were threatening to break up the community.

So, Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians addressing various issues that threatened disintegration of the church. The first of the issues that Paul tackled was one of divisions or schisms.

“What is this I hear,” Paul writes, “that each of you is saying, “I belong to Paul, or to Apollos, to Cephas . . . (1:12).” “Were you baptized in the name of Paul . . . Is Christ divided . . . ?” You can almost hear Paul’s frustration in his questions to the Corinthians.

“How did you get so low?”

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians has a lot of relevance for Christians in the Great Lakes Region. For we, not unlike the Corinthians, have identified ourselves more with our “tribal” or “ethnic” or even “national” identity than with Christ. We refer to ourselves as a Muganda Christian, a Hutu Christian, a Lendu priest; a Kikuyu religious leader—where the emphasis is on Muganda, Hutu, Lendu or Kikuyu. But how did we get to that place?

What is a tribe? Why tribes?

Many of us think that “tribes” are natural, that is just the way things are, the way God made us. We feel that we are born of this or that particular tribe, and nothing can be done about it. We do not choose to be born of this or that tribe. That is why most of us actually feel that the problem in our region is not “tribe” because that is the way God made us. The problem (we feel) is “tribalism”—to let the fact that we belong to this or the other tribe become more significant than our belonging to the Body of Christ. We feel the real problem is when our belonging to this or the other tribe becomes too powerful that it trumps all other relationships, including our relationship with Christ. We feel the real problem is when belonging to a particular tribe becomes the overriding factor in determining who gets access to power, economics, education or other public services.

This is indeed true. But the issue of tribe is more complex. It has to do with “identity”—and in this case it is not as “natural” as we think. For when we consider identity, who we become is not simply a fact of biology but has many other factors related to it.

But before we get into this, let us first think about the term “tribe.” What is a tribe?

- Does tribe refer to people who speak the same language? Then Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi are not two tribes. Why then do we still refer to them as “tribes”?
- Does “tribe” have to do with size? The Flemish in Belgium (6.5 million) and the Walloon (4 million) are not referred to as “tribes” even though they speak different languages; yet the Baganda (5.5 m) are a tribe?
- What then is a tribe and why is “tribe” the primary way we name ourselves and talk about people in Africa (yet not in Europe or the West)?
- Of course more recently, people feel the word “tribe” is negative, so we use “ethnicity.” But does this makes matters any clearer? What is ethnicity? Does it mean same language, does it refer to size, and does it mean people descended from the same line, just like a clan? What is it?

Resources for Learning

There was a time when the word “tribe” was used to characterize those social formations—often sharing the same cultural, linguistic and religious community—which didn’t possess a state. Thus we find “tribes” in the Old Testament, or refer to the “Germanic tribes.” But this fact is not very helpful to understand the way the notion of “tribe” is used to name and identify groups in Africa today. Tribe and tribalism as we experience it in Africa today is a modern phenomenon that cannot be viewed as the equivalent of the Old Testament tribes.

The way the notion of tribe is used in Africa today is complex. It has many angles and factors to it. Some of these factors connect to the story of colonialism, other factors relate to the African cultural background, and still other factors connect to the distinctive shape that politics and economics have taken in post-colonial Africa:

(a) Consider some of these **colonial factors**:

- Language: The way Europeans used the language of “tribe” in relation to Africa (and not to their own European societies) connotes “primitive.” Europeans live in nations (developed), Africans live in “tribes.”
- The Europeans who first came to Africa were very preoccupied with the issue of “identity” as something stable. “Race” and the related connotations of racial purity, (white) racial superiority was what provided their “identity” and that was stable. The Africans did not only belong to the black race, they belonged to “tribes” which gave them a sense of identity. Europeans could not imagine a sense of tribal fluidity (e.g. Hutu—Tutsi categories, or communities that did not have a clear tribal identity, e.g. the Acholi in Uganda). They not only organized people according to tribes, they made the tribes “fixed.” Where there were no tribes, they created them. Where in the past the sense of African belonging had a certain fluidity and built in frameworks of openness to the stranger [all meant to ensure that there were no unmovable borders between communities], the new modern “tribes” were cast in concrete; they became fixed and stable. The identity card sealed the definition around “tribes.” You could speak many languages, but you could not belong to more than one tribe.
- The education system: anthropology, civics, geography, and history assumed this understanding of tribe and built onto it, thus helping to instill it as an imaginative lens in the minds of all who went to school. Consider this as evidence: the educated are more “tribal” in their thinking than the uneducated peasants!
- Having a multiplicity of (competing) tribes also helped the project of European colonialism. Through a divide and rule strategy—often using more powerful tribes to do the dirty work of colonialism—tribal competition, rivalry, hatred (in a word, tribalism) was build into the European project of “nation-building.”

