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## **The Cultural and Pedagogical Work of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa (1856 - 1919)**

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### **1. Son of a Blacksmith**

Firinga (Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa's pre-Christian baptismal name) was born into the Malagasy ancestral religious practices of his father Rainiantoandro *10 Honors*,<sup>4</sup> captain of the royal blacksmiths of Queen Rasoherina.<sup>5</sup> He was drawn into the Church of Mahamasina by his sister, Ernestine Rasonavony. She was a student of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny. Firinga was captivated by the Church's religious ceremonies and attended the Catholic school that was run by Pierre Ratsimba. He was baptized Raphaël on Sunday, November 7, 1869, by Father Limozin, parish priest of Saint Joseph's Parish in Mahamasina.<sup>6</sup>

From then on, his life changed. He became more pious, more assiduous, and more diligent. Raphaël was an intelligent boy. Brother Gonzalvien noticed this and proposed that he continue his studies at the École principale Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur d'Andohalo (1871). In 1874, he became a boarding student there.

That same year, with the death of Brother Yon and with the departure of Brother Indrenis to the Island of Réunion for the sake of his health, Raphaël, along with three of his fellow students, was asked by Brother Gonzalvien to join Brother Ladolien and himself to be part of the educational team of the Andohalo School. They willingly accepted, and the four young men soon "*showed themselves to be dedicated and zealous in their efforts as teachers and educators of their young fellow citizens.*"

The faith of this young teacher was confirmed and developed through reflection, catechism study, and the example provided by Brothers Gonzalvien and Ladolien. A three-day retreat and membership in the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary further strengthened Raphaël's faith and piety. One could see that he had what it takes to be more than solely a teacher. He informed Brothers Ladolien and Gonzalvien of his intention to become a Brother, and he entered the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. After some very bold letters to his parents so that he could obtain their consent – they were hostile to his decision – he was admitted as a postulant on April 16, 1876. He entered the local novitiate in Antananarivo under the name of Brother Raphaël-Louis on March 1, 1877.

Brother Gonzalvien, his director and novice master, carefully directed and strictly monitored his formation. Privately, he praised him highly: "*He is endowed with all the qualities desirable to be an excellent Brother of the Christian Schools. Everyone admires and reveres him.*" When Brother Raphaël-Louis first appeared in the robe, those who saw him in the church said, "*Here is a man of faith! He is worthy to wear it!*"

The formation of Brother Raphaël-Louis continued beyond the usual canonical term. The years 1878 to 1883 were a continuous novitiate. He was providentially being prepared to face an ordeal that would demand faith, zeal, humility, and the personal discipline of mortification.

## **2. Respected Leader**

Because of the Franco-Malagasy / Hova War (1883-1886), all Catholic missionaries of foreign birth were forced to leave Madagascar. With the death of Father Basilide Rahidy, SJ, on April 10, 1883, Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa, twenty-eight years of age, was now the only native Malagasy male religious who was present in Antananarivo. As such, the Catholic Christians of Antananarivo elected him president of the Catholic Union of Madagascar. He subsequently came to be known as their “Prefect of the Church,” the one who they saw as its official representative.

Brother Raphaël-Louis organized meetings, presided at worship, administered the sacrament of baptism, blessed marriages, preached retreats, converted Protestants along with followers of ancestral religious practices and agnostics, and worked with the young people who were part of the Catholic Union. These young people were former students or employees in the upper echelons of royal administration and under the official protection of Victoire Rasoamanarivo,<sup>7</sup> daughter-in-law of the prime minister, who was herself a living example of holiness.

He alone was left with the care of schools, both in the city and in the countryside, along with the material and spiritual care of the six novices and postulants of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, and the protection of the lepers of Ambahivoraka.

During those four years of war, he remained a religious who was not shaken by reproaches and incitements to abandon religious life. He abandoned himself only to Providence and remained faithful to his exercises of piety. When the war ended, he resumed his place in the community, taught students, wrote works on education, and recorded his experiences in “Fruits of Four Years of War.” But another, shorter Franco-Malagasy war (1894-1895) was about to begin. Once again, Brother Raphaël-Louis remained in the country alone. This time, the bishop invested him with the care of Catholics as their spiritual leader. He once again instructed them and took special care of the Catholic schools since there were many, including some Catholics who were against their place and role in society. During this time, he also escaped from an ambush thanks to the protection of Saint Michael the Archangel.

