



Genocide
in Rwanda
*Complicity
of the
Churches?*

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RWANDA - 100 DAYS - 1994

ONE PERSPECTIVE

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On 6 April 1994, the plane carrying Juvénal Habyarimana, President of Rwanda, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, President of Burundi, was shot down in Kigali, Rwanda, and both Presidents were killed. Thus were unleashed the forces that led to the genocide of Tutsis and the elimination of moderate Hutus, that were responsible for the massacre of approximately a million people, all within 100 days.

Even now, nearly ten years later, profound and difficult questions remain. These exist on many levels. It is still not known who shot down the President's plane; other factual matters are unclear. Yet there are still more difficult and painful questions such as: what accounts for the failure of the human community outside of Rwanda to respond to genocide? Relevant to this book's subject is the terrible question: how could such a thing have happened? How could a people predominantly Christian, (sixty-three percent Roman Catholic), have descended into genocide?

It is critical to continue to ask the question. Perhaps it will never be answered satisfactorily, but each attempt should lead us a little closer to understanding, and to changing what needs to be changed so that such a horror is less likely to happen again. The Gospel itself and the true nature of the Church demand that the memory of genocide be kept alive and that the question be endlessly and objectively pursued.

On 6 April 1994, my religious Congregation, the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, was holding an international meeting of leaders at Vankleek Hill, Canada. I was present at the meeting as Superior General of the Congregation.

We have had Sisters in Rwanda since 1959 when a community of three, two Belgians and a Canadian, arrived in Mubuga, diocese of Nyundo, in north-west Rwanda. On this day in April 1994, we had six convents and forty-three Sisters and novices. Thirty-one were Rwandan, two were from

Zaire and ten were European or American. The numbers of Hutu and Tutsi Sisters were nearly equal.

Those Sisters at the Vankleek Hill meeting who knew Rwanda well, and the tensions that had been building there, immediately feared the consequences of the death of President Habyarimana. The same day, we heard of the attack on "Centre Christus," a Jesuit retreat facility near Kigali airport, where in a frequently repeated pattern, the Tutsis – priests and lay people – were separated from the Hutus and murdered.

From 4-16 April we had telephone contact with the Sisters at our convent in Kibuye, a provincial city in north-west Rwanda where the Sisters from four of our convents and several Sisters from other Congregations were regrouped. Thus we heard directly of the day and night hunt for Tutsis, the searching of the convent, the murder of many people in the area. We recognized the fear in the Sisters' voices and we were frantic in concern and a sense of helplessness. We were grateful to be in touch nearly daily with UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda) in Kigali, and were told of the ongoing massacres there. In addition, there were bulletins coming from various religious sources and the testimony of some returning Canadian missionaries.

From Kibuye, we learned that one of the Sisters had been lost in the forest, hunted by the *interahamwe* (extremist Hutu militia). We had just about given up hope for her survival, when she was brought to the convent, having been hidden and protected for two weeks by Hutu neighbors.

From Belgium we heard that the government was announcing the return from Rwanda of Belgian expatriates, and that we could expect our Sisters who were stationed there. It was with immense relief and gratitude that the Sisters meeting the planes in Brussels found none of our Sisters on them. I believe that the decision of our European and American Sisters to remain in Rwanda was a significant contribution to the safety of our Rwandan Sisters.

On 16 April the phone lines to Kibuye were cut and we entered a period of greater darkness, in which we could no longer express tangibly the throbbing communion of the whole Congregation. At this time, the first Synod of African Bishops was convened in Rome. The Rwandan Bishops who had gathered in Kigali for their departure to Rome were unable to leave because of the violence.¹ On 11 April 1994, six days after the beginning of the genocide, they issued, through the Vatican, the promise of their support of the interim government.² In addition, they also denounced troublemakers and requested that the armed forces protect everyone, regardless of their

ethnic identity. On 17 April, the Bishops called for an end to bloodshed, holding responsible both the government and the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front). On 25 April, they asked all Christians to refuse to kill.³

In April 1994, there were nine Bishops in Rwanda, seven of whom were Hutus. The Archbishop, Vincent Nsengiyumva, was extremely close to President Habyarimana, even having been a member of the central committee of MRND (*Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement*) for many years, until he was asked by other members of the Church not to take so political a role. He regularly wore a portrait pin of the President on his vestments while celebrating Mass.⁴

Catholic missionaries, in numbers, had gone to Rwanda when the country became a protectorate of Belgium. In this way the Church was associated in the minds of many with the Belgian presence. It was the Belgian administration that instituted identity cards, designating people as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. Some members of the Church had first favored and promoted the Tutsis, while later missionaries awakened the Hutus to sense an injustice in their situation.

So many burning questions arise for all of us in the Church: to what extent is it important and healthy for the hierarchy to be deeply involved with a government in power? The Archbishop and some of the hierarchy in Rwanda in 1994 had obviously lost their objectivity with regard to the government.

