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The Missionaries of Africa and the Rwandan Genocide

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Abstract

On the basis of documentary evidence, this paper examines the position of the Missionaries of Africa, also known as White Fathers, in political and ethnic matters during the buildup to the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide itself, and the postgenocide period. It argues that the Missionaries of Africa responded to the genocide in different ways. Some, especially those who returned to Rwanda after 1994, recognised the errors done by the church and tried to restart their ministry on a new foundation. However, many, particularly in Belgium, the country from where half of them originated, adopted a more defensive attitude. They subscribed, explicitly or not, to the double genocide theory according to which the crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front equalled or even surpassed those of the Rwandan authorities and the militias during the genocide. On the whole, the General Council of the congregation in Rome reacted to the Rwandan situation in a nonpartisan manner.

Keywords

White Fathers – Catholic – Rwanda – Hutu – Tutsi – genocide

In the 15 June 1998 issue of *La Nouvelle Relève*, a quasi-official Rwandan publication, thirty prominent people, including members of parliament and cabinet ministers, published a note addressed to the general chapter of the Missionaries of Africa then meeting in Rome, in which they suggested that the congregation should 'momentarily withdraw from the country'. They might come back later, they added, 'with staff who would have never been involved in the Rwandan tragedy' (*La Nouvelle Relève* 361, 15 June 1998, 5). Two weeks

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later Privat Rutazibwa, a former Catholic priest who had joined the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1992 when it was still fighting the Habyarimana regime and was now heading the Rwandan Information Agency, made the same claim in an article titled '*Missionnaires de l'évangile ou apôtres de la haine*' (Missionaries of the gospel or apostles of hatred). The article took the form of an open letter to the representatives of the male and female branches of the Association of Major Superiors of Rwanda (ASUMA); Jan Lenssen, the regional superior of the Missionaries of Africa; and Frieda Schaubroeck, a Bernardine sister (Rutazibwa 1998; Rutazibwa 2017).

The incident that triggered the request for a moratorium on the White Fathers' presence in Rwanda was the publication by ASUMA on 7 April 1998 of a document titled '*Situation de notre pays et des communautés*' (Situation of our country and of the communities'), which expressed solidarity for the 'suffering of so many men, women and children victims, for about eight years, of a conflict over which they have no control' (Bizimana 2001, 71). For the signatories of the article in *La Nouvelle Relève* this was nothing short of a provocation. On 7 April 1998 Rwanda celebrated the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the genocide that had claimed the lives of close to a million mostly Tutsi people. Speaking of eight years, as the religious leaders did in their memorandum, meant that all the trouble started in 1990 when the RPF invaded Rwanda to resolve the decade-long problem of Tutsi refugees in camps outside the country. No mention was made of the genocide that was commemorated all over the country on the same day. The ASUMA leadership could not have expressed more clearly that the genocide was of minor importance in their eyes. The issue of the Missionaries of Africa's response to the genocide against the Tutsi is disputed. Did they underplay it, as the Rwandan officials quoted above accused them of doing? Did they recognise its unique character and draw lessons from it? Did their opposition to the RPF—well attested for many of them—allow them to preserve the memory of the genocide?

This is only one aspect of the broader question of the debate on the memory of the genocide. As Rwandan historian Paul Rutayisire observed in a recent paper, the Rwandan genocide is the object of a 'conflict of memories' (Rutayisire 2015). For the genocide survivors and the new Rwandan government it is a defining moment in Rwandan history. Like the survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants, they feel that this atrocious crime must never be forgotten. On the other end of the spectrum is the position of the partisans of the former regime, according to whom the genocide against the Tutsi, ghastly as it may seem, was just one in a long succession of violent events in the Great Lakes region, and not necessarily the worst. The critics of the RPF government put the emphasis on the crimes committed by the movement before, during,

and after the genocide in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In a attempt to minimise the importance of the genocide against the Tutsi they use the term 'double genocide' to indicate that as many Rwandan Hutu as Tutsi suffered violent deaths in the last decade of the twentieth century (Chrétien 2012).

Where are the Missionaries of Africa located in this debate? This matter has never been the object of a critical enquiry. Instead, attacks and counter-attacks have prevailed in newspaper articles, written publications, and Internet blogs from the time of the genocide to this day. What exactly the White Fathers specifically said and did is not known. The purpose of this paper is to examine, on the basis of documentary evidence, their position in political and ethnic matters during the buildup to the genocide, the genocide itself, and the post-genocide period. Special attention is paid to the variations of their position over time, and to the differences of opinion within the congregation on the genocide against the Tutsi and its aftermath.

The Missionaries of Africa graciously opened their archives for this project in Rome, Brussels, and Kigali, and some of them agreed to be interviewed. Several individuals close to the current Rwandan government did the same.

1 A Contested Legacy

One of the accusations made in June 1998 was that 'in connivance with the colonial power [the missionaries] allowed the massacre of Tutsi under the cover of a so-called Hutu social revolution' (quoted in *Dialogue*, Brussels 204, May–June 1998, 77). This refers to the role André Perraudin, a Swiss White Father who served as vicar apostolic and archbishop of Kabgayi from 1956 to 1989, and the Missionaries of Africa congregation as a whole played in Rwandan politics on the eve of Rwanda's independence.

In the absence of a proper history of the Missionaries of Africa in Rwanda, we can rely on several academic studies on this period of the country's history (Linden 1999; Rutayisire 1987; Carney 2012, 2014; Saur 2013). The first White Fathers arrived in Rwanda in 1900. They soon established a string of mission stations in the area. After the First World War, when Belgium replaced Germany as the colonial power, they played an important political role in the affairs of the country. They were, in the words of Alison Des Forges, 'kings without crown' (1969, 176).

The categories of Hutu and Tutsi existed in precolonial Rwanda, as attested in the relations of the first travellers and missionaries, but they were fluid and versatile. They did not designate a 'race', as the missionaries and colonial

agents used to say, or an ethnic group in today's terminology. They referred to a variety of ill-defined socioeconomic, tribal or kinships groups. Without necessarily understanding the long-term consequences of their actions, the White Fathers contributed to the development and the consolidation of the binary system of ethnic identities that, pushed to its extreme, led to the genocide. The first form of identity, that of the Hutu, was attached to people deemed to be physically, socially, and culturally inferior and who were seen, at a later stage of their history, as quintessential victims. The second one, that of the Tutsi, was attached to people presented as being born to command. The Hutu were said to form a natural majority in contrast to the Tutsi minority, which was not genuinely Rwandan and had violently 'conquered' the native population. One of the most active promoters of today's discredited Hamitic theory, according to which the Tutsi pastors arrived in the Great Lakes region from Egypt or Ethiopia long after the Hutu cultivators, was the White Father Albert Pagès, author of the 1933 work *Un royaume hamite au Coeur de l'Afrique* (A Hamite kingdom in the heart of Africa).

