



**Timothy Longman (2010) Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda, New York, Cambridge University Press. 359 Pages**

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PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies

**Introduction**

Professor Timothy Longman is a specialist in Political Science and Director of African Studies Centre at Boston University. He is recognised for a high reputation of teaching in various Universities globally, a Human Rights Researcher at the Center Fellow in California, Berkeley and Social Construction in Post-Rwanda Genocide. The Author starts by introducing Rwanda as one of the most Christian countries in Africa. He cites the church to have played a pivotal role in instigating and construction of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Church buildings were key state planning and military killing grounds of innocent Christians and citizens. The church leaders allied with the state government officials in playing ethnic politics against the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa tribes of Rwanda as well as time setting traps to massacre Christians hence exposing failures of the church in Rwanda of God's decree of guarding the flock.

**Key words: Rivers of Blood, Genocide, Ethnicity, God's Hidden Face and Devil Christians**

**1.1. Background**

The book gives a historical background on ethical setup of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa tribes of Rwanda. Professor Timothy Longman states that 1990 Northern Rwanda was invaded by Tutsi Refugees NRA (National Patriotic Army) and (RPF) Rwandan Patriotic Front) based in Uganda leading to killing of 13000 Tutsi followed by political reforms in 1991 and legalization of the constitution. In 1992 Catholic and Protestant church leaders formed committees for negotiation between political parties and President Habyarimana to form a government of national unity. Professor Longman observes that genocide plans were complete by 1993 of which a thirty paged warning document by had already

been signed by November 1993 and April 1994 with President Habyarimana taking full control of the government.

These conflicts followed the assassination of President Habyarimana on his way back from Arusha Peace Agreement. The military killed prominent Tutsi, Prime Minister Uwilingyimana, and 10 Belgian UNAMIR soldiers, PSD Party Leader Frederic Nzamurambaho, Vice President and the Minister of Labour Landwald Ndasngwa his wife and two children, Minister for Information from MDR, Faustin Rocogoza, President of the constitutional court and MDR Sympathizer Joseph Kavamganda, Human Rights activists Charles Shamukiga and Rwanda Rushya. Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> the Death Squad hit Centre Christos killed 17 Rwandan (Hutu and Tutsi), attached Nyundo Diocese killing 30 people plus 2 priests, Bishop Kalibushi kidnapped, attacked Cathedral at Murumba Nyundo killing 300 people plus 8 Priests, Rumbura Parishes attacked and Priests Killed, in Rukuna Parish Kibungo Father Evode Mwanangu was killed. The Author reiterates that the church played a major role in making Rwanda a fertile ground for genocide by actively involving in ethnic politics, discrimination and taking the lead in state politics. Good practicing Christians killed their fellow Christians and neighbours. Catholic Bishops, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterian and Pentecostals fully supported the new leadership of 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1994. On 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1994 there was a massacre of 20,000 to 30,000 people at Gitaramana Prefecture instigated by Burgomasters, political party leaders and the clergy. Road barricades were mounted by Hutu to massacre the fleeing Tutsi. In the 1980s and 1990s church leaders in Rwanda cooperated with political leaders to flourish the church but during President Habyarimana regime they supported ethnicity and Hutu ethno-nationalism. Indeed Hutu church leaders were stumbling blocks during the genocide for they gathered the Tutsi in churches and subjected them to Hutu militia in full support of the genocide in Rwanda.

## **1.2. The Church and Genocide in Rwanda**

The author observes that the majority of the participants in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide were Christians. Church buildings served as primary killing grounds than anywhere else in the Rwanda as the organisers of the genocide exploited these concept of the sanctuary to systematically slaughter thousands of people with false protection using firearms. In some communities the clergy, catechists and church employees identified the Tutsi for elimination. Elizaphan, Ntakirutimana of Seventh Day Adventist Church, Catholic Priest Jean Francis Kayiranga and Edward were used to congregate people at Nyange Parish and subjected them to soldiers' massacre burring survivors alive. In Kigali Munyeshyaka of Sante Fanulle Parish used death squads to sexually assault and massacre the Tutsi refugees in churches. At the same time National Church leaders never condemned the genocide publicly but instead supported the authoritarian regime.

