BEGINNINGS...
KABALE DIOCESE
(1973)
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INTRODUCTION

Beautiful Kigezi After having seen pictures of the unique splendour of this part of Uganda, a friend wrote: “From the pictures, all I could think was... ‘God smiled on this corner of His earth... and beauty was born.’” If this is true of the land, how much more true of the people! When one is given to go into the history of the Banyakigezi with all its great men, its legends, its joys, its tragedies, one cannot help but be impressed. And yet, to get the full picture, the Christian knows he must go beyond the appearances to see the invisible.

Amidst the ups and downs of human activity, amidst the natural calamities, amidst the turmoils brought on by wars, we must see that the Spirit of God hovered over his people. Indeed, what really matters is the action of the Spirit in all this. There is a new vitality, a new life, a new dynamism, and it is up to us to read the events as they happened and discover there an ever growing consciousness in the people as a whole of the existence of the Church of Christ. This new creation has gone hand in hand with the tremendous vitality of Kigezi society. There is no doubt that Christianity has profoundly influenced the Banyakigezi, but at the same time, they have given their own particular colour to Christianity. Christ lives on in the hearts of these special men that are the Banyakigezi. “The word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us...”

The emergence of the Church in Uganda as a whole and in Kigezi in particular can be compared in many ways with what happened in the Primitive Church. From the beginning, the new Christian community put all its strength in the building up of a more humane society. Long before the words “development” and “Africanization” were coined, these Christians understood deep in their hearts that each and every Munyakigezi had his own personal worth and that his contribution had to be obtained if the New Kigezi was to emerge as a dynamic community. A Christian is a whole man, a man fully alive. That’s what the Kingdom is all about.

In this age of Ecumenism, our hearts are rightly saddened when we read about the constant bitter opposition between the Anglicans and the Catholics. The true Christian on either side instinctively shudders when he experiences the horror of the division that exists between the churches among the people of Kige-
zi. Christ has come in the midst of His beloved people to help them become even more ONE, surely NOT to oppose brother against brother like an enemy. Notwithstanding these scars, all the Christian churches have been unanimous in bringing a real Christian influence in many fields: children have been given a dignity never before known through Christian education; women have come to be acknowledged as the worthy complement of man through monogamous marriage; civil authorities have been recognized as the rightful leaders of the community; men have come to understand that they are responsible for their home, their village, their country, the world! We can only hope that the Lord will soon pour His Spirit of Love so abundantly over His People that all the Banyakigezi will become ONE big happy family and thereby become better able to take its place in the family of nations.

Before we carry on, a word about our method. Not every story is history. Nor can we expect every event to have the same importance. Therefore, our goal cannot be to establish with the greatest accuracy the minutest details of the past, but rather to bring out in any given event its deep meaning. The event becomes a sign, a symbol, of something permanent in a determined period. It is not the bare facts as such that matter but the collective awareness which was at their origin. Our task will be to look attentively at what did in fact happen and to discern what events, what movements, what slogans captured the hopes and energies of the people of the time so as to make them cross a new threshold in their march towards progress. We all know how much it takes to change one man, let alone a whole society. And yet changes involving radical transformations are there to see. Because we have chosen to be historians instead of journalists we have omitted details of no collective significance. In a word, we have left out nothing that we considered either symbolic or typical of Kigezi Society.

Kigezi welcomes careful drivers

Perhaps the oldest account on record that speaks of the People of Kigezi is the text we owe to a missionary, Father Dufays WF, who was a member of the second team of missionaries sent to Rwanda. Coming from Bukoba, they were on their way to Rweza which they reached on the 19th November, 1903. Here is a page taken from Fr. Dufays’ “Jours Troubles” where he describes what happened when they arrived at Rutobo through Kamwezi. The careful driver knows that Rutobo is the gateway to Kigezi.

“When we arrived at Rutobo in 1903, we went to pay a courtesy call on a lady called Muhumuzi. At the time we had no idea of her identity, Father Classe, who was in charge of our little group, led the way. She was kind, talkative and very curious; she wanted to meet all the Europeans of the group, but we could not see much of her because she was quite hidden behind a mass of stringy stuff coming down like a screen from the top of her head. But she did not want to let us have any food for our porters. As we were not very pleased with the reception, we decided to leave without saying goodbye. When I later found out who she was, any regret she may have had at not seeing us again was nothing compared to mine.

From Rutobo, we headed west. Finally we reached the shores of Lake Bunyonyi. As we had no means of crossing it, we had to go around it by the southern track, even though we knew there was an immense swamp across our way. It was hard going indeed. All we were able to do was six or seven kilometers that day, and that at the cost of more than eight hours of tiresome efforts in water and mud.

It was there that I had the dubious pleasure of taking my first dive, head first, into the mud. If it would not have been for the help of one of my porters, I would have surely lost my life in that treacherous swamp. I had climbed onto the shoulders of the strongest soldiers of our escort. As I was last of the group, somebody asked me to look behind. As I did so, my porter lost his balance and down I went.

That country is called Nدورwa and its population, with its long hair, did not inspire much confidence. They could be seen looking down at us from the hill tops as if they were getting ready for an ambush. At one point, I thought sure we would come to a fight. Some of our porters had stayed behind enjoying the fire in the fresh morning air. All of a sudden, a signal was given and a band of Banyendorwa came forwards shouting and brandishing their weapons. I immediately ordered the porters to get away quickly to join the rest of the party. As I came forwards, they stopped. We cautiously made our way back to the group with a watchful eye on the Banyendorwa.”

Obviously this passage reflects the spirit of the times when it was fashionable to write about adventurous expeditions in Africa. But the fact remains it has a lot to tell us of what was going on in Kigezi at the time.
The passing visitors could not know what lay behind such a hostile reception. Over a period of years, bitter experience had taught the people of the mountains that strangers brought trouble. You cannot be exposed to constant raids without being affected. One day it was a troop of Banyarwanda that came to plunder and kill. They hadn't even recovered when a band of dreaded Pygmies fell upon them. Fear and terror gripped their hearts. And what was worse, there seemed to be no relief in sight. The first encounters with Europeans were no better: they felt utterly helpless against their fast shooting rifles. And if that wasn't enough, even nature seemed to turn against them. Like successive waves, calamity after calamity came upon them: the great famine of 1897, the locust invasion, smallpox epidemics... They couldn't understand what was happening to them. What had happened to the old order? Their world was upside down. It is no wonder they had become suspicious of anyone crossing their homeland. They had by then become instinctively hostile to newcomers.

The great lady the fathers had visited at Rutobo, Muhumuza, was clearly taking advantage of the situation. She was clever enough to stir up these hostile feelings but to her own ends. The exiled queen would stop at nothing to install her own son as the new king of Rwanda. She meant to crush any foreigner who had any semblance of authority. Nor did she have any scruples about "using" the Nyabingi cult for her own purposes because of its political undertones. This cult had a widespread following in Kigezi. It was believed that some people were possessed by the spirit of Queen Nyabingi. Their mysterious pronouncements were received by the ordinary people as oracles of the dead queen... If at its origin it was focused on the veneration of a former queen, it had now become for the ordinary people a desperate search for individual security, a sort of protection against relentless and merciless calamities.

In spite of its distortions, the Nyabingi belief did not blur in any way the high idea of God that the people of Kigezi held in common with other Bantu peoples. It is true that the cult had brought about a lot of needless suffering and that it had increased internal fighting among the clans, but together with the more simple family veneration of ghost-relatives (emizimu), these traditional beliefs had kept vivid a certain idea of survival after death and a deeply embedded religious sense. These were to be a valuable asset for their acceptance of the Word of God. But what seems to
THE PEOPLE ARE THE CHURCH

While the missionaries reached Mbarara in 1901 and Rwaza in 1903, it was only ten years later that they considered the possibility of foundations in the country now called Kigezi. With an acute shortage of personnel, the hierarchy of the time, Vicars Apostolic Streicher and Hirth, were not prepared to get involved in a territory that could possibly not be theirs. Only when the borders were determined could they take on their respective responsibilities in earnest.

But the Lord, He could not wait! There are no boundaries for Him. The time was ripe for the Banyakigezi: God’s plan was not going to be deterred. And so it was that something quite unprecedented happened. The Spirit of the Lord stirred up the hearts of some remarkable African laymen who would bring the Good News of peace to their brothers. When we look back on them today, we are filled with awe and wonder. What a great God who could make of simple men such giants in the faith!

YOWANA SSEBALIJJA, THE FORERUNNER

If anyone paved the way for the setting up of the Church in Kigezi, it was Yohana Ssebalijja. It is said that people gave him that name precisely because he was par excellence “the forerunner of those who were to come”.

The oft times decorated Muganda had had a long history of distinguished service to his country and to his faith before ending up in Kigezi. He was born at Buyego, near Nandere Parish. His father was the Great Chief in the Clan of the Fumwe (chiefet). In 1892, two years after his baptism, he began his career as a catechist at Kampungu. He went on from there to serve as catechist at Bukoba and in Ankole before the British administration recruited him into its service at Bunyaruguru. After several excursions into Kigezi territory... “He established himself at Nyarushanje in 1909 in the North East of Rukiga. Nyarushanje lay on the edge of the area under dispute between the British and Belgian Congo Governments... As many chiefs of his time, he had a church built on his own com-
pound. As it turned out, this was the first Catholic church in Kigezi. He enlisted the services of a private catechist to initiate willing Bakiga into the mysteries of the faith while he was involved in court cases and administration. He would then send these catechumens to Mbarara or Kitabi to complete their formation. After four years, about one hundred people of the area had come to be baptized. They believed in the Lord.

For both political and religious reasons, Ssebalija had made it clear from the start that he was categorically opposed to Nyabingi practices. Let us listen to him as he tells us of the arrest of Mukeigana who was “possessed” by such a spirit. She later embraced the faith in Nyakibale before she died.

“At Nyarushanje, I was told of a woman named Mukeigana, who was possessed by a wonderful Nyabingi (goddess or evil spirit), and who lived in Kafunzo village. I found her, arrested her, and seized 20 cattle and some goats which I forwarded to my master. I informed him that she made people throw off their obedience to us. He imprisoned her for a year in Mbarara, and confiscated her property. The Bakiga said that I would not live, having arrested Nyabingi! A few days later I was informed of another woman, named Kaziga, also possessed of Nyabingi. I found her at home performing incantations. When her men saw me they quickly reported to her, but I also moved quickly and found her casting spells. Ekirago (mat) had been placed on the door leading to an inner room, and she was thrusting rods at people in the outer room, through holes in the wall. The people clapped their hands and exclaimed ‘Kasingye’, meaning Long Live. I found her in the inner room, holding two rods. I gave her three strokes and took her outside. When night fell, she repeated her incantations in the room where I had placed her under guard, and she was whispering to the soldiers, “My brothers, have you come to see me?” I ordered her to keep quiet. Next morning I took her to Nyarushanje where I kept her for a few days before sending her to my master, who sent her to prison in Mbarara.

The country remained reasonably calm with all the Bakiga fearing me and wondering who I was that I did not fear the risk of being killed by Nyabingi! They themselves were extremely fearful of Nyabingi, believing that it caused diseases among those who refused to accept its authority and give presents to it.”

This document tells us a lot about the man and his people.

Ssebalija was not simply a “Sunday Catholic”. His faith permeated all of him. He had somehow experienced the Living Lord. He was an African, a Muganda, a layman, and a government official whose heart had been transformed by someone greater than he. Christianity was not just an exterior varnish: in all that he said and did, he tried to act like someone who really believed in the Invisible Lord. Yowana could not separate being a Christian and being an administrator. He was a christian administrator. No wonder he was not afraid of Nyabingi when everyone else was. No wonder he was so categorical about crushing the negative influence of these two women. No wonder he did all he could to stamp out the fear that was paralyzing his people. Another man would not have acted in the same way. Being a Christian made a difference.

As for the people, they had been for years at the mercy of uncontrollable and unforeseeable calamities. In their fear and ignorance, they had blindly resorted to Nyabingi for help. But to no avail. When Ssebalija appeared on the scene, he did not have to preach. All he had to do was to be himself. They instinctively sensed that this man carried with himself the answers to all their problems and the fulfillment of all their aspirations. Confronted with the threatening incantations of these sorceresses, Yowana knew nothing better than to act swiftly and destroy their hold on the people. Everyone, but especially the young, welcomed this return to peace and order. The change was long overdue. It was not surprising that before long a good number of catechumens had gathered around this government agent. Not content with the fruits of sound administration, they wanted the inner peace and strength that came from this man.

Good Bishop Streicher kept his fatherly eye on the happenings among the people of the mountains. In 1910, he sent Ssebalija an outstanding catechist in the person of Yohana Kitegema. He was to be followed by Augustino Kapeere, Matthayo Kayonza, Yosefu Lwanga, and Antonio Munwaza ... all Baganda catechists excepting Rafaeli Kabukuru, and Antonio who were from Nyarushanje. However, Kabale not Nyarushanje became the main center. When the boundary commission had finally reached an agreement over the disputed area, the saintly bishop came on foot with Father Le Tohic from Mbarara to get some first hand information on the Bakiga and their country. Some time later, in the beginning of February 1913, the bishop returned with Father Lefleur with the precise intention of setting up properly staffed missions.
Yowana Ssebalija tells us about this second trip of the Bishop and the moral influence he had on the people.

"Msgr. Streicher visited Rukiga while I was in Nyarushanje. From there he travelled to Kumba, Bufumbira, Kibuwa, and returned across Lake Bunyonyi to Kabale. In Kabale he found me. In that area was also a rebel named Rwantare. Msgr Streicher asked me to find a man to send to Rwantare. I replied that Rwantare was untraceable, and that it would be useless to send anyone. Nevertheless, he insisted and I found a man. The messenger found Rwantare and told him that Msgr. Streicher wanted him. Immediately, he stood up with his bowl of honey-beer and came. When I saw him I asked if he were Rwantare the rebel. He replied that he was indeed Rwantare but that he had not rebelled and that he had never encountered any of my messengers until that day. Other Bakiga confirmed that this was Rwantare. His toe-nails were overgrown and caked in clay, as he had been building a house in the papyrus reeds where he spent the day hiding. His finger-nails were also overgrown. I took him to Msgr. Streicher who warned him never again to rebel against the Europeans, to obey their orders. He then gave him six feet of American cloth and a letter to Mr. Combie so that it might be known that he was no rebel. When he appeared before Mr. Combie, no action was taken against him. He was told to obey the Government's orders, and he then returned home. The Lord is powerful! Those who trust Him are favoured by Him. He had carried out several expeditions against Rwantare, who had several people killed and their houses burned down. Here he was now, peacefully submitting.

When the Bishop left Kabale, he spent the night at Mpalo, accompanied by the Reverend P. Lafleur. From there he travelled to Mbarara via Rutobo. He was pitted for having to travel on foot through immensely hilly country, but God protected him well and he completed the journey without any hitch."

Ssebalija obviously had a great love and respect for his bishop. There were no priests there yet, but Yowana knew that his efforts had the blessing and encouragement of all that the Catholic Church stood for.

As we look back over the years, we can safely say that Ssebalija commanded a great respect and that his authority made a tremendous impact on the new Kigezi. This is even more striking if we recall that he somehow had to stand alone as the representative of the new order of things.

But can we blame Ssebalija for not sufficiently disassociating the Church from the State? All the Catholic leaders of the time were familiar with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter on the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal powers. More locally, in Buganda, the missionaries who had witnessed the havoc brought about by politico-religious wars never ceased preaching and putting into practice the luminous Word of the Lord: "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar — and to God what belongs to God." (Mt. 22:22). If the official teaching of the Church was so clear, we can rightly ask ourselves why it was that in practice Ssebalija felt himself obliged to act so vigorously against the Nyabingi cult and yet so favourably for the Christian faith in exercising his civil authority. Wasn't it because he was acutely aware that he stood for a new order of things, and more especially that he was the bearer of a new message: Peace, a peace that the world cannot give. He knew only too well that the new type of administration that he was introducing would be effective only if he succeeded in changing the mentality of the people as well. That is why the first enemy to conquer was fear — fear that had kept in bonds the tremendous potential of the people of Kigezi. When the new master set out to over-power the local cult and its leaders, it had nothing to do with setting up a sort of Kigezi colony: it was a matter of establishing true justice for everyone. If he promoted the Christian Faith, it was first and foremost to save the poor and the ignorant from being taken in by unscrupulous "leaders". If he himself always behaved like a honest and disinterested individual, it was to help people understand that the new order made it possible to be just. "Nobody puts new wine into old wineskins... New wine, fresh skins." (Marc 2:22.)

Going further, we may even say that it was a necessity for him to put an end to the Nyabingi practices. If he didn't, he could never have established his own moral authority to awaken a minimum of collaboration from his subjects. Besides, didn't Nyabingi herself polarize both the religious and the political?

One can only marvel at the man who accepted to carry out, all by himself, such a difficult task as being the first agent of the British Government without losing sight of his duties as a Christian. His rare common sense and good judgment dictated what was to
be done in any given situation, but it was his faith that inspired him.

The praises of our hero would not be complete without underlining his exemplary personal life. At a time when chiefs took advantage of their power to become rich, Yohana remained disinterested; when rich men took several wives, he remained faithful to his one wife to death; when judges accepted bribes, he was just to all; when men with prestige were tempted to sit back and take life easy, he was never satisfied that he had done enough. He was a true disciple of his Master who came not to be served, but to serve. No wonder people trusted him: they could always count on him to bring the best of himself to meet the challenge of the day.

A MAN CAME SENT BY GOD
HIS NAME WAS YOHANA KITEGANA

Yohana Kitegana is the great pioneer of the Catholic Faith in Kigezi, but unfortunately, he did not leave us anything in writing about those early years. We have, however, two different accounts of that period which give us a very good idea of our man. Without further ado, let us listen to our eye-witnesses.

The first one has been given to us by Paulo Muhimbe, one of the first neophytes from Kabale. His testimony is particularly interesting because he makes us feel the impact a true Christian had on the pagan people of Kigezi.

“When I was a boy of about twelve years old, I saw an old man with a beard coming along. He built a small house for himself on Kabale Hill. Every day, he beat the drum but we did not know why. Then we saw him coming to visit us daily. He would talk to us about God and he started to like him. We often went to his house. Our parents warned us to be careful. “This man,” they said, “might poison you or make you lose your ‘soul’ and become like madmen.” We stopped going to his house.

But he came again to see us. My brother had a big wound. Kitegana came to treat him. Once he got cured, our parents told us that if anyone of us wanted to pray, he could do so... boys only, girls were not allowed! However, Yohana was inviting everybody to pray. He was instructing both young and old, boys and girls alike, even little children. He was giving them pearls but the old people were scoffing at him.

One day some people organized an ambush to kill him. Somehow, he was delayed that day and eventually did not come. They got tired of waiting and went home.

After a year or so, Yohana left Kabale and set himself up on Rushoroza Hill. Already then many people were following him but they were not ready to be baptized. If they came to his instructions, it was because they saw in him a good man. It was at this time that I too began to follow his instructions regularly.

We did not yet know how to cultivate sweet potatoes, but Yohana had a nice garden of them for he used to cultivate a lot. Every time we went to see him, we found that he had cooked lots of sweet potatoes which he distributed to all of us. He was like a father eating with his children.

Once I was a bit older I asked Yohana to become a catechist and to build a church in our place. He accepted and visited us every day. At that time many people had started praying at the Protestants nearby, but when they saw what a kind man Yohana was, they came to pray with me. Some of the C.M.S. people heard of what I was doing. They took me to Rugarama telling me that they could give me some work. Once I got there they tried to force me to become a Protestant. I escaped. They went to the police to accuse me. Soldiers came and took me to prison at the Gomborora, then to the D.C. As soon as Yohana heard about it, he came. He found me in front of the D.C. and he explained to him what I had been doing as a catechist. The D.C. said that there was no case and I was free again. Yohana then told me that he would pay my poll tax and give me some clothing.

At the time, there were as yet no fathers at Rushoroza. The many catechumens were visited regularly by Fr. Lafleur from Kitabi. They were sent to Kitabi to complete their instructions.

The appearance of this old man was indeed something special in Kabale. Who before had ever seen a man of his age treating wounds, feeding children and taking a personal interest in everyone but especially the little ones? “By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (John 13:35) The Lord said this at the Last Supper. Somehow Yohana’s common meals around a pot of sweet potatoes were a foreshadowing of the sacred meals Christians would soon take around the altar.
made himself visit personally the principal families in the area. He was so worthy, so fundamentally good, so much a man of God in all things that he very soon attracted strong and deep sympathies. He was known by the name “Omureju” that is to say “the bearded one” (because of the beard he wore.)

There as elsewhere the main spring of his action was first and foremost prayer. His long rosary rarely left his hand. Next charity, as seen in his goodness, his generosity, his interest in the poor and the sick, his love for work, his complete impartiality, his total lack of arrogance towards more simple people. He knew that nothing is more incompatible with apostleship than scorn and disdain; whereas understanding, self adaptation, compassion for the weak make a stranger into a friend and further his apostolic work. Natives are always hospitable to a visitor in whom they recognize a friend. They are generous in their offer of food and provisions. In this way Yohana was made welcome in many parts. Everywhere and always, directly or discretely, he managed to leave a few grains of “good seed”.

At this time everyone in Kigezi was bewitched by the influence of one great lady, a rebel against all authority which was not her own, a remarkably intelligent witch, cunning, insinuating and with tremendous prestige. The country was restless and revolt endemic. Her name was Nyira-Gahumuza and she claimed to be possessed by the very fearsome spirit called Nyabingi. It did not take Nyira-Gahumuza long to realize that those who adopted the Christian religion were fatal enemies to her own influence and therefore, to be eliminated. For Yohana she was a very troublesome person.

In spite of everything, the work of our catechist and his few collaborators made great strides. After a few years, beginners and catechumens could be counted in the thousands. Chapel schools, still humble grass contructions grew in number in many villages. As the followers of religion became more zealous, so Nyabingi’s followers were heard more often too. Yohana was the inspiration, the father, and guide of this young, but very lively Christianity.

Although they were 150 km. away, the missionaries from Mbarara — the nearest mission — came to visit Kigezi from time to time. They administered the sacraments, gave appropriate instructions and offered the advice they thought opportune. But the ordinary everyday apostolic work was directed by Yohana. The
necessity of founding a missionary post became clear. However, the 1914 war delayed the project until 1923.

During those long, difficult years, the work met a host of obstacles. Protestants settled in the area with considerable material means. Their action brought Kitegana numerous and sometimes very delicate problems. A simple native, he found himself in conflict with the Protestant Mission which was well equipped and secure in official protection, directed by a group of eminent Europeans, rich in all human resources. Kitegana had none of these resources but he was convinced that by prayer and work, the mission of the Church would go ahead just as the same for he was not relying on human resources, but on God’s grace.

At last in 1923 at the end of November, three missionaries arrived to found a mission at Kabale. Yohana was delighted; his great wish had been realized. The fathers found there a fine Christianity flourishing with nearly a thousand people baptized and a few thousand catechumens.

