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THE SUPREME BEING AMONG THE BANYARWANAD OF RUANDA

By RT. REV. LÉON CLASSE, WHITE FATHERS
Vicar Apostolic of Ruanda

IMANA n'Imana yahanze byose! "God is God and it is He who has made all things!" Thus say our Banyarwanda, a native tribe of Ruanda in central Africa.

Do not look for idols in this country as our people are out and out monotheistic and for them "nothing can be like God," let alone surpass Him. They laugh wholeheartedly when they are shown pictures of idols and when mention is made of fetichistic tribes. "Those people are of wood," they say, and with supreme contempt they blow their spittle afar, than which there is no stronger mark of disdain. For to them "Imana," God, "is stronger, more powerful than all warriors," as they say, or further, "no one is like God," "God has long arms," that is to say, is mighty. Hence the proverb: "What God has planted will not be uprooted, in spite of the most violent storms."

It is He who made man, and their good common-sense psychology has dictated the proverbial saying: "He who fashioned the hearts of men, did not make them all according to the same last." This God is good to all: "Your best friend might dig a hole to make you fall into it but God will always reserve for you a little hole by which to escape." This idea of God's goodness and mercy is so real that of a truly good man it will be said: *N'Imana mu Rwanda*, "he is like God in Ruanda."

Therefore our pagans—we cannot but call them thus—love to name their children after some quality of God and in our mountains many may be found who are called: "It is God who speaks," "It is He who makes me live," "It is God that saves," "It is He who gives," "He who is from the beginning."

The name of God is always on our Banyarwandas' tongue. "There is nothing so good as God." In any emotion, whether of joy or sadness, they exclaim: *Mana y'Irwanda!* "God of Ruanda." Their wishes for themselves or for others are couched in the following expressions: "May God be favorable to me," "May God keep you," "May God be with you." If a chief is to be placated and won over, for the proverb says: "He who is well buttered (that is, who has many cattle) will not be wanting in flatterers," he will graciously be addressed: "You who are always on good terms with God" or else "God is always on your side."

But, let us not delude ourselves, all this is very nice in "theory," but the theory is not carried out in practice. We should not complain, however; it is already quite a blessing to find such sentiments among our Banyarwanda and the missionary finds them useful in his catechetical instructions and in winning over to the true God souls that are so impregnated with lofty ideas. And they can understand. In practice, since God is essentially good, since nothing is to be feared from him is not, they argue, this worship of beautiful words suffi-

cient? They have another proverb: "God gives us, it is not a trade you make with Him." So they ask favors of Him, but nothing more. *Man iraduha*: "God give us!" Worship is confined to the sole prayer of petition. To recognize that He is good, exalted above all beings, invincible, omniscient, Providence, is not this sufficient worship? And if our good blacks offer sacrifices, it will invariably be to the spirits of their ancestors that might harm them, as they think, and that must therefore be appeased. No one will think of offering sacrifice to God: He is good and nothing therefore is to be feared from Him.

Our Banyarwanda believe in a life after death and a remuneration, reward or punishment. The punishment consists of fire, the fire of our mighty, active volcanos. In our volcanic region, earthquakes are not at all rare; when a more violent one than usual is heard, the natives will say: "The wicked are trying to force the doors of the volcano but they will not succeed." The reward granted to the virtuous consists in watching large herds on the extinct volcano "Muhabura" (nearly 14000 feet elevation). Felicity beyond comparison will be found there, consisting in drinking one's fill of milk and honey and smoking excellent tobacco. But this happiness would seem to be rather feeble as no one is in a hurry to go to these celestial pastures: *Ibyo mu Rwanda birachyalyoshye!* they say, "the attractions of Ruanda are still pleasing to me!"

THE RELIGION OF THE CENTRAL ESKIMO

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Prefect Apostolic of Hudson Bay

THE whole interior of Ellesmere Land, of Baffin Land, and of the country extending from Hudson Bay northwest to the Arctic Ocean, is an immense treeless tundra. The Eskimo inhabits this whole inland area, though he is never found in forested districts. It is, therefore, inexact to describe the Eskimo as a man inhabiting the Arctic coast land exclusively and to describe his culture as one depending necessarily on the sea. The expedition of Rasmussen has verified by direct observation the information given by the missionaries upon this point and has been able to distinguish between the Eskimo of the coast, and those of the interior, or caribou eaters. The coastal and inland groups constitute but one people, the people of the northern tundra.

It is not easy to describe this tundra. In summer time the country appears somewhat undulating, with here and there little hills rounded by former glaciers. The glaciers in their movement towards the sea have left their marks upon the rocks, which they could not carry away as they have carried away whatever soil may perhaps have been there. Moraines have been deposited on all sides. Between these undulations of the land are valleys, which are transformed each spring into torrents by the melting snows, and in which no soil can keep its footing. Only here and there in the shelter of jutting rocks does one find a few dwarf willows creeping along the ground. No one of them lifts its trunk more than four or five inches above the earth.