

Br. Rogatiaan Vilain

Karel Vilain was the son of Leopold and Isabelle Mertens and was born at Schoten-Deuzeld on May 8th in 1902. At the age of 17, he became a soldier in the Belgian army belonging to the Militia class of 1920. Because of his youth he was inducted in the Flemish school of Cadets. On November 30, 1920 he was promoted to Corporal and two years later October 1st 1922 to Sergeant. After his military career between 1923 and 1927 Karel Vilain worked in a business office in Antwerp. At the age of 25, he entered novitiate at Edingen on September 15, 1927. Being a bit older than his classmates, he held a certain prestige among them as well as a mysterious awe concerning his earlier life which he fancied as good humour. Given the religious name Rogatiaan he made final profession on September 17, 1931. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Cathedral of Brugge by Mgr. Lamiry on May 26, 1934.

Br. Rogatiaan was fluent in Dutch and French and soon achieved many academic degrees and a Licentiate in November 1940 He served as lector of philosophy in Ciney as well as at the Franciscan College in Doornik On May 10th 1940, he was mobilized in the army. Shortly he returned to Ciney and became vice-director of the Seminary for seven years. In 1952, he was appointed as a teacher in Lommel-Werkplaatsen at Christ the King College where he taught Latin, French, mathematics, accounting and social behaviour.

On August 8th 1955 he asked and received permission to go to Canada to work in the Custody. For two and a half month he worked hard at preparing himself for the language, the culture and the voyage. His trip to Canada was one of the most tragic episodes of his life. Feeling poorly health-wise, on October 28th 1955 he boarded ship at Le Havre with Br. Cyprian Verhulst. The trip had barely started when Br. Cyprian noticed that Br. Rogatiaan was upset and experiencing a mental crisis. He had to be placed in sickbay. Because he needed constant attention, the Captain decided to leave him in Quebec, even though his destination was Montreal. Br. Cyprian telegraphed Br. Thomas Van Leer the local Canadian superior who soon arrived to attend to the situation. Through the care of Canadian Immigration Services, he was placed in a psychiatric facility and a few months later with the cost borne by the steamship line he was repatriated to Belgium. Accompanied by two nurses he boarded ship at Halifax on February 11, 1956. He reached Oostende on February 18th and placed in the care of Br. Robert Bentein and a doctor who immediately took him to the psychiatric institute of the Brothers of St. John of God at Leuze. After he was released from Leuze he underwent further rehab in the friary at Meersel-Dreef .

From that time, he held some positions teaching French and religion. In 1966 he was made assistant priest at the Capuchin church in Aalst. During this time he became a bit famous for poetry and prose that he published in the "Franciscan Standart". The last seven years of his life he was organist at the Church in Aalst and eventually all the friars considered him one of the best organist in the Belgian province.

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In the course of the years he played for hundred of listeners at ceremonies and celebrations. In 1973, he was given a diploma by the Royal Choir at St. Jobin. He was very pious and suffered from depressions which forced him to be placed in the care of the Brothers of St. John of God in Gent. He died in the Institute on January 23rd 1975. He was a gifted friar who suffered greatly from unknown mental demons all his life.

