

ON STATE—RELIGION DYNAMICS
THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE
STATE, RELIGION AND SECULARISM

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1916

The chain of events leading to the Rwandan genocide dates 79 years back in time.

1. Belgian military occupation.
2. Establishment of a Racial-Political Framework,
 - *Tutsi*, elite minority with racial ties to Europe
 - *Hutu*, subordinate commons, excluded from politics & education
 - *Twa*, associated with hunting, dehumanized and marginalized

Unfounded theory.

Under Belgian mandate, the Church became an integral part of the administrative framework.

1. Belgian military occupation is complete.
2. Start of Belgian intellectual occupation!
 - The Church is embedded into the Rwandan society. It became a
 - a religious sanctuary;
 - an economic power;
 - an educational resource.
 - The *Catholic White Priests*¹ start to
 - reinforce ethnic classifications
 - promote Tutsi dominance in education & religion
 - utilise the Church to control the masses

A collaboration that effectively legitimized systemic inequality.

¹European-Christian Missionary Group.

1959–1961

The interval marks the *Hutu* Revolution.

1. Shift in Political Power – *Hutu* political dominance is established in Rwanda.
2. Exodus of *Tutsis* – Uganda, Burundi.
3. Abolishment of the *Tutsi* monarchy.

The Church shifts its focus towards the Hutu majority after the revolution. Grégoire Kayibanda serves as the first president of Rwanda, until ...

1973–1975

1. Juvénal Habyarimana seizes power in a coup.
2. Establishment of *Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie*² – the only political party in an authoritarian regime.
 - Anti-democratic Rule
 - Increased social disparity
 - Polarisation of the two ethnic groups

Tension starts to build up in Rwanda ...

²National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development, shorthand MRND.

STATE-CHURCH DYNAMICS

The Church was deeply entrenched in the Rwandan society.

- Close ties with political power only deepened the ethnic divisions.
- The Church was exploited by its leaders for their own personal interests.

1987–1990

1. Establishment of the Rwandan Patriotic Front ³– Tutsi exiles and refugees in Uganda & Burundi (1959)
2. RPF launches a military invasion into Rwanda
3. Stalemate – the Arusha Accords are signed, August 1993.

With the RPF threat in sight, a reversal of the 1959 revolution would reinstate the power hierarchy.

Danger: The Church is deeply intertwined in the politics of the regime. Pastors, priests in charge risk losing their authority.

³Shorthand RPF

1994—GOD HAS ABANDONDED THE TUTSIS!

1. President Habyarimana dies in a plane crash.
2. the Arusha Accords are shattered – Hutu officials campaign to kill Tutsis.

Many Church leaders actively participate in the genocide.

- Tutsi minorities sought refuge in Churches, only to be handed in (by Priests) to death squads.
- Priests, along with genocidal militias, would set up checkpoints to identify and kill anyone
 - with a Tutsi ID;
 - *without* an ID *included Hutu!;*
 - suspected to be Tutsi.

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So did trust in the Church as an institution.

- The Church is not remembered for the actions of its members, rather **its catastrophic silence** in the face of human suffering and profound ethical failure.
- The Church lent moral and spiritual authority to policies that disenfranchised the Tutsi minority.

Instead of standing for what is right, the Church allowed itself to become a tool of the state, controlling the masses and justifying the killings of **nearly a million people**.

ENDING REMARKS

The Rwandan genocide sheds light upon the dangers of religious institutions aligning too closely with political power.

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Question: Is secularism the solution?