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# Bringing God's Highest Truth to a Land Governed by Fear – Part 1

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*By William Connery*

*Although the United States and Western Europe had sent missionaries to most of Europe and some countries of the developed world in the 1960s and early 1970s, still the vast majority of the world's nations had no access to the Divine Principle, no knowledge of True Parents or God's historical dispensation. That began to change in 1975. After receiving the Blessing among the 1800 couples on February 8 of that year, William Connery was among a larger group of newly blessed members mobilized to Japan to support a large rally at which True Father would speak. While there, he was asked to be part of a large group of new missionaries from the United States, Germany and Japan, going out to pioneer many of the world's nations that until then had no Unificationist presence. William Connery was asked to be one of the missionaries to Uganda. At that time Uganda was governed by Idi Amin, who is remembered as one of the cruelest dictators in modern history. William's story, told here in his own words, gives the reader an insight into the faith and resilience, under very difficult circumstances, of early missionaries whom True Parents entrusted to represent them throughout the world.*



*The three missionaries to Uganda (William Connery is at left)*

We had a special meeting on February 12: a list of 95 nations was read out and we were to pick out 3. We left Tokyo February 15 and returned to the States. I went to training at Barrytown, New York, which lasted from March 3 until May 14. During that period, Father came to speak to us at least ten times. His advice was always strong and fatherly. In one speech “*Directives to Foreign Missionaries*” given on March 20 – he said:

*Wherever you go throughout the whole world you will find established Christian churches. Do not try to fight or argue with that mission. Find a way to work together. Don't argue, don't make enemies. It takes too much time and energy. Tell them “You are my big brother” or “You're my elder sister.” Tell them “Please pray for me.” If you say, “The Principle is this, the Creation is like this, the Fall of Man is like this ... Rev. Moon is the Lord of the Second Advent from Korea, etc.,” they will get upset! You don't have to tell them all at once. Use your wisdom. Give them the precious jewels gradually ... You can say Rev. Moon is a prophet – that's fine.*

Our schedule during that period was very strenuous. We usually got up at 6:00, went outdoors for exercise, then had breakfast. Most of the day was spent listening to Mr. Sudo give lectures on Divine Principle and Spiritual Guidance. There were also three 30-hour street-preaching conditions during that time—two in New York City and one in Washington, D.C. The personal commitment of each missionary was being challenged.

On April 5, Mr. Salonen took me aside and asked if I would be willing to go to Uganda. Without much hesitation, I said yes. Actually, I knew very little about Uganda but my information soon grew. I discovered that the nation was under the leadership of Idi Amin, and was considered one

of the most dangerous countries in all of Africa. I gave my fate to God, praying in my mind: "Well, if You want to get rid of me, this is Your chance. Anyway, I will go because someone must bring Your New Word to the Ugandan people and it is better for me to die than for some worthier brother or sister to go and die." God had guided me through many difficult situations in the past and I had trust in Him. Rev. Moon had wanted all the missionaries to leave for their nations by April 30. This could not be done, due to financial problems. On April 24 we had a big dinner at Barrytown as a send-off for 14 missionaries who were being sent out right away. The rest of us went fund-raising from April 25 until May 11.

On May 13 there was a farewell banquet for all foreign missionaries and the next day most of us visited the new National Headquarters which had just been acquired on 43rd Street in New York City. Then most of us left either that day or the next day for our nations. I almost couldn't leave America. I had two suitcases packed with books, tapes and clothes. I also had my sleeping bag. The airport personnel wanted me to leave behind the bag but they eventually let me go on board. I flew on KLM with a British sister who was going to Tanzania. We flew over the Atlantic on a Jumbo Jet: Elizabeth was in a section with over one hundred young people who were going to do Christian missionary work for six weeks in Germany. We switched to a smaller plane in Amsterdam and flew to Cairo, where we waited for 3 hours. No one was allowed to leave the plane except for those disembarking and also any taking of photos was forbidden; because the airport was considered a military installation (and actually soldiers with machine guns could clearly be seen from the windows of the plane). We took off and headed nearly due south. Elizabeth kept telling me to eat more food on the plane — my stomach was turning over like a person awaiting their execution. I arrived 9:30 pm at Entebbe Airport, which is twenty miles from the capital of Uganda, Kampala.

