



BROTHERS WITNESSES OF HOPE

2- BROTHER FRANÇOIS CARDINAL (1952-1992)



He gave his life like Jesus



Map of Rwanda



BROTHER FRANCIS CARDINAL (1942-1992)

On Mission in Rwanda until the End

1- A Beautiful Christian Family

In the Immense Territories of Canada, around the Middle of the 20th Century, many families devoted themselves to cultivating Vast Plots of land. In the village of Saint-Benoît, father Léopold and mother Noëlla



Saint-Benoît

form a Beautiful Family of nine children: together they loved each other, they helped each other, they lived a Simple and Solid Christian Faith. François was the fourth child: he was reserved, sometimes a little shy, he avoided Noisy Meetings; he rather liked to

do Manual Work, to be outside, to move towards Vast Horizons. Majestic Rivers flowed nearby, where Green Hills and Plains extended, and Vast Cultivated Fields where he could help his father with Heavy Agricultural Work. He willingly went to School, travelled long roads often covered with Snow or Ice and punctually fulfilled his Duty. He got along well with his Classmates and Teachers.

One day, a Religious Man arrived at his School: he was a Brother devoted to God who gave his life to the Christian Education of young people. Francis remained fascinated by this perspective: devoting his life to making Jesus

Known and Loved by children and young people, at School, in Sport, in



Leisure Time, in Adventures, and in Friendships. It all started close to home, then, one day, it would be on a Mission in Distant Countries!

With a little nostalgia, he left his family, whom he reunited with during the Holidays. His affection for his parents and brothers and sisters did not diminish, on the contrary it became more Mature and Interior.

2- The Formative Years in the Life of the Brother

From the small Town of Oka, he settled in La Prairie, cradle of the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Instruction in Canada. In those years, the Canadian Branch of the Congregation experienced a Blossoming full of promise: Dozens of Primary and Secondary Schools quickly sprang up, Boarding Schools full of Educational Activities, Editions of Books and Albums, Competitions, Meetings, Celebrations, - all, animated by Faith and Prayer. Vocations were multiplying and swarming near and far.

François moved forward serenely, more and more convinced of having found his way. "The young man (now aged 19) appeared to be a Calm, Serene and



Thoughtful Applicant in everything. The smile was reflected in this expressive face that shyness made blush easily. Not very talkative, he was Discreet, Friendly and a Methodical Worker. His intelligence was of the Pragmatic Type...".

Then there were the important moments of Formation: The Novitiate and Scholasticate. He deepened the Vocation of the Brother, undertook Religious Studies and familiarized himself with the Rule. He committed himself with his usual seriousness to his Religious Profession: he now became Brother François.

He was preparing for Teaching by studying Educational Sciences. He was first in Manual Labour and Sport. François was a Good Volleyball Player, especially because he was quite tall – almost 1.90 m. He excelled at Ice Hockey. It is delicate towards little ones, but Robust and Resistant towards adults.

3- The First Experiences in the Brothers' Schools

He was now ready for Direct Activity with children. His Superiors sent him to a School in the Big City of Montreal. Brother François came out of that First Experience, rather disappointed: The Asphalt of the City



Montreal

did not excite him, the students did not have easy Motivations, the Concrete Horizons suffocated him. His Direct Superior understood immediately: he transferred him to a School in a Small Town, Mascouche, where he would find a fatherly Director

and more Simple and Studious Students. The Community was very young. The Brothers were part of the City's Sports Teams: they brought a Spirit of Respect and the Results were Splendid, to the great satisfaction of the Coaches. Brother François had regained great serenity and could now consecrate himself definitively in the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, founded by Jean-Marie de la Mennais: he made his Perpetual Profession on June 29th 1969.



Francis' departure for Rwanda

The same year, Brother François volunteered to be sent to Rwanda, in Africa, one of the most recent and most difficult Missions of the Congregation.

