



A civil war turned genocidal, costing up to a million Tutsis their lives: Skulls of victims of a massacre in Kigali

Blood on the Altar

Rwanda: What did you do in the war, Father?

HE IS A BELOVED FIGURE IN THE southern French village of Bourg-St-Andéol. Several times a week, as morning sunlight filters through the yellow stained-glass windows of a 12th-century church, Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka, 37, leads his worshipers through the masses that have regulated the rhythms of life here for centuries. For the past two weeks, the Rwandan priest has also been obliged to participate in a different sort of ritual. Every morning after breakfast, he checks in at the local gendarmerie—obeying a court order aimed at preventing him from fleeing France. Munyeshyaka has been identified as one of 432 people sought by the Rwandan government for allegedly planning or participating in the 1994 genocide in which as many as 1 million Tutsis died.

The case has embarrassed Roman Catholic authorities and focused attention on alleged crimes by members of the clergy in the Rwanda bloodbath. According to the London-based human-rights organization African Rights, at least 40 Rwandan priests and other religious figures abetted the genocide. Some of them are in Rwandan prisons, but many others escaped. The group has gathered evidence against two priests reportedly living in Rome, two nuns in Belgium and a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who is said to have fled to Chicago. The group's allegations were among those that led police to arrest Munyeshyaka on July 28. He spent 15 days in jail before being freed pending an inves-



'They're going to pay': Munyeshyaka

tigation. "We're talking about nuns who doused petrol on their parishioners and burned them alive," says African Rights director Rakiya Omar. "priests who killed fellow priests, people who went out of their way to murder dozens, hundreds, thousands of people."

Munyeshyaka was the priest of Sainte Famille Church in Kigali, where 18,000 Tutsis and Hutus sought refuge during the four-month-long civil war. Tutsis who survived under his protection described the priest as a power-crazed thug who swaggered through the church corridors wearing a flak jacket and carrying a pistol in his belt. He allegedly helped the Rwandan Army and the Hutu militia identify sympathizers of the Rwan-

dan Patriotic Front, the Tutsi-led rebel force. Witnesses describe him pulling Tutsis out of hiding places and turning them over to be shot. Five witnesses claim that Munyeshyaka offered protection to Tutsi girls who agreed to sleep with him—and condemned to death those who refused.

Prayer vigils: Munyeshyaka calls himself a hero. "Out of the 18,000 people in the church, very few died," he says. "Both the RPF and the militias wanted to kill people inside the church. The Hutu and Tutsi refugees wanted to kill each other. But I calmed them down. I said, 'This is stupid. We're all victims.'" The priest denounced the accusations as propaganda inspired by the Rwandan government. "In Rwanda there are organizations of paid accusers," he says. He scoffs at charges that he offered protection in exchange for sexual favors. "How could I have done it with all these people around?" he says with a dismissive laugh. "There was barely any room to sleep."

French Catholic authorities have stood by the beleaguered priest. A missionary order helped Munyeshyaka get a visa to flee the war zone, but the bishop of Viviers, who administers the parish of Bourg-St-Andéol, denied that the church had "hidden" or "protected" Munyeshyaka and lashed out at the press for judging him before he receives a proper hearing. In Bourg-St-Andéol, many townspeople have also rallied round Munyeshyaka. Dozens of young Catholics hold a prayer vigil for him every Friday. "Father Wenceslas, we pray for you," reads one handwritten note in a visitors' book at the local church. "Christ was mistreated and condemned too." Munyeshyaka says he welcomes the investigation and has no intention of stepping aside. Then his face hardens as he aims a blast at his accusers. "All of them," he vows, clenching his fist, "are going to pay."

JOSHUA HAMMER in Bourg-St-Andéol