African religious institutions served the authoritarian oppression of the population by engaging in ethnic discrimination and violence in Rwanda including Central Africa and West Africa. Churches are

involved in ethnic divisions and bloodshed in most African countries. Professor Longman cites Catholic Church in Democratic Republic of Congo, Lutheran church in Tanzania, Catholic and Anglican in Burundi hardly stand up for the rights of the masses and the population but instead influence political violence and genocide. According to the author observation Religious institutions should significantly stand for the protection of the rights of the population. They are central to civil societies, entrusted by the power for democratization and political transformation for a peace coexistence and stability of communities in the world. African churches are to emulate the Eastern Germany and Poland churches that helped in democratic transformation to facilitate peace and tranquillity in their countries. The church has the obligation of remaining autonomous in condemning ethnic and state conflicts before escalation into genocides. The Catholic and Protestant churches in Rwanda remain blamed for the loss of lives of Christians, citizens and the destruction the state of Rwanda.

### **1.3. River of Blood: A Manifestation of Rwanda Churches During 1994 Genocide**

The author pegs the atrocities and genocide in Rwanda to the way the missionaries propagated Catholic and Protestant churches in Rwanda. On arrival the Catholic leaders presented themselves as political players interpreting Rwanda power in ethnic terms targeting to convert the Tutsi avoiding the Hutu. Christian missionaries centralized, codified and rationalized the Hutu and Tutsi creating an ethnic gap for conflicts. The missionary activities met resistance in independent Hutu kingdom. The Catholics competed with the Protestants by using chiefs to convert indigenous elites with the pretext of redeeming them from slavery and oppression. They divided the Rwandese into ethnic groups by applying the Hamitic hypothesis to divide the Hutus and Tutsi of Rwanda as well as assuming that all chiefs were Tutsi hence creating Hutus-Tutsi ethnic conflicts. They saw the Tutsi as a superior race to Hutu whose relationship was that of conquerors ruling over the conquered. The division between the Hutu and Tutsi widened as the Catholics and Protestants further strengthened the conflict between the two tribes of Rwanda.

The church continued to spread centrality of ethnicity to Rwandan Politics and individuals in the country and also used their political power to influence the selection of political leaders. The Anglicans, seventh Day Adventist and the Presbyterian missionaries all sought the favour of the state leaders. The entanglement of the church and the state in ethnic politics caused denominational divide among the Christians and the citizens as recorded in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Christian missionaries played a crucial role in developing ethnic ideologies and conflicts in Africa. The church stereotyped the tribes, used Tutsi and Hutu morphology to describe their phenotypes that was used to categorically massacre groups during the genocide. The missionaries believed that the physical differences of the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa was that of personalities and psychological trait hence destined Tutsi rights against the Hutu and Twa. According the letter by Mgr. Classe to the Belgium Resident

Morteham the Tutsi were believed to have been ordained by God to rule the Hutu and Twa of Rwanda. In contrary the church created new opportunities for the Hutu elites in the church institutions hence encouraging ethnic politics without challenging the central principles of Rwanda conflict. The church opted to remain conservative on the existing structures of power and supported the rights of the Hutu against the Tutsi.

The Catholic Church created classes of educated and westernized Tutsi elites who dominated all positions of power in the country from the 1930s developing an ideology that supported ethnic tension. During Habyarimana regime, the majority of the priests and Pastors were Tutsi with leadership positions reserved for Hutus. The state forced most of the respectable Hutu scholars and priests to withdraw from the church leadership to take government positions of demoted Tutsi leaders hence sparking ethnic conflicts. Professor Longman observes that church leaders protected patrimonial structures linked to state ethnicity and genocide hence remained challenged during the conflict.

#### **1.4. Church and State Involvement in Rwanda Genocide**

At the time of independence of Rwanda in July 1962 most Hutu leaders had risen to prominence by the help of the Catholic Missionaries. Most of the Hutus were educated, employed hence challenged the Tutsi hegemony over Rwandan society and politics. The majority of the indigenous clergy were Tutsi who condemned the Belgium administration with the White Father Kabgayi becoming the centre for Hutu activism as the conservative Tutsi churchmen looked to Nyundo church for support. This segregation led to revolutions by which Mgr. Perraudin was accused by the Tutsi for encouraging anti-European, anti-catholic rhetoric of UNAR but refused to endorse PARMEHUTU replacing Kinyamateka with a moderate Tutsi called Justin Kalibwami and a more hard line Tutsi to maintain neutrality for the church.

