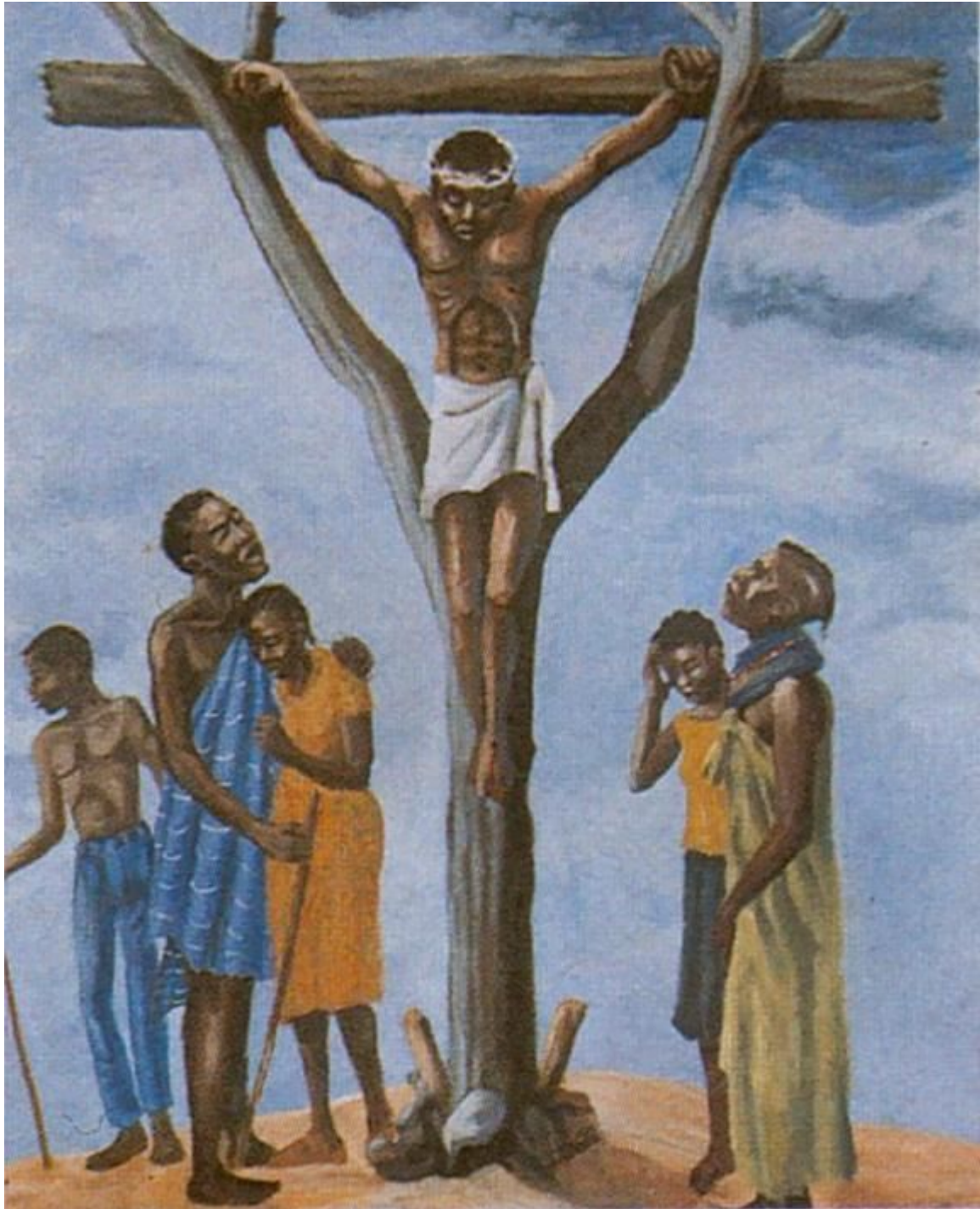


A martyr Church in the heart of Africa

Witnesses of the love of God





# Blessed Maria Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta (1939-1964)

## virgin and martyr

Anuarite Nengapeta was born on December 29, 1939 on the outskirts of Wamba (Congo), into a pagan family. Shortly thereafter she was baptized into the Catholic Church together with her mother and two sisters. At her baptism she asked to be given the name Alfonsina. When she was still young, Anuarite entered the novitiate of the diocesan Congregation of the Holy Family (Jamaa Takatifu), a congregation founded in 1936 in Bafwabaka by Bishop Verfaille, scj, the apostolic vicar of Stanleyfalls (diocese of Kisangani and Wamba). She made her first religious profession in 1959 taking the name of Maria Clementina.