Until the mid-1950s the Hutu-Tutsi language was hardly present in the White Fathers' political commentaries (Carney 2012). This shifted after the emergence of a radical pro-Hutu movement linked to the missionaries in the late 1950s. In this matter Perraudin and the younger generations of White Fathers appeared as sorcerer's apprentices (Saur 2013). Through their unconditional support of the Hutu cause, they unintentionally prepared the ground for a series of violent episodes in which the Tutsi were the main victims, causing a massive exodus of refugees to Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire in 1959 and subsequent years.

There is no evidence that the Bahutu Manifesto of March 1957—which articulated the Hutu people's grievances in terms similar to those of the Hutu extremist propagandists in the 1990s—was drafted by one of the Belgian missionaries or by the vicar apostolic, but its proponents all had links with the Catholic missionary establishment. Two served as editors of the Catholic magazine *Kinyamateka*, one worked as Perraudin's personal secretary, and three were former seminarians (Carney 2012; Saur 2013).

There is little question that in his much-debated February 1959 Lenten Pastoral letter *Super Omnia Caritas* Perraudin offered a racialist vision of the Hutu-Tutsi division, the former collectively described as victims and the latter as oppressors in the context of a century-old 'feudal' system (Carney 2012). For Perraudin Rwanda's social divisions were broken down along a clear Hutu-Tutsi axis, due to the fact, as he wrote, that 'in … Rwanda social differences and inequalities are for a large part linked to racial differences' (Carney 2012, 97). His aim was to apply the social doctrine of the Church, centred on

the idea of social justice, to a rapidly changing political situation and, in this way, preserve the influence of the Catholic Church in the new Rwanda. Like the Belgian colonial government, he was obsessed with the risk of a Tutsi-led communist takeover after independence (Saur 2013).

2 The Kaleidoscope of the Missionaries of Africa

Just like the Catholic Church of Rwanda to which they contributed so much, the White Fathers represented, to use Saur's phrase, a 'kaleidoscope' (2013, 1348). In the late 1950s many of them, the younger ones in particular, favoured the Hutu radical movement Parmehutu, and supported Grégoire Kayibanda when he became the first president of the Rwandan Republic in 1962. However, some resisted the pressure to identify with the Hutu cause and remained ideologically independent. When the Tutsi became victims of pogroms in 1959, 1963–64, and 1973 they did not hesitate to assist them. They refused to support the discriminatory policies of the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes (Carney 2012; Kabanda 2007).

Up to this day, the names of Stanislas de Jamblinne, Robert Defalque, Henri Bazot, and Clément Forestier evoke gratitude in the community of genocide survivors and among RPF sympathisers. Others are less known, for example Hans Gyr, a Swiss White Father who worked in Rwanda until the genocide. In November 1994 he presented in the *Petit Écho des Missionnaires d'Afrique*, an internal publication of the Missionaries of Africa, an unflattering description of the Church he found on his arrival in Rwanda in 1957. 'The church was powerful', he wrote, 'almost a state in the state. It was rich of buildings, of social organisations…. Compared to that of the people, our lifestyle was too rich even though we lived modestly. I did not feel comfortable but I accepted it because I did not want to singularise myself…. After the events of '63 [during which between 10,000 and 15,000 Tutsi were massacred] I was so disgusted by the gossips and the lies that, after my leave (1966), I did not want to return to Rwanda'[1] (*Petit Écho* 859, 1995/3, 139–140).

3 Solidarity with the Oppressed

The White Fathers who defended the Tutsi when they suffered violence and discrimination were rather isolated. In the postindependence period most White Fathers, especially the Belgians of Flemish origin, espoused the cause of the Hutu 'majority' and expressed unreserved loyalty to the Rwandan

government. 'When I came to Rwanda, I was told that we were on the side of the Hutu', a Flemish White Father who arrived in 1963, candidly admitted in an interview. To various degrees, they embraced the stereotype of the arrogant and devious Tutsi and of the Hutu always at risk of returning to their 'slave' status. This did not prevent them from developing friendships with Tutsi on a personal basis with the understanding that these particular men and women were the exception to the rule.

Increasingly rejected in academic circles, the Hamitic theory remained popular among some missionaries. As late as 2008 one of them declared in an interview that the Tutsi 'are not a people [*volk*] like the other blacks. They come from Ethiopia.... They always give a good impression. They can manipulate the whites.... I arrived in Rwanda in 1958, in the bush, ten months before the revolution started. And it was a great time, but not for me'. When the Tutsi came to Rwanda with their cattle 'five centuries ago', he continued, they said to the Hutu that if they wanted milk and cattle they had to work for them. 'That is how they colonised them'. During the social revolution, he added, the Tutsi were thrown out of Rwanda but they will come back, not with cattle this time, but with '*belles filles*' (beautiful girls) (Brille 2008, 90).

4 The Missionaries of Africa and the RPF Invasion of Rwanda

The 1990–1994 period is crucial to understanding the Missionaries of Africa's attitude during and after the genocide. The political analyses they developed in those years shaped their conception of the situation created by the RPF victory in July 1994.

On 1 October 1990, four hundred RPF combatants trained in Uganda invaded Rwanda from the north to allow the return of the hundreds of Tutsi refugees scattered in the neighbouring countries. The Rwandan army soon repelled the invaders with the assistance of French military advisers as well as Belgian and Zairian troops. Four years of guerrilla warfare followed, with massive displacements of population in the north, war casualties among civilians, and, in retaliation, massacres of Tutsi by soldiers and armed groups close to the Habyarimana government.

At the time, the Missionaries of Africa from Rwanda numbered about 90, down from nearly two hundred thirty years before (AMA, Assemblée précapitulaire, 22–26 October 1991, Rapport du régional). As they aged they gradually handed over their parishes to the Rwandan clergy, except in the northern dioceses of Ruhengeri and Byumba that experienced a shortage of priests.

The initial reaction of the missionaries, especially those who ran parishes in the north, was anger at the RPF, which they said had brought unnecessary hardship to a population living in peace. On 22 October 1990 the Belgian French-speaking daily *Le Soir* published a document on the situation in Rwanda signed by 101 expatriates, including eleven White Fathers, those who were in Kigali at the time, six priests of other congregations, seven religious brothers and six sisters ('Rwanda: 101 expatriés témoignent', *Le Soir* 22 October; Vleugels 2005). The signatories gave unqualified support to the Habyarimana government, which they claimed was unfairly accused in the European media of refusing to welcome the Tutsi refugees, doing too little to fight corruption, and mishandling the ethnic question. 'In the crisis', they argued, 'a clarification was made between those who support the country and those who want to demolish from outside with a few infiltrated accomplices and a few Western allies'. They noted that, so far, no pogrom against the Tutsi had been occurred. This statement contradicted a fax sent by Jef Vleugels, the regional superior, to the Belgian provincial on 19 October 1990, according to which groups of Hutu had burned houses, killed at least ten people, and injured many others in Kibilira in the Gisenyi prefecture (Vleugels 2005). The initiative of sending a collective letter to *Le Soir* did not emanate, as has been reported, from the missionaries (Vleugels 2005) but the following month they continued to campaign in favour of the Rwandan government.

