

Can These Bones Live?

Death in the house of God—what an oxymoron? The home of Life itself, full of bones. How does such a thing happen?

Centuries ago, the temple of our god was full of death. The Israelites had brought in Molech, Baal, and Asherah poles—the gods of the surrounding cultures—and bowed the knee. **A second trip to Rwanda reveals that death can still rule in the home of the Life Giver when the surrounding culture of hatred is allowed to breach the walls of the churches.** As I sat and listened to the stories of genocide from many groups of caregivers in Rwanda, one young man said, *“I used to think of the Church as a sanctuary. Now I think of it as a cemetery.”*

In 1994, almost one million people were slaughtered in that beautiful country while the world did nothing. At the beginning of the genocide, thousands sought protection in the houses of worship. Thousands were massacred in those churches, and their remains have been preserved as evidence of the desecration in the house of God (see Nyamata and Ntrama). **Thirteen years later they are still staggering under its effects. The trauma of that time still haunts their lives.** As one young woman said, *“Everyone in Rwanda believes God keeps changing. People who were talking about faith turned and were involved in the genocide. How am I to know who God is?”* Another caregiver said, *“When the leaders fall down it is hard to think that the followers will be able to stand up.”*

I love Rwanda and its people and long to see the dry bones of their souls live. Though I have worked with trauma for decades, it is still difficult to grasp what happened there. It was a raw, brutal, violent, and frenzied thing—and it happened in churches. It was not the bad guys. It was neighbors, fellow church members, relatives, and friends. **I asked one man, “Did the leaders of churches not know this was wrong?”** He told me that the majority of pastors he works with are illiterate. I thought of Hosea 4:6: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”* And then I thought of us, sitting in the pews and standing in the pulpits of America. **Are there ways in which the house of God in this land has so imported the surrounding culture that death is within the walls of the Church?** Have we, too, followed the Israelites and the Rwandans and made the house of God a cemetery rather than a sanctuary?

When the Scripture speaks of knowledge, it does not mean information. According to God, knowledge means loving obedience to what is known. Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). Whenever the Church imports the culture of its surrounding world within its walls, it brings death. We do not live with Baals and Molechs. We are not being fed a diet of hatred for our neighbors and fellow church member. Yet **we do live surrounded and cannot deny being impacted by the gods of information, success, comfort, and pleasure.**

One of the things I know from the history of Israel and from Rwanda is that the people of God import other gods in small increments and do not even notice that they are beginning to die. You do not go from worshipping a holy God to sacrificing children to Molech in a day or a week. You do not go from dinner with a neighbor to genocide in a day or a week. **You get there little by little; blind, numb, and not noticing until eventually the horrific seems normal and acceptable.** God help us from ever traumatizing His body again by importing death into His house!

“Can these bones live?” by His great mercy they can—both in Rwanda and here. *“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people...then you will know that I am the Lord...I will put my Spirit in you and you will come to life’”* (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

It is my prayer that as caregivers in this country and around the world, that we will not carry death in even the smallest ways—in our words, our deeds, our desires, and our choices. **The greatest trauma in this world is sin, and it is sin that brings forth the genocide or death of any kind. May the house of God, us, be full of the life of God because we live in loving obedience to Him rather than in mindless enslavement to the systems of this world.**

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