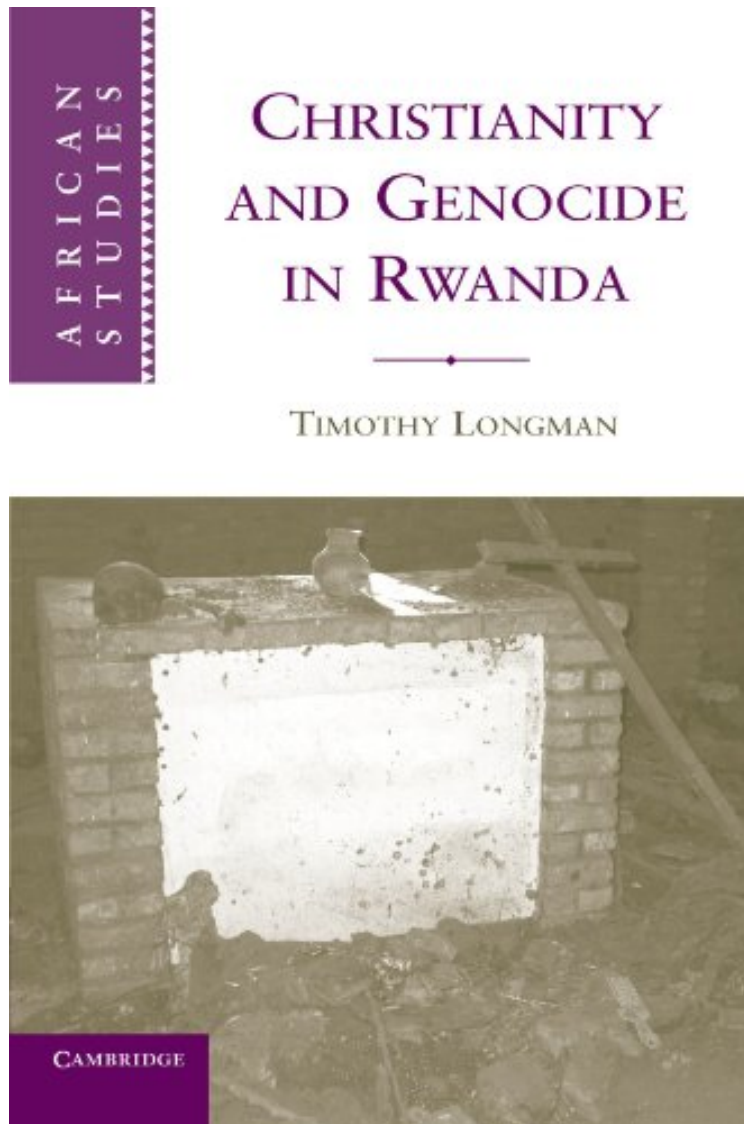


## Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda (African Studies)

*Timothy Longman*

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**Timothy Longman : Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda (African Studies)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda (African Studies):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. something in the nature of Christianity in Rwanda made it unable or unwilling to restrain genocide. By Customer Nearly Twenty two years ago in Rwanda, Christian leaders and laypersons contributed to the massacre of their neighbors only a few days after celebrating Easter. During the violence that enveloped the land of thousand hills between April and July 1994, an estimated 500,000 to one million Tutsi and their perceived Hutu and Twa allies were killed in a country in which nearly 90% of the population identified as Christian.

In *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, Timothy Longman seeks to explain both how and why Christians became involved in the 1994 genocide. Rwandan Christians did not contribute to the genocide due to a nominal faith; instead, Longman's forceful narrative claims that something in the nature of Christianity in Rwanda made it unable or unwilling to restrain genocide. Longman, the Director of the African Studies Center and Associate Professor of Political Science at Boston University, argues Rwanda's churches were not simply implicated in the genocide because of the disturbing contribution of individual Christians. Rather, he contends that Rwanda's churches were deeply culpable as social institutions. Longman's book describes the formation and development of Christianity in Rwanda from its genesis in 1900 during colonialism through the end of the genocide in 1994. His narration illuminates the complex ways that Rwanda's churches politicized ethnicity, authorized autocratic and discriminatory governments, and promoted obedience and acquiescence to Rwanda's political institutions.