It was during this period that the regional superior Jef Vleugels began to send faxes to the Generalate in Rome and to the Belgian and French provincials describing the social, political, and military situation in the country. The first one was dated 16 October 1990. Apart from blaming the RPF 'assailants' for reawakening ethnic divisions (Vleugels 2005, 43), the first faxes maintained a factual tone on the whole. Their main objective was to reassure the authorities of the congregation about the safety of the missionaries. In December 1990 Vleugels shared information about the Tutsi priests thrown into prison after the RPF attack and echoed an article published in *La Nouvelle Relève* that deplored the Hutu extremist newspaper *Kangura*'s decision to publish his '*Appel à la conscience hutu*' (Call to Hutu consciousness) (Vleugels 2005).

5 Human Rights and Peace Mediation

We should not conclude from this that the leadership of the Missionaries of Africa in Rwanda did not take a stand on the conflict. Some of them alerted public opinion about the murders of Tutsi in the period preceding the genocide. Their main concerns, however, especially for those who worked in

the north, were the Hutu populations living in camps and the alleged crimes of the RPF against them.

In September 1991 a group of concerned people including three clerics, André Sibomana, a diocesan priest, Guy Theunis, a White Father, and Tharcisse Gatwa, a Presbyterian, established a human rights organisation called Association Rwandaise pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques (ADL) (Longman 2011). It published two voluminous reports in December 1992 and December 1993 respectively that contained the findings of ADL fieldworkers and other human rights organisations on the state of human rights in Rwanda. Theunis was in charge of the organisation's publication. Judging from his remarks on 28 April 1998 to the French Parliamentary Commission on Rwanda, he was also the main compiler of the two reports (http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dossiers/rwanda/audition01.asp#THEUNIS).

The first report, which covered the period from September 1991 to September 1992, gave a detailed account of the massacres and other forms of discrimination suffered by the Tutsi throughout Rwanda, often with the complicity of state officials. At first ADL had little information on the crimes allegedly committed by the RPF in the areas it occupied in the north of the country. This is where Vleugels, probably in consultation with Theunis, stepped in. On 14 September 1991 he lamented in a letter to the communities of missionaries the 'disinformation' in the media regarding Rwanda. The RPF and its allies in Europe circulated various lists of Tutsi victims, he pointed out, some with hundreds of names, but that was only one side of the picture. 'The RPF that—it is the least one could say—has provoked this tragedy comes out unscathed, with clean hands. It is therefore urgent to balance this information and show in the media, especially abroad, an aspect that is never spoken about: the civilian victims of these attacks and these infiltrations' (ADL 1992, 67–68).

In order to fight this 'disinformation' Vleugels asked the missionaries working in the dioceses of Ruhengeri and Byumba to list the civilian victims of the RPF attacks. The December 1992 ADL report included 790 names collected in this fashion (ADL 1992). The criteria and the methodology used for the compilation of the lists were not specified. In the introductory section of the report Vleugels admitted that 'the list [did] not always differentiate the names of people killed by the RPF and the Rwandan army' (ADL 1992, 68). We could add that the authors of the survey lumped together the civilians enrolled and armed by the Rwandan army, the collateral victims of combat, and the civilians summarily executed by the RPF on the suspicion that they represented a threat. More importantly for a discussion of the Missionaries of Africa's attitude to mass violence in the 1990s, we have here an early example of what

would characterise their discourse after the genocide: the desire to 'balance' the crimes of the Hutu government and its allies, and those of the RPF.

The documentation relative to the 1990–1994 period shows two trends in the congregation. The first was to denounce *urbi et orbi* the alleged exactions of the RPF. On 10 February 1992, for example, sixteen priests of the Mutara deanery in the diocese of Byumba, including thirteen White Fathers, wrote in an open letter: 'It is no longer battles between two armies, but terrorism against peaceful populations' (Vleugels 2005, 71). One of Vleugels' faxes spoke of 'Ugandan terrorism' (Fax of 28 February 1992, in Vleugels 2005, 76). For the Missionaries of Africa and the leadership of the Catholic Church in general, the RPF was the enemy and the Rwandan government deserved loyalty.

The second trend, more perceptible when extremist discourses started to multiply in an atmosphere of chaos and violence, was to help Rwandan society find a middle way between the two extremes, namely Hutu Power and the RPF. At the regional superior's instigation, the assembly held in Kigali after the general chapter of the Missionaries of Africa in 1992 recommended that all communities be 'sensitised to active non-violence' (AMA, Rapport de l'Assemblée post-capitulaire, 16–22 November 1992, 6). The Missionaries of Africa did not formally take part in the Comité de contacts, an interdenominational mediation committee of church leaders established in January 1992 to bring the two warring parties to the same table (Ngomanzungu 2003; Gatwa 2005), but they supported its action. In June 1993 they actively contributed to the creation of a Pax Christi group aimed at promoting grassroots peace initiatives (Vleugels 2005), and took part in several '*marches de la paix*' (peace marches) in the following months.

6 The Missionaries of Africa during the Genocide

On the eve of the genocide the Missionaries of Africa in Rwanda numbered 81, not including an intern and a few students outside the country. All but two were Europeans or North Americans. Half (40) were Belgian and in most cases Flemish. The French were the second largest group (16). The others were Canadian (7), Italian (6), German (4), Dutch (3), Spanish (2), Swiss (2), Congolese (1) and Tanzanian (1) (Vleugels 2005).

Like the bulk of the United Nations' peacekeeping forces and virtually all the expatriates, the majority of the Missionaries of Africa left Rwanda soon after the shooting down of President Habyarimana's plane on 6 April 1994. The following morning reputedly moderate public figures such as Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the prime minister, and ten Belgian soldiers were assassinated

in Kigali. Almost immediately groups of Tutsi were massacred in various parts of the capital, Nyundo, Rutsiro, Cyangugu, Kibungo, and elsewhere. Under pressure from the authorities of their respective countries who feared for their security, most White Fathers rapidly left Rwanda by road via Butare and the Burundian border on or planes chartered by the French, Belgian, or Italian governments while the Kigali airport was still open. However, some stayed on. According to Belgian journalist François Janne d'Othée (1994), in late April the Missionaries of Africa still numbered 21. By June there were still about ten White Fathers in Rwanda.

Two White Fathers lost their lives at the beginning of the genocide period. On 7 April 1994 André Caloone, a French national, was accidentally killed by a drugged soldier searching for Tutsi people in Ruhuha in the Bugesera (Vleugels 2005). The body of Joachim Vallmajo, a Spaniard, was never found. There have been allegations that he was murdered, together with a few Hutu priests, by RPF soldiers near Byumba around 20 April 1994.

