

Genocidaire priest Munyeshyaka ex-communicated : How it unfolded

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“Claudine, truly, if I am let off, I will give you a second child...but this time I want a girl;” reads a transcript from French judicial authorities retrieved from a telephone conversation between Catholic priest Wenceslas Munyeshyaka and someone believed to be his mistress.

The mistress is identified in the transcript as Claudine Mukakarara, and this conversation was taken as admission on the part of the priest to have breached the vow of celibacy that binds all Catholic priests.

Just like that, he was ex-communicated by the church that had remained protective to

him, even when he faced the most heinous of crimes – genocide and crimes against humanity – and had remained in active practice in France until last week.

Tried and convicted in absentia by Gacaca courts in 2006 for genocide-related charges, Munyeshyaka faced more charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

The UN tribunal later referred his case to the French judiciary which in 2015 dismissed it despite overwhelming evidence, attracting uproar from survivors of his crimes and the government of Rwanda.

The former vicar of Sainte Famille Church in 1994 has since remained in France where he continued to serve as a priest in different parishes such as Gisors Vallee d’Epte and Plateau d’Étrépagne parish.

He was serving at Saint-Martin de la Risle until his excommunication last week by Bishop Christian Nourrichard of Evreux parish.

He was dismissed from priestly duties and prohibited from conferring any sacrament or celebrate them after having admitted that he has sired a son, now 11 years.

According to French media, the decision was taken after Munyeshyaka “registered in the civil status registers of Gisors an acknowledgment of paternity on a son, born in July 2010, from an affair he maintained in Gisors.”

The lively relationship he enjoyed with the reported mother of his child is proven by *The New Times*’ access to copies of transcribed discussions that Munyeshyaka had with Mukakarara by telephone in September 2014.

According to the transcript from the French prosecution, in the conversation that lasted 10 minutes and 22 seconds, on September 27, 2014, he called Mukakarara saying “Mimi Cherie, Louise just called me, I am moved, she told me that I will have my answer on Tuesday, she even gave me her son who assured me that I will have the answer not later than Tuesday. He is the one who is going to appear in my defence. He is now 39 years old, meaning that he was 19 at the time.”

It is believed he was preparing for his case, trying to recruit defence witnesses on whose testimonies French courts based to acquit him of his role in the Genocide.

Mukakarara then asked him if he knew the witness, he answered, “I know him well ; he is called Hakizimana.”

He then says that he would put him in touch with his defence lawyer before he left the topic and started what seems like an intimate conversation with his interlocutor.

Munyeshyaka continued, “...Thank you very much, Claudine, really if they set me free,

I will give you a second child (he laughed), you are the one who showed me that path, but this time I want a girl.”

Mukakarara replied, accusing him that he only sires boys, “no, I want a girl,” he insisted, to which she responds that God will make the miracle happen to them.

The recordings were revealed by the French prosecutor Gerald Patrick in 2017, triggering an investigation by the church.

Munyeshyaka was granted the status of political refugee on July 30, 2021, by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), which enabled him to apply for a residence permit.

The one thing that haunts Genocide survivors who had sought refuge at Saint Famille parish, apart from the mass killings he ordered at the time, is the pistol that he always carried on his belt, even during the mass sermons.

Munyeshyaka, who is visible in many photos taken during the Genocide against the Tutsi brandishing a gun, has been pinned by many – including genocide perpetrators – on working with the Interahamwe militia to kill thousands within Kigali.

He was also seen on many occasions with senior government and military officials at the time, and they were always seen together at church premises where they picked people and took them to unknown locations to kill them.

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