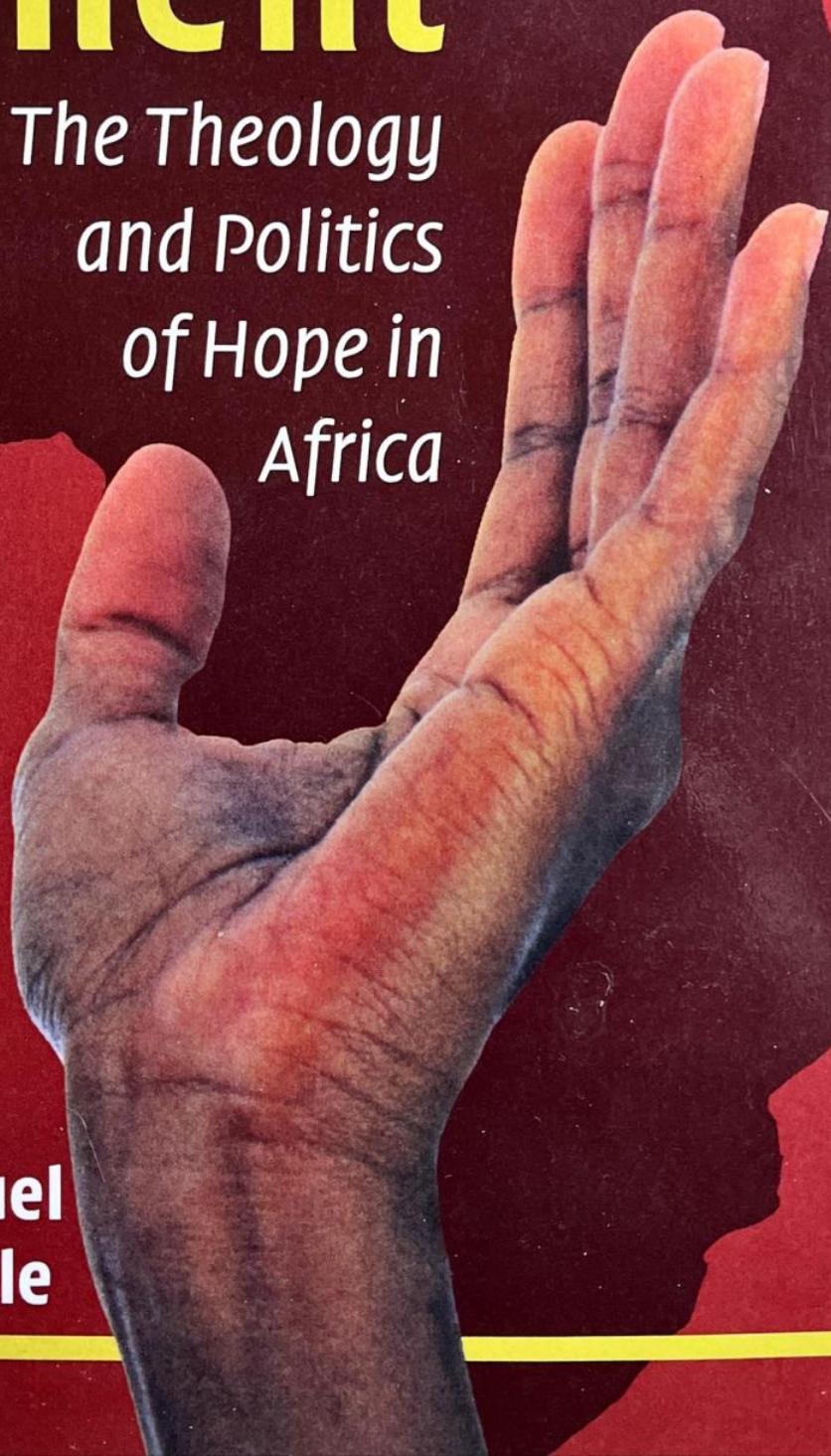


Born from **Lament**

*The Theology
and Politics
of Hope in
Africa*

**Emmanuel
Katongole**



There is no more urgent theological task than to provide an account of hope in Africa, given its endless cycles of violence, war, poverty, and displacement. So claims Emmanuel Katongole, an innovative theological voice from Africa.

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"The Resurrection of Congo"

CHAPTER 8
CHRISTOPH
Christopher Munzehirwa and the
Politics of Nonviolent Love

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried.