Judging from the eight faxes Vleugels and Theunis sent from Kigali between the seventh and tenth of April 1994 (Vleugels 1995) and the minutes of the General Council of the Missionaries of Africa in Rome (AMA, Conseil général, April-June 1994), the main preoccupation of the congregation's leadership was the security of its members. In addition to the news of the confrères, the faxes gave a factual description of the situation on the ground. Theunis, the main author of the faxes, depended on ecclesiastical sources for his information. Neither he nor his sources tried to analyse the nature of the tragedy that was unfolding before their eyes. Only one fax, sent on 8 April at noon, mentioned that the victims of the Rwandan soldiers in Nyamirambo and Masaka near Kigali were Tutsi (Vleugels 2005). In a fax sent that evening, Theunis observed that 'the massacres [had] spread throughout the country and the city of Kigali'. No indication was given of the fact that an operation of great amplitude against the Tutsi as a group, soon to be recognised as genocide, had started. The faxes' factual tone struck French historian Gérard Prunier, the author of the first academic study of the genocide in 1995. 'One has almost the impression', he wrote, 'of reading a trade union or diplomatic list, where only the welfare of the insiders is of concern. Violence is described as "happening" but the perpetrators are never identified. One has the surrealistic impression of reading about murders being committed by armies of ghosts whose faces are forever blurred' (Prunier 1995, 250–251).

One of the members of the General Council, the Spaniard Pedro Sala, happened to be visiting Kigali when the president's plane was shot down. He stayed in the capital with the regional superior until 14 April. Back in Rome, he became the main source of information on Rwanda, where he had ministered

for some time before being appointed to the General Council. He gave a report on the Rwandan situation to his fellow councillors on 17 April. The discussion essentially revolved around the repatriation of the confrères. 'As a first step', the minutes read, 'the General Council decides to contact the provincials who have confrères repatriated from Rwanda and ask them to pay attention to their psychological and human needs and explore how to help them "detoxify" from the climate of violence and hatred they witnessed in recent times' (AMA, General Council, 17 April 1994). At a subsequent meeting on 30 May 1994, Jean-Claude Ceillier, a French councillor, reported on a meeting of about forty Belgian, French, Dutch, German, and Spanish missionaries repatriated from Rwanda that had been held in Antwerp two weeks before (AMA, General Council, 30 May 1994; Vleugels 2005).

The first sign of a greater opening to the reality of the genocide on the part of the General Council appears in the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 1994: 'The General Council asks Father Sala to draw the attention of the regional [Jef Vleugels] on some of their statements which lack objectivity and that they should be careful not take sides' (AMA, General Council, 1 June 1994). From this succinct record we can infer that the General Council was concerned about the partisan stance of some Belgian White Fathers, who stood with the interim government and opposed the RPF.

7 Early Responses to the Genocide

On hearing about mass massacres in Rwanda, some White Fathers arrived at the conclusion that something had gone wrong with the evangelisation of the country. Clément Forestier, a French missionary who had signed the expatriates' open letter complaining about the disinformation in October 1990 but was also known for having objected to the discrimination against Tutsi in the Habyarimana regime (Bizimana 2012), expressed disillusionment after his return to France in April 1994. 'My biggest disappointment', he declared to a Belgian journalist, 'is to realise that this religion was superficial. We did outside painting but no in-depth work. As long as the churches were full, we were happy. Now they are full of corpses' (Janne d'Othée 1994, 107). Otto Mayer, an eyewitness of the genocide, also realised that the church had to do a self-critique. 'I do not believe the theory of the popular anger', he said in an interview to the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. 'Too many people lied: the government, the opposition and even the church.... It was in cahoots with the state' (*La Croix*, 6 July 1994, quoted in Pontzeele 2004, 202).

How many White Fathers shared these views is not known. They probably represented a minority. Both outside and inside Rwanda there has been great resistance, not least in church circles, to the recognition of the reality of the genocide. The fact that many White Fathers refused to use the term until mid-1995 is a clear indication of this attitude. It was much easier to speak of 'ethnic violence' and 'widespread massacres' than of a deliberate attempt to exterminate an entire population group. To account for the genocide many missionaries, especially those of the older generation, fell back on the familiar ethnic-based explanation. For them, the amplitude of the massacres did not change the fact that, even after thirty years of Hutu rule, the Tutsi were the oppressors and the Hutu their victims. By invading Rwanda in October 1990, the Tutsi army had caused havoc in the country. Ultimately they, and nobody else, were responsible for the genocide.

The May 1994 issue of *African News Bulletin—Bulletin d'Information Africaine* (*ANB-BIA*), a newsletter compiled by the Missionaries of Africa in Brussels, published as a 'point of view that may help to understand what is happening in Rwanda' an unsigned article dated 25 April 1994 and titled '*Le chaudron de l'Afrique centrale*' (The cauldron of Central Africa). The author made a vitriolic attack on the European media that, according to him, were 'passionate about the defence of the minorities but uninterested in the extermination of the majorities'. Massive disinformation was being spread: Tutsi priests had managed to secure influence on Radio Vatican, and 'beautiful Tutsi women have infiltrated the humanitarian organisations and made use of their charms to conquer the ground'. Amazingly, when one considers that by then dozens of Tutsi priests had been killed in the diocese of Nyundo and in other parts of Rwanda, this paranoid article seemingly enjoyed the support of the White Fathers. The editor of *ANB-BIA* supported the argument by referring, between brackets, to an earlier article that blamed an international human rights commission for attributing 95 percent of human rights abuse committed in 1993 in Rwanda to the government, and 5 percent to the RPF (*ANB-BIA* 254, 1 May 1994, 4–5).

In Switzerland André Perraudin, the archbishop emeritus of Kabgayi, gave interviews to all major Swiss French-language newspapers during the genocide period. On 18 April 1994, for example, he echoed in *Le Journal de Genève* an opinion the Belgian White Father Walter Alvoet had expressed two days before in the Flemish newspaper *De Morgen*. 'I condemn [the authors of the killings]', Perraudin said, 'but I try to understand them. They act out of anger and fear. Out of anger against the murder of their president Juvénal Habyarimana on 6 April. And out of fear of returning into slavery because, if the press says today that it is the Hutu who are massacring the Tutsi, looting and creating

havoc, we must remember that, for centuries, Tutsi believed in their natural right to command and dominate. It was the institution of serfdom, an institution of pride and domination of a race over another' (Roger de Diesbach, 'L'ancien archevêque suisse du Rwanda crie son angoisse', *Journal de Genève,* 18 April 1994, quoted in Chrétien 2012, 165).

The testimony of Jean-Damascène Bizimana, a Tutsi Missionaries of Africa seminarian who was on holiday in Switzerland during the genocide, gives a hint—limited of course—on the discourse his confrères were holding during that period in the European communities. Bizimana lost many family members during the genocide. In a text titled '*Grande est ma souffrance, infinie mon espérance*' (Huge is my suffering, infinite my hope) that the *Petit Écho* published in February 1995, he expressed his indignation at hearing consecrated people justifying the war and the massacres (*Petit Écho*, 858, 1995/2). One of them, he reported in a book a few years later, a Swiss brother by the name of Léon Seuret who had worked in Rwanda from 1950 to 1981, told him one day: 'Jean Damascène, I condemn this barbarism. It is diabolical! But I understand the Hutu's anger. You always considered yourself as superior to them. It is normal that they rebelled' (Bizimana 2001, 38). Bizimana had the same experience in Toulouse where he went later in the same year to further his studies. He could not bear 'hearing again and again priests who were denying the genocide, minimising it or, even worse, justifying it' (Bizimana 2001, 74).

