

CELEBRATING OUR ANCESTORS IN THE FAITH

The Martyrs - Models of Christian Commitment

*To our clergy, religious, all Christ's faithful, and to all
People of good will in Uganda:*

Peace and God's blessing!

I. OUR GOD IS A GOOD GOD

1. God's goodness to Uganda

"Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal!" (Ps 107:1)

Dear brothers and sisters, as the pastors placed among you by God, we feel impelled to make ours the joyful invitation of the psalmist. It is indeed right and fitting that all Ugandans, and especially we Christians, should raise a great song of praise and thanksgiving to God, the Father of all, who has expressed in so many ways his love and care for our nation.

For those with the eyes of faith, it is clear that the Lord has been generous in a particularly abundant way with our country. We have only to look around us: the breathtaking beauty of our mountains, the great expanses of our lakes, the power and strength of the Nile, which passes through our land. The Lord's glory and love are manifested in these wonders of nature which adorn our country.

And nature not only makes us rejoice because of its beauty, but also because of its outstanding fertility. We know that when we work our work is rewarded by harvest. God has arranged things in such a way that there is no reason, apart from human greed and incompetence, why any Ugandan should go hungry. If we want to, we can produce crops to feed ourselves and others. Our lakes and rivers teem with fish that are good to eat. There is ample grazing land for our cattle. The Nile gives us enough electricity for our own needs with a surplus that we can pass on to our neighbours. Beneath our soil there are mineral resources still only partially developed for use by man. Yes, indeed God has been good to Uganda. "Lord, you have made so many things! How wisely you have made them all! May *the* glory of the Lord last for ever! May the Lord be happy with what he has made!" (Ps 104:24,31).

Yet, if we were to stop here, we would not yet have recounted the greatest of the Lord's blessings to our country. In his infinite mercy and love, in the fullness of time, he revealed to us 'the Good News of his Son, Jesus Christ. Over one hundred years ago, courageous men landed on the shores of Lake Victoria and began the work of spreading the Gospel and establishing the Church, God's people, in Uganda. God's goodness to us found expression both in the preaching of the Gospel and in the way that preaching was received by those who first heard it.

The depth of their faith and the strength of their commitment were celebrated by us all in 1979 when we commemorated the first centenary of the faith in our country. In those first hundred years God gave a host of expressions to his fidelity; looking back over our history as his people, we are able to see that he has taken to heart his covenant with us. We can see that he is still working to bring the good work begun at the start to its fulfilment in the Day of Christ Jesus (Phil.1:6). So as Ugandans we cry out: "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1 : 3).

Perhaps we can sum up what we are saying here .about God's goodness to Uganda by recalling some words spoken by Pope Paul VI when he gave us the joy of his visit in 1969: "Uganda is particularly dear to the Catholic Church, since it has provided the first canonised African martyrs and the first African bishop of modern times, and because a third of its population comprises faithful sons and daughters of the Church, making this one of the first Christian nations of Central Africa". What we have to remember is this: none of this is our own doing; it is all the grace of a good God. "It is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. God has made us what we are" (Eph 1:8-10).

2. The Martyrs: a special sign of God's goodness

The words of Pope Paul VI introduce us to the special theme of this present Pastoral Letter. Brothers and sisters in the faith, we are writing -to you on this occasion about those we proudly call the Martyrs of Uganda. In them, in their lives and in their death, we find a very special reason to praise and thank God.

These twenty-two men were our own flesh and blood. Their descendants still live among us. Until not so long ago there were those in our midst who knew and remembered them. They were men of considerable human qualities and talents. Many of them rose, in the course of their lives, to high and responsible positions in public life. Several of them manifested exceptional qualities of leadership. St. Charles Lwanga was a champion athlete and several of his companions were also famous for their physical strength and prowess. In the Martyrs we have to do with real men, full of vitality and vigour. Their faith and their sanctity had nothing to do with a flight from the realities of their human existence. By their faith and their sanctity they became fully themselves and completed their manhood.