The Church must examine its preaching, pastoral functions, and formation to see how it had confronted conflict between Hutus and Tutsis before the genocide. Frequently, in various countries, we have seen that silence, or looking the other way, is an easy but ineffectual response to ethnic or social conflict. The Church is the traditional advocate of justice, but has not always modeled justice well. In Rwanda, did the institutional Church help Christians to understand and to recognize structural evil, as well as personal sin? Everywhere in the Church, this understanding seems slow to enter Catholic moral teaching and practice.

Beginning on 10 April, the Pope issued a series of anguished and passionate calls for the cessation of violence in Rwanda. In officially expressing his sympathy on the death of President Habyarimana, the Pope addressed himself to the Prime Minister, Mme. Agathe Uwilingiyimana, thereby acknowledging her as acting head of state.⁵ On 27 April, the Pope was one of the first world leaders to characterize the events in Rwanda as "genocide,"⁶ and he continued his strong appeals through May and June. On 15 May, the Pope spoke of this 'out-and-out genocide.'⁷

On 24 May, the Vatican Permanent Observer at the UN, Geneva, Archbishop Paul Tabet, addressed the Special Session on Rwanda at the UN Human Rights Commission, Geneva. He called for immediate action, saying, "the facts are obvious to all, and to the genocide of a people has been added the systematic extermination of members of the opposition, and of those who attempted to assist those who were being hunted down."⁸

Though the Pope and his representative reacted and spoke strongly and clearly, it is surprising to find so little reaction from the African Synod of Bishops. A general statement on 14 April expressed sadness and pleaded for a peaceful resolution of differences, and was signed for the Synod by the Presidents' Delegate.⁹ It is also notable that while various persons or groups wrote or were quoted in *L'Osservatore Romano*, none used the term "genocide" except the Pope and Archbishop Tabet.

On 25 April Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Council, "Cor Unum," called a meeting attended by about thirty representatives of Catholic relief organizations and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and discussed ways to deliver humanitarian aid to the Rwandan and Burundian people. They also appealed for diplomatic mediation and concrete measures to ensure long-lasting development.¹⁰

While still in Canada, I applied for visas for Congo (then Zaire), for Burundi and for Rwanda. I hoped to find a way into Rwanda to be with our Sisters, and possibly to find a means for them to leave the country until peace could be restored.

Returning from Canada to Namur, Belgium (our Congregation's center), with another Sister, I stopped in New York City to meet with Archbishop Renato Martino, then the Vatican's Permanent Observer to the UN. When Archbishop Martino received us, we presented the list of our Sisters in Rwanda. With it we attached a petition asking the UN to do everything possible to implement the Arusha Accords, to guarantee human rights, etc. We called for an emergency session of the Security Council to strengthen the mandate of UNAMIR in order to enable it to stop the bloodshed. We asked the Security Council to encourage the Organization of African Unity to take action. Archbishop Martino listened to what we knew of the situation in Rwanda and promised to do what he could.

While we were in New York, we also contacted the American and Belgian missions to the UN, presenting the same papers that we had given to Archbishop Martino. We were given access only to minor American officials who gave us perfunctory responses. The Belgian representative seemed more concerned and attentive to our information.

Once back in Namur, I began contacting other religious congregations who had Sisters in Rwanda and discovered that the Superior General of the Assumption Sisters was planning to go to Rwanda. I contacted her and we flew together to Bujumbura, Burundi, on 16 May. There we quickly encountered a Canadian religious who had been based in Butare, south-central Rwanda. Since the beginning of the genocide, she had courageously ferried many people at risk across the border into Burundi. She offered to drive us to Butare and at the border left us in the car while she effectively negotiated with the border guards to permit our passage into Rwanda. This area at the border within Rwanda was then empty and desolate – the scene of some of the largest massacres, the rivers full of cadavers – our Sister driver told us.

Close to Butare we began to meet hostile roadblocks, but finally arrived at the Assumption Sisters' convent. This community, who had lost some of its members, was astonished, overcome and overjoyed to see their Superior from Paris. Sister then drove me to our closest convent, at Kiruhura, about twenty miles north of Butare.

We pulled up before a house locked and shuttered. When no one came, I left the car to walk around to the back of the house. One Sister was coming around the side and I glimpsed others running into the fields. The arrival of a vehicle in the weeks following 6 April had repeatedly signaled demands for money, threats, and attacks. When the Sisters realized that I and the driver were there, they gradually drifted back, amazed and very happy to see us. No one had dared to leave the property since 17 April. There were eight professed Sisters and eight novices, as well as four Sisters from another Congregation at Kiruhura. They were traumatized and drained by constant fear and the expectation of the worst. The mission complex was comprised of small and simple accommodations for the Sisters. There were no walls or protection and they had frequently been "visited" by gangs of militia, sometimes wearing banana leaves – intent on doing their "work." The Sisters had heard and witnessed the murder of many neighbors. Nevertheless, deeply united, the Sisters were trying their best to carry on the community schedule, particularly of prayer in common. They were hiding a woman who had been badly wounded by a machete, and two neighbor children whose parents had been killed.