8 The Emergence of the Double Genocide Theory

In May 1994, after the first acts of vengeance by RPF soldiers became known and allegations of RPF atrocities, which Human Rights Watch did not judge as credible at the time (*Human Rights Watch*, 6/4, May 1994), started to filter down from camps of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, the term 'double genocide' became part of the political vocabulary. On 16 May 1994, for example, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* ran as a headline: 'The Rwanda: double genocide' (Chrétien 2012, 95).

Along with French military commanders such as General Christian Quesnot, some Missionaries of Africa accredited the idea that, though less visible, the crimes of the RPF equalled those of the Hutu militias in number and cruelty. As we shall see, the first Missionary of Africa who used the term 'double genocide' was Philippe de Dorlodot in July 1994, but some of his confrères had started to disseminate the same idea before this date, at a time when the genocide against the Tutsi was still in full swing.

In May 1994 Jan de Bekker, a Dutch White Father who had worked in the diocese of Byumba until the genocide and returned to the Netherlands soon afterward, made a six-day trip to the prefectures of Byumba and Kibungo, then under the control of the RPF, at the request of the Dutch Caritas. In an article published in the August 1994 issue of the *Petit Écho*, he claimed to have seen an empty country. He acknowledged that the RPF had gathered the people in camps because of the presence of Hutu militias in the area, and he certainly knew that more than 300,000 people had fled to Tanzania at the end of April. However, for him this was not a satisfactory explanation. 'In reality', he wrote, 'the RPF is busy eliminating all its enemies in a manner more discrete than the militia of Hutu extremists. They enquire about the political past of the people and all those (in particular the elites) who supported the MRND are eliminated without mercy' (*Petit Écho* 854. 1994/8, 371).

De Bekker referred to the murder of three Hutu priests in Byumba, information that matches reports of crimes committed by the RPF in this area in April 1994 (Des Forges 1999; Guichaoua 2010). One wonders, though, how he could have assessed the seriousness and the scope of the RPF crimes in the entire country after a trip of only six days. We do not know how many Missionaries of Africa read his article. It is possible that it contributed to their negative attitude toward the RPF after the genocide.

9 'Rejoining the Rwandans Where They Are'

The question of the return to Rwanda of the Missionaries of Africa who had left the country in April 1994 was raised as soon as the RPF had taken possession of the country in mid-July, forcing the former Rwandan government to take refuge in Zaire and ending, despite pockets of Interahamwe resistance, the massacres of Tutsi. In early August a second Dutch White Father, Kees Maas, visited the dioceses of Byumba and Kibungo and the refugee camps in Tanzania at the request of the Dutch Caritas. A few days later Antonio Martinez, a Spanish confrère, travelled to Butare, Kabgayi, Kigali, and Nyagahanga. On 24 August Pedro Sala, a member of the General Council in Rome, and Jan Lenssen, the newly appointed regional superior of Rwanda, went on a mission to Rwanda at the request of the General Council (Vleugels 2005).

On 12 September, Sala reported to the General Council that the church would welcome a return of the Missionaries of Africa, and that the new government had 'expressed the need for missionaries to reconstruct the country'. However, 'on our side', the secretary noted, 'it won't be possible to resume all the commitments we had before'. On the same day, Sala reported, the Regional

Council of Rwanda was meeting in Brussels. They decided to reinforce their presence in Nyagahanga in the diocese of Byumba, where three White Fathers had stayed during the genocide, in Kigali, and in places like Ruhengeri and Gikongoro that were without priests. One of the criteria for sending missionaries back to Rwanda, the Council General resolved, was to 'intervene where there [was] hope of reconciliation'.

There would always be the risk, they added, 'of being accused on both sides, that is, of being pro-RPF in Rwanda and pro-Hutu in the refugee camps of Goma and Bukavu. In a tone very different from that of many White Fathers, particularly in Belgium, the General Council had a discussion on the ideological dimension of the Rwandan conflict. 'The question Tutsi-Hutu needs clarification', they pointed out, 'For some it is a false problem; for others there is a problem, it seems. There is also an ethnic problem in the [diocesan] clergy and in the religious congregation. In the current circumstances, we must realise that we cannot return and work exactly as we used to do before' (AMA, General Council, 12 September 1994).

On 30 September Jan Lenssen, the regional superior, went to Rome for a meeting with the General Council. He expressed the view that the Missionaries of Africa should 'commit themselves to the Rwandese people and the Church in Rwanda where they are, in the refugee camps and inside the country'. He reported that three White Fathers, Léopold Greindl, Jef Vleugels, the former regional superior, and Guy Theunis had been declared undesirable by the Rwandan government and should be assigned to other duties.

A passage of the minutes of this meeting shows that the General Council may have been reluctant to put on the same footing the genocide and the acts of violence attributed to the RPF, as some White Fathers were inclined to do. At an international conference on human rights and reconciliation in Rwanda on 16–17 September in The Hague, Theunis had implied an equivalence between the two 'sides'—the interim government and the RPF—involved in the 'genocide and the massacres'. 'If Rwanda wants to quit the logic of war in which it finds itself since 1990', he said, there ought to be 'a direct dialogue between the two belligerents and a trial of those responsible for the genocide and the massacres on both sides' (Rutazibwa, 216). Lenssen asked the General Council for permission to reproduce Theunis's paper in the *Petit Écho*. Interestingly, the General Council declined to publish it as it was 'because of the use of certain phrases and because it presents views on the policy of the Society by Fr Theunis who is not even a regional superior'. Instead, they amended the text, with Lenssen's consent, and published it as a 'Letter of the General Council' in the September 1994 issue of *the Petit Écho*. In the revised document the paragraph devoted to the political situation in

Rwanda read: 'Today, the arms are silent, but we must say that a certain logic of war remains: thousands of refugees are still outside the country and everything should be done to establish a real dialogue between the forces in presence' (*Petit Écho* 1994/9, 418–419).

Meanwhile, volunteers were returning to Rwanda. By September there were only sixteen White Fathers in the Great Lake region: three in Kigali, three in Nyagahanga, and the rest in the refugee camps of Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire (*Petit Écho* 1994/9, 418). The first to come back to Rwanda on a permanent basis, on 3 September, was Henri Blanchard who had left Kigali in June (Blanchard 1994). Otto Mayer and Marc François arrived on 1 October. Others were too old or too traumatised to envisage a return to Rwanda, or felt that they could not work in a country ruled by the RPF. On 31 December Lenssen reopened the provincial house in Kigali. In February 1995 he proudly announced, in an article titled 'The region is alive again' in the *Petit Écho*, that nineteen confrères were now working in Rwanda and eleven in the refugee camps (*Petit Écho* 1995/4, 173).

10 The Ideological Debate

The question of whether the new regime should be given a chance and be assisted in its enterprise of reconstruction, or should instead be vigorously opposed because of its exactions against the Hutu population never ceased to be debated within the congregation. Despite some misgivings, those who chose to return to Rwanda generally opted for the first option, with the support of the General Council in Rome. Those who remained in Europe, and especially in Belgium, and those who worked in the refugee camps until they gradually closed in 1995 and 1996 tended to take a hard line against the RPF government. The debate was internal and external. When journalists, in Catholic as well as secular media, wanted information on Rwanda, they often turned to the White Fathers, the best-known missionary congregation in Rwanda.