A transparent religious, full of serenity and joy, even in difficult times, she carried out everything with diligence and love. Spiritually she was accompanied by Bishop Wittebols. There were three ideals that she cultivated in her life: obedience, humility, prayer. Desiring to "please Jesus alone" she prayed often and with great intensity. In one of her most difficult moments he wrote: "Lord, here I am spiritually sick. I come here looking for a healing remedy ... Did you not shed your blood for me? And also for blacks? Answer me ... Jesus, allow me to die even now rather than abandoning you".



When Zaire was being torn apart by bloody internal conflicts, during which many religious were cruelly killed, on November 29, 1964, a gang of young Simba, driven by hatred towards the Catholic faith, entered the convent of the Holy Family of Bafwabaka and took hostage 18 professed, 9 novices and 7 postulants. Sister Anuarite, who had been in the field not far from the house as this was happening, came back to join the sisters saying: "What are we going to do? Let us go together. If we have to die, let us die together". The sisters were taken to Ibambi, where they spent the night. Sister Anuarite calmly exhorted her sisters to watch and pray: "Let us pray to the martyrs of Uganda, we are in great danger; let's pray, let's pray! As for me, I don't know if I will still be alive tomorrow". On 30 November they arrived in Isiro. There in a variety of ways and with cruel brazenness, during the night the sisters were pressured to give up their virginity to the soldiers who had kidnapped them. Sister Anuarite was selected by the commander. Unanimously, the nuns and Sister Anuarite vigorously resisted their efforts.

Confronted by the obstinacy of the officer, who promised her great favors if she agreed, Sister Anuarite replied with force and an obstinate will: "I cannot accept to become a man's wife; if necessary, I would prefer to die; I refuse, I am consecrated to God". The furious officer



began to beat her violently, but he did not succeed in breaking the will of Sister Anuarite, who offered her life as a sacrifice of sweet perfume, murmuring the holy name of Jesus. Finally, in the darkness of the night, at 1 o'clock in the morning of December 1, 1964, Sister Maria Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta was murdered with a rifle shot. Courageously facing death, she offered with a loud voice the Christian virtue of forgiveness: "I forgive you, executioner, because you don't know what you are doing". At the same time, the other nuns began to sing the Magnificat.

With Sister Anuarite dead, the other sisters were encouraged to continue to resist their persecutors, comforted and strengthened by her testimony. In fact, as the sun arose, the Simba realized that all their efforts had been in vain. They said, "We have never seen women with such hard hearts like yours. They are witches, we no longer want to see them here in Isiro".

Maria Clementina Anuarite was beatified in Kinshasa by John Paul II on August 15, 1985.

The memory of the virgin and martyr, well known and remembered in Congolese prayers, is a welcome occasion to pray for the Church and the people of this African country, especially for the SCJ communities and their apostolic activities. Blessed Maria Clementina Anuarite was a model of humble simplicity in prayer, docile and free obedience, community life without ethnic discrimination and fetishistic fears, and above all of virginal love to the point of heroism.

Here are some of her thoughts: "At the hour of meditation we must be happy: it is the time of rest and relaxation with the Lord, just like an engaged couple who converse together without effort and without getting tired ... And we who are consecrated, need to think of the Bridegroom of our souls, much more frequently".

"Don't worry about anything. Know what God wants from me, when he asks something of me. If I seek my joy away from Jesus, know, my soul, that you will not be able to find consolation. Jesus, give me a spirit of prayer and fidelity, so that I can observe my rules. Give me the strength not to put my trust in myself and say: there is no danger. Prudent virgin, may I be prudent!".





# Prayer

Most Holy Trinity, in communion with the whole Church,  
I thank you for the abundant graces you have given  
to Blessed Sister Mary Clementine Anuarite Nengapeta,  
model of obedience and fidelity to the vow of chastity  
to the point of sacrificing her young life.

By following her example,  
grant me the grace to listen constantly to the Word of God  
and in generous service to others.

May you deem, O Lord,  
to glorify in the Church  
your faithful Servant as Virgin and Martyr.

Through her intercession,  
grant me the grace I now ask...

Mary, Queen of Martyrs,  
recommended with maternal affections  
my supplications to your Son Jesus. Amen.





