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Genocide in Rwanda: twenty years later

Maureen Fiedler | Apr. 8, 2014 NCR Today

I remember the chilling news stories in 1994. There was genocide in Rwanda. Between 500,000 and 1 million Tutsis were murdered by the dominant Hutus in that country. This week marks the 20th anniversary of the beginning of that horrific event.

This week on "Interfaith Voices," I interviewed a BBC reporter who covered that story on the ground: David Belton. Also part of the interview was Cameron Hudson, the director of policy for the Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Hudson provided some backstory, noting that the old colonial rulers, the Germans and Belgians, had a hand in stirring up the hatreds and rivalries that came to dominate Rwanda after independence.

Most chilling, however, was the answer that came when I asked about the role of religious institutions in the genocide. Belton pointed out that the country was largely Catholic, but most Catholic priests and evangelical ministers fled the country. A couple of very courageous priests, including a Franciscan who sheltered him and his camera team, remained, come what may. As a result of the departure of the clergy, most of the massacres took place in churches because they became mere buildings, not true places of refuge or worship, and were not overseen by a respected member of the clergy.

The Catholic archbishop in Rwanda did not call out the genocide for what it was, even though the Vatican had named it quite plainly. Belton asked him why. The reasons are complex, but they boil down to this: He would have been killed. Not many bishops are Oscar Romeros.

Listen to my interview with David Belton and Cameron Hudson on Rwanda [1].

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Links:
[1] http://interfaithradio.org/Story_Details/The_Moral_Lessons_of_Rwanda