Uganda Martyrs Dramatize Faith in Equality of Races

Vatican City — (RNS) — Sainthood in the Catholic Church was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites for 22 beatified Negro converts martyred in Uganda in the 19th Century for refusing to renounce their new faith.

Final approval was voted by the congregation at a meeting, attended by Pope Paul VI, in which it accepted as miraculous two cures attributed to the martyrs.

Members of the first Uganda Christian community, the 22 — ranging in age from 14 to 50 — are expected to be canonized at solemn ceremonies in St. Peter's Basilica on Sunday, Oct. 18.

The rites are to be attended by the Pope and some 2,000 bishops from around the world in Rome for the Vatican Council's third session which starts Sept. 14.

Dramatizing the Catholic Church's stand against racial injustice, canonization of the Uganda martyrs will make them the first Negro Africans declared saints in modern times.

They were converted by missionaries of the White Fathers who first arrived in Uganda in 1878. The White Fathers, who began research on the martyrs' lives in 1886 and have since promoted their cause for sainthood, sponsor a Uganda Martyrs Center in Washington, D.C.

The Sacred Congregation's approval was warmly commended by Father John A Bell, W.F., the center's director, who observed: "I think this public act on the part of the Church will reinforce statements and pronouncements by the Church on the fundamental equality of all men in the eyes of God."

All male, the 22 martyrs were beatified in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV. Beatification, a major step toward canonization, permits the Blessed to be honored locally in public worship. Following canonization, a saint is honored in public worship throughout the universal Church.

The Church requires two miracles attributed to the Blessed before canonization. However, miracles are not required for martyrs' canonization asked for no such dispensation.

Preliminary approval of the two medical miracles attributed to the intervention of the Uganda converts was given by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1941. The congregation has now voted final acceptance of the cases as miraculous.

The two cases in which the miracles are said to have occurred involved pulmonary plague. One of the cures affected Mother Maria Louisa Griblet, a Swiss nun; and the other, Sister Rachilda Buch, a German nun. They were members of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa, known as the White Sisters — a counterpart of the White Fathers.

In 1941 the two nuns were reported dying when a novena to the martyrs was started in a Uganda parish on their behalf. Later the nuns recovered. Sister Rachilda died in 1953 in Belgium. Mother Maria is now serving in Hoima, Uganda.

The 22 Uganda converts were put to death in various ways between 1885 and 1886 by order of King Mwanga, their native chief. Twelve of them were pages in the king's court and their age were between 14 and 25. The other ten were from 25 to 50 years old.

A leading figure in the court, Joseph Mukasa, who was among the early converts, was martyred first because of fears that his influence would Christianize the kingdom. He was sentenced to be burned alive, but instead was beheaded by the royal executioner.

Another convert leader, Charles Lwanga, supported the 12 pages who declined to give up their new faith. He and the pages were burned alive in 1886. The remaining eight Africans were martyred later in various ways.

The names of the 22 Africans were released by the White Fathers from their U.S. headquarters in Washington. Although all were baptized, the Christian first names of some are not known. The 22 follow:

Joseph Mukasa, Charles Lwanga, Matthias Mulumba, Denis Ssebuggwawo, Andrew Kaggwa, Pontian Ngondwe, Athanasius Bazzekuketta, Mbaga Tuzinde, Gonzaga Gonza, Noah Mwaggali, Luke Banabakinto, James Buzaballawo, and Bruno Serunkuma.

Also Mugagga, Kizito, Gyavira, Mukasa Kiriwawanvu, Adolph Ludigo, Anatole Kiriggwajjo, Ambrose Kibuka, Achille Kiwanuka, and John Mary Muzeyi.

The Negro martyrs are believed to make up the largest group ever to be canonized at one time. However, the Church has had other Negro saints through its long history.

Two of the most noted nonwhite saints are St. Martin de Porres, a 17th Century Peruvian lay Brother in the Dominican order, canonized in 1962; and St. Benedict the Moor, a 16th Century Franciscan in Italy, canonized in 1807.