4- Rwanda, a Beautiful and Tormented Country

Rwanda is a small Country in Central Africa. Its Territory is entirely



Hilly: “the Country of a Thousand Hills”. It is dotted with numerous Lakes rich in water; the Largest is Lake Kivu. In the game West is a Chain of Volcanoes: some reach 4000 m.

Many Wild Animals live in National Parks, including Mountain Gorillas. The Climate is both hot and humid and a Large Number of Vegetables could be grown. The Population is simple, welcoming and Very Religious, unified by the Language, Kinyarwanda, and by Centuries of Common History.

This land which could be a Little Paradise has been crossed by numerous Tragedies, some of which are Truly Terrible. Rwanda has always been a Country inhabited by Three Ethnic Groups: A Majority of Hutus, a Minority of Tutsis and, less numerous, the Twa. For a long time, they had found a form of peaceful coexistence, they spoke the same Language, they felt like a Single Nation.

Then, for various reasons, Bloody Battles broke out to gain or retain Power, Seize Wealth and control the Country. These Tensions were exacerbated by Euro-

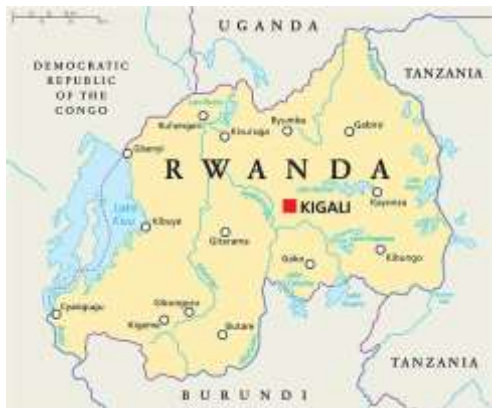


pean settlers, who sided with one or another Ethnic Group, pushing Racism and Opposition Movements to the extreme, to the point of Unleashing Hatred and Terror. Most of the Population remained Moderate and desired Peaceful Coexistence. Unfortunately, during these years, the Most Radicalized and Violent Fringes of the Factions predominated. The task of people of good will, of

moderates, of men of the Church, were to bring reconciliation and pacification to the Country. The other task was to bring Economic and Technical Development, also because Revolts and Violence arose from that Extreme Poverty.

5- Brother Cardinal's First Evangelization Camps

When Brother François arrived in Rwanda, the Canadian Missionary Brothers, notably Brothers Irénée and Gérard, had already opened, in



1968, a Beautiful School, Inyemeramihigo in Gisenyi, on the Border with Congo. The New Missionary felt at ease: he taught Mathematics and Geography, he announced the Gospel with simplicity and above all by example, he devoted himself to all kinds of

Manual Work: working the land on Terraces, starting to cultivate, raise Farmyard Animals; he renovated a Disused Mill, restarted a Cement Crusher and built New Premises. Unfortunately, it was precisely in these years that Riots broke out, with looting, forced migrations to neighbouring Countries and sometimes Real Massacres. To help the Country and



make the Population independent, the Brothers entrusted the Management of the Centre to Rwandan Teachers.

In 1974, Brother Cardinal was sent, with another Brother, as an Educator to a Youth Detention Camp in Mayange, Bugesera. With the young “delinquents”, they transform the Prison into a Garden: they demolish the Dormitory Barracks and build Brick Houses; they engage young people to cultivate the Fields and raise Livestock; they sold their products, investing the Profits in continuous improvements; they open Sports Competitions inside but also outside the Prison. Mayange became a place to acquire Dignity, the desire for the future, learning a Trade and also the First Approaches to Faith.