Christopher Munzehirwa

DR. CONER

1926 -
1996 -

Emmanuel Kataliko's predecessor as Archbishop of Bukavu was Christopher Munzehirwa mwene Ngabo. Munzehirwa had been ordained a diocesan priest for Bukavu in 1958, but he soon entered the Jesuit order. After his religious profession in 1965, he undertook a brief period of studies (social and economic science) in Belgium, before he returned to Congo to serve, first as director of social services at the Ignatian House in Kinshasa, then as rector of the Jesuit scholasticate in Kimwena, and eventually as the provincial of Jesuits in Central Africa (Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi). In 1986 he was named coadjutor bishop of Kasongo, and eventually the titular bishop there in 1990. In 1994, Pope John Paul II named him Archbishop of Bukavu.

Munzehirwa's tenure as Archbishop of Bukavu lasted just a little over two years—two turbulent years in the history of Congo and Bukavu. At the time of his installation as archbishop (June 1994), the Rwandan genocide was still unfolding in Congo's eastern neighbor and millions of refugees were crossing from Rwanda into the city of Bukavu, located on the Zaire side of Rwanda's western border. The arrival of so many refugees there and in the neighboring villages created an immediate humanitarian crisis. The city was crowded; the countryside was overpopulated; trees were cut down for firewood and to make spaces on which to pitch makeshift tents; the population was hungry; and there was fear of an outbreak of cholera and/or other diseases. At the same time, armed gangs—made up of undisciplined, underpaid, and demoralized Zairean soldiers, plus Rwandan *Interahamwe* youth militias (many of whom

had committed genocide in Rwanda)—roamed the streets, terrorizing the population, extorting money from the refugees, and pillaging the towns and homes of the local population.

In response to that refugee crisis, Munzihirwa's leadership assumed various forms. He met with military commanders and issued statements that called on soldiers to be disciplined and to avoid pillaging; he reminded them of their duty to protect people's property and lives. He also encouraged the local population to welcome the refugees. He himself did as much. On many mornings he would go across the bridge and help children, the sick, and the infirm cross over the bridge. When the genocide in neighboring Rwanda was over, he appealed to the international community to put pressure on the Rwandan government to welcome the refugees back, while at the same time protesting the forced repatriation of refugees. As Rwandan troops prepared to attack Zaire in the fall of 1996, and civil and military leaders fled the region, Munzihirwa remained the sole leader and shield between the Rwandan forces and the vulnerable populace of Bukavu. On Sunday, October 27, 1996, he issued a final plea from the pulpit to the people, encouraging them to "stand firm in charity," not to flee from their homes, and to avoid rumors and radio propaganda meant to incite panic. Two days later he drove to a neighboring parish and rescued two Rwandan nuns whose lives were threatened. In the afternoon, he held a meeting with remaining civic and business leaders to try to figure out a way to save the city.¹ As he left that meeting to return to his residence at the Jesuit Alifajiri School in the evening, he was stopped at a checkpoint and shot dead by a Rwandan military commander.

Munzihirwa's assassination was not wholly unexpected—either by his colleagues (who constantly worried about his exposure) or by Munzihirwa himself. In an Easter message that year he had written: "Despite anguish and suffering, the Christian who is persecuted for the cause of justice finds spiritual peace in total and profound assent to God, in accord with a vocation that can lead even to death."²

But what drove Munzihirwa to embrace a "vocation that [could] lead even to death"? What did he see? What shaped Munzihirwa's vision in the way he understood himself as a pastor and shaped his courage as well as his simple lifestyle? What was his vision of society, into which he invited the people of

1. Among other things, he recorded and sent a radio message to Rome in a bid to raise international awareness of the situation. See Christian Decker, "Voices from the Grave," <http://jloughnan.tripod.com/zaire.htm> (4/3/15).

2. See John Allen, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2013), 49.

YARA

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Bukavu at this critical time? What inspired that vision of society, and what were its specific marks?

The key to answering these questions—that is, the key to the whole of Munzehirwa's life and pastoral ministry—lies in one of his favorite sayings: "There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried."³ The more closely one examines this observation, the more one notes that the "seeing" that Munzehirwa refers to is the yada'—the intimate personal knowledge of and participation in God's anguished love for God's people that Jeremiah (and Jesus) pointed to. But just as with the wailings of Jeremiah and Jesus, Munzehirwa's anguished life points to a revolutionary social vision founded on nonviolent, self-sacrificing love. Munzehirwa not only invoked this vision, he performed it as he invited the people of Bukavu into its reality. That is why, in the face of the region's (Congo's and Rwanda's) violent politics of power and plunder, Munzehirwa's vision and "politics" could not but clash with that of the generals, and would thus lead to his inevitable assassination. However, this is what makes Munzehirwa, for all his limitations, a kind of Jeremiah and Christlike figure, whose life and ministry provides an ecclesiological illumination of the church as a nonviolent alternative and interruption of the politics of violence. The church's own ability to be such a nonviolent interruption depends on its ability to enter the "way of Christ"—to enter, that is, the way of God's self-sacrificing love that is manifested through his suffering and death. As it turns out, entering the "way of Christ" is not a mere pious or spiritual recommendation; it is an invitation into a revolutionary social vision.