# The servant of God, Father Bernardo Longo (1907-1964)

## missionary and martyr



He was born in Pieve di Curtarolo (Padua - Italy) in 1907. Before reaching the heart of Africa, the Congo, the destination of his youthful ideals, his path was very troubled. He started in middle school at the diocesan seminary of Padua; but he had to stop for health reasons. At the age of 20 (May 5, 1927), he had to go to Verona for military service, and only in 1936 was he ordained a priest, becoming a spiritual son of the servant of God Father John

Leo, founder of the "Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" (Dehonians).

In 1938 he became a missionary in the Upper Congo region (Africa), in the middle of the equatorial forest, in the still unexplored area between Avakubi and Wamba, which he himself defined as the "home of the Walesse, pygmies and elephants". From 1950 onwards he moved to the village of Nduye (near Mambasa - Congo): it became his mission, his love, his martyrdom.

A missionary with a generous heart, he showed himself very quickly to be a volcano of ideas and initiatives, in support of the evangelization and the human and spiritual promotion of the people. Not high-tech, his projects were within everyone's reach: how to grow bananas or coffee, how to work wood to build a table or a hut, how to take apart and reassemble the parts of an engine, etc. And, for women, with the cooperation of the Pious Mothers of Nigrizia, he showed how to work with cutting and sewing and how to manage a school or a dispensary.

He has always lived poorly with the poor. He lived in a miserable hut of mud and straw. Also the church, school and workshop were made of mud and straw. But in such a poor environment he lived as a missionary with a big heart.

Everything in his life and his work was done for his Blacks, pagans, Muslims or Christians, all pulled together into a common work of love. And when, in the vortex of the 1964 revolution, they urged him to hide in the forest to save his life, he replied: "In the moment of danger the shepherd cannot abandon his flock". He wanted to remain in the



Mission with "his Sisters", exhorting them, despite everything, to be witnesses, to forgive and to live Christian hope. One day, seeing them surrounded by a group of threatening Simba, armed with spears and rifles, he spoke these inspiring words: "We accept death as an act of love, for the salvation of these people and the pygmies".

And when, subject to an unjust sentence, a nun asked him for his last message for their family, he replied from the prison cell: "Tell them that this is the most beautiful death for a missionary!".

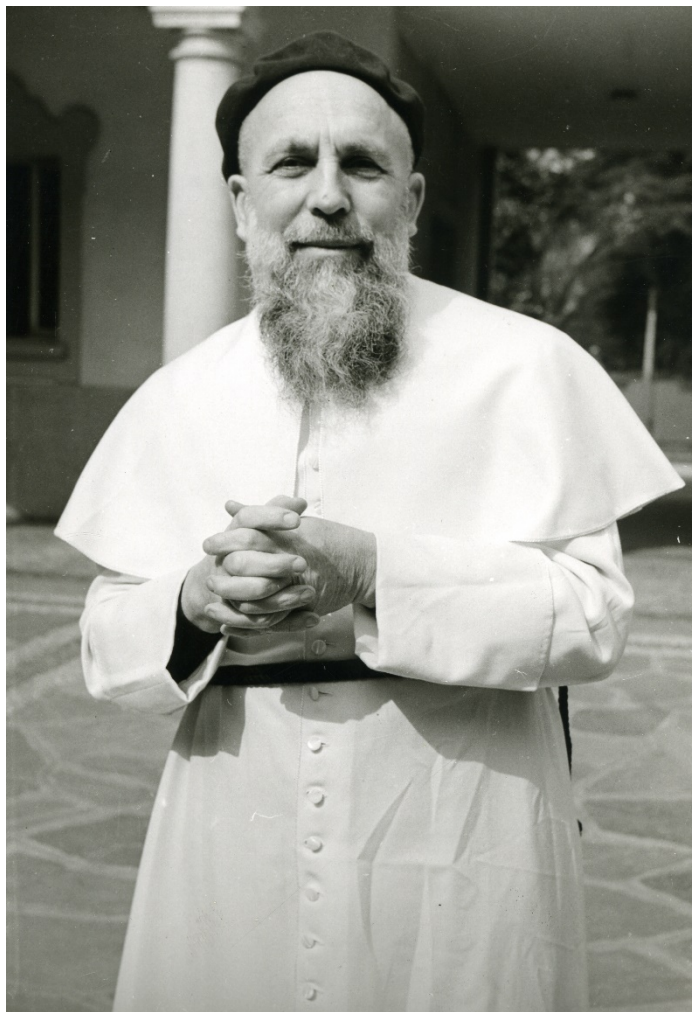
He died at the gates of Mambasa, with his gaze turned toward his Nduye. He was hit in the chest by a spear, only because he was a missionary of the Gospel that announced love and forgiveness. Not a coffin, but only his cassock and rosary accompanied him into the tomb, thanks to a Protestant friend, a nurse from the nearby hospital. Over the tomb, a cross was placed: it summed up his faith, his life, his hope for eternity.