Over several days, the Sisters had the occasion to tell me what they had been living, and I was able to talk with them, together and in private, and to tell them how deeply the whole Congregation was affected, and also to deliver the mail I had brought.

Kiruhura was in contact with the mission at Ruyenzi (twelve miles from Kiruhura) and with Kibuye, our two other communities. The Sisters had kept contact by wireless as part of the daily routine for many years. I wanted to reach both these convents.

As a result, I went to Butare with the Superior of Kiruhura, in an ancient jeep, to find out how we could achieve this. We went first to the Bishop's residence. Bishop Jean-Baptiste Gahamanyi was imprisoned in his own home. He knew that his sister had been killed close to the mission at Ruyenzi. His office, maintained by a dedicated Belgian laywoman, was a busy place. People came seeking direction and help of all kinds. Many of these persons had been witnesses to terrible massacres of even thousands of people. They spoke hesitantly of their experiences in hushed and incredulous tones.

It was here that I first began to understand the confusion in trying to determine who was responsible for the atrocities. A soldier seemed to be guarding the gate of the Bishop's residence, and yet gangs of militia or *Interahamwe* had already attacked. The Bishop was hiding a number of persons who were in danger.

We quickly realized that if I wanted to visit Ruyenzi or Kibuye, a written permission (travel pass), detailing who could be in the vehicle, had to be issued by the Prefect. We went to the Prefecture, which was surrounded by hundreds of people seeking protection. Later we learned that these people had either been driven back to their communes to be massacred or taken to one of several designated spots in Butare to be slaughtered.

We met with the Prefect, Sylvain Nsabimana, who had succeeded Jean-Baptiste Habyalimana. The latter had been replaced, had disappeared and was eventually executed because he had tried to assure the security of his Prefecture and had resisted the genocide. Prefect Nsabimana gave us the requested permission to go to Kibuye.

There remained the question of a vehicle. The mission at Kiruhura did not have one that was reliable. The Bishop's secretary, by means of strong persuasion, obtained the loan of a vehicle from the Seminary. When we went to pick it up, we found another strongly enclosed community attempting to protect a number of priests. Giving up the vehicle even for a short while was a real sacrifice. Before the end of July, fifteen priests of the diocese of Butare had been killed. The diocesan secretary insisted it was not safe for two Sisters to go alone cross-country. She managed somehow to obtain a military escort comprised of two soldiers and a military chaplain. Only later did I discover that these men had no will to intervene even if trouble arose at the

checkpoints. We had decided to return to Kiruhura that evening, the eve of Pentecost, and to come back the next day to complete our business. However, the Suzuki would not start and there was no one to repair it. Many businesses had been pillaged and were closed.

Back at the Bishop's residence, the secretary obtained lodging for us at the African Catechetical Institute (ICA). We walked the several blocks through nearly deserted streets. All the vegetation had been cut down so that it could not provide shelter for anyone being hunted. At each corner checkpoint, we were halted by persons who demanded our destination and checked our passports.

When we reached the ICA, it was entirely in darkness. Sometime after we knocked, there was a very tentative response and inquiry of who we were. Inside, the building was in complete darkness except for some carefully placed candles. The setting was permeated by the smell of fear. A dozen or so persons, some of them injured and fleeing, were clustered in one room listening to a radio. My companion translated for me: one of the visionaries of Kibeho was announcing that President Habyarimana had been received into heaven. Exhausted, full of information and images that were profoundly disturbing, we went to our designated rooms, disgusted with this last detail, to pass a night of troubled sleep.

The next morning, Pentecost, we joined the Bishop for mass in his small chapel in the residence. Returning to Kiruhura, we found the Sisters deeply agitated and saddened. During the night, a gang had descended on the convent, seeming to know that there were persons hidden there. They searched every inch, and had taken away the injured woman and the children the Sisters were hiding. The children were killed, and the woman again cut with a machete and left to die in a latrine. Friends came to tell the Sisters that her cries could be heard for two days.

On 23 April, with one of our Hutu Sisters, I set out to drive from Kiruhura to Kibuye. At that time I intended to return to Kiruhura within a few days. Our escort preceded us. There were then no good roads to Kibuye and we crossed rough and dusty terrain, encountering forty-five roadblocks en route. At each one, a group of men – or sometimes young boys – stopped the jeep and looked at the travel pass, our identity cards and the vehicle ownership. There was obviously a set routine. Some had difficulty – holding documents upside down, unable to read. All were armed either with machetes, spears, or clubs of various kinds, some studded with glass or bits of metal. At every checkpoint one of the group was holding and listening to a radio, which seemed to be of good quality. Here and in other situations at Kibuye,

we experienced what a powerful factor the radio was in inciting to continuing violence.