The Way of Christ: A Revolutionary Social Vision

In a 1995 Advent message to the refugees, Munzehirwa wrote:

We hope that in entering the way of Christ, in a month we will be able to wish each other a "Merry Christmas," the joy of the Son of God, who is born in the gash of human history and who knows that he will die on the Cross to save the world. It is this profound joy of true hope—that which hopes against all hope—that I already wish for you and that, in solidarity, we will construct together while waiting for the day of your return to your homeland.⁴

3. Allen, *Global War on Christians*, 49.

4. Christopher Munzehirwa, Advent Pastoral Letter, Bukavu (November 18, 1995; translation by the author).

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Munzehirwa addressed this message to Rwandan refugees at the height of intense pressure being brought by the United Nations concerning the forced repatriation of the Rwanda refugees. In his message, Munzehirwa protested the decision to repatriate, arguing that “we cannot agree to the measures taken against you that violate the rights of man and especially the rights of the refugee. The refugee cannot be repatriated against his will, above all when he knows that almost certain death awaits him in his homeland.”⁵ Inviting the refugees to identify with the Son of God, he encouraged them not simply to accept their suffering but to see their suffering as in the spirit of Christ’s, as a “purification to prepare for a better, clearer, and more united future.” In that way their suffering, rather than simply being passive endurance, would become an opportunity for “conversion” and for the construction of a new society “that we will construct together as we wait for the day of your return.”⁶

True, Munzehirwa understood the work of conversion to be at its core a “spiritual” message, a new encounter with God. But because it was that, it was also a revolutionary social experience. Quoting Charles Péguy, the French poet and essayist, he noted:

Social revolution . . . will be moral or will not be revolution. . . . We cannot transform the social system without reforming ourselves first, provoking in ourselves a renovation of spiritual and moral life, digging down to the personal, spiritual, and moral foundations of human life, and renewing spiritual and moral ideas that preside over the constitution and over social life as such, and by awakening within that group a new spring. Our true battlefield is first the soul, the spirit of man.⁷

Accordingly, if the way of the Son of man, who is born “in the gash of human history,” points to Christ’s willingness to suffer violence rather than use violence to establish his kingdom, entering “his” way is at the same time a social vision—a vision of society founded not on war but on nonviolent love. War cannot be the foundation of true and lasting peace, Munzehirwa often reminded his audience: “We must remember that war is always something despicable. Those who love peace work to build structures of justice, forgiveness, and love.”⁸ As he reminded the university students of Bukavu, these structures

5. Munzehirwa, Advent Pastoral Letter, 1995.

6. Munzehirwa, Advent Pastoral Letter, 1995.

7. See Sébastien Muyengo Mulombe, *Christophe Munzehirwa: La Sentinelle des Grands Lacs* (Kinshasa: Afriquespoir, 2011), 17–18 (translation by the author).

8. Deogratias Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque Christophe Munzehirwa Mwene Ngabo*,

of peace take time to “grow” and require the necessary social, political, and economic institutions of a nation: “We need peace to grow. Not the peace of the armies of those who each day are standing at the ready for war, nor the peace of the cemetery. Rather, we want living and invigorating peace that allows economic, legal, agronomic, and medical sciences to flourish in our university.”⁹

If Munzihirwa’s vision of peace required the building of institutional structures of justice, forgiveness, and love, it also required and equally depended on everyday nonviolent interruptions of the business of war. Thus, in the anxiety-saturated atmosphere, as Rwanda prepared to attack Bukavu in 1996, Archbishop Munzihirwa warned the populace against rumors (war-mongering) and encouraged them to go about their daily lives, cultivate their fields,¹⁰ open the markets and shops, replant trees, protect the soil cover, and resist the temptation to flee from their homes.¹¹ Just as for Kataliko, Munzihirwa’s everyday practices were not only an effort to resist the effects of war but were the path for the “construction of true and durable peace.” For Munzihirwa, however, “the greatest weapon in the struggle for peace and resistance against violence [had to] remain solidarity and charity toward everybody.”¹²

Behind Munzihirwa’s call for “charity toward everybody” is a vision of shared humanity with the Son of God, who, via the incarnation, establishes our shared humanity with our suffering brothers and sisters. This is what Munzihirwa was pointing to when, in the Advent letter quoted above, he told the refugees: “Since we welcomed you, your fate has become in some ways ours. It is the same Christ who suffers in all of us.” It is the same vision of our shared humanity that Munzihirwa proposes as an antidote in the highly charged and

Prophète et Martyr en notre temps (Bukavu: Center Interdiocésain de Pastorale, Catéchèse et Liturgie, Julie 2003), 83 (translation by the author).

9. Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque*, 83.

10. In an address to the students and faculty at the University of Bukavu, less than two weeks before his assassination, Munzihirwa talked to his audience about the need for medical research in preventive, nutritional, and curative medicine, but also reminded them that healthy eating is the first medicine. See “L’Université de Bukavu et la paix,” Bukavu (Oct. 19, 1996), in Joseph Mukabalera Cigwira, “Monseigneur Munzihirwa Christophe, Romero du Congo? Le concept de Martyre de Béatification et de Canonization revisités à lumière de l’histoire religieuse contemporaine” (PhD diss., L’Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2003).

11. “We need the agronomic research that helps us not only to improve vegetable and animal species, but which permits ecological equilibrium through the reforestation of our hills, which were stripped in ignorance of the unpleasant consequences of deforestation or in the greedy unconsciousness of people who only cared about getting rich” (Munzihirwa, “L’Université de Bukavu et la paix”).

12. “Stand Firm in Charity” (Oct. 27, 1996).

volatile "ethnic" context in Bukavu.¹³ Even as people have a right to defend themselves and their property against looters, Munzihirwa warned against perpetrating ethnic violence: "Let us remember that we are Christians. We never encourage racial, tribal, or ethnic discrimination. And one who harms a human being [who is] the image of God harms God himself."¹⁴ Behind Munzihirwa's appeal lay a vision not only of shared humanity (in the image of God) but of reconciled ethnic differences as the foundation of a new society: "Our happiness should be in seeing people of all the ethnicities around the Great Lakes Region rub shoulders like brothers, enriching themselves from their differences and from constant dialogue. The strongest countries are those who have succeeded in reconciling differences."¹⁵

Performing the Way of Christ

I have taken time to outline the social vision behind Munzihirwa's invitation to the refugees and the citizens of Bukavu into "the way of Christ" in order to underscore both its revolutionary and nonviolent nature. This social vision was particularly revolutionary in the context of Munzihirwa's Bukavu, as well as in the broader context of the church in Congo. For, as Prunier notes, while the Catholic church grew increasingly powerful in the wake of Mobutu's collapsing state, it was also "thoroughly Zaireized" in that it tended to reflect the ethnic and political culture of Congo society.¹⁶ Given this observation, the radical nature of Munzihirwa's vision consisted not only in the force of his words but also in the way in which he himself embodied that vision and lived it out in his actions, actions that confirmed that the "way of Christ" was not an abstract theological doctrine, not simply a restatement of a principle of Catholic social teaching. This was no mere pastoral knowledge; this was *yada'*, the intimately personal knowledge of one born in the fracturing of human history. In order

13. For a good background to and analysis of the politics of "ethnicity" in Kivu, see Gérard Prunier, "The Catholic Church and the Kivu Conflict," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 2 (2001): 139–62.

14. Mulombe, *Christophe Munzihirwa*, 11.

15. Munzihirwa, Letter, Sept. 27, 1996. Again, in a letter directed to all churches (Sept. 29, 1995), Munzihirwa writes: "Let us remain welcoming to strangers in order to enrich ourselves with multiplied values that bring together different ethnicities and races. . . . It is crazy to attack peaceful people just because they are of a certain ethnicity. No one among us has chosen his or her parents or his or her ethnicity."

16. Prunier, "Catholic Church and the Kivu Conflict," 156.

to get a sense of what this knowledge, or *yada'*, looked like, I will highlight four characteristics of Munzehirwa's life and ministry.

watchman
The Muhudumu of Bukavu

Soon after he was appointed bishop of Kasongo in 1990, Munzehirwa started using the title *Muhudumu*—a Swahili word that means “watchman” and is often used for a shepherd who stays out and awake at night, watching over the sheep—to refer to himself and his role as bishop. Munzehirwa saw this title as theologically fitting (a reflection of John 10:1–18) and culturally relevant, a title that described his pastoral ministry better than titles such as “bishop” or “archbishop.” Thus, at the height of the tensions in Bukavu, with war looming, Munzehirwa is reported to have answered those who encouraged him to take refuge in another diocese by saying, “I am the *Muhudumu* of Bukavu. Yes, I have the possibility of leaving, but where will the population of Bukavu flee to?”¹⁷ For the same reason, in the homily that he gave shortly before his assassination, he encouraged his priests to “stand firm” and not to flee from their parishes. It was Munzehirwa's self-understanding as the *Muhudumu* of Bukavu that gave him the confidence and courage to engage different publics and offer various messages and warnings to the soldiers,¹⁸ the international community, the refugees, and the local populace.¹⁹ He took his title of *Muhudumu* so seriously that he saw himself not simply as caring for the Catholic faithful of the