- Modern politics of the nation-state is built on violence and often the imagination of violence and enemies. In the Western case, that potential or actual enemy is “outside” the borders. The unique feature of African politics—colonial and post-independence—is that the enemy is “within” in the form of the rival/competing tribe. Thus the social space in Africa is not only fragmented in so many tribes, it is set up in such a way that the tribes will always be at war with each other as they fight for the spoils of political power and for the economics of the national cake (politics and economics of “eating”).
- So, we live not only in the fact of “tribe” as the primary identity (when we meet someone we immediately would like to know what “tribe” they are from); but politics and economics in Africa assume and build on that imagination.

What other historical factors do you see?

(b) There are also **cultural** factors that make “tribe” the dominant way we view and engage life and others. Some of these many include:

- A sense of loyalty and tradition
- A strong sense of community and social “belonging” in Africa. Mbiti said it well: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”
- Poverty and powerlessness makes many of us easily exploitable
- Unequal distribution of resources: making some regions appear to be doing better than others
- The symbolic nature of African relationships. At times symbols and appearances are more treasured than the real thing
- Christianity has often easily and uncritically built onto this “tribal” grid

Since the factors are multiple and complex, a good analysis of any tribal or ethnic conflict must point to the interconnected nature of the various factors and players, whether on the economic, cultural political, social, national, regional and international level.

Session Four: Personal journeys—between pain and hope

This section might best be done by small group discussion.

Activity: Participants share their personal journey as it relates to tribalism using these and similar questions:

- » What were the times you were able to see the spell? When were you blind to the spell?
- » When did you feel most frustrated?
- » When were you a victim?
- » When were you the perpetrator?
- » Speak about the biases and prejudices: it is always the “they” who have the problem?
- » Name a place of pain.
- » Name a place of hope.

Workshops/Seminars: Another possibility is to organize workshops/seminars around the complex factors which make “tribe” and “tribalism” seem natural—factors which assume the reality of tribes, and thus succeed in entrenching it more deeply within the cultural, social, economic and political fabric of the region. Consider individual workshops on:

- the cultural factors
- economic factors
- political factors
- the religious factors
- the regional and international factors

The seminars could be regional or country specific. The seminars could also simply be a continuation of the panel discussions yesterday.

Third Movement: LIVE OUT Alternatives

How do we go on from here?

Scripture: Mk 3:31–35: Who are my mother and my brothers?

Session Five: Christianity and tribalism—the options before us

Adam Hochschild's book, King Leopold's Ghost is a very moving and quite disturbing book. It recounts the brutal plundering of the Congo Free State under King Leopold II of Belgium. It is the story of untold suffering, death and destruction—all under the guise of civilization—as King Leopold's *force publique* used brutal methods to drive the natives into mines and rubber plantations. What the reader might miss from the story is the fact that this was also the time that massive missionary efforts were underway in the Congo. Whereas the missionaries might have had a more spiritual (saving souls) and humanitarian (clothing) idea of the gospel, the Congolese who became Christians were looking for a more “practical” answer—resources to survive and overcome the King Leopold's rubber terror:

The missionaries had come to the Congo eager to evangelize, to fight polygamy and to impart to the Africans a [] sense of sin. Before long however, the rubber terror meant that missionaries had trouble finding bodies to clothe or souls to save. Frightened villagers would disappear into the jungle for weeks when they saw the smoke of an approaching steamboat on the horizon. One British missionary was asked repeatedly by Africans, “Has the Savior you tell us of any power to save us from rubber trouble? (Adam Hoschild, King Leopold's Ghost, p. 172)