While we rightly rejoice in the human qualities of the Martyrs, we are equally proud to recognise in them our ancestors in the faith. For us Africans, the dead, those who have gone before us, have a special part to play in our lives. In our devotion to the Martyrs, we see this traditional belief of ours taken up and purified, so that we can truly say that it is from their blood that we have been born anew in the faith. In this sense, they belong to all of us; all of us Christians, no matter what is our tribe, can claim to descend from them. This is our *joy* and our pride before the whole Church and the world. We are especially happy too, that in recent years more and more Christian communities in different parts of the world have been finding in the Uganda Martyrs a source of courage and inspiration. Once again we find in the words of Scripture the expression of our happiness and our recognition of God's goodness: "Let us now give praise to godly men, our ancestors of generations past, men whom the Lord honoured with great glory, in whom his greatness has been seen from the beginning of time... Some men left a reputation, and people still praise them today" (Sir 44: 1-2.8).

3. Celebrating the Martyrs' Centenary

Although the Martyrs are a constant source of joy for us, there is a special reason why we are writing to you about them now.' Next year, on November 15th 1985, the feast of the first martyr, St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, we will begin the celebration of the centenary of their deaths for the faith.

Clearly this centenary is a cause for celebration and we certainly intend to see that it will be properly celebrated. As shepherds of God's people in Uganda, we welcome this celebration as a great opportunity for all of us to grow in faith, as a true hour of grace for our Christian community. We feel that through this centenary God, who has been so good to us, is inviting us to savour and delight in his great works, done in our midst.

However, we are deeply conscious that the celebration of the Martyrs' centenary will have a real effect on our Christian lives only if we prepare for it and it is our wish that this preparation begin now. We designate the year that lies ahead as a time of specially intense preparation. Through this letter, *and* through our teaching at diocesan level, we want to provide you with some guidelines, which we consider

important for a. proper preparation for and celebration of the centenary. Through the centenary the Lord will visit us, his people. We must prepare, with faith and intelligence, for his coming. (Mt. 25:1-13).

II. A CELEBRATION OF FAITH

We bishops are keen that devotion to the Martyrs increase among you. We hope that the celebration of the centenary will see a growth in such devotion. It is important, however, that the devotion in general and the centenary in particular should be truly Christian, should be expressions of a sound faith. Conscious of this, we want now to offer you some fundamental guidelines, which we hope will become the characteristics of our work of preparation for the Martyrs' centenary.

1. A growth in knowledge

Knowledge of the Lives of the Martyrs among Ugandan Christians is at best uneven and at worst superficial. Many of you, we know, have only a vague idea of how the Martyrs lived and died. This is a pity, because the story of the Martyrs is a precious part of our inheritance *and* belongs to you all. We know from pastoral experience that a deepened familiarity with the Martyrs can lead today's Christians to a deepened commitment to the faith.

So it is our wish that this year of preparation be marked by activities which will lead you all to know the Martyrs better. Plans are afoot to make available once again a book on the lives of the Martyrs. Each language group in the country should do what it can to produce even a short work on the Martyrs. A special responsibility in this matter of deeper knowledge rests on priests and those engaged in the education of the young. During this year we expect them to make the Martyrs the subject of their homilies, their catechesis and their lessons in religious education. This is the only way to ensure that our young people grow up with a sound grasp of the history of their ancestors in the faith.

2. Not by outward show but by inner renewal

It will be natural that we will want to celebrate the Martyrs' Centenary with special occasions when we come together as God's people to give him thanks and praise. Events of this kind will certainly be organised both at national, diocesan and parish level. Yet we want to remind you that if our celebration of the centenary is confined only to such occasions, it will not have achieved its aim. We need to remember that Jesus warned against empty worship. Recalling the words of Isaiah, he reproved the people of his time: "These people honour me with their words, but their heart is really far away from me" (Mk 7:6).

In other words, while liturgical celebrations and community gatherings will have their place in the centenary and the preparations leading up to it, we must keep before our minds that the principal purpose of all these events and indeed of all the initiatives connected with the centenary is a deep inner renewal of our community and individual Christian lives. It is not enough to be proud of the Martyrs and to express this pride in moving ceremonies; we have to live out in our lives the message that comes to us from Christ through them.

3. Celebration of a living presence

There is another possible misunderstanding about the centenary celebrations that we would like to dispel right from the start. When we celebrate the Martyrs, we are not merely calling to mind a group of outstanding Christians who lived and died in the past, the memory of whose life and death inspires us now. Although their memory does, of course, inspire us in this way, this is not the whole story. As Christians, we believe in the Communion of Saints. Applied to our Martyrs, this means that they live now in the glory of the Risen Christ and that, with Christ, they are concerned for and involved in the work of

our salvation. It seems to us that the centenary is an opportunity for all of us to grow in the awareness of the living presence of the Martyrs among us.