17. Mulombe, *Christophe Munzehirwa*, 15.

18. In a September 1996 letter addressed to the military, which entreated soldiers to stop pillaging the goods of ordinary civilians, Munzehirwa wrote: “Soldiers whose ideal is pillaging cannot defend the homeland. Pillaging is in the heart of the soldiers tired of themselves. . . . Discipline is at the base of military efficiency. . . . The Gospel tells that while soldiers asked John the Baptist what we should do to save our souls, he responded, ‘Respect justice and content yourself with your pay.’” — *no pillaging LK 3:14*

19. In a letter to Cardinal Danneels and the European community (Jan. 30, 1996), Munzehirwa invited them to exert pressure on the Rwandan government to welcome the refugees back, pointing to the need to investigate the possibility that the government of Rwanda was invoking the 1994 genocide as an excuse to carry out mass killings of Hutu in the refugee camps (Mulombe, *Christophe Munzehirwa*, 10). In an October 1995 letter to the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, he warned of a new “Palestinian problem” in central Africa: “The refugees find themselves cornered. Zaire doesn't want them anymore. Rwanda doesn't want them either. . . . The situation therefore is explosive. There is urgency.” In a letter to President Jimmy Carter, Munzehirwa declared: “The refugees in the camps live in a painful situation. They feel despised. . . . The health care available to them is elementary and insufficient. . . . [and] the prospect of forced repatriation. . . . breeds strong fear among them” (Letter, Jan. 30, 1996).

archdiocese, but also as the watchman for the entire population of Bukavu. Thus, on the afternoon of his assassination, he met with key civic and business leaders of the city to work out a plan to protect the city. A Protestant pastor captured Munzihirwa's impact in these words: "Munzihirwa . . . was a pastor for all people of Bukavu and of Kivu."²⁰ Another pastor I met in Munzihirwa Square (the city has so named the area where he was assassinated) concurred: "Munzihirwa was truly a Christian. Beyond Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal. Even beyond Christian."²¹

Welcoming Refugees

Munzihirwa's advocacy on behalf of the refugees did not endear him to either the local population or the Rwanda government. Already by November 1994, public sentiment had turned against the refugees: they were seen not only as dangerous interlopers but also as the beneficiaries of help and services that the local population could not dream of receiving. Consequently, the local political parties operating in Kivu sent a memorandum to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which read in part:

These refugees have destroyed our food reserves, destroyed our fields, our cattle, our natural parks, caused famine and spread epidemics; they benefit from food aid while we get nothing. They sell or give weapons to their fellow countrymen; commit murders of both Tutsi and local Zairians. . . . They must be disarmed, counted, subjected to Zairian laws and finally repatriated.²²

Munzihirwa opposed this wholesale condemnation of the refugees as he also opposed the 1996 decision by the NGOs and the American government to reduce food rations to the refugee camps in order to force the refugees to return to Rwanda. "Even refugees deserve to eat," he argued. At the same time, he opposed the "humanitarian" approach of aid agencies that were giving out food rations, and he suggested that NGOs instead pay local farmers to grow the food. Otherwise, the humanitarianism of the NGOs would end up disempowering the refugees and impoverishing the local host communities.

20. Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque*, 30.

21. Interview, Munzihirwa Square, Bukavu (July 17, 2013).

22. Quoted in Prunier, "Catholic Church and the Kivu Conflict," 151–52.

The key to understanding Munzihirwa's radical hospitality to the refugees is that it reflects the incarnational vision of the shared humanity with one who was born "in the gash of human history" and thus calls us into the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. Even before he became the Archbishop of Bukavu, when he was still a Jesuit provincial, Munzihirwa spent time with refugees. This was particularly true in 1979, during the refugee crisis in the West Nile (Uganda) as Ugandan refugees flooded into Congo following the destruction of the town of Arua by Idi Amin's fleeing soldiers. Munzihirwa, together with a Comboni priest, set up camp among the refugees, much to the chagrin of the UN and other humanitarian agencies. But as a result of the presence of Munzihirwa and the other priest, conditions in the camps improved tremendously.²³

