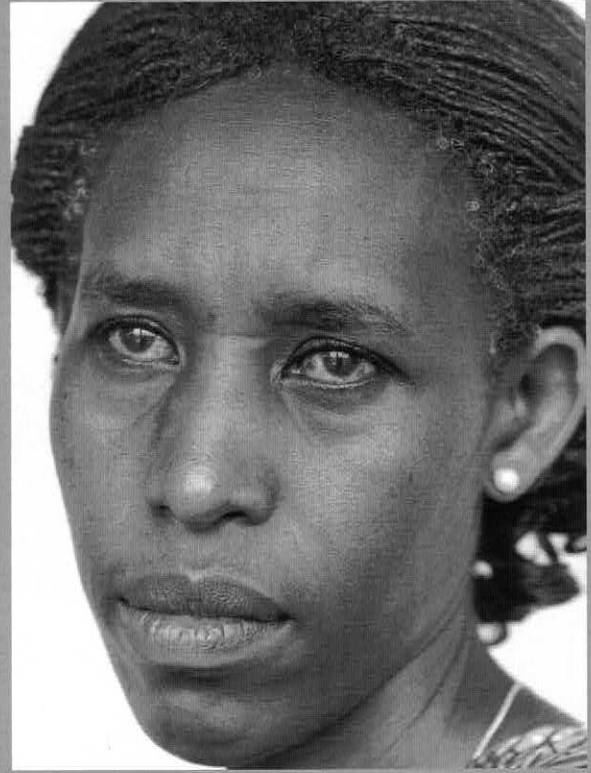


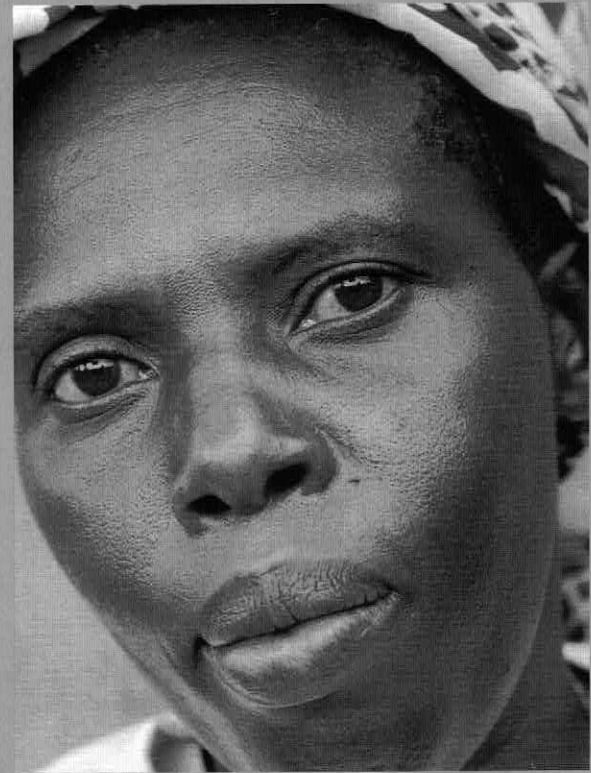
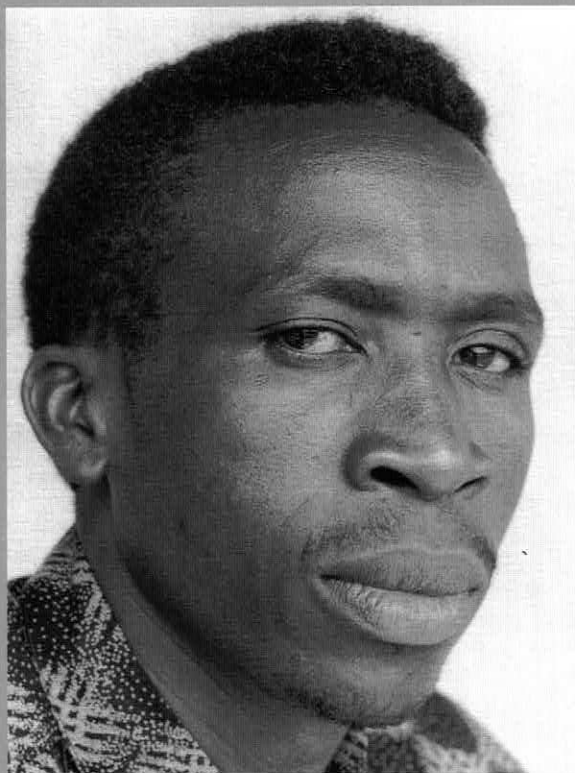
# *African Rights*