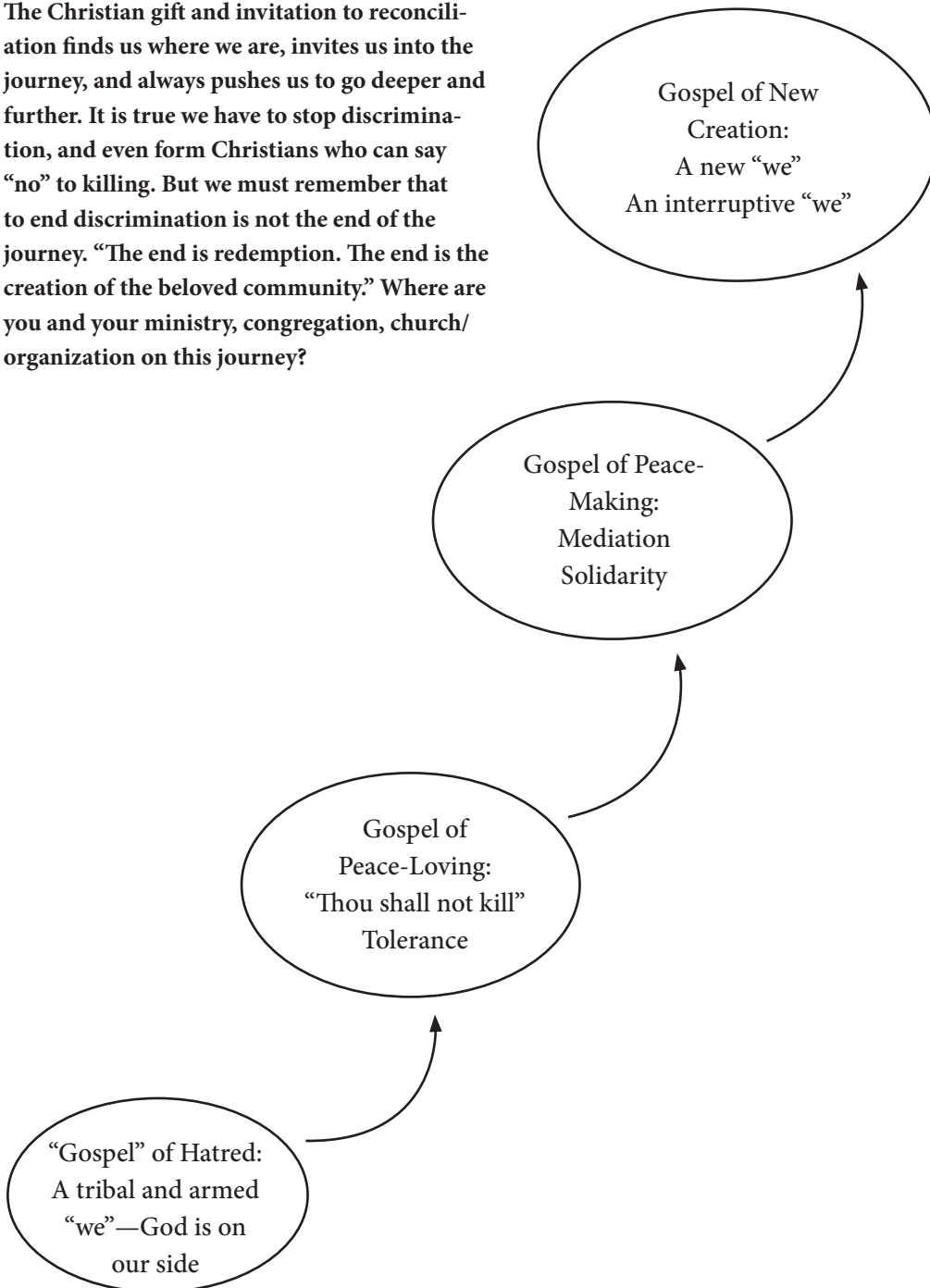
It is a very similar practical preoccupation that Christians in the Great Lakes have. They are asking the same or similar question in relation to tribalism. Does the savior we preach and profess have any power to save us from the spell of tribalism?