A Simple Way of Life

In Bukavu, people still talk about Munzihirwa's simplicity. He dressed simply (one of his confreres at the Jesuit school said that he had two shirts, which he personally washed and hung out to dry). He never took up residence at the bishop's palace, instead staying with the Jesuit community at the Alifajiri School, where he had a simple room. He often walked to his office at the cathedral or rode in one of the community's cars. On the day of his assassination, he was dressed in a simple clerical shirt when he approached the roadblock and identified himself as the archbishop. "If he had not told them that he was the archbishop, they would not have known," one of the priests remarked.²⁴ When a group of young Xaverians found his dead body the following morning at the corner of the street, they laid it on a bed and carried it into the church. Later that afternoon, they made a plain coffin out of the benches from the church, and carried his body to the cathedral for a simple funeral mass, at the end of which they buried him in a simple grave outside the cathedral. He died and was buried in the same simple way that he lived.²⁵

A priest summed up the significance of Munzihirwa's lifestyle well:

Munzihirwa was a simple priest, a simple bishop, with a simple yet profound message. . . . His preaching and message was always simple and concrete. . . .

23. Interview with Didier (July 2013).

24. Interview with Didier (July 2013).

25. For one who lived and died simply, he must be turning in his grave to see the expensive monument and mausoleum that has been constructed over his and his two successor bishops' graves.

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It was a message of a God who cares and protects all, especially the weak and poor, and wishes everyone to experience the same freedom and dignity of being children of God.²⁶

The priest's observation confirms that Munzihirwa's simplicity not only reflected the "way of Christ" but was also the source of his own freedom and courage. "He was completely free, simple, and unafraid," the priest noted. But while Munzihirwa's message and way of life struck this quoted priest (and others) as fresh, it proved to be a challenge to many other priests, who feared him and tried to avoid him at all costs. In a society known for its flamboyance (a reflection of Mobutu's *authenticité*), some priests found him and his simple lifestyle "odd" (not befitting the office of archbishop) and even an embarrassment to the church.

Sharer in the "Way of Christ"

Writing to the Christians of Corinth, Paul reminded them that we are "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10). Death was a constant theme in Munzihirwa's preaching: he noted that "in life's death, dying is important, because all preceding existence is a preparation for this act. And the final silence is a word of great richness for the one who knows how to listen within (to the interior)." On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination as a priest, meditating on the words of 1 Peter 4:13, he said: "Insofar as you share in Christ's suffering, rejoice so that on the day of his glory, you may also rejoice and be glad." Munzihirwa further noted how this was the spiritual center of his ministry: "For a long time, I have begged Christ to give me the grace to keep this message in my heart. May the memory of his cross remain at the core of my being." This was another confirmation of Munzihirwa's freedom and courage for, as he wrote, "Only free men stand upright in the face of death; only they know how to defy death."²⁷

However, the true source of Munzihirwa's courage was his identification with the suffering of Christ. For Munzihirwa, that identification meant that he

26. Interview with Fr. Mukabalera, Bukavu (July 17, 2013). See also Mukabalera Cigwira, "Monseigneur Munzihirwa Christophe." This dissertation not only declares that Munzihirwa was a martyr but also compares him to Oscar Romero.

27. Mulombe, *Christophe Munzihirwa*, 8-9.

Death's vocation

Vision as telos

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||| understood death not only as part of his calling but as the calling itself. "We commonly say that the deceased have been 'called to God'. In effect, death is a vocation." The calling of death is, ironically, the source of life. Only those who enter the way of Christ are able to live fully: "If we are faithful to him, we cross life and death with hope. Henceforth, instead of living to die, we die to live. Our existence then passes from life to life."²⁸

||| As the situation in Bukavu worsened, Munzihirwa became increasingly aware of the possibility of his assassination. He also knew that if he toned down his criticisms of the Rwandan government, including its policy regarding the refugees, its ideological manipulation of the genocide for political ends, and its impending military attack on the city, he could save his life.²⁹ But he did not. In October, two weeks before his assassination, when he attended a meeting in Kinshasa, he told his Jesuit superior: "Do not be astonished to receive bad news. Pray only for the Lord and the Virgin Mary to accompany us to the end of the path."³⁰ And as Rwandan forces prepared to attack Bukavu and aired announcements over the radio encouraging the residents to flee for their safety, Munzihirwa, in what would be his final message to the people, encouraged them not to flee their homes, but to "stand firm in charity." A Jesuit confrere noted that on the Saturday evening after Munzihirwa had written his "Stand Firm in Charity" homily, which he directed should be read in all the parishes the following day, he said to his Jesuit confreres at dinner: "I think I just signed my death certificate."³¹

Things That Can Be Seen Only with Eyes That Have Cried

The foregoing observations confirm Munzihirwa's short-lived but powerful and exemplary leadership and how it was intrinsic to what he came to understand as the "way of Christ." Abstracted from this theological matrix, Munzihirwa's life and agency cannot make sense. For it is this invitation into the way of Christ that provided the logic not only for the social vision (telos) of a nonviolent, reconciled society, but also the logic for Munzihirwa's exhortations—and his personal way of life. What is clear is that if Munzihirwa's own

28. Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque*, 25.