Although he was well over sixty, Yohana did not feel he could rest on his laurels. His ambition was to push even further the great work to which he had dedicated his life. He wanted to lay at least one more foundation.

Early in 1924 a small caravan took Kitegana and his companion Augusto Kapere towards Bujumbira. After two trying days through mountains and valleys, they arrived at a place called Kidwa, on the shores of Lake Mutanda. They stayed with the inhabitants for a few days to have time to find their bearings. They had to build themselves a hut of mud and erect a temporary chapel of reeds.

Obtaining and bringing on foot all the necessary materials, then the building, took our pioneers only a matter of two or three weeks. Already the “prayer drum” had resounded calling to catechism. The beginning was laborious; indifferent surrounding, people unsympathetic to innovations, slow in making decisions and not very persevering. But the kindness of our catechists, the numerous visits which they made among the people to become acquainted with them — and the help of the grace of God — soon brought them a small nucleus of praying ones, composed mainly of children. As they had to sustain themselves, those in need, and the orphans who would soon arrive, they devoted several hours a day to cultivation. Our catechists knew how to wield a hoe; they were experts in good agricultural methods: their plantations of bananas, sweet potatoes, maize, beans etc... convinced the inhabitants that the newcomers were far from lazy and that they had decided to stay in the area.

Their life of prayer and work was a fine example for these people who had never seen such important men as these strangers seizing a spade and digging with such tenacity and with such wonderful results.

Yohana took care not to forget that material charity is one of the surest and most direct ways of reaching a soul. At Kidwa, as at Bunyaraguru and at Kabale, he treated sickness and especially wounds free of charge. Then while his companion took care of the day to day work of their new evangelical station Kitegana toured the numerous and beautiful villages of the region to ascertain which centres looked most promising for further posts as means became available.

Several times Fr. Nicolet came from Kabale to visit his children at Kidwa and to become better acquainted with this interesting country. His frequent tours in the company of Yohana led him to doubt that Kidwa was the ideal place for the future mission. Once again Yohana was the wisest and most enlightened adviser of the missionary. Finally, Mutolere hill was chosen. The ecclesiastical authorities and those of the Protosorate approved the choice. Mutolere supplanted Kidwa as the central catechetical establishment until the end of 1929. Frs. Nicolet and E. Klep and Brother Simon came to establish a permanent post which was to become the splendid mission there today.

Meanwhile there was a small group of good catechists. Yohana helped them to settle into well situated centers; then he left them under the immediate control of his faithful collaborator, Augustino Kapere. He himself had to return to Kabale. However, each term when Fr. Nicolet made his regular visit to Bujumbira, Yohana was invariably his loyal and valuable travelling companion.

From 1930, old age — he was almost an octogenarian — obliged our hero to be more sedentary. His deeply religious life intensified even more. While remaining the adviser and the right arm of the missionaries, the friend and father of all, he lived like a monk.

A few notes made by one of his best collaborators, the native catechist, Rafaeli Kabukure, bring this out: “When I, Rafaeli Kabukure, arrived in Kabale, in 1915, and found Yohana there, I saw
that he was truly a man of God. His words were not vain words. They were precious to all those who heard them. With his manner of teaching, never a day passed without our hearing words that gave strength to our hearts. His lips only uttered the words of a father.

His manner of working was admirable. This man who was already old, used a hoe better than anyone. He did not know what rest was. Then he was always walking through the famous mountains of Rugika. There was not a valley nor a hill which he had not crossed. Of his actions the most beautiful was prayer. He often spent the whole night reading and meditating the Gospel. Then, as the cock crowed, he extinguished his lamp and made his way to the chapel, where he prayed until daybreak. One would have thought that Providence had exempted him from sleep... and when he taught the Faith, one would have thought he held the whole of religion in his head.

He took very little food. Not more than two bananas, No sauce, even if there happened to be a very good one. Sometimes he went as many as ten days without touching any “bushera” (a kind of boiled native drink). His clothing consisted of an animal skin. He only put on his white gown on Sundays. He was not interested in fine clothes. What did concern him was finding the means for helping the orphans, whom he collected from all parts... To the sick his charity was boundless. He prayed for them and sought to find them some cure. There were not any hospitals yet or dispensaries in this part of the country. And God visibly blessed his cures. Accompanying him on his tours, I have often witnessed this fact.

One day when we were in Kijuguta village we found a patient with a severe attack of dysentery. He was lying down. As soon as he saw Yohana, the poor man cried out. “Oh! Master! There you are! Thank you for coming to see me! But I am dying! Only give me a cure which will save me.”

Yohana urges him to have trust in God, and to accept his will, whatever it may be... Then he turns to me and says, “Let us go out and find a medicine.” He picks a few leaves from a bush called “omusoroza”, crushes them between two stones, and brings the medicine to the patient. “Rub your hands with this,” Yohana tells him. “Have trust in God and you will be cured.” The sick man rubs the medicament in his hands. As for me, I was thinking: “What use will that be?” For, convinced of the inefficacy of this “omusoroza” in such a matter, I was inwardly scorning this... We return home.

The next day the man arrives; he has come to thank Yohana for curing him! And Yohana congratulates him, as is the native custom, then tells him it is God he must thank, not him... Myself, I was full of admiration for the way God hears the prayers of his servant, Yohana. Expressing my surprise, he replied, in all simplicity, “My child, everything is possible to him who has faith.”

A father from the mission asked Yohana if he would buy two otter skins for him. The latter hurries to find them. However, judging the price exorbitant, he leaves them. He takes his rosary and prays... The next morning, two superb otters, which have left the neighbouring swamp during the night, are there, astray in Yohana’s banana grove. He sees them and calls to us. We find him in the middle of reciting his rosary. “Come and help, children.” We soon killed the two huge otters. We realized that the Good Lord had sent them. And that, Father, is one of the things which I, Rafaeli Kabukure, saw with my own eyes in the life of our Yohana Kitenga.

The religious influence of Yohana was enormous. In all things he saw the interest of God and men’s souls. But this worthy pioneer of religion did not ignore the material needs of the people and country he evangelised. He was convinced that a minimum of well-being is necessary for the practice of virtue, just as St. Thomas says, moreover. Most of the chiefs liked to ask his advice. And he, while he respected in them the representatives of authority and received them with great dignity, did not hesitate to tell them his thoughts on the customs they should modify, the cultivation they should introduce, the methods they should use, the elementary principles of hygiene to observe in the construction and running of their homes, good administration of justice etc. etc.etc.

The Protectorate officers knew him, thought well of him, learnt to profit from his experience and in many cases did not scorn his observations. Also during his last years, the Government wanted to recognize officially his high qualities and noteworthy services rendered in Kigezi county. The Government decorated him in the name of H.M. King George V with the distinguished service medal of the British Empire.

In May 1939, this great old man, nearly 85 years old, this hero of Christ was seized by the sickness which was to take him to the Master whom he had so loyally and generously served since the blessed day of his conversion. His illness, at first mild, resisted all treatment then worsened, until July 27th, 1939 when this good
servant yielded up his fine soul to God in peace, after having piously received every help from the Holy Church.

During his illness, Yohana had maintained his calm and perfect possession of his soul in patience. Even then his rosary never left his hand and he prayed continually to the Holy Mother. The many visitors who came to see him were exhorted to persevere in their faith and to love their neighbour and their country. To everyone he said that he was departing with complete confidence in God and in his compassion.

Yohana Kitsugana was given an official burial in the cemetery at Kabale Mission. High mass was celebrated for the repose of his soul. It was attended by native sisters, catechists, a huge crowd of chiefs, children, and innumerable friends. Everyone accompanied him piously to his last resting place. All are convinced that the Good Lord has received in heaven the one they consider to have been a true saint of God."

Yohana’s “enormous” influence did not come to an end with his death. He was realistic enough to leave behind him a good number of helpers. He had always done his best to build up a team of reliable catechist to extend the influence of the Church up-country. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of these men who dedicated their lives to the service of Christ and of their fellowmen. We should like to mention Augustin Kapere (a Mugaranda), Antonio Munwewa, Yohana Rutimbiro, Yohana Tizira, Luka Kinya, Benedicto Birangwa, Cornelio Rukuba, Andrea Kwehungana, Louis Kanyire, Sipiriyo Kabakure, Amato Kagemura, Blazio Rugasira... With such a group of catechists, one can understand why the influence of that great old man was to last.

Perhaps what is most striking is the realization that an uneducated layman managed to combine a very busy life with a high degree of prayer and contemplation. His great zeal, his spirit of prayer were nothing else than the gifts of the Spirit bringing forth the fruits of an authentic charity. Among the many reasons we may bring forward to explain why so many people were attracted to the Catholic Church in Kigezi, we should never forget Yohana’s warm and dynamic personal presence and his constant prayer. He was truly a man sent by God.

JOHANA DID THE PLANTING
TANASI DID THE WATERING
BUT GOD MADE THINGS GROW

Atanasi Naluumba is another one of those great men who carried the torch of the Faith to Kabale Diocese. Before coming to Kigezi in 1919, he had been working for many years as a catechist in Buganda and in Ankole before the foundation of Kitabi Parish. Atanasi is said to have been born around 1880 in the Saza of Ma-wokota. He came from a very poor family and in his youth, he had to emigrate and settle in Nazinga. It was there that Atanasi started his life as a catechist in 1903.

As a young man he was fond of teaching and was quite good at explaining things to others. Although he was not a very educated man, he knew enough about Christ to understand that he could dedicate his life to his service. Like his close friend, Yohana Kitegana, he too did not want to be bound to a family: he did not marry so as to devote himself entirely to the task of preaching the Gospel. He was to remain faithful to his calling to the very end.

As we read the account that he left us of his life, we might be tempted to think that people such as he are the object of easy criticism. It may indeed be easy to pass judgment on his simple faith, but if we are honest with ourselves, aren’t we doing it to excuse our own lack of commitment and indifference? True men of faith always challenge us and stir us from our torpor.

Atanasi had to be a man of convictions: three times he was offered the post of Gomborora Chief and three times he refused it. He did not want to be anything else than a catechist at the service of the Church. To those of us who knew him, he left an example of great piety. Every day at dawn, in the mist of Kabale, Atanasi would be found waiting at the door of the church praying. He would never miss spending his half an hour with the Lord before daily mass. He had a great love and devotion to the Virgin Mary and to the Martyrs of Uganda. Every time he went back to Buganda, he would pay a visit to the shrine at Namugongo with some of his catechumens.

In 1969, after a short illness, he died at Rushoroza where he had spent more than fifty years of his life doing the work of His Master. He was buried next to his old friend, Yohana Kitegana, to await the return of the Lord he had loved so well.
Let's listen to Atanasi now as he tells us his own story:

"In 1917 I had a dream and that dream was about my going to Rukiga as a catechist! In that dream I saw a man called Kasisiri sitting by the side of a river with his feet in the water. He was weeping and asked me to go to his place to teach him the Word of God. I kept a happy memory of this dream and one day I met Yohana Kitegana in Buganda. I asked him about my dream. He told me that there were many people in Rukiga who wanted to know God. I kept silent...

When an European Administrator, Bwana Phillips, who was well known to Bishop "Stensera" (Streicher), was about to be appointed D.C. in Kigazi, the people of Mbarara told the bishop about some trouble that was brewing concerning our mailo land in Kigazi. Bwana Phillips told the bishop that he would look into the matter but he wanted a man to work for him. I was told to go to Villa Maria to see the Bishop. When I arrived, Msgr. Stensera was very pleased to see me. He said: "Go to Mbarara and from there carry on to Kigazi. Stay with Yohana Kitegana, who is an old man now. He is my right hand; you will be my left hand. Do the work the European D.C. is going to ask of you but tell him that you are a catechist. You will also keep your eye on what is happening to our mailo land in Kigazi." So I left Villa Maria to go to Mbarara.

But to reach Mbarara was not an easy venture at the time. There were two roads: one by Kabula, the other by Koki. Both were dangerous on account of the wild beasts but through Koki we could get food and water. So I took the Koki road. At one place called Nyaminyonga near Bukanga I spent the night with my friend but very early in the morning, at about one o'clock, I left the place to join the others who were going in the same direction. As I was going along, a lion heard the noise I was making in the tall grass. I heard a voice in my heart telling me to climb a tree. There was a tree with three branches. I climbed it in a hurry and waited. Then a lion came a-running! He bypassed the tree but came back roaring. Many other lions came. I do not know how many rosaries I said in that tree! I was very much afraid of them at the beginning, but after a while I got used to them. When the sun rose, I could count them: there were fourteen lions all around the tree. At about 10.00 o'clock, they left and after a while I reached the four other people who were going to Mbarara. They congratulated me and as they were pagans, they said that in our clan we had good mandwa as protectors. As for me I was full of thanks to Almighty God who had saved me from the lions like Daniel and to our Lady who had heard my rosaries.

We reached Kamuli near Kayondo. They wanted to spend the night there, but I wanted to reach Isingiro. I left them but after half a mile, I saw a giant hyena (orutagwe). I went towards some houses. I was very much afraid of it, but I could not run because it would have run after me. These are some of the hardships we had to go through in those days. From Nyamitanga, I went to Kitabi where a catechist took me to Kagamba. Nyarushanje was my next stop before reaching Rushoroza on the first of January, 1919.

I met with great joy my friend Yohana Kitegana. He was doing fine. He had some men working for him. He told them to stop and wait outside the house as we went in. "Do you know any of these people?" Yohana asked. I went outside and my eyes fall on Kasisiri. "I know this man; he is called Kasisiri." I had never seen him before and he had never seen me either.

"This is a sign from God," Yohana remarked. And turning to the man, he added: "Come and pray; this man is your catechist." From that time on, Yohana was to explain many things to me about Kigazi.

After two days, I went to see the new D.C. He had already received a letter from Nyamitanga telling him of my coming. He showed me the place where I would be teaching his guards and boys how to read and write. He told me that later on I would be teaching the sons of the chiefs as well, I reminded him that I was a catechist and that I might have to take Yohana's place. He asked that I warn him in good time. Anyhow I was to teach five days a week. The rest of the time I was free to stay at Rushoroza. I started work at eight in the morning and returned at seven in the evening. The D.C. had his guards escort me to Rushoroza. Sometimes I had four, sometimes six!

After a while, he brought me Bihwahwa and Cyrinana (Giramwara) both sons of chiefs of Bufumbira. Bihwahwa was praying as a Catholic while Cyrinana was praying as Protestant. After their course with me, they become gomborora chiefs. Bihwahwa was baptised Aloysi, while Cyrinana was baptised James. He became a sasa chief later on.

In 1922, the D.C. proposed that I take over the Gomborora of Kikungiri. I simply told him that that was not my work. Thinking
that I was afraid of the fathers, he offered me the Gomborora of Chah in Bufumbira. But this I refused as well. When I went to Kitabi to tell Fr. Lafleur about all this, he told me many things about the Baganda chiefs in Kigezi that I did not already know.

The following year Yohana got a letter from Nyamitanga asking him to start the catechumenate with me as their catechist. I had sixty six balondo that first year. I also taught them how to read and write.

At about the same time we opened a small school. I enlisted the help of some young men: Mattias Kahunire, Lazaro Kibanda, and a bit later, Barnaba Kasiyabo, Petro Begumisa who had left the seminary because of his very bad eyesight also came to help us run the school. Fr. Klep from Kitabi made sure that everything was all right. At that point, I left the teaching to them and gave all my attention to the catechumenate. Before long Fathers Van Ertryck and Bringuer came to see if they were ready to be baptized. Not one of them failed the test. How happy I was!

At long last the fathers who were to start the parish came. They were Fr. Laane, Fr. Nicolet and Bro. Theophile Martin. As soon as they arrived, people began to flock to Rushoroza.

But already before — as early as 1920 — many people had started coming to us. In the course of that year, Ssebalija left Kigezi to go back to Buganda. Some people were delighted with this news because he had always been an ardent proponent of our religion in Kigezi. One day a man did something very bad in front of many people. He said to me, “I curse your religion”, while licking a dog on the muzzle. He did this to show that a dog was far better than our religion. One of the spectators replied by saying: “Do you not know what happened at the time of the apostles, as we read in the Bible?”

That very day I went to Rushaki. Nobody had been praying there yet, but I found 110 catechumens. In the evening I went to Nyakibamba to find 63 catechumens where there were none before. When I went to Rubira on Sunday, there were 8 more. The Sunday after many people from Kashaakyo wanted to start praying. So when after a month Yohana Kigebane came back from accompanying Ssebalija to Buganda, he was very surprised to learn that I had a grand total of 600 catechumens! The news got around to other parts of Kigezi and they too started praying in great numbers; in

Nyakishenyi, Nyarushanje, Bukinda and Rubanda. After some time, we had catechumens all over the country.

Then there was the time we had so much trouble with the plots (mahika) for the churches. It was so bad that the D.C. had to settle the question himself. At Kigata, I was obliged to pull down the church that we had built a few days earlier. Father Goulet came to have a look and chose another plot for the new one. Strange situation when we know that the first plot had been given to us by the D.C. himself. It took a long time before the matter was settled but in the meantime, I was thanking God because we had so many enthusiastic catechumens. Even the girls assisted in building churches for them. Before long we had new churches in all the mahikas.

On feast days, the people would come from far to pray at Rushoroza. They used to bring firewood to cook their own food and sleep all over the kigando or under the buraza. On those days, I would teach in the church myself taking the people by age groups (bibiina). I did this from the time of Fr. Laane up to the time of Fr. Mischler. I even asked that other catechists be allowed to do the same thing so that they too could get used to speaking in public.

I thank God for the care and love He has shown me up until now and I ask forgiveness from those I might have offended.”

There are many elements in the life of “Tasni” that remind us of Abraham, the father of believers. For Abraham to leave his country the way he did “to go to the land I will show you”, he had to be very sure that God was someone real. That’s what we call a living faith. For Atanasi to leave Buganda, his home, his “ruto-kye” (banana plantation), his friends to go to a strange land, God had to be very real to him. Besides, for an African to choose not to get married when he could have married like everyone else, there has to be a very strong reason. Only a living God could be so exacting, so captivating. If we read Atanasi’s account carefully, we feel that he has somehow experienced God. To use Jung’s phrase, not only did he believe in God he knew Him, and we might add: and he loved Him with all his mind, with all his heart, and all his soul. Atanasi may have been a shy, self-effacing individual, but he has left his own unique mark on the Church of Kigezi, but more especially of Kabale.

Let us not be down-hearted if we do not find in ourselves such a powerful faith. “God makes things grow”. If we ask Him
with confidence, He will give to us too His Holy Spirit and we shall do still greater things!

A PAST SO FAR AND YET SO NEAR

Our survey of this first period of the history of the diocese would not be complete without a report from the only living member of the expedition that came to Kigezi in 1913 to get land for the mission. He is Fr. Pierre Etcheverry, the now venerable old man of 90 years who is living in Mushanga after having spent sixty years in the service of the people of Ankole-Kigezi. The past seemed to come alive for him as he told of his first contact with the great-grandfathers and grandfathers of the people living in our new parishes today......

"It was the end of October, 1913. I hadn't been in the country very long and I didn't know the language well when I was asked to accompany Fr. Le Tohic on a three month safari all around Kigezi. We were going to demarcate some mailo land (freehold) and to pick out some suitable sites for places of worship. Fr. Le Tohic told me that Bishop Streicher already had three main stations in mind: one for the Bakiga, one for the Bahororo, and one for the Bafumbira. I was naturally quite excited about visiting this promising new land.

When we left Nyamitanga, we made quite an impressive caravan. Besides the two of us, there were three Baganda catechists: Yohana Kitegana, Simeo Barironda and a certain Janarius. We had a dozen porters with tinned food, bedding, a couple of tents and all the little odds and ends that we thought useful. And last but not least, we had our donkeys!

When the people first saw us, they ran away. It was rather unusual to see European faces not to mention our strange donkeys. We ourselves were particularly struck by the many beehives hanging from the trees. It was not long before the younger men approached the catechist and we too became friendly with everyone. In spite of some wicked rumours they had heard about us, they came to realize that we were men of God and that we wished them every blessing. We were struck by their desire to learn about God: it was more than ordinary curiosity; they were definitely ready to commit themselves.

We spent twenty days in the Kabale area. A little church had been built on the Boma, but we knew that that land had already been reserved for government administration. From the beginning, Rushoroza was chosen as the site for the new mission. At first the people refused to give up their land for the mission mails. The District Commissioner came from Ikumba to meet with the people and to explain to them the advantages of the coming of the fathers. No one was forced to leave and in the end, they accepted to go elsewhere to find their land. There was plenty of it still available.

Nothing exceptional happened on our way to Bufumbira. But we were warmly welcomed by Mr. Combie with whom we had supper at Ikumba. It was Kidwa that we chose as the site for the future mission in Bufumbira.

After a visit to Rwaza (where Fr. Loubias had been killed) and to Nyundo (where the aged Bishop Hirth was staying), we made our way to Rujumbura. In Kinkizi, we pegged out a mailo land at Zoorma. When we had picked out a nice spot in Nyakibale, we went to pay a courtesy call on Makobore. The old chief gave us a wonderful reception. He was in an exceptionally good mood and went out of his way to make us feel at home. We were the first Europeans to enter his house. It was a huge palace with many rooms. We were offered milk and bushera. As we leisurely took our drinks, I could see many eyes peering at us through the many holes in the partitions. Makobore was delighted to have a long discussion with the very talkative Fr. Le Tohic.

We stopped in Nyarushanje to visit Ssebalija. He was extremely pleased to see his old friend, Yohana Kitegana. How proud he was to show us the first church in Kigezi. It was at Musungwa behind the actual primary school.

Our trip had been successful. We had been granted sites at Bukinda, Nyakiguwe, Kahoka, Nyakanyinya, Kahumuro, and many other places. With that and the openness of the people to progress, our hearts were filled with anticipation for what the Lord was going to do amongst His people in the hills.

To understand why Fr. Le Tohic and Fr. Etcheverry came to Kigezi to locate Freehold land and why some years later Bishop Streicher asked Atanasi to enquire about the matter, let's go back a few years.

In 1908 some Freehold land located around Lake Victoria had to be given up because there was a lot of malaria and sleeping sickness at the time, and the people had to move out. The Governor
had accepted the principle that those freeholds be exchanged against some other better located plots in other parts of Uganda. Bishop Streicher had set aside two square miles of these for Kigozi because he wanted to get things moving there as soon as possible.

After the journey of the fathers around Kigozi, the new Freeholds were not registered although the application had been filed long ago. As no government official was willing to finalize the matter, the situation dragged on and on for years. In 1918 Msgr. Streicher asked the D.C. Phillips about the matter and Atanasi was told to enquire about the documents. He discovered that some plots had been given to the Anglican Church while others were being used for rest houses (Migindi).

When Rushoroza was started, the question was still pending. In February 1924 the Provincial Commissioner visited Kabale. Fr. Laané went to see him in person, and his intervention proved to be decisive. The acting D.C., Captain Elliot, was asked to visit every county in the district and to hold a meeting in every one of the Headquarters with a missionary to find out whether the people had any objections to the Freeholds of the mission or not. The people who were occupying the land in question were asked to come and they were told that if they had any objection to giving up their land in favour of the Church they would be granted compensations. But there were no objections made! Everywhere there was a complete unanimity about giving the land to the Church. Everywhere it was the same refrain: “We want the fathers; we want them to teach us; let them come here and build their church.” Captain Elliot was so impressed that he told the fathers to start building at once without waiting for the official documents. The land titles finally arrived in December 1924.

