

# GBUR

Groupe Biblique  
Universitaire du Rwanda



## HISTORY OF GBUR

1984-2007

For every student and graduate to be an agent of  
godly transformation in church and society

*[www.gburwanda.org](http://www.gburwanda.org)*

## **UGBR HISTORY**

### **What is GBUR?**

GBUR (Groupe Biblique Universitaire du Rwanda) is an Evangelical and interdenominational Christian Organization bringing together students and graduates from Universities and Colleges of Rwanda. It is affiliated to the International Fellowship of Evangelical students (IFES).

It is a ministry that seeks to contribute with other components of the body of Christ to bring about in Rwanda and beyond the fullness of life promised in God's word. We prepare students to be agents of transformation in various areas of life in church and society as God's calling will lead them. The process continues beyond campus when as graduates they are indeed involved in different professional fields and ministries in churches, Christian organizations, public and private institutions.

### **1984-1989: The beginnings**

It formally started in 1984 under the name GBU by students of the National University of Rwanda in Butare ( the only university by the time). But the root idea came up in 1983 by Israel Havugimana who was coming back from studies in Belgium where he had been in touch with GBU. Previous to that, Chua Wee Hian, then General Secretary of IFES, had a vision to pioneer new national GBU movements where not yet started, and Rwanda was among the priorities on his agenda. He had already sent Lindsey Brown ( who became General Secretary of IFES from 1991 to 2007) to France to study French as in preparation to send him to Rwanda. When they knew Israel was graduating from Belgium and returning home, they dropped the idea of sending Lindsey and just encouraged Israel to help pioneer a GBU movement in Rwanda. He will also eventually send Solomon Andria then General Secretary of the GBUIAF to come and give training to the first group formed into the basics of a GBU ministry.

This group of students was committed to strengthen their faith as well as reaching out to their colleagues. A good amount of effort however was also devoted to back up some secondary school Christian groups through visits and bible camps.

### **Challenges**

The major challenge they faced was a kind of mockery the intellectuals of Rwanda and particularly university students, skeptic to matters of genuine faith ("uburokore"). The Rwandan society was massively catholic and the mainline protestant churches had lost the liveliness of the 1930s' revival. Only a marginal younger generation was trying to forge their way, seeking by all means to recover the aspects of an authentic faith. This movement among the youth was ignited (spanning from the 70s to the 80s) through a new wave of revival that swept over some protestant schools and nurtured by the recalled

English missionary Peter Guillebaud through the work Scripture Union he was himself founding. Israel and other youths<sup>1</sup> were themselves ‘graduates’ of this movement.

They would for instance hold their prayer meetings or evangelistic services amidst of screaming by other students. The university culture of the time promoted perversion in every respect. As a way to usher them in (‘baptism’), new first year students would face severe pressure to compromise their faith or other positive values through obscene demonstrations and confessions<sup>2</sup>.

### **1990-1994: GBU & AGBURWA**

As it always is with a work started by the Lord, all these challenges didn’t stop the group from growing and bearing fruit. From 1984 to 1989 The group founded was now structured with stable leadership. After graduation these students spearheaded many Christian initiatives or joined existing ones infusing in a new sense of renewal, in the steps of Israel who had already started African Evangelistic Enterprise right from Belgium. Christian ministries such as Scripture Union benefited much from their input.

In 1989 the same generation of early GBU graduates, now settled professionals in different fields, started consultations with other Christian intellectuals of the time to launch a graduate level of the ministry so as to continue their fellowship even after campus, continue reach out to their fellow intellectuals with the Gospel and give stronger support to the still ongoing ministry at the campus.

In 1990 they came up with a name for this fellowship: AGBURWA (Les Amis des Groupes Bibliques du Rwanda) and deposited its request for legal registration. They also set up an office and had to recruit the first fulltime staff to coordinate the work. Getting a candidate wasn’t a quick-fix issue. Someone was needed who would be equal to the task yet their financial capacity wasn’t such as to insure life conditions suitable to the required level of education and Christian caliber. After clearly hearing from God Antoine Rutayisire volunteered to take the job. He was in the eyes of his colleagues, the right foot in the right shoe.

