

THE FEATURES

Still Recovering in Rwanda: Undercurrent of Sadness and Distrust Remains

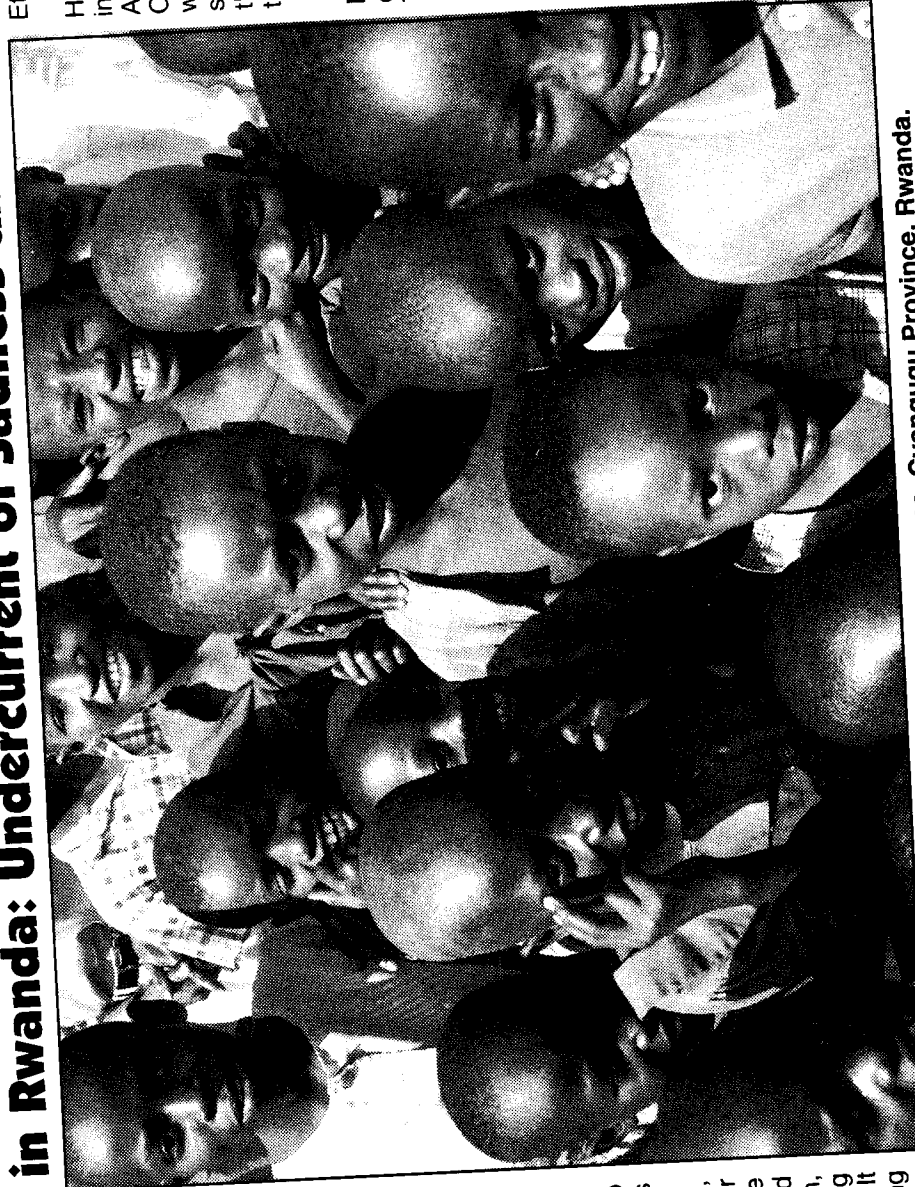
By JULIA KENNEDY

Do you remember Rwanda? Depending on who you are, the answer to that question might be a roll of the eyes and, "of course!" followed by a synopsis of the genocide. Others might say, "Where is that? What happened there?"

Writing about this central African country, which I visited in July, is a humbling task. It has been done many times before. "Hotel Rwanda," which came briefly to Bakersfield, starred Don Cheadle and detailed the awful events of the 1994 genocide to which the rest of the world was slow to respond.

During the genocide, members of the Hutu Power movement organized a massive slaughter of a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus, shooting men, women and children and hacking them to death with machetes. It was the result of a long-standing conflict between Hutus and Tutsis, two groups of Rwandans many would argue have more in common than they do differences.

I visited Rwanda to meet and learn from fellow Christians who are trying to heal their country's wounds by providing for the physical and spiritual needs of those around them. Now, I hope to be one of those many voices who describe what it is like today for a



Children pose at a church in the village of Bugarama, Cyangugu Province, Rwanda.

clergymen informed me — those who planned the killings, those who carried them out, those who pointed to where victims hid, and those who looted dead peoples' homes, stealing everything from furniture to livestock to the clothing off a person's body. Barely anyone escapes responsibility. Nobody is at the hearings. Rwubisisi even brought don't have anything like that," Amooti said.

Rwubisisi of the Cyangugu province in southwestern Rwanda also believes gacaca is vital to the health of Rwandan society.

On a recent Sunday at a small church in the village of Bugarama, he preached about the importance of telling the truth

many Rwandans feel was arbitrarily created by foreigners.

Background to the Conflict

The idea that Tutsis came from Ethiopia into Rwanda is a strictly European notion, said Rev. Nathan Amooti of the Episcopal Diocese of Kigali.

"In our oral tradition, we don't have anything like that," Amooti said.

Ethiopian legend. It came from John Hanning Speke of England, who in 1863 proposed that all central African culture originated from a Caucasoid people in Ethiopia, which he believed to be a superior race. Speke suggested the Tutsis were one of many tribes that belonged to this group.

According to Amooti, Hutus and Tutsis had no real distinction as ethnic groups. They were more like classes that could become part of each others' families. Although Tutsis were often kings and cattlemen and Hutus were farmers, they frequently intermarried.

"If a Tutsi king married your daughter, straight away, you became Tutsi," Amooti said.

Gourevitch makes a similar point in his book: "The regime was essential feudal: Tutsis were aristocrats; Hutus were vassals," he writes. "Yet status and identity continued to be determined by many other factors as well — clan, region, clientage, military prowess, even individual industry — and the lines between Hutu and Tutsi remained porous."

Before the Belgian and German colonists came, Amooti said, "we had the same culture, 100 percent. The same religion even. It was one religion. Even the gods we worshipped, the ancestors, everything was the same."

So how did Hutus and Tutsis become pitted against each other? Amooti says the theory of