## **3. Christian Educator Passionate for Culture**

When the community reconstituted, he assumed his role as a teacher. While he accepted, on the one hand, the French annexation of Madagascar on the political level, one biographer writes that Brother Raphaël-Louis opposed cultural colonization, doing so by means of a “linguistic” resistance.

As the district chief of the Faravohitra neighborhood, he was very interested in encouraging religious vocations. He also gave advice to the bishop, to priests, and to his confreres. And he was a member of the Malagasy Academy from the beginnings of that learned society.

Brother Raphaël-Louis was a prolific writer. He wrote in religious journals and composed a Malagasy grammar, poems, and plays. All his writings had only one goal: the education of Malagasy young people and, above all, faith education and the awakening of priestly and religious vocations.

He formed youth clubs where people could go to receive training and life counseling. Brother Raphaël-Louis was considered one of the most influential members of the Catholic Mission. It is also not surprising that he was involved in the secret society called VVS (*Vy, Vato, Sakelika*).<sup>8</sup> Young intellectuals of the time had formed this group to preserve the Malagasy civilization. The society and its members were considered “anti-French” and political.

On December 24, 1915, at 6:30 p.m., Brother Raphaël-Louis was arrested by the police. They collected all of his papers and imprisoned him in Antanimora, Antananarivo. He did not put up any resistance. Incarcerated, his first action was to kneel down and thank God! While in prison, he recited the community’s prayers, recited many rosaries, and made the Way of the Cross. With the aid of his profession crucifix,<sup>9</sup> he spent long hours in prayer, meditating on the best means to advance the Kingdom of God and bring about priestly and religious vocations. He was the oldest of those accused in this distressing affair involving the VVS. On February 18, 1916, after 58 days of incarceration, he was declared innocent and released.

Assigned to Saint Joseph School of Fianarantsoa in 1917, he was placed in charge of school supervision, taught catechism, prayed, and wrote a daily “Life of the Saints.” The rosary never left his fingers. Weakened by work and undermined by illness, he died two years later on May 19, 1919, during the Spanish Flu epidemic, comforted by the sacraments of the Church.

In 1933, Brother Raphaël-Louis’ mortal remains were found to be intact, without physical corruption,<sup>10</sup> and they were returned triumphantly to Antananarivo. Here, they were venerated in Soavimbahoaka, on the hill formerly called Ifahitra but now called “the people’s blessed hill,” as he had liked to call it.

#### **4. Religious Academician**

Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa was one of the very few indigenous members of the Malagasy Academy founded by Gallieni’s decree<sup>11</sup> of January 23, 1902.

The inaugural session of the Malagasy Academy was held on February 27, 1902. At the next session on April 3, 1902, “*on the proposal of various members, the candidacies of Monsieur Mondain, author of various works on the Malagasy language, and of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa, indigenous scholar as an associate member, were voted on and approved unanimously.*” It would not be long before he became a full member, replacing Rabesihanaka who resigned because he had not attended any sessions and felt out of place in such a learned society. At the Malagasy Academy, Brother Raphaël-Louis rubbed shoulders with Julien, Berthier, with his former students, with Fathers Cadet and Malzac, and with Pastors Vernier and Mondain.