**Christianity and Colonialism** Since Christianity's inception in Rwanda, first Catholic, and later Protestant, missionaries have sought to cultivate intimate relationships with Rwanda's political powers in order to secure influence and power in the country. The first Catholic missionaries, the Society of Missionaries better known as the White Fathers, entered Rwanda with the goal of obtaining the favor of Rwanda's kingdom. Longman argues that the White Fathers were convinced that Christianity would thrive in Rwanda by maintaining a cozy alliance with the colonial administration and the Rwandan kingdom. They believed that if royal court elites converted to the faith, then the masses would follow suit. In their efforts to obtain the favor of Rwandan elites, the White Fathers partnered with the German colonial administration in expanding and consolidating the Rwandan monarch's control over the autonomous regions in Rwanda. When the remaining independent kingdoms resisted assimilation or when challenges to the monarch's power emerged, the White Fathers sided with the Rwandan royal court. Additionally, when the Belgian colonial powers took over Rwanda from the Germans following their defeat in World War I in 1916, the White Fathers continued to pursue Tutsi elites with various tactics, including the provision of educational opportunities for Tutsi youth. The White Fathers now collaborated with the Belgians to require King Musinga to legalize Christian mission in 1917, and again in 1931 to replace Musinga with his son, Rudahigwa, in order to install a king more favorable to Christianity. Eventually, the White Fathers' efforts in befriending the royal court paid off. Following the conversion of the Tutsi elite to Christianity in the 1930s, a significant portion of the kingdom's population converted throughout the next decade. To many missionaries, the widespread acceptance of Christianity by the 1940s confirmed the value of sustaining an intimate connection between Rwanda's churches and the state.

**The racialization of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa** Seeking to convert the political elites of the Rwandan kingdom was rooted not only in a pragmatic desire to obtain converts, but was also funded by racial theories prominent in Europe at the time. The Belgians and the White Fathers observed distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi to be basically racial and social, flattening out regional variation, lineage, clan, existing political institutions and the relative flexibility associated with Hutu and Tutsi prior to the arrival of the missionaries in Rwanda. Accordingly, the White Fathers and the Belgians attributed any sign of nobility, power and civilization to the Tutsi, who they perceived to be superior and fit to rule to the Hutu and Twa. While categories like Hutu or Tutsi are likely very old in Rwanda's social discourse, these identities are not primordial, static, and immutable. A few years before the arrival of the first missionaries, the kingdom of central Rwanda experienced thirty years of expansion and consolidation under the rule of King Kigeri Rwabugiri (c. 1860-1895). Rwabugiri concentrated and centralized power through various socio-political structures. It is in this context, that Longman contends that Hutu and Tutsi started to become less fluid categories, obtaining greater ethnic salience, corresponding with a difference in social status. And while this process of increasing ethnic stratification began before the colonialists arrived, Hutu and Tutsi were inscribed with new and more rigid meanings during the colonial period. Despite the fact that there were Hutu chiefs and elites, as well as poor Tutsi, the White Fathers and Belgians facilitated the development of Hutu and Tutsi into rigid and highly stratified racial categories by legally inscribing them through identity cards in the 1930s. These identities also corresponded to various political, economic and ecclesiastical advantages and disadvantages. While Tutsi enjoyed access to property rights and roles in important institutions, Hutu, on the other hand, faced disadvantages through taxes, forced labor, and discrimination. The White Fathers and Belgian colonial administration did not create ethnicity in Rwanda, and many Tutsi elites manipulated the socio-biological ideologies of the Europeans to secure power and advantages. Nevertheless, the White Fathers and the colonial powers inscribed Hutu, Tutsi and Twa with new meanings, resulting in a more stratified society marked by these enduring identities.