After three years of Passionate Work in Mayange, in 1977, when the centre was well underway, Brother Cardinal was called to a Large Technical School which was opening at that time, in the North of the

Country, in Rambura. The Brothers of the Rwandan Mission realized that it was necessary to help young Rwandans learn a Profession that could guarantee them a secure future through Rational Agricultural



Techniques, Modern Artisanal Professions, such as Mechanics, Electrical Engineering, and Electronics... Brother François was particularly dedicated to the Agricultural Sector. In addition to Theoretical Lessons, each Student was given part of the Field, where they could experiment with the Agricultural Techniques learned. Back in their village, the young people continued to grow the Products they would sell, thus experimenting with a way to earn a living. Tireless, Brother François travelled the Thousand Hills, supervised the Duties, encouraged, facilitates marketing, gave New Motivation, sowed words of Peace and Consolation. In addition, he created an Association of Former Students, with whom he remained in contact and continued his Educational Action: he started from

Evangelical Thought, proposed New Work and marketing Projects and indicated ways of pacification in these years of increasing violence.

The Large Technical School of Rambura was becoming more and



Rambura

more important. The Government wanted to take it over and transform it into a Huge High School, with Physics-Chemistry, Agriculture, Mathematics-Scientific and Literary Sections. For reasons of Prestige but also of Financing, in

1990, the Management of the Immense School Complex (nearly 1000 Students all Boarders) passed from the Brothers to a Director imposed by the Government. This sudden change of direction was also a way of exerting a more direct influence of the Regime on approximately a thousand young people who attended the “Secondary School Group”. This change would mean that the Brothers would be forced, with Great Pain, to abandon “their” Work in Rambura to begin another, in Kirambo.

6- Butamwa: a Laboratory of Hope

Near the Capital Kigali, in the Parish of Nyamirambo, there were 17 Hectares of Marshy Land, a Malaria zone, abandoned for years. A Missionary Father, Serge Desouter, of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), undertook to create a Training centre for young people in Agriculture. He encountered many difficulties and asked for help from the Brothers. Brother François was sent to Butamwa in 1980 to develop this Emerging Work. With a few Canadian and Rwandan Colleagues and Local Assistants, the “Rural Youth Training Centre” became a Model of Technical and Moral Education. Two-Month Courses were organized for groups of around fifty young people at a time. Each Week the students devote themselves to a Specialized Crop: Corn, Sorghum, Soya, Pineapples, Cereals, Bananas, Various Fruits, etc.

They prepared feeds for Small Livestock (poultry and rabbits) and



Large Livestock (cows, sheep, pigs). Every Week, a Van brought the Products obtained for sale on the Capital's Market: The Profits were reinvested in the Internal Activities of the Centre which were becoming more and more Autonomous. François also received help

from International Organizations, his family and his friends in Canada. With this Development, the Centre was also becoming a centre of attraction for Farmers in the Country. They received Initial Assistance to purchase Selected Seeds, Laying Hens and Livestock at a good price to start Breeding. They market their products with those of the Centre; they collaborate for the production of Animal Feed, for the Processing of Butter, Jam, Juices and Flours. The Centre's Apprentices and Farmers work together to clean up Marshes, Build Water Pipes and Repair Communication Routes. With the confidence he had gained, Brother



François managed to open a Small Savings Bank in order to offer Mini Loans to Farmers. The beating heart of this enormous work was Brother François: The Inhabitants of the Reborn Region considered him their "father" and greeted him with respect. They said with gratitude: "May Our Brother Francis reign among us! »

The “Director” devoted himself above all to the Centre: he followed his young people individually, he was always among them in the fields, he was the first to take on the most difficult Work. He spoke to them by example. When he gave them Agricultural Lessons, he also added Exhortations to a sense of Duty, Justice, Respect for people and things and Civil Coexistence. Every Sunday Evening, he brought his young people together to discuss the Gospel or the Values inspired by it. Spontaneously, young people came together in moments of Prayer and Celebration, especially at the end of their Internship. Then they gave free rein to their gratitude, particularly to their “father” Director, with accents full of emotion.



Our Missionary was loved and esteemed by his Brothers: he was Elected to the Provincial Council, where his Opinion, full of Practical Wisdom, was well listened to. He was very close to the young Rwandan Brothers: he welcomed them during Vacation Periods, for Practical Apostolate Courses and was interested in New Vocations. In all this

enormous work, Brother François advanced at a forced pace despite Health Problems: Back Pain, increasingly Severe Attacks of Malaria. When he returned to Canada (every 2 or 3 years) to see his family again, update his Brothers on the Mission, asked for help with New Machines... he took the Opportunity to seek Treatment, but his thoughts were still there, in his Rwanda; he only aspired to return to his Boys and Farmers as soon as possible.