# Prayer

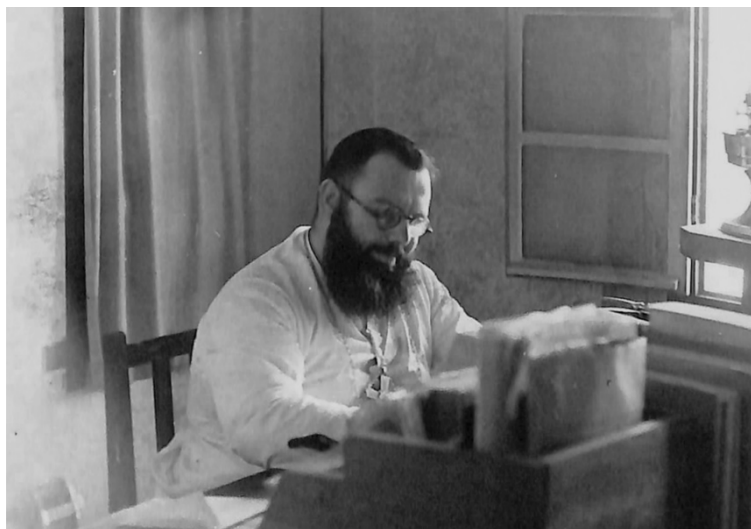
We bless you,  
Lord Jesus, good shepherd,  
because you have given to the Church  
the servant of God, Father Bernard Longo,  
priest of your Heart.  
You called him to proclaim  
the Gospel to the poor  
and to give witness to it with the sacrifice of his life.  
Look at our poverty and, through his prayer,  
grant the grace we ask of you ...  
Allow us to participate in the feelings of your Heart  
and give us your Spirit  
so that our life will become  
a living offering to God the Father  
for his glory and his joy. Amen.





## Bishop Joseph Wittebols (1912-1964)

first apostolic vicar and bishop of the diocese of Wamba



On November 26, 1964, in the courtyard of the Wamba prison, Bishop Wittebols, the first apostolic vicar and bishop of the diocese of Wamba, after a long martyrdom, fell under the blows of the rebels together with seven Belgian missionaries and confreres. And thus, in the full vigor of his years, the beautiful figure of a missionary bishop was taken away. As the title of his book said "Total Self-gift", it became realized in his person.

Born on April 12, 1912 in Etterbeek (district of Brussels), Joseph Wittebols entered into Dehonian religious life in the novitiate (1931-1932) of Brugelette (Belgium). This was followed by a program in philosophy at the Scholasticate of Our Lady of the Congo in Louvain, and by theology at the Jesuits. He took great care in following his religious and priestly formation, and he neglected nothing that he believed could prepare him for his future apostolate. In addition to a great upbringing, he had a profound common sense, a healthy right judgment, total self-denial, a great ability to work and a tenacity that nothing could discourage. And he had an acute awareness of his responsibilities. All of this helped him to prepare for his apostolate.

Ordained a priest in Louvain on 11 July 1937 in the autumn of 1938, he boarded a ship in Antwerp (Belgium), bound for the African continent. In Stanleyville (Kisangani - Congo), the bishop gave him as his first field of apostolate to start a new school – from scratch! It was to become the Collège Sacré-Coeur. He was its founder and director until 1949. He was popular, drawing the esteem of all for his calm temperament, his optimism and his exquisite and caring benevolence, in particular towards his collaborators.

When on 24 March 1949, the apostolic vicariate of Wamba (which became a diocese in 1959) was erected, Joseph Wittebols became its first apostolic vicar. His episcopal consecration took place in the chapel of the Mission Prosecutor's Office in Brussels on June 16, 1949.