*With Photographs by Jenny Matthews*



## **Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka:**

In the Eyes of the Survivors of  
Sainte Famille



**Press release: A new 96 page report on Rwanda from *African Rights***

**Strictly embargoed until 00.01 hours Tuesday 6 April 1999**

**For further information contact: Rakiya Omaar tel: 00 44 (0)171 717 1224**

## **Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka In the Eyes of the Survivors of Sainte Famille**

Father Munyeshyaka, a Rwandese Catholic priest currently resident in France, has been the subject of legal controversy for four years. Repeated attempts by relatives of victims of the genocide and survivors of the massacres at the Catholic Parish of Ste. Famille in Kigali in 1994 to prosecute Fr. Munyeshyaka for complicity in genocide have been confounded by the French legal system. Until recently, non-nationals could not be tried in France on the charge of genocide. Finally it seems the way is clear for the plaintiffs to confront Fr. Munyeshyaka in court. In an effort to support the process of justice to ensure that the case is not forgotten and to encourage the French Catholic Church to establish its own enquiry into the accusations, *African Rights* is publishing the results of its own investigations into the case.

*In the Eyes of the Survivors of Sainte Famille* contains the testimonies of 45 survivors who have spoken in detail about the events at the Parish of Ste. Famille. We hope that the remarkable consistency in their accounts, and the fact that all of them were willing to have their photograph published as a symbolic signature to their words will awaken interest and further investigation into his case. In particular, we hope that the French Catholic Church, members of which have, in the past, dismissed the accusations against Fr. Munyeshyaka as "a lot of slander against a priest who saved many lives" will reconsider. Not only do the accusations come from people of all ages and walks of life, but among those prepared to testify against the priest is a member of the Catholic clergy, Father Célestin Hakizimana.

We urge the Catholic Church not to remain complacent as it has tended to do in the past when faced with allegations against churchpeople. The admission by the French Bishops' conference in 1997 that the Catholic bishops were silent bystanders to the mass murder of the Jewish people during the holocaust, and "that this silence was a fault" was an important step towards greater transparency. Fr. Wenceslas Munyeshyaka is only one of a number of Catholic clerics to be accused of involvement in the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994; almost all of them continue to work within the Church. This fact is in direct contradiction with the new spirit of public self-examination and atonement for the sins of the Church's past which Pope John Paul II has embarked upon in preparation for the new millennium.

The trial of Fr. Wenceslas Munyeshyaka is a chance to remind the Catholic Church that the allegations against its clergy are becoming skeletons in its cupboard, undermining its moral authority. The Vatican is now in a poor position to intervene on behalf of human rights in Rwanda. This situation will persist until it openly embarks upon a painstaking inquiry into the various accusations against churchpeople. However slow the process of justice, it is the only path towards peace and healing in Rwanda. The Church owes it to the survivors, and to churchpeople who are the subject of accusations, to make a contribution towards the process of justice.

## No Sanctuary at Ste. Famille

Ste. Famille is positioned on a hill overlooking the city of Kigali, and very close to its commercial centre in Ruhenge. It is one of the largest churches in the city, set in extensive grounds and surrounded by a high wall. It must have seemed like the ideal sanctuary to people whose lives were at risk. And indeed when the violence broke out on 7 April, following the death of President Juvénal Habyarimana, some residents of troubled districts of Kigali fled to the church immediately.

