

CHRIS MANNION AND JOSEP RUSHIGAJIKI

Rwanda - 1st July 1994

The 1st of July will be the twentieth anniversary of the tragic deaths of Brothers Chris Mannion and Joseph Rushigajiki while they were attempting to save some of the Brothers and other persons in danger in Save, during the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

Thus are woven together two lives given, that of the Brother welcoming into the drama his country is living through, and that of the other come from Rome, witness of the interest of the whole Marist family in the Brothers of Rwanda.

20 years after this tragic event, we commemorate their lives with a testimony of Chris Mannion's friend Brother Stephen Smyth, and an account of Brother Alexandre Rugema, who had left Rwanda a few days before the beginning of the conflict.

You can find other informations and a prayer in our site:

<http://www.champagnat.org/530.php?p=188&b=Mannion>

Account of Brother Alexandre Rugema, Rwanda

When the Rwandan genocide broke out in Save, Brother Nzabonaliba Albert ran about everywhere in order to save :

- the Tutsi Brothers, by leading them to the frontier of Burundi,
- the teachers and young postulants and the Brothers who had stayed in Save,
- people he did not know and who were targeted by the militia; he ransomed them with money,
- the Benebikira Sisters who were under attack everyday and to whom he brought food...

In the meantime, Brothers Stanislas Ngombwa, superior of the District of Zaire at the time, and Spiridion Ndanga, who was Master of Novices in Nyangezi (Zaire), succeeded in sending a message to Rome to ask that someone come to help evacuate the Tutsi Brothers trapped in Save. It was thus that around 28 June 1994, Brother Christ Mannion, General Councillor of the Marist Brothers and British by birth, was sent by the Superior General to go to Save to give help to the Brothers in danger of death.



Before leaving Rome, the Superior General told him: «It could be that you are forced to walk many kilometres on foot, in the jungle, perhaps carrying someone on your shoulders. It could be that you lose your life there».

He travelled via Bujumbura (Burundi) and reached Save. He saw and spoke with the brothers who needed help. He told them : « I am going to Mururu to see the other Brothers and I will come back to get you ». Brother Joseph Rushigajiki offered to accompany him. The next day, on the way back, they encountered at Gikongoro and Butare numerous people fleeing towards Zaire. Brother Joseph Rushigajiki could have been aware of the danger, but the two Brothers went on anyway. It might have been considered suicidal. No, the Brothers were only thinking of their Confrères in danger of death.

At Butare, they asked for assistance from the French soldiers present there. They agreed to accompany them to Save. The two Brothers led the convoy: the Brothers' car, a jeep and at least 3 military lorries (for the Brothers had the intention of also evacuating 200 young Benebikira Sisters who were also trapped in Save). Two kilometres from their destination, the French jeep ran into a gutter and the convoy halted to get it back on the road. The two Brothers, not knowing what had happened behind them, continued on



General Council - 1993

their way. Two hundred metres from the Brothers' residence, the car ran into an ambush and was riddled with bullets and the Brothers were killed. The French military convoy, hearing the shooting, turned back, for they did not wish to face the soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR). It was on 01 July 1994 around 7.00 pm.



Br. Chris Mannion

Brother Chris Mannion had been a General Councillor only a few months when, in June 1994, he went on a mission to Ruanda to attempt to rescue the Brothers under threat in Save. He was 43 years old and the youngest member of the Council. He found his death in front of the novitiate and school of Save where the Brothers were. Like Christ, he paid with his life while his Brothers recovered their freedom.



Br. Joseph Rushagajiki

Brother Joseph Rushagajiki had offered to accompany Chris on this dangerous mission and was even more aware of the risk, since he belonged to the country. He set his life at stake for his Ruandan Brothers and for his superior, Chris Mannion. He was only 41.