Among these great Malagasy Europeans, he was the only knowledgeable indigenous Malagasy. The president of the Malagasy Academy, Doctor Fontoynt, wrote in his letter of condolence at

the time of the death of this illustrious academician, “*I read in the Tribune that Brother Raphaël-Louis died in Fianarantsoa. It is a great loss not only for you, but for us and for all those who are interested in everything Malagasy.*”

Fourteen years after his death, during the reburial of his ashes in Antananarivo, the president still recalled Brother’s deep knowledge not only of the Malgache language, his mother tongue, but also of French, which he taught to many of his fellow citizens. “*Brother Raphaël was an excellent educator, grammarian, and remarkable linguist. Many of his talks at the Malagasy Academy bear the imprint of a clear and precise mind. We loved to hear him speak in impeccable French, debating in both languages.*”

These testimonials show the cultural richness of Brother Raphaël-Louis, someone who was very well known and greatly appreciated in the religious milieu of his time, but someone who is little known, if not forgotten, in the cultural milieu of Malagasy literary history. Fortunately, in the year of his beatification, that void was filled by a doctoral thesis in Malagasy literature entitled “*Ny very tadiavina hita ao amin’ny sangan’asan’ i Frère Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa*” [*The Malagasy Values Lost but Found in the Works of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa*].

## 5. Literary Work

It is difficult to draw a complete picture of Brother Raphaël-Louis’ literary work. All that can be said is that it was immense, varied, and little known. No one has been able to inventory it because a number of writings were destroyed by the “vandalism” that was done when he was arrested in 1915. Likewise, the rule of religious modesty that he held, and the anonymous collaboration that he had brought to many works of the Catholic Mission, resulted in works that were either collective ones or works officially authored by French missionaries. His literary authorship can only be proven without dispute in a few cases.

The written works of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa may be classified in two categories.

### *Works of Christian inspiration*

He produced pamphlets whose purpose was to enlighten the followers of ancestral religious practices and Protestants:

- *Fonjabolamena madio* [*Lingots*<sup>12</sup> and *Pure Gold*].
- *Fanambadiana kristianina* [*Christian Marriage*].
- *Ramanantsoa sy ny zanany* [*Ramanantsoa and His Children*].
- *Leingahy mianaka* [*Leingahy and His Son*].

These works were as much demonstrations of Catholic truth as they were refutations of the errors of Protestants and the followers of ancestral religious practices.

For religious celebrations, he composed works that enabled observers to penetrate the beauty of Catholicism. One of these is *La pièce historique et véritable Apologie de la Mission* [*The*

*Historical and True Apologia of the Mission*]. It was presented in Antananarivo on November 13, 1912, on the occasion of the closing of the Catholic Mission's Jubilee Year.

There is also the translation into beautiful Malagasy of the play *Le Signe de la Croix de Bajou* [*Bajou's Sign of the Cross*], and *The Virtues and Extraordinary Talents of Bishop Cazet*, a work characterized by Malagasy proverbs. To the end of his life, he worked on a translation of *Lives of the Saints* [*Tantaran'ny olo-masina isan'andro*] and a translation of the *Lamentations de Jérémie* [*Book of Lamentations*]. It may also be said that the letters he wrote to his canonical superiors or to his confreres have a genuine literary value.

### ***Works of Secular Inspiration***

Brother Ismaël Norbert notes the following works of Brother Raphaël-Louis: 41 poems written in 2,500 verses on 100 pages, and 11 plays on 193 pages. Among them are the following:

- *Andrianampoinimerina, Radama I, Radama II, Kings of Madagascar*;
- Translations of the *Fables of La Fontaine* and the *Adventures of Telemaque*;
- *History of Madagascar*, written around 1881-1882 in response to the repeated requests that were made to him<sup>13</sup>;
- *Malagasy-French Dictionary*, a work in which he was a collaborator with Fathers Abinal and Malzac.<sup>14</sup>
- *The History of the Saint Joseph d'Andohalo College* in 500 handwritten pages.<sup>15</sup>

The education of youth was also Brother's ongoing concern as shown by the work *Fanabiazana ny tanora* [*The Education of Young People*]. The Malagasy Catholic periodical *Ny feon'ny Marina* [*The Voice of Truth*] published a series of articles by Brother Raphaël-Louis between November 1913 and April 1914.

Worth mentioning again is *Ny fahaiza-miteny* [*The Art of Oratory*]. This very original work is an education in itself. Based on the national game *Fanorona* (equivalent to a Malagasy chess game), he applied the 21 figures of the game's strategy to a unique oratorical technique.

