The Role of the Catholic Church in the Rwandan Genocide and Post-genocide Reconciliation | Sari Cureton | SFS ‘21

Key Questions:
What was the role of the Catholic Church in the Rwandan genocide?
How has its role impacted post-genocide reconciliation efforts?

Thesis
The Catholic Church is complicit in the Rwandan genocide not only through the participation of its clergy but through the reinforcement of ethnic divisions within Rwandan society in the years preceding. However, this has not prevented the Church from playing an active role in the reconciliation process.

Methodology:
- Examination of analytical works highlighting reconciliation efforts
- Analysis of secondary sources describing the role of the Catholic Church in Rwandan society prior to the genocide
- Review of statements released by the Catholic Church pertaining to the genocide

Background
Prior to the genocide the Catholic Church played an instrumental role in Rwandan politics and society, which gave it the power to exacerbate tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Members of the clergy also participated in the planning and execution of the genocide. In the years after, the Church facilitated reconciliation through national and grassroots efforts. In recent years, the Catholic Church also issued an apology for its involvement.

Conclusion
The Catholic Church has been instrumental in the process of reconciliation. Its efforts have complimented those of the government and has countered the negative aspects of the punitive governmental approach to reconciliation. Recently, the decision of the Church to take responsibility for its involvement has also benefitted the process of healing. However, to continue this work the Catholic Church must also address its role in spreading racist ideology in the years prior to the genocide and throughout the colonial period.

Implications
1. Religious institutions can play a vital role in peacebuilding that is unique from but also works in concert with governmental efforts.
2. Religious actors can engender conflict within their own religious community by exacerbating existing tensions.