CHRIS MANNION – OUR BROTHER

A testimony by Br Stephen Smyth

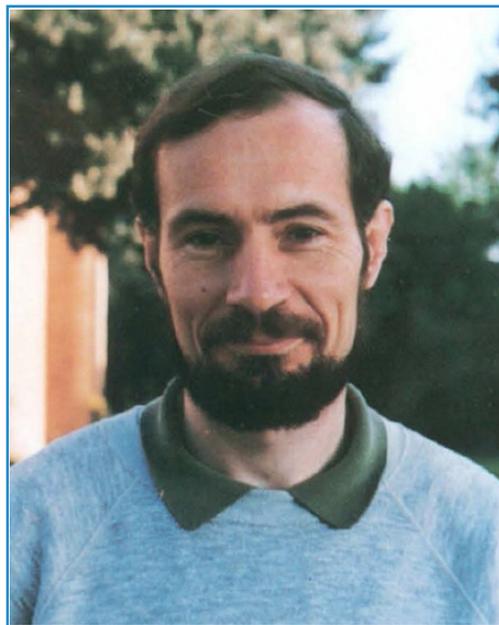
Chris and I were good friends, keeping in touch over 30 years, but only actually spending two of these in community together. So, while I have heard about many of Chris's escapades, my own 'Chris story' is perhaps somewhat quieter.

We first met in 1963 at a vocations summer camp run by the Brothers in St Joseph's College, Dumfries, in the south west of Scotland. Chris had come up from Darlington in England and I down from Glasgow. He was heavily into the sports. I was always happy to leave that side of things to him. Over the next few summers we became friends. Then in '69 Chris came to Habay-la-Vieille in Belgium to begin his Marist postulancy at the same time as I began my novitiate. During this year we truly became brothers. His sense of 'being Marist' and 'being Brother' continued to deepen and widen through all the later experiences and stages of his life.

Over the years Chris and I became part of each others' families, with Chris's parents, Terry and Harry, and mine also becoming friends. Chris had clearly inherited the gift of making and keeping friends. He maintained many strong and deep friendships from every period and place of his life. Significant among these are the Brothers in Ireland, where he made his novitiate; his community and colleagues in Cameroon, especially the Awa family into which he was 'adopted'; and the religious who trained with him in St Anselm's to become novice masters and mistresses. Family, friendship, fraternity and relationships were all central to his personality and spirit.

Chris was a passionate man. He fell in love often: with people, with ideas and

with life in general. He knew when to be intimate, when to be professional and when to be prophetic. He had great energy, a deep commitment to justice and equality and a capacity for hard work. He could be very direct, forceful, even brusque. Physically he was rather clumsy, as more than a few dishes found out. In all these characteristics he was loved in return – even, or especially, by those on the receiving end of his occasional practical jokes.



Even when I first met him, Chris's ambition was to work in the missions. He fulfilled this when after completing his various studies he was appointed to Cameroon.

We all know that Chris was a great sportsman. He loved all forms of sport but particularly cricket, football, tennis and running – all of which he took part in with gusto. Wherever he went, there are stories of robust football or tennis matches and, later, of running including competitions on Mt Cameroon. He played to win,

both on and off the pitch or track.

He was a prodigious reader and a great educator. Education for Chris was far more than rote learning. With a love of history and a superb memory, he drew on many sources for inspiration. He expected the best of people and challenged and encouraged them to achieve, not only in academic subjects, but as fully rounded persons. He demanded no less of himself and he modelled what he taught. He treated everyone with respect. In Sacred Heart College Cameroon, his affectionate nickname was 'Pharo'oh' (Pharaoh) because of his strong leadership and example.

He loved his ten years in Cameroon: the people, the culture and the teaching. It was then with some reluctance, but a deep sense of vocation, that he agreed to return to Britain and train as novice master. Being Chris, he threw himself wholeheartedly into that role. As well as deepening his own spiritual formation and widening his friendships, this re-kindled his love for Dublin. All of this prepared him for the later and demanding roles of Provincial and General Council member.

