

Morier-Genoud, Eric. *Catholicism and the Making of Politics in Central Mozambique, 1940-1986*. The University of Rochester Press, 2019, 279 pp. ISBN: 9781580469418

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Catholicism and the Making of Politics in Central Mozambique, 1940-1986 could easily be considered part of the major effort made by recent authors to go beyond the simplistic and persistent views normally expressed about the role played by Catholicism and the Catholic Church in African contexts in colonial and postcolonial times and their relationship with the political powers. It is the culmination of long and detailed research carried out by Eric Morier-Genoud in recent years. Largely based on his PhD thesis, *Catholicism and the Making of Politics* does what most doctoral students hope to do with their work: to go further and deeper. Taking this as its starting point, Morier-Genoud's study on the Church and the state in twentieth-century Mozambique now encompasses the convoluted period of transition from colonialism to independence and the first years of the civil war that continued to devastate the country until 1992. This wide-ranging approach has the noteworthy advantage of circumventing politically-based perspectives that usually divide such analyses into the pre- and post-independence periods. Thus, by including the transitional period, Morier-Genoud reveals a clear understanding of the ruptures and continuities in the history of the Catholic Church in Mozambique and its role in the country's broader historical processes.

One of the most significant contributions of Eric Morier-Genoud's book is to show that the Catholic Church, its members, institutions, and dynamics are far from performing the role of a monolithic historical agent. By looking closely at the Catholic Church's presence in Mozambique, the author traces the multilayered historical processes behind the country's transformation from a former colony under European (Portuguese) imperial rule into an independent nation, revealing the crucial role that the Church played in these changes. His analysis focuses on central Mozambique, largely corresponding to the Diocese of Beira, and later to the Diocese of Tete, after its creation in 1962. The numerous religious congregations present in Central Mozambique are the main (but far from the only) actors examined by Morier-Genoud. Their centrality, multiplicity, and internal diversity helps us to understand

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and explain the complex, competing, and even conflicting attitudes of the Catholic Church towards Mozambique's social and political transformation after the 1940s. The chronology spans the period from the establishment of the Missionary Agreement, signed by Portugal and the Holy See in 1940 in order to surmount decades-old conflicts over missionary and ecclesiastical affairs, to the mid-1980s and the efforts made by the Catholic Church to end the civil war that had torn the country apart, paving the way for a peace settlement.

Catholicism and the Making of Politics is divided into six chapters. The first—"The Making of the Diocese of Beira"—examines the initial years of the newly-created diocese, the establishment of ecclesiastical diocesan structures and strategies, and the establishment of Church and state interactions in this new scenario. Dom Sebastião Soares de Resende, the first bishop of Beira, takes a leading role, not only because of his intrinsic centrality to religious life and politics, but because of his character and his impact on Mozambique's political and social context. In the second chapter—"Diversity and Dynamics of the Imperial Church"—the focus shifts to the different religious congregations working in central Mozambique. Morier-Genoud traces their main features, highlighting both the similarities and the divergences of these congregations in relation to a vast range of social and political aspects. It is an extensive and comprehensive overview of both their presence and their work, covering their schools, members, and the main activities and stances that they adopted. Furthermore, the chapter explores the strained relations between some congregations and the bishop and amongst themselves, examining the types of conflicts and arguments that placed different members of the same entity in opposition to one another. Some of these divergences are further explored in Chapter 3—"The Formation of an African Church"—where certain contentious issues, such as the formation of an African clergy, the conversion of "heathens," or the appropriation or re-appropriation of the Church's message, are brought to light.

The issue of how to convert—and how to measure exactly how profound and genuine the conversion of new Catholics might be—has often provided a multitude of different answers. Here, the author examines these and other issues, comparing statistics (after making a series of well-grounded and reasonable considerations about the problems raised by the use of colonial statistics) whilst also seeking more personal responses than any statistical tabulation might give. Both Chapter 4—"Gathering Storm: Vatican II meets African Nationalism"—and Chapter 5—"Decolonization? War, Implosion, and the Vatican"—are centered upon the political issues linked to African nationalism, the war, and the debatable process of decolonization. The first of these two chapters covers the period

from 1958 to 1969 and the second one the period from 1969 to 1974, in other words, the final moments of Portuguese colonialism and the final struggle of a Church trapped in its “imperial” past and its uncertain “African” future. The Vatican plays its role as a major actor here, despite all the contingencies that every historian faces due to the restricted access to archival sources but which Morier-Genoud has partly succeeded in overcoming. Moreover, the author scrutinizes the impacts of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) within the Mozambique Church as well as the reactions and further attitudes of both the bishops of Beira and the religious congregations during this pivotal moment in the history of Catholicism. Finally, Chapter 6—“Independence: Revolution and Counterrevolution”—tackles other controversial, perhaps less well-known, moments in the history of the Catholic Church in Mozambique: independence, the implantation of FRELIMO as a party-state, and the civil war. Morier-Genoud thoroughly analyzes how different sectors of the Catholic Church viewed the new political environment and how, once again, it had to position itself in relation to changing prejudices, ideological divergences, and distinct public opinions. While, in the previous chapters, the author showed how the Catholic Church reacted to the debates and disagreements over colonialism and independence, this chapter examines the uncertainties regarding the future outcomes of the civil war, FRELIMO’s religious policies, and the impacts of communism on the Mozambican social and political climate.