Brother Francis was not very inclined to open up about his most Intimate Spiritual Life, but we perceived its depth in his intense Prayer, in his long pauses in Adoration before the Eucharist, in his familiar attendance at the Gospel, put into practice to the letter, in his Assiduous Participation in Daily Mass: this was the Source of his Total Dedication to the extreme.



“Every Day he communicated with the one from whom he expected the necessary strength to take on a New Day with all that it would entail. You just had to look at him in the Chapel. Straight in

his chair, his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle for long moments. From his Justice in the relationship with the Lord Jesus was born his Justice in the relationship with others... Every Sunday Evening, he brought together his Trainees to communicate to them the Great Principles of Christian Life. Very quickly, we noticed a Beneficial Development in the lives of these young people. It was practically at the end of a Last Meeting on the Gospel that he was struck to death.” (Brother Paul Latraverse)

7- Persecution: The Circle Narrows

From 1990, Rwanda was hit by a New Wave of Violence: Ethnic Tensions worsened, Refugees exiled years earlier started a Real War which was opposed by the Government, with the interference of other Nations... Again Evacuations, Violence, Hunger, Increasing Hatred, fuelled by Media Campaigns of Terror. As Brother François continued his Work,

he began to realize that he too was entering a circle, where he was exposed ever closer to danger. His Brothers felt threatened, but they saw



that he was still moving forward, without calculating the reactions of the people his peace action could disturb. What accusations could be made against him?

○ It did good for everyone, regardless of Ethnicity, Background or

Political Orientation.

- He was on the side of the Poor, of the Small Farmers, of those Left Behind, brother of all.
- He defended Victims of Injustice when Authorities abused their Power, in the Region's Peasants' Council.
- Due to its neutrality, the Butamwa Region was not well viewed by Violent youth Groups.
- The Rural Youth Training Centre welcomed everyone, without checking the Ethnic Origin written on the students' Identity Cards.
- The Centre's Recruitment was carried out at the Parish Level and with Christian youth Movements: Catholic Action, Xavéri, Renewal in the Spirit, Scouts, etc.

Brother Cardinal enjoyed enormous respect in the Region, especially among Small Farmers and the more moderate and Religious Population. By eliminating him, the Regime would have terrorized and enslaved all those who did not share the extremist and violent positions of the most Racist fringes. Brother François became the symbol of a Society

of Conciliation, Justice, Development, coexistence inspired by the Gospel, which opposed a Regime of Vengeance, Injustice and Greed. “We have to make it disappear, even Physically. »



The signs of persecution were increasing. “For three or four Months, he himself had started to feel threatened. I spoke with him about the Projects on the Mission, on the Centre and

the threats circulating against him. He could come back to Canada. He knew very well what he was doing by staying there and continued his work for the Farmers, for the Young people of the Centre and for the Population of the Butamwa Region.” (Br. Robert Gonnevillle)

He himself clearly analysed the Events. He wrote to his Mother a few days before his death: “Many Soldiers left the Army for Politics. The real reasons that led to the War were coming to light. As long as Injustice persisted, as long as money was man's only god, Respect and Forgiveness would be difficult. Despite the somewhat difficult context, we continued to train young Farmers. »



His fate was sealed: in recent Months, his Telephone wires had been cut several times. On October 28th and 29th, 1991, a disturbing event occurred. “A gang of around Twenty Bandits armed with Grenades operated near Our Centre. The Farmers deputized the Authorities by killing Six

Bandits. They were looking for others... Providence was there to protect us. Who was the Real Target?" (Letter to his Mother)

8- The Murder of a Righteous Man

Brother François prepared to die. In Canada, he told his parents who warned him of the danger of returning to such an Unstable and Violent Country: "If we had to flee every time they threatened us, the Poor People would always remained abandoned." And to his sister, shortly before taking the plane for the Final Departure, placing a hand on her shoulder, he whispered: "Would you abandon your loved ones when they need you the most?"

