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**Rwanda before the Genocide: Catholic Politics and Ethnic Discourse in the Late Colonial Era.**

*By J. J. Carney. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xi, 343. £47,99 / $74.*

In Rwanda in 1994 more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were victims of genocide. How was this possible in a country where 90 percent of the population belonged to a church, and 70 percent to the Roman Catholic Church? The American church historian J. J. Carney has examined the motivations, ideas, and political positions of the leaders of the Catholic Church, with special attention to the period 1952–62, the critical years before Rwanda’s political independence in 1962.

The book is a revised version of the author’s dissertation presented to the Catholic University of America in 2011. The author has scrupulously examined statements and correspondence of the clergy, located in archives in both Rome and Rwanda, of which he gives account in transparent footnotes to every paragraph, displaying a clear style that makes the book easy to read.

Carney states that the Catholic Church in the 1950s represents the resurgence and ultimate triumph of the “church from below,” formed by the first Rwandese converts who came from the ranks of Hutu peasants and marginalized *petit* Tutsis. “For late colonial Hutu leaders and their missionary allies, the Hutu social revolution was closely connected to the liberation of the poor masses and the establishment of a more egalitarian Rwandan society marked by social justice, democracy and economic equality” (3). Carney discusses the role played by the Catholic hierarchy within these political dynamics and the internal tensions within its ranks.

It is striking that Hutu-Tutsi antagonism was not present in the post–World War II period. Mention of antagonism between the groups is almost completely absent from the reports produced by the White Fathers (56). In the late 1950s the pan-ethnic political reform movements changed into “a mission to empower the Hutu masses over and against a perceived Tutsi oligarchy” (3). Hutu-Tutsi antagonisms came to the fore when political parties were formed in the wake of political independence. Carney formulates it very concisely: “The surfacing of the ethnic question stemmed in part from Tutsi elites’ failure to share political power and in part from Hutu elites’ growing recognition of the electoral salience of ethnic labels” (70). André Perraudin, a Swiss White Father and bishop of Kabgayi, then publicly adopted the Hutu social analysis in his Lenten Pastoral of 1959, in which he claimed that “in Rwanda social differences and inequalities are for a large part linked to racial differences,” without mentioning the masses of poor Tutsi peasants. This position was continued by his successors. Carney labels this stance Perraudin’s pro-Hutu “analytical partisanship” (135), an uncritical support for the state, more out of institutional self-interest than of ethnicism per se. This “analytical partisanship” made it impossible to raise a prophetic voice, despite all public laments against violence.

Carney does not perceive a direct link between the events of the 1950s and the vastly different historical context of the early 1990s (4). Nevertheless, he notices a continued broad support of the government from the side of the church, a hesitancy to speak out with a strong voice in the early weeks of the genocide (198), and a general failure of the church leaders to maintain prophetic distance from state leaders.

An example of accuracy, transparency, and erudite research, this book is indispensable for understanding the relationship between church, state, and ethnic discourse in twentieth-century Rwanda.

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