The book meticulously points out the internal divisions among the Catholic congregations, challenging the still recurrent interpretation of a rigid, almost immovable institution whose policies, methods, and courses of action emanated from above directly to the branches below. This narrow-minded perspective often neglects or minimizes the multidirectional dynamics of any religious entity, especially one with such a diverse and complex history as the Catholic Church: Morier-Genoud does the opposite. By encompassing most of the Catholic players present and active in Mozambique during the period under study, he shows, firstly, that the assertion of a strong and unquestionable alliance between the Catholic Church and the Portuguese colonial state has to be discarded by historiography and any rigorous scientific analysis; secondly, that, within the Church, issues such as colonialism, imperialism, nationalism (whether African or Portuguese), independence, war, revolution, and politics in general created divisions among the clergy. These clashes between secular and religious clergies, between (and within) congregations and between hierarchies and lower ecclesiastical ranks, ran through the entire Church, from the higher decision-making echelons in the Vatican to the most far-flung mission in Mozambique’s hinterland.

If Morier-Genoud largely, and fortunately, contributes towards overcoming the still persisting assertions regarding the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Portuguese colonial administration, he also considers the challenges posed by the new post-colonial momentum. The changes in the attitudes of FRELIMO towards the Church in the first years after independence reveal the fine lines between ideology and *realpolitik* in the state and the Church.

Morier-Genoud highlights a crucial aspect by stressing the importance of looking at the Church and its politics “through the prism of religious congregations, thus from a horizontal perspective” (170). The study of congregations is particularly important in the African (Catholic) religious context, since these played a central role in the evangelizing/conversion processes. Whereas other works focus their analyses on a specific congregation, within one or two territories, by centering its research on a diocese with such a diversity of religious congregations, Morier-Genoud’s book gives an appealing insight into the pluralistic views and initiatives within African Catholicism.

As was the case with other dioceses within the Portuguese empire, and due to Portugal’s history and the consequences of the 1940 Missionary Agreement, Beira’s ecclesiastical structure was not confined to one single congregation, which was frequently the scenario in a missionary context. Led by a secular priest, under the scope of a *Padroado* (patronage)-based structure, the diocese hosted several congregations from the late nineteenth century onwards, besides the secular clergy and in addition to the emergence of the laity in the second half of the twentieth century. Even within the Portuguese context, Beira, as Morier-Genoud underlines, represents a relevant case study, not only in the history of Catholicism in Mozambique and Africa, but also in Portuguese colonial history, precisely because of this diversity. During the period under study, the diocese of Beira had, at its helm, two important figures in both Mozambican and Portuguese Catholic history: Dom Sebastião Soares de Resende and Dom Manuel Vieira Pinto. Other leading figures in the history of Catholicism in Mozambique passed through its schools, missions, and seminaries (namely Zobué and Amatongas), such as Mateus Gwenjere (“the most politicized African priest in Mozambique” [153] and a former member of FRELIMO) and Alexandre dos Santos (the first black Mozambican to be ordained, in 1953, and to run a seminary in the country, later the Archbishop of Maputo and a Cardinal). The diocese also witnessed a number of controversial events, such as the exit of the White Fathers (1971). The latter decided to leave the country amid great internal mistrust over the political path followed by the Church in Mozambique. Some of the most dramatic episodes of the war in Mozambique occurred in

the neighboring diocese of Tete and these are also included in this work: the massacres of Mukumbura and Wiriyamu, whose denunciation led to the Macuti affair, the arrest of two Portuguese priests, and, most significantly, to an intense international outcry against Portuguese colonialism. All of these events are mentioned by the author, who thoroughly contextualizes the complex political and social scenarios of Mozambique in the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst the armed conflict grew worse over the years, Morier-Genoud clearly explains its impacts on day-to-day Catholic life, the relationship between the Church and the state, and, above all, its repercussions inside the Church, exacerbating the clashes between the different viewpoints expressed about war, colonialism, and independence.