## **6. Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa's Communications with the Malagasy Academy**

All his communications with the Malagasy Academy can be found listed in the *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache* (BAM). They are of the greatest importance and carry an inestimable cultural wealth. Here are some key references:

- *De l'orthographe malgache. Réflexions préliminaires*, BAM, I, 4 (1902), pages 186-189 [*Malagasy Spelling. Preliminary Reflections*].
- *Quelques règles d'orthographe malgache*, BAM, II, 4 (1903), pages 237-239 [*Some Malagasy Spelling Rules*].
- *Règles de prononciation malgache et orthographe tirée de ces règles*, BAM, III, 1 (1904), pages 15-16 [*Rules of Malagasy Pronunciation and Spelling Taken from These Rules*].
- *Notes sur la langue malgache*, BAM, V (1957), pages 51-54 [*Notes on the Malagasy Language*].

In conclusion, one may say that Brother Raphaël-Louis left us an immense cultural heritage. His modesty only enhances the cultural value of his contributions, and his status as an academicien classifies him among Malagasy's greatest sons. The Malagasy proverb "*Volamena latsaka ambovoka tsy avelan'ny soa tsy hamiratra*" (Free translation: "*Like gold powder thrown into dust, its value would not let it tarnish*") exemplifies his character and value.

## **7. Pioneer of Inculturation: Proclaiming the Gospel in the Malagasy Cultural Milieu**

Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa, professed religious of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, native of Madagascar, and worthy son of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, lived in the Malagasy social and cultural milieu of the nineteenth century. De La Salle, the founder of the Institute in seventeenth century France, is well known as a religious educator and, by his charism, for the human and Christian education of the young and the poor.

Born on November 13, 1856, in Antananarivo, Brother Raphaël-Louis came from a large Hova family associated with the Malagasy ancestral religion. He died in Fianarantsoa on May 19, 1919. He lived at a particularly significant time in the history of the Big Island (as Madagascar is known), given the passage of the country from a Malagasy kingdom into a Western colonial possession. These were the determining human and religious circumstances in his life and in the life of the nation and the Church in Madagascar.

When the first three Brothers of the Christian Schools (Brothers Gonzalvien, Ladolien and Yon) landed on Malagasy soil on November 24, 1866, young Firinga was only ten years old. These three Brothers had come to educate and evangelize in Antananarivo, following the Jesuit priests who had arrived earlier. No one would have believed that through unexpected historical circumstances such as the two Franco-Malagasy / Hova wars (1883-1886; 1894-1895), the evangelizing work of the missionaries would have to be taken over by the first indigenous Christians. Both groups, the missionaries and the natives, in very different ways, would be charged in the same environment to carry out the Word of the Master: *Go into all the world to proclaim the Gospel (Mk 16:15)*. Brother Raphaël-Louis, along with a laywoman, Victoire Rasoamanarivo, and with the young people of the Catholic Union, accomplished this at great cost in a sudden and extraordinary surge of faith, one that was only equaled by the youth of the Malagasy Church's incipient evangelization.

## **8. "Missionary" in a Malagasy Context of Initial Evangelization**

With the growth of European expansion and the colonial period of the nineteenth century, Madagascar witnessed the arrival of the Protestant missionaries of the *London Missionary Society* and the French Catholic missionaries from the island of Bourbon (Réunion). In the face of the growing influence of both politics and evangelization in her Kingdom, the Queen of Madagascar decided to expel all foreigners, including missionaries (priests, nuns, religious) from Malagasy territory. Brother Raphaël found himself alone. Before their departure, he was entrusted by the departing missionaries with the care and responsibility of the young Malagasy Catholic Christian community. Pope Paul VI, evoking this historical example of evangelization, would later, in his 1969 pastoral visit to Kampala (Uganda), launch a challenging call in no uncertain terms: "*Africans, you are now your own missionaries . . .*" And on Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to

Madagascar in 1989, Brother Raphaël-Louis was hailed several times as an equal to Victoire Rasoamanarivo, one of the remarkable figures of the Church in Madagascar.<sup>16</sup>

Brother Raphaël-Louis himself was a first fruit of the missionaries' initial evangelizing work in Madagascar. Having witnessed and suffered from their absence during the wars, Brother Raphaël-Louis carried a particular concern for the next generation of missionaries, for native religious and priestly vocations, and especially for their training.