The unanimity of the people was indeed striking. It was a sure sign of the new era. The ordinary people were aware of their needs and somehow they were conscious of the role of the Church. We must say that the obvious change of mentality was due to the persistent work of our dedicated catechists. But what a change since the time of Ssebaliija!

Who could have imagined that a handful of ordinary local laymen could have had such a tremendous influence? The Lord’s leaven was powerful indeed to raise such a dough!
II.

THE SERVANTS OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

As great as had been the work accomplished by these few laymen, it was not complete. Until the priests came, something essential was missing before we could say that the Church was truly implanted in Kigezi. We must never forget that the Church is not man-made: it comes from God. And the Lord has so arranged things that He has made Himself present to those who believe in Him through His priests. In the old days, people used to say that priests are other Christs. They were right.

Even if we consider what our catechists were best at — their preaching and teaching — we realize that the Lord was in control of them through his priests. In the first place, who had sent these catechists, if not the priests? Who had encouraged them and guided them every step of the way, but the priests? Isn't it significant that it was left to the priests to check the catechumens to see if they had received the message accurately? Somehow these chosen men were given the tremendous responsibility of making sure that the message was being handed on faithfully — as they had received it.

One thing no catechist ever dreamed of doing was to gather the Christian community around the altar, the table of the Lord. Although the priest is consecrated primarily to proclaim the Word of God, everything that he does is directed towards the building up of a Christian community of love where the Eucharist is celebrated. Through the priest, the Risen Christ is somehow "seen" to be present in the midst of his people to bring them all together in a living body. His Body! No wonder the priest is never so much himself as when he officiates. He knows he is taking Christ's place as He gives Himself in love to those who come to Him. The fathers would come to build all shapes and sizes of churches, but much more than that to build communities of love where everyone would be welcome.

Ideally, it would have been great to have Bakiga, Bahororo, and Bafumbira priests to do this work but they were still unborn in the womb of the nascent community. In the meantime, the Lord called men from many nations in Europe and America who did not hesitate.
to leave their homes to put themselves at the service of their African brothers until they could look after their own people. Let's see how it all worked out.

RUSHOROZA

"A city built on a hill top cannot be hidden"

In his letter of the 12th of October, 1923, Bishop Streicher appointed Fr. Laane the first Parish Priest of Kabale. It was the 30th parish in the Uganda Vicariate. The official opening of Rushoroza was not by any means the first contact the fathers of Ankole district had had with the population of Kabale. As a matter of fact, the founding of the new parish had been prepared long ago. Yohana Kitegana and his catechumens had been on the spot since 1911. Furthermore, Fr. Salle and Fr. Favier were coming regularly from Nyamitanga and even from Kitobi to give much needed encouragement. Roads had already been made and even motorcycles could now reach Kabale. The way of the Lord had been prepared in more ways than one.

The year 1924 was a very busy one on Rushoroza Hill. Fr. Laane did not want to build any temporary building on the hill so from the beginning everything had to be built either with brick or with stone. Within a year they had built a fathers' house, a kitchen, a chapel to Our Lady (not the present one), a school, quarters for catechumens, and a carpentry shop. The new church in bricks, which had been built by the old brother Theophile Martin, was already an impressive building. It was to be blessed in 1925. At the end of the year, Rushoroza was beautiful to see with roads, gardens and trees. At the end of his visit Fr. Manceau, the regional superior of the White Fathers, could declare that the new mission was the best looking and the best established in the whole Vicariate! There is no doubt that the personal resources of both Father Laane and Father Nicolet facilitated this tremendous upsurge of development but it could not have been possible without the positive cooperation of the people of Rushoroza who seem to have been very numerous! In fact, one point that struck Fr. Manceau was the never-ending comings and goings to the fathers' quarters and baraza by all kinds of people anxious to find out more about the newcomers. But we must add that some of them were attracted by the little dispensary which was run by the fathers themselves.

The work of the missionaries during that first year of foundation was not limited to the Bakiga. The preparation for a foundation in Bufumbira was for them an urgent necessity from the beginning. They had applied for and obtained a plot of one hundred and thirty acres with many other smaller plots. The Good News was to be brought everywhere and to everyone!

Another point worth mentioning was the great courtesy which was prevailing between Dr. Stanley Smith of the C.M.S. hospital and Fr. Laane. Very often they had to exchange letters to iron out the conflicts of all types which were arising every now and then between the "bashomi" and catechists of both sides. Not only did they take great care not to hinder in any way the work of one another, but they went out of their way to help one another in many instances.

Fr. Laane was a man of human relations. Besides his great charm and culture, he consistently put the needs of others before his own. He was personally known to all the governors of Uganda from Sir Harry Johnston to Sir Philip Mitchell. While on visit to Kigezi, the latter once remarked that spending fifteen minutes with him was a saving of countless hours.

He was a tall but plump Dutchman of one hundred and thirty kilos. When he arrived in Kabale, he was by no means a young missionary. He had started his missionary life in Buganda in 1896, had founded Mitata Maria, Holema, and Mahagi. A man of experience if ever there was one. He was quite handicapped for climbing the hills of Kigezi. So everytime he had to go somewhere on foot, he used to take along several yards of cloth. He would stand in the middle the cloth around his waist, give the ends to the children on both sides who would gayly "walk him" up the hills. At the end of the safari, the piece of cloth was divided among all the children who had done the pulling. For long-distance safaris Fr. Laane used to travel in a special chair called "Kyaburamu" from the French "char-à-bas". This famous vehicle had a wheel at the back and two shafts by which a man could pull the chair. The others pushed at the back.

He was always accompanied by a delighted group of followers who would sing a sort of calypso about him, taking their turn at the pushing and pulling. They regarded it as an honour to be able to take the missionary round, as indeed it was.

The first safaris were meant to gain the confidence of the most timorous people in far-away places. The Nyabingi Movement had
made the people afraid of foreigners. The fathers had to make themselves seen. So people flocked over the mountains to see the bearded Mjuungu. They would join the group which swelled to a hundred as the day wore on, singing and dancing with joy as they accompanied the priest on his way. At every hamlet the group would stop and the father would get down to speak to the people who had never seen a white face before. Many feared that he could perhaps eat their children. He would speak to them and let them crowd close to him and touch him. He never flinched because he realized that he could only gain their confidence by allowing them to take their time to get to know him in their own way. He gave them "centies" throwing a handful of coins into the crowd, so that with screams of delight the people scrambled and fought to get them. (People still speak of him as a very rich man.) He also gave them safety pins and showed them how to remove their jiggers, for many people were practically crippled with jigger infection. The aged and the children suffered especially. He taught them how to use the pins, demonstrating on the victims themselves. The people were thrilled and wore their safety pins like medals until they were required for further use again. Later on, as the Baganda chiefs managed to teach some of the people to read a little, the father would take small booklets to them in order that they might practice their reading and learn more of Christianity and the outside world. He also took medicine with him and would treat those he met who were in need of care, instructing them how to use the stuff themselves and asking the worst cases to come to the mission for further treatment. Fr. Laane loved these safaris and the people loved him and soon came to realize that the White Fathers were their friends.

In most parts of Rukiga and Bufumbira, the safaris were as described above, with the exception of Nyarushanjane. Before 1914 more than a hundred people had been baptized there. And they were ready for more. So they administered the sacraments, instructed the little children for their first communion and so on. After a while, even elsewhere the safaris with "centies" and safety pins were no longer needed. The fathers would go off on safaris in the torrential rains walking up and down the mountains and sleeping out in tents. The people now knew them and flocked to hear the Word of God. They were ministered to in their bodies and in their souls. The mentality changed quickly after that.

Fr. Laane and Nicolet were very concerned about the physical conditions of the people for many were undernourished and diseased. A group of young children who had come to be initiated in the mysteries of the faith caused them much worry for one child died of malnutrition, three others were so ill they were baptized before time while still others remained in bed. No wonder: they had had as their sole diet sweet potatoes. When he became aware of the conditions under which they lived, Fr. Laane ordered that at the mission every child should have at least two good meals a day. He meant to put a stop to this needless suffering. Hadn’t Christ to make men entirely whole?

Through the force of circumstances, the young parish was going to lose prematurely its founding fathers. In October, 1926, Fr. Laane was appointed at Entebbe; Fr. Nicolet went on home leave and good old brother Theophile was sent elsewhere. The light shone on the mountain. But it was just the beginning. More, much more was to come.

No one could replace a Fr. Laane or a Fr. Nicolet in the hearts of the people. They were unique but not more unique than the men sent to replace them: the future bishop, Fr. Lacoursière and Fr. Torelli, — both of whom were in Toro — and a newly ordained priest from Canada, Fr. Léopold Bélanger. They would continue in the footsteps of their predecessors and take the light further into the world of knowledge.

With them Rushoroza got its first schools. The ignorance that had kept the people of Kigezi in fear and darkness was going to be destroyed. As we will see, the first schools were a far cry from what they would become but as the proverb goes: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." That first year — 1927 — was to be a very difficult year for the new school. In January, Bishop Streicher came to visit the new foundation and he took a decision unusual in Uganda at that time. He allowed the new school to be filled up with pagan boys as there were not enough baptized children around Rushoroza. Three teachers out of four knew hardly more than their pupils and the fourth one, who was a bit more educated, was planning to leave the teaching profession. Under such conditions, the new syllabus from Makerere was more an ideal than a practical help. Then came the very severe drought. Many children had to go home for there was a shortage of food in and around Rushoroza. To make things worse, an unexpected competitor came upon the scene: a Kishwahili course!
Fr. Vermeersch was sent to Rushoroza to run this Kishwahili school as it was apparently needed for the running of the administration in Kigezi. This initiative was made at the request of the Provincial Commissioner. At the opening of the Kishwahili course, the twelve best children left the vernacular school to follow the new course since they were promised places in the new administration. Fr. Vermeersch had quite a hard time for he had to run the new little school without money, without teachers, and without books. This experiment, which was later made in Nyakibale and Mutorere, does not seem to have had any lasting result since the government policy did not stress so much the need of that language in the administration as time went on.

Very soon it became clear that another kind of school was needed. The fathers knew that they had to improve the quality and the number of catechists. At the very most, a catechumenate could handle two hundred and fifty people at one time. And yet, every six months a thousand possible candidates had to postpone their catechumenate. They could not start their regular instructions although they already knew how to read and write and memorized the small catechism. Some of them had to wait for years.

That is why the fathers decided to open a “Normal School”. This expression signifies in French a sort of teacher training college. Young men were taught for a year and then sent out on probation as catechists in the villages. If they did well, they would come back for another year of academic training. Besides training the catechists this school provided free courses in reading and writing every Monday and Friday for any young man who was willing to be instructed. It acted as a sort of demonstration course. In 1928 thanks to the Normal School, the fathers were able to send one hundred and sixty nine catechists in the villages. More than 17,000 people started to follow instructions. In Bufumbira with the help of Banyarwanda catechists from Rwanda, a regular catechumenate was in operation with already forty five candidates.

Another school which was of great help not only to the new parish but also to the administration of the district was the technical school of Feso Kihaka. It was at the beginning a very humble undertaking. The “salamal” was built at the place of the actual garages. About ten pupils were taught carpentry and brick-laying. It proved to be a rewarding venture for very soon the new district had enough qualified workers on the spot at a time when so many things had to be built.

After a while a great number of regular and self-styled catechists were beating their drums to call their people for instructions. A newly arrived D.C. was somewhat puzzled by so many “enthusiastic souls”, as he called them. He started to enquire about their work, their teachings, their poll tax, their “Kijwaro” (the piece of cloth they used to receive four times a year). And he imposed regulations: he did not want them to teach in their own little churches, but only to pray. At the missions they had quite a different outlook on the matter. Fr. Nicollet called that period a time of Josephism in Kigezi, in remembrance of the Austrian Emperor, Francis Joseph, who had the habit of regulating even liturgical details in his empire. Happily enough the D.C.—Sacristan went on leave and left the catechists get on with their work in peace.

**NYAKIBALE**

“Let the wasteland rejoice and bloom” (Isaiah 35:1)

If it is true that no two people are alike, it is also true that no two mission-foundations are alike. Besides, in spite of obvious similarities, a Muhororo is not a Mukiga, nor is Rujumbura Nدورwa. The hour of the Bahororo was to have its own peculiar characteristics. Let’s see how the Spirit of God worked with men and events to fashion himself a people there.

After the first World War there was in Rujumbura only one catechist with a handful of Christians. In March 1923 Fr. Van Ertryck and Fr. Bringuier were at Kitabi and they were determined to prepare a foundation in Rujumbura county. Fr. Van Ertryck especially was very keen about this new project. It was a job cut out for him. Only six years later — in March 1929 — Rujumbura counted more than forty catechists and seven hundred baptized people and about five thousand catechumens. The main part of the fathers’ house had been finished. It was time to start a new parish.

On the 19th of October, 1929, Fr. Bringuier and Fr. Etcheverry came to Nyakibale. Good old Brother Tobie arrived a few days later. They had a very hard time. The site of Nyakibale was bare: no trees, no banana plantation, nothing. A severe shortage of food made it impossible to find people willing to work. The old church was about to collapse, so a classroom was turned into a chapel. But soon heavy rains came and the walls came tumbling down one after the other.
In the meantime Fr. Van Ertryck had persuaded the bishop to allow him to realize what he had undertaken with so much heart. And so the younger Fr. Etcherry stepped down to go to Ibanda. Thus Fr. Van Ertryck came from Kitabi with the seventy Bahororo catechumens to give a much needed push to the new foundation. The county chief, Mr. Kalegesa, did what he could to provide food and milk, but the situation became so precarious that Bishop Streitcher was tempted to postpone the whole thing and send the fathers back to Kitabi. But the fathers did not complain. They knew that if a community was to thrive there, they would need lots of food and firewood. That rainy season, with the help of the seventy catechumens and some twenty eight Batoto, they planted literally thousands of trees and banana plants. With what enthusiasm they worked! After a few months Nyakibale hill was no longer a desert-like place: new life covered its flanks, a sign of yet greater marvels to come.

"Unless a wheat grain falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest."  

When we look back over Fr. Van Ertryck's life, we have the impression that he himself sensed that Nyakibale was going to be a very important place in his life. He had started his missionary life in Buganda. He went on from there to become the Vicar General in Mahagi (Zaire) before going to Kitabi. Although Runyankore was at least his 3rd African language, he learnt it well enough to leave us the first prayer book for the faithful. When the prospect of giving birth to Nyakibale appeared on the horizon, the energetic priest put all his heart into it...... The fruits of his work were just beginning to appear when one and a half years after the opening of the parish, he fell ill and died. It was March 10, 1931.

Fr. Favier from Kitabi took his place. The work went on as usual; the new church had to be started. Bro. Tobie supervised the building which was finished by June, 1932. The people collaborated as much as they could going as far as offering a month's salary (6 shillings) for the expenses. The work had been slowed down, however, by fever and endemic diseases, not to mention the food shortage.

In November, 1933, a catechumen came to the mission with typhoid fever and eventually died. Before long a whole group of catechumens were contaminated with that terrible disease. Fr. Seynavee, a young priest of thirty three years who had just arrived, was the only one valid enough to look after them. He did so with great care and devotion. During the visit of Bishop Michaud, he was advised to be extremely prudent and take all the necessary measures to avoid contamination. The catechumens had all come to the point of recovery when on February 23rd, Fr. Seynavee felt feverish. He got worse so the doctor from Kabale was called on the 29th. He was told about the urgency of the case but did not think it necessary to rush and arrived on the 5th of March. As for Fr. Seynavee, he did not have any illusion about his state: he prepared his last will, put some order in his papers, wrote a last letter to his mother (he was the only son of a widow) and asked to receive the last sacraments.

After a quick examination, the doctor decided to have him transferred to Kabale but it was too late. The young priest died on the 6th of March after having made the offering of his life for the parish of Nyakibale he loved so much. "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

After his visit the regional superior summarized the foundation of Nyakibale in these terms: "Your parish is only five years old but already two missionaries have died here and for more than two years epidemics of typhoid and cerebro-spinal meningitis are endemic in this part of the country. On account of these calamities, you have had many inspections, circular letters from health inspectors and other officials which have brought you lots of worries. You have been obliged to change many things and to spend a lot of your time and money on the buildings and other facilities of the parish to keep up a high standard of cleanliness. And yet the Lord's work went on.

If a high standard of cleanliness had to be kept at all costs, it was often to the detriment of the smooth running of the parish. Catechumens were sent home at the slightest alert. Sometimes they were prevented from coming to the parish. Once after an outbreak of meningitis in Rujumba, the fathers received a letter from the health inspector forbidding them to move out of Nyakibale. Everyone was free to come and go as they pleased, but not the fathers. There was no case of sickness at the parish itself. Fr. Bringueir complained that this regulation, affecting the fathers alone, was more directed at preventing the Catholic religion than cerebro-spinal meningitis. The restrictions were lifted! Once the home-base was solidly established, there was no holding Fr. Bringueir down. He was nearly always out in one or
other village, extending to all the presence of Christ. On the more concrete level, he would set up a modest church with a two-class school house not far from it. The man in charge got four shillings a month to teach the catechumens and the children in the school.

Before long the whole area was connected to the central station: in 1932, Kehoko; in 1933, Rutooma; in 1934, Kasese; in 1936, Katoila, Kyamakanda, Buloma... As these schools began to develop, it became increasingly necessary to set a father aside to oversee their delicate growth. That work was entrusted to Fr. Vermeersch who gave all he had to this all-important field. After a while schools in permanent materials were built in Makiro, Nyakanyina, Nyakishoja and Kishaliro. The sixty one official catechists and the hundred unofficial ones were no luxury with the great influx of catechumens. When the sisters from Bwanda arrived, they looked after the children and the older girls. The great number of girls at the catechumenate created a problem; the fathers were afraid that the time would come when there would be too great a disproportion in the number of marriagable Christian boys as compared to the girls. As a result they decided to be more exigent for the admission of girls.

One of Fr. Bringuier’s worries was to know the exact limits of his parish. It was accepted that Nyakishoyi and Nyanushane subcountries would be part of Nyakibale, but some parts of Kajara and Kabezi were too far away to be looked after properly and had to become part of Rushoroza. Anyhow Rujumbura and Kinkizi counties were already large enough for a single parish. And how?

Fr. Bringuier was a witty character and a man of a strong physical constitution. He alone had passed through the difficult years of the foundation without any serious health problem. But after ten years of strenuous work, time had come for him to go home for a rest. He would not come back again. It was the war. MUTOLORE

"My door was always open to the traveller" (Job 31:32)

"I was king and pope in Mutolore for ten years," exclaimed the aging Fr. Nicolet to a young missionary when he mentioned this third great foundation in Kigezi. One had to know Fr. Nicolet to appreciate his typically French exuberance. People loved him even though he tended to dramatize and exaggerate things a bit. And yet there was much truth in what he said. He had put himself out for Mutolore long before he was named its first parish priest in 1929. Forty two times he had gone on foot from Kabale to Mutolore. No wonder he knew every valley and hill. The actual road from Kabale to Kisoro was mapped out according to his advice. He was very proud of that.

Going back to before Fr. Nicolet’s time, local tradition has it that a White Father from Congo (now Zaire — Bubumbira county was then under Belgian rule), probably Fr. Smuders, had paid them a visit. He is said to have planted a cross in Nyaruza and to have delivered a sermon on hell which has left a lasting impression on the local population! But as soon as the border-commission had completed its task — in 1911 — Bishop Streicher came in person to get an idea of the situation. He went as far as Kisoro. He found the site of Seseme extremely well situated but he did nothing to take possession of it officially. At the beginning of 1912, Frs. Le Tohic and Lafleur came to choose the main plots of Kidwa, Kisoroza, Nyaruza, Mulamba, Rusengo, and Kinanira. The year after — as we saw — saw the coming of Frs. Le Tohic and Etcheverry who came to demarcate more accurately the plots already chosen.

After the foundation of Rushoroze, Fr. Nicolet accompanied Fr. Van Hoef, who was there visiting from Zaire, as far as Kidwa where they visited Yohana Kitagana and Augustino Kapere. They both agreed that the place was not suitable for a future foundation: too close to the lake, lava soil, no horizon and so on. It was decided to look for another place. Yohana suggested Mutolore. They want to have a look. There they found a good water supply, good soil for gardening, clay for bricks, two roads leading to the place and a couple of houses for travellers. The Provincial Commissioner agreed to exchange the plot at Kidwa for Mutolore. The government graciously gave the two houses for our catechists. The foundation was to start in 1928. Fr. Nicolet undertook the building of a small house and of a chapel. Cultivation was started but the foundation had to be postponed for a year.

At last, on the 5th November 1929, Fr. Nicolet, Fr. Klep and Bro. Simon arrived for good in Bubumbira. No time was lost. Fr. Klep went to Rwaza to fetch good builders and in February already they organized the official opening of the new school. Many visitors came to take part in the festivities for already then Mutolore was a place renowned for its hospitality. The D.C. and the local chiefs were there and with much ceremony "à la Nicolet", a sealed letter (in Latin) was placed under the northwest corner of the building.
The fathers' quarters were under construction and finished by 1931. The people themselves had undertaken the building of many chapels — more than forty in the whole of Bufumbira. Schools were started in many places with unequal success. In Kinaria in 1932, in Nyarusha in 1933, in Gyuulanda in 1934, but like everywhere else in Kigezi at the time, attendance was not very promising. It is significant that the fathers thought building a school more urgent than a decent house for themselves and a church.

Many visitors from Zaire and Rwanda used to stop over at Mutolere. But the year 1932 was marked by the visit of an unusual tourist: King Albert of Belgium! He was inspecting the natural parks on the Zaire side when he decided to pay a visit to Uganda. He was announced for the 13th of April and of all places he wanted to stay at Mutolere. The British officials were somewhat surprised by such a decision, but there it was. The reception was organized by Fr. Nicolet — of course! Before long he had the whole hill busy like a beehive getting ready for the coming of His Majesty. Everything was to be done according to the most royalist of protocols. All the chiefs in Bugumbira, all the officials of Kabale, and all of Bufumbira were there to see the king. The official reception was followed by games, singing, and Batwa dancing. You can imagine that Fr. Nicolet was extremely pleased at the end of the day. Everything had gone according to plan. But then not every place is Mutolere. It does not happen every day that a king drops in on you!

A few weeks later, another reception took place at the parish: this time it was for the new Bannakibira sisters from Villa Maria. As soon as the people heard of their coming, they went as far as Chyanakane to receive them. Hundreds of children were dancing and singing along the way. No stilt protocol here. Things just happened. Drums came alive. People started dancing joyfully. This spontaneous welcome delayed them. Exhausted but happy, they arrived late in the evening. They were coming to stay.

