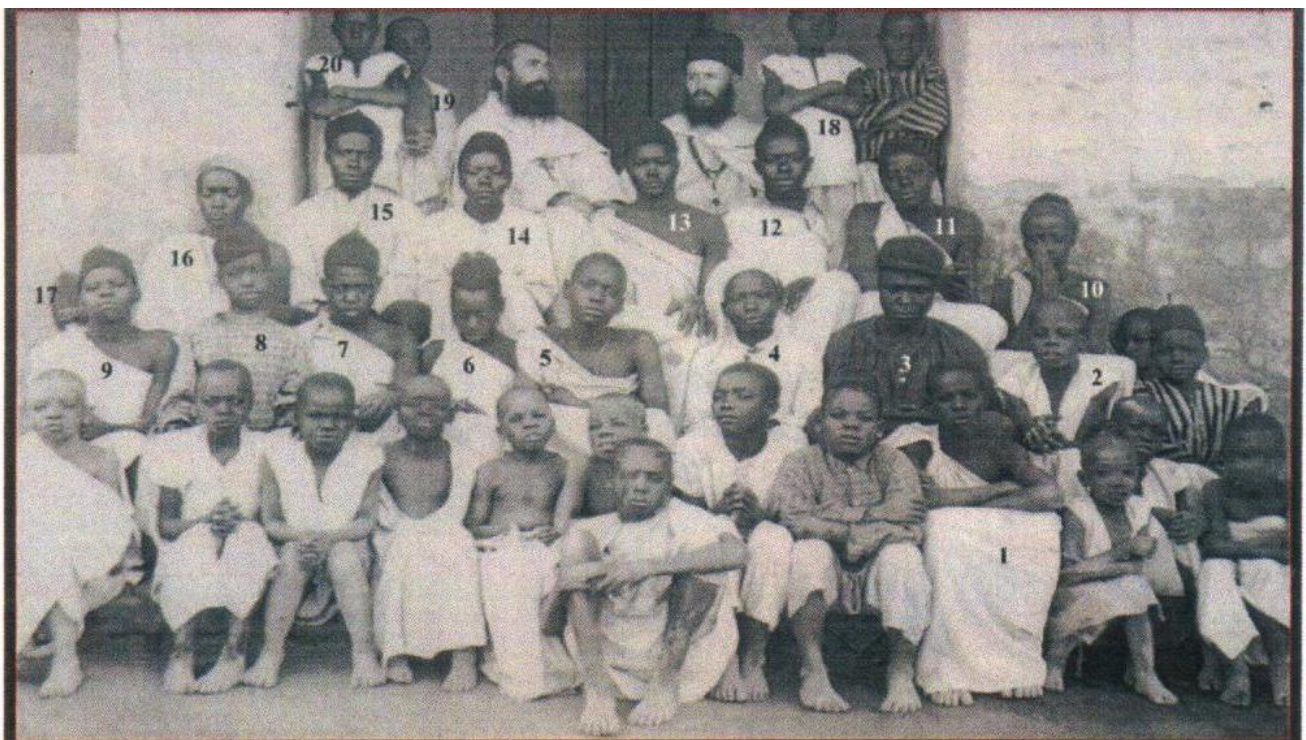


## Martyrs of Uganda

Today, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, is the feast of **St. Charles Lwanga and his companions**, more often called "The Martyrs of Uganda". I am sure that many of you who read this post have never heard of these martyrs. Yet in Central Africa, especially, today is a great day of celebration.

Pilgrimages would normally bring thousands of pilgrims from right across Uganda and from its neighbouring countries. They would walk hundreds of miles, each diocese arranging its participation to make a truly national and international pilgrimage, with more than a million pilgrims arriving annually on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June. This year, however, the authorities have had to cancel the pilgrimage for the first time, due to the dangers of the corona virus pandemic.

In all, 45 young Christians were killed in the most brutal and cruel way between the years 1885 and 1887. Twenty-two were Catholics and twenty three Anglicans. Whatever their adherence, they were killed by a king who feared the loss of his authority over his courtiers due to the new religion of the "book". In fact, the missionaries taught their catechumens to read and write. They also taught them to refuse the king's carnal pleasures in which he used them for his own gratification. These two developments enraged the king who ordered their deaths in revenge and in jealousy. Most of them were burned alive after being cruelly tortured.



**This Photograph was taken in Tanganyika at Bukumbi Mission (Mwanza) in September or October 1885  
The 20 future Martyrs above, had gone to welcome and congratulate their newly appointed Bishop to  
Uganda, Msgr. Leon Livinhac.**

1. Mukasa Kiriwawanvu
2. Andrea Kaggwa (Kahwa)
3. Yozefu Mukasa Balikuddembe
4. Anatori Kiriggwajjo
5. Mbaaga Tuzinde
6. Ponsiano Nngondwe
7. Yakobo Buuzabalyawo
8. Dionizio Ssebuggwawo
9. Atanansi Bazzekuketta
10. Adolf Mukasa Ludigo
11. Gonzaga Gonza
12. Ambrozio Kibuuka
13. Karoli Lwanga
14. Akileo Kiwanuka
15. Bruno Sserunkuma
16. Matia Kalemba Mulumba
17. Luka Baanabakintu
18. Kizito
19. Muggaga
20. Gyavira

Within a year of their deaths, the number of catechumens in the area had quadrupled. Their story brings to mind the tales of the early Christian martyrs and recalls a quote from the third-century Christian writer Tertullian: *"As often as we are mown down by you, the more we grow in numbers; the blood of Christians is the seed."*

When you look at the photo of these youngsters, taken a few months before the first of them was killed (Joseph Mukasa, number 3 in the photo) you would not think that it is over 130 years old. It could be a photo taken only yesterday.

We easily ignore or forget the sufferings of millions of fellow believers, persecuted for their faith. The terrible reality is that people right across the world are still being chased from their homes, deprived of their rights, beaten and killed, because of the difference of their faith. Yes, Christians persecute and are persecuted. Muslims persecute and are persecuted. Hindus, Buddhists, Jews; all persecute and are persecuted. It can be said that both the persecuted and the persecutors are minority groups within their own religious groupings. It can always be pointed out that there are many countries in which the different religions live well together and cooperate in building peaceful and just societies. Also, the persecutions are often an unfortunate mix of economics, land ownership and use, power and cultural motivations. But they are still persecutions; violence committed in the name of one god or other.

True believers in God will always respect the other, whatever his or her colour or creed. True Christians will always see the other as a manifestation of "The Other". True believers will honour the other who seeks God in whatever way he or she has been led to God.

We pray that, through the prayers of St. Charles Lwanga and his companions, God will loosen the blinkers that hide the truth from our eyes; blinkers that enable us to live comfortably and happily while others suffer and are persecuted for their faith. We pray that we may learn to recognise and expose religious and racial prejudice wherever they raise their ugly heads. May we all accept and practise the tenants of our faiths which encourage us to respect and to love one another as human beings and children of the same God. Indeed, let us learn "to love our neighbour as ourselves".

Terry Madden  
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