

Ch. 1. Building the Christian Kingdom: Catholic Politics in Rwanda, 1900-1950

While this dissertation primarily focuses on the 1950-1962 period, the ethnic and political tensions of the late colonial era did not arise in a historical vacuum. This first chapter therefore outlines the historical contexts that set the stage for the rapid political and ecclesial changes of the 1950s. I begin with the missiological vision of Charles Lavigerie, the founder of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) whose writings set the theological contours for missionary engagement of pastoral and political questions in early 20th century Rwanda. Recognizing the Buganda missions' importance for shaping the outlooks of the first generation of Rwandan missionaries, I also offer a brief overview of the early history of Catholic mission in neighboring Uganda.

After considering these late 19th century contexts, I delve into a more detailed study of Rwandan Catholic history between 1900 and 1950. Here I highlight how Catholic leaders' concerns for the church's own institutional and evangelical interests shaped their engagement with political and ethnic questions, focusing in particular on the visions of Rwanda's first three vicars apostolic – Jean-Joseph Hirth, Léon Classe, and Laurent Déprimoz. I argue that two lasting and contrasting themes emerged in the earliest years of Catholic mission – proclaiming the kingdom of God to the poor and marginalized while striving to build the kingdom of God by converting Rwanda's political elites. After achieving success among marginalized Hutu and Tutsi populations during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church adopted a more top-down approach after the First World War. Under the leadership of Classe, the Catholic Church built its pastoral capacity and formed