Thanks to Fr. Klep, money was no problem in those early days. After building the sisters' quarters and the cigar factory, they were ready to undertake the building of a church worthy of Mutolere. Bro. Bonaventure, the brother-architect, was appointed there to supervise the operations in December 1933. The work went ahead quickly as a lot of people contributed to the carrying of building materials to the site of the new church. Finally the official consecration took place on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the 29th of June, 1935.

In the meantime, the more important task of building up the Body of Christ was not neglected. Fr. Nicolet took special care to look after every one, even the minorities in his huge parish. He visited the Bahunde but could not find a catechist to stay with them. He got the Pygmies to go to school for some time, but they refused to be baptized. They even put forward their reasons for doing so: "If our children are baptized they will be written down in your books; they will be counted among the Bahutu and in this way, we will lose our Kitwa (Pygmy) identity. Then the Europeans will ask us to pay the Poll Tax." The authorities always had a special treatment for the Pygmies and they became more conscious of their traditional heritage and of their present privileges. They refused to be assimilated to other ethnic groups.

A bit eccentric this Fr. Nicolet, and yet the Lord obviously took him as he was and used him to make Himself known to his people. Perhaps he didn't mix with the people in the same way as Fr. Laane did, but he got to know them well. Fortunately, he put down in writing some of his findings: e.g. the thirteen different types of customary marriages, many details on the Nyabingi cult, the Bacwezi, and many historical notes of interest.

One of the last services Fr. Nicolet rendered to Bufumbira before leaving for Ibanda was to make known to the proper authorities an outbreak of cerebro-spinal menigitis. For some unknown reason, the people had refused to reveal the deaths of their relatives suddenly taken away from them. People were buried at night and nobody dared to say a word. Fr. Nicolet went to Kabale to report what was happening and quick action was taken to stop further cases.

The Scandal of Christianity

To our shame, there has been from the start bitter opposition between the churches in Uganda. To skip over these pages would be to deny reality. Whether we like or not, the Catholic and the Protestant from Kigezi bears the mark of division in his psychoreligious make-up. It is all the more tragic because it seems to be so deeply imbedded in the hearts of the people. How could something imported take on so quickly such huge proportions? Is Christianity to blame or must we find the answer elsewhere?

Fr. Laane in Rukiga, Fr. Van Ertryck in Rujumbura, and Fr. Nicolet in Bufumbira had given a great impetus to the newly found-
ed community. This widespread growth of the Church was to cause some alarm in the C.M.S. Everywhere in Kigezi, Protestant chiefs were asked to build churches and to support travelling preachers. In Rujumbura Fr. Van Ertryck had complained several times to the D.C. because of the interference of the C.M.S. in the affairs of the local chiefs. It wasn’t even discreet. Everybody was forced to take part in the building of Protestant churches. The local chiefs spent a lot of time doing the work meant for catechists and claiming they were acting under the orders of the authorities.

In January 1925 the D.C. organized a meeting with all the chiefs in Kigezi. He knew very well what had been going on and he told them bluntly what he thought. To show that he wanted to prevent further abuses, T. Rwomushana was fined sixty shillings; Yofeti of Kebishoni Gomboora was down-graded; Kagubala got a strong warning and was publicly reprimanded. Furthermore, a new agent was appointed in Rujumbura with strict orders to prevent further interference. Gelson was appointed new agent in Bufumbira and Paulo Kangwaye in Nyakishenyi. The District Commissioner said in so many words that religion was not to be forced on the people and that everybody should follow the example of the Catholic priests who were working for the good of the people out of charity without forcing anything on anybody. The next day some Protestant chiefs came to Rushoroza to see Fr. Laane. They told him how they had been under pressure from the people of the C.M.S. to build many churches since it was their method to use the influence of the chiefs to spread the Protestant religion.

Perhaps more experienced in the ways of the Lord, Fr. Laane had a rather different approach in his way of making converts: He knew it was more Christ-like to seek out the poorest of the poor and this was clearly his way of doing. Seeing the crowd of poor people that followed him everywhere — the lame, the ragged, the sick, the orphans — somebody had enough selfishness to describe the religion of Fr. Laane as the religion of “the dirty ones” (Edini ya barofa). It was really the religion of the poor, the religion of those who knew their insufficiency, who felt enough misery in their hearts to be open to the Good News of the Kingdom.

Already at that time the religious opposition had something of a social connotation. This sort of opposition was there to stay. In spite of periodical gestures of goodwill, the administration remained biassed. Much, however, depended on the D.C. Some were opposed to any injustice of any kind in as far as it was possible but others saw in bigotry the best way to strengthen the British Empire as if one could not be a Catholic and at the same time a true citizen of Uganda.

A request was even made to a high ranking official to suppress the small grant the parish Priest of Rushoroza used to receive every year for the schools. Their reasoning was as follows: As the Church Missionary Society did not receive any help from the Belgian Authorities in Rwanda, there was no reason why the White Fathers should receive any from the British Government in Uganda. The answer was simple: the money was not British money. It came from the poll tax and was to benefit the people who gave it.

Ironically enough, it sometimes happened that the opposition turned against those who had created it, as it was the case in Bucundura. An old forgotten case was put before the newly arrived D.C. by a Protestant catechist from Kashamba. As a result, the leader of the Catholic group from Bucundura was publicly sentenced to six strokes. Fr. Lacoursière inquired carefully about the case and went to see the D.C. It then became apparent that the translation had been somewhat twisted and thus the judge had been ill-informed. The D.C. recognized his mistake and promised to make up for it. Later a Protestant catechist was found guilty in a court case and was duly meted out six strokes too. It happened to be the Protestant catechist of Kigata, a well known troublemaker. The government was seen to be just to everyone. Eventually when the people of Bucundura heard about the punishment unjustly inflicted to their catechist, Paula Nyakemasi, they came in big numbers to the catechumenate — the number rose from sixty to three hundred, in a matter of days. The case of Bucundura was one among many. Every time people felt injustices committed against one of their leaders, they reacted by joining the catechumenate in great numbers.

Some time later, this opposition took the form of a kind of race to acquire as many plots as possible. In Maziba there were thirteen “Kanisa” for one Catholic church; in Mpalu fifteen for five; in Kamwazi twelve for one and so on. It became almost ridiculous, as buildings never converted anybody. Once a quickly built kanisa collapsed on the congregation. Nobody was badly injured, but this little incident left a bad impression.

“And there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.” (John 10:16).
The powers of darkness strike back

Zikanga, son of Muteta, was a little shepherd boy around Munure in the Rubanda area. When he was about twelve years old, he heard about the Christian message. His catechist, Sipriano Kabakure, recalls that he was a faithful catechumen. He came regularly to the instructions and he was quick to catch the main prayers.

Zikanga was an orphan. His parents had died a few years before. And so our little boy was being looked after by his older brother Kikombe. But Kikombe was closely associated with the local sorcerer, called Komunda. From time to time, Zikanga was asked to prepare butter for Komunda and he knew that this butter was used for pagan practices. One day when his brother had sent him to bring butter to the sorcerer, he went to tell the mutongore chief, Bagazonza, instead. Several times, Kikombe told his younger brother to stop praying. He went as far as threatening Zikanga openly.

The young boy went to his religion lessons as usual but he told the catechist about the danger he was in. He knew that Kikombe was a staunch pagan and that he might one day do some harm to him. Soon afterwards, Kikombe attacked him and threw him into a pit full of red ants. The boy managed to escape and told Sipriano Kabakure about it.

Sometime later Kikombe wanted to send a cow to the sorcerer. Zikanga heard about it and went to tell the Gomborora chief, Yosefu Bagamuhunda. Soldiers were sent and the cow was taken to the saza headquarters at Mpolo. This was too much for Kikombe. He decided to kill Zikanga. One fine evening, when Zikanga was leading the cows home, Kikombe was waiting for him hidden in a place called Kazaribirindi. He had a heavy stick with him. With one blow, he broke Zikanga’s skull and finished him with a knife. He then threw the body in a swamp at Rwamanyege. It was the 28th June, 1928. Zikanga was about fourteen years of age.

Soon children noticed Zikanga’s absence. After some inquiries they found the little skin Zikanga used to wear. They reported to the chiefs. Kikombe was suspected as Zikanga had very often spoken about the constant danger he was in. After some hard questioning, the murderer consented to take the chiefs to the place where the body had been hidden. They found the skull and some bones. Zikanga’s remains were brought to Kabale for inquiries.

It was on the 19th July, 1928. The murderer was condemned to prison.

From what we know we might say that Zikanga had been imprudent. It was asking for trouble to be so openly against pagan practices especially after the warnings he had been given. But this sad event is indicative enough of the new era. Just a few years after the coming of Christianity to the country, a boy of fourteen could not tolerate the fundamental fallacy of pagan practices which were still binding the adult society of his times. In this event what matters is to understand the new power which was at the origin of Zikanga’s refusal — a power that transformed his death into a sign of the new mentality.

(From Sipriano Kabakure, Stefan Karebe (policeman), Regina Kyozeire and Rufina Nyemijumbi (Zikanga’s sisters).

Looking at the spread of religion in Kigezi, we are inclined to see only the spectacular side of it. Over a span of twenty years, Christians could be found in every village. But we might overlook that for many of these people it was a sort of way of the cross. Christianity involves such a drastic change that it is bound to meet with opposition. Let’s look at two examples among many.

Kembaya, a thirteen year old girl, wanted to join the catechumenate. Her parents refused. She left her family and went to live at her grandmother’s at Hamurwa where she could follow the instructions more easily. She was baptized on the 12 October, 1933 and called Pulkeria. When she came back home, her parents did everything they could to prevent her from praying; she was obliged to work on Sundays; she was often beaten; and even her grandparents turned against her. After so much bad treatment she fell ill. Some people brought her to her aunt who also refused to look after her. Abandoned by her own relatives, she died asking her fellow catechumens to pray for her. She died as an outcast, rejected by her family.

At Kijuna there was a sorcerer named Kibatware. His wife and children wanted to be instructed and baptized, Kibatware did not want to hear of it and showed his strong opposition to the new faith by beating them every time they manifested the desire to pray. He was bitterly opposed to his own son Rwakyenere, a boy of sixteen. On the advice of his mother, Rwakyenere took refuge at his uncle’s house in Rutoma near Kabale. From there he could go
to Rushoroza for instructions. At the shrine of the Baganda Martyrs he got sick, was baptized and died on the 9th of October, 1927.

Once the mother heard of it, she did her utmost to be baptized and to have all her children instructed. She thought it her duty as a Christian to bring and destroy everything her husband had for his pagan practices. The man became very angry. The next day his wife was dying, poisoned. Before she died she urged all her children to follow instructions and be baptized. After her death, her four children had to leave their home for the father was making things impossible for them. They were later baptized and brought up in the faith by their uncle, Paulo Kakwenza, who later became Sasa chief in Ndurwa.

Reading these sad reports — and so many of them could be recorded — one cannot help remembering the warning of the Lord: “Do not think I have come to bring peace but a sword. I come to set sons against their fathers... a man’s worst enemies will be members of his own family.” (Mt. 10:35)

"NINSHOMA"

"Reading — Riting — Rithmetic"

The educational facilities were still in their elementary stages in 1932. Rushoroza had only one school for the whole parish. This school, called “Elementary Vernacular School”, was for boys and had only four classes. To encourage attendance, school fees were not even required. Not only that, if a boy had followed the term without missing too often, he was awarded a pair of shorts or a shirt by Fr. Torelli. Fr. Van Spaandonk was the first to ask for fees (one shilling a term!) It was a very daring move and the school attendance went down considerably as expected.

Many factors were to stimulate further progress. The government policy was definitely in favour of expanding the school system. The spirit of competition also had its part to play. Any improvement at the “High School” at Rugarama had to be matched with a similar move at Rushoroza. And so it was that uniforms were introduced; good Fr. Laane gave one hundred shillings for the acquisition of a brass band; a flag was bought; and a bit of English was inserted into the curriculum. Finally a boarding was built so as to help children from Mutolere, Nyakibale and even Mbarara to find accommodation on the hill. All these measures were meant to improve the standard of the school. Such were the humble beginnings of St. Mary’s College.

When the students had completed the course at the elementary vernacular school, some were selected to go to the Normal School to become grade C teachers. Fr. Torelli sent all his catechists there. Going through that Normal school had many advantages: they would receive a monthly salary of four shillings and after two years of schooling, they would get a grade C diploma. One of the main subjects to be taught was Kishwahili but the formula did not prove to be satisfactory. One day, Mr. Jowitt, the director of Education, came to visit the school with Fr. Hughie from Kampala. They questioned the wisdom of teaching Kishwahili instead of the vernacular. The fathers were very much in favour of this move. The Director made up his mind there and then to introduce the change and to organize a new sort of Normal School to cope with it. It was to be the Vernacular Teacher Training College (V.T.T.C.). The new syllabus came into being in 1937. We should not be surprised to see so many changes in the educational system. The school structures had to be in perpetual evolution to meet the challenge of the day. They were started from scratch and within a period of thirty years or so, they had to reach the level of the Cambridge School Certificate.

For the sake of information, here is a description of the old system. At the bottom of the ladder, we had the Sub-Grade Schools for the little children (a two year course). The Elementary Vernacular Schools catered for the older children. It was a four year course. If the student was able and willing, he went on to Intermediate School A and Intermediate School B. The Intermediate A was a preparation for Intermediate B. Finally, the student finishing Intermediate B was admitted to Makerere College. When the Normal Schools were called Vernacular Teacher Training Colleges, the Intermediate A and B were changed into Junior and Senior Schools.

We cannot exaggerate the importance of these early efforts to give Uganda a top-notch educational system. When we look at other African countries and compare with what we have we can be proud of our achievements in the field of education and grateful too to the British Administration and the Churches.
KITANGA

"How beautiful on the mountains,
are the feet of one who brings good news". (Is 52:7)

When the Rwenzori Vicariate (comprising the four districts of the Western Region) was created by the Pope on the 28th of May, 1934, a former Parish Priest of Kabale — Bishop F.X. Lacoursière — was named its first bishop. That was indeed good news for the people of Kigezi because they knew that the kindly bishop knew them personally. And he knew the country too.

When you’ve struggled up a mountain like Soko Hill (Bisika: the Wall!) or Mabindi Hill or Bucundura, you can’t very well forget them. He once remarked: “These hills weren’t made for big men like me!” But what had impressed him most was the fantastic number of people living there. Literally thousands were waiting to be baptized, some for years. Now that parishes had been started in each of the three main centres of Kigezi, the time had come to expand. And so it was that one of Bishop Lacoursière’s first decisions was the foundation of Kitanga Parish.

The obvious choice for the first parish priest was Fr. Torelli, who originated from the mountain country: Switzerland. To use the words of General De Gaulle about himself, Fr. Torelli “was a man upon whom it had rained a lot.” He had nearly died of typhoid; he had been severely cauterized and humiliated. Was it life that had made him so shy? Seeing him, one had the impression he was hiding behind his huge beard. But like most Swiss, he was a hard worker, a man of duty, a high class ascetic, and yet he was always gentle with the people.

About eight years before the actual foundation, Fr. Torelli would come regularly from Rushorozi to supervise the work. Andrea Kwehanganwa, the catechist, was the real leader of the small community. He was very active in getting the necessary buildings ready. Finally on the 12th of January, 1935, Fr. Torelli, Fr. Hautmann and Bro. Remy took up residence in Kitanga. The community house was ready, the school was in operation since 1933 and a little dispensary with catechumens’ quarters had been built thanks to the cooperation of the local people.

Things moved quickly. While there were only one hundred and forty two Catholics with about five hundred catechumens in 1929, the new parish counted about three thousand Catholics and twelve thousand catechumens by 1935. A church in dry brick had been built long ago. Although it was twenty six metres long and seven metres wide, it was already too small for Sunday worship. To meet the needs, a church with a seating capacity of three thousand was soon under construction. This giant size church might surprise us today, but we must remember that the parish at that time covered six Gombororas in Kigezi and three in Ankole — a huge territory! One did not have to be a prophet to foresee that in the near future not just one, but many new centres would have to see the light of day. With that in mind, the fathers got busy. And so Bukinda, Nyakishenyi, Nyarushanje, Mpalo, Rushoka were in the course of time granted little schools of two classes while churches in permanent materials were erected.

The work of developing centres of Catholic worship in well located areas was not an easy task. During the forties the competition between Catholics and Protestants took the form of a race to acquire as many plots as possible. The authorities had to intervene. In 1945 the D.C. sent to all parishes a reminder of an old regulation. In short: a distance of three miles to be found between two churches of the same denomination and a mile was to be the minimum distance between two churches of two different denominations. This regulation was very fair, but it was hard to put into practice: much time was spent in court cases.

Fr. Torelli was keen on noticing the most humble sign of real spiritual progress and that was his joy. “By their fruits you will know them.” But it is not easy to assess the quality of a person’s relationship with God. It is always difficult to get an idea of the solidity of the faith but there is one sign that is pretty certain: the forgiveness of injuries. Fr. Torelli was personally struck by two examples in particular.

It was night. Someone knocked at the door of the house. As Yoselfu Kajunja, the Gomborora chief at Ruhinda, opened the door, he raised the lamp he was carrying to see who it was. A man threw a spear at him. Yoselfu fell very badly wounded. At once he was brought to his residence at Nyarushanje, but nothing could be done to help him. He was going to die. Father Torelli went to give him the last rites. Several times and very explicitly, Yoselfu asked that his murderer be forgiven, that no case be made against him. He died peacefully the day after, in October 1933. Only a heart filled with the Spirit of Christ could do such a thing.
Bazimba wanted to be baptized, but his wife was against it. By using the “Pauline Privilege”, Bazimba, baptized Daudi, could leave his unwilling wife to marry a believer. Once she understood what he was about to do, she took a knife and tried to kill him while he was asleep in the middle of the night. She ran away. In the early morning people came to help Daudi and carried him to the hospital. On their way, they could have apprehended her, but Daudi asked them not to do him any harm as she acted as a pagan. “I want to forgive her as Christ forgave his enemies on the cross.” A true disciple of the Son of God.

When Fr. Torelli left Kitanga, he was a broken man. He had given the best of himself — all he had — and God took it that to work wonders in the hearts of his people.

Everything that glitters is not gold

The march towards maturity of the newly founded christianity was not without pitfalls. It takes many life-time to become a Christian to the marrow of one’s bones; in the case of a people, it’s a question of generations. Instant salvation is sheer illusion. It is the end… but the end of the beginning of a long series of conversions. It is no surprise then that elements in the pagan past tend to surface now and then. It would seem that each new element that presents itself must be newly “baptized” so to speak, so that the whole man is christianized.

One dimension of the cultural heritage of Kigezi was an uncritical attitude concerning dreams, delirium, and epilepsy. It was generally taken for granted that these phenomena were of a supernatural origin. As a matter of fact, they had been the buck-passing of the Nyabingi dogmas and were accepted as tangible signs of the other world. This magic conception of the world did not vanish overnight with the teaching of the Church. Moreover, the miracles of the Gospel were not properly understood. People were allowed to be fascinated by their marvellous aspect, forgetting that for Jesus miracles were primarily signs of a much deeper healing: spiritual blindness, spiritual paralysis… Furthermore, the miracle stories of Lourdes were perhaps too often repeated and they stirred up the imagination of simple souls a bit too much. At the time of Christ and now, they were signs that the Powerful One was now here, with us, to save us! They were never meant to be the centre of the message.

People were not critical enough. Their background tended to make them overlook the slow working of secondary causes. They didn’t seem to realize that most of the time God does not act directly on us. He works through other people and things. Very closely connected with this was their tendency to overlook reality, i.e. the world as it is. In their ignorance, they failed to understand that nature and the world about them have unchanging laws which enable us to become masters of them. To allow ourselves to get carried away because of an imaginary world opens the gate to all sorts of exaggerations. It also lead them to disregard their own personal responsibility. Why bother to do anything — especially if it requires a lasting effort — if God (or some other invisible power) does everything anyway?

Without any bad will involved, some good souls eventually found themselves quite mixed up… all because of one little sick orphan girl. From Ascension Day to Pentecost, in May 1932, Rushoroza became the centre of many mysterious events. Almost immediately an unhealthy desire to witness marvellous things developed among the people. There was a danger of a mass movement. It had to be avoided at all cost. All the conditions for a serious crisis were found together. Thanks to the discretion and prudence of the parish clergy, this danger was averted. They knew enough about mystical theology to discern what was happening. But as long as this magic conception of the world was prevalent among the christians the danger of doubtful mysticism remained a threat.

What helped to enlighten the community of believers was the preaching of the core of the message of Christ. This was done especially during Lent. Special retreats were preached and they were taken very seriously. For three days at the stretch people were explained the mystery of Christ and were given the sacraments. It was a very heavy work for the fathers involved, but this regular return to the essentials of the faith kept the Church very much alive and yet in order. The Spirit of Christ is not a spirit of wild enthusiasm, but a Spirit bound to the definite saving action of God in the Body of Christ. Saying the rosary while meditating on the mysteries of Christ and making the way of the cross did a lot to nourish the faith too.

Once again the Lord used his priests to guarantee the authenticity of the faith. Steeped in the Scriptures and in the living
tradition, they were able to discern that these manifestations were not of the Spirit of Christ.

A certain uneasiness

Even today some of the people are still asking themselves why some of the fathers were so afraid of progress. They did all they could to help people get ahead and yet they were forever fearful that once they got “rich” they would put religion aside. We are concerned here with a danger far more subtle and far more difficult to deal with than misguided illuminism: the inordinate thirst for earthly possessions. Better than our predecessors, we are in a position to put the question differently: Was the danger threatening man from within or from without?

There are a number of reasons which lead the fathers to be uneasy about the solidity of these young Christians. One of them was Nyabingi. We must remember that the Nyabingi cult had fostered in the hearts of many a self-centred attitude: they had gone to Nyabingi to find security in their struggle for life. But instead of lifting their hearts to something greater so that they could outdo themselves, this man-made cult simply catered to their own whims. As a result, they had learnt to “use” Nyabingi for their own selfish purposes. Hence when some of these people accepted the faith, they subconsciously expected it to be the best way to achieve success and security.

Another obstacle lies in the vocabulary. Even those who were most sensitive to the Christian message were apt to be mislead by words such as “blessing”, “peace”, “sin”, “mercy” etc...... Wasn’t it still too much to expect them to be able to think in such radically new dimensions? Taken from their common every day language, these words were used in the course of their religious formation but with a completely new meaning. Obviously, the psychological connotations these words had acquired in their profane use remained and many people accepted these words without being fully aware of the completely new content they were meant to convey. They did believe in Christ but it would take much time before the Spirit of Christ permeated and transformed them to the core. The young plant was still very fragile......

Add to that, that it was not unusual for people to become Christians because it was fashionable, because “everybody was doing it”. Some went through the steps leading up to Baptism without
putting their hearts in it. They were just going through the motions without a true change of heart. They had not come to know Christ as a living person, nor to experience so to speak his presence in their heart. They were Christians only in name. Is it any wonder then that when their faith was challenged by either success (or failure) they would drop the Church like a useless garment?

