

## Book Review

*Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*

**Immaculée Ilibagiza**

(Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2006) Hardcover, 216 pages

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“If they catch me, they will kill me,” (130) thought Immaculée as she struggled physically, psychologically, and spiritually to survive the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Following a powerful introduction by Wayne W. Dyer, Immaculée Ilibagiza relates a heart-rending drama with the able assistance of award winning journalist, Steve Erwin. Readers will find their emotions pushed to the limits by the high definition images of love, violence, betrayal, death, destruction, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Part one sets the stage by revealing Immaculée’s emerging awareness of the powerful prejudices between the ruling Hutus and minority Tutsis. At school, she became aware of the racial differences during ethnic roll call, in which students identified themselves by name and status as Hutu or Tutsi. As a Tutsi and a woman, her opportunities for advancement were limited, yet her intellectual talents were eventually recognized, and she was admitted to a university.

In part two, Immaculée takes us blow by blow through the genocide as the carnage unfolds in her small village. Neighbors turn against neighbors, and no Tutsi is safe from the killing sprees that sweep the villages and towns of this central African nation. As the

deaths of family and friends mount, she runs to a Hutu pastor for safety. Her inner struggle for meaning, faith, and hope permeates the pages describing her precarious survival in a 3 by 4 foot bathroom.

Immaculée emerges from hiding when the French establish nearby camps. Soon, victorious Tutsis liberate the prisoners, and Immaculée is on her path to freedom (part three). But physical survival is not enough. We see her rise above the ashes to experience a new dimension of emotional and spiritual freedom. During her incredible journey to forgive and reconcile with those who murdered her family and friends, we learn that she experiences a call shared by many *Encounter* readers, “I could see that whatever path God put me on, helping others to forgive would be a big part of my life’s work” (159).

Clearly, *Left to Tell* is not an academic text, nor is it a clinician’s handbook. Why should professionals care about this biography? I was drawn to the story because of her powerful message of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as her experiential answer to the age-old question of suffering. This book should stimulate meaningful discussion in church groups and on Christian campuses. Researchers and clinicians

interested in forgiveness should read this book if for no other reason than to challenge the limits of such concepts often measured in university psychology labs or the comfortable counseling offices of American

suburbia. We cannot limn the contours of our constructs unless we examine responses to transgressions that image the face of evil.