Rev. Moon told us to make special conditions for our nations. My first started as soon as I left the plane — I began a seven-day food fast. I felt that God was protecting me from the very beginning. The few people who were at the airport were either half-drunk or so fascinated to see a white person that I easily got through customs (I eventually found out that usually only three kinds of American white people come to Uganda: missionaries, CIA agents or crazy people — eventually I would be accused of being all three). It took me until 2:00 A.M. to get to Kampala and I began to experience the serious economic situation: the first taxi I took ran out of gas a mile outside Entebbe; luckily someone could stop and take me in.

The first few days were quite a memorable experience. I stayed in the hotel where the German missionary had stayed: he had come to Uganda on April 26 but had already moved, but nobody knew to where.

The first day I went out to investigate my new surroundings. "Culture shock" is probably a mild term which I could use to explain my first few days. Weather-wise there were very few problems. The weather in Uganda was very similar to the mid-May weather of New York. Even though Uganda is on the equator (Kampala itself is just thirty miles north of the equator) the altitude is 3000 – 4000 feet: during the day it gets no higher than 85° and during the night it drops to 60° and never lower.



*Meeting with a member of the Christian clergy in Uganda*

Two important aspects of living on the equator were very noticeable during my first year in Uganda. First, the sun always rises at 7:00 A.M. and sets at 7:00 P.M. – this was quite unusual for an American used to time variations in the sunset from 5:00 P.M. in the winter to 9:00 P.M. in the summer. Also summer, autumn, winter and spring – the change of seasons – had to be forgotten in Uganda. It was eternally springtime.

And of course it was amazing to be around so many black people. I'm from Maryland myself, which had been a slave-owning state. I've never felt any hatred towards blacks (I had always been taught that we're all human beings, equal in the sight of God), but I often felt uncomfortable around black people because of the racial problems in America. Also most of the schools I had attended were all or predominately white and I had never developed any real friendships with blacks. Uganda was a completely different world from the one I had lived in for twenty-six years. That first day I spent walking around Kampala. It is quite an interesting place. The original center of the city is built on seven hills (like Rome) and most of the hills are crowned by churches, mosques or hospitals. The center city itself looks fairly modern – with at least seven buildings that were 10 stories or higher (the two tallest were twenty stories) – but I soon discovered that looks could be deceiving. There had been no real development since 1972, the year that Amin had kicked out the Israeli technicians and the Asian merchants. There was a too-sudden attempt to Africanize the economic life of Uganda – Amin called it Economic War – but the ignorance of many people and the greed of others soon proved too harsh for the economy and a once-thriving nation was stopped dead in its tracks.

I didn't believe the mess I had read about in the magazines, but I saw living proof before my eyes in Kampala. Most shops had nice show-windows, but a quick step inside usually revealed practically empty shelves. The streets were full of people looking for "essential commodities" (a term I would become very familiar with) such as salt, sugar, soap, detergent – things that

Americans take for granted. They were hard to come by in Uganda at that time. The usual means for people to get these goods was through *magendo* – the black market – which even the government participated in.

In reality, the economic situation didn't bother me too much in the beginning – I was fasting for seven days and didn't want to have anything to do with food. My main concern was with people – how to reach them in order to teach them the Divine Principle (DP).

That first day I met two people – Herbert, who worked at the Post Office and Oscar, a high-school student. Oscar told me someone had stolen his suitcase and he had no place to stay. So I brought him to the hotel and he stayed overnight in my room. The next day Oscar and I walked around, trying to find the German missionary. We also spoke to a few people and I treated him to two meals, though I continued my fast.