In July 1994, I went over to Rome to have a short holiday and to spend some time with Chris. I arrived just after the community had heard that Chris was missing in Rwanda. A pall of sadness and uncertainty had fallen over everyone. Those were very difficult days. I had the privilege of being with Br Sean Sammon when he first phoned Chris's parents. Their faith, like Chris's life, remains a witness to us all.

We may never know exactly what happened to Chris. But, going to Rwanda in those circumstances was so 'very Chris'. Almost regardless of the danger, he was driven by his care for the Brothers and pushing himself to do what he saw as right. His loss was both tragic and prophetic. It still speaks to all of us who knew and loved him. Inspired by Chris, we continue to stand in faith and solidarity with all those affected by the genocide that engulfed Rwanda.

Naturally, we may wonder what else Chris might have achieved had he lived longer, had he, that night in Rwanda, taken another path, another course of action.

However, with great affection and respect, I prefer to remember and give thanks for Chris and all I know of his life. He and I were good friends and Brothers. He was particularly supportive of me when, during his time as Provincial, I faced a difficult period on my own life. I consider that our friendship still lives on. I sometimes find myself 'talking' with him as I consider some issue or challenge. I think I know what he might say; I certainly know the love, principles, skills and sensitivities he would bring to bear on any matter.

In Sept '94, a memorial mass was held for Chris in his parents' parish, Holy Family, Darlington. Family, Brothers and friends gathered from

all over Britain, Ireland, Canada and elsewhere. There was an impressive group of former pupils from Sacred Heart College, there to say thanks and pay respects to Pharo'oh and his family and his Brothers.

Later a brass plaque was set up in the Lady Chapel of the parish. It is a fitting memorial for Chris, a local son and our much loved and passionate Marist Brother: the simple plaque is discreet, beside our Good Mother, close to the altar.

Br Stephen Smyth, Glasgow
30 May 2014



MARIST MARTYRS

Africa

Argelia:

Henri Vergès (1994);

Rwanda:

Étienne Rwesa (1994), Fabien Bisengimana (1994), Gaspard Gatali (1994), Pierre-Canisius Nyilinkindi (1994), Joseph Rushigajiki (1994), Christopher Mannion (1994),

Zaire (Dem. Rep. of Congo):

Christian (Édouard Ettinger - 1964), Lucien Cyrille (Lucien Vandamme - 1964), Fernando de la Fuente de la Fuente (1996), Miguel Ángel Isla Lucio (1996), Servando Mayor García (1996), Julio Rodríguez Jorge (1996)

America

Guatemala:

Moisés Cisneros Rodríguez (1991)

Asia

China:

Jules André (Marie Auguste Brun - 1900), Joseph Félicité (Joseph Planche - 1900), Joseph Marie Adon (Joseph Fan - 1900), Postulante Pablo Chen (1900), Léon (Jean Raymond Vermorel - 1906), Maurice (Marius Maximin Durand - 1906), Joseph Amphien (Armand Paul Guillot - 1906), Prosper Victor (Prosper Paysal - 1906), Marius (Jacques Rosaz - 1906), Joche Albert (André Ly - 1951)

Europe

Spain: Lycarion (François B. May

- 1909); Bernardo (Plácido Fábrega Juliá - 1934), Laurentino, Virgilio y 44 compañeros (1936), Crisanto (Casimiro González García - 1936), Aquilino y 3 compañeros (1936), Cipriano José y 20 compañeros (1936), Guzmán y 41 compañeros (1936 - 1938), Eusebio y 58 compañeros, muertos en diversos lugares de Spain (1936 - 1938), León Gaudencio (Laureano Vicente Sierra - 1937), Sixto José (Daniel Ruiz Castro - 1939)

Oceania

New Zealand:

Euloge (A. Chabany - 1864)

Salomon Islands:

Hyacinthe (Joseph Chatelet -1847), John William (John Roberts -1943), Augustinus (Frederick Mannes - 1943), Donatus Joseph (Francis Fitzgerald -1943)

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