For quite other reasons, Bishop Lacoursière and his priests were to look with suspicion on any innovation coming from abroad. They wondered if they had the right to introduce changes that would somehow make them suffer more. Bishop Lacoursière once remarked: “For many what was coming was a new consciousness of their poverty.” He came back on this often in his annual reports. Once, he gave the example of educating girls. Having tasted something better, they wouldn’t be able to go back to the fields to dig, would they? They got their education, but all the same these men had asked the question. Furthermore, it was the same bishop who carried on a long correspondence with FAO (of the United Nations) for aid!

A closer look at the problem makes us realize that there is nothing wrong with improving the material well-being of a people. The Lord has come to Kigezi not so much to help them to die (to save their souls!), but to live full human lives. “The glory of God is a man fully alive.” Education, a job that brings out the best in people, the comfort and health that come with it, certainly did not spoil people: it simply made them more free — free to do what their heart of hearts really wanted. Some chose to cut themselves off from their brothers still more by using what they had received only for themselves... at times, even at the expense of others. Others acknowledged that it was Christ who was making this new freedom and happiness possible and they used their “gifts” to make others happy too.

In conclusion, we might say that the missionaries — like the rest of the Church for that matter — were one step ahead of their thinking. Everything inside them prompted them to leave no stone unturned to promote the development of the full human person and yet, their “old Church” theology prevented them from understanding why this had to be right. It was during the Second Vatican Council (Gaudium et Spes) that these ideas attained their full flowering. The Church became fully aware that anything which contributes to make men fully human is profoundly Christian. This
is the new creation where everything is completely renewed by the Spirit of Christ. Once more practice preceded theory.

**Father “Mutuburante”**

The officials of the central government sent to all the religious authorities a circular letter around 1936 with a long list of questions. They had observed an alarming decline in the stability of the marriages in the country. While the customary marriage was not respected as in former days, the religious marriage was not taken seriously either. Faced with so many unlawful unions, broken homes, abandoned children, they felt that something had to be done. The obvious thing to do was to consult the religious leaders. As a rule religious marriages were not performed unless the requirements of the traditional marriage were fulfilled. As a result the number of marriages blessed by the Church was going down. In Kigezi the excessive demands of the bride wealth (Enjugano) was the main difficulty. Already in 1923 the statutes of the Vicariate stipulated that the bride wealth should not exceed ninety or a hundred shillings. But by 1935 the father of the bride would not hesitate to ask up to three hundred shillings (while a good school teacher was receiving a salary of about fifteen shillings a month!) As many young men could not afford such an exorbitant amount of money or the equivalent in cattle, the customary marriage brought unbearable difficulties to young couples. The Church authorities never thought of suppressing the bride wealth altogether. They were well aware that more than anything else it guaranteed the stability of the marriage. What was being challenged was not the bride wealth itself, but the abuses people made of it, thereby making a happy marriage difficult for newly-weds. Young men had to struggle for years before they could get married. Many in desperation found themselves obliged to live with the girl of their choice without being married or to go to Rwanda to get their wives. Confronted with such human suffering, the Church was compelled to be very outspoken on the matter.

Bishop Lacoursière indicated as a reasonable proposition a cow and a bull; the government itself was in favour of a similar amount. For instance, Mr. Kukombe, the Saza Chief in Ngorwa, was one of the great promoters of this proposal. He truly wanted to help the poor. In some places, up to six or seven cows were being asked for. To help the mentality evolve discussions were organized at the Sunday “Bibina”.

In 1939 the parish priest of Rushoroza launched a campaign against the abuses of that custom. He got nicknamed “Mutuburante” (the one who makes the number of our cows swell!) It was impossible to eliminate hypocrisy in the matter: officially some people accepted only one cow and a bull, but unofficially many more things labelled “obukosyo” were expected. The government regulations also failed because the rich people, including some chiefs, were against it. They wanted to be acknowledged as rich by the size of the bride wealth they gave. The resistance went on for years. Little by little in spite of bitter opposition, mistakes and a great deal of suffering, the mentality changed for the better and more Christian marriages were made possible. Things were made a bit easier for the young couple to make a good start of their marriage.

**The Parish Priest is dead**

Nearly twenty years had gone by since the coming of the missionaries to Rushoroza. During that time, the community had become so numerous that three priests had more work than they could handle. Fr. Le Tocic was in charge. He was not a young man and over the years he had come to know his beloved Bakiga. As a result, he had a great influence. Besides being an able organizer, he had the gift of leading them to take things into their own hands and to come up with success!

That year the Lenten safaris had been particularly strenuous. He had brought peace to countless hearts as they came by the hundreds to confess their sins; he had preached with all he had; and he had handed out many remedies to the sick. His friends noticed how tired he was and told him to take a rest...but it was too late. He had a heart attack and after having received the last rites, he passed away. Significantly, Kitegana and Tanasi were at his side. It was the 22nd of April, 1939.

Nothing special was organized. But the word soon got around. People came from everywhere...by the thousands, they came to the funeral. Rarely had such a huge crowd been seen in Rushoroza. They came to pay their respects to a missionary-priest who had given his life for them, who lived and died in the midst of them.
Priests had died before and priests would die again but there was something special about this death. The Christian community became more conscious of itself and somehow they sensed that they owed it to men like him... priests that the Lord had sent to build up His Body... in love.

III

"THERE WAS A VINE..... YOU TRANSPLANTED IT.
IT TOOK ROOT AND FILLED THE WHOLE COUNTRY"   (Ps 80: 8)

There was a tremendous vitality in the tender shoots of the Lord’s vineyard. The Second World War was a time of crisis, but it would not stop the flow of life in the growing community. A new generation of men filled with the Spirit of Christ would meet the challenge head on.

As the threat of a possible world war became more imminent, Msgr. Riberi came from Rome to enquire about the possibilities of having dioceses that could support themselves. It was clear that in the event of a war, the missions would not get the help they used to receive from the Vatican. In 1937 it was decided to start a campaign promoting the duty of church tithe among the people. In the whole of the Rwenzori Vicariate, it was a success. As usual the people of Kigezi responded generously. However, the war was bound to cause a slowing down of church activities. No new parish was founded. But then none was closed either in spite of the fact that several fathers were called to serve in the forces not to mention those who went to the north to help keep some of the parishes there open. The minor seminary of the diocese — then in Kitabi — kept on training its eighty or so students. Brothers were asked to look for more resources instead of building anything new. Fathers were asked to diminish the number of their safaris on motorcycle. The reception of the sacraments went down but the number of catechumens asking to follow instruction remained very high, up to the late fifties. By the end of the war (in 1944) “Catholic Action Groups” were once again organized in every parish together with the Association of Catholic Teachers. The idea was to train an “elite”, as it was called in those days, but this new effort was not much more successful than similar attempts in the past.

The years that followed the war were marked by a general effort to organize the Catholic community. As a matter of fact, there was nothing new but the previous efforts started to bring encouraging results: a general desire for education, ordinations to the priest-
hood, lay apostolate, hospitals... Only three new parishes could be opened in Kigezi during those twenty years before independence: Makiro, Rubanda, and Bukinda. All in all, there was a lot of growth but it was in depth. The roots of the vine were sinking deep into the rich Kigezi soil.

"Open your eyes and see!
the fields are shining for the harvest" (John 4:35)

From the beginning in every parish the fathers were faced with a great number of people who wanted to be received into the Church, or as they used to say, "to receive a second name". It was a long journey to Baptism. One didn't become a Christian over-night. For most people it lasted two years, beginning in a central area called a muruka where a teacher-catechist gave them their first education in reading and writing. They also had to learn a small catechism by heart. It meant two little booklets of about sixty pages. Before being admitted to the intensive six month session at the parish, they were tested orally by the parish priest. As most parishes could not take more than two hundred and fifty at a time, some had to wait for several years.

The timetable of the regular catechumenate was well organized. One of the priests (or a well trained catechist) would give them two solid classes on the Plan of God every day. The rest of the day was filled with such activities as manual work, reading lessons, singing classes and so on. The sung Latin mass number 8 was learned by heart and most of the time sung with great gusto. More popular songs, most of them translations from French or Latin hymns, were also enjoyed.

As the work of evangelization went hand in hand with literacy campaigns, it was necessary from the start to provide the community with little booklets. The idea of a Sunday missal could never be materialized as it was bound to be an expensive book. But active participation in the mass was made possible by something unique to Africa. As the celebrant went through the liturgical gestures, a well-worded paraphrase expressing the meaning of both the words and the actions was recited by the community. This "commentary" had the advantage of polarizing all the attention of the people on what was happening. For the people who could afford it, there were a few books such as "Amakuru Mahango" (a history of salvation giving the main events of the Old and New Testament). There was also "Catechismu Enyonyore", a translation from Luganda of a more advanced catechism; "Ekibabo ky'O-bukristu" by Fr. Nicolet; "Amagara g’Omumita", a simple prayer book by Fr. Van Ertryck. Besides his Mutabya Series, Fr. Biever translated into Runyankole-Rukiga the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles with a lot of footnotes in five separate booklets. With all these tools at its disposal the young Church began to grow not only in numbers but in depth as well.

The risen Lord acts differently all over the world. Hearing about the mass conversions in Central Africa, a missionary working in Moslem areas said: "Here we content ourselves with changing the water in the lake; elsewhere it's like fishing with a line but for you, not only are you using nets, they are breaking!" "God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth." These past years have certainly been a time of grace for the people of Kigezi. But we can ask ourselves why did all this happen here? There seems to be a number of reasons.

In spite of the attendant dangers, the first Christian missionaries arrived with the colonial powers who would introduce all the achievements of the West. For some people western culture must have been a sort of guarantee of the veracity of the new religion. To be a Christian meant to be a progressive citizen and who wants to be backward anyway?!

Another contributing factor was the Pax Britannica. For over fifty years and in spite of two world wars, there were no major obstacles to hold progress back. All the strength was channelled without slackening towards teaching, preaching, educating, advising...

Some rightly attached a lot of importance to the optimistic and energetic character of the people. They had been in the grips of ancestral fears long enough and now that they saw the light, there was no holding them back. It is true that the fear of "Sitani" was more effective than any book of Apologetics, but there was more to it than that. With great unanimity the people of Kigezi had kept vivid the idea of a living God. They were believers and they had developed, in the course of time, a family morality of good standing. As an old man once noted: "Before you came, we knew the commandments of God but not in order!" There was a good base to start with. By the end of the century the excessive miseries caused by the Nyabingi frenzy brought discredit to the cult of the Mandwa.
The inherited fear of strangers left its place to its complete opposite: outright friendliness. For years, new ideas and new people were warmly welcomed by the people of the mountains.

If we consider the Church, some elements in her were more apt than others to attract people to her. Could it have been her sacraments? - where Christ meets the individual as a unique person. It's a great joy to be given the feeling that "I" am important, that "I" matter, even if I am a child or a poor man. In Baptism, there may have been many baptized together but each one had water poured on his head, each one got a special name. In confession, I stand alone before my Saviour to be healed. In Confirmation, I receive the Spirit in my own way. It may have been her great respect for order and harmony through the authority of the Pope and the bishop. Or again, her very concrete history: no dry system of ideas here but a living and acting Lord who is constantly busy with the events that affect each man's life. Was it the feeling of belonging to an international community? The veneration of the Queen Mother so traditional in Bantu kingdoms? It might have been all that together. But more than a doctrine, what was brought was a new life, a life in the Spirit - with an eternal destiny. This particular aspect of new-life, as such, certainly clicked with the traditional insights so characteristic of the Bantu Philosophy.

All these circumstances put together were most favourable to the Church but in the last analysis, the unanimous evidence given by the people themselves to justify their move towards the Catholic Church was the love they saw among the Christians. When asked why she had become a Christian, a good Mukiga mother said: "I saw that the priests were good people. They were there for us. They loved us." Once again the words of Christ proved true: "If you love one another, then they will know that you are my disciples."

But this great "conversion" movement before the war and many years after was not without its drawbacks. Growing so rapidly the Church lost her character of a selected minority. The fervour of the first years could not be kept up. Going to Kitabi or to Mbarara on foot for six months of instructions was in itself a good way to select those who meant what they said about believing in Christ. Among them, some were truly remarkable, like that Salome from Bufundi, a lame girl who could not walk but who came on her knees to Rushoroza passing through Bukoba, every first Friday, joyfully singing and encouraging others on the way. She did not even realize that every one of her trips was in itself an achievement. Or again those first Christians in Kinkizi who had to pass through herds of wild beasts at night to go to mass at Nyakibale. Conditions for Baptism were strict but how could a crowd of two hundred and fifty catechumens be carefully and personally instructed and followed up with the best will in the world? How are we to maintain in the fidelity of their Baptism all those people bound to go back to their own surroundings with so few priests to feed them with the Word of God? Defections were inevitable. In the net bad fish are found with the good. This always was and will always be... whether we consider the community as a whole, or our own heart. We can only do our best, and leave the rest to the Lord.

"All, from the least to the greatest, shall know Me, says the Lord." (Jer 31:34)

The years which followed the war were marked by greater changes in the mentality of the people. Many had left the narrow confines of the hills to go as far as Tororo or Mombasa. It was quite a discovery for them to see something else. They came back with new ideas, and especially, with a new outlook. Having seen for themselves what the modern world was like and the key place schools played in progress, they developed a desire for more educational facilities. There was still a lot to be done in Kigezi in that line.

In many places only sub-grade schools with two classes were functioning... impossible to add more, the children were simply not coming. There was no Teacher Training College in Kigezi since the Normal School had been closed because it was no longer up to standard. The people felt the need of another Teacher Training College as they were not given enough places in similar institutions outside Kigezi. As a result, a Vernacular Teacher Training College was started at Nyakibale in 1947. The place had been prepared by Fr. Stokman. Fr. H. Witbroek was the head of the college for two years until Fr. Stokman took over. It eventually had to close its doors as the needs changed: more English was introduced into the syllabus necessitating a new type of teacher. This task was assigned to the college at Ibanda.

It is to the credit of the parents that they responded so generously to the new challenge of the times. In many places schools in permanent materials were built by the people themselves. Outsiders
never cease to be amazed when they see the people of the mountains combine all their energies to work together to achieve something beautiful, but something they really consider worthwhile. Such was the spirit of collaboration at Muyumbu, for instance, where the school cost the parish priest only one hundred and fifty shillings. The great majority of the existing eighty primary schools of Catholic foundation were built during that time. For many years the Department of Education encouraged this type of collaboration by distributing grants to any voluntary agency willing to take part in that great effort. The parents wanted to do their best to make their children better off than they were. They were truly engaged in the task of lifting up the whole country.

In every parish, the father in charge of the schools was a very busy man. He was collecting school fees, supervising buildings, giving out school supplies, paying out the teachers' salaries and on top of that, doing lots of paper work.

Religious Instruction was given in all the classes and the children who wanted to be baptized would receive the sacrament after class four. But the effective teaching of religion was going to be the greatest challenge to our teachers. They knew that Religious Instruction is not like other subjects. You have to practice what you preach. It is useless to talk about love if you yourself think only of yourself. Besides even the most devoted teachers felt deep down in their hearts that there was more to R.I. than teaching something: they knew it was much more a question of introducing the children to Someone, the Lord, who is alive but invisible! Experience shows that if a child does not come from a good home, there is not much hope that the teachers are going to change him radically. Yet when we remember the great influence that our own teachers have had on us, we can have some idea of what a good teacher can do for our children. If our teachers can stand competent, dedicated and responsible before our youth, they will live on in the hearts and minds of their students to inspire them to still greater conquests, “For God and My Country”. Only men and women filled with the Spirit of Christ can hope to achieve this.

"Labourers for the vineyard"

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the long list of catechists who have made the people feel the presence of the Church in every village of Kigezi. These married men were somehow the representatives of the priests. Chosen from the midst of the community and living with them as one of them, they have always been remarkably close to the Living Body of Christ. For all practical purposes the catechist has always been the head of the local community. In many ways, their work has been a priestly work — they have always been men-of-the-Word. In the absence of priests, they have preached the Gospel as they understood it there and then. Perhaps in their subconscious and in that of the people, there has been a secret desire that they would one day have enough priests for each community. In connection with this it is significant that up until Fr. Hoffinger’s intervention at the Katungo Catechetical Meeting, they knew nothing better for their Sunday worship than to sing the Latin mass... but without a priest.

On the more personal level, it has always been the catechist who could call each member of the village community by name. Whenever there were cases to resolve, or vital information to be obtained, the priest always referred to his right hand man. He it was who called the priest for the anointing of the sick. And if they died, the catechist would bury them. If the Church were to lose its precious catechists over-night, many would feel the tremendous gulf there is between the handful of priests and the great mass of people at large.

From what has been said, it is clear that they need to be prepared for such an important task. The great Baganda catechists, Kitegana and Atanasi and Augusto Kapere, who left such an impact on Kigezi, were trained catechists. In the old days, there was a school at Rubaga for this. With the creation of the Rwekoni diocese came the Normal Schools with their Grade C teachers to help the hierarchy provide catechists for the main centres. But already in 1941 the Grade C (vernacular teachers) could no longer qualify to teach and only a minority of them went on working as plain catechists. A new type of school had to be founded.

In 1943 Bishop Lacoursière wrote to Rome for such a training college. With the war, it was impossible to expect aid. All the fathers could do was to rely on local initiatives. For many years courses were held regularly in every parish. Furthermore when a new candidate was given work, he was always up under the wings of an experienced catechist. A little book was prepared by Fr. Mischler to guide them in their daily work. Retreats, working sessions were multiplied but it was obvious that nothing could take the place of a regular training given at a specialized institution.
Bishop Ogez was finally able to open such a Catechists Training College at Ibanda in 1963. Many candidates who had completed their primary schooling (or junior classes) received a full year course with the possibility of doing a second year later. Much thought has been given to this venture and in all likelihood we’ve not seen the end of it!

But one thing is sure: the Lord always provides what is needed...as long as we do our part. No one will deny that men like Kitagana were called by God. He was an African but a missionary all the same. Now the Lord is certainly inviting men from Kigezi to step out in faith as they did to serve the people like they did. We get the catechists we deserve. The people more than anyone else must help the likely candidate to discover that the Lord is calling him to his service. We are all responsible for the others, but it helps a lot if we have a member who can help us to help others. We expect the catechist to help us, but we must encourage him and support him in his difficult task, “I am in the midst of you like one who serves.”

The first fruits of the harvest

With the full flowering of the faith came something unheard of in Kigezi: young men and women who would choose not to marry (even though they could) to dedicate themselves to Christ and his people in a special way. To produce people such as these, there had to be a living faith in the community. Not to have one’s own family is sheer folly if there is no Christ. Indeed, there is more to life than what we see. The sisters and brothers are a living proof of this.

The first sisters to come to Kigezi were Africans. They were the Bannabikira sisters from Bwanda who had been founded by the Sisters of Africa. As soon as Rushoroza, Mutolere and Nyakibale were set up as parishes, the parish priest called in the sisters to help with the girls and little children especially. Thus from the beginning, the people were able to see for themselves what women dedicated to the service of the Church are like. Very soon every parish had a group of “Babazi” postulants willing to try the noviciate after a time of probation with the sisters of the parish.

The idea of a life-long service in the religious life was not easily understood at first. Parents did not want to let their daughters go: that meant no bride wealth and no grandchildren. That was hard to take. The young men, puzzled by this new trend of ideas, sent a delegation to ask Fr. Le Tohic about these many girls living on Rushoroza hill. They were afraid of running short of wives in the near future. There were some who readily accepted the dedication of girls to the religious life as it was customary to set girls aside for the Nyabangi cult. The first postulants went to Bwanda already in 1930. Others went to Virika after the division of the Rwenzori Vicariate to join the group of the Banyatereza.

Once Bishop Lacoursière received help from the Canadian Sisters from Chicoutimi in 1937, it became possible to start a local group of sisters. Under the direction of Sr. Bruno, the first candidates went to Butale for their formation. But the official noviciate was not started before 1943 with Sr. Alfonsi and Sr. Henriko. The second noviciate was already better attended with Sr. Andrea, Sr. Gertrude, Sr. Bernarde, and Sr. Terezia. As time went on, the stress was put on higher academic qualifications. Many sisters graduated from Teacher Training Colleges, Senior Secondary Schools and even Universities. In 1964 the Congregation of Our Lady of Good Counsel, as they are called, had developed enough to have its own superior general.

The Sisters of Kyabirukwa (their mother house) have gone through many a trial since their foundation but they have done a great deal for the Church. More than ever they are looked upon as a community who is to do a lot for the welfare of Kabale Diocese in the fields of pastoral work, education and nursing — as their qualifications allow. It is difficult to know exactly how many girls from Kigezi have embraced the religious life. Besides the Sisters of Kyabirukwa, some are found in Bwanda, others in Toro and still others in the Ladies of Mary. Surely more than one hundred have made their religious profession in a congregation working in Uganda.

When we think of dedicated men, priests spontaneously come to our minds but we must not forget the brothers although they are still few in number. There is no doubt that the people were intrigued by these unmarried men who accompanied the first priests... Bro. Martin, Bro. Tobie, Bro. Simon, Bro. Remy, Bro. Bar-sabas, Bro. Bonaventure... What they did for the development of Kigezi is not sufficiently known. It was through their efforts that builders, bricklayers, tailors, cobbler etc... came to be. They had given their hearts to their Lord and their skills to the people.

We can hope that with the years more men will follow in their
footsteps, but already now we have young men from Kigezi who have joined the Brothers of Christian Instruction and the Bannakaroli Congregation from Buganda. Their joy in the service of others never ceases to strike those who see them. Their whole life points to Christ who lives in them so powerfully.

While Fr. Beaudet was parish priest at Rushoroza another important group came into being: the Bafatima. It was Sr. Amedeo of the Bannabikira who took this initiative. It was a little community of girls called “Ekibina kya Bilkira Maria owa Fatima”. They met once a month and they came together every year for a retreat. Sr. Amedeo insisted a lot on giving oneself to Christ in a community. Many girls followed those retreats made under the most difficult conditions: no food, no sleeping accommodations... After a while some of the girls left but some of the others wanted to remain at Rushoroza as their relatives wanted to force them into bad marriages. They kept busy with manual work and they were faithful to community spiritual exercises. Their numbers increased and by 1958 they spread to other parishes. They were even asked to help at Katigondo Seminary. As the community stands, it would seem easier to turn them into a lay institute rather than a classical religious congregation. But their spirit of service is of more use to the Church than any juridical status! With a better spiritual formation and more specialized training for their work, they will surely attract more people to serve the Christian community in a spirit of simplicity.

“The harvest is rich but the labourers are few” (Mat 9:37)

On Sunday, the 8th of July, 1951, a huge crowd of perhaps 15,000 people gathered at Rushoroza. They came to witness an event of supreme importance to the Church: the ordination of the first Mukiga priest: Fr. Narsisio Kangakeizi.