Whereas many would like to answer with a definite “yes—of course”; and would even want to quote texts like Ephesians 2:11–27, to show that the “dividing wall has been broken,” the facts on the ground are not always so positive.

That is why a good way to think about the resources that Christianity and the Gospel might offer in relation to tribalism is to consider the various historical alternatives and paradigms through which Christianity has related to the issue of identity.

Christianity and Tribalism: The options before us

The Christian gift and invitation to reconciliation finds us where we are, invites us into the journey, and always pushes us to go deeper and further. It is true we have to stop discrimination, and even form Christians who can say “no” to killing. But we must remember that to end discrimination is not the end of the journey. “The end is redemption. The end is the creation of the beloved community.” Where are you and your ministry, congregation, church/organization on this journey?



1. A “gospel” of hatred: Christianity fueling tribalism. The tribal “we.”



- We all know a number of historical cases where the Gospel and Christianity has not been the Good News, but has simply been a catalyst that has fueled tribal, racial and ethnic divisions.
- Consider some historical cases
 - Apartheid
 - Racism
 - Northern Ireland
 - Crusades

- A more recent story: see the story of Adelbert (previously mentioned)

- The assumptions:
 - Often this tribal view of Christianity is sustained by the assumption that ethnicity, tribe or race is created by God.
 - There is also a tendency to feel that “we [in my tribe] are the chosen race/tribe.”
 - Scripture might often be cited to justify the treatment of the others.
 - When the language of reconciliation is used in this context, it simply means reconciliation with God and among the members of my group.
 - For the rest, the church simply radiates and intensifies the divisions within society.
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2. A gospel of “peace-loving”: Christianity policing tribalism: thou shall not kill.



Peace-loving Christians are committed to a life of keeping the commandments and to peaceful coexistence between tribes or ethnic groups.

- Some of the underlying assumptions:
 - Tribe/ethnicity created by God—and thus “natural”
 - Due to historical misunderstandings and injustices the tribes live in hostility
 - Tribes are created equal: the constant sin is for each tribe to think that “our” tribe is superior/better than others. This too is somehow “natural”—the result of original sin

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- It is the key problem of **prejudice** and **discrimination**
- The Gospel does not only warn us against such prejudice, it provides a commandment: “Thou shall not kill”

- The church
 - Mandate of the Church: to work to eliminate bias, discrimination and prejudice based on tribe and ethnicity.
 - The gospel of reconciliation encourages us to be peace-loving; tolerant. Reconciliation encourages restraint and co-existence between different tribes and groups.
 - The preaching of the gospel of reconciliation goes hand in hand with other forms of education: human rights education; anti-bias training.

3. A gospel of “peace-making”: Christianity bridging the divides:
The Christian “we” is a peace-making “we.”



Christians committed to peace-making actively work to resolve conflict between groups and to establish understanding and solidarity between them. Most ministries of reconciliation operate here.

- Some underlying convictions that sustain this commitment:
 - Tribes are created by God—and therefore “natural.”
 - Even though we are made by God differently, we are all children of the same Father.
 - The church is a community of communities; a family of families; a clan of clans.
 - Paul’s image of the body: 1 Cor 12:12–26: like the body with many parts, so the different tribes each has a special value and role in the body of Christ.
 - The church as a multi ethnic community of faith, each worshipping God in the style, language and custom that is most natural to each.
 - The church is called upon to live not simply to be a community of peace between, but of **solidarity** with, different tribes/groups.

- The Gospel of Reconciliation is taken seriously as a gospel of mediation and building solidarity, which involves many activities. e.g.
 - mediation and conflict resolution between groups—through a whole range of mediation skills, programs and activities
 - joint worship services (now and again)
 - friendship building activities: e.g. football matches
 - reaching out in solidarity: e.g. disaster relief
 - advocacy for **justice** on behalf of marginalized others and groups

4. A Gospel of a new creation: a new community:
The Christian “we” is a confused we; an interruptive we.



Christians committed to the gospel of a new we, strive to build and live out the vision of a new community, whose identity is grounded not on tribe, race or ethnicity, but on the story of God.