Our relationship with them in our Christian lives here on earth is beautifully summed up by one of the prayers of the Mass: "Lord, you are glorified in your saints, for their glory is the crowning of your gifts. In their lives on earth you give us an example. In our communion with them you give us their friendship. In their prayer for the Church you give us strength and protection. This great company of witnesses spurs us on to victory, to share their prize of everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Preface of Holy Men and Women I*).

4. Their lives as well as their deaths

A martyr is a Christian who gives up his life for the faith. A martyr's death is, therefore, the culmination of his self-giving to the Lord. It is a mistake, however; to think that a martyr's claim to sanctity rests only on his death. The Uganda Martyrs lived lives of deep Christian commitment, lives that equipped them for the moment of the heroic sacrifice. While we have much to learn from the manner of their deaths, we have also much to learn from the way they lived. We hope that in the course of this year of preparation for the centenary celebrations you will come to a deeper appreciation of the outstanding qualities of the martyrs' lives.

5. A celebration for today

Some may be tempted to say: "The Uganda of today has too many serious problems, is facing too many grave challenges, for us to waste time in organising celebrations for the Martyrs' centenary. We should be concentrating on the real issues that face our nation". We understand this objection, but we do not accept it. We are convinced that, if the centenary of the Martyrs is celebrated in the ways that we have been outlining, it will really be a chance for all of us to get to grips with the many challenges that characterise our national life.

This celebration is, therefore, not to be carried out in isolation from the real situation of our country today. It must be a celebration that has its roots in that situation. It must be a celebration that speaks to the Christian people of Uganda and indeed to all her citizens precisely in the often painful circumstances in which they find themselves. It is to some of these circumstances that we now wish to turn.

III. CHALLENGING MODELS

Our faith tells us that the Martyrs live now in Christ and that, in and through Christ, we are in communion with them. This is indeed a consoling reality. Yet, like Christ's word, it is a double-edged sword, because, besides consoling us, the Martyrs also challenge us. In what precisely does their challenge consist?

The Martyrs were prepared, at whatever cost, to be different, for Christ's sake, from the environment in which they lived. The question is: are we? Sadly, it seems to us that we have to confess with humility that very often there is little that distinguishes the lives of many Ugandan Christians today from their fellow citizens who do not believe in Christ. This is the case despite a history of one hundred years of the presence of the Gospel and the Church in our midst.

If we recognise our sin and weakness with humility, the Lord will come to our aid with his forgiveness and healing. He will do this also through the example of the Martyrs and it is to this example that we now wish to turn, as it sheds light on our present situation.

1. The challenge of Christian family life

As pastors, we are concerned about the situation of Christian family life in Uganda. We see that many of you choose to live together with a partner without seeking the grace of the sacrament of matrimony.

Others, once having married in church, prove unfaithful to their vows, either by entering into polygamous unions or by a series of well-nigh casual sexual unions. Others again entirely abandon the partner they have taken before God and the Church. Naturally, all these situations make it all the more difficult for those Christian couples who are trying to live faithfully in holy matrimony. Much bad example is given to children and young people, and many of them suffer both materially and spiritually because of the behaviour of their elders.

We hope that the celebration of the centenary of the Uganda Martyrs will prove an inspiration to those of you who are married and as a challenge to those of you who, in one way or the other, are not accepting the grace of matrimony. In this regard, you have a bright example in St. Matthias Mulumba. Before he heard the gospel of Christ he was a polygamist in a polygamous culture. When he enrolled as a catechumen however, he retained only one of his three women. We can imagine that this step was no easy one for him to take. May he inspire and challenge many of you to act with the same faith and determination in your married lives.

2. Sexual morality

Another area of our national life that urgently requires pastoral attention is that of sexual morality. The wide availability of all kinds of contraceptives has meant that our young people have been deluded into imagining that they can have indiscriminate sex without any consequences. As pastors, we are deeply concerned about this situation. We know that the grievous sin of abortion is being committed more and more frequently among us. We know that the hospitals are having to deal with many young people suffering from venereal diseases which leave many of them permanently sterile. In all this, we see that our people are being taken advantage of by ideologies and business interests that certainly do not have the real interests of Uganda at heart.

During this centenary we propose once again to the young the example of the Martyrs. They were normal, strong, healthy, mainly young, men. In the situation in which they lived they had many opportunities to abuse sex. Yet we know that by their attachment to Christ they were able to resist the temptations which surrounded them and even the immoral and insistent invitations of the Kabaka himself. We hope that during this centenary you young people will ask yourselves where the Martyrs found the strength for such resistance and, having discovered the answer, you will begin to turn the evil tide of sexual immorality here in Uganda.