While deploring the acts of vengeance committed by RPF soldiers, by the Tutsi refugees who had returned to the country, and by some genocide survivors, the White Fathers who returned to Rwanda plainly recognised the reality of the genocide and expressed sympathy for the survivors. Clément Forestier, who came back in February 1995, found that the testimonies of the survivors 'were horrific and beyond imagination'. He also felt that most newcomers had come with a spirit of vengeance and that 'their arrogance was hard to bear'. 'I came here', he shared, 'at the service of a traumatised church that tries to find its way. Having ceased to be as powerful as before, it rediscovers humility in

service' (*Petit Écho* 864, 1995/8, 395–396). Along the same lines, Henri Blanchard wrote in 1997 that 'a lot of energy and a lot of courage [would] be necessary to rebuild something' and that 'all the moral forces of the country should help the people to recognise, accept, and welcome each other'. 'Let us not discredit the churches too quickly', he added, 'even though they must do a revision of life' (*Petit Écho* 881, 1997/5, 233).

The tone was different in the writings of Missionaries of Africa working in the refugee camps or who remained in Europe. Yves Vermeire, a Belgian White Father who did reconciliation work in the refugee camps of Benaco in Tanzania, is one of the few who acknowledged, admittedly in a veiled way, that some of the refugees had taken part in the genocide. Their heart, he wrote in a report of 20 December 1994, can be tortured by feelings of 'shame at the recollection of the horrible acts which they unwittingly witnessed or in which they took part' (*Petit Écho* 869, 1995/4, 175).

By contrast, most testimonies of missionaries and development workers present in the camps of Bukavu or Goma during this period downplayed or even denied the possibility that refugees might have been involved in the genocide. Typical of that point of view was the text the Belgian White Father Philippe de Dorlodot wrote on return from a visit of the refugee camps around Goma, then battling cholera, on 26 July 1994. Based in Bukavu at the time, he was one of the first to speak explicitly of 'two genocides', one perpetrated by 'certain authorities, the military and the Interahamwe' against the Tutsi, and the genocide 'of which nobody talks', committed by the RPF against the Hutu in the occupied zones. 'We know', he commented, 'that there have been massive massacres and the testimonies that were missing are starting to emerge'. In a further section of the document he labelled as 'genocide' the afflux of a million refugees in Goma panicked by the RPF who 'wanted to empty the north-west [of Rwanda] to avoid having to manage a hostile population'. He only described as a 'crime' the calls made by the interim government and the Hutu extremist radio RTML to run away from the RPF and escape to Zaire. The only solution, he concluded, was to return to the pre-1990 situation when the respective rights of the Hutu and of the Tutsi, who represented 85 percent and 15 percent of the population, were protected (de Dorlodot 1996: 88–89).

11 Serge Desouter, Archenemy of the RPF

In Europe the most resolute enemy of the RPF among the Missionaries of Africa was Serge Desouter. A loner, he had been living in the margins of the

congregation for a long time and certainly cannot be described as a representative of the White Fathers.

Desouter's deep-seated animosity toward the new government of Rwanda had several roots. The first was his development work in Rwanda in the 1970s and in various other countries afterward. He felt bitter toward the RPF, which he believed had destroyed, by its ill-considered decision to attack Rwanda, a country that was on the road to development. He would have disagreed, of course, with authors such as Peter Uvin (1998) or Jean-Paul Kimonyo (2017), who argued that the international development agencies that had heavily invested in Rwanda in the 1980s had limited results in terms of economic development, had favoured nepotism, and had failed to respond to the ethnic violence affecting the country prior to the genocide.

The second reason was his proximity to the CVP, a Flemish Christian democrat party campaigning at the same time for the rights of the Flemish nation and for those of the Catholic Church. The CVP had strong links with the Habyarimana regime. Many Flemish politicians and opinion makers saw counterparts in the Hutu people who, like them, had long suffered oppression from a dominant ethnic group (Brille 2008; Desouter 2014).

The third reason was more personal. Desouter's first posting, soon after his ordination, was to the parish of Muyanza in the diocese of Byumba from 1968 to 1974. It was there that he developed an interest in aviculture and started to study Rwandan history. In 1972 he wrote a piece titled '*Cailloux, pierres et roches sacrés. Réflexions à propos de l'autel de Muyanza*' (Sacred pebbles, stones and rocks. Reflections about Muyanza's altar) (Desouter, Curriculum Vitae submitted to the ICTR, 3 April 2006). In 1994, he was very distressed to hear from people he knew there that on 22 April the RPF army reportedly killed eight hundred people (Desouter 2014). This crime, which was never investigated, is mentioned in various anti-RPF websites. It certainly reinforced Desouter's determination to denounce as widely as possible the alleged exactions of the RPF.

When the news of the genocide reached Belgium the political parties and development agencies that had supported the Habyarimana for many years became very anxious. This prompted Rika De Backer, former CVP minister and president of the Flemish development agency Agence de Coopération Technique (ACT), to ask her friend Serge Desouter in June 1994 to write a piece on the Rwandan situation while the genocide was still ongoing. Under the title *Rwanda. Achtergronden van een tragedie* (Rwanda. Background to a tragedy), it was published in book form by ACT in July 1994, together with the Dutch translation of an article by François Nzabahimana, a former Rwandan minister in exile, about the events that led to the genocide. A revised and augmented edition of this book with some additions was published in Dutch in

December 1994 (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1994b) and, with a somewhere different structure, in French in February 1995 (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1995). These books gave the point of view of the Hutu opposition in exile on the recent developments in Rwanda. The authors argued that the responsibility for the disaster that had struck Rwanda lay entirely with the RPF. It was true that a genocide had occurred, but the RPF's crimes were even worse. The only solution was to apply a revised version of the Arusha Accords and prevent the RPF from ruling Rwanda alone.

Desouter was part of a delegation of European politicians that included Rika De Backer and the former Christian Democrat International counsellor Alain de Brouwer who tried to put in place a political solution for Rwanda along those lines at a meeting held on 23–25 October 1994 in Bukavu. Refugee representatives from Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire, and members of the four major political parties present in Rwanda before the genocide attended (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1995). This led to the creation in April 1995 of the Rassemblement pour le Retour de la Démocratie au Rwanda (RDR), headed by François Nzabahimana (Saur 1998; Chrétien and Kabanda 2016), a Hutu opposition party that petered out when the refugee camps were dismantled in late 1996.

The Bukavu meeting adopted a 'Charter for the rapid and peaceful return of the Rwandan refugees' that proposed the creation of an international tribunal for all crimes committed since October 1994 and the relaunch of the process of democratic pluralism in line with the Arusha Accords (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1995). In his memoirs Desouter recalled having 'worked hard' to draft this document (Desouter 2014, 60).