They had come from far. Even the now aged former ruler of Kigezi was there: Yohana Ssebalija. Bishop Lacoursière performed the ordination ceremony which took place in front of the old church. For the occasion, a little booklet had been prepared by Fr. Desbiens. It was meant to explain the ancient rite to the people who had never seen an ordination ceremony. As usual many were very much impressed when the new priest lay prostrate before the altar during the singing of the litanies. Some thought that he was dead and started weeping! Fr. Van Spaendonk assisted the new priest since it was he who had selected him to go to Bukalasa Seminary. At the end of the mass when the new priest gave his blessing, the enormous crowd responded with a thunderous AMEN and flocked towards the new priest to receive his special blessing. A bodyguard had to be formed around him.

Then came traditional dances and the offering of gifts according to the customs of the land. Their feelings expressed in this traditional and popular way were meant to congratulate the new “father” for so many years of successful studies. But there was more than that. They knew that the dignity conferred upon Fr. Kangakeizi was in fact the collective promotion of every one and the assurance that the Church in Kigezi was meant to stay. Here was a priest who had his roots firmly planted in the people. He was not transplant. More and more now the people would feel at home in their church. The “other-Christers” would be like them in every way.

A few days later, another beautiful ordination was to take place in Bufumbira. This time, it was Fr. Peter Rukasi. The same enthusiasm and the same piety accompanied that second ceremony. After all it was not so common in the history of modern times to have two priests ordained only twenty eight years after the foundation of the first parish. This was the outcome of Bishop Streicher’s policy on the matter. He was convinced that a country who could give martyrs to the Church could also give priests.

Already in 1927 Bukalasa Minor Seminary had received the first Mukiga student. He was F.X. Kigorogoro, but he stayed there only two years. The second was Arkadi Bandekye but he left after four years. Fr. Kangakeizi was the last Mukiga to go there in 1932, and he completed the full course. In 1935, Kitabi Seminary in Ankole was opened. Fr. Rukasi went there in 1936 and most of our twenty priests from Kigezi have studied there. The Mutolera pre-seminary had been running since the late fifties but it was only in 1965 that St. Paul’s Seminary was started at Rushoroza. In 1971, the first students to have completed the full Senior Secondary course there went to Katigondo Major Seminary.

When we see the great sacrifices the missionary bishops have made to keep their seminaries running effectively and for such a long time, and on the other hand the handful of native clergy, when we have to meet such crying needs, we can ask ourselves if Kigezi will not be one of the first to inaugurate a new form of priesthood. Each Christian community should have its priests and yet here we
are with only one priest for nearly every 10,000 Christians. The Christian community is facing a problem of life or death. The people of Kigezi are being challenged as never before!

"The Lord gave them the power to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness" (Mt. 10:1)

A loving heart can not remain indifferent to human suffering no matter what form it takes. True to its Master, the Church has sought to relieve man of all his miseries and to make him whole and happy. That is one of the reasons every parish had its own little dispensary. At Rushoroza, Nyakibale, and Mutolele, the dispensary were run by the fathers themselves, but this rudimentary way of doing could not last. It was surely better than nothing, but only until qualified personnel could be called in.

In 1954 Bishop Lacoursière had made plans to start a hospital in Nyakibale and one in Mutolele. A German association of Doctors in Wurtzburg sent Dr. ROCUS to Nyakibale in 1955, but there was only a dispensary and a small maternity with twenty six beds to welcome him. The lack of funds had prevented further development. In Mutolele, the Dutch Franciscan Sisters of Breda (Holland) had accepted to come and good Fr. Klees was only too happy to supervise the building of the hospital in his old parish. Things went fast from there. They now have twenty four maternity ward beds and one hundred hospital beds.

In Nyakibale things were more difficult. Dr. ROCUS could not work without a hospital so he went to Mutolele. In the meantime the little dispensary of Nyakibale was run by sisters of the Good Counsel and later by some of the Grail Workers. In 1961, the Sisters of Breda decided to take over the Nyakibale project. On the 18th of July, 1961, three sisters arrived to start their own house. As funds were available, they went on to hospital wards, a hostel for relatives, and nursing schools. On the 14th of September, 1963, the official opening was made by Fr. Lefebvre. Since then things have developed very nicely with sixty maternity ward beds, eighty five hospital beds, three operating theatres, X-rays, a laboratory, incubators and the rest.

The work performed by these devoted doctors and religious sisters does not attract much attention in the life of the diocese but their popularity is high and their influence for the good is unquestionable. Besides the purely medical services they offer, we owe them special thanks for the nurses they are forever training to look after their own people. Little by little another of man's enemies will have lost his grip on the children of God. Only a healthy man can work hard and enjoy it.

"I am the vine, You are the branches" (John 15:5)

Pope Pius XI's Encyclical letter "Mens Nostra" was the occasion for the fathers of the Uganda Vicariate to start some sort of "Catholic Action Movement". The idea was to get the ordinary laymen to take on more responsibility in the mission of the Church. Every Catholic should be an apostle but it was felt at that time that it would be far better if their action were under the immediate direction of the hierarchy. Being the true sons of the Church that they were, the fathers decided to do all they could to implement the new directives.

In Buganda they first tried to re-organize some old boys associations into a group called "Ekibina ky'Abajuruzi be Buganda". The Apostolic delegate declared the association to be in conformity with the views of the Holy See. That may have been all right for Buganda; they had old boys associations from many famous schools; but in Kigezi, there were no schools with old boys yet. Moreover the name itself must not have been very popular with the Bakiga. The beginnings of an organized elite came out of it, but in Kigezi, it was still too early. The people could not see the need of it. The argument was: "Since Baptism is sufficient to be saved, why bother having an association next to it?" In a way they had a point, but that sort of reasoning was sign enough that they were still very individualistic in their way of seeing their faith. They were not yet awakened to the need of actively spreading it, not just as isolated individuals, but as an influential group.

In Kigezi as elsewhere in the vicariate, the fathers had introduced the custom of Sunday "Bibina". After Sunday mass, a group was asked to stay for a discussion in the church. The first Sunday was for men, the second for women, the third for boys, and then for girls. They came from all the villages just for that. During these meetings, topics adapted to the concrete needs of each group were discussed. They ranged from house-building to
the education of children. It was a very effective formula even though it did not exactly coincide with the idea of Rome.

Another successful attempt were the Parents Associations. Parents organized themselves for the building up and upkeep of the little bush schools. This association did wonders. Eventually many schools were built. The children were looked after, and teachers were paid by the parents themselves. As such undertakings were not possible without money, the idea of collective work for the Church on Tuesdays was introduced. This kind of lay participation corresponded much more to the needs of the time than to a fixed definition of what “it should be”.

For some reason the Catholic teachers were never able to form an association that could bring something positive to the community as a whole. But many of them had a great influence through their membership in other groups. Thanks to their superior education they had much more self-confidence than others. In the midst of their own people — even outside formally organized groups — they became aware that they had a great responsibility. They knew that if they didn’t take the initiative nobody else would, and so they lead the way with courage and realized marvellous things.

In the forties it had become a tradition to have a meeting once a year in Rushorozao with all the Catholic chiefs and influential people. In 1948 at the occasion of their annual gathering, the decision was taken to send to Rome Mr. Paulo Ngorogoza, the newly elected Secretary General of Kigezi. Money was collected in all the parishes. He would go for the celebrations of the Jubilee Year, 1950. But from that gathering came the idea of another association: the Kigezi Catholic Council. Its purpose was to foster the welfare of the Catholic community. The rules were sound and prudent but the idea of a political party was very much in the air. The Kigezi Catholic Council soon became a tool of the Democratic Party and after a while it had to be dissolved. The political undertones were too great to be considered a Church group. It did have one great advantage: it showed that the Church was somewhat lagging behind especially with regard to lay involvement in the things of this world. Vatican II would set that right.

The time had come for a more direct participation of the layfolk in the spiritual work of the hierarchy. The people responded generously to any kind of material venture that was proposed to them such as buildings, harvest offerings, tithes and so on, but when something of a more spiritual nature was presented to them interest died down. Things have their importance but anything that has to do with people and their personal problems is even more important.

In June 1949, Miss Catherine Dickson and Miss Sbak came from the headquarters of the Legion of Mary in Dublin. They came to see whether they could start a branch of the movement in Rushorozao. They were welcomed with keen interest as the need for something like that was making itself felt more and more. They stayed in Kabale long enough to start three “praeidias” in Rushorozao, mostly with young people. The new organization spread rapidly over the whole district. What would have been unthinkable twenty years earlier was now a reality. Thanks to the presence of some devoted teachers, the movement had the necessary direction to move ahead with a solid footing. Ten years later some people in Dublin had doubts about what was happening in Rushorozao. It sounded too good to be true. The parish counted more than seventy groups! It was the first parish in the Catholic world to have such a large number of Legionaries. They sent a special envoy to enquire. He visited the praedias, went to curia meetings, looked into the books, read reports, put questions to the right people, and finally decided that everything was quite in order. The movement had not divated: the zeal was real.

The fifties were the crucial years leading up to Independence. The lack of outstanding people in politics, the threat of Communist infiltration in Africa made the hierarchy aware of the need of training leaders. The super-abundance of leadership courses, books and magazines on leadership reflected the trend of the times. It was in the midst of this that Fr. Blanchard’s movement of the “Mamanzi” got its start in Nyakibale. It did very well. It was an adaptation of the old “Bibiina” Sundays. Soon it was extended to the whole diocese by Bishop Ogez who saw in it a way of training people who were in a position of leadership. For once a movement that was working well could be considered true “Catholic Action” in its aims and method. Unfortunately, it did not reach the kind of prominent people it was aiming at. Moreover, even the simple method of “See, Judge, Act” was somewhat too far from African life and way of doing things. In many places, it ended up in very down-to-earth realizations, such as collective shops, hammer mills, and so on. In a way it became a movement parallel to the Legion of Mary.
For a moment let us turn our attention over to our youth. Who better than they could bring Christ to the world of the young? Already in 1934 we could find in the vernacular schools of Rushoroza, Nyakibale and Mautoile a movement called the “Eucharistic Crusade”. Its orientation was basically spiritual; they would get prayers “done”. Fr. Kizza, a Muganda priest working at Rushoroza, started a group called “Malaka” (the angels). It helped them to do things for others but unfortunately it disappeared when Father left. On the girls’ side, the Baganda sisters took care of the group called “Aman Yonyozzi”. Later on this group was also dissolved but many of them joined the Legion of Mary. The Scout Movement was soon implanted in all the parishes even though it was the war period. Because of its international character, it had a special appeal to the fathers and to the boys, but it did not aim at fostering “Catholic Action” as such.

Eventually a remarkable youth movement was introduced; The Xaverians. This African style Catholic youth movement from the Congo was started in many schools, even the most remote, in 1955. Without neglecting the personal formation of the individual person, one of its main goals was to make them more aware of the others and their needs. “Love” is their pass-word. This movement was helped by Fr. Blanchard’s publication of many of the Xaverian booklets to ensure the normal running of the activities of every group. Moreover, every year sessions were held for the formation of leaders. The Training College at Ibanda provided practical initiation to the new movement for any teacher who was keen on youth activities.

The vitality of any youth organization has always relied heavily on the devotedness of the teachers. Good educators know that the activities of a group, even outside school hours, can provide some of the most worthwhile opportunities for developing the minds and hearts of our youth. The sooner a child begins to think of others and to do something practical for them, the more chances he will have of being an effective leader in the Church of tomorrow. It is significant that many seminarians have been recruited from their ranks.

As we look back in retrospect, we can better understand what made the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church such a problem. There was of course the novelty of “Catholic Action” as the hierarchy conceived it in far away Rome. On the other hand, the Christian community of Kigezi was still too young to think in terms of getting together in more specialized groups to face up to the more complex challenge of transforming in a Christian way the milieu they came from. If we improve the water, the fish will be better!

But the root difficulty seems to be elsewhere. Without realizing it, the Church leaders were separating too much the Church and the World, the Spiritual and the Temporal, the Soul and the Body, the Redemption and the Creation. Christ’s Kingdom is not limited to the Church, nor to the hierarchy. The Risen Lord is undisputed King of everyone and everything. The Saviour is constantly at work in his creation to bring it to its fulfillment.

If the Church leaders had simply gotten on with the job as they saw it and as the needs made themselves felt, they would have avoided lots of unnecessary tension. There is no doubt that “movements” have a role to play in the Church (e.g. the Liturgical movement, the Catholic action movement…) but only as long as the Church as a whole has not become aware of that particular dimension of its life. Each Christian should be so fully present to the groups he already belongs to that he won’t need “special” groups “to consecrate the world” by bringing Christ into it.

“When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the crown of unalloyed glory” (1 Pet 5:4)

Under the direction and with the impulse of Bishop Lacousière, the Rwenzori Vicariate developed rapidly. All the stations, but more especially those of Kigezi were overwhelmed with work. Even the smaller parishes had up to a thousand baptisms a year. To save money and personnel, Bishop Lacousière never wanted to have a secretary. How often he worked well into the night drafting reports and keeping up to date with his voluminous correspondences.

In 1953, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was set up in Uganda and the Vicariate of Rwenzori became the diocese of Mbarara. Bishop Lacousière remained in charge until 1955 when, worn out, he sent in his resignation to the Holy Father and went to Canada for treatment. He would return to spend the rest of his days in his country of adoption. For those of us who knew him personally, he was the living image of Christ: a man of God, a man for others; a man who gave and forgave. Each day he started afresh with an invincible faith and trust. His love for the Church, his humility, his fidelity, his charity towards everyone remain with us as a constant call to al-
ways do better ourselves. When the Lord came to get him his remains were given a place of honour in Mbarara cathedral, a perpetual reminder of his undying presence to us.

For a period of two years, Fr. De Jordy acted as the Apostolic Administrator. He very ably kept things going until the new bishop was finally named in August 1957. He was Bishop Ogez, a Frenchman who had been working in Zambia.

He was warmly received by the people of Kigezi and once he was better acquainted with the situation of the diocese, he decided the foundation of Bukinda parish in 1959. He gave a fresh impetus to the medical centre of Nyakibale and planned another hospital at Mutoole. All the lay apostolate movements were given a new start. To give a stronger voice to the Catholic Community, a newspaper “Agaeteeraine” came into existence in 1959. Later on, he attempted to start a Farm School at Nyarushanje thanks to the assistance of “Misaraor”. Maryhill High School at Nyimitanga was a success. Many girls from Kigezi were able to find there a senior education of the highest standard.

Bishop Ogez is best remembered for his forward-looking attitude. He was able to keep pace with the newest developments both at home and abroad. And he did everything he could to give the Church all the necessary means to go ahead with the times.

“Everything is possible for anyone who has faith” ...(Mark 9:24)

To commemorate the centenary of Lourdes, Bishop Ogez and his clergy had decided to undertake a vast mission throughout the diocese. They wanted to revive the faith and to foster a true devotion to the Mother of Jesus. Fr. Audette and Fr. Seike took a statue of Our Lady of Fatima around the diocese. Special instructions, prayers and films accompanied the coming and going of the statue in every centre. The reception of the statue was the occasion of great enthusiasm among the people. Thanks to the inspired preaching of the Word of God and to the spirit of prayer, many conversions took place: many people came back to the Church, some of them after many years of negligence.

The Lord manifested Himself in another quite unexpected way. At the beginning of May 1958 when the statue of Our Lady arrived at Rushoroza for three days, something beautiful was about to take place. It all had to do with a man named most appropriately Lazaro.

Lazaro Byekwaso was born in 1926 at Rwene. When he was about eight years old, he became sick and after three months, he was unable to walk. As he could not stretch his legs, he began bit by bit to get about on his hands. He managed to come to Rushoroza to finish his catechumenate and was baptized by Fr. Stokman in December 1943. Ever since his baptism he had taken the habit of saying his rosary every day. When the mission began in Rushoroza, Lazaro came to spend the day in the church. He followed the instructions with everyone else and asked our Lady to be able to walk again. On Saturday the 3rd of May, he did the same. But on Sunday morning he felt great pain in his knees. He remained lying down but kept on reciting his rosary. In the afternoon, the pain became intolerable. In the evening, he prayed a little and fell asleep at about 8 o’clock. He was suddenly awakened at about 9 and it was then that he realized that his legs had stretched out in his bed! "I could stand up," he said, "but I felt pain in my knees. As I was unable to sleep for the rest of the night, I said my rosary."

During those days, Lazaro was staying at Bangirana’s house behind Rushoroza. He and his wife Kangiri were pagans but when they saw their nephew standing and walking with a stick, they too fell on their knees and recited the rosary.

The news of that miraculous cure was not known in Rushoroza before Tuesday, but soon the word got around and on the 8th, Lazaro did his best to go and see Fr. Witbroek, his parish priest. Fr. Witbroek knew Lazaro and when he saw him now, he could not believe his eyes. Not only was he standing and walking, but the palms of his hands were no longer rough and thick but smooth and soft as those of a child.

Lazaro had some friends in Kakole who wanted to see him. He went on the same day the statue went: what a day for those who could see the marvels of the Lord! People came from far away. Great confidence and thanksgiving filled the hearts of everyone. Through his Mother, the Son of God had shown his love for this little one. Finally, Lazaro decided to go to Rwene to see his mother and relatives. He was received with great joy. Many people seeing him cured, asked to join the catechumenate. God is alive. Lazaro taught them their prayers. When asked how he felt, he simply said: "I received a favour from our Lady and I thank her every day. I ask her a greater faith to serve her better."
"You too are being built into a house where God lives" (Ep. 2:32)

The building up of the Catholic Community in Kigezi was to some extent made visible by a common task: the building up of the great church of Rushoroza. After the war preparations were made to start the work. The making of bricks and the piling up of the necessary building materials on the chosen site was a tedious task. It was carried out with great courage by the people of Rushoroza Parish. Boys and girls, men and women, old and young trudged up the hill with bricks on their heads to do their part in this wonderful work.

This unanimity in such a realization was the outcome of the collective awareness of the community. In working together, the people had expressed something of their most intimate thoughts and the work done tells more than many words!

The actual building was stopped several times due to lack of funds. Bro. Bonaventure and Bro. Barsabas were in charge of directing the work. By 1965 it stood complete in all its glory. It was not a cathedral yet, but in the hearts of the people, it was already! We can still remember a group of laypeople sending a letter to Rome asking the Pope for a bishop. "We've already got a cathedral," they said! Their wish came through. Today Rushoroza church stands as a concrete symbol of a community that is a living temple of God.
“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW” (Rev. 21:5)

If fifty golden years have sufficed to fully set up the Church in Kigezi, we may ask ourselves if fifty years are near enough time for her to reveal herself as she really is. The Church is a mystery: it is something that comes from God, something that we can discover bit by bit in much the same way as we discover the living person but which is totally beyond our wildest dreams. It is something nearly too good to be true. The intense inner life of the Church is invisible and yet if the Spirit of Christ who lives in her members is real, there must be some clear enough signs of that presence. It was inevitable that many dark shadows have clouded the vision, have marred her face so to speak. But the lines that follow would like to show that in spite of everything it has become increasingly clear in the eyes of all that the Church’s unique mission is to proclaim that Jesus, the son of the Virgin Mary, is now the Son of God in Power. He is with us to give us His Spirit so that we can love as He loved and thereby form communities of love where each person can become fully human, fully himself. All the rest is secondary.

The events leading up to Independence proved to be a great time of testing for the Church. Outright opposition between the churches, changes of regime, social advancement through the churches; all these and many more had created a great deal of confusion in the minds of the people about what the Church is. A time of crisis was to clarify the situation.

The oncoming elections brought about feverish activity on both sides. Everything was in effervescence. Tension was running very high. But politics blurred everything. There was only one thing that mattered — and for many it was a question of life and death — and that was to win the elections! In years past, when the political parties had been formed (UPC and DP), the historical circumstances were such that it became somehow taken for granted that the UPC was a Protestant party while the DP was a Catholic one. And so political leaders had no scruples about using these respective churches to gain popular support. The closer the day of
the elections became, the greater the animosity between the two groups.

The District Commissioner did his best to cool down the growing antagonism between the Native Anglican Church and the Catholic Church as it was a detriment to both. He finally decided to invite the religious leaders on both sides to come together to see what could be done to foster mutual love and respect among their members. The political frenzy had become so high that when the NAC leaders heard what it was all about, they just couldn’t see the point of such an exchange! They could see nothing but politics. The parish priest of Rushoroza had to make a special appeal for peace and mutual respect. Fortunately, only minor incidents occurred.

Much more serious were the indiscriminate baptisms that took place at this time. This was part and parcel of the political intrigues used to enlist as many potential voters as possible. On the Catholic side, there were abuses but they were limited to baptizing infants irrespective of the genuine faith of their parents and old people who were dispensed from the long catechumenate anyway. But on the whole, because of the obligatory six month spiritual formation at the parish, the sacredness of the sacrament was respected. Were baptized only those who believed in Jesus Christ and who wanted to take their new life seriously. One had to spend six months getting ready for it!

Quick baptism, as it was administered by many NAC men, was creating a double problem. People were given to understand that the Catholic Church was a political rival that had to be defeated at all costs. And a sacred spiritual experience was reduced to the status of an insignificant rite, a political button. These cheap baptisms may have helped to win the election, but they certainly did not fill the churches.

At one point a split occurred in the UPC. What was striking was the fact that there were Catholics in both branches of the “Banyama” (Meat-eaters) and the “Baboga” (Vegetarians). One’s political party was no longer seen to be determined by one’s religious affiliation. This was a very important development.

What consternation! The Democratic Party lost! Many Catholics thought that their end had come. “How could the Catholic Church lose? How could God not hear our prayers like that?” Some were hot and prayed and prayed for victory and had lost their rosaries away. One still remembers Bishop Ogez standing on a pile of bricks at Bukinda after the elections reassuring the people that things would go on as before. It was surely a great moment of truth for these people. It was a crisis of faith, but what is wonderful is that they did keep on praying! The loss did not crush them; it simply helped them to see the true face of the Church of Christ. It is a community of love and mutual respect that is above and yet within every political party. It is God’s gift to men. It is the Lord living in each man’s heart. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord!” (Is 55:8).

“Thus says the Lord God to these bones: See! I will bring spirit into you that you may come to life” (Ez. 37:5)

When missionaries went home on leave and told their friends that all the churches in the diocese had altars facing the people they were amazed. On the whole the people took to the changes introduced by Vatican II without too much trouble. The younger you are, the easier it is to change. Yet it was high time that something be done. Perhaps here more than anywhere, there was a danger of looking at the mass or at the sacraments as something magic, especially when a “secret language” (Latin!) was being used. The new liturgy helped them to understand what was happening so that they could live it: they were truly meeting the Risen Lord. The churches of Kitanga and Nyakibale are notable examples of what can be done to create a sense of togetherness so necessary for a better participation of the people in the sacred mysteries. It took a long time to translate into Runyankore-Rukiga the liturgical texts as there were so many changes and additions but the joint work of the two dioceses, Kabale and Mbarara, was well worth waiting for.

But the main changes of Vatican II were not all of a liturgical nature. The re-discovered concept of collegiality which brought out the importance of each bishop with regard to the Pope had many repercussions on the diocesan level too. People, but especially the priests, became fully aware of their irreplaceable responsibility. If the Holy Father needed the bishops, the bishop needed his priests. Open dialogue with the bishop became a must. A Senate of priests was created. Different diocesan committees were set up to prepare clergy meetings and to analyze pastoral problems. Mutual trust and unity of action were a direct consequence of this. Because a
new way of doing entails learning and therefore mistakes, a great deal of patience and understanding would be needed on all sides.