3. The responsibilities of public office

In Uganda today it is important that all should see that to hold public office is a sacred form of service to the people. Public officials are called by God to use their positions to benefit their neighbour, especially the poor and underprivileged. They must at all costs avoid temptations to opportunism and self-aggrandisement. The money that they administer belongs not to them but to the nation and they are called to administer it with scrupulous honesty and fairness. In this area, we know the strong power of example. Those in high office give the lead to those more humbly stationed and thus have a correspondingly greater responsibility. The ethics of public life soon become the ethics of private life, so that what is at stake here is the moral fabric of the nation.

In the Martyrs of Uganda we have seen a real example of men who knew how to hold public office while respecting their fellow citizens and the laws of God. We are told that St. Matthias Kalembe the Mulumba, a high public official, once he became a Christian, refused to make use of the porters to which his rank entitled him. To those who reproached him for thus demeaning himself, he replied, "Am I not a slave, the slave of Jesus Christ?" A man in Matthias' position had many opportunities to amass wealth. Instead, he chose to earn what he needed by his own labour. When he realised that his duty of administering justice was becoming impossible for him because of the bribes he was constantly offered, he resigned his position rather than give up the real practice of the faith. Are we prepared, like *him*, to turn against the tide of corruption? To refuse to accept and give bribes and suffer the consequences?

4. The responsibilities of the military

Another aspect of our national life on which the example of the Martyrs throws light is the responsibility of those who serve the country in the armed forces. A country's soldiers are called to be those who are ready to give their lives in the front line of the defence of the citizens' rights. The relationship of soldiers to the general population should be one of great respect, because the soldiers are the servants and employees of the people. This respect should be expressed in the way soldiers move around the country and in the way they treat civilians when they come into contact with them. The ideal is that direct contact between soldiers and civilians should be kept to the minimum and that civil law should be enforced by the police.

Great attention should be paid to the recruitment of soldiers to ensure that those who constitute the army are men of honesty and integrity. Officers are especially responsible for military discipline and behaviour. However, each individual soldier is called by God to act according to his conscience. No one is bound to obey orders which clearly break the law of God.

As an encouragement to all those who bear the name of Christian and serve in our country's armed forces, we want to hold up the living example of St. Bruno Sserunkuma and St. Pontian Ngondwe, who served in the "security forces" of their time. Bruno, we are told, did not find it easy to break with the overbearing and rough ways he had been used to applying to his work before his conversion to Christianity. But, little by *little*, with the encouragement of the missionaries and the strength of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he began to live his soldier's life in a new way. His death shows us that, while he respected the Kabaka as his earthly commander, he knew that the laws of God were supreme over all. His soldier's courage was tested and found true in the fires of Namugongo.

5. The need for reconciliation

Another aspect of the situation in Uganda today that pre-occupies us is that hatred and the desire for revenge is growing in the hearts of many. A dark cloud is thus cast over the possibility of true reconciliation in the future.

Our ancestors in the faith, the Martyrs, invite us to renounce our desire for revenge. They learnt how to bear the injustice of their suffering while still forgiving those who afflicted it. We know that even among themselves there were moments of disagreement and even of fighting. On one occasion St. Mukasa Kiriwawanvu beat St. Gyaviira for calling him names. Mukasa was reported to the Kabaka and put in prison. The two only met again when the time of their martyrdom was but they forgave each other sincerely and embraced.

The Martyrs came from different tribes. Yet this does not seem to have been a problem for them. Their oneness in Christ gave them courage to live and die together as real brothers. Once again, we hope that deep reflection on the lives of the Martyrs will inspire us Christians to distinguish ourselves by our unity and love.

6. Several other lessons

It is not the specific purpose of this Letter to give a complete analysis of our present situation. We have tried to some extent to do this in our earlier Letters, "I Have Heard the Cry of My .People", "Re-Shaping our Nation", "Be Converted and Live" and "In God We Trust", We *would* ask you to re-read them in the *light* and context of the lives of our Martyrs. We feel the teaching of those Letters has still really to be heard by many of you and has still to be put into practice.