## **9. Lasallian Pioneer of a Human and Christian Education in Madagascar**

Brother Raphaël-Louis worked to evangelize his contemporaries, particularly in the churches and schools of Antananarivo, because he had adopted the charism of John Baptist de La Salle and was imbued with the spirit of education. He remained a great religious educator despite the difficult challenges that he experienced during the war years when the missionaries and his confreres were absent. He was able to devise apostolic pathways imposed by the necessity of circumstance, through catechisms, visits to the sick and lepers, etc. As an apostle who was animated by the spirit of faith and zeal, he knew how to develop new ways of teaching and learning. These were ahead of what the Church and Second Vatican Council would only launch and approve of later on as the active and committed role of the laity. He wrote:

The education of the young in the missions is one of the most effective means of making Religion take root among unbelievers, because it is through and in that way that the principles of Religion can enter into all parts of the soul, with the first impressions from childhood and growing up with childhood.

On June 18, 1933, when Brother's earthly remains were brought back to Antananarivo, Doctor Fontoynt, president of the Malagasy Academy, of which Brother Raphaël-Louis was a member, testified:

Brother Raphaël received the just reward of mastery in the art of teaching as well as his deep knowledge, not only of the Malgache language, his mother tongue, but of French, which he taught to many of his young compatriots. Brother Raphaël was an excellent educator, grammarian, and remarkable linguist. Several of his papers at the Malagasy Academy bear the imprint of a clear and precise mind. In these days, when his remains are brought back to Tananarive, all those among us who death has not yet called, through my voice, bring a deserved tribute of deference, of recognition for the services rendered to the Malagasy people, and of affection in memory of Brother Raphaël-Louis. His superiors and colleagues from Europe were able to appreciate his important value, to whom his many students had devoted, and still dedicate, their boundless affection.

## **10. Pioneer of a Pedagogy Modeling Culture and Faith**

Starting in 1896 with the assent of his superiors, Brother Raphaël-Louis organized a teaching method based on oratorical jousting that attracted the top young people of the area. It was a great honor to be one of these thoughtful participants. In this group, discussions were mostly philosophical. Logic around topics of morality and dogma was especially cultivated. On Sundays,

young Catholics, who today would be called volunteer catechists, went out to outlying villages and evangelized. Despite a lack of documentation that prevents a full appreciation of the work of these groups, there is no doubt that they were very effective. Some of these eager, talented young people would receive additional religious instruction twice a week from Brother Raphaël-Louis. It was a work that perfectly fit his interests and his skills.

Brother Raphaël-Louis, having frequented the literary milieu of his time, knew how to bring together holiness and science. Because he was an outstanding writer, historian, poet and more, he was frequently consulted by intellectuals of all subjects and faiths. He knew how to combine simplicity, knowledge, and a holiness of life, which earned him the admiration of scholars and scientists of the time. The *Revue de Madagascar*, upon publishing a posthumous study of the Malagasy poet Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo on “*Malagasy Poetry and Folklore*,” wrote:

His more or less strict fidelity to ancestral traditions was supported by Catholic missionaries in these regions. Literary history relates, with books in support, that Raphaël Rafiringa was its promoter.

As a corresponding member of the *Bulletin de l'Archiconfrérie du Très Saint Enfant-Jesus*, he wrote many articles intended for missionaries. And the name of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa is cited among some of the outstanding Brothers of the Christian Schools in the *Dictionnaire historique de l'Éducation chrétienne d'expression française* (Paris, 2001).