Antoine Rutayisire, a graduate of Butare National university had finished his studies in linguistics in 1982 without knowing the Lord and without a hint he needs to . Aged 24, with high hopes to soar up in his carrier as an academician, he was appointed assistant professor at the Nyakinama campus. But soon after appointment, he was unexpectedly dropped into a remote countryside secondary school of Rulindo due to the then called ‘ethnic balance’<sup>3</sup> (“iringaniza”) reasons. His hopes were deeply shattered and his heart deeply wounded. He then started erring his mind into boring searches but at the same

---

<sup>1</sup> Michel Kayitaba who was a teacher by the time was also instrumental in spreading the movement. Many of them were eventually among these very first students to lead GBU. Simon Pierre Mugabo, Silas Kanamugire, Jean Batiste Bugiuwenda among others.

<sup>2</sup> Israel is said to have iron-faced the persecution and evolved victorious. He was forced to ‘exile’ from the campus to the nearby home of the Anglican Bishop

<sup>3</sup> *Iringaniza* was a justifying name of the discriminatory system that the Habyarimana regime instituted to keep the Tutsi out of all strategic or desirable responsibilities in the country.

time got open to issues of faith. As a trained linguist he ventured to read the Bible for a literary criticism. As it happens with all open-minded searchers, instead of analyzing the Bible, it analyzed him! It cut through his heart, healed his wounds and spoke straight to his need to change direction and soar in a different career. The major challenging truth he faced was the command and the example of the Lord Jesus to forgive his offenders. This he painfully settled with the Lord in a heart-searching retreat he took for the very purpose. He was helped very much for his beginnings in the Lord by the close friendship of Michel Kayitaba (who had been sent to the same school for the same reasons), a colleague teacher and an older sound Christian.

Being a first staff worker of AGBURWA ( with the title ‘National Secretary’) was a good though challenging experiment to start with. By the time he was asked to take the ride, he had enjoyed 7 years of steady growth through intensive personal bible study and reading<sup>4</sup>. He had conducted different trainings and given public preaching to a number of national and international audiences. He was enough equipped for the task.

The first office occupied was hired from Scripture Union facilities in Kacyiru. The founders were strongly committed to support the work. A table, a chair, a drawer and a typing machine, that’s the set of equipment he had for Work! The legal registration was eventually obtained in 1992. He would alone run the office, hold the accounts, visit the students, visit the graduates, organize prayers, retreats and seminars for them, and keep up his family!

### **Challenges**

Rwanda was now at war since October 1990 against the then rebel movement of RPF in the north and insecurity was gradually gaining the whole country as ethnic hatred got hotter among the people. The University had not been able to resume work the whole year from October 1990 to October 1991. So when AGBURWA was founded, the students were not at the campus and had no news an inclusive organization of students and graduates had started. Antoine had to introduce himself wisely enough for the students to accept him in his right authority as a National Secretary and allow him serve them. It was not an easy job.

Another fact dominating the Christian circles in the late 80s and early 90s was the rising of a charismatic revival through the wide-spreading of Pentecostal churches. A generalized accent of the Pentecostal preaching was the labeling of all mainline protestant churches as ‘unspiritual’. In the mainline protestant churches themselves an even younger generation was rising and reacting to the plateauing and declining of liveliness in the older generations. They were then open to this new thing of ‘spirit-baptism’ and ‘tongues’. As a consequence many youths shifted from catholic and protestant churches to Pentecostal churches with a radical rejection of all links with their former churches.<sup>5</sup>

When Antoine started his work with the resuming of the university in October 1991, many new students in the GBU<sup>6</sup> were graduates of some secondary schools where the

---

<sup>4</sup> He himself recalls he read at first the whole bible 3 times a year and had written his own commentaries of some bible books from personal study, a unique record in Christian discipline by Rwandan standards of the time.

<sup>5</sup> To date many of them have realized they were heavily biased!

<sup>6</sup> under the leadership of Gratien Kanyandekwe who was also sharply charismatic .

