

Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, 350 p., ISBN 978-0-521-19139-5 (hardback), price € 70.00.

Could Christianity have done more to obstruct the violence that led to the Rwandan genocide? It did not. Why not? This question led Timothy Longman to perform intensive research into the social and political developments in Rwanda during the decade preceding the 1994 genocide, with a particular interest in the position of the Rwandan churches. This research led him to the thesis that Churches were deeply implicated in the 1994 genocide; that Christianity as a system of belief, and Christian churches as institutions, served more as a support for the organizers of the genocide than as a hindrance. Although clergy and other church personnel who actively participated in the killings were exceptions, the churches nevertheless helped make the genocide possible.

Longman is well positioned to deal with these questions. As a doctoral student in sociology, he conducted field research in two Catholic and two Presbyterian parishes in Rwanda during the years 1992-1994, the years preceding the genocide. This gave him a direct insight into the functioning of both the Catholic and the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda and the influence these institutions were exerting in local communities. It gave him the opportunity to note the implications at the local level of the growing political tension, while the country was immersed in the civil war that began when the army of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had invaded the country in 1990. After the genocide, Longman served as the director of the Rwanda field office of Human Rights Watch (1995-1999). He is actually the Director of the African Studies Center of Boston University, USA. The present book is the result of intensive review and deeper reflection of the material gathered for his PhD thesis.

The particular contribution of this book, to the already vast literature in this subject, is that Longman possesses a thorough knowledge of the development on different levels of the churches in Rwanda in the years preceding the genocide, and examines it from a political-sociological point of view. This brings him to the observation that in the years preceding the genocide Rwanda underwent an important social change. People no longer accepted the strong centralized leadership developed under the guidance of President Habyarimana, who came to power in 1973. Within the political arena and within the churches people became conscious of their power, and pressed for decision-making at the local and regional level, and a desire to break down the one party system created by Habyarimana. The president was thus forced to create a new constitutional law that guaranteed more influence from below. Within the churches there was also a surge for sharing power and democratization, and institutions were created to empower people at the grass root levels, and towards a consciousness of claiming human rights. In sociological terminology this means that a 'civil society' was developing in the years preceding the genocide; a wide variety of associations ranging from economic groups to more spiritual societies created new public space, autonomous from the state. Longman follows the conceptualization of the sociologist Antonio Gramsci, who considers civil society to be a site of contestation between two classes: a ruling class seeking to organize consensual domination and the subaltern class seeking to organize their resistance. This concept of civil society provides Longman the instrument to

analyze the social change in Rwanda and to apply his analysis to an interpretation of the power dynamics that caused the Rwandan genocide.

The development towards a more open and democratic society was thwarted by the attack of the Tutsi dominated army of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in 1990. With the position of ruling class being put in danger, President Habyarimana played the nationalistic card, emphasizing the Hutu character of the nation, and creating the image of the Tutsi as endangering the status quo. By doing this the dominating class, seeking the support of the majority of the people, tried to break the resistance that was formed by the development of the subaltern class seeking democratic reform. This was intensified when in April 1994 the President was murdered in an attack on his airplane. The nationalistic Hutu circles eliminated the moderate politicians, and ordered that at a regional and local level all those who endangered their positions be cleared away. Church leaders in general identified themselves with the ruling class, as they felt also their own position threatened by independent movements within the churches.

In doing this Longman rejects the idea that the genocide was a result of a spontaneous uprising of the Hutu population against the Tutsi, and that these events were inevitable. Longman emphasizes the organization of the genocide by the government and military officials, who in several cases had to intervene in order to see that the genocide was fully accomplished. This makes his basic question about the role of the churches in this, even more important.

The book consists of two parts. Part one provides a social and political history of the churches in Rwanda in an attempt to explain the implications of the churches in the 1994 genocide.

Part two consists of a meticulously elaborated description of the power dynamics within two parishes of the Presbyterian Church: Kilinda, the Presbyterian parish where the German Lutherans started their missionary work in 1907, and Bigihu, which was developed as an important parish in a remote area since 1950.

The first part of the book leads to three major conclusions (p. 200).

1. The principle of supporting public officials for the good of the church, even when the officials engage in reprehensible behavior, dates back to the earliest days of Rwandan Christianity.
2. Churches have played a major role in shaping the very nature of ethnic identities in the country. Longman makes a strong formulation on this point: 'Although the genocide was an extreme expression of ethnic hatred, it was not inconsistent with actions previously condoned, or at least tolerated, by the churches' (p. 200).
3. Some church personnel were drawn to reactionary politics, when the leaders felt their position threatened, and turned to ethnic arguments to regain popular support and bolster their positions.

The second part of the book gives a detailed and well documented account of what happened during the genocide within the two parishes of the Presbyterian church: Biguhu and Kirinda, an account that is of great documentary value. In fact these chapters illustrate

convincingly the third conclusion proposed in part one, by showing that leaders of the local level were ready to do everything, even the organization of the genocide, when their position was endangered.

I consider this socio-political explanation, clearly defined and proven by meticulous research on the local level, as an original contribution to the debate on the question as to what were the deepest reasons for the genocide that has taken place in Rwanda.

Longman shows that the lack of an independent position of the church with respect to the political authorities is a heritage from the missionary period, which was continued long after the churches became independent. This made the church leaders vulnerable in the period when the political authorities attempted to maintain their power even by means of genocide, and expected the church leaders to follow them in what they qualified as the correct patriotic behavior.

Nevertheless, this is not the main objection of the author against the churches. He concludes his analysis of the historical development of the churches in Rwanda with the statement that these churches contributed to a great extent to a climate in which ethnic identities were created in which Hutu and Tutsi considered themselves as different and competitive races. I would note that this conclusion may be caused by the fact that in the description of the history of the church, Longman bases himself for mostly on the study of Paul Rutayisire, *La Christianisation du Rwanda 1900-1945*, (Fribourg 1987). Unfortunately, the analysis of Rutayisire does not take into account the growing tensions between Hutu and Tutsi, and the development of ethnic consciousness in the pre-colonial era in the 19th century. In line with Rutayisire Longman sees the consciousness of the ethnic identity as a result of the teaching of the church, which indeed may have had an important influence on it, but has not been its sole creator. I feel that he goes too far in stating that the churches were responsible for the ethnic conscience that lead to the genocide. The antagonism between Hutu and Tutsi was already rooted in people's consciousness before the missionary era. In connection with this it may be argued that the dynamics of power structures on the national and local level are not sufficient explanations for a genocide on such a scale.

Another note that I would like to make is that the conclusion about the longing for the maintenance of power by an Hutu elite, becomes dominant in such a way, that Longman all too easily explains all changes of position and nominations of personnel within the church in Kirinda and in Biguhu from this angle. Here he draws conclusions that will not be shared by those who had a clear insight in the aspects of these mutations.

This does not alter the fact that Longman has presented an original aspect of the reason for the genocide, which, in its isolation might be not sufficient as a sole explanation of the gigantic genocide, but shows many important mechanisms that played a major role. This approach makes his book one of the most fundamental studies of the Rwanda genocide. — GERARD VAN 'T SPIJKER, Utrecht, The Netherlands.