



A.L.F. Library

"Consideration for the Month"

April, 2007

In the February issue we chose as the monthly "Thought" for consideration from our library, a news release taken from the ENI (Bulletin-06-0926). A word of explanation is in order. ENI is an independent news agency covering religious, ecumenical and humanitarian affairs. It is an association under Swiss law whose members include the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Conference of European Churches. We counseled our readers to read it carefully so as to keep each person named in the release in proper perspective. When we used the news item in February, little did we realize there would be more information to follow so soon.

In *The Catholic World Report* (February, 2007), on p. 21 there appeared in a box the following news release with a picture of the priest, Athanase Seromba:

A Catholic priest has been sentenced to a 15-year prison term after being convicted of involvement in Rwanda's 1994 genocidal violence.

Father Athanace Seromba was found guilty by the International Criminal Tribunal sitting in Arusha, Tanzania. He faces an 11-year stretch behind bars, having been given credit for the four years he served while awaiting trial. The Catholic priest was charged with directing Hutu militia members in an attack on a church where about 2,000 Tutsi people had taken refuge. The Tutsi were massacred by gunfire and explosives; the militia then demolished the church building, killing any survivors.

The 82 year old Adventist pastor, Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, who was released the same time that the Roman priest was sentenced had been charged with the same identical acts as the priest. It was suggested that the early release of the Adventist minister was because he was in ill-health. This may be true as he has died since his release; however, there is also the factor of false allegations and the attitude of the leadership of the Church in this whole affair. Was there ever a full report of this incident given by the then editor of the *Adventist Review*? In the February issue, we suggested that the Adventist minister may have worked in conjunction with the priest as the charges for both were identical. This possibility we now conclude to be erroneous. If there are workers in Africa, or missionaries who have the facts, we will be happy to have the full and true picture. It might also be that the new editor could begin his service by

doing what the retiring editor did not do -- give a full report to the Church of the Rwanda incident. In current issues the fact that there are three living men who have served as editor-in-chief of the Church paper is being emphasized. This is true, but there is only one of the three - Elder Kenneth Wood - who ranks with those of the past. The new editor has yet to demonstrate his talents for such a comparison.

More on Rwanda

CATHOLIC NUN SENTENCED FOR GENOCIDE

A traditional court in Rwanda has sentenced a Catholic nun to 30 years in prison for her role in the 1994 genocide.

Sister Theophister Mukakibibi was convicted by a traditional Rwandan court of helping ethnic Hutu militia men to kill Tutsis hiding in the National University Hospital in the town of Butare, where she worked during the time of the genocide. She is the first nun sentenced by a Rwandan court for crimes committed in 1994.

The president of the local *gacaca* court in Butare said that the nun selected Tutsis sheltering in the hospital and threw them out for the militia groups to kill. The Catholic hierarchy in Rwanda has been accused of having close ties to extremist politicians and aiding Hutu militia in the weeks leading to the mass killings.

Last year, Father Guy Theunis, a Belgian missionary priest, became the first foreigner to face a *gacaca* court on charges of genocide. After strenuous international diplomatic intervention he was released by Rwanda on the promise that he would face the same charges before a court in his native Belgium. Two other Catholic nuns were found guilty by a Belgium court in 2001.

Rwandans are using the traditional *gacaca* courts to speed up the process of bringing those responsible for the genocide to justice. Some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in the 1994 genocide. Many of these people had sought refuge in churches (*The Catholic World Report*, January 2007, p. 18).

[The *Catholic World Report* is a publication of Ignatius Press, whose publisher and editor are Jesuits.]