**Christianity in post-colonial Rwanda** Following World War II, sensibilities concerning human rights and colonialism began to change, prompting young missionaries to advocate for the interests of the Hutu. By providing Hutu with educational opportunities in church schools, the European missionaries fostered a new Hutu elite who challenged the injustices of the Rwandan system and eventually, after a popular revolt in 1959 drove Tutsi chiefs from office, and assumed political power, according to Longman. During this time, the Catholic Church, like the Belgian colonial administration, transferred its allegiance from the Tutsi elite to the Hutu elite. In this way, the Church continued to participate in Rwanda's ethnic politics as it sought to establish local parishes as hubs of political power. Between 1959 and 1990, Rwanda's Catholic and Protestant leaders, in many ways maintained the pattern it followed since Christianity's inception in Rwanda, by aligning themselves and their churches with those in political power. After the revolution that culminated in Rwanda's

independence in 1962, the new Hutu-led regime under Grigore Kayibanda maintained intimate personal and official connections with Catholic hierarchy, despite pressing for political independence from the Church. And when Juvenal Habyarimana grabbed power after a military coup in 1973, he eagerly cultivated important relations with both Rwandas Catholic and Protestant churches, recognizing their political clout. Rwandas church leaders responded, by and large, through fostering obedience to the Habyarimana regime. Thus, given the general support Rwandas churches offered those in power, Rwandas churches failed to provide a substantial opposition to the waves of violence that occurred against Rwandas Tutsi in 1959, 1965 and 1973 despite being directly affected by it. Rwandas churches and Christian leaders failed to condemn the violence, setting an important precedent for future violence. This pattern of providing explicit and implicit support to those in power continued through the presidency of Juvenal Habyarimana, as Catholic and Protestant leaders aligned themselves and their churches with those in political power. During the Habyarimana regime, a system of patron-client relationships developed between the Habyarimana government and church leaders, channeling government resources and political positions as rewards for support of the political authorities. And while Rwandas churches and leaders came into conflict with the state from time to time, compromise generally prevailed. During the 1980s and 1990s, a confluence of new theological developments and grassroots democratic activism within Rwandas churches furnished fresh provocations against Christianity's affiliation with state power. Nevertheless, in aggregate, Rwandas churches impact on democratic reform was mixed with some groups and individuals advocating reform of various kinds, while other Christian leaders perceiving these reforms as threats to their established power. More specifically, Longman argues that church leaders sought to remain relevant within the changing political context and to respond to internal pressures, providing mild endorsements of political reform as long as it did not subvert their personal power and kept their opposition in check. Rwandas churches and Genocide The genocide, which occurred in a span of 100 days, was perpetrated in the context of a civil war that took place between October 1990 and August 1993. Catalyzed by the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana after his plane was shot down in April 6, 1994, massacres erupted across Rwanda, as the genocidal plan was set into motion by elites of the post-Habyarimana government and military. Longman reveals that even though Protestant and Catholic leadership did not participate in the planning of the genocide, clergy, catechists and other church employees used their knowledge of the local population to identify Tutsi for elimination, while in several cases church staff killed parishioners and neighbors. Yet, the Rwandan churches did not simply commit sins of commission, but sins of omission as well: most church leaders failed to name and rebuke the genocide. This tacit support of violence enabled many Christians to perceive the genocide as consistent with Christian practice and belief. As such, Rwandas Christian leaders cultivated an atmosphere where good, practicing Christians could kill their neighbors without feeling that they were acting inconsistently with their faith, Longman argues. While there were Christians and churches that prompted by their Christian beliefs actively resisted and condemned the genocide, by and large, Rwandas churches and Christian leaders failed to act as an impediment to the systematic slaughter of up to 1 million Tutsi along with the murder of Hutu and Twa who took a stand against the genocide and the interim Rwandan government. Conclusion Taken as a whole, Longmans book demonstrates that instead of establishing an alternative to state power by resisting ethnic discrimination, opposing violence and attending to Rwandas marginalized, many of Rwandas Christian leaders and churches fomented a situation in which genocide was possible and sometimes even encouraged. Longmans analysis of the church's role in the genocide establishes his book as an essential contribution to the already large body of scholarship on the Rwandan genocide. The church is indebted to Longman for offering a book, which raises important questions for Christians as the church remembers the devastation of the 1994 genocide and contemplate the witness of the church today. What does it look like for Christians in Rwanda to embody forgiveness and repentance given the culpability of the church in the past? How can Rwandas churches cultivate an identity and unity rooted in Jesus Christ that challenges ethnic or political allegiances? How ought Christians relate to the Rwandan government today given Rwandas churches past relationship to political power structures? If fear, social pressure and obedience were some of the drivers of the mass participation in the genocide, how can faith, hope and love shape Christian witness in Rwanda today?