The decrees of the Council also called for a lot of lay participation in many forms. Lay people have always been very interested in Church problems, but the new changes were not easily understood by the majority of the people. Unfortunately, they had come to depend too much on the fathers. When something that required courage had to be done, they would bring forward lots of ideas of what should be done... not by them, but by the fathers! They were not adult enough to stand on their own two feet. The Council stressed that each man is animated by the Holy Spirit and that each man is to be counted upon wherever he is. Every Christian should be able to stand up for good — alone, if he has to.

Vatican II did a lot to change the attitude the Catholics had towards the members of other Christian churches. Here in Kigezi, it was bound to improve the relations with the Anglican communion. The situation created by the fear and mistrust of the past had no reason to be maintained. Sincere believers on both sides became more concerned not only in creating a friendly atmosphere amongst themselves but also to work together to bring about changes that only a concerted Christian effort could attain. Thanks to its new constitution, the Uganda Joint Christian Council established branches in every county. Unity was beginning to reach the grass roots. There’s life, new life, in those old bones! But we’ve only seen the beginning!

“Put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator.” (Col 3:10)

The school system is the backbone of any country. It was only natural then that when the people of Uganda got their Independence, the government assumed the full responsibility for the schools. Bishop Ogez welcomed this move with open arms. True, the Church had started its own schools from scratch. She had invested much time, money and personnel in them. The fathers, the parents, and the teachers had made them what they were. But now that others were ready and able to continue this vital task, it was only right they did.

The transfer was not made without difficulty. Everyone had to compromise in the best British tradition. The Ministry of Education was as yet not very clear in its policy. Steps were taken that lead to confusion and that discouraged fruitful collaboration in a situation that was already charged with emotions. On the side of the Parents Association, no clear-cut way of doing could be followed as was the case in Buganda because the Church was divided into three separate deaneries. There was little communication amongst them which made unity of action difficult, if not impossible.

The hierarchy was satisfied because the teaching of Religion in the schools had been guaranteed in principle. The priests were freed from the administrative burden to dedicate themselves to a more pastoral work. New forms of presence had to be imagined to help teachers in their difficult task of handing on the faith to the children.

In Kigezi, even after many years of Independence, there leaves much to be desired. Illiteracy is still a heavy burden. Only one child in three has gone to school. Parents are either too poor to pay the fees or unwilling to do so... Some of the children themselves show no interest in studying. Is it because the syllabus does not cater to their real needs? Surely the Catholic community could do more to back up the government policy by taking a greater interest in their teachers and by persistently getting after the parents to make them understand how important it is for them and their children that they open their minds to the saving light of understanding. An uneducated man brings shame to the community. He is only half the man he should be.

The more education a man has, the more power he has at his disposal. He knows! He will not be the slave of events, nor of other people who would use him. The educated man is able to take the lead in his village, in the county, in the country. The future of the nation lies in his hands. Here, the Catholic Community of Kigezi owes a great debt of gratitude to Kitabi Seminary. Already in 1935 it opened its doors as the first Senior Secondary school in the area. Its main purpose was to train future priests, but in so doing, it also gave to Uganda a strong contingent of enlightened and dedicated men who have already put their mark on the new Uganda. We can be proud of them.

In the sixties, the need was felt for more senior secondary schools. The government controlled ones just did not provide enough places for our children. So the Parents Associations firmly put their request before the bishop. They wanted two private senior schools: one in Rushoroza, St. Mary’s College and one for girls in
Nyakibale run by the Canadian Sisters of Our Lady of Good Counsel. These men and women began to understand what Christ meant when He said that the TRUTH would make us free.

"Sing to the Lord a new song
His praise to the ends of the earth" (Is. 42:10)

Only a Mukiga, a Muhororo, a Mufumbira can say: “Jesus is Lord” the unique way he does! “The Word was made flesh...” Bantu flesh. When the missionaries arrived, they knew by heart the famous word of St. Paul: “I made myself a Jew to the Jew...” (1 Cor. 9) And they tried to become Bakiga with the Bakiga... They learnt the language as best they could, the customs, the culture, the history, the proverbs of their adopted country. But they never quite succeeded.

The Church in Kigezi is now faced with a great challenge: to make it possible for the Spirit of Christ to permeate the genius of the people of Kigezi to its very core. The world is waiting to see this new facet of the face of Christ.

There’s a lot of talk today about African Authenticity. People want to revive the values of their ancestors. It is possible that Paganism, which was so closely liked up with the lives of the people, will also appear, but this need not be considered dangerous. Undoubtedly, it will be the moment to look Paganism straight in the face and assume it by transforming it into something completely new. This will call for a great deal of creativity on the part of new wise men of today.

Perhaps more important than the past is the present. The people of Kigezi are interested in progress and the young especially will not listen to the man who does not fully enter into what makes them tick. They know what their very being cries out for. They don’t have to study history for that. This is the language the new-missionaries will have to learn. It’s not enough to know the language. In fact, it is conceivable that a man not know it and yet capture the spirit of the times by far better than one who does. The local Church will have to learn the new language of each new generation. In other words, the leaders of today will have to be in close contact with the African realities as they are, not as they would like to think they are. In a country where there is an abyss of culture between the priest and his own family, this will be particularly difficult.

The actual situation has been aptly described as being a process of putting flesh on the bones! The essentials of the message have been given. Now it’s a question of making it appetizing and attractive so to speak. People must be made to feel completely at home in the Church, as at home as they feel at a bugenyi for instance!

Before thinking of changing anything in the lives of others, it is of capital importance that the army of artists that will be needed start off by being penetrated themselves by the Living Word of God. It’s like a mother who transforms food into milk for her baby.

Already there have been some noteworthy achievements in this line. The new typically Rukiga hymns composed by Fr. Ndumira and his colleagues express the Christian mystery like never it’s been done before. The people took to them at once. That was not as much the case for the masterpieces of Mr. B. Mubangizi when they were introduced here. Although they were in a language the Bakiga could understand, they lacked that very special Kigiga flavour. They even altered the melody when they sang them. But those hymns that grew out of their own soil are rocking the churches on Sunday and filling the valleys during the week.

Other attempts are still to come. The new catechism has its merits but is still too foreign. The mass has some scope for adaptation but nothing really local has been effectively introduced yet. Many priests are dissatisfied with the wedding ceremony. It appears to be an empty formality after the meaningful exchange of the bride wealth and all that goes with it. We’ve yet to find the Kigezi-way for a priest to be the familiar head of the community. Why not incorporate somehow the potentialities of our dances?... for instance, for Corpus Christi? When will we see more local statues or drawings to decorate our churches? We could go on and on. But we have the right to expect great things!

A word must be said about exploiting to the full the rich cultural heritage of our ancestors as expressed in our proverbs, tales and expressions. These reflect the genius of the people. Somehow they express the best of what our forefathers have learned from life. They are pregnant with Kigezi common sense and century old wisdom that will outlast all the changes of the modern world. Our Christian truths are surely but the blossoming forth of them. They could be studied and explained by a deeper and renewed understanding of this unsophisticated wisdom that has a true African flavour.
“I shall give you a new heart,
and put a new spirit in you” (Ez. 36:26)

“Nowadays economists tend to say that there is poverty, not because people lack money to buy things but rather because people don’t have needs...” This reflection by Fr. Misieaen, a missionary in Tanzania who studied Economics, is thought-provoking to say the least. It brings us face to face with the problem of the Church’s role in development here in Kigezi.

We tend to forget how providential it was that the Church arrived in Kigezi at the same time as the colonial government that was to introduce so many opportunities for economic progress. But all the same, there was so much to do in those early years that the civil authorities couldn’t possibly hope to do it all. That is why the Church stepped in. Coffee trees were planted in all three of the first foundations “to give the people a good example”, as the officials put it. Before long, there was a cigar factory and wolfram mine operating at Mutoro. Brick-works were put into operation in Kabale. All these ventures were worthwhile efforts, but they would be handed over to laymen or to the government as soon as possible.

In the sixties, we could find much the same type of activity but with a difference. The stress was on training people to help themselves. In the Kabale Social Centre Fr. J. Lacoursière organized a program for helping school leavers by giving them some manual skills in traditional handicrafts. Group ventures began to appear; co-operatives were formed to run hammer-mills, shops, swamp reclamation, and farms. Undoubtedly Fr. Lacoursière’s greatest contribution were the Thrift and Loan societies where people learned to save their money, put it together and thereby achieve a power they did not have before. They have a membership of over 6,000 people. Invaluable training was given in this way. Men learned how to work together to improve their lot. They came to understand that they did not have to be at the mercy of events. They could do something about their standard of living. Little by little they came to realize that they were important. Their self-respect and self-esteem went up. They were men, and they meant to put their mark on the new world. They would have their say.

A huge step was taken towards real progress when Women’s Clubs were started by the women of the Grail in Kabale, starting in 1961. Here the heart of the matter was being touched. A man can not be truly happy and productive if he is not happy at home, if his wife does not bring out the very best in him. Nor will the children coming from an unhappy and badly kept home be of much use to anybody. Up until 1968, this International group started and ran these clubs all over the district. Regularly they held courses for the leaders at Rushoroza. These women would return to their villages and help the women understand just how important they are, and how much they can do to conquer illness by washing their children daily, by giving them the right kind of food... In a word, they learnt the importance of creating an atmosphere of warmth and love around themselves which would enable their husbands and children to become fully themselves. Without this very basic human and psychological development, economic progress is impossible.

It’s outdated to think that the Church’s main contribution to development lies in directly material projects. The fight must be taken to the level of the human heart. Any real development must come from within. But the trouble is that this type of contribution takes time and patience. It is invisible and cannot easily be measured, but it is nonetheless the only one that is real, long-lasting and effective. When we get right down to it, what the priest changes is the man himself. He sets him on a long spiritual and psychological journey which will lead him (not by force) to think for himself, to be open to change, to take initiative and to be creative. Such a man will feel his own real needs and take the necessary steps to meet them with courage and dignity. Any other solution is like trying to heal heart disease with an Aspro: you may relieve the pain for a time, but you’ve done nothing to root it out. “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” Gal 4:6

“For thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep” (Ez 34:11)

Bishop Ogez was a broadminded and farsighted man. During all of his twelve years here, he did not conceive his work as bishop as the activity of a super-parish priest. He thought and acted in terms of the Church as a whole. And it was obvious to him that
new dioceses had to be established for the good of all. With determination, he made possible the formation of Fort Portal Diocese. Toro and Bunyoro were thus put into the hands of the new Holy Cross Father Bishop, Vincent McCaulay. No sooner had this been done than he actively prepared the creation of Kabale diocese. Priests were sent for further studies. In 1964, Bro. Garnier got busy putting up the new headquarters at Rushoroza. But the main difficulty was to find more personnel: one needs men to run a new diocese effectively. Already in 1963, Bishop Ogez had contacted the Verona Fathers. Once their collaboration was agreed upon, the foundation of the new diocese became possible. In February 1964, four very enthusiastic Verona Fathers arrived: Fr. Dempsey, Fr. Ambrozi, Fr. Tomaino and Fr. Cisternino. After a six months language course at Mushanga, two were sent to Rushoroza and two to Makono. In November Fr. Pasquali, Fr. Tanel and Fr. Tosello also arrived. Everything was ready. On the 1st of February 1966, it happened! A new diocese.

Everyone was wondering who would be named the first bishop of Kabale. The Holy See thought it wise to send a man who had already had experience in administrative and pastoral affairs: Bishop Nkalanga of Bukoba, who was an African and who knew the language. He came to the diocese with all his gifts. He was the right man, a man of God. His evangelical simplicity and his very persuasive personality made him an ideal leader. His ability to really listen to others never failed to win their collaboration. When all also failed, his disarming smile solved the worst problems.

During his stay in Kabale, he organized the visit of Cardinal Rugambwa. Its purpose was to make possible the coming of some Tanzania priests to staff the new parish of Kakole. When his own mission was accomplished, Bishop Nkalanga was called back to Tanzania to take over the bishopric of the Cardinal. It was the 4th of April, 1969. The Lord had provided shepherds for his flock.

*This is the day the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad!*

The year 1969 will always be remembered as an historical landmark for both Uganda and Kigezi. Uganda received the visit of his Holiness Pope Paul VI and Kigezi was given its first Residential Bishop.

The visit of the Pope was a never to be forgotten event for the people of Uganda. No other African country could boast of such an honour. It was here that the Pope chose to touch the whole of Africa. By his coming, the Head of the Universal Church, the Successor of St. Peter, made it quite clear that the Africans — the people of Kigezi included — were as dear to his heart as anybody else, that they are an important member of the Body of Christ.

This event was prepared with bubbling activity all over Kigezi. Money was collected to offer a present to the Pope. There was also to buy a new car for the new bishop. Many people went there to witness the ceremonies. Those who could not go kept listening to their radios and participated in organized festivities in their own villages.

The visit of the Pope was a prophetic gesture, a gesture meant to be an incentive which could accelerate the movement of history. He was showing the way; he was making known to the world the mind of the Church. It was the attitude of a man who sees history in the making and who contributes to it. He started off by making his famous appeal: "Africans, you must be missionaries to yourself." Then in a very significant ceremony, he consecrated twelve new African bishops among whom was our beloved Pastor, His Lordship Bamahao R. Halem’Imana, from Kinanira Parish. The Vicar of Christ Himself laid his hands on his head and confirmed on him the power to be the Good Shepherd in the place of Christ here in Kigezi.

For the people of Kigezi, it was truly a day that the Lord had made. It was He and no one else who had given them one of their own sons to be the first in charge of the diocese, the common father of all the faithful. From now on, it would be clear to all that the Church Universal trusted the young Church. By putting everything into the hands of Africans from Kigezi, the Church was saying to the world: "We know it won’t be easy. You will have to make your own experience of becoming an adult community where people work in love and harmony no matter the obstacles. Prove yourselves. Show Christ, show the rest of us your brothers that we were not wrong in showing you so much trust. You can be sure that we all await with longing to see how you, Kigezians, are going to live Christ. Be yourselves. Don’t be afraid to create something new. You are different from the rest of the world: don’t be ashamed of it. We love you the way you are: so must you!" And so it was that the Church was fully established amongst the people of the hills.
The ways of God are always mysterious. He doesn't always work the way we would have thought. This is especially true of the way He chooses people to do His work. When God told Samuel to go to Jesse's house to choose the King of Israel, it was the most unlikely son who was called: the little shepherd boy, David, who was looking after his father's sheep! When Nathanael was told that Jesus was the Messiah, he asked: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" History has repeated itself many times since. Each sister, brother, priest or bishop knows in his heart that this is so. "Why me, oh Lord?" And the Lord to answer as He did to Jeremiah: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you..."

If it is true that the Lord takes whom He wills, it is also true that He prepares his instruments to fulfill the task He sets before them. Moses immediately comes to our minds. Here was a "Make-rere graduate" who ended up looking after the flocks of his father-in-law when he discovered his vocation... but the Lord had seen it in him that he was armed for his job! When we look at the Lord's choice for the first resident bishop of Kabale, the same holds true.

He was baptized a little boy by Fr. Piekarzyn, the only Polish father in the diocese. Hearing the delicate voice of the Lord in his heart, he went to Kitabi Seminary and to Kariungo to be ordained a priest on the 7th December, 1958, in Mutolere Parish where he would begin his ministry. Not even a year had gone by when the bishop brought him to Mbarara to become the Editor of "AGEETTEIRAIN," After three years of dedicated work, Bishop Ogiez sent him to Rome for further studies in Church Law. When he returned he was appointed to the Uganda Catholic Secretariat. It was July 1966. Two years later, he became the first Ugandan diocesan priest to hold the post of Secretary General to the Episcopal Conference. It was from there that he was sent to Kabale to feed the lambs, to tend the sheep of the Lord, "Pastor Bonus", the Good Shepherd... who gives his life for his sheep.

Still deeply impressed by what Christ through the Church had conferred on him in Kampala, the young bishop made his way to the people God was giving him. Literally thousands of men, women, and children turned up for the huge installation ceremony which took place on the 24th of August, 1969. People from all three ethnic groups mingled freely: they prayed, they sang, they danced, they participated together. Speeches were delivered with rare enthusiasm, gifts were presented, and all sorts of dreams were dreamed. What would the future hold? And yet this crowd vibrant with life, with all the energies of the new generation and the old was in itself the greatest prophecy of things to come: that day when there would be only one shepherd and one sheepfold where everyone loves one another. The Spirit of Love hovered over this people already: soon he would fuse them into one! "That they all may be one!"

After a moment of transfiguration, the bishop got down to the challenge at hand. He undertook to visit all the parishes and important centres of his diocese. He wanted to know his people after his long absence. He was received with joy everywhere. On the spot he was able to observe the vital elements at work and also the pastoral difficulties. One of his first important decisions was to erect Kekole and Muku as parishes. It was the end of the beginning.

"And know that I am with you always, Yes, to the end of time" (Mt. 28:20)

It is extremely exciting to be alive today. This is particularly true of people living in Kigezi. Once you've allowed your heart to beat with the rest of the population, you've had it: you must get involved or opt out! One is reminded of one dear soul who once remarked: "Here, you've got to be prepared to face a psychological shock every half hour!" The whole world is in full evolution at the moment but somehow it seems more traumatic here because we are faced with a people that has just become aware of its terrific human potential and because there are all sorts of fields of growth and tension at work at the same time. What's going to develop is anybody's guess and yet we must be dead serious about one thing: it's going to depend on each one of us how things are going to turn out. Those who see clear and who come up with the convincing solution will win the day. The days of "chanci yangu" are over. Man, working with the Lord, is in charge, not some mysterious undefined power. Let's take a closer look at the situation of the Church.

Perhaps one of the most impressive things about the Catholic Church in the world and here in Kigezi is its terrific organization. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that there is someone in charge. People know where the Church stands. This is obviously a strength but it is not without its dangers. Bishop Pailloux once said: "Unfortunately, in the Church, things usually start with love and end up in administration." More than ever we will have to come back to what so struck the first Christians in the district: the personal in-
terest in each individual. People matter, not regulations! Too often the men in the cloth have forgotten that they were loving fathers before cold-blooded administrators. The Church is a family, not a business. It is a living Body, not a static set of buildings. If we look after the people with love and care, the buildings and things will look after themselves. Somehow everyone in position of authority, from the bishop down to the last head-of-a-family, will have to learn to become more person-centred. Before all else, the Church is about inter-personal relationships. In one word, LOVE!

Confronted with the fact that her church would be paired with another one because of the critical shortage of personnel, one old lady said: “If there’s nobody to teach us, we will fall back into Paganism again.” At the moment, the Church in Kigazi is blessed with twenty or so highly skilled African priests and an army of priest-substitutes that are the catechists. The ordained priests are too few to have a real influence on any given community while the catechists on the whole are barely one step ahead of the communities they are present to but unable to lead effectively. It has become a question of life and death. Either we take the means to bring the unadulterated message of Christ to the starving masses or they will surely lose their faith. This is all the more serious as there is nothing more difficult to bring back to the Church than a man who has received just enough teaching to think he knows what it all about. He’s been like vaccinated... against the Church! Many feel that it is here more than anywhere that the young Church will have to pool all its thinking power and imagination to come up with some brand new forms of ministry to meet the need. When we come before the Risen Lord for judgment and thousands of people have died of spiritual starvation, will He be satisfied with: “Sorry Lord, we had no priests”? We must use our talents. Are we alone without prophets in the Church today? The whole Christian community is concerned here, not just the hierarchy.

Indeed, one of the special features of the Church in this part of Uganda is the great spirit of collaboration that exists between the clergy and the people at large. It is unique, but where does it come from? It may be due to the natural energy of the people. They are alert and ready to take up a challenge at the drop of a hat. More probably it stems from a time consecrated tradition that laymen are just as much the Church as its leaders. Those twelve years of exclusively lay leadership have left their mark on the people. They don’t have to be told they have a crucial role to play: they know it.

what’s more, they have proven it. They have an in-built desire to participate in discussions about Church issues and to have a part to play in the decisions. Outsiders are rightly struck when they witness this utter lack of complexes and psychological barriers that prevent other churches, particularly in Europe and America, from having this uninhibited dialogue. More than elsewhere, we have a more like-minded community in Kigazi. Our history has not divided us, it has rather brought us together. The Church of Kigazi seems to say with the simplicity of St. Peter: “I will give you what I have.”

Enlightened laymen and women have always been considered a must if the people are to bring a positive contribution to the general mission of the Church. The clergy have gone out of their way to give them the intellectual tools to think and act wisely. The seminaries, individuals sent abroad for special courses, training on the spot... all these have contributed to form something of an “elite”. But somehow, somewhere along the line, some of these more educated members of the community lost track of the fact that they owed something of a debt to those who were less favoured. Submerged in their newly acquired position and social status, they were cut off from the anguish of their fellow man. As a result, beside those few truly concerned educated men, there is a too big number who are digging an ever deeper ditch between themselves and their own flesh and blood who have not had the same opportunity to shake off the chains of poverty. Can they not see what’s happening? How can a man worthy of the name walk through some of our villages and remain indifferent? The destitute are legion. There are old people who have scarcely a bite to eat; fathers of large families are without work; the youth have lost all glimmer of hope in their eyes; children, badly dressed, idle away unable to find school fees; the sick — especially the toddlers — waste away and die when a few shillings could save them... The Gospel will be preached only when such as these have heard the GOOD News. It is up to the favourited to carry the burdens of these men, not by giving them money, but by giving them the means to lift themselves up like men. For the moment, they are a helpless army. Let’s free them so that they can put their shoulder to the task too.

At the level of the family, there is also much to think about. Among the Bantu peoples, we find something unique, something we could call the extended-family. The familiarity, the sharing, the
genuine concern for others which we usually expect to find in the husband and wife team was found extended to embrace a much wider group. This gave to its members a strong sense of security: when the immediate family was found incapable of meeting a need, people knew they could count on their relatives. In most instances, the individual could feel at home somewhere no matter what happened... even if it was only to have someone to listen to you. Such was the simplicity of the set-up that it was taken for granted that anyone could step in to do what had to be done, for instance, to correct another man’s child. It is significant that today in Europe, there is a great trend to expand the loving concern of the family to a whole community.