## **11. Precursor of the Ecumenical Movement in the Malagasy Church's Springtime?**

It has been said of Brother Raphaël-Louis that he knew how to give a prominent place to “inculturation,” which was not yet talked about in his time. But this characteristic affirms that he was a fully qualified Christian educator. His faith and religious convictions had an impact in schools and on social life, extending to all religious groups – Catholic, Protestant, and the followers of ancestral religious practices. With great perseverance, he contributed to the promotion of a genuine culture that is nourished by the Gospel, along with the experience of advanced societies.<sup>17</sup>

There were quite a number of children from good Protestant families that arrived in the Brothers' schools and needed close accompaniment. And more were to come. To form a child in Christianity, especially if he belonged to an influential family, one had to lay the foundation for a religious future. It was, therefore, necessary to strengthen the Christian spirit in these newly arrived children. Brother Raphaël-Louis did not content himself with teaching reading, arithmetic, and other subjects. He consistently focused on the formation of consciences in order to turn his students into mature adults, educated citizens, and men of duty.

For him, the Christian must be ready to serve the Church and the country. All year long, on Sundays and holidays, morning and evening, Brother Raphaël-Louis instructed the faithful. Along with Catholics, Protestants and followers of ancestral religious practices came to him. He instructed and enlightened them all, proving the existence of another life after this one, of a place of torment for the wicked, and of happiness for the good whose duration would be eternal.

## 12. Conclusion

What is the influence, therefore, of Brother Raphaël-Louis' action on behalf of inculturation in his time and in today's world in Madagascar? It is understood that the birth of the Church, along with its roots in the Malagasy environment of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was the fruit of the work of laypeople that included Victoire Rasoamanarivo, Brother Raphaël-Louis, and the youth of the Catholic Union. Upon their return in 1886, the missionaries were both delighted and surprised to see the Catholic Christian community unified after three years of their absence, and ever more numerous and dynamic. Brother Raphaël-Louis' was a model religious who was deeply attached to the Church and served as a Christian educator of great virtue. He was also a great Malagasy figure, who awakened and promoted a Christian culture and nourished a civilization by the light and the vigor of the Gospel.

His influence did not have the significant impact in the life of the Church and the country that he and all the missionaries may have dreamed of. This was undoubtedly due to the vicissitudes of the socio-cultural and political-religious history experienced in the Malagasy nation at the time. What is clear is that both the citizens and the Christians of Madagascar will find in Brother Raphaël-Louis a new model of "inculturator," someone who presented a challenging vision and a daring educational mission for a better future in the service of youth and beneficial to all Malagasy society.

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ILF & BFR, *Le Frère Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa, Académicien, Écrivain, Orateur, Traducteur, Poète, Grammaire, Linguiste, Historien, Visionnaire*, édité par l'Imprimerie Lasallienne, Faravohitra et Bureau "Frère Rafiringa," s.i.d.

Jean Rabenalisoa Ravalitera, *Ny very tadiavina hita ao amin'ny Sanganasan'i Sefrera Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa*, FLSH (Antananarivo, 2008, Thèse de Doctorat).

Mgr. Victor Sartre, *Mémoires, Pour l'Histoire de Madagascar . . . (1933-1990)* (Ambozontany / Karthala, 2008).

Bruno Hübsch, *L'Église catholique à Madagascar, Esquisse d'une histoire du XXIème siècle*, Collection Foi et Justice, Série "Recherche historique."

## Endnotes

1. This article was originally published in the French language in *Rivista Lasalliana* 80 (2013) 3, 391-403.

2. Jean Rabenalisoa Ravalitera, a lecturer-researcher at the University of Antananarivo, is a full member of the Malagasy Academy. He received his doctor of humane letters degree from *Université d'Antananarivo* in Madagascar.

3. Brother Hilaire Raharilalao, the vice-postulator of the cause of canonization of Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa, is a full member of the Malagasy Academy. He received his doctor of biblical theology degree from *Université de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* in the Ivory Coast.

4. A system of honors. The government distributes honors for whoever wants them as long as the person pays. The government adopted a classification, a hierarchy that applies to anyone, civilian as well as military. This honor, *voninahtra*, in Madagascar is measured by degrees. The honor on the social scale was on a level with superior officers. "Ten honors – Dix honneurs – a brigadier general" [*Voyage à Madagascar (1889-1890)*, Dr. Louis Catat, 1895 – Ethnology, page 147 – salines-editions.com.]

