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The Church in the Social and Political Evolution of Rwanda: The Road towards the 1994 Genocide

This study was intended to comparatively analyse the church's role in the social and political evolution of Rwanda: The road towards the 1994 genocide. The study was guided by the need to find out more about the cultures and customs of Rwanda, the church's role in the Rwandan community in colonial era, the church's involvement in the social and political system of pre-genocide Rwanda, the church's involvement in the social conflict resolution of pre-genocide Rwanda and the church's role in 1994 Rwandan genocide. The study applied a library research design and it mainly considered secondary sources of data. In particular it looked at books, journals, telecasts and internet sources that had relevant information concerning the subject matter. The findings revealed that the church's contribution in Rwanda had both positive and negative impact on the Rwandan community. On the positive impact, it was found out that the church in Rwanda as elsewhere is actively engaged in education by setting up schools; and in the health sector, through the construction of a number of health units such as hospitals and dispensaries. All these, apart from the services they offer, also provide employment opportunities useful for development and improved standards of living of the communities. However, on the negative side, the church is believed to have had an upper hand in Rwanda during the 1990-1994 genocide. This is noted on the issue that the church was seen getting deeply involved in genocide of ethnic Tutsi in Rwanda. More to that, the Churches were a major site for massacres; many Christians participated in the genocide, including priests, nuns and lay leaders, the church also indoctrinated ethnic differences among Rwandese. Finally the church of Rwanda served as the country's killing fields when ethnic and political violence started. However, there are some Rwandese and other communities that have not accepted reconciliation in their hearts because of what they went through in 1994, but both institutions- church and state are trying to promote peace and reconciliation among Rwandese such that what happened in 1994 does not occur again. The study, therefore, recommended that the church and the state should devise means and mechanisms for working together in meeting the needs of the people. The church should as much as possible detach herself from participating in active politics; because there is no doubt that throughout the history of Rwanda, Church leaders have had close ties with the political powers. To ably deal with the perpetrators of the conflict and reflect justice among the victims, the government with the help of the international community should strengthen the justice system in dealing with the perpetrators of the genocide regardless of one's status. The gacaca or the local justice system trying the genocide cases has been associated with mixed outcomes, both positive and negative. That for the church and state to continue working together they should be open to each other without taking sides because of religious or political affiliation for the benefit of the people they lead. Government, church, schools and higher institutions of learning should talk openly about the differences between Hutus, Tutsis and Twa instead of making Rwandese remain suppressed. This can be done by telling them that they are one people, that there is no Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, and that they are all Rwandese

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