In the preface to the book that included the Charter, Rika De Backer mentioned that the organisers of the Bukavu meeting did not invite 'anybody who had been associated in any way with the massacres of April and May 1994' (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1995, 8). If this was the case, why did François Nzabahimana recommend in the same volume (Desouter and Nzabahimana 1995) that Théodore Sindikubwabo, the man who, in his capacity as interim president of Rwanda, had incited the Butare population to join the killing campaigns against the Tutsi on 19 April 1994 (Des Forges 1999), should remain in the same position in a postgenocide settlement by virtue of the 1991 Constitution? This contradiction shows that the organisers of the Bukavu meeting had a very restrictive view of the genocide. It is no wonder that the RPF ignored their proposal.

Back home Desouter continued along the same lines. In June 1995 he published in association with Filip Reyntjens, a political scientist of the University of Antwerp who shared his abhorrence of the RPF, a report titled '*Rwanda: Les violations des droits de l'homme par le RPF/APR. Plaidoyer pour une enquête*

approfondie' (Rwanda: the RPF/APR's human rights violations. Plea for a comprehensive investigation). Both had been in Rwanda after the genocide, Reyntjens for one week in mid-October 1994 (Reyntjens 1994) and Desouter in transit on the way from Bujumbura to Bukavu during the same period. They had little time to gather information on exactions allegedly committed by the RPF. For their June 1995 compilation they essentially relied on reports from Human Rights Watch and a Spanish human rights organisation as well as testimonies from Rwandans in exile.

In March 2006 Desouter was one of the exonerating witnesses at the trial of Aloys Ntabakuze, a military commander charged with genocide crimes, crimes against humanity, and war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha. Ntabakuze was declared guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Desouter did not mention the defendant's name in his 90-page 'expert report'. Instead, he testified against the RPF, which according to him was seeking power at all costs, and he endeavoured to demonstrate that the genocide had not been planned. An expanded version of the report, complemented with appendices, was published the following year under the title *Rwanda: Le procès du RPF. Mise au point historique* (Rwanda: the trial of the RPF. Historical clarification).

12 Guy Theunis's Media Activism

After the genocide the White Father most present in the French-speaking media on matters concerning Rwanda was Guy Theunis. Many erroneously believed that he was the spokesperson of his congregation. His analytical tone and his sense of nuance was reassuring. This does not mean, however, that he was neutral—far from it.

Presenting Theunis as pro-Hutu would be incorrect (Braeckman 2005). He had as many Tutsi as Hutu friends. During his first pastoral posting in Cyanika near Gikongoro in the early 1970s, he had heard from his confrère Stanislas de Jamblinne the story of the crimes committed against the Tutsi in the area in 1963 and 1964 and witnessed *de visu* violence between Hutu and Tutsi. If he became controversial in some circles after the genocide and applauded in others, it was because of his political positioning. He was resolutely and without any concession a critic of the RPF. It would be hard to find anything positive on the new government of Rwanda in his writings. Without going as far as Desouter or de Dorlodot in the denunciation of a double genocide, he always made a point of putting in balance the genocide, which he agreed was tragic, and the equally execrable crimes his numerous contacts in the Hutu community in exile attributed to the RPF. An active member of ADL in the early 1990s,

as mentioned earlier, he often presented himself after the genocide as a human rights activist, a title he knew would give him credibility.

Theunis was never formally trained as a journalist. He learned the skill on the job as editor of the Christian information and reflection journal *Dialogue* in Kigali from 1989 to 1992, as compiler of a review of the Rwandan press afterward, and as a weekly presenter on Rwandan Catholic radio. He was good at compiling reports and sending news bulletins. One of the first tasks he completed on his return to Belgium in April 1994 was to prepare for publication the issue of the journal *Dialogue* that should have come out in Kigali the same month. He remained the editor of *Dialogue* until 1995. François Nzabahimana was a member of the editorial committee in Brussels until he took the lead of the RDR. The August-September 1994 of *Dialogue* issue included a remarkable collection of firsthand accounts of the genocide. The Belgian *Dialogue*—as opposed to the 'Rwandan' *Dialogue* published in Kigali since 2004 (Mugesera 2017)—appeared until 2009. It gradually became the mouthpiece of the Hutu community in exile, with numerous articles critical of the RPF government.

The radio station Amahoro, which Theunis administered on his return to Belgium, played a similar role. It had programmes in Kinyarwanda for Rwandans around the world, including in the refugee camps in Tanzania and Zaire. According to its original charter, its mission was to 'provide Rwanda and neighbouring countries with credible information allowing the Rwandese to obtain elements of information that the current Rwandese radios never mention' (quoted in Mugesera 2013).

In 1996 Theunis's congregation assigned him to other ministries. However, journalists and conference organisers continued to call on him. In June 1997 he was interrogated by the Belgian Senate and in April 1998 by the French National Assembly on matters related to the genocide in Rwanda.

Theunis cannot be accused of denying the genocide. For example, in a talk he gave on 24 September 1995 in Brussels, he mentioned the 'planned massacre of the Tutsi'. He also observed that some people had 'not yet accepted the reality of what happened either because they deny the reality of the genocide or because personally they have been deeply traumatised' (Theunis 1995c, 1). Nor did he come out as an unconditional defender of the Catholic Church. In an essay written at the invitation of the French sociologist André Guichaoua in July 1994, Theunis did not hesitate to speak of the 'marriage' between the church and the state in Rwanda, and of the church's fear of making pronouncements on matters of justice, peace, and development because of its links to the state (Theunis 1995a). Lastly, unlike many of his Flemish confrères, he never entertained the idea that the main problem in Rwanda was the 'oppression' of the Hutu by the Tutsi.

Yet in his public statements Theunis has so often cast suspicion on the RPF leaders' integrity in matters of human rights, always 'balancing' the genocide and the alleged crimes of the RPF, to the point that his recognition of the reality of the genocide, though attested, became inaudible. Despite the fact that he and his friends provided support to genocide survivors in Rwanda and in Europe, he appeared as the spokesperson of the Hutu community in exile. It is a fact that he often expressed sympathy in public for their plight. Typical is this declaration to a journalist on 30 August 1994: 'Since 1990 there may not have been a genocide [against the Hutu], but there have been massacres which continue to this day. Every day we receive messages saying that killings have taken place in this or that region.... We should perhaps speak, as in Burundi, of a selective genocide' (Theunis 1995b). Elsewhere he denounced in a language unintentionally reminiscent of the Hamitic theory 'the glaring injustice' of a 'country conquered by a people of strangers while the original inhabitants live in poverty either as refugees in a foreign land or as displaced people inside their country' (Theunis 1994: 9).

Theunis's ambivalence appeared in a debate organised by the Dutch-speaking missionary magazine *Wereldwijd* in June 1997. 'The Hutu are generally peaceful', he declared on that occasion. 'They wanted a non-violent evolution. Violence always comes from the same side. From one side!' To the journalist who asked whom he meant, he responded, in reference to the attack of a Tutsi *sous-chef* against Dominique Mbonyumutwa in November 1959 and to the October 1990 RPF invasion: 'On the Tutsi side. It is always the Tutsi who provoke in one way or another and spoil the whole thing'. The White Father's co-debater, Colette Braeckman, then intervened in reference to the genocide. Did Theunis mean that the Tutsi always initiated violence? Realising that he was on slippery ground, the missionary changed his tune: 'This is a caricature.... I simply protest against the fact of opposing two categories of people. On both sides, there have always been pacifists in Rwanda. They constitute the majority' (Goris and Van Laere 1997, 15).