29. In a letter to Cardinal Danneels and the European community, Munzihirwa accused the Rwandan government of using genocide as an excuse to carry out their own genocide against the Hutu in the refugee camps (Mulombe, *Christophe Munzihirwa*, 10).

30. Mulombe, *Christophe Munzihirwa*, 16; Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque*, 25.

31. Interview with Didier (July 17, 2013).

participation in the way of Christ opened him up to embracing the vocation of death, it also freed him to speak and advocate fiercely as the Muhudumu of the refugees and the vulnerable populace of Bukavu. Three related conclusions emerge from this treatment of Munzihirwa's life and work in Bukavu, conclusions that have far-reaching implications for peacebuilding efforts in Africa and beyond.

Political Heart Transplant

The first conclusion relates to the significance of the prophetic dimension of peacebuilding. In the preceding chapter I noted that prophetic ministry is grounded in lament and that both Jeremiah's and Jesus's laments are a social critique of politics that had lost or forgotten the spiritual anchor of the covenant with God. Such politics have not only led to the exploitation of the poor, they have increasingly turned to military might and strategic alliances to secure their legitimacy. In the face of shallow visions of peace that promised "peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14), Jeremiah pointed to the restoration of the covenant and the knowledge of God as the foundation of true and lasting peace. It was a similar prophetic moment, in its double gifts of critique and energizing, that Munzihirwa embodied in Bukavu in the context of the refugee crisis and the impending military attack on the city. But what makes prophets like Jeremiah and Munzihirwa unique is not simply their harsh critique, but also the fact that they see and stand within the reality of a completely different society, a different politics grounded within a different vision. It is this alternative vision in which they stand that makes possible and impels their critique of the reigning social and political ideologies.

Once we have grasped that conclusion, it becomes clear that prophets like Munzihirwa are not simply calling for law and order, nor merely for justice and reconciliation; they would not be satisfied with mere legal and administrative adjustments within the framework of the current politics. They invoke a totally new vision of society: in this vision it is not the generals who reign supreme, but God. For them, politics devoid of God cannot be true politics, but are a mere sham. And just as it was for Jeremiah and Jesus, a mere invocation of God—a politics in which leaders commit all manner of violence and injustice and then "flee to the temple like a brigand to his cave"—will not do, so it was for Munzihirwa. He was not merely asking that the generals become more God-fearing. It is not merely the heart of the generals that he was after; he was after the very heart of politics, seeking, as it were, a political

transplant—seeking to give politics a new heart and a new spirit. This is the ambitious nature of prophets, what makes their lives and message at once a gift but also a challenge. For while they already see and stand within this new creation themselves, the reality around them reflects and operates under a different logic. The prophet's life thus becomes one great act of "groaning" in the one act of giving birth (Rom. 8:22), as the prophet takes on what might appear to be a futile attempt to build a new world within the shell of the old.

The Way of Nonviolence

As I have suggested above, the heart of Munzehirwa's message was an invitation into the way of Christ and the nonviolent, self-sacrificing love of God. A clear conclusion emerging from the story of Munzehirwa is that nonviolence is not just an ethical position one adopts from among many other options, nor is it merely a strategy for peacebuilding.³² It is an ontological claim, a statement about the way the world really is. Nonviolence is not one among other beliefs about the world, but is a claim that this is the way God creates, rules, and governs the world.³³ The story of Munzehirwa confirms that, in order to come to this knowledge, one must surrender one's whole life to God and to a "vocation that can lead even to death." Nonviolence is a suffering love.

There is thus something inherently tragic, something inherently violent,

32. There is a renewed interest today in nonviolence as a strategy for peace. In *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan argue that not only are campaigns of nonviolent resistance more than twice as effective as their violent counterparts in achieving their stated goals, successful nonviolent resistance ushers in more durable and internally peaceful democracies. For a good introduction and overview of this nascent area of interest in nonviolence and civil resistance studies within the broad field of peace studies, see Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

33. The claim seems to stand in stark contrast to the seemingly violent depictions of God in the Bible. While there may be no easy way to deal with the complex issue of violence in the Bible, the claim that God creates, rules, and governs creation in nonviolent ways requires an acknowledgment of the Christ event as the decisive hermeneutical lens through which Christ is interpreted. For if in Christ "the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19) and he is the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), then in Jesus we see God as God truly is. And in Jesus we see a God who would rather suffer violence than use violence to establish God's kingdom. For a more elaborate discussion of Christian nonviolence as an ontological claim, see Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), esp. 205–41.

about nonviolence. This is what the slain Archbishop of San Salvador, Blessed Oscar Romero, called the “violence of love.”³⁴ And this is what Munzehirwa meant when he spoke about “things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried.” He was pointing to the circular logic involved within the nonviolent struggle for a more just and peaceful society. While such struggle may not make the world more “peaceful,” and will certainly not rid the world of violence, it is a “vocation” for those willing to walk the way of Christ.