Many of the early arrivals were Hutus—our witnesses include members of the political opposition who knew instantly what the death of Habyarimana would mean for their security, and one member of a large group of over 400 Hutus who were forced out of their homes in Gisozi, Greater Kigali. But Tutsis also came in droves, and they came from all the surrounding areas.

There was only one entrance to the church and this was closely guarded. As the weeks passed and the church became more crowded, many refugees were turned away. Of the Tutsis who did gain entrance, most had to pay a bribe at the gate.

Fr. Munyeshyaka took charge of the Parish of Ste. Famille early on in April, after the parish priest, Father Anaclet Mwumvaneza, was forced into hiding by threats from militiamen. The survivors of Ste. Famille all expressed their shock at the appearance and attitude of Fr. Munyeshyaka. They gave numerous examples of his hostility towards them and towards Tutsis in general. Clad in a flak jacket, and armed with a pistol, Munyeshyaka was an intimidating figure who, from the beginning, did nothing to make the refugees feel welcome. It was not long before the refugees discovered where Fr. Munyeshyaka's sympathies lay. Jean-Claude Rwabakika, a 35-year-old data processor, fled to the church on 20 April after militiamen attacked his home and killed his parents. Jean-Claude said that Fr. Munyeshyaka divided the refugees according to ethnicity and discriminated against the Tutsis.

Wenceslas Munyeshyaka treated the Tutsi refugees as traitors to the nation of Rwanda. He said that we were in permanent contact with the Rwandese Patriotic Front via radios which he claimed we had, which of course we didn't have. By contrast, Munyeshyaka showed himself to be very welcoming towards the refugees who came from Gisozi, fleeing the battles between the RPF and the FAR. He gave them blankets and food; they could go and walk around town whenever they wanted to. In the evening, they used to come back, accompanied by the interahamwe, who would walk around amongst the refugees. Munyeshyaka didn't even ask them to leave their arms outside the church.

The militia were often to be seen wandering around the parish and civilian local officials attended mass there, as well as holding regular meetings with Fr. Munyeshyaka. Most notorious among them were the préfet, Tharcisse Renzaho, the councillor, Odette Nyirabagenzi and the schools inspector, Angéline Mukandutiye, who have been implicated both in the killings at Ste. Famille and in many other massacres in Kigali.

According to Munyeshyaka, the militia tried to kill him on three occasions during the genocide and later in the camps in Goma. He has argued that: "It was necessary to appear pro-militia. If I had another attitude, we would have all disappeared." However, the regular meetings between Munyeshyaka, the préfet Tharcisse Renzaho and other génocidaires who came to supervise the abduction and execution of the refugees, along with the priest's often-declared dislike of the Tutsi refugees, constitute loud declarations of support for the militia, not the "silence" which the priest claimed he maintained.

Paulin Munyemana said that, even before the genocide, Munyeshyaka had been openly in favour of the extremist party, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), whose agenda relied explicitly upon ethnic segregation and discrimination. Paulin was a sector leader of the opposition party of the Democratic Republican Movement (MDR). He

had been in hiding at the hostel of the Sisters of Bizeramariya, near Ste. Famille for almost a year after his life was threatened in his home sector in Murambi, Byumba. As a Hutu opposed to the political aims of CDR, he knew he would be a target when the propaganda of hatred was unleashed following the murder of President Juvénal Habyarimana and so he immediately sought refuge at Ste. Famille.

