

Homily for James Hannington, Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, and his Companions, Martyrs, 1885

October 29, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

1 Peter 3:14–18, 22; Psalm 124; Matthew 10:16–22

James Hannington was consecrated to be a missionary bishop for Eastern Equatorial Africa of the Church of England. Learning of his arrival on Buganda's border, a region of the country we know as Uganda, they were captured when they arrived on October 21, 1885.¹ He was killed by spear eight days later.²

From what I've been able to read, they were the first Christian victims of a new "kabaka," or king of Buganda, the region of Uganda on Lake Victoria's western shore. His name was Mwanga.

The third of June is when the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches commemorate Christian converts' executions in Uganda. Missionaries from both traditions had arrived in the late 1870s.³

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Hannington, (accessed 29 October 2020).

² <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/james-hannington-captured-11630609.html>, (accessed 29 October 2020).

³ *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* (LFF) (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 274.

Mwanga's father permitted Christian missionaries to evangelize members of the court. The growing influence of those who believed in Jesus Christ within the court led Mwanga to have the Christians killed. Twenty-three Anglican and twenty-two Roman Catholic converts to Christianity were executed between the thirty-first of January in 1885 and the twenty-seventh of January in 1887.⁴ On the third of June in 1886, thirty-two young men were burned to death when they refused to renounce their faith.⁵

It's worth noting that in the homily preached by Pope Paul VI, on October 18, 1964, when he announced the canonization of the Roman Catholic martyrs, he recognized that the Anglican victims too were martyrs for Christ.

Christians and others would be persecuted during the military dictatorship in Uganda of Idi Amin from 1971 until he was overthrown in 1979. A Muslim, Amin died in exile in Saudi Arabia in 2003. He was never prosecuted for his crimes against humanity, including the murder of the Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda_Martyrs, (accessed 29 October 2020).

⁵ LFF, 274.

Archbishop Luwum, along with the other Anglican bishops, the Roman Catholic cardinal archbishop, and a senior member of the Muslim community, were ordered to a presidential palace meeting. Luwum alone was not allowed to leave. He was shot to death, either that night, February 16 or the next day—available sources were not specific.

This very morning in France, a Muslim terrorist entered Notre Dame Basilica in Nice and killed three people. When I hear of Christians' persecution by Muslims, I try to remember that in Myanmar, Rohingya Muslims are persecuted by the Buddhist majority. The Prayer Book version of the Sixth Commandment is straightforward: "You shall not commit murder."⁶ The only answer to the reality of evil for me is my faith in the resurrection of the dead to the life of the world to come.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 350.