Pentecostal movement had made its greatest impact. They simply couldn't give their pulpit or listen to an 'unspiritual' (= non Pentecostal) minister.

So Antoine started his work against severe challenges. On the one hand he had to cope sustaining his family on a mince salary and serve faithfully in an increasingly insecure environment. On the other hand he had to win the acceptance of students who looked down on him as a "non-spiritual and self appointed minister.

For these two combine factors, it took Antoine a full year (until early 1993) to get the students fully accept him as their staff worker.

### **Towards an integrated structure**

Since 1982, The National university had extended itself to two other campuses: Nyakinama ( Faculies of Arts and education) and Mburabuturo ( Faculty of Law) these two other campuses had their GBU groups started in 198... and 1991 respectively. Another GBU group was born in 1992 in the Institute of Agriculture and animal husbandry (ISAE) in Busogo Ruhengeri. The work among students was growing and more demanding on Antoine.

By the time the students started opening up to him, he already felt pressure on the side of the graduates who had expected him since his appointment to be their mobilizer, coordinator, and office secretary. A need was obvious, first to fully integrate the two aisles of the ministry (students in the GBUs and graduates in the AGBURWA); second, to ease the work of the National Secretary by redefining his job description and allowing him to be more available to the students. It would take the Executive Committee of the Graduates to appoint a separate secretariat in the committee and be more involved in organizing and coordinating their own activities. These two needs led to a joint meeting of the AGBURWA Executive committee and key student leaders in the GBUs in March 1994 to discuss the matter.

In the same period, a new strategy was being developed in the GBUF as to restructure the national movements in a way that the ministry would span from university students to Graduats and to Secondary schools. A kind of template for the name of a national movement was already adopted by a number of movements: GBEE... ( Groupes Bibliques des élèves et étudiants de...). In the meeting, Antoine put the idea on the table and the new name in view for the Rwandan movement would be GBEER ( Groupes Bibliques des Eleves et Etudiants du Rwanda). An Executive committee including both Graduates and students was elected. As for legal matters, there would be no need to register two separate associations since the work is one. The GBUs would simply slip under the cover of the previously acquired legal registration by AGBURWA which would still stand even now that it had become GBEER. A task committee to review and suit the constitution to the resolutions adopted was appointed.

### **1994: Rwanda, GBU, AGBURWA, GBEER in the tomb!**

That was the last time for many of the participants of that meeting to see each other! In the night of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994, Rwanda fell into a 100 days carnage that deeply affected every single individual, every single institution and every single aspect of life in the country: the Tutsi Genocide. GBEER never saw its day. Members of the graduates committee and of the joint executive committee and student leaders died or took exile. Israel Havugimana, a hutu, was shot down right in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> April together with all of his extended family at home. He had relentlessly and publicly opposed the hatred and the killing of the Tutsis since 1990. He had gradually come clearly in the limelight of the genocide perpetrators. The Legal Representative Simon Pierre Mugabo, a tutsi, was killed in one of the hiding movements in Kigali. Many others died in their homes.

### **1995-2000: Resurrection**

From July 1994 to early 1995, Rwanda was a heap of ruins. Dead bodies all over the places, infrastructures destroyed, a smell of death hovering over the land. Many survivors were still wondering weather they are really alive or why they should be. For them the idea of living was more painful than that of death. Life was more an obligation than a luck.

The Hutus were for most of them also wondering what would be their fate or suffering under the weight of complex and guilt. Many had had a direct touch at different levels of involvement in the Genocide. Some did participate in the killings. Others betrayed their friends or relatives. Others just failed to protect them. Still others were forced to kill. Some usurped possessions. Even those who had no personal involvement, had at least a relative, a close friend who had. Above all , the fact that the name HUTU was, , associated though not loudly with Genocide made the case of the hutus unbearable.

Many former exiles had massively returned home with the victory of RPF over the ex-FAR. They were themselves carrying a load of over 30 years' inner wounds of the exile. They were also coming from different countries boarding Rwanda and so had their own ( some times bitter) cultural differences and conflicting interests.