Paulin took charge of the administration of the ever-increasing community of refugees there, organising teams of refugees to work for security, food and health, but he received no support for his efforts from Fr. Munyeshyaka. Such was the shortage of food and water that refugees began dying from "bad living conditions", Paulin said: "I often went and asked Munyeshyaka to help me find a way to bury the bodies, but he told me to wait." But Paulin, like almost every other survivor interviewed, claimed that Munyeshyaka was hoarding supplies in the parish store, which was "bursting with food." They believe he deliberately withheld these supplies from Tutsi refugees. Several of them recounted an incident where one desperate man tried to climb up to get water from the reservoir tank but was forced at gunpoint to come down by Fr. Munyeshyaka. Jérôme Berete, one of a number of Hutus who had refused to conform to the ethnic segregation enforced by Munyeshyaka, said he was also threatened by Fr. Munyeshyaka because he had taken water: "He brought out a gun and nearly shot me. I begged for mercy and luckily he let me go." Meanwhile, refugees remember often seeing Fr. Munyeshyaka sharing beer and goats' meat with the militia.

### **The Massacre of 15 April**

According to the survivors, Munyeshyaka was aware of the militia's plans to attack the church and was present during several massacres. The first massacre at Ste. Famille took place on 15 April, claiming the lives of more than 100 Tutsi men and boys. The victims' names were called from a list, and those inside the church heard the gunshots as they were killed outside. Fr. Munyeshyaka witnessed the abductions, but although he had a phone, refugees say he made no effort to call for help. Gorette Uwimana overheard militiamen telling Fr. Wenceslas that they would return to kill the women and she will never forget his reply:

Wenceslas told them that the women were not a problem as they did not have an ethnicity. He said the bad ones were the men.

### **The Massacre of 22 April at the Missionary Centre of CELA**

A few days later, on 22 April, refugees flooded into the Parish of Ste. Famille following a massacre at the missionary Centre for the Teaching of African Languages (CELA), which was nearby. The majority of the new arrivals were women; most of their husbands, brothers and sons had been killed that day at CELA under the supervision of the préfet, Tharcisse Renzaho. Munyeshyaka is said to have watched from outside the fence. These refugees were wary of the priest; they came because they had nowhere else to go. Among them was Joseph Bitega who was already conscious of the priest's inhumane attitude towards the refugees.

Joseph had gone to CELA early in April, and when the White Fathers, who ran the centre, were evacuated on 12 April, they left the keys to their house with him, so that the refugees would have access to the telephone. Fr. Wenceslas had visited CELA soon after the departure of the White Fathers on the night of 12 April; he asked for the keys, but was refused entry by refugees patrolling the centre. The following day he returned and asked to see Joseph Bitega, who immediately hid. Complaining that he was now in charge of CELA, he left reluctantly, only to return two days later saying that he had received permission to enter CELA from one of the White Fathers. Joseph opened up the rooms where the White Fathers had been staying and Fr. Munyeshyaka began to search them. Munyeshyaka

identified the valuable items and told Joseph that they now belonged to him and should not be touched.

On the morning of 22 April, Fr. Munyeshyaka arrived with Tharcisse Renzaho, Odette Nyirabagenzi, Angéline Mukandutiye, interahamwe militiamen and soldiers. The boys and men were rounded up and taken away in vans and minibuses to be killed.

Before they took Joseph away, Fr. Munyeshyaka came to him and asked for the keys to CELA. Joseph said:

What really shocked me was that instead of trying to find a way of saving us, Fr. Munyeshyaka asked me for the keys to CELA. I gave them to him and then we were taken to the police detention centre in Muhima. A few minutes later, we were taken to Rugenge sector to be killed.

Joseph watched as the men were taken one at a time and shot. He ran and managed to escape.

The survivors of the attack on 22 April claim that not only did Fr. Munyeshyaka make no attempt to prevent the abductions, he showed himself to be in support of the killer's actions. André Karangwa recalled his words after the raid: "Munyeshyaka came here and said: 'You innocent ones who are still here, come and take refuge at Ste. Famille.' He thought those who had just been killed were guilty."