Most members of the Portuguese clergy, as Morier-Genoud argues, were in favor of colonialism—reproducing centuries-old insights about the Portuguese “historical mission” in the evangelization of “heathens,” their responsibilities in terms of missionary Catholicism, and, primarily, their accomplishments in that conversion process over the course of history. Conversely, the secular clergy surrounding Soares de Resende and the young priests may have constituted an exception to this. Most importantly, the author mentions that the majority of Portuguese priests and brothers adopted a passive attitude towards political issues, while others opted for a more proactive defense of the colonial regime and of the Portuguese evangelization efforts. Among the congregations, the Franciscans and the Jesuits, with strong ties to Portugal and with a large number of Portuguese nationals operating as their missionizing members in Mozambique, were more inclined to support the imperial solution. Other congregations (White Fathers, Picpus Fathers, Burgos Fathers, and others), less imbued in those rhetorical assumptions about the merits and obligations of Portuguese conversion, were less inclined to maintain a vigorous defense of colonialism. However, most of these missionaries were foreigners—thus permitting a simple association between foreigners and the support for independence, which nonetheless has to be properly examined—whilst there were other foreign missionaries aligned with the colonial regime. The passive attitude of some Portuguese clerics towards the political offensive against religious personnel is illustrated by the cases of Dom Manuel Ferreira Cabral (the successor of Soares de Resende in Beira) and Dom Félix Niza Ribeiro (Bishop of Tete), who stood by unresponsively while Catholic missionaries and priests were arrested or expelled by political authorities. On the other hand, we have the role played by Dom Manuel Vieira Pinto, publicly favoring Mozambican independence, who was expelled from the country just before the Carnation Revolution that overthrew the *Estado Novo* regime, in April 1974.

Another aspect of the book is the light that it sheds on the simplistic approach usually adopted by historiographers when writing about the Vatican's attitudes towards Portuguese imperial politics close to the end of the period of colonialism. Even if the lack of pontifical sources available (due to the Holy See's current archival policies) may raise considerable obstacles to the historian's efforts to further analyze the role played by the Vatican in relation to contemporary political issues, such as decolonization, Morier-Genoud seeks to circumvent these obstacles by using different materials, such as personal interviews and sources originating from other participants who had close relations with the Vatican and its personnel (his research includes the consultation of important archives belonging to the congregations). Pontifical sources could be useful in illustrating the internal ambiguities that existed in relation to this question inside the Holy See. As Morier-Genoud and other authors have shown with their compelling works, the Catholic Church all over the world (in this case in Mozambique) was profoundly divided over these subjects: decolonization and/or independence. One can safely conclude that these same concerns, doubts, and even fears also existed inside the Roman Curia.

Although Morier-Genoud examines some of the impacts caused by Vatican II in the context of Mozambican Catholicism, his book is less clear about the impacts, if there were any and to what extent, of the changes that had been made to the Vatican's missionary policies in the preceding decades. Vatican II, and its decree *Ad Gentes*, should be understood as the culmination of a longer process that can be traced back to the 1919 *Maximum Illud* and the 1926 *Rerum Ecclesiae* (briefly mentioned in the book but excluded from the author's proposed chronology) and which also had other important moments with Pius XII's missionary encyclicals: *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957). The latter document specifically addressed the question of Africa and its evangelization and was particularly relevant for local Catholicism. Furthermore, the resonance of the first visit of a Pope to Africa is missed. When Paul VI visited Uganda, in July-August 1969, he said that Africans must have an African Christianity. What consequences did this have in Mozambique?

In the epilogue, Morier-Genoud asks, "can we conclude that the Church remained colonial or became neocolonial after independence?" and he answers, "It would seem more appropriate to say that the Catholic Church underwent its own revolution with independence and that it significantly changed its historical trajectory toward a Mozambique-centered and neo-Thomist identity" (168). This is one of the challenges faced by most former "colonial" churches—those established during colonialism and for decades associated with the European colonizer. It is not merely a question of hierarchy or of ecclesiastical

membership—by the mid-twentieth century the Holy See was already committed to a strategy to “indigenize” the local clergy with the introduction of local members while propagating a transnational discourse of the Church’s universalism; it is more a matter of religious experience and practices and whether these are considered “local” or “foreign.” Was that strategy sufficient to “indigenize” the Church and to develop an institution that local populations considered to be truly theirs? The Catholic Church in Mozambique, and elsewhere, could remain “colonial” if we look at it as an imposition from outside: a white and/or European entity that failed to appear to its believers as belonging to them as their own. The Catholic Church often struggles between its universalistic message and the need to create and improve autonomous churches throughout the world, which then tend to develop a nationalistic framework and discourse. Some Catholics around the world, whilst remaining faithful to Catholic principles and to the religious authority of the Pope in Rome, may still acknowledge that their religion is localized and therefore foreign. To what extent might we argue in this vein? This would open a new debate and would, obviously, call for fresh research to be carried out. Given its quality, this book surely encourages us to consider a series of entirely new questions.