

THE UGANDA MARTYRS (1885-1886)

These are Christians who were killed in 1886 under the commands of kabaka Mwanga of Buganda who had just come to power after the death of his father kabaka Mutesa I in 1884. Many of the Uganda martyrs were young boys who had accepted Christianity and some were working at kabaka's palace as pages (messengers). On 3rd June 1886, 37 of them were killed and burnt at Namugongo which was Buganda's traditional sacrifice center. That's why every 3rd of June all Christians in the world gather at Namugongo to remember the death of those Christians heroes.

REASONS FOR THE KILLING OF THE MARTYRS

The killing of Bishop James Hannington and Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe as the first Uganda martyrs was due to Buganda's traditional prophecy and fears that Buganda's independence would be taken away by Foreigners coming from the Eastern direction.

Mwanga's autocracy or unquestionable authority as enshrined in Buganda's custom also led to the death of the Uganda martyrs in Namugongo. According to Buganda's custom, no one had a priority to question the king's powers and as such, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe became a martyr when he questioned the king's orders for persecuting Bishop James Hannington in Busoga.

It's also believed that the killing of the Uganda martyrs was part of the annual traditional norm of sacrificing to the ancestors and the gods commonly known as "kiwendo" in Buganda at that time. History as thus concluded that, kabaka Mwanga had Christians as rebels at his courtyard to fulfill this cultural demand in 1885.

The death of kabaka Mutesa I in 1884 left behind a power vacuum which resulted into the killing of the Christian converts. Muteesa 1 had peacefully and maturely managed to handle religious disagreements in Buganda but his death however, led to the rise of Mwanga into power in 1885 at every tender age who could not make rational decisions to handle disagreements of the time.

Kabaka Mwanga's immoral and unethical behavior of homosexuality also contributed to the killing of the martyrs in Namugongo. This put the king into conflicts with the pages at the courtyard who rejected his sexual demands after being converted into Christianity and as such, he felt angered thus ordering for their killings.

The martyrs were also believed to have dead due to the influence of the traditional prime minister (katiikiro) joseph Mukasa. The prime minister is thought to have ill advised kabaka Mwanga to do away with Christianity in Buganda for reasons of winning his favors and gaining cheap popularity hence leading to the killing of the Christian converts.

The Uganda martyrs were persecuted because of the influence of the foreign religious teachings that made the pages disobedient to the traditional religion such as stopping worshipping, sacrificing and offering in the shrines a factor that made Mwanga annoyed forcing him to order for their death.

The Martyrs were victims of kabaka Mwanga's desire to have control and superiority over all sections of people in Buganda kingdom. This as a result, made him to order for the killing of those who opposed him and his authority.

kabaka Mwanga was also Suspicious that the church Missionary Society in Buganda was working too closely with General Gordon who acted as an agent of Egyptians in Sudan. These thus became a strong threat to Buganda's independence a factor that made Mwanga to hate Christianity hence killing most of its converts at Namugongo.

Mwanga feared to become a mere subject to the missionaries More so in his kingdom given their strong influence and Contributions in Buganda. To avoid such a disgrace, the only solution he had was to scare them away by killing some of their followers.

Christian teachings that emphasized equality for all people partly contributed to the persecution of the martyrs. This made the Christian pages in the courtyard lose respect for their king and seeing him as equal to them a factor that annoyed Mwanga to order for their killing in a bid to protect his respect and loyalty.

The Uganda martyrs were also persecuted due to the influence of the Arab Muslims who settled at the king's palace. These increasingly misadvised kabaka Mwanga against missionaries as agents of European colonialism in Buganda thus making the king to hate Christians and ordered for their killing in Namugongo thus creating the Uganda martyrs.

It also believed that some martyrs died because of some grudges with their seniors at the king's palace especially over leadership. As such, the senior pages got scared of the junior pages thinking that they would take over their positions hence influencing the king to kill them.

Some martyrs died because of the strong belief in life after death and resurrection of their bodies copying example of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This forced many pages in the king's palace to withstand all forms of threats from mwanga and accept death hoping to resurrect soon.