Recently an old Mukiga expressed his concern at some of the things he noticed. In the traditional family, there was a great stress on the authority of the relatives (Ab’ekika) and of the clan elders (Abakuru b’omuryango). It was supra-parental authority. It was not unusual for disputes arising between a father and son, or a brother and brother to be resolved in this way. Nowadays, with the coming of the local administration, this type of authority seems to be losing its hold. As a result the children are not getting the firm but loving guidance they need to become responsible and self-disciplined men. It is becoming evident that the father will have to take the full responsibility of the children he begets. Together with his wife, he’ll have to discern what is good for his children and to take the necessary steps to see to it that he is obeyed. Understandably, this is a great challenge when their sons and daughters are more educated than they are, but with their irreplaceable experience and wisdom, aren’t they in the best position to help their evolving children to integrate their book learning into the realities of concrete life? Such a child will not forget his flesh and blood when he has his “obarua”. And let not the mother think that her role is unimportant. It seems most unfortunate that the children are thought to belong to the father. Children badly need both the father and the mother who live in deep love and unity if they are to be well balanced individuals. This inequality (and it is not the only one unfortunately) between the man and the woman within the traditional marriage is becoming more and more destructive as modern ideas come in. “The two become one body,” Gen. 2. Much more could be said about the “spiritual revolution” that must take place in and around the family, but let these few words suffice to help people realize that this is a vital problem.

Some Church historians express surprise today that one of the most basic realities of social life in Uganda — not to mention elsewhere — has been passed under silence by the teaching authority of the Church. We are referring here to the powerful dynamism created by the co-existence of different ethnic groups in an area. Here in Kigezi we are blessed with three such groups: the Bakiga, the Bahororo and the Bafumbira, each having its own personality. In the collective awareness of each one of these, there is certainly a cultural heritage which helps to define and bring into focus the “soul” of each group so that it enjoys a life of its own and blesses the whole community with its own creative action. There is no doubt that the more such minorities a diocese has, the richer it is potentially. “Two heads are better than one”, as the adage goes, and that, especially when they are different! But sad experience is there to show that much harm can be the outcome if instead of collaborating closely they consider one another as opponents to be feared and mistrusted. This calls for mutual love and respect. If Kabale diocese is able to harness all the dynamic forces within it, there is no telling what beautiful fruits it will have to show the world.

Quite different is the tension that exists between the Protestants and the Catholics. It is hard to imagine that they are anywhere near as deep as the ones deriving from the ethnical differences. In fact, the sincere Protestant and the sincere Catholic is first and foremost a Christian, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they meet, they soon discover that what divides them is more often than not words, not basic doctrines. With the “substantial agreement” of the Windsor Statement on the Eucharist, the Anglican and Roman communions are well on their way to union. But in the minds of the simple folk, it must be made clear that what divides us is not something having to do with politics. With all the injustices and hurts registered in the hearts of many, this will be hard to root out. Committed Christians on both sides must strive to bring about as many get-togethers as possible and to do everything in their power to create in the hearts of the less enlightened a sympathetic attitude towards people of the other group. How wonderful it will be when we will be able to talk to any Christian like one of our own.

Priests have often complained of the unreasonable demands made on them by some of the ordinary faithful. It could be that there is here a touch of immaturity on the side of the faithful. And
of course, the father who was soft-hearted enough to give in to their demands was labelled "Patriarchal!" But behind all that, wasn't there something genuinely Christian expressed? In times of trial and sorrow, why did the people instinctively turn to "Tata" or to "Sister" for help, guidance, and comfort? Didn't this attitude somehow reveal an unconscious idea they have of the Church? The Church is their Mother. Some would put it down to "childish" behaviour, but aren't they missing the point? The whole complex of people and things that the Lord has left us to see to it that we have life and life in abundance — don't they bring out the motherly concern of God for us? Doesn't this sense of belonging to a Universal Community where we feel at home, where we feel at one with the rest of the world no matter where they are, express what the Romans called the "Sensus Ecclesiae", i.e. a certain "feeling-with-the-Church"? Whatever the reality might be, there is no denying that this quasi instinctive feeling puts each Christian in touch not only with all his fellow believers throughout the world, but with that multitude of people who have preceded him. The Mother of Jesus seems to polarize all these deep-seated yearnings. No wonder Catholics have such a great love for her; no wonder she is called the Mother of all Christians.

"I have a dream..." Martin Luther King voiced, with that famous refrain, the deepest sentiments of every black man on the globe. Gone are the days when the horizons of the people of Kigezi stretched as their gorgeous mountains. Now with the coming of Independence, the Economic War, the radio and what have you, they are caught up in a great movement that is as wide and as powerful as the continent. With their black brothers, they are becoming more and more aware of their importance, of their mission to the world. They are experiencing a great expectation, their hearts are burning with a great hope, they aspire after a liberation the likes of which has never been seen before. The common man can not be troubled by far-fetched speculation: he needs a vision, he needs a dream, he needs an ideal. He is moved by the heart, by intuitions. Let not the Church fail them! The Lord wants them to know that He is aware of their terrific hunger and thirst for fulfilment and happiness. He wants them to know that He is with them. He wants them to know He loves them.

"He has deposed the mighty from their thrones
And raised the lowly to high places.
—The hungry he has given every good thing.
While the rich he has sent empty away." (Luke 1:52).

APPENDIX

MAKIRO

Together with Rujumbura, Kinkizi County was under the care of the fathers from Kitabi Parish, but it was very far away and very hard to get to. For many years the only road to reach Kinkizi was through Nyakishenyi. In the early twenties some people from there had been baptized and they were visited regularly by the fathers in Rujumbura. Fr. Bringuer in particular was very keen on getting things started there.

In 1931 the Provincial Commissioner was touring the country. Being a good Catholic, he went to Makiro to fulfil his Sunday obligation. Seeing this "Muzungu" at the back of the church, some ladies started talking among themselves disturbing the rest of the congregation, not to mention the preacher! With appropriate gestures, the Commissioner did his best to restore liturgical law and order. Finally, Louis Kanyere, the catechist, was able to find a happy ending for his homily.

Signs of progress could be seen here and there. Catechists were working at Zoroma, Kayungwe, Musasa and Kayonza. The little school at Makiro was singled out and recognized in 1937. Around 1942, the shortage of land became a problem in Ndarwa and Bufumbira. As a result the government officials opened settlement areas in Kinkizi county.

In spite of much talk about a new foundation in Nyakishenyi, it was Makiro that was chosen to be the site of the future parish. A two-classroom building was arranged so as to be used as the temporary fathers quarters. Fr. Desnoyers was the first priest to stay there but he didn't stay long. Fr. Desbiens replaced him in June 1944. A few months later Fr. Poulot came to join him.

The new parish had the advantage of taking some of the burden from Nyakibale and Rushoroza by including the part of Rwija within its limits. The fathers found twenty seven catechists and 3,500 Christians on arrival. But as soon as the parish began to operate, the number of catechists was increased to sixty. Many little schools were opened too. But the most important construction was that of the church which could later be turned into a school. But as a
matter of fact, it was later used as a Parish Hall and quarters for the catechumens.

In 1945 the new road through Rutenga was opened. Later the road through Rujumbura did a great deal to make the access to this hilly part of Kigezi easier.

Thanks to the effective cooperation of the people, the new house for the fathers was quickly built. The work on the site of the new church was started in 1954 under the able direction of Fr. Pouliot.

RUBANDA

At first, the building up of a Christian community in Rubanda was a very difficult undertaking. In the early thirties, the shortage of food obliged a great number of our catechumens to move to other parts of the country. Their numbers went down from six hundred to one hundred and fifty. Moreover, our catechist, Sipriano Kababure and Amato Kahemura, could not do much without facing a lot of difficulties.

Protestant opposition was very strong. A group of people from the "Edini ya Mwoyo" had made an agreement with some influential people to prevent any progress of the Catholic Faith in that area. A Protestant church was even built on our own land in Rubanda itself! If rich in the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit, the people of the "Edini ya Mwoyo" were somewhat short of common sense. They had visions, transes, revelations and many of their activities brought about regrettable excesses. They insulted people; they were proud and arrogant, threatening and sometimes beating others. It became so bad that the state of mental anarchy in which they were living brought an end to the bit of credit they had acquired not without intrigues and calumnies. The solid common sense of the Rubanda peasant could not get on very well with these eccentricities. They could not help but notice how orderly and prayerful were the Catholic gatherings even when conducted by catechists. The influential people refused to back up these excesses and the Protestant church that had been built on our land was definitely abandoned in the middle of 1933.

After that, the Catholic community took shape rather quickly. Already in 1935, Bishop Lacoursière had planned to have a parish on that site. The freehold of Kahoko in Rujumbura was given up and the title was transferred to Rubanda. World War II prevented a speedy foundation, but already in the early forties, the people were making countless bricks. They knew what they wanted: a primary school and a big church. But the staff of Rushoroza parish was overworked. In 1947 and 1948, not much could be done either because there were only two priests who were more often than not sick.

In 1949, the situation improved. Four priests were appointed at Rushoroza, all of them in good health so it was possible to open a regular catechumenanate in Rubanda and to begin building the fathers' house. The new parish was opened in 1950 with Fr. Fontaine as its parish priest. The collaboration of the people was marvellous. Bricks were made, building materials were gathered on the site of the new church, and on top of their manual work a grand total of sixty thousand shillings were collected to build the fine church we now see, dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. (1954) Great indeed was their determination and their enthusiasm.

BUKINDA

Just off the Mbarara-Kabale road, Bukinda has always been easy to get to. Already in 1927, it could be reached from Kabale by motorcycle. Moreover, it had the great advantage of making a triangle with Kyerero and Muhanga. Those three places were staffed with outstanding catechists and as a result, Bukinda counted sixty Catholics and three hundred and fifty catechumens in 1928, Kyerero had seventeen Catholics and six hundred catechumens, while Muhanga had 30 baptized people and three hundred catechumens. After a while it was considered necessary to have a big church in dried bricks at Kasakatunda (Bukinda). In February 1930 under the leadership of the catechist Benedicto Birangwa, that wish was realized. Soon afterwards a small school for boys was put up on the hill.

Once Kitanga was founded in 1935, the Bukinda part of Ru- kiga was looked after by the fathers of the newly founded parish. In the Nدورwa part of the parish, things didn't look very promising at the outset. Maziba was considered to be a difficult place with small Protestant churches on apparently every hill top. Yet in 1928 Nyanja and Nyakigugwe had fifteen baptized people with four hundred catechumens. In Kahondo only one family was praying and Kashakeye was infamous for its beer! Kamwazi could not be given a catechist to lead the very small community that was there; the people left on their own found nothing better to do than burn
down the house of the Protestant catechist! At Omunkole it was better; there were only two Catholics and a catechist but all of them were involved in teaching a group of catechumena. Under the care of the Kitanga Parish, the community of Bukinda grew up in age and in grace.

In 1959 Bukinda was chosen by Bishop Ogez as the site of the future parish. That move brought much relief to both Rushoroza and Kitanga parishes. Father Pouliot was appointed its first parish priest. He built the actual fathers’ house, but left in 1962. In 1963 the new church was started by Bro. Majella with Bro. Siebertz’ plan. It was completed by Bro. Van Berkel.

The year 1972 marked the opening of the Junior Seminary of the Congregation of the Apostles of Jesus, a new African Religious community, Fr. Ambrozi was in charge. It was his community, the Verona Fathers, who had this fine initiative.

**NYAKISHENYI**

In the beginning, Nyakishenyi was part of Rushoroza Parish. On the 29th of November, 1926, Fr. Torelli came all the way from Kabale. In the Diary he wrote: “The catechist Yohana Mpmizo is assisted by nine young men: Matayo, Edwado, Esha, Ernesti, Samuli, Andrea, Eugenio, Ephrem, and Atanasio. And they are working hard. They are teaching six hundred and fifty catechumens to love Christ. The Catholics are only seventy one in number. The chief, Paulo Kangwagye, is asking for a school. I am extremely pleased with what I saw there.”

In 1928 Fr. F.X. Lacoursière came to Nyakishenyi and found that the church was too small for Sunday services. It was decided to make it bigger. In 1929 Fr. Torelli asked himself where would be the best place to have the new parish: Nyakishenyi or Nyarushanje. Nyakishenyi had 3,900 catechumens so he was in favour of Nyakishenyi. (Even today the Nyarushanje people would say he was biased!) From 1929 to 1935, Nyakishenyi was looked after by Nyakibale when Kitanga took over. In 1956 Fr. Leo Katesigwa made it possible to keep the Blessed Sacrament in the church. Fr. Jean Lacoursière and Jolly Bro. Majella built the little chapel to our Lady and the new fathers’ house.

In January 1963, the new parish of Nyakishenyi was officially opened under the title of Our Lady Queen of the Martyrs. Fr. Cléchet was the first parish priest. He wanted to start at once with the building of the new church but he was transferred to Rwanyena Parish before he could really start. It was Fr. Boiler with the help of Bros. Van Berkel and Groener who planned the new church and saw it through to completion. It was dedicated in January, 1973.

**NYARUSHANJE**

With the initial push given by Ssebalijja, Nyarushanje counted 237 Catholics and 900 catechumens in 1926 already. The Gomoro chief of the time had a catechist of his own to help those who wanted to pray. There was also a little school with the limited attendance of 11 children. But Nyarushanje was far away from Rushoroza. The fathers could not visit them as often as was necessary. Consequently, there were defections among those first Christians. The fathers were very popular, however, and when Fr. Torelli visited Kayanga for the first time, he was warmly received by a crowd of six hundred people! (Kayanga is the home of the first religious priest of Kigezi, Fr. Victor Zimukarei, of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers.) Under the leadership of the catechists Antonio Munyaza in Nyarushanje and Johana Mpmizo in Nyakishenyi, the number of catechumens went up noticeably in 1929: up to 2,400 in Nyarushanje and 3,500 in Nyakishenyi. Fr. Goulet attributed this success to the zeal of our devoted catechists.

But somehow the people were not convinced of the necessity of primary education. Lazar Rubungo was running a little school with two classes in 1931 but it was only in 1947 that this school could be upgraded to class three. Grazing cattle was the great obstacle to school attendance but then where were the girls? Kayanga Primary School was recognized as a P. 2 only in 1954 and did not make any progress for years. Other schools, however, were built in Kisizi, Nyabushenyi and Karama.

With the people in Europe becoming aware of their responsibility to help improve the material welfare of the Africans, Bishop Ogez was able to get help from the German organization “Misereor” to build an agricultural school. Nyarushanje was the ideal spot for the project. Fr. Babikidde, the parish priest of Kitanga, had acquired enough land in the area to make possible the Nyarushanje Farm School. In 1962 Groener took direction of it.

It seemed appropriate to put the parish next to the school. In 1963 Fr. Raymon became the first parish priest. In 1964 the school went into operation with a first intake of thirty students.
After Independence, there was a massive rush for Senior Secondary Schools. There were jobs available in government posts. As a result, Agricultural and Technical schools were looked down upon. Besides, the Farm School ran into debt and had to be closed after only three years. The experiment was perhaps made a bit too early.

**RWANYENA**

In November 1929, in the midst of the eight Protestant churches of Kamuganguzi. Fr. Torelli found a little community of fourteenth Catholics. Many of them were originating from Rwanda or Karagwe. They had already a group of seventy five catechumens. In Karujanga, the situation was even brighter. There was a catechist and eighteen Christians with two hundred and seventy five catechumens. They wanted to start a little school. Fr. Torelli wasn’t the one to stop them. He promised them a teacher if they built the two classes.

In Rubaya there was a double difficulty. No catechist would accept to go to that part of the country as there were many wild pigs who had nothing better to do than destroy crops. Moreover, Fr. Torelli could not decide which plot would best serve the little community.

This difficulty would be solved many years later. In 1960, Mr. Paulo Ngorojoza, former Secretary General of Kigazi, was promoted to the Knighthood of St. Gregory in recognition of the services he had rendered to the Church in Kigazi. As a token of his gratitude, he gave a large piece of land at Rwanyena for the future parish.

Rushoroza had become a huge parish. As Rubaya sub-county was difficult to reach on account of Lake Bunyonyi, it was obvious that a foundation on the other side of the Lake would be most welcome by all. Fr. Jones did a lot to go in that direction. He was replaced in 1963 by Fr. Ciéchet who continued. When Fr. Dempsey arrived in 1966, he found nineteen catechists and about 8,500 baptized people, among whom were many children of pagan parents. The school of Karujanga was already a full-primary; the one at Kihungye had met with many difficulties and had not yet made the grade; as for the school of Kyasano, it was still of recent foundation. Many church-schools were set up in the meantime to combat illiteracy as school attendance on the whole was rather low. In 1967 Bro. Tognon was appointed at Rwanyena and the work of building the new church soon began.

**BUHARA**

If we go way back, in 1925, it was Rwene, not Buhara that was thought to be the most likely centre to start a parish at: there was literally nothing at Buhara. But oddly enough, Bugarama was by far the best centre in terms of people with a groups of more than four hundred and fifty catechumens, but it has always remained inaccessible. From Bugarama the catechist Fransisko and his two helpers used to visit quite regularly Kabanyoni, Nyarutojo, Kafunjo, Nyaruhanga, and Ruboroga. The prospect of a school in Kabanyoni was in the air and it seemed quite feasible.

In 1929 Rwene was counting forty five Catholics and the local catechist, Patero Katwire, was full of zeal, instructing about three hundred and fifty catechumens. There was at that time a promising mutungo chief, Paulo Ngorojoza, but the place was difficult to reach either from Kafunjo or from Karujanga.

Buhara, on the other hand, could be reached without too much trouble from Rushoroza. Sebastiano Tiwangye stayed in Buhara many years. At first there wasn’t much collaboration, but as time went on the improvements became noticeable. During the war, the freehold at Buhara was properly demarcated and the little school — already ten years old — was making progress. When Arakadi Rwendaire was catechist, the number of catechumens increased steadily and it soon became evident that Buhara had now become the most suitable site for the future parish. They had built a nice little church in bricks already in 1934. The priests from Rushoroza had a little building at their disposal when they came. A further step was made when a catechumenate was begun at Buhara itself, in 1958. Thanks to the help of the Verona Fathers, the centre could be officially opened at Christmas 1957. Fr. Tosello was the first Parish priest.

**NYAMWAGABIRA and RWENGIRI**

The northern part of the diocese was later divided into two parishes: Nyamwagabira as an off-shoot of Makiro parish and Rwengiri as a part of Nyakibale. Those two parishes have many things in common. In the past the density of the population was so low and their access so difficult that the missionaries concentrated their efforts on more densely populated areas. As time went on, settlers came to cultivate new lands and it was clear that this trend would only increase in the future.
The parish priest of Makiro, Fr. Pouliot, started to prepare the site of Nyamwegabira as a possible parish. A school with two classes was opened in the early fifties. Later on, more land was acquired and a little catechumenate was begun. Fr. G. Brunet made a plan for the fathers' house and actually started building it. In 1966 Fr. Tanel carried on the work and the new parish was officially opened on the 1st of January, 1968. It was high time, for the new parish counted more than 11,000 Catholics. And they were much too far from Makiro to be looked after properly. Thanks again to the Verona Fathers another parish was launched. Since then a great effort has been made to improve the schools. A literacy campaign is already bringing good results.

It was Mr. Rwakitonera, the Head Catechist of Nyakibale, who was mainly responsible for the selection of Rwengiri as a possible site for that new parish. Endless difficulties to acquire land and the great shortage of priests made the foundation impossible for many years. As more settlers arrived, Fr. Geraets carried on preparing the place. Once the land question was settled, it became possible to go ahead with the buildings. Thanks to Fr. Geraets's tenacity, the parish was officially opened in 1967. It already had five primary schools and 10,000 Catholics to its credit.

**KINANIRI**

During the month of April, 1929, Fr. Torelli decided to go around Kigezi on foot. From Rushoroza he went to Nyanushanje, Nyakishenyi, Kinaba, Muko, Nyakalemba and finally Kinanira! When he arrived there, he found 11 baptized and many children. A man called Gaitano had invited the people to build four little churches, and three catechists were teaching two hundred catechumens. But the place was isolated; it was difficult to reach with no road, no bridge. Fr. Desbiens is said to have crossed the swamps with the help of a door on which he had put his motorcycle and pushed it.

The population was mixed with Banyarwanda, some Bakiga, and a few Bahunde, but the people kept shifting from one side of the border to the other. Many came from Zaire in time of trouble and when they did not find what they wanted in Uganda they went to the other side. It was difficult to build a local community. A freehold land-lease was applied for at Nyanutembe but in the meantime it had practically lost all of its population. Another freehold was obtained at Busengo, an area much more densely populated but no longer central enough.

Kinanira itself was not very much developed in the past. There was no chance of having a primary school at the parish itself. A Protestant centre had been built in the vicinity, while the school at Kabulesazi — three miles from the parish — would not permit another school to be properly attended at Kinanira itself. Moreover, the place was always difficult to reach and it could not be properly developed as long as a car could not reach it. Fr. Schoneck built a wooden bridge and that helped a lot.

As Bishop Ogez had promised to set up a parish at Kinanira, the collection of money was organized all around Mutilere to help the future foundation. The people started to build a church for themselves and a house for the fathers. Unfortunately, the building was not properly supervised and once the roofing of the church was finished, it collapsed. There was no casualty. In 1963, Fr. Piekarczyk was put in charge of the area. It was eventually separated from the mother mission, Mutilere. The parish was officially set up in 1968 with Fr. Petero Rukasi as the first parish priest.

**KAKOLE and MUKO**

In 1965 at the occasion of a diocesan meeting of the clergy, it was decided to do something about the planning of future parishes. Kigezi was about to become a diocese on its own so every parish priest was asked to prepare suitable places for future divisions. The parish priest of Rubanda, Fr. Kangakkezi, had a meeting with his catechists about possible sites. Muko and Kakole were proposed. When Bishop Nkalanga was appointed Apostolic Administrator, he visited Rubanda and the two proposed sites. In April 1969, he told the people to prepare accommodations and to collect money for the two projects.

Kakole had a strong active community. Already in the early fifties they built by themselves a nice church and a school in permanent materials. With great enthusiasm and under the direction of Fr. Karwamara, they went on to start the priests' quarters and finished them by March 1970. The new parish was officially opened when the Apostolic Pro-Nuntio visited Kigezi in October. Fr. Babi-kidde and three ladies from the Bafatima arrived in November. The parish counted more than 13,000 Catholics. Some are far away, but the parish is well situated on the Kabale-Kisoro Road.
Muko parish was part of Mutowere and had a catechist as early as 1929. A little church-school was built later but attendance was never very high. The place itself was nicely situated on the main road but up-country, the parish extends to places extremely difficult to reach. Muko was officially opened as a parish in February 1971. It had been actively prepared by Fr. Bakehahwenki. When everything was ready, Fr. Kangskezi was appointed the new Parish priest, assisted by Fr. Bagamuhunda. Muko is an extensive parish and it had the advantage of helping people too far away from Mutowere and Rubanda. As it is a very hilly part of Kigezi, another division would be desirable in the future.

"Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus!"

Rushooreoozi's Cathedral, outstanding sign of Christ's presence in Kigezi.

Hope for the future. Kyabirukwa Sistera on the day of their profession, flanked by Bishops B. Haisimana and J.B. Kakubi.
Bishop G. Nkalanga introduces Fr. B. Halam’Imana as Bishop-elect of Kabale Diocese.

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NB: All these documents are available at the Generalate of the White Fathers of Africa, 269 Via Aurelia, Rome 00168, Italy.

Kigezi in South West Uganda

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- Fr. Piekarczyk
- Fr. Torelli
- Fr. Desbiens

Photos: most from Agaetseraine.