

# FIRE AND WATER: THREE KWANSABAS

Theresa Pihl on Memories  
of Ugandan Martyrs

FIRE AND WATER: THREE KWANSABAS IN MEMORY OF  
THE UGANDAN MARTYRS, CHARLES LWANGA AND  
COMPANIONS

Charles Lwanga served as a page in the court of the 19th century Ugandan King Mwanga, who sexually abused him and the other boys. Their baptism and dedication to Christ and the moral teachings of the Church infuriated Mwanga. He gave them a choice: denounce your faith or die. They chose life.<sup>1</sup> On June 3, 1886, Charles and his companions sang as they walked to the place of their execution, where they were burned alive.

Today, there are over 400,000,000 Christians in Africa, giving testimony to Tertullian who prophesied in the second century, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.”<sup>2</sup> These poems are an attempt to honor these brave young men and their Christian witness. I chose the African American poetic form kwansaba – which I first

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 30:19, NIV.

<sup>2</sup> “Bishop Barron on St. Charles Lwanga.” *YouTube*, June 14, 2010, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://youtu.be/O7WlYcrOEu0>.

learned from Poet Van G. Garrett at an HBU writing conference in May 2021 – for its African roots.

## REBIRTH

The king's lust burns for ebony boys,  
black, broken shining souls yoked as pages.  
Lwanga's courage rises to protect, respect, love;  
Pouring water with words: Father, Son, Spirit–  
washed clean, sun dried, reborn they rejoice  
singing as they walk the narrow path–  
martyrs' blood soaking seeds soon to sprout.

## SEEDS

Charles Lwanga to his killer: “You are  
burning me, but it is as if  
you are pouring water over my body.”  
Fire and water till rich black soil  
for seeds of the Word to sink  
down, down, deep . . . dying then rising until  
sparks shoot forth setting the world ablaze.

## KATONDA!

Katonda! Creator God, we praise your name!  
Kagingo! Master of Life, we choose you!  
Ssewannaku! The Eternal One, we glorify you!  
Source of Grace pour forth into hearts  
love, joy, peace, light, fire and water.

Tend to wounds lanced open and tender.  
Receive this crown of blood black thorns.

# Bibliography

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“Bishop Barron on St. Charles Lwanga.” *YouTube*. June 14, 2010. Accessed February 7, 2022.  
<https://youtu.be/O7WIYcr0EU0>.