The Church’s Gift and Burden: Bearing God and Bearing with God

Munzehirwa’s story thus provides a compelling ecclesiological illumination of the church as a sign and sacrament of the way of Christ. In her incarnational presence in the world, and in places of conflict in Africa and elsewhere, the church remembers and bears the story of the incarnate God. In this “remembrance” the church finds herself in that “terrible middle” between an embattled and suffering people whose history she shares and the suffering God of love, whose story she bears. Her calling in that terrible middle is to offer this story of the suffering God as a gift to an embattled people, even as she carries the burden of her knowledge and participation in God’s own self-sacrificing love for humanity. Ellen Davis has talked about the twin disciplines of “bearing God and bearing with God,” which is both the gift and the burden the church bears.³⁵

And this is the gift and burden that Munzehirwa bore as he found himself in the terrible middle in Bukavu. This is also what his names pointed to. Munzehirwa’s father, Albert Ngabo, had had a number of wives before he married Elizabeth Mwa Lubongo, Munzehirwa’s mother. All Ngabo’s previous wives had borne children who died at birth, but Munzehirwa’s mother bore five children, all of whom survived. Ngabo named the youngest of these children Munzehirwa, meaning “gift of providence.”³⁶ At his baptism, Munzehirwa was given the name of Christophe, after Saint Christopher. According to Christian legend, Christopher was crossing a river when a child asked to be carried

34. “The church believes in only one violence, that of Christ, who was nailed to the cross. . . . Taking upon himself all the violence of hatred and misunderstanding, so that we humans might forgive one another, love one another, feel ourselves brothers and sisters” (Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988], 10).

35. Ellen Davis, “Jeremiah: Master of Lament,” Sermon at Duke Summer Institute (May 29, 2013).

36. See Mirindi Ya Nacironge, *Père Evêque*, 4–5.

across. When Christopher put the child on his shoulders he found the child was unbelievably heavy. The child was the world, according to the legend, and Christopher was Christ carrying the weight of the whole world.³⁷ Behind this legend of Christopher lies a deep christological mystery that came to characterize Munzehirwa's life and ministry, namely, that in order to come to know Christ and to know him as crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-2), we must carry him on our shoulders. At the same time, of course, "Jesus carries us on his shoulders."³⁸

37. See, "Saint Christopher," Catholic Online: http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php? saint_id=36#wiki, accessed Dec. 6, 2015.

38. Jon Sobrino, SJ, comes to this conclusion with respect to the Salvadoran context, and especially in the life of Oscar Romero. Reflecting on Karl Rahner's dialectic of "carrying and being carried," Sobrino notes (quoting Rahner) that "being a Christian is a heavy-light burden, as the Gospel calls it. When we carry it, it carries us. The longer one lives, the heavier and lighter it becomes." See Jon Sobrino, "Jesus of Galilee from the Salvadoran Context: Compassion, Hope, and Following the Light of the Cross," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 451.

CHAPTER 9

The Costly Loss of Lament

The pathos of our condition is not that we have failed. . . . The pathos of it is that we cannot bring ourselves as a people to contemplate our failure.

Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness*

Our discussion so far, especially in the last two sections, has increasingly pointed to the practical, social, and political dynamism of lament as confirmed through the stories of Kataliko, Nyirumbe, and Munzihirwa. We need to note that the notion and practice of lament should play a more explicit and prominent role in the theology and practice of the churches in Africa. The fact that it doesn't do so yet is, of course, unfortunate. For the loss of lament in the church today is costly not only theologically but also politically. No one has drawn our attention to the "costly loss of lament" from contemporary (Western) churches more than Walter Brueggemann. Noting the "curious fact that the church has, by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented," Brueggemann discerns an underlying theological problem.¹ The loss of lament reflects "the absence of a genuine covenant

1. See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, "Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (1986): 57-71. See also Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011) on the survey in Protestant churches that reveals that, while psalms of lament constitute 40 percent of the book of Psalms, in the Protestant hymnals surveyed, songs of praise, thanksgiving, and trust (which number thirty-seven, or under 20 percent of all Psalms) are chosen over songs of lament. Moreover, absent from contemporary hymns of lament are the themes that are most prevalent in the laments of the Psalter: the problem of enemies, unmerited suffering, and