At each checkpoint the men were suspicious, unresponsive; some outright angry and hostile. We were taking sacks of food to Kibuye as well as our own bags. In several places all of this was thoroughly searched. Some men, especially as the day grew later, seemed to be under the effect of a kind of intoxication. With others, a sort of frenzy appeared in their eyes and in their manner. We saw first-hand that once one has killed, a sickness takes hold, which in certain persons is hard to dislodge. At the first very difficult barrier, I left the vehicle to appeal to the soldiers in the jeep ahead of us. They kept their eyes fixed forward, making no response to my requests.

Our route passed by the mission of Birambo, where the Sisters of the Assumption were stationed. I particularly wanted to stop as we had heard that there had been a massacre there. When we pulled up in the cluster of the devastated school and convent buildings, the place seemed deserted. We left the jeep and began investigating. A Belgian Sister came to meet us. On 21 April, three of their Sisters had been taken and killed; two priests, as well as many people of the parish, were also murdered. The remaining Sisters, three Rwandans and two Belgians had arranged the kitchen of the school. They stayed there day and night with a couple of laywomen, sleeping there on the floor. Though they had little food, they offered us something to eat. We gave them news of the outside world and were able to share with them what we had in the vehicle. They told us that some people occasionally dared to come out from the forest to bring them food.

Leaving these Sisters reluctantly, we continued on to Kibuye. In late afternoon we drove up the hill toward the convent and school. Some of the Sisters were in the road outside of the house to welcome us. They knew from the wireless that we were on the way.

What great joy and emotion! There were twenty-two Sisters of St. Mary at Kibuye, including the communities of Mubuga and Kibingo. Also with them were eight Sisters of other Congregations and fifteen secondary students from Mubuga, as well as one child. As it was a boarding school, there were a number of substantial buildings, a water supply and food that had been stocked for the coming trimester. The Sisters had moved to the students' dormitories and only emerged briefly from these buildings to go to the dining room.

On 13 April there had been explosions around the mission. On 15 April, the school secretary was led away and murdered. Some people came seeking refuge at the convent. The Prefect, Clement Kayishema, ordered

that they must either go to the church or to the stadium, where he alleged that they would be protected. In previous ethnic conflicts this had proven true. The Sisters saw neighbors, friends, and family leave. All day long on 16 April, the Sisters heard arms fire and explosions coming from the stadium. On the night of the 17th, they heard continuous grenade and other explosions from the church. It was clear that mass murders had occurred.

In and around the beautiful stone church of Kibuye, more than 5,000 defenseless people were slaughtered and bulldozed into mass graves. (In 1996, I visited the UN forensic team, at the time excavating one small section of these graves. The director, later at Arusha, in 1997, told me that three-fourths of those exhumed were women and children, and over thirty percent were children under ten years of age.)

After the massacres in the church and stadium, the militia had come to the convent nearly daily, particularly at night, to harass the Sisters and students. They separated the ethnic groups and threatened the Tutsis with death, on one occasion even leading a group down to Lake Kivu, explaining that they would dispose of the bodies in the lake. The Sisters and students held firm in their unity. One of the Hutu Sisters became spokeswoman for the group, arguing, reasoning, and pleading with the militia and *interahamwe*.

When we arrived from Kiruhura, we found a courageous group of Sisters and students. The Tutsi Sisters were aware that they were the only members of their ethnic group left in the region. Of course, they were horrified, confused, and terrorized. I was able to hear their stories in groups and personally. We wept, reflected, and hoped together. The regular routine of common meals and extended common prayer together steadied and strengthened us. From children in schools in the US, Canada, and Belgium I had brought messages of support and sympathy. The Sisters read these, over and over, and found strength and consolation. Some board games we had with us, played in the dark at night, keeping quiet so as not to attract attention, occasioned some of the first laughter in weeks.

From the beginning, I was searching for the means for all the Sisters and the others at the mission to leave the country temporarily until peace would be re-established. So on the day after my arrival, I went with two other Sisters to the Prefecture. The Prefect was not present that day, but the sub-Prefect began a diatribe against the Sisters, inferring that particular ones were actively discriminating against Hutus. His behavior was unsettling and frightening.

On the next day, we met the Prefect, Clement Kayishema, in his office on the lake. He spoke of protecting the mission, and said that the Sisters and

students should not attempt to evacuate by road. His advice was good as many fleeing Tutsis were killed at the checkpoints. He also counseled against boats on Lake Kivu, which he said would be intercepted. That night, a friend of the Sisters came secretly to the convent. He told them that he knew the name of the person who had been designated to kill the Tutsi Sisters and that that man would be returning to Kibuye the next day. He said that the only hope for the Sisters would be if their Superior General remained there.

The next morning, hoping to evaluate the reliability of Prefect Kayishema, I returned to the Prefecture with two other Sisters. Almost immediately, Kayishema began a frenzied justification of the "war." He said that most of the local civilian population was actually in league with the RPF to overthrow the government and that they had to be eliminated. He continued in the same tone for nearly two and a half hours. It was clear that I could not leave.