In the church there was a mixture of hope, suspicion, confusion and remorse. There was a government fully holding the strings of security, new churches had opened with courage and vision to re-evangelize Rwanda . So there was hope. There was also suspicion. Christians from the exile were suspicious, not sure who of the native believers is not stained with the blood of the Genocide. The natives were neither sure they are safe from the new worship cultures and new beliefs. Pastors were not sure their positions are secure. There was confusion: So far faith didn't offer satisfying answers why should God have allowed such a horrible thing. In fact it felt he has betrayed his people or has been immeasurably hard on them if anything was wrong with them. There was remorse: the

church succumbed just like all other institutions in the country. In most churches, it had just happened between believers and pastors as between nonbelievers.

Yet amidst of such an irreconcilable society, the Government boldly talked of reconciliation and reconstruction! It was unbelievable!

Against all contradicting facts, they decided to reopen the university in April 1995, decisively not ready to allow a loss of more than one academic year. In fact one of the major signs of hope for national life in general was the reopening of the university.

It was from the above described ashes that the GBU also “resurrected from the dead”.

A few remaining members who survived the Genocide or were confident enough not to go to exile, at least not for long, had to come back for studies. These were the stones the Lord gathered again and rebuilt his work on. Among them, Frederic Nzabahimana and Syldio Dusabumuremyi were the leaders. Some others from the exiles had also been in the GBUs of other countries and were vigorously coming both to enjoy studying in their mother land and to plant the Gospel in the university among them Rusanganwa Vincent, Norbert Rutebuka were the leaders. Some others had no acquaintance with GBU before but were ready to join any initiative to see the university evangelized or determined to spearhead one. John Kalenzi ( from Uganda), Pierre Kaberuka ( from Congo) can be mentioned among others. But all things together, the university was just a mini-sized sample, well representative of the Rwandan society. So the GBU had to rise up to the challenge. Thanks be to the Lord, the corner stone of the church, the work did start, take root and slowly developed.

The first problem to tackle was the setting up of structures and appointment of leaders. The provisional committee led by Frederic Nzabahimana had to hand over the leadership to an elected one led by Vincent Rusanganwa. This elected committee had themselves to succeed bringing together students from all the various backgrounds and convince them to pray and serve together in harmony, a crazy task! Divides could arise for instance about provenance, about gender roles( women in ministry), about ethnicity, behavioral rules, and about doctrinal lines. Thanks be to the Lord who knows the times before time, he had arranged things as to have a mature leader in the group for every problem that would divide the group. And by God’s grace these opinion leaders in the group were harmoniously cooperative.

End 1995: Phocas Ngendahayo Appointed National Secretary. Antoine had joined AEE as Team leader following a call from God. A committee of student leaders and Antoine former National Secretary organized a jury and selected from 3 candidates: Aaron Ruhimbya, Rukara Rukunda and Phocas Ngendahayo.

1995-1996 :Phocas tries to gather the remaining graduate members of AGBURWA. Elected AGBURWA executive committee led by Antoine R. as Chaiman, Daniel Bavugamenshi as V/ch., Richard Benda as Sec, Jacqueline Mugabo as Treasurer, Bishop Mvunabandi, as Advisor, Anne Mukobwajanna as accounts auditor Reoccupied the same office. IFES gives financial support to the work. 5000\$ a year

He also continues the work where the Genocide had stopped it.  
Among other things he restarts the process of integration GBU AGBURWA

1997: Divisions resurge more severe in GBU Butare: ADEPR members refuse to continue fellowship in the GBU. GBU heavily affected because they were many and among the leaders. The remaining tried to reorganize and continue the work.

1998: GBU ISAE reopens and GBU Kist/Khi begins led by John Nkubana.

1998-1999: Phocas tries to introduce small groups system in the GBUs. Hard job because, they've become familiar with church style ministry.