The Christian pages in Buganda are also believed to have accepted persecutions due to the strong faith they had in Jesus Christ. This made them strong and not to denounce Christianity in spite of strong warnings and intimidations from the palace officials and kabaka Mwanga hence their death.

Kabaka Mwanga's suspicion over Alexander Mackey's activities in Buganda kingdom prompted him to persecute some Christian pages in Buganda. Mackey for instance conducted lessons with Mwanga's subjects at his base in Natete, causing suspicions over what he exactly taught the king's subjects a factor that annoyed the king to kill all those that attended Mackey's lessons.

Kabaka Mwanga is also suspected to have persecuted the martyrs over the influence of drugs such as cocaine which robbed him senses to make rational judgements hence acting too brutal even over minor issues.

The killing of the martyrs is partly attributed to the presence of the blood thirsty and extremist chiefs such as Mukajanga, who served as Mwanga's chief executor. These always misadvised kabaka Mwanga against Christianity and were always ready to execute whoever was condemned by the king thus leading the massive death of Uganda martyrs between 1885-1886.

The rise of kabaka Mwanga into power in 1885 after the death of his father Muteesa 1 in 1884 also contributed to the killing of the martyrs in Buganda. Mwanga rose into power at 18 years old with less experience to handle religious matters in the kingdom which resulted into the killing of Christian converts.

The martyrs were killed due to Buganda's fight against the spread of European culture into the kingdom which was diluting the kiganda culture. They were therefore considered rebels against the establishment of Buganda traditions in the following ways.

- The pages questioned the king's authority of which was unacceptable in Buganda. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe for instance questioned Mwanga's orders of killing Bishop James Hannington in Busoga something that undermined the king's authority.
- The pages after converting to Christianity, denounced working and serving their traditional gods in the shrines which also portrayed a rebellious act towards Buganda's tradition.
- Many of the kabaka's pages upon converting to Christianity, refused to eat the meat slaughtered in shrines as sacrifices to the gods hence being rebels to the tradition in Buganda.
- Many of the converted pages in kabaka Mwanga's courtyard also refused to worship in shrines because it was considered evil in Christianity thus being rebels towards the establishment of Buganda's tradition and hence deserved death.
- The pages also lost respect for kabaka Mwanga and as such, refused to take orders from him. they for example refused to fulfill the king's sexual demand something that seemed disrespecting the king's authority according to tradition in Buganda.
- Some pages refused to go and hunt with kabaka Mwanga as their tradition demanded and hence were treated as true rebels towards the establishment of Buganda's tradition who deserved to be murdered.

THE EFFECTS OF THE DEATH OF UGANDA MARTYRS ON THE CHURCH

The killing of the Uganda Martyrs had both positive and negative effects on the spread of the church/ Christianity as shown below.

(A) Positive effects on the church

The death of the Uganda martyrs favored the spread of Christianity as shown below.

The death of the martyrs proved the fact that Christianity had actually taken a deeper route in Buganda amidst the existence of other religions such as Islam and African traditional religion. This thus made the church to receive recognition and financial support from missionary countries in Europe hence leading to its growth.

The killing of Uganda Martyrs also helped to make Christianity popular and famous within and outside Buganda hence making people develop sought to know more about this religion and as such, many people were converted into Christianity.

The Christians who remained defended the death of the martyrs on grounds that they had not died but had joined Christ in heaven a teaching that attracted very many people into joining Christianity.

The martyrdom also won the church much sympathy from the on-lookers, friends, relatives and those who got news of the killings. These were inspired by the heroic acts of the martyrs who accepted to die for their faith hence easily joined Christianity to show their solidarity with the martyrs thus leading to the spread of Christianity in Buganda.

The acceptance of the Christian pages to die made kabaka Mwanga believe that he couldn't easily stop the spread of Christianity by mere persecution. This therefore forced him to make peace with Christians hence leading to the spread of Christianity in the region.

The killings/massacres inspired and aroused many more evangelists both within and outside Buganda like Apollo Kivebulaya, Bobby kizza, yohana kitagata among others to take on missionary work within and outside Buganda a factor that contributed to the growth of the gospel.

The martyrdom worsened the working relations between Mwanga and the missionaries and as such, Mwanga started befriending the Christians and appointing some like Apollo Kaggwa in important positions in his palace to restore the relation which made Christianity to spread.