5. Raphaël-Louis' father was a senior official to Queen Rasoherina. He belonged to the noble Hova caste. He was the royal household's captain (supervisor) of slaves. One of the blacksmiths' responsibilities was forging the slaves' chains [*"Beato Raffaele Luigi Rafiringa: Lasalliano" – Santi Beati* (Fonte: Santa Sede – Aggiunto / modificato – September 6, 2009)]. Retrieved from Wikipedia: July 25, 2016; the Hova, or free commoners, were one of the three principal historical castes in the Imerina Kingdom of Madagascar, alongside the Andriana (nobles) and Andevo (slaves). Andriamanelo (1540-1575) consolidated the power of the Hova chiefdoms around Antananarivo under his rule [Ada Boahan, *General History of Africa VII: Africa under Colonial Domination* (Paris: UNESCO, 1990)].

6. At the time of Raphaël-Louis' baptism, "Ra" (Monsieur) was added to Firinga. [Italo Carugno FSC, *Brother Raphaël-Louis Rafiringa (1856-1919)* (Rome, 2009), page 5. Freely adapted from Fr. Martial-Adda Mertens, *Sous l'ardent soleil malgache* (Gembloux, Belgique: Imprimerie J. Duculot, 1927)].

7. Victoire Rasoamanarivo (1848-1894) converted to Roman Catholicism at 15 years of age. She devoted her life to the poor and the sick and looked after their needs. She spent her free time in prayer. She was beatified by Saint Pope John Paul II in 1989 [MLA citation: "*Blessed Victoire Rasoamanarivo*" Catholic Saints. Info – February 3, 2019. On website October 7, 2020.]

8. The VVS, or Vy, Vato, Saklika [*Iron, Stone, Network*], was a nationalist society formed in Madagascar in 1913 by Hova Merina elites to inspire rebellion against French colonial rule on the island. The society soon attracted a diverse and large membership among the professional class, including Imerina office workers, shop employees, and primary school teachers. Although the group occasionally presented itself as a cultural organization, it used the national press to call on the populace to sacrifice themselves for the freedom and dignity of the *tanindrazana* [land of the

ancestors]. Brother Raphaël-Louis was imprisoned for his membership in the group [Stephen Ellis and Faranirina Rajaonah, *L'insurrection des menalamba: une révolte à Madagascar: 1895-1898* (in French) (Paris: Karthala Editions, 1998).]

9. This is a small crucifix that is given when a Brother professes his first vows. It is not visible but hangs on a chain under his robe and represents his vow commitments.

10. The expression “without corruption” signifies, in Catholic circles, that the bodily remains of a deceased person did not decompose in the grave.

11. General Joseph-Simon Gallieni was a French soldier, active for most of his career as a military commander and administrator in the French colonies. He is known in Madagascar as the French military leader who exiled Queen Ranavalona III and abolished the 350-year-old monarchy on the island. His decree, mentioned above, established the Madagascar National Academy of Arts, Letters and Sciences [Malagasy Academy]. It is Africa’s oldest Academy. He was the first Governor-General of Madagascar. In 1903, Gallieni honored Brother Raphaël-Louis with the Medal of Civil Merit for the success of his efforts to normalize relations between France and Madagascar.

12. Archaic. An ingot of metal. A mold in which metal is cast for safekeeping or transportation.

13. This manuscript contained approximately 600 pages. The work was handed over to Father De la Vaissière to finish.

14. This work attributed to Father Malzac was a collaborative work with Fathers Abinal and Malzac that was published in 1888. Father Malzac states in the preface, “with the help of several intelligent Malagasy persons who know French well.”

15. It is a work of historical value written in the form of a diary.

16. The Missionary Spirituality of the First Malagasy Lay Christians by Bruno Hübsch (Dehoniana 2001/1, pages 134-151). [Cf. <dhonianadocs.org>: page 5 (point 16); page 6 (points 20 & 21); page 7 (points 22 & 23).]

17. Bishop Victor Sartre, January 19, 2000.