### **The Massacre of 17 June**

An RPF raid on the church of St. Paul, also in Kigali, on 16 June succeeded in evacuating the refugees there, enraging the killers. Early the following morning, Fr. Munyeshyaka told the refugees that the RPF had killed all the Hutus at St. Paul, which was untrue, but was an inflammatory comment, guaranteed to exacerbate tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi refugees at Ste. Famille. He warned them that they should expect reprisals.

Soon afterwards, Colonel Munyakazi, head of the gendarmerie in Muhima, came to meet with Fr. Munyeshyaka. Then around 10:00 a.m., the interahamwe arrived. This was the worst day in the lives of most of the refugees at Ste. Famille. Between 70-100 Tutsi men and boys were slaughtered along with two women. Their bodies were left strewn all over the church courtyard. Although Fr. Munyeshyaka disappeared during the massacre, he came back at midday, when it had ended. According to Emile Rukundo, the priest showed no signs of sorrow or remorse. He simply said that: "all these Tutsis had 'killed themselves'."

Enock Kayonga said that the next day he counted 54 bodies lying in their own blood in the yard of Ste. Famille. Then, in preparation for the arrival of western journalists and troops of the United Nations Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) who were due to evacuate the refugees, Munyeshyaka ordered the refugees to hide the corpses in the garage of the general store. He promised some of them that they would be evacuated in return, Enock said: "That evening, Munyeshyaka told us to remove all the bodies. I removed two of the victims' bodies... Munyeshyaka promised to let us be evacuated on the condition that we remove all the bodies."

On 19 June some of the leading génocidaires of the area, including the préfet and Colonel Munyakazi, returned to the parish to search for surviving males. Donata Mukasekuru believes that Munyeshyaka collaborated closely with them.

On 19 June, Munyeshyaka refused to celebrate mass, and instead paraded around with the killers: Angéline Mukandutiye, Colonel Munyakazi, who commanded the Muhima brigade, and others. They picked out seventeen boys, whom Angéline accused of shooting at her during the night; she had them searched. Then Colonel Munyakazi led them away and put them in his van. They never returned.

All these men were later killed. Not once did Fr. Munyeshyaka plead with the killers to stop, nor did he utter a word of condemnation of the militia or comfort to the terrified refugees, not even privately.

### **The Evacuations**

The selection of refugees to be evacuated was naturally a source of considerable anxiety and tension. However, Fr. Munyeshyaka's handling of the evacuations showed that he was prepared to use any avenue to manipulate the fate of the refugees. UNAMIR requested that the names of the refugees be listed alongside their chosen destination, in accordance with an agreement between the interim government, the RPF and UNAMIR. By June, the RPF controlled territory in the south and east of the country and most of the Tutsi refugees at Ste. Famille chose to be evacuated to the RPF zone, rather than those areas which remained under government rule. The refugees wrote their names down on pieces of paper which were used to compile a list. The priest was given a copy of the list and refugees say that he then gave a copy to the militia—many refugees believe it helped them target their victims.

The first UNAMIR convoy left in early June and, despite threats to the refugees in the vans heading for the RPF zone, the first evacuation was successful. In fact, when the radio reported news of the escape, many more refugees came to Ste. Famille. However, on the second attempt the interahamwe surrounded the vans, and Fr. Munyeshyaka publicly identified those who had chosen the RPF zone as "*Inyenzi*" ["cockroach", a term of abuse for the RPF]. Michèle Gasibirege was evacuated, but she was very upset at having to leave without her brother or mother. She accused Fr. Munyeshyaka of having done:

... everything within his power to stop the evacuation... Though the men were the most at risk, he rejected their pleas, and even removed their names from the evacuation lists. He used to say that they would swell the ranks of the *Inyenzi*. He privileged only the women and girls.