The killing of Uganda martyrs scared many Christians in Buganda, scattering many into different parts of Buganda and Uganda for fear of losing life hence spreading the gospel wherever they finally settled thus leading to the growth and expansion of Christianity.

The death of the martyrs helped to reduce tension between Catholics and Protestants and created a short term unity between the two groups against a common enemy kabaka Mwanga a factor that led to the spread of Christianity in Buganda.

The martyrdom also inspired other missionaries to come to Buganda to defend their counterparts in the spreading of the church and this increased on the church manpower in the region hence contributing towards the expansion of Christianity.

The determination of the martyrs to die for their faith taught the surviving Christians in Buganda and Uganda at large to endure all sorts of persecutions and suffering during the spread of the gospel hence leading to the growth of Christianity.

The martyrdom gave birth to future celebrations in remembrances of the Uganda martyrs for example every 3rd of June where thousands of people both within and outside Uganda move to Namugongo to show their solidarity with the martyrs thus strengthening their faith in Christianity.

The killings resulted into increased financial support to the missionaries from their home governments such as Britain, France and German to facilitate their activities in Buganda such as establishing churches in different parts of the kingdom and Uganda at large thus contributing to the spread of Christianity.

The massacres inspired the surviving Christians to name churches after the Uganda martyrs and this has kept the church strong. It for instance led to the establishment of Uganda Martyrs church Namugongo, St Kizito Luwanga and Kakumba chapel among others.

The death of the Uganda martyrs forced the British government to come and declare Uganda a British protectorate and after, they gave protection to Christian missionaries in Buganda against any further threats which favored the spread of the good news in the region.

(B) Negative effects on the church

The death of the Uganda martyrs also hindered the spread of Christianity as shown below.

The killing of the martyrs reduced on the number of Christians in Buganda because 37 of them were killed with several others withdrawing from Christianity for fear of their dear lives hence greatly reducing on the church congregation.

The martyrdom made Some people in Buganda opt to join Islam because it had little conflicts with the kingdom and the king. this greatly worked against the growth and spread of Christianity because some potential Christian converts instead joined Islam.

The failure of the martyrs to resurrect as expected, portrayed Christianity as a false religion and thus forced many Christians to backslide because they lost confidence and hope in the religion hence hindering the growth of the church in Buganda.

The killing of the martyrs in Namugongo made Some Baganda and Ugandans at large to get scared of joining Christianity because they feared that Mwanga would kill them as he had killed the Martyrs a factor that denied the church in Buganda to grow.

The massacres laid a foundation for the 1888-1893 religious wars in Buganda which brought insecurity and rivalry among Christian sects hence hindered the spread of the gospel in the region.

The killing of the Uganda martyrs also scared some missionaries from coming to Buganda kingdom fearing that they would be killed by kabaka Mwanga thus hindering the church manpower and its spread in Buganda and Uganda.

The martyrdom in Buganda increased conflicts between the missionaries and kabaka Mwanga which reduced on the missionary concentration and time of preaching the gospel hence hindering the growth and expansion of Christianity in Buganda kingdom.

Many Christians in Buganda as a result of the martyrdom, got scared of spreading the gospel publically for fears of being identified and killed by kabaka Mwanga hence affecting the church negatively.

STUDY QUESTIONS.

- 1. Under what circumstances did the first (Uganda martyrs) Christian witnesses lose their lives in Buganda?**
- 2. How did the death of the Uganda Martyrs contribute to the expansion of the church in East Africa?** (App. positive effects for the death of Uganda martyrs)
- 3. Assess the role of the death of the Uganda martyrs on the spread of the church in East Africa.** (App. positive and negative)
- 4. How far did the killing of the Uganda martyrs lead to the spread of Christianity in East Africa?** (App. To small extent positive effects and to a large extent other factors that led to the spread of Christianity in East African.)
- 5. Account for the martyrdom in Buganda in 1886.**
- 6. “The Uganda martyrs were rebels against the establishment of Buganda’s tradition” comment** (App. To some degree it is true that the martyrs were rebels against the establishment of Buganda’s tradition. Other factors however caused the death of the martyrs other than being rebels to tradition in Buganda.)