The Catholic Church offered the Hutu activist support to transform Rwanda Society in several key ways in order to emerge the Belgium power in the 1950s and 1960s. The church played the role of a kingmaker after independence in 1962 influencing the Hutu-Tutsi politics. The Church Missionary Society emphasised evangelism rather than engagement in the public life of the nation. The socio-political context attracted many Tutsi that embodied many ethnic politics and Pietistic Movement in Rwanda. The church offered little response to the wave of violence in Rwanda in 1959, 1965 and in 1973 the time when the church was directly affected by conflicts. The church collaborated with the state regimes than voicing for the society to enhance peace and harmony. The church blindly supported President Habyarimana who literally advocated for moral revolution, education and employment of the Rwandese people in Rwanda. He developed strong ties with churches, religious leaders such as the Catholic Arch Bishop Vincent Nsenyumvu, venerated religious leaders to high offices with all the Hutu Anglican Bishops such as Joseph Ruzindana and Adonia Sebunguri

supporting his regime. The collaboration between the state and the church existed at all levels of the hierarchy, political positions and government resources were distributed through a patriarchal structure that rewarded loyal individuals and the communities.

The elites in Kirinda organized structures of community security, political parties, communal government, national leaders of the church and media hence made genocide possible. Political parties were identified as a threat to security and continued to associate with Rwanda Patriotic Front and the war. In 1990 the elite in Kirinda publicly embraced Anti-Tutsi as the main instigators of unrest since they were aligned to Twangirayesu who was a close associate to President Habyarimana. In August 1992 and January 1993 ethnic violence occurred in Gishyita and Rwamatamu killing 6 people, burning 500 homes and displacing 5000 people. The massacre raised anxiety among the local Tutsi giving the expanding conflict an ethnic character. The militia attacked the Tutsi killing and displacing hundreds of thousands of residents from Ruhengeri, Byumba and Kigali. Nationally the Arusha Accord signed in August, 1993 in Tanzania by Rwanda Political parties split the opposition parties to support President Habyarimana setting a stage for the genocide. This was followed by Burundian President Ndadaye being assassinated, murder of Ntawirakanayo and Nyilingabo as support for Hutu tribes.

During this period of conflict the church never offered moral guidance to the parishioners. Some churches like Bigulu opposed ethnic intolerance amongst the Hutu and Tutsi church leaders and never supported ethnic, class divisions and exploitation of the masses. The author also observes that there was direct denunciation of ethnic and political violence in the church pulpit between 1992 and 1993. By the time President Habyarimana plane went down on 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1994, the conditions for genocide in Kirinda and Bigulu were already in place. The local Kirinda leaders sought to win Hutu masses by identifying local Tutsi as a threat to security and presenting themselves as defenders of Hutu interests. Immediately after the death of President Habyarimana violence sparked in Kibuye prefecture displacing many people, from Kayove, Gishenyi, Ramba, Rutiro and Mabanza April, 1994 with more than 1000 people massacred in Mwendo and 3000 in Mabanza majorly coordinated by community leaders. The Tutsi armed with mobs of local militia and military gathered in central locations to organize attacks on the Hutu homes. These massacres were organized by sub-prefect Birambo together with the Burgomaster of Mwendo and Bwakira together with the Security Committee. They organized armed youths to barricade bridges at Nyabarongo, Kibuye, Gitaramana and Gisovu and barricaded roads to Kirinda and Bwakira to massacres of Tutsi refugees April, 1994.

In Mwendo and Gikongoro Hutu gang Militia from Birambo set fire on Tutsi homes and slaughtered Tutsi refugees from Kirinda and Bigulu between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1994. The security expanded the number of road blocks throughout the territory to capture the Tutsi who would escape the massacre. According to the Author the Tutsi hiding could be uncovered and those fleeing were killed between

the expanded roadblocks and organized population barricades that worked as guards. The church leaders played a role in supporting security committees by actively participating in organizing road barricades and patrols to massacre the Tutsi. The majority of the Tutsi from Kirinda and Bigulu were killed in the 1994 genocide. In Kirinda the church was the centre of the patrimonial structures that organized the support for the elites who instigated the violence in Rwanda. The involvement of the church in organizing patrols and barriers assured the general population of the moral acceptability of involvement in the civil self-defence that acted as death squad. The role of the church in empowering the poor through economic opportunities and greater security, promotion of unity, alternative ideological framework exposed exploitation and encouraged self-empowerment made the locals more vulnerable to manipulations at Bigulu. The churches in Rwanda were sites of genocide, politics and ethnic conflicts, Church leaders like Twangiragesu and their allies were a threat to the church for they actively supported genocide in Kirinda because they were state agents and a considerable centre of power in Rwanda.