Under the guidance of such a dynamic, generous, enterprising and methodical pastor, who was also a fervent religious, an excellent pastor and an optimistic and self-giving leader, the apostolic vicariate of Wamba experienced a period of great prosperity. Bishop Wittebols made it his mission to make joy and optimism reign in all the communities entrusted to his care. He preached by example.



Sometimes Msgr. Wittebols has been called “the bishop of the nuns”. In fact, he was very concerned about their material, spiritual and moral situation; he often preached their retreats. His reflections have been collected in two volumes: *The Total Donation* (1960) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1962). A few days after his death, he had the joy of witnessing, from heaven, the martyrdom of one of the nuns, Sister Anuarite, who died to remain faithful to her vow of virginity.

The declaration of independence of the Congo (1960), with the riots that followed, was fatal for the mission of Wamba: “currently the church is in danger, not only in the world, but especially in our country”, where it is “despised and slandered with great hostility by those who, abandoning Christian wisdom, returned miserably to the doctrines, customs and institutions of paganism”.

On August 15, 1964, the day of the Assumption of Mary, the rebels entered Wamba, immediately imposing a regime of terror. Day and night, there were hateful accusations, insults, threats. Searches became everyday experiences. The mass killings of indigenous leaders, public administrators and many of the most prominent men in the square in front of a crowd gathered by force, led Bishop Wittebols to the following reflection: “The spirit that animates them is absolutely not Bantu; it must be coming from abroad”.

On 29 October Bishop Wittebols and the mission staff were forced to live, first in the hospital of the Palms and then in the mission itself, where they were guarded day and night by armed soldiers. Increasingly, for days and weeks, they had to endure brazen attacks, searches, torture inflicted on one or other of the brothers, outbursts of hatred, humiliations and harassment of all kinds. The totally forced inaction, the uncertainty of tomorrow, the collapse of his work and the absolute impossibility of averting evil, deeply saddened Bishop Wittebols. It is difficult to determine his inner dispositions during those dark hours, full of uncertainty. The bishop did not have the habit of complaining: he knew how to accept what happened to him. He did not become angry. During his imprisonment, humiliation, torture, where even his outward appearance bore the evident signs of the worst tortures, his great calm and dignified attitude impressed everyone, revealing at the same time his resignation and his total abandonment to the will of God.





# From the writings of Msgr. Joseph Wittébols

## Holy abandonment

"The attitude of total abandonment to the good will of the Father fully marked the life of Our Lord. This is what makes Jesus the only victim, without blemish, the only one pleasing to the Father, the only one capable of redeeming humanity by repairing the offense done to God. To be a victim he became human, and he gave witness to it all his life, from the initial *Ecce Venio* to the *Consummatum est* on the altar of the cross. It is also the disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the co-redemptrix, whose life was totally guided by the desire to create with love the *Ecce Ancilla Domini* of the Annunciation". (La Donation total, 195).

## Obedience

"And, finally, our obedience must be total and complete. The obedience willed by God is not one that our superiors must snatch from us with exaggerated regard, or with turns of phrase, or with excessive insistence. No, to be truly supernatural, our obedience will be prompt and quick, without interminable discussions, and not because it cannot be done otherwise. It will be complete. We will not try to give the superiors only an appearance of satisfaction, while keeping an emergency exit so that we can go off on a tangent as soon as the opportunity arises. Jesus did not discuss his Father's wishes; in all things, in small and in big, he has always hastened to obey. 'My food, he said, is to do the will of my Father' (Jn 4:34)". (Ecce Ancilla Domini, 117).

## The total donation

"Whoever hears this call understands that his life will no longer have meaning if it is not given. And the word 'gift' here does not mean giving something, but giving oneself; and we do not give ourselves partially. We have not given of ourselves until we have given ourselves without reserve and without limit. A total self-gift to God". (La Donation total, 61).





# Prayer

We thank you merciful Father  
for calling your apostle and pastor  
Bishop Joseph Wittebols  
to the service of your Kingdom among the poor and needy,  
preaching your Gospel of Love.  
In the total self-gift of life  
he fulfilled his consecration to the Heart of Jesus.  
By professing Ecce Venio and Ecce Ancilla,  
he offered himself for the people entrusted to him.  
We ask you Father  
that the Church may be an instrument of reconciliation and peace,  
and that the seed scattered with the testimony of your servant,  
may stir up new signs of the civilization of Love.  
Because of his example and intercession,  
give us what today we ask of you with faith ...  
and may we too be always rooted in you  
and be strong witnesses of your name. Amen.