Some key underlying assumptions that **sustain this commitment**:

- The story of God always calls us into and forms us into a new identity.
- This is the story of a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)
- The story of “new creation” is a story of being “unhinged” from old creation; from old (so-called “natural”) identities
- It is the story of Abram and Sarai (Gen 12:1ff)
- This is the story of Jesus—an ever expanding “we”: “Who are my brothers and sisters?” (Mk 3:31–35)
- It is the story of Acts: “You will be my witnesses . . .” (Acts 1:8)
- It is the story of Antioch (Acts 11: 26): it was such a strange, confused and mixed up group (ethnically) that people did not simply know what to call them. So they called them “followers of the [strange] preacher who called himself the messiah (Christ).
- It is the story of Revelation: The new community gathered for worship in the New Jerusalem: an assembly impossible to count (and tell apart) from every tribe, tongue and nation. (See Revelation 7:9—“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”)

Reconciliation means building, finding oneself part of this restless community of **pilgrims** (Ephesians 2:19).

Reconciliation means being **ambassadors** of God's reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20); both a sign and evidence of God's gift of new creation.

Reconciliation means not simply building onto the old categories and identities, but also **interrupting**, disrupting, confusing them in very concrete but fresh ways.

- Consider some concrete cases:
 - ***During the Genocide in Rwanda:*** "The only community that was able to provide a bulwark against barbarity for its adherents was Islam. There are many testimonies to the protection that members of the Muslim community gave each other, and their refusal to divide themselves ethnically. This solidarity comes from the fact that being Muslim in Rwanda where Muslims are very small (0.2%) proportion of the population, is not simply a choice dictated by religion. It is a global identity choice. Muslims are often marginal people and this reinforces a strong sense of community identification which supersedes ethnic tags, something that the majority Christians have not been able to achieve." Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 253

- ***Another example: The eye witness account of a certain Jean Baptiste Murangira, one of the killers in the 1994 Genocide:*** “I know the case of a Hutu boy who fled into the marshes with the Tutsis. After two or three weeks they pointed out to him that he was Hutu and so he could be saved. He left the marshes and was not attacked. He had spent so much time with Tutsis in his early childhood that he was a bit mixed up. His mind no longer knew how to draw the proper line between the ethnic groups. Afterward he did not get involved in the killings. That is the sole exception. The only able-bodied person not forced to raise the machete, even coming along behind. It was clear he was overwhelmed.” Jean Hatzfeld, Machete Season, p. 122

Session Six: Shaping Christian imagination of New Creation

Initiatives, stories and experiments toward a new “we”

The goal of this session is to engage the imaginative possibilities of opportunities, practices and disciplines through stories and case studies that make the living out the “new we” possible in the face of the tribal spell. This can be done in the general plenary, groups or a combination of the two.

- At any rate, the stories and sharing need to be very specific, talking about concrete places, people, activities, stories:

- People: examples of individuals embodying the new we

- Experiments: initiatives that offer an example of how old tribal/ethnic identities are interrupted

- Practices that make the new we, e.g. worshipping together, working together, eating together

- Practices through which a new “we” is sustained, e.g. courage in the face of martyrdom, memory, friendships, pilgrimages; story telling . . .
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- How about the case of inter-marriage and raising children together (adoption, foster parentage)

Stories, Dreams, Initiatives, Resources and Imaginative Possibilities:

Possible stories and initiatives to consider:

- Buta seminary: 40 students killed in 1995. A similar case of Nyange (Rwanda)
- Mi-Parec Peace teams: e.g. Mutaho
- Bishop Taban and Holy Spirit Peace Village, Kuron
- Mi-Parec Peace Teams
- Living with Shalom (MCC)
- IEFS Student groups
- Foster parents (ala Odama)
- Nyankunde rebuilding initiative
- Lessons from Le Chambon
- Seeds of Peace (Maine): <http://www.seedsofpeace.org/>: where largely Israeli and Palestinian young adults come for a three-week program to foster reconciliation and peace. What began in 1993 as a camp program with 46 Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian teenagers has expanded into a global operation with offices in over ten cities around the world and nearly 4,000 young leaders working for peace, whom we call “Seeds.” Seeds of Peace is best described in a book, *The Enemy Has a Face*, by the founder of the camp program, James Wallach.
- Engaging art/artists

A GIFT AND A CALL

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 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 5:17-20