Fr. Munyeshyaka could and did save lives—principally the lives of a select number of women and young girls. According to the refugees, these women were given special treatment: food, water and accommodation which he withheld from the rest. They were evacuated by Munyeshyaka to the Mille Collines Hotel and given priority on the UNAMIR evacuation lists. There was a price for these privileges, and the refugees have accused Fr. Munyeshyaka of demanding sexual favours. Most of the refugees were shocked by the open favouritism displayed by the priest, as Antoine Nkusi explained:

Munyeshyaka had put several beautiful women in the three rooms next door to his. Whenever we saw them coming and going at night around Munyeshyaka's home we could guess why they were there. When Munyeshyaka realised that a lot of the refugees noticed the girls who went up the stairs of his house to his room on the first floor, he moved into more basic quarters on the ground floor, and even reserved a room at the Mille Collines Hotel.

Valentine Gahonzire managed to escape with her brother to the Mille Collines Hotel at the end of May. She saw the priest at the hotel on many occasions, she said: "He had a room reserved there, and would go in with his girls, then return to St. Famille."

Rose Rwanga feels that Fr. Munyeshyaka was to blame for the death of her daughter, sixteen-year-old Hyacinthe, who was one of only two women killed at the parish. Before Hyacinthe was murdered on the 17 June, she had pleaded with Father Munyeshyaka to protect her; he would not agree to do so. Rose believes it was because her daughter had refused to sleep with him.

Fr. Wenceslas had the opportunity to chat up attractive Tutsi girls. Those that satisfied his needs were evacuated to the Mille Collines Hotel. Those who refused his propositions were not. These propositions were of course to sleep with him.

My daughter had resisted his propositions. She had refused to become his friend. But of course Wenceslas had hidden girls who had responded positively to his requests.

## A Plea for Action

We believe the testimonies of survivors show that there is sufficient evidence against the priest to warrant careful examination by both criminal and ecclesiastical authorities.

The question of why, so many years on, Fr. Munyeshyaka remains at the heart of the Catholic Church—which evacuated him to France and is paying for his defence lawyers—is a source of much anger and pain among survivors. They have experienced further frustrations at the repeated delays in the legal case in France, a country which itself has an historical responsibility, not yet fully exposed, for arming and training the forces behind the 1994 genocide.

In February 1996, three survivors of Ste. Famille travelled to France to testify in a court of law against Munyeshyaka. But justice has eluded them. Josepha Umwangavu is one of the survivors who made the journey to France. She spoke of their efforts and of the disappointment she has felt since.

I was very pleased to go to France because I thought that the French courts would take up the Munyeshyaka case. I couldn't understand how he could continue to celebrate mass in France when he had participated in the genocide in Rwanda. I left France thinking that Munyeshyaka would be arrested immediately. But to this day, he continues to celebrate mass.

I greatly regret having wasted my time in going to France to testify against Munyeshyaka. It seems that the French court has taken no notice of what we said. If the judges didn't think that our accounts were evidence enough, why haven't they come to Rwanda to carry out their inquiries? What more do they need? Why hasn't the Catholic Church done anything to follow up the Munyeshyaka case? For this reason, I can't go back to Church to pray. I daren't go back to Ste. Famille church. As soon as I see it, I remember all the Tutsis who died there in the presence of Munyeshyaka, who is now being protected by the Catholic Church.

*African Rights* hopes that the French judicial system will employ all the means at its disposal to establish the strength of the evidence against Munyeshyaka. Most importantly, it should endeavour to go to Kigali to meet with survivors of the massacres at the Parish of Ste. Famille. Only then will Munyeshyaka's accusers be convinced that the case has been properly investigated.

The survivors of Ste. Famille have spoken of the most traumatic events of their lives; it is vital that their testimonies are met with an appropriate response. Fr. Célestin Hakizimana was in charge of the nearby church of St. Paul and did his best to protect, feed and comfort the refugees at Ste. Famille. When he visited them during the genocide he was unable to offer them an explanation for Father Munyeshyaka's behaviour.