### **1.5. Theologies of Liberation and Empowerment**

As the church in Rwanda underwent democratization the White Fathers and the Catholic Missionaries allied with the State political powers hence compromising the church functions. The church's relationships with Kayiribanda regime strained and were politically vulnerable. The new theological ideas and structural changes within the churches increased grassroots economic development programmes and proliferation of lay church movement and organization for reassessment of the role of the churches in society. The empowerment of the laity within the churches and rethinking of the nature of Christianity was a central idea for the organization. The Roman Catholic Church theology paid little attention to social issues and salvation but focused on selfish material gains hence forgot its role as keepers of God's law. The church in Rwanda paid more allegiance towards political affiliation and propaganda hence compromised its goal of guarding the God's flock. Apart from spreading the gospel the church in Rwanda practised Human Rights and political democracy in empowering the poor. The church was to be transformed from a preferential option for the poor by take up radical political transformation. The new theologies created pressure to church leaders who were politically engaged in Rwanda administrative systems of ethnic discrimination.

The church initiated programmes to eradicate poverty through food increased food production, fighting soil erosion, fostered income generating projects like basketry, honey production, charcoal, and jelly making and wood carving, the communities were encouraged to make cooperatives. The sustainable programmes were to empower the poor and the marginalized communities for development. The Tutsi found opportunities for education and employment restricted by presidential ethnic quota system that limited the Tutsi admission to schools and government leadership. Many Tusti supported political reforms due to deprivation of education and employment opportunities by

the government. Habyarimana centralized power in the hands of limited groups of relatives, his wife Angathe Kazinga from Gishenyi family in key government positions.

The Catholic and the Protestant leaders were drawn in key allies with leaders of both Catholic and Anglican churches in Gishenyi and Ruhengeri compromised by the state government. The conflict among the elite exploded into public views followed with assassinations in April 1988 of a popular army official Colonel Stanislas Mayuya considered being a threat to President Habyarimana's regime. The civil society became the basis of support for those who challenge the political status quo and provision of solutions for those who were in discount with the state policies. The Catholic Kinyarwanda Language (Kinyaniateka) newspaper exposed the government strategies, corruption, and nepotism, land accumulation by government officials, embezzlement of 30 million Rwandan Francs, economic problems leading to several arrests including Editor Father Sibonana. In September 1990 the intellectuals and the Roman Catholic Church called for a central information service to stop intimidation of the Press and depoliticization of the national radio and renounced political monopoly in Rwanda. They advocated for free association, principle for multiparty, separation of powers within the state, discontinue animation politics. The church practices liberation theology to shape the political world of Rwanda. It also provided humanitarian support, human rights, women association, cooperatives centred towards influencing a political change. The Episcopal conference of Catholic Bishops contributed significantly to expansion of press freedom in Rwanda and formed human rights groups such as the Jesuit community, Rwanda Bible Society, Presbyterian Church. The Christian community authorized Editor Sibomana of Kinyamaleka to publish political issues on corruption, violation of human rights and administrative mismanagement. The church also supported other civil society organizations engaged in political reforms and created solidarity in the church congregation. During this time many people stopped participating in politics and animation, evaded taxes, protested against the government regulations such as uprooting or burning coffee trees and forests owned by the community, rich individuals or churches. Episcopal and Anglican Churches supported political reforms, strategies to reform church rituals, theology and leadership in Rwanda, all these generated discrimination and animosity among the Rwandese.

#### **1.6. Challenges faced by the Christian in Confronting Rwanda Genocide of 1994**

The church continued to support Habyarimana but failed to address ethnic tension and violence in the state. The growth of populist theologies and lay church structures in the 1980s allowed people to have greater freedom to read the Bible and reflect on its message to distinguish between the church leader's behaviours and the scripture. The church preached unity among the Twa, Tutsi and Hutu. The population was to rise against dishonest schemes. Many people within the Catholic Church became frustrated with the continuing alliance between the bishops and the state that undemocratic practice in the church. The church compromised its credibility for lived in the colonial lie by submission to

temporal power that impeded denunciation of violation of human rights. Bishops limited dissent and independence in the church instead they sought to control pietistic movements. Struggle for clerical leadership in Catholic Church brought leadership conflicts. Protestant leaders engaged in the political fray through public sermons, speeches, asserting political engagement as neutral arbiters in national conflicts. All African conference of Churches (AACC) helped to organise peace agreements between political parties and government. The church spearheaded by Bishop Twagirayesu the president of the Rwanda Council of Churches (RCC) led ecumenical peace negotiations between the warring parties in Nairobi of Kenya in 1991 and 1992, in 1993 Paris and Dar es Salaam in Arusha Tanzania to restore peace in Rwanda.