Here, however, in addition to what we have already said, we want briefly to point to some further ways in which the Martyrs can illuminate our situation and especially its negative aspects. Under the pressure of fear and suffering, some of you are giving in to the temptation to return to the superstitious practices of your traditions. In this way you are increasing the fear which is in your hearts and making yourselves

slaves to the Evil One. The young Martyrs give us a striking example in this. We know, for example, that when St. Achilles Kiwanuka and his cousin St. Ambrose Kibuuka went to the Kabaka's palace for the first time, their parents gave them amulets to wear against danger. Yet, when they came to know St. Charles Lwanga and were led by him into Christianity, they told him about the amulets and burnt them without fear.

Another evil which characterises our situation in Uganda today is that of the continuing division between Christians. We are glad that in some places and in some ways there is greater understanding and mutual respect between members of the different Christian denominations. Yet we all know that this is not the whole story. There still remains a measure of suspicion, distrust and rivalry that does no honour to the Gospel we claim to serve. During the Martyrs' centenary and its preparation we need to recall that the Catholic martyrs died together with their Protestant brothers. We need to recall the courageous intervention of the Catholic St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe on behalf of the Protestant Bishop Hannington, when the former knew that the latter was in danger of his life. We need to recall that when Pope Paul VI came to visit our country he made a special point of visiting the shrine of the Protestant martyrs. On that occasion, Pope Paul said: "In the Martyrs' spirit of ecumenism, we cannot resolve our differences by mere reconsideration of the past, of judgement upon it. Instead, we must press on in confidence that new light will be given us, to lead to our goal; we must trust that new strength will be granted us, so that, in obedience to our common Lord, we may all be able to receive the grace of unity".

IV. COURAGE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

From what we have said so far, it is clear that there are some very close parallels between the situation in which the Martyrs were called to give their witness for the faith and our present day situation here in Uganda. There is one such similarity which we have not explicitly mentioned so far and it is this: the Martyrs had to pass through many trials and sufferings for the faith and many present-day Ugandans are also facing times of acute suffering.

We are thinking of those who are being held in detention without trial. We are thinking of whole groups whose homes have been destroyed, whose crops have been stolen and who have been forced to seek shelter in other parts of the country as "displaced persons". We are thinking of those whose right to remain in Uganda has been suddenly questioned after years of residence here. We are thinking of all those children who are orphaned and who do not know where their parents are. We are thinking of the many families that have been split up in recent disturbances. We are thinking of those who are socially excluded on grounds of religion and politics. We are thinking of those who are forced to live in exile for fear of their lives. We are thinking of the unborn children who are killed by abortion. We are thinking of the thousands of young people who are unemployed and growingly desperate. We are thinking of all victims of violence, no matter by whom the violence is perpetrated.

Yes, many of our brothers and sister in Uganda are tasting what real suffering means. In this, they are similar to the Martyrs. But our question is this: is our response to the evils and suffering of our day like that of the Martyrs?

We know how easy it is for us to become confused and discouraged, to become divided and suspicious of one another. We know the *negative* effects on our community *life* of the *evils* of our time. On the other hand, we know that *in* the face of their own *difficulties* and temptations the Martyrs remained strong and united, serene and confident in the Lord.

We want to be like the Martyrs and so it is important for us to become aware of the ways in which they opened themselves to the grace of God which equipped them to face their troubles in such a heroic way. We would like to underline in particular two characteristics of the lives of the Martyrs that are of great significance also for us today.

1. A strong attachment to the Word of God

Everything that we know about the Martyrs tells us that, from the very beginning, they understood the importance of the instruction in the Word of God they were receiving from the missionaries. We know that Father Lourdel and his companions insisted on this and were very slow to admit anyone to baptism who was not consistent in attending catechism lessons. We know that the embryonic Christian community at Mityana used to send a messenger regularly to Kampala to learn the Fathers' lessons by heart so as to be able to return and repeat them to his companions. We know that future Martyrs used to give up their sleep to go on foot by night from the Kabaka's residence to that of the Fathers to hear the Word of God.

Perhaps the most striking proof of the Martyrs' attachment to the Word of God was the way in which they reacted to the departure of the Fathers after only a relatively short period of instruction. Rather than dispersing and losing interest, these laymen assumed the leadership of their Christian communities and went on instructing them in the faith so that, when the Fathers returned, they found a marvellous increase in the number of catechumens and a remarkable degree of fidelity to the Church among those already baptised.