I wrote to the Sisters at Kiruhura, saying I was unable to return at that time, and said goodbye to the soldiers. The military chaplain drove the jeep belonging to the Butare diocese, in which we had come.

In the days and weeks following, we were constantly seeking possible ways for the Sisters to leave the country, but in every case we were always in doubt as to who could be trusted.

Various events punctuated this time. Once, with the permission of Kayishema, we went to visit our two abandoned missions at Kibingo and Mubuga. The first was completely destroyed. Mubuga had been substantially pillaged, but the structures of some buildings had remained standing. In the jeep on the mountain road to Mubuga, I experienced for the first time the totally unfamiliar odor, descending like a suffocating fog, of the cloyingly sweet-sour smell of mass human decay.

The church at Mubuga had been the scene of another terrible massacre and here the bodies had been left for many days before being thrown into mass graves. When we arrived, some efforts had been made to clean up the church, but holes in the roof, the grenade burns, the stain of blood on the walls, and the odor of death and decay were irradicable. Standing in the church, we felt the utter horror and absurdity of all that had happened.

There were very few people to be seen. Though the Sisters were well-known to the people of Mubuga, the few we glimpsed kept their distance. Who knows what they felt – hostility, shame, a mixture of many emotions.

Later in Kibuye, on several occasions we heard groups of soldiers running in step in the direction of the mission. The first time, we were sure

they were coming to take the Tutsi Sisters. Then we heard them singing. They were returning from Bisesero where in the mountains many Tutsis had gathered and were resisting. Singing, the soldiers recounted how many they had killed that day.

As the days passed, it became clearer that it was not possible from the interior of the country to find a way for the Sisters to leave. There were no means of communication either within the country or to the world without. We found a brave driver and I asked Prefect Kayishema for a travel pass. I told him that I would be gone for one day to Goma, Congo, passing through Gisenyi in north-west Rwanda. With two companions, a Rwandese and a British Sister, I set out along the rough route to Gisenyi. There were the usual roadblocks. At one of these, the tire of the jeep was speared, but fortunately we had a replacement.

To reach Gisenyi/Goma, we passed close to Nyundo, the diocesan center. Thirty-one priests of the diocese were eventually killed during the genocide, nineteen of them between 7-9 April near or at Nyundo, where they were having a meeting on 6 April. It is ironic that on 28 December 1993, Bishop Wenceslaus Kalibushi of Nyundo and the clergy of his diocese had issued a press release in which they had noted the distribution of weapons in their parishes and asked the authorities to explain their use.¹¹ The answer came only in the events of July 1994.

Bishop Kalibushi had always refused to identify himself by his ethnic origin, though he was in fact a Hutu. In the early days of the genocide, he was led outside the city, forced into a mass grave and the militia prepared to shoot him. For some unknown reason, they relented at the last moment and after some weeks he escaped to Goma, Congo. We had the opportunity to talk with him there on two occasions. He was devastated by what was happening to his people and by the death of so many of his clergy.

One heroic example of a Hutu who resisted genocide was Sister Félicité Niyitegeka, a member of the Auxiliaries of the Apostolate stationed in Gisenyi. She helped many to safety in Congo, for which her life was threatened. Her brother, an army colonel, asked her to stop her activities, but she said she could not. On 21 April, she was taken to a cemetery to be executed with forty-one others. Because of her brother, she was several times given the opportunity to escape. However, she refused to leave her companions and was killed with them. Félicités has been named among the "heroes of the nation."¹²

As we passed through Gisenyi, we stopped at the convent connected with the cathedral. Three of the Sisters from there had been killed in May.

The doors were locked and the curtains drawn. We knocked and were admitted to find several Brothers and Sisters. The atmosphere was extremely tense.

After a short visit we left to continue to Goma. As we were leaving the house, one of the Sisters called me aside, and looking right and left, led me silently to a small shed. Inside was the fragile eighty-year-old mother of one of our Sisters. Her son had been killed in April, and these Sisters had since been hiding and caring for this woman. She was later brought out of Rwanda and reunited with her daughter.

We had to leave the driver and the vehicle at the border, and after some harassment by the customs officials, we crossed on foot into Congo. We walked into Goma and found the convent of the Bernardine Sisters. Their welcome was warm and gracious.

In Goma I was able on 9 June to telephone to the Generalate in Namur, Belgium. It was the first contact since 17 May. I gave what news I could, and asked that a Sister Councillor who was American (Belgians were also being threatened) come to Goma and then on to Kibuye, in order that I could come out to look for some help – though what help there could be was unclear.

Returning to Kibuye on 10 June, we found the Sisters even more tense and frightened. On the 9th, word had reached Kibuye that a soldier of the RPF had killed the Archbishop and three other Hutu Bishops, as well as at least ten priests at Kabgayi. Several persons had already been to the convent to warn the Sisters that reprisals against them could be expected.