I never saw Fr. Munyeshyaka kill anyone but I can say that he didn't behave like a priest during the genocide. The interahamwe regarded Munyeshyaka as a brother.

The refugees at Ste. Famille suffered greatly. The militiamen went there whenever they wanted and separated people, taking those to be killed. Many of the interahamwe militiamen treated it as their home and Fr. Munyeshyaka, who was responsible for these refugees, made no attempt to stop them.

His language frightened the refugees during the genocide. They had come to him for protection. But when he spoke to them he said: "You, *Inyenzi*, what have you run away

from?" When a person was called an *Inyenzi* during the genocide it was done to denounce them. I often heard him saying this. It showed that Munyeshyaka didn't like the refugees.

Munyeshyaka liked to work closely with senior officials, even ministers. He continued his contacts with officials during the genocide. During this time it was the military officials who came to see him at Ste. Famille. Each evening, Munyeshyaka would cook meat, and he would get beer, or more often wine, to entertain the soldiers at the end of their working day. I saw soldiers relax at his home every evening. When they had finished eating, they certainly wandered around amongst the refugees.

Whilst he was preparing good meals which were given to the soldiers with a warm welcome, just next to him, there were people, and especially children, who were dying of hunger and didn't even have water to drink. When I visited the refugees, they used to ask me why Munyeshyaka didn't do anything to save them even though he was friends with the killers. When they asked me this I didn't know what to reply.

I hope that Fr. Munyeshyaka will be brought to justice.

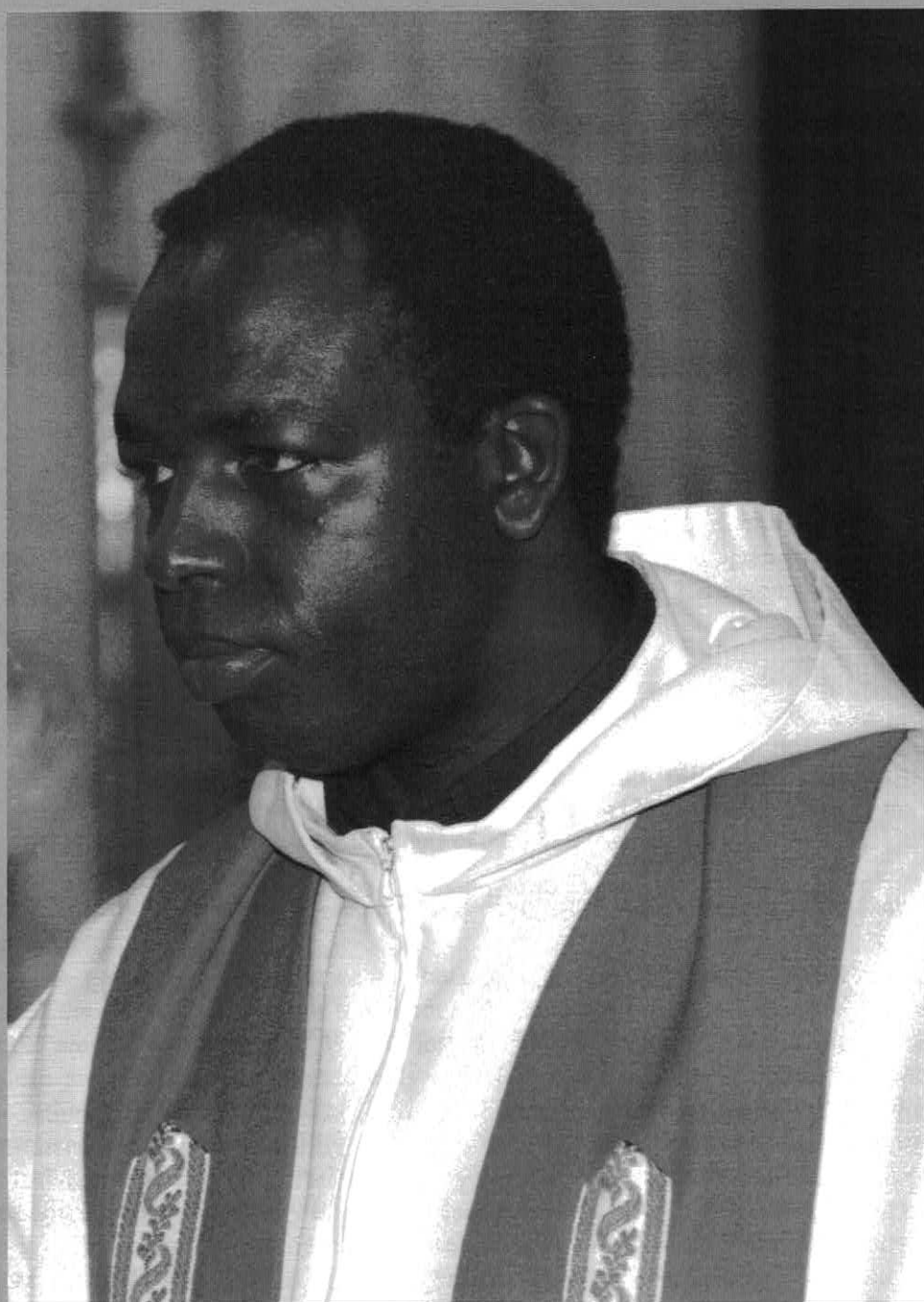
But alongside the testimonies describing the callous attitude displayed by Fr. Munyeshyaka at Ste. Famille, stands the evidence of his political allegiances, spelled out in a letter to the Pope, dated 2 August, to which Munyeshyaka was a joint signatory with 28 other priests.