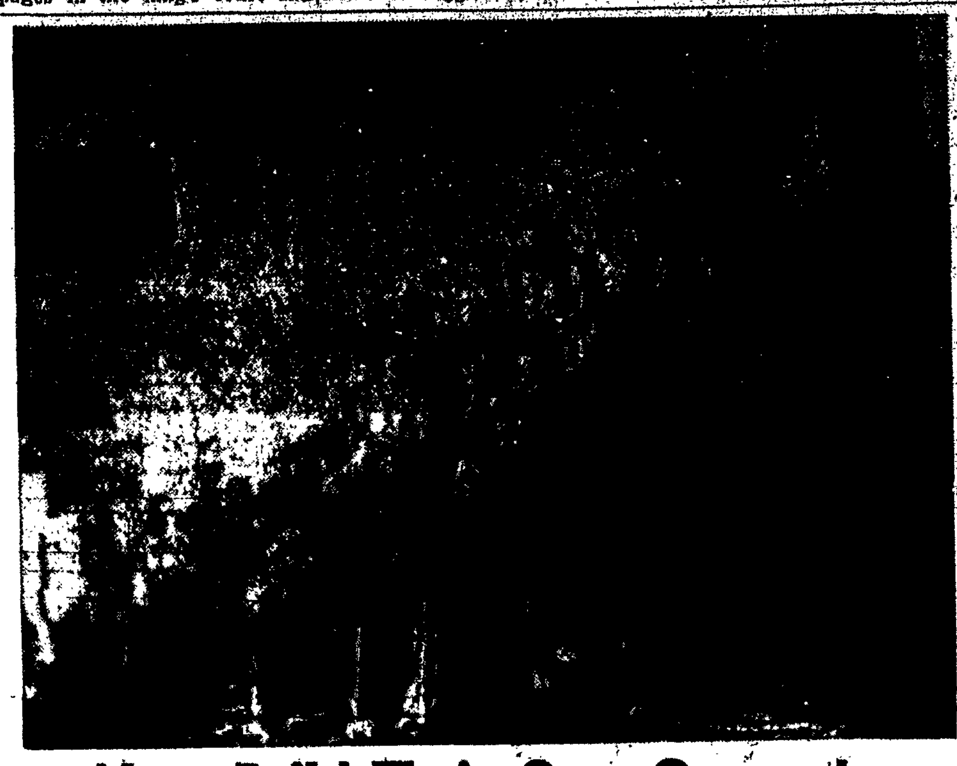
St. Martin de Porres was the first person of mixed Negro and white blood to be raised to the dignity of the altar. His father was a Spanish nobleman and his mother a former Negro slave. The saint is universally known as the patron of interracial justice.

St. Benedict the Moor, known in Italy as "The Black," was born of Negro parents near Messina in Sicily. He joined the Friars Minor of the Observance as a lay Brother and later became novice-master of the friary in Palermo.

The White Fathers, whose apostolate is mission work in Africa, were founded in 1868 and are officially known as the Society of Missionaries of Africa. They have educated some 1,000 African priests, of whome 17 have been consecrated as bishops. Of these the most prominent is Laurean Cardinal Rugambwa, Bishop of Bukoba, the first Negro Prince of the Church.

Pope Decorates General

Omaha, Neb.—Gen. Thomas S. Power, commander in chief of the Strategic Air Force Command, and Mrs. Power have received decorations from Pope Paul VI. The general was named a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Sylvester, while Mrs. Power was awarded the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal.



Nuns Build Their Own Convent

Villanueva Del Arzobispo, Spain — (RNS) — Cloistered Dominican nuns received special dispensation to mingle with workmen and help rebuild their centuries-old Santa Ana Convent near Villanueva del Arzobispo, Spain. When the Sisters found that the money they were earning by sewing was totally inadequate to help finance construction of the convent, they switched to manual labor. The convent was founded in 1540.

GOP Immigration Stand Criticized

New York — (RNS) — Some 35 religious, welfare, labor and other organizations interested in immigration and refugee matters have sharply protested the immigration plank in the 1964 Republican Platform as being "innocuous to the point of being meaningless."

Representatives of the various groups, all members of the American Immigration and Citizenship Conference (AICC), sent a statement to GOP leaders in San Francisco calling on them "promptly to issue a forthright statement in support of an American immigration policy that would do away with the discriminatory national origins quota system and correct other inequities in our present law that have such a serious effect on our relationships abroad."

Groups signing the statement included: Church World Service, overseas aid arm of the National Council of Churches; Lutheran Immigration Service; National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church; United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; Community church of New York; American Friends Service Committee; National Catholic Welfare Conference.

Also, American Jewish Committee; American Jewish Congress; Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia; Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.; Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and United HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society) Service.

The statement was formulated following discussion of the platform plank during a meeting here of the executive committee of the AICC. The AICC is a coordinating organization for some 90 national and local religious, civic, labor and welfare groups united to promote change of U.S. immigration policy on a non-discriminary basis.

The platform plan, the statement said, "completely avoids the basic issues inherent in our present immigration policy and law."

In its platform, the GOP called for "immigration legislation seeking to reunite families and continuation of the 'fair share' refugee program."

"We are appalled," the statement issued here said, "at the failure of the 1964 convention at least to reaffirm the Republican Party pledge as contained in the 1960 platform.'

Peace Corps Trains

St. Louis—(NC)—Fifty Peace Corps volunteers will begin 11 weeks of training at St. Louis University starting Sept. 20, for eventual service in Costa Rica. The group will spend 60 hours a week learning community development, Spanish and Latin American history at the Jesuit-run institution.

Mrs. Leone Attends Meet

Ithaca—Mrs. Joseph Leone, immediate Past Grand Regent of Court Santa Maria #240, Catholic Daughters of America, left Friday July 17, to attend the National Convention of Catholic Daughters.

The Convention is being held at the Diplomat Hotel, Hollywood by the Sea, Florida.

Mrs. Leone is a State Delegate to the Convention representing all Catholic Daughter Courts in the Diocese of Rochester.

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