Early in the genocide, toward the middle of April, three priests of Kibuye had been killed. In June a priest arrived in Kibuye from Nyange. Several times he celebrated masses and gave homilies for the Sisters. His behavior and his words were very ambiguous. Later in 1994, he was arrested and charged with alleged crimes committed in Nyange. He was taken to the prison in Kibuye, where in 1998 he was tried, convicted and eventually condemned to death. In October 2000, the Court of Appeals of Ruhengeri acquitted him of all charges and released him.

During these June days the fear and tension continued to grow. The Sisters had been restricted to the convent buildings since the early days of April. It began to seem that the situation would never end, or would only end tragically. Stories and rumors of the advance of the RPF, and the consequent frenzied statements and actions of the authorities then in place were very threatening.

Fear was certainly a huge, if imponderable, factor in the genocide. There can be little doubt that many who were not instigators of the drama were nevertheless drawn into it by fear, either for themselves or for their

families. Without living in a similar situation, it is hard to imagine what a strong catalyst fear can be.

On 21 June, an indirect message arrived that a Sister was waiting for me in Goma. With the same two Sisters, I set off again for Gisenyi/Goma carrying a travel permit from Kayishema. In Goma, the Belgian Provincial Superior for Africa and the American Assistant were waiting. The Bernardine Sisters again welcomed us.

At the same time, French troops arrived in Goma and were preparing to mount their military operation – code name *Opération Turquoise* – with its mission “to protect people at risk, but not necessarily to disarm the RGF [Rwandan Government Forces]... to take down the barriers and disarm the self-defense forces and the *Interahamwe*.”¹³ We were originally uncertain of the French because among the people we knew in Rwanda, there was the suspicion that the French intended to shore up the government in power. However, a Spanish Carmelite Father, acting as Consul for his country, urged us at least to talk with some French officers who had come to his residence. Our first conversations were brief and very tentative. The French were seeking information on the roads, on local conditions from Gisenyi to Kibuye.

The interim Rwandan Government, having fled from its temporary quarters in Kabgayi, was then established in Gisenyi, and we had an indication that we might receive safe passage out of the country for our Sisters from the interim President and ministers gathered there.

In what now seems a kind of blindness, we wanted to continue to negotiate with this totally discredited government so that the Sisters could leave “legally” and under the “protection” of the same people who, at the very least, countenanced the genocide. Part of this was due to the Rwandan Sisters’ insistence that their departure should be only temporary and that they would return to Rwanda as soon as possible. A big factor was the difficulty of discerning truth, with no means of communication in an atmosphere permeated with fear.

On 23 June, with my Assistant and another Sister from Texas who had joined us, and with an interested American and an English journalist, we crossed the border and proceeded toward the hotel on the lake in Gisenyi, where the interim government was struggling to hold on. The atmosphere in the city was surreal. Groups of schoolchildren had been commandeered to stand on the sidewalks of the major thoroughfare, waving Rwandan and French flags to welcome the “saviors” they expected. We were taken for an advance group of the French and hailed. In fact, as far as I know, the French had not yet entered Gisenyi, at least not officially.

What a troubling contrast there was between the beauty of the hotel's setting on Lake Kivu and the hostility and extreme strain of the atmosphere. We expected to meet with some government ministers. However, we were left to wait some time on the terrace and then were taken to the office of Daniel Mbangura, whom we were told was Cabinet Chief. It was immediately evident that he was absolutely opposed to the Sisters' departure. Having made that clear, in a kind of fury he launched into a defense of all that the interim government had done, as justified by the "war," caused by the invasion and advance of the RPF. His discourse was nearly textually a repetition of what I had heard from Prefect Kayishema at the end of May.

We left his office feeling under threat and eager to get away as fast as possible. Our fear for the Sisters at Kibuye had grown even greater. While still at the hotel headquarters, the two Sisters received a travel permit to go to Kibuye and they left shortly after, with the intention of remaining there until some help arrived – or best, if the Sisters could leave the country.

Back in Goma, we again had conversations with the French officers and gradually accepted that their concern was real and that we could trust them. Eventually, we deeply appreciated these men. Finally, we explained what we had witnessed happening in Rwanda and the dangerous situation of our Sisters and others at Kibuye. On 24 June, French troops arrived by helicopter at Kibuye. With Prefect Kayishema they went to the convent. Of course, the Sisters were reticent in expressing their fears.

On 25 June, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, on a mission for the Holy Father, came to Kibuye. A priest, who had preceded him to prepare his visit, had arranged for the Cardinal to stay at the convent. However, when he arrived, Prefect Kayishema took over all the arrangements and insisted that the Cardinal stay in a motel on the lake. That evening, there was a tightly controlled public meeting, and the Sisters had no opportunity to talk privately or freely with the Cardinal. He was travelling throughout the country in the short period of a few days, and in two locations – with the interim government and with the RPF leadership – he issued an appeal for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Perhaps the Cardinal's activities and contacts were so restricted that he did not see the depth of the genocide and hence condemn the effort to exterminate the Tutsis. Or perhaps he feared that too direct a condemnation would cause further violence and suffering.¹⁴

In Goma, we tried to explain the constraints the Sisters were under in the presence of Kayishema. On 26 June, the French went again to Kibuye and took some reporters with them. This time several French soldiers were left at the mission. The next day, again trying for an "approved" departure

from the country, the Assistant and two other Sisters went again to the Prefecture. Prefect Kayishema once again passionately defended his government's actions. Early on the morning of the 28th, six French helicopters landed on the grounds of the mission at Kibuye and evacuated the Sisters and students, in all forty-seven persons who were taking refuge there. Those being evacuated thought they were being taken to Bukavu, Congo. It seemed like a dream for all of us when we were able to meet them at Goma airport.

