

*Reflections on Amahoro-Africa
Rwanda and Burundi*

TRUTH PERFORMED

(Wesley White, 3 June, 2008, Glasgow, Scotland)

We are on a bus together heading from Rwanda into Burundi where we will soon meet an amazing variety of people who humble us with their habits of concretely demonstrating the compassion, care and justice of Jesus in the aftermath of genocide and in the midst of ongoing warfare. The land passing by through the window is green, lush, beckoning, and in stark contrast with the poverty that seems to stab the serenity like a murderous blade, already too familiar in the Tutsi and Hutu experience. After crossing the border, I am joined in my seat by a young African leader who keeps me engrossed for two hours or more with his story of survival, forgiveness and his efforts at reconciliation that are more about tangible love than forensic words. Orphaned children depend on him. They are housed and fed by him. They are loved by him. But he sees way beyond their immediate need to the roles they will assume in a new generation of leaders who will *live justice* in this land. His vision is internationally transformative in scope. As his story unfolds, I shake my head, I gulp, my eyes swim. I laugh with him for joy. I laugh in hope.

And suddenly in the crowded space of the bus, I need to be alone. I retreat to a back seat by myself and open my Bible for some personal time with God. A single sheet of paper slips out from the flyleaf containing notes I have recently taken during a seminar discussion at the University of Glasgow where I teach. My colleague Christopher Seitz from nearby St. Andrews University was our guest lecturer, and he had been urging us to consider the common Hebraic pedagogic ideal as seen, for example, in *Psalms 111:1-8*. *Verse 2* says, “*Great are the works of the Lord; They are **studied** by all who delight in them.*” Seitz reminded us that behind a term like “*study*” lies a Hebraic pedagogic chiasm that goes something like this: *Knowledge validated in Practise; Practise humbly seeking more Knowledge*. There is an interplay, in other words, between *learning as study* and *learning as practise*, and in the Hebrew mind they freely interchange. In this case, therefore, the knowledge gained through rigorous study *is only validated* through the practise of it, and healthy practice is *humbly hungry* for more knowledge.

The pedagogy intoned in this Psalm is concerned with *the great works of the Lord*. What *great works*, in particular, does this poet have in mind? **Verses 3-6** describe them for us, but only when we come to **Verse 7** are we specifically told what they are. “***The works of His hands are truth and justice.***” And then **Verse 8** shows us how good Hebrew study habits cannot help but emerge in practice. “***They are performed in truth and uprightness.***” *Truth performed* is where this pedagogy has taken us. Truth performed *in the interest of justice*.

I am reviewing all this in my solitary bus seat. It has become holy space. I feel vulnerable in this crowded, yet transcendent moment. And so I turn my head once more so as to stare out the window---and pray. I pray for this young African leader whose story, whose life, has made me laugh and cry. And I pray for the many young Africans like him whom I have met over the past few days. And then I realize why awe has risen as a lump in my throat in this land so easily swamped with despair. These new black friends are adept at *performing truth* when it so rare in the world at large. They are, in the best sense of the word, *studying* the great works of the Lord. They are Hebraic scholars of the highest sort. And they stoop to include me in the stories of their lives.