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### **NO SANCTUARY MANY OF RWANDA'S CHURCHES WERE BLOODIED BY PRIESTS' ROLE IN MASSACRES.**

Julian Bedford - Reuters

Bloodstains and bleached bones around the church at Nyamata bear testimony to the horror that overwhelmed Rwanda and invaded its religious sanctuaries.

As in hundreds of other religious centers across the country, the genocide between April and July failed to stop at the wooden doors of the church in Nyamata, just south of the capital, Kigali.

Instead, machete and grenade in hand, it entered and drew into its deadly embrace hundreds of men, women and children who took refuge in the house of God, believing it would save them.

A deeply religious country, Rwanda is struggling to come to terms with the slaughter in its churches, missions and chapels, in which bishops and priests are implicated and the hands of many churchgoers stained by the blood of hundreds of thousands.

"The Church mirrored society," said Roman Catholic Archbishop James Griffin during a visit to Rwanda earlier this fall. "There were wonderful acts of individual heroism and sacrifice, even to the point of martyrdom."

But at the same time, "there were priests who remained inactive, there were priests who were forced on pain of death to act and there were, I admit, priests who committed heinous acts."

Many of the clergy - accused of cooperating with the killings by troops and militiamen loyal to the government of the Hutu majority - fled in July to neighboring Zaire or Tanzania as the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) neared victory.

Witnesses say one such man was Father Wenceslas **Munyeshyaka**, a pistol-packing priest who was in charge of Sainte Famille Church in Kigali, where thousands of Tutsis sought refuge. He, like others accused, has vanished among the millions who fled and cannot give his account. But witnesses tell this story:

The red-brick church complex turned into a deadly trap for many of the Tutsi men, women and children, they say. Hundreds were seized by Interahamwe militiamen and slaughtered. According to the witnesses, Wenceslas played an active role in weeding out young Tutsi males who disappeared after they were taken by militia.

"Father Wenceslas cleared the list of those to be evacuated by the U.N.," said Richard Nsanzabaganwa, who spent more than a month at Sainte Famille before U.N. peacekeepers drove him to safety.

Others said that the bearded priest, dressed in military fatigues instead of his usual black robes, finally fled Kigali shortly before it fell to advancing rebel forces on July 4.

A similar story is told about another cleric: In the nearby parish of Mibilizi, survivors of the mass slaughter say Abbe Laurent Ntimugura helped authorities track down those they wanted during the frenzy of bloodletting.

Laurent Nkongohli, of the human rights group Association of Peace Volunteers, said the Church was to blame for being too involved in politics and allied with the former government. President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu whose assassination on April 6 set off the butchery by Hutu extremists, virtually controlled the church and packed it with supporters, he said.

"Priests were not chosen on the strength of convictions but on their political acceptability. That was especially true of the upper reaches of the church hierarchy," Nkongohli said.

Vincent Nsengiyumva, Archbishop of Kigali, was also a member of the central committee of Habyarimana's ruling National Republican and Democratic Movement (MRND) party.

Nsengiyumva was killed with four bishops and eight priests by four RPF soldiers on July 3, a day after the rebels seized the government headquarters at Gitarama, southwest of Kigali. The RPF says the four soldiers were renegades, angered by the killing of relatives in the area. One soldier was killed by guards during the attack, and three escaped.

Meanwhile, the priests who fled their parishes maintain there was no genocide. In August, 30 of them wrote an open letter to Pope John Paul II, denying the massacres were genocide and saying they resulted from RPF "provocation." The 30, including Wenceslas, demanded an end to all talk about an international tribunal on the massacres.