We feel that a similar attachment to God's Word is an absolutely essential condition for our own fidelity to the faith in the difficult times through which we are living. We very much hope that during this year of preparation and during the centenary itself our Christian communities will grow in their love for Scripture. We call on priests, religious and catechists to increase their own daily study of the Bible so that they may be equipped to proclaim it with power to their brethren. All those engaged in pastoral work, especially among the youth, should favour the establishment of groups based on reading, study and prayer on the Scriptures. "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" and ignorance of Christ disqualifies us *from calling ourselves Christians*.

2. A strong attachment to the community life

Apart from their attachment to the Word of God, the Martyrs drew strength for their trials from the mutual support they gave one another. It is well-known that throughout the period of their suffering and death they encouraged one another to face whatever was to come with faith in the Lord. We can be sure that this mutual encouragement, this true living of the Christian community life, was an important element in their final perseverance. Rather than dividing them and making them suspicious of one another, their sufferings drew them together. In this they became what we may rightly call the patron saints of the small Christian communities.

For us, in our present time of trials and problems, it is of vital importance that our Christian community life should grow. Too many of our communities are still simply gatherings of separated individuals who have little or no care one for the other. If some of our number fall away or are attracted to the new sects it is often because they do not find in our midst that mutual support which they have a right to expect. So we fervently hope and in our individual dioceses we shall do everything in our power to see that this is the case that during this time of celebration of the Martyrs a new vitality be given to the formation and growth of small Christian communities. This form of pastoral work has been repeatedly approved and proposed by us and by our brother bishops throughout East Africa. We encourage all these who have already set out along this road. They will need perseverance but the fruits of their sustained efforts will be great. To those who have for some reason or another not yet begun we say: take the Martyrs' centenary as your opportunity! Begin now, wherever you are to build and nurture small Christian communities.

In summary, what we are saying is this: a true, practical and sustained preaching of and listening to the Word of God and a renewed effort to build up small Christian communities would be the best possible ways for us in Uganda to prepare for the centenary of the Martyrs. It would be the best possible way to respond to the voice of Christ calling to us through the witness of their lives, to the voice of God our Father who has been good, so good, to Uganda.

V. FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

Uganda has a beautiful motto: For God and my Country. When the Martyrs lived and died, this motto had not yet been coined, but in their lives and in their deaths they were nonetheless faithful to it. They understood that fidelity to God and to their country and its people could never be in real contradiction. They understood that infidelity to the clear commands of God could never be a service to their nation. They understood that the true strength and greatness of their country lay in Jove of God arid of his commandments.

Thus although the Martyrs died the death of traitors, they were in fact real patriots and we can say that their blood flowed not only for their brothers and sisters in the faith but for all those who are proud to call themselves Ugandans. It is our fervent wish and deep prayer that the celebration of their centenary and the year of preparation leading up to it should see the whole Church involved, with new zeal and hope, in works of pastoral renewal. We are certain that this will equip us more and more to give a truly Christian contribution to the reconstruction and reconciliation of our nation.

From this moment we entrust the celebration of the centenary to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Martyrs and of Africa. By her prayer and that of the Martyrs themselves, we know that the one hundredth anniversary of the Martyrs' heroic and holy death will truly be celebrated: FOR GOD AND OUR COUNTRY.

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda

November 15th, 1984.

VI. PRAYER IN PREPARATION FOR THE CENTENARY

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda wish that the following prayer be used in Christian communities throughout the country in preparation for the centenary of the Uganda Martyrs:

God our loving Father,
we praise and bless you with all our hearts
for the wonderful work of your Holy Spirit in the Martyrs of Uganda,
whom we proudly call our ancestors in the faith.
There is so much in their lives and in their deaths that we want to thank you for:
their unshakeable faith in you,
their Christ-like love of each other,
their deep attachment to your holy Word,
their spirit of joy and forgiveness,
their willingness to die for you.
Father, you are truly marvellous in your saints!

Now we ask you to send your Spirit of power upon us
as we prepare to celebrate the Martyrs' centenary.
You know better than us the graces we need,
but in particular we ask you for these:
to know and love the Martyrs more;
to understand that they live with us in the Communion of Saints;
to live today with the same strong witness they showed;
especially, Father, by their intercession, increase our faith!

We know you love us: the example of the Martyrs shows us that.

Do now, as you did in their days, the wonders of your grace.
And remember, Father, that this is not only our own
weak prayer, but that we pray through the intercession
of Mary our Mother, of St. Charles Lwanga and his glorious companions,
and in the name of your beloved Son and our Risen Lord,
Jesus Christ.

AMEN.