

Reviews

CHURCH AND REVOLUTION IN RWANDA by Ian and Jane Linden, *Manchester University Press and Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1977, xvi + pp 304*
£9.95

Linden has followed his monograph *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland* (1974) with another book of the same genre, a fascinating and highly authoritative account of 'the encounter between Roman Catholicism and Rwandan society'. His narrative has successfully survived the transition from doctoral thesis to book, the immense wealth of detailed information in both text and footnotes being suitably complemented by 'state of the nation' summaries at the end of every chapter and by a clear initial statement of how the material is organised:

The ideology and political power of the Church are considered primarily in terms of three major points of conflict within Rwandan society: the struggle between king and nobles, between the different economies and societies of the northern clanlands and central Rwanda, and between the ruling class and the governed. Since these points of conflict, and, of course, the Church's political power and ideology, were strongly influenced by the policies of colonial rule, that of the Germans and Belgians. These interactions are discussed fully in the context of colonialism. Each chapter attempts to encompass the three points of conflict, their development through time, and their dynamic interaction with the Church.

After an introductory assessment of the political and socio-cultural structure of Rwandan society at the time of the missionary and colonial penetration in the mid-1890s, the remaining chapters focus on identifiable stages in the evolution of the Rwandan Church. First, the founding of an exclusively Hutu Church, thanks to the literally forceful persuasion of Ganda 'askari-catechists' and 'strong-arm missionaries'. Then in the decade preceding the outbreak of World War One, Rev. Classe was successful in normalising relations between the church and the two arms of secular authority, the German administration and the Tutsi court. The 1920s wit-

nessed the gradual turning to Catholicism of the ruling class, culminating in a 'tornado' of conversions once the 'pagan' king Musinga had been removed by the Belgians and replaced by the 'Christian' Rudahigwa. Throughout the 1930s and early 1950s the new Tutsi-dominated Church and the Belgian administration provided reinforcement for each other (the latter's reforms having destroyed the complicated system of checks and balances which had restrained Tutsi power during the era of their territorial expansion in the nineteenth century). The post-war years saw the growth of Hutu demands for emancipation, amplified at the United Nations, and orchestrated more and more within Rwanda itself by a new generation of 'social democrat' priests from Europe. When Belgian paratroopers finally brought the Hutu Republic of Rwanda to birth in 1961 amid widespread violence, the Tutsi laity had rejected the Catholic Church as an agent of imperialism, and the Tutsi clergy had rejected their tutors, the White Fathers, as 'an aberrant offshoot of the Universal Church'.

Linden is determined, however, to qualify this evolutionary treatment of his subject. For example, although from the mid-1950s onwards 'the Church could no longer provide an integrative religious ideology to buttress the State', this must be balanced against what is perhaps Linden's central thesis, namely the claim that 'from the outset the stratification of Rwandan society accentuated the inherent contradictions in Catholicism—viz. the unifying force of Christian equality and the hierarchical principle of order'.

These two quotations conveniently provide the cue for two criticisms of Linden's book. The first is that the author's repeated reference to the 'disintegration of the Church as a "first estate"', after the ethnic violence of 1959-1963 is likely to give the reader a misleading impression of what 'the encounter between Roman Catholicism and Rwandan society' would look

like if he visited the country today. The danger is compounded by the author's disproportionately meagre treatment of post-independence developments—a mere five-page 'Epilogue'—and by his decision not to refer to Church-State relations elsewhere in Africa. As well as saying that Rwanda's current leaders come from 'the rebellious north that had killed missionaries and Tutsi', he should add that Rwandans stream to Mass on Sundays in numbers unparalleled elsewhere in Africa except perhaps in neighbouring Burundi; that despite the State's nominal takeover of education, nearly all the teachers have been trained in Church institutions and remain sympathetic to the Church's teachings; that the Church is still easily the biggest employer after the State; that, there being no villages as such in Rwanda, the church/mission compound remains by far the most influential focus of 'westernisation' or 'modernisation' outside the two or three towns. It is understandable that there should currently be great interest in exposing the foibles of individual missionaries (especially those belonging to an order whose training inevitably confers an aura of superiority) and of whole missions (especially those whose message is grounded in doctrines of infallibility). Linden is right to point out, for example, that no African could really become a White Father, and that 'the essential defect of the Church's official position was woolly thinking about its institutional relationship to politics'. But he should also ask the questions, somewhat unpopular in some development circles, 'where would Rwanda be today without the missions?' and 'why do so many Africans in Rwanda and all over the continent spend their meagre resources on Church education and Church medical care rather than opt for the 'free' social services provided by government?' Livingstone may well have neglected his wife and children, but Zambia has nevertheless declined to 'africanise' the name of the town which was named after him.

The second criticism arises from Linden's attitude of apparent agnosticism towards his subjects' religious beliefs. He is entitled to say that 'the personal preferences of the missionaries, based on *class*

and social attitudes developed in Europe, determined reactions to Rwanda's social problems as much as pastorals and directives' (my italics), but what about their personal preferences that were based on the *quality of their religious experience*? What about the differing quality of religious experience of their converts? Linden assumes that this can simply be 'bracketed', passed over in favour of more widely accepted sociological categories. To take one example, peripheral to the author's main thesis: he explains the 'Revival' which broke out in the Protestant Church in the 1930s in terms of 'anxiety caused by contemporary social and economic upheavals', and of 'the Catholic monopoly of chiefly office'; he considers it significant that the British missionaries involved shared an upper-class, Cambridge, military background. This does nothing to explain the remarkable change in relations between Rwandan Christians and missionaries which followed the Revival, nor the fact that of the few Hutu and Tutsi who refused to condone the ethnic violence of 1959-1963 nearly all were members of the continuing Revival movement. The evidence for these phenomena is well enough documented to merit serious sociological attention. The eruption of ethnic violence both in Rwanda and in Burundi has been discussed from many perspectives, but the one which so far has been neglected is that of the actors' religious commitment. Rwanda and Burundi remain, after all, the most 'Christian' countries in Africa.

If, however, these objections to the author's chosen terms of reference are set aside, this book is undoubtedly a masterpiece, and, to quote the blurb, 'the first comprehensive history of Church and State in a little-known East African kingdom'.

One final point. Those who are prepared to pay £10 for this book will be disappointed to find that pages fall away from the binding on the first reading, that there are numerous misprints, and that all the French accents have been inked in by hand before the final printing. Such features are, however, hardly Dr. Linden's responsibility.

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