Everybody knows, except those who do not wish to know or understand it, that the massacres which took place in Rwanda are the result of the provocation and of the harassment of the Rwandese people by the RPF. To speak of genocide and to insinuate that only Hutus killed Tutsis, is to be ignorant [of the fact] that Hutus and Tutsis have been each other's executioners. We dare even to confirm that the number of Hutu civilians killed by the army of the RPF exceeds by far the Tutsi victims of the ethnic troubles...

Evidently Munyeshyaka's experiences of the work of the militia at Ste. Famille had limited impact.

The genocide was the crisis which exposed the depth of the involvement of the leaders of the Catholic Church in the history of ethnic politics in Rwanda and the resulting divisions among its members. For almost a century, bishops, priests and nuns, both Rwandese and foreign, had been openly involved in the country's politics and practised routine ethnic discrimination. The close ties between the Church and State inevitably compromised the Church's ability to take a stand against the killings as an institution. Without the guidance of their leaders, members of the clergy acted upon their own personal convictions and loyalties. Many Church leaders went into exile in July 1994, as the genocide was brought to an end. Fr. Munyeshyaka's reluctance to acknowledge the nature or extent of the 1994 genocide was certainly shared by many other members of the Rwandese Catholic Church. But there were others who suffered at the hands of the interahamwe militia and others still who were killed for their courage or their ethnicity. Many clerics used their position to save lives with individual acts of heroism that will never be forgotten by survivors. Instead, Fr. Wenceslas Munyeshyaka is remembered by Jean-Bosco Muganza and many other survivors of Ste. Famille as the priest who: "directed the militiamen; demoralised the refugees; and sowed hatred between the Hutu and Tutsi refugees."





Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka giving communion at the Parish of Andelys in Evreux, France, March 1998

April 1999  
ISBN 1 899 477 28 4

*African Rights*  
11 Marshalsea Road  
London SE1 1EP  
Tel: 44 (0)171 717 1224  
Fax: 44 (0)171 717 1240  
email: [afrights@gn.apc.org](mailto:afrights@gn.apc.org)  
web: [www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~afrights](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~afrights)