The church is blamed for failing to obstruct path towards genocide and creating climates for the genocide in 1993 and 1994 in Rwanda. Christians were not faithful in preaching brotherhood, love but endorsed disobedience towards authorities, instigated ethnic discrimination and politics. This reflects to the genocide situation where many Tutsi Christians who sought refuge in churches or public buildings were gathered by Burgomaster and eliminated heightening ethnic tension and polarization among the Tutsi and Hutu communities. The church helped to create a context in which genocide against the Tutsi was acceptable and approved Bishops in support the government. None of the pastoral letters mentioned assassination or ethnic attacks or violence. The clergy never held government officials, armed forces, Interahamwe or opposition party's accountable attacks for violence. The Bishops never addressed Tutsi massacre in Kibuye and Gishenyi, they failed to address increasing exclusion and isolation of Tutsi by militant Hutu supporting the government. Bishops repeatedly refused to distance themselves from ethnic discrimination and politics of violence, never defended Father Sihomana and journalists from Kinyamateka taken for trials but remained silent. When the church personnel were killed such as Antonia Lacatelli an Italian Volunteer with the Catholic Church in Bugesera and Brother Francois Cardinal who was a Canadian Monk in were killed in 1992 the church leadership remained silent. The church in Africa is unable to address and condone social sin of political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural alienation that affect African Christianity and the general life of the citizens. Optimistic leaders always want the best for and from the people. In any ideal situation Christian leaders pour their hearts and souls into their work because God has called them to ministry hence visualize their work through a spiritual lens for commitment in worshipping God.

The Tutsi sought refuge in church buildings but Bishops never offered sanctuary. Many Rwandans read the failure of the church to condemn government officials from organising ethnic attacks or orderings assassinations, targeting church personnel and buildings as an endorsement of ethnic politics of violence. The Protestants and Seventh Day Adventist Churches failed to oppose ethnic political violence. They never held the government accountable for organizing the massacres and



assassinations. The church leaders allowed the state to define the public discourse leaving many Rwandan Christians alienated to political processes. The assassination of President Melchior Andaye of Burundi by Tutsi army officer in 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1993 escalated the violence in which 50,000 people were killed driving 150,000 to urban areas but the church remained silent never addressing even the assassination of President Andaye. A few Church clerics like Bishop Nyundo, Priest of Kibuye and Gishenyi continued to criticize the government for distributing weapons to civilians. Most of the churches were unwilling condemn descent towards genocide or alert the world on the impending disaster. Established in 1950s Kirinda church designated for evangelism, activities like health, technical school and development services. The Bigulu church was known for church in bridging the gap between the poor and the rich to prevent hegemony of elite groups. The church developed leaders in both the church and the political world and advocated for liberation theologies, sustainable development, decentralized church structures and proliferation of lay organizations for progress. The church linked the local communities to the international community both socially and economically. The church helped to organize institutional and theological background on which the masses of the population could challenge injustice and exploitation hence raising the consciousness of the population about the national political issues and the national networks. The challenges of the status quo and the public support for opposition parties linked local political leaders and the business people to be on the defensive part of the regime. Bigulu community leaders hindered mobilization of the masses towards the government. Many parish members became targets of destruction during the genocide. Christians should avoid ideological thinking because of its inherent divisive and hostile quality; they should have much confidence in God's plan than in social programs. The local churches empowered the poor by providing the intellectual and moral leadership necessary for revolutionary restructuring the society. The church Pastors and development workers offered ideological and theological justification for assumption of power by the lower class hence never supported the regime. The pastors, prophets, bishops and evangelists proclaim the gospel that the God who saves the soul also heals the body and provide answers to human fears and insecurities solutions. Christian leaders are entrusted with a mandate of healthy parenting, creation of healthy environment in which spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical parts of the congregation are natured (1 Tim:3:4).

### **Conclusion**

Christians should avoid ideological or inherent divisive hostile operations with state governments but be confident in God's plan for His people. Many Pastors and Priests never encouraged compassion and charity for the poor but became tools of the genocide in Rwanda. The Presbyterian and the Catholic churches were aware of the looming conflict but never engaged reconciliation between the warring parties leading mass massacres of God's people. The Rwanda

genocide revealed that the church in Africa remains bare footed and godly disarmed in condoning social sins of political oppression, economic exploitation and cultural alienation that affect African Christianity and otherstate citizens across Africa and the rest the world. Rwanda genocide remains a generational history and a benchmark of preparedness in conflict prevention and management.

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