Pascal Ratovona, Madagascar GBUAF Itinerant Secretary for central, Mauritius and Madagascar helps in his many tours through Rwanda

1999: Phocas attends IFES World assembly

March 2000: Syldio Dusabumuremyi offers to serve as staff. Started effectively august 2000

September 2000: Phocas goes for a 6 months training in the UK. He contacts many friends who pledge to support the ministry

Major achievements 1995-2000:

- Reconciliation Ministry has started in GBUs, Healing seminars bear much fruit among students.
- Graduates hold retreats and Bible studies
- Ada Lum the Champion of Inductive Bible Study comes to train students in Rwanda
- Lindsay Brown IFES General Secretary visits Rwanda
- Daniel Burdané, the GBUAF General Secretary visits Rwanda
- John STOTT, IFES Vice-President, eminent writer and Speaker visits Rwanda
- David IVASKA IFES fund development ambassador visits Rwanda,
- Sammy Tippit, International Evangelist holds crusades in Butare University and Kigali open air.

December 2000: the integration process comes to final step. The General Assembly including Students and Graduates drops GBEER and adopt UGBR as the name

2000: First full time volunteer (for 3years): Judith Mukantama joins UGBR.

2001: First National Congress of UGBR, Butare university, theme: For a generation that makes the difference. Focus on leadership. Main Speaker: Chua Wee Hian former IFES General Secretary, Guest speaker: Keith Walker UCCF Missions Director. Attended a group of students from Brunel University,UK.

July 2001: Silas Kanamugire donates the first car to UGBR  
 2001: GBU ULK , day and night; GBU KIE (?) begin.

November 2002: First own office acquired from support grant of 40000\$ by German Charity, Hilfe Fur Brüder through IFES.

2002: Acquired Jeep Landcruiser from donation of 17000\$ by a friend family in the UK  
 Conference triennale des GBUAF a Bamako. Phocas attends together with 2 students  
 Regine Nshimirimana and Tom Bagaza

**2003: IFES World Assembly in Amsterdam, UGBR is affiliated**

2003: Second National Conference, NUR Butare. Theme: Whom shall I send? Focus on Mission. Main Speaker: Calisto ODEDE associate General Secretary EPSA.  
 Silas Kanamugire takes over from Antoine R. as Chairman. Emmanuel Kwizera a student is elected V/ ch.

2004: Second fulltime volunteer, Justin Ngoga joins UGBR

Lucas OWAKO, sent as missionary from partnership of three movements: NKSS Norway (funds), FOCUS Kenya ( resource person) and UGBR (field). Mandate: to start Bible study department in UGBR.

Dec 2004: 25 UGBR delegates attend FOCUS Kenya Mission convention, “Commission 2004”

2005:

- Leah Wangombe, missionary from Trinity Fellowship comes to Rwanda, based in Butare. Discipleship Ministry starts to students in NUR.
  - Lambert offers for 3<sup>rd</sup> full time volunteer, effectively start January 2006.
- 2006: SIP, First campus based ministry starts, Lambert Bariho first campus staff based in Busogo. for GBU ISAE and ULK Gisenyi
- Emmanuel Kwizera full time volunteer for secondary schools. Exploring the possibility of starting GBS ministry.

May 2006: Syldio attends IFES Formation for General Secretaries in Bishofsheim, Germany.

May 2007: Syldio D. attends Haggai Institute in Maui Hawaii.

**2006-2007:** Dr Kigabo is Chairman, Emmanuel Kwizera is still Vice chairman.

**March 2007:** Phocas Ngendahayo announces transition from office as GS .

**May 2007:** Syldio Dusabumuremyi is Elected General Secretary

**September 2007:** Phocas Ng. goes for Studies in Redcliffe College, UK

Lukas Owako ends his 3 yr term in Rwanda. Lambert Bariho to continue the work.

Syldio Dusabumuremyi takes over as GS from Phocas.

**December 2007:** UGBR hosts the GBUAF triannual conference. 19 countries represented. Theme: Go and Make disciples of all Nations. Focus: mission. Main Speaker: Vinoth Ramachandra from Sri-Lanka, IFES Secretary for interfaith dialogue. Renowned evengelical thinker, speaker and writer.