13 Uneasy Coexistence

Before we conclude, let us return to the debate between the Rwandan government and the Missionaries of Africa in postgenocide Rwanda. As already mentioned, the White Fathers, of whom there were about forty at the end of the 1990s-about half of what they numbered in April 1994—deliberately kept a low profile during this period. The new government did not launch a persecution against the Catholic Church, as the anti-RPF propaganda inside and outside the country claimed it did. It is more correct to say that on the side

of the government there has been irritation and disappointment at the lack of cooperation from certain sectors of the Catholic Church and at the recurrent tendency to put the genocide and the crimes attributed to the RPF on the same level. The relations between church and state have been tense at certain moments, but they never broke off. One should remember that many senior government officials were Catholics.

Only one White Father, a Fleming by the name of Stefaan Minnaert, publicly departed from the common attitude of opposition to the RPF. After working as a teacher in Kigali after the genocide, he served as general archivist in Rome before leaving the congregation and joining the diocese of Gent in Belgium. In recent years he has regularly collaborated with the postgenocide Kigali-based edition of the journal *Dialogue,* which supports the actions of the current Rwandan government.

In '*Missionnaires de l'évangile ou apôtres de la haine*', the June 1998 article cited in the beginning of this paper, Rutazibwa mainly criticised the attitude of the Rwandan churches before the genocide and the attacks made against the new government from Europe after the genocide. He had little to say about the White Fathers in Rwanda during that period. At most he blamed two of them—Jan Lenssen, the regional superior, and Antonio Martinez, the apostolic administrator of the diocese of Ruhengeri—for being part of an anti-government 'ideological circle' (Rutazibwa 2017, 144).

The response of the religious superiors to Rutazibwa's article was remarkably moderate. At an extraordinary meeting of the ASUMA Committee to which Jean-Damascène Ndayambaje, the superior of the Josephite brothers of Rwanda, a largely Tutsi congregation that had lost many of its members during the genocide, had been invited, they discussed all the issues raised by Rutazibwa. In a statement subsequently published in *La Nouvelle Relève*, they recognised that the publication of their earlier document on 7 April 1998, the commemoration day of the genocide, had been inappropriate. They also admitted that before 1994 the church had 'not reacted to the official racist and ethnist ideology' and that it sometimes had to 'confess the sins of its children'. However, they invited their critics to consider the past events in their context and to avoid all globalisation ('Réunion du Comité de l'ASUMA 11.7.98', *La Nouvelle Relève*, 364, 30 July 1998, 26).

14 Theunis's Detention

After 1998 the relations between the Catholic Church and the Rwandan government continued to improve. On two occasions, in 2000 and in 2004, the Catholic bishops publicly acknowledged that some of their members had

taken part in the genocide (Denis 2021). The sudden arrest of Guy Theunis on 6 September 2005 at Kigali Airport when he was in transit between Goma and Brussels, his detention in a state prison, and his appearance before a *gacaca* court in Kigali (Theunis 2005) revealed that, in some quarters, there were still ill feelings against the Missionaries of Africa. Theunis was accused of inciting genocide, revisionism, and genocide denialism. After eleven weeks in jail his case was transferred to a Belgian court, which exonerated him.

Space is too short here for an analysis of the charges against Theunis, his supporters' responses at the time, his own response in a book published in 2012 (Theunis 2012), and the replies from Rwandans who remained convinced of his guilt (Bizimana 2012; Mugesera 2013). It is clear that the case against him was weak. The ADL reports that he compiled in 1992 showed his willingness to publicise the crimes committed by the Habyarimana regime and its allies against the Tutsi. At the same time, his blunt denial that there had been a genocide ideology (Theunis 2012) was troubling. How could the planned and systematic extermination of the Tutsi population have taken place without an ideology? Where did the RTLM's lethal propaganda come from?

15 Conclusion

How did the Missionaries of Africa respond to the genocide against the Tutsi? The first observation is that they did not speak with one voice. As in the late 1950s and the early 1960s when the first pogroms against the Tutsi occurred, some Missionaries showed compassion and tried to save lives. The majority of the eighty or so White Fathers who ministered in Rwanda before the genocide left the country in April. Among those who later returned on a voluntary basis, a certain number acknowledged the pain of the survivors, recognised that the church had committed errors in the past, and endeavoured to restart the mission on a new basis. We have seen that the General Council of the Missionaries of Africa in Rome tended to support this type of response to the genocide. On the whole, the General Council reacted to the Rwandan situation in a nonpartisan manner.

Judging from the Missionaries of Africa's declarations to the press, their publications, and various conversations, we can say that a significant number of them, especially among those who did not return to Rwanda, adopted a defensive attitude regarding the genocide and promoted, explicitly or not, the double genocide theory. They did so in two different ways. The older missionaries, those who arrived in Rwanda in the 1950s and 1970s, gave credence in the statements they made after the genocide to the stereotype of the cunning and deceitful Tutsi who oppress the Hutu majority. No consideration was

given to the fact that in 1994 many Tutsi lived in rural areas and were just as poor as their Hutu neighbours. As in colonial times, some White Fathers continued to adhere to the discredited Hamitic theory. The younger missionaries abstained from using an overtly ethnicist language, but their opposition to the RPF was no less resolute. The best way of describing the attitude of the majority of White Fathers regarding the Rwandan question is that they have long been, and remain, partisan. In September 1991 the regional superior Jef Vleugels invited his confrères to fight the 'disinformation' benefiting the RPF by documenting their crimes in the north of Rwanda, aiming to 'balance' the information. Similar campaigns continued, from Belgium especially, after the genocide, but this time in response to the genocide.

In a paper presented in July 1994 Guy Theunis rightly denounced the alliance between church and state in colonial and postindependence Rwanda (Theunis 1995). By systematically adopting the point of view of the opposition to the current Rwandan government, he and many of his confrères maintained, in a reverse way, the political positions of the past.

The Rwandan genocide is a sore point in the Missionaries of Africa's history. A generation later it still evokes sadness and, for some, bitterness. We can draw some lessons from the complex and multifaceted story of their attitude before, during and after the genocide against the Tutsi. The first is the danger of too close a proximity with the government of the day, nourished by the desire to facilitate the development of the missionary enterprise. It is true that as far as Rwanda is concerned, the Missionaries of Africa are no longer involved in political matters. However, their long association with the governments of the First and the Second Republics continues to influence their views, particularly in Europe. A second lesson is that for missionaries as for many other people of good will, hell is paved with good intentions. It was for the sake of social justice that in his now infamous 1959 Lenten pastoral letter Bishop Perraudin unwittingly strengthened ethnic stereotypes, exacerbating rather than calming the tensions that would lead to the genocide against the Tutsi thirty-five years later. Many of the missionaries who subscribed to the deadly Hamitic theory were fervent adepts of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The uncritical association of the Missionaries of Africa as a body—with the exception of some independent individuals—with the Hutu cause, legitimate as it seemed at the time, was an error.

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Note

1 All translations from the French are mine.