It was Sunday Evening, November 29th, 1992. Brother François ended his Weekly Exhortation on the Gospel. In particular, on this day, we commemorated the Founder of the Brothers, the Venerable Jean-Marie de la Mennais, of whom he felt himself to be a Humble and Ardent son. He was about to sort the Centre's Papers and Accounts when he heard Suspicious Noises. He came out with a Shotgun and fired a few Shots into the Air. He waited a little: he didn't feel any reaction. He returned to the Office. The Bandits, numbering 6 or 7, some in Military Uniform, came out and shoot him. The Large Caliber Bullets hit him in the Lower part: one hit the Femoral Artery. Brother Cardinal bled out almost immediately. A serene smile remained on his face. Meanwhile, the students, their faces on the glass, stare in Astonishment. A young Brother tried to come to his aid, but he was shouted to go away.



Who were the killers? Nothing clear emerged from Official Investigations, closed before the Genocide. From certain Independent Journalists (who paid for their denunciations with their lives) and eyewitnesses, we could propose this Reconstruction:

- A Group of Bandits was sent by some Important Person annoyed by the action of Brother François.
- To obtain Weapons of War and Uniforms, the killers had to have contact with Elements of the Army.
- They did not act to recover the Stolen Goods: they took away little money but mainly Documents: they did not steal all the money (from the Small Bank), nor the expensive Electronic Instruments.
- The Testimonies found specify: “Our Mission was to kill him, even if there was nothing to steal.”

Again, the question: “Why was he killed?” » And we answered: Because of the Christian Message of Justice, Fraternity, Promotion of the Lowly and the Poor, the Work of Reconciliation, which Brother Cardinal embodied in his life and disseminated around him. We offer you some Testimonials:



Genocide Memorial

" Brother. Cardinal took the side of the Poor, the Oppressed of the Regime. Revealed Blatant Injustices against the Poor to the Authorities. He denounced certain Attitudes and even Unjust Measures, going as far as Oppression, which he witnessed." (Brother Gaston Boucher)

“Here - in Rwanda, in these years - the committed Christian who worked to unite Farmers, who tried to facilitate access to credit and land, who were aware of the problems of people displaced by Ethnic Conflicts, who educated young people in Truth, Justice, Respect for people and things, did not take Innocent Actions without consequences. Nothing was innocent here.” (Michel Courtemanche)

“His mistake was to have repeatedly released students who had been imprisoned on pretexts, but whose real reason was Ethnic. Brother Cardinal opposed the enlistment of his young men in Extremist Squadrons.” (Jean-Paul Kimonyo)

“Respect for the dignity of Farmers and Social Justice were his strong points. We received his Testimony as a Religious man committed to the service of the human dignity of Farmers and Social Justice as the most Beautiful Legacy he left us”. (Brother Gabriel Lauzon)



François in Rwanda 1996

“Like him, let us put ourselves at the Service of the Poorest, to help them become aware of their Dignity. Like him, we are not afraid to take the side of those who suffered Injustice. Like him, we worked

for the development of united people, where everyone was respected for who they were. Like Christ, Brother Francis offered his life for the Country which had become his homeland”. (Mgr Giuseppe Bertello, Apostolic Nuncio)

Brother François was killed because his Christian Faith put him in Direct Conflict with those who opposed it: those who wanted Racism

against respect for each person, hatred against Fraternity without Distinction, Exploitation against the Development of Poor, Oppression against Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

9- Hopeful Celebrations

All the Religious and Civil Authorities were present at his Funeral which took place in Nyamirambo, his Parish, near Kigali. A huge crowd participated with emotion in the Funeral Rite presided over by the Archbishop of Kigali, surrounded by the Apostolic Nuncio and other Bishops. Around forty Priests concelebrated, many Religious men and women were present. The Poor people came to greet their “king” with emotion. Pope John Paul II also sent a Message of Esteem and Condolences.