In the south, on 30 June, the advancing RPF soldiers reached Kiruhura, where the other group of our Sisters was located. Eventually, they took our Sisters to the mission at Save, to join other Sisters that they had assembled there. When the RPF had fully occupied the area and taken control of the country, they permitted the Sisters to return to their missions, circulate freely in the country, or move out of the country if they wished.

Over a period of time, all of our Sisters left Rwanda, dispersing for some months to our houses in Congo, Cameroon, Belgium or Canada. After a period of healing and recuperation, all have returned to Rwanda.

The first months and years were extremely trying. Much was in ruins. The memories of violence and death were vivid and always present. As did other persons, the Sisters sought the places where their families had been killed. Many recovered bodies and were able to clean, clothe, and rebury their dead with dignity. Places of interment were identified and blessed.

In September 1997, I testified against Clement Kayishema at the International Tribunal at Arusha, Tanzania. I witnessed to the fact that he had clearly exercised authority during the time I was at Kibuye. His defense had affirmed that he had not been able to control events. I was also able to tell of the conditions and situations I had witnessed in my time in Rwanda.

I have been back to Rwanda four times since 1994. In 2000 and in 2003, I led a retreat and workshop which dealt directly with questions of reconciliation in a general way, and also specifically among the Sisters. The Sisters wanted directly and openly to confront painful memories and past history. Their determination, in spite of the inherent difficulty, is to live and to work together in the charity of Christ. Their courage and grace in struggling for genuine unity is an inspiration. They are all fully engaged in ministries of education, health, or pastoral care. After a hiatus of five years, when we decided not to admit any candidates to the Congregation, we now have a number of young women in preparation for religious life.

Though many people were profoundly disillusioned with the Churches during the genocide, and gave up religious practice, in these recent years, there has been a gradual return to the ecclesial community. Now churches are often full and prayer groups flourish.

In the years 1995 and following, the Bishops who had been killed or disappeared in the genocide, and those who died of natural causes, were gradually replaced by the Vatican, thus almost completely reconfiguring the hierarchy. Through the years, many letters have been issued by the Conference of Bishops or by individual Bishops to their dioceses. For example: "We again seize this opportunity to condemn the genocidal acts and the massacres which were committed in Rwanda. We condemn criminal acts which aim to kill innocent people."¹⁵

On the occasion of the centenary celebration at Save on 8 February 2000, the Archbishop of Kigali, Bishop Thaddeus Ntihinyurwa, asked pardon in the Church's name for the evil caused through lack of courage by some members of the Church, and for crimes committed by some Christians.¹⁶

On 3 September 1997, Bishop Alexis Habiyaambere addressed the Christians of Nyundo. He recognized that violence was continuing. The Bishop condemned all such activity and in the name of the Gospel he called on the people of his diocese to renounce every action and attitude that undermined peace. The Bishop exhorted his people to open their hearts to others as brothers and sisters. The role of parents in forming their children was emphasized. "When a Hutu finds himself in the privacy of his own home, what does he say of the Tutsi? When a Tutsi knows that no Hutu can hear him, how does he speak of him?"¹⁷

No doubt the gradual transformation of hearts and minds will have to take place in the formation of priests and religious, in the catechesis of children and youth, in schools, in the associations formed on the hills, and those of Hutu and Tutsi widows, as well as in the basic communities favored by many parishes.

Of course many terrible and trying questions remain. I simply mention some here as central to an ongoing analysis. Certain commentators, seeing the moral collapse of the government, of the academic world, of the army, etc., will claim that the Church was neither worse nor better than these other institutions. In all of these groups there were villains and heroes. And yet it would seem that because of the Gospel, the Church's teaching on justice and charity, the claim to grace through prayer and the sacraments, that the Church should hold itself to a higher standard and acknowledge its sinfulness in its participation in the genocide in Rwanda, while continuing always to point to the possibility of conversion and transformation.

A claim that an incomplete evangelization was a factor in the Church's failures needs to be examined. Was preparation for baptism too summarily practiced? In some countries, north and south, it is alleged that Christians

adhere to a kind of superstitious dependence on sacraments, without regular clarifying and powerful preaching of the Gospel.

The whole issue of the practice of obedience to God, to elders, to authority needs to be examined. Only a long and enlightened initiation leads from a concept of blind obedience to free, faithful, critical obedience.