Although Rwanda is among the most Christian countries in Africa, in the 1994 genocide, church buildings became the primary killing grounds. To explain why so many Christians participated in the violence, this book looks at the history of Christian engagement in Rwanda and then turns to a rich body of original national and local-level research to argue that Rwanda's churches have consistently allied themselves with the state and played ethnic politics. Comparing two local Presbyterian parishes in Kibuye prior to the genocide demonstrates that progressive forces were seeking to democratize the churches. Just as Hutu politicians used the genocide of Tutsi to assert political power and crush democratic reform, church leaders supported the genocide to secure their own power. The fact that Christianity inspired some Rwandans to oppose the genocide demonstrates that opposition by the churches was possible and might have hindered the violence.

"This book is far more than a profoundly moving and convincing account of one of the late twentieth century's

defining events. It is indispensable for scholars in fields as diverse as conflict and genocide studies, civil society, and religion generally. Longman's analysis of Rwanda's churches as important repositories of power, and thus inherently political organizations, capable both of buttressing authority and of challenging it, constitutes a huge theoretical advance in conceptualizing the role of religion in public life." Paul Gifford, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

"The massive involvement of Christian communities in the killing of Tutsi is one of the most disturbing and controversial questions in the background of the Rwandan bloodbath. In this path-breaking inquest, Tim Longman brilliantly illuminates this long-neglected aspect of the Rwandan tragedy. His book stands as a major contribution to our understanding of the less than edifying role of the Church in Rwanda and other genocidal settings." Rene Lemarchand, Emeritus Professor, University of Florida

"This thoughtful study significantly advances our understanding of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In a bold and nuanced analysis, Longman shows how and why churches linked to the state and imbued with 'a conservative, hierarchical, bigoted version of Christianity' gave moral sanction to violence against Tutsi, making it easier for people to participate in the genocide. Using local case studies, the book elucidates power struggles within churches that mirrored and also shaped conflicts in civil society. This view from below provides valuable insights on the concerns and fears of ordinary people during the turbulent democratization period of early 1990s Rwanda, while Longman's unsettling conclusions constitute a cautionary tale: 'if religious institutions become too closely tied to state power', he warns, 'they have the capacity to legitimize abhorrent state actions'." Catharine Newbury, Five College Professor of Government and African Studies, Smith College

"Longman's book is an important contribution to the emerging micro-level literature on the genocide. It benefits from Longman's long association with the country and his extensive research on the genocide for Human Rights Watch. He uses sources that few scholars have tapped into, namely the communal archives which consists of letters and reports that local authorities wrote to higher ups at the time of events." Perspectives on Politics

"Within a large literature, this book significantly advances the understanding of the Rwandan genocide ... Recommended." T. P. Johnson, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Choice

"This book makes a major contribution to the literature on religion and conflict as well as on the 1994 Rwandan genocide ... Longman's long-term engagement with Rwanda, as well as his familiarity with the literature in French and English on the country, has made him one of the leading American experts on the African Great Lakes region and also on religion and conflict ... This book should be read by anyone interested in Christianity in Rwanda." Jennie E. Burnet, University of Louisville, International Journal of African Historical Studies

"... Longman's insightful and original contribution provides a fresh perspective on the role of the churches in Rwanda, analyzing them as inherently political organizations that had become too closely tied to state power and continuously stressed obedience to political authorities." Daewon Moon, Africanus Journal

**About the Author**

Timothy Longman is director of the African Studies Center at Boston University, where he also serves as associate professor of political science. From 1996 to 2009, he served as associate professor of political science and Africana studies at Vassar College, New York. He has also taught at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; the National University of Rwanda, Butare; and Drake University, Iowa. He has served as a consultant in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo for USAID and the State Department, the International Center for Transitional Justice and Human Rights Watch, for whom he served as director of the Rwanda field office 1995-6. From 2001 to 2005, he served as a Research Fellow for the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, directing research on social reconstruction in post-genocide Rwanda. His articles have appeared in the African Studies , the Journal of Religion in Africa, the Journal of the American Medical Association, Comparative Education , the Journal of Genocide Research and America, and he is currently completing a book manuscript titled Memory, Justice, and Power in Post-Genocide Rwanda.