From that Generous Sacrifice which came to the gift of life, everyone hoped that a path of Peace could open up, to put an end to the Increase in Violence. Words of Reconciliation resonated: “We must condemn the use of Violence, Extermination, and Revenge. All together with courage, like Brother Cardinal, we must promote all the paths that lead to Peace and Reconciliation, in Dialogue and Respect for others. » (Father Yvon Pomerlau)

Another Religious service took place in Nyundo, Presided over by Bishop Wenceslas Kalibushi. Many Authorities were present, but especially his closest friends: The Workers and Students of Butamwa. At the end of the Ceremony, following the Traditional Rwandan Rite, each person threw a handful of Earth into the Tomb, on the Body of Brother François: His Martyred remains became the Grain of Wheat of the Gospel which dies underground to carry much of fruit.



Our Lady of Kibeho

But would it really bear fruit? After only a year and a few Months, hell would be unleashed on Rwanda, a Genocide of Unimaginable Proportions, with frightening Massacres causing Hundreds of Thousands of Deaths, as the Virgin Mary announced during her appearance in Kibeho, a Small Town in Rwanda.

We do not know God's plans and times. However, we are certain that the seeds of good sown by Brother François would bear fruit: it would be a process of Reconciliation and Justice, the ability to forgive enemies, an Education of youth which brought values



Catholic Youth Associations

of Respect, Fraternity, of Development, according to the “dream” of Brother Cardinal. We could glimpse these seeds of hope in the pacification of the Country, in the New Economic Development, in youth Organizations



New Youth Vision

in all fields - Cultural, Sporting, Folkloric, Professional - as in the splendid Association "Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle", in a Christian Renewal with a flowering of numerous Vocations in Religious Families, in Communities like that of Emmanuel, in Christian Associations.

The “Martyrs” of Rwanda have certainly contributed to this New Spring, such as the Rugamba family, Sister Antonia Locatelli, Sister Felicitas Niyitegeka, numerous Missionary and lay fathers killed in hatred of the Faith, to which we could also add Brother François Cardinal, Missionary of the Brothers of Christian Instruction.

Sr. Locatelli. Tomb



10- “Like Jesus, Brother Francis shed his Blood”

Even in Canada, his Native Country, commemorations took place at Funerals held in his favor. Many people participated in these Rites: his many brothers, his holy Mother Noëlla, surrounded by Francis' many brothers and sisters and a large crowd of friends. In particular, the Bishop of Saint-Jean Longueuil, Mgr Bernard Hubert, drew a parallel in his Homily between the gift of Jesus' life and the sacrifice of Brother François, who wanted to imitate Him to the end: “Like Jesus, Brother François Cardinal gave his life.”



*Noëlla, **M**other of
Br. François*

We ended with the Tribute dedicated to him by the Canadian Missionary Brothers, who wanted to leave the remains of their Heroic Brother in Rwanda (in Nyundo), donating to this land the most precious Relic of their Mission.

“We remembered this 50-year-old son, so loved by his venerable mother and his beloved brothers and sisters.

- *We remembered this Martyr for Social Justice in a Country that adopted him 23 years ago. The Brothers of Christian Instruction*

are mourning one of their own. They felt both Impoverished and Honored.

- *Our Founders, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes, had already wanted their Spiritual Children to have the Courage to go as far as Heroism. Today they have found a Hero.*
- *The numerous Testimonies of Solidarity and Regret received from all sides prove that the Poor and the Oppressed have lost their Courageous Defender.*

In fact, Brother François was a “Martyr”, a “Witness” that the Rights of the Poor and the Least must be Defended, even at the Cost of his Own Blood.”



A MORE DEVELOPED BIOGRAPHY HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY THE POSTULATOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, ROME

BROTHERS WITNESSES OF HOPE COLLECTION

N°1 – Brother Zoël HAMON

No. 2 – Brother François CARDINAL