The Church in all its institutions and members must denounce extremism in every form. Christians can be helped to recognize this tendency in their own hearts, in others, and in groups and movements. Once extremism is manifested, immediate and radical action must be taken to discredit and uproot it.

The work of various sciences, as well as religion, is required to find the relation – in theory and in practice – of truth, remembering, forgiveness, and reconciliation. A true rebuilding of the nation will depend on this continuing work, and the faith communities have a large part to play.

In 1995, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa visited Rwanda. He addressed a rally at Kigali where the President and other political figures were present, and spoke some difficult truths: "I reminded the Tutsi that they had waited thirty years to get their own back for what they perceived as injustices done to them. I said that the extremists among the Hutu were also quite capable of waiting thirty years or more for one day when they could topple the new government, in which the Tutsi played a prominent role, and in their turn unleash the devastation of revenge and resentment... I told them that the cycle of reprisal and counter-reprisal... had to be broken and that the only way to do this was to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, to move on to forgiveness, because without it there was no future."¹⁸ Archbishop Tutu recounts that President Kagame and others present received his sermon with considerable magnanimity.

In South Africa, in Guatemala, and in various other countries, types of "truth and reconciliation commissions" have done thorough, difficult and efficacious work in the restoration of true national unity. The time for this may not yet be right for Rwanda. However, Rwandans who belong to the Church, and those of us who care deeply about Rwanda and its people, journeying together in the search for truth and in the repeated decision for charity, will help to prepare the future of peace and prosperity for which all long.

1. The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Giuseppe Bertello, had denounced human rights abuses, disappearances, and assassinations between 1990-1994. He was targeted in the first days of the genocide and barely escaped with his life.
2. Agence France-Presse, "Les Evêques du Rwanda promettent leur soutien au nouveau gouvernement," BQA, No. 14190, 12/04/94, 29, as quoted in Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (New York City: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 245.
3. Missionnaires d'Afrique, Guy Theunis and Jef Vleugels, fax no. 10, 25 April 1994, and no. 15 and annex, 26 May 1994, as quoted in Des Forges, 246.
4. Des Forges, 43-44.
5. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 April 1994, Weekly Edition in English, pp. 1, 8, 12.
6. Ibid. 4 May 1994, p. 23.
7. Ibid. 18 May 1994, p. 1; 15 June 1994, p. 1.
8. Ibid. 18 May 1994, p. 1.
9. Ibid. 27 April 1994, p. 13.
10. Ibid. 10 May 1994, p. 4.
11. "Kalibushi, Monsignor Wenceslaus and priests of Kibuye and Gisenyi," Communiqué de Presse, 28 December 1993 (ADL), quoted in Des Forges, 146.
12. Des Forges, 248.
13. Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Canada: Random House, 2003), 450.
14. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20 July 1994, p. 2.
15. Message de la Conférence des Evêques Catholiques du Rwanda, in Charles Ntampaka, "Controverses sur la Responsabilité de l'Eglise Catholique au Rwanda," *Dialogue*, no. 215, (Bruxelles: Mars-Avril 2000), n. 24, pp.48-49.
16. Ibid., p.50.
17. "Pastoral Letter of Bishop Alexis Habyambere to the Faithful of the Diocese of Nyundo," *Dialogue*, no. 200, (Bruxelles: Sept.-Oct., 1997), pp. 60-64.
18. Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 259-260.

MEMORY NEVER FORGETS MIRACLES

*Philippe Gaillard**

"Die Sprache spricht als das Geläute der Stille."
"Language speaks like the peal of bells of silence."
Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*

In 1994, before, during and after the genocide in Rwanda, during which around one million people – mostly civilians – were killed, I gave hundreds of interviews, reports and conferences to all kinds of audiences – newspapers, television, radio stations and the general public. At the time, I was the head of the delegation of the International Red Cross (ICRC) in Rwanda. At the end of 1994, I decided not to talk any more about the Rwandan genocide and declined all further invitations. I just wanted to go back to silence and to invisibility, as befits an ICRC delegate and my own rather shy and discreet personality.

Almost eight years [Editor's Note: now ten] have passed since the genocide was committed, and by being here I am once again talking about it. Not because I am less shy today than eight years ago, not because I need to be visible again, but because I still have some kind of debt, or rather duty, towards all those who died in Rwanda in 1994, who were given so little attention later that some people think that the Rwandan genocide can be considered as a "case study." For those who died, and especially for those who survived, the Rwandan genocide is certainly not, and never will be, a "case study." It is because of those victims that I am here today. You may kill as many people as you want, but you cannot kill their memory. Memory is the most invisible and resistant material you can find on earth. You cannot cut it like a diamond, you cannot shoot at it because you cannot see it; nevertheless, it is everywhere, all around you, in the silence, unspoken suffering, whispers, and absent looks. Sometimes you can smell it and then

*Address given at the Aegis/UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Genocide Prevention Conference, Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Newark, UK, January 2002.