My third day in Uganda was a Sunday. I woke Oscar up early and we both said the traditional 5:00 Sunday Pledge together. Later on we attended a service in the local Roman Catholic Church. In the afternoon the German missionary came to check on his mail and found Oscar and myself studying the Divine Principle in our room. I must admit that Ulf was grateful yet shocked at meeting me: grateful to know that at least one other missionary had made it into the country and shocked at all the material I had brought – several DP books, a DP teaching outline, a tape recorder and over 30 tapes of Mr. Sudo's lectures, spiritual guidance and some of Rev. Moon's speeches. Even one of my bags still had a Unification Church sticker on it. After Ulf had left, Oscar and I went downstairs for tea and Oscar was almost arrested by an army man. It was my first contact with the local authorities: the man left us alone when he found out that I was a tourist-businessman and the young man was just trying to help me.

The next day Oscar left to return home – I gave him \$10 which he said he needed for transport. Then I moved in with Ulf, who was staying at the local Scout headquarters. The woman there was friendly, but her boss did not want us to stay there; so Ulf and I moved into the cheapest hotel we could find, at \$8.00 a day. I returned to the Catholic Church and met Father Joseph, a white priest from Malta, who said I could meet the local Vicar-General in a few days.





*William (left) with Ulf Ingerwersen, the missionary from Germany*

Both Ulf and I had entered Uganda on three-month tourist visas. We knew of the government persecution against the churches, especially newer and smaller ones, like the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. We knew we couldn't operate openly as Unification missionaries. So we began the search to find the means to stay legally in Uganda. Ulf had about the equivalent of a Master's Degree in Engineering, so he began to search into businesses which could use engineering skills. I had a BA in History, so I decided to find a job as a teacher. During our training it had been strongly stressed that we should stay in our nations as ginseng tea salesmen — but the government animosity against foreign business in Uganda was still so strong that Ulf and I decided to try other avenues that more closely matched our own personal training. That is why I wanted to meet the Vicar General — possibly he could get me into the local Catholic school system. Yet when I met him two days later he quickly closed the door on any contact with the Catholic schools.

My main purpose in Uganda was to teach the Divine Principle and especially show people how it is a fulfillment of their own religious background. I come from a strong Roman Catholic tradition myself (including seven years in a minor seminary) and have always felt that the DP was the completion of my basic Christian faith. My own feeling was that God wanted to reach all people, and having a strong religious faith was sometimes a hindrance to God (just as when Jesus came — the people who accepted him and the Gospel were not the Pharisees and Sadducees but the fishermen, tax-collectors and harlots).

We were actually very blessed in Uganda. It had been a British protectorate for seventy years and English was the official language. And the better educated a person was, the more English they knew. So from the very beginning the people I met were very friendly and were honored to know a person who they could speak English with.

At the Roman Catholic Church I met Andrew, a student at Gaba National Seminary. He took me to the Seminary, about twenty miles from Kampala. It is fairly modern, being run by local priests with help from the Verona Fathers. Andrew showed me around, I had a simple lunch with him and I was able to teach him some of the Principle — he seemed interested and had a very inquisitive mind. I actually became a member of the choir in the Catholic Church and came to know most of the members: before the end of May I started teaching two of them the Principle. Meanwhile, our finances were being depleted by our \$8.00 a day room and the need for eating (it was forbidden to prepare food in the room). Somehow Ulf met Abdul, who was a Bangladeshi working at a local college. Abdul was living by himself in a three-room apartment, renting it from the government for a nominal \$10 a month. He offered Ulf and myself one of his rooms, which had its own entrance, for \$40 a month. Of course he was making a profit — but he was still saving us money — one month in our hotel cost \$240! So on the morning of May 27, Ulf and I moved in with Abdul; later that same day I visited Kibuli Mosque, which is on one of the hills overlooking Kampala.



*William with early members*

We began a seven-day condition of praying 3:00 – 4:00 in the morning. On June 3rd we had prayer at three, ate some breakfast and then started walking to the Catholic Cathedral on Rubaga Hill. About half-way there we met a flood of people heading towards Namugongo, about

eight miles east of Kampala. What were all these people doing on this day? On June 3, 1886, more than 30 Anglican and Catholic converts had been burned to death for their faith at Namugongo by Kabaka Mwanga (the king of the local Baganda tribe). In 1964 the 22 Catholic martyrs were canonized by Pope Paul VI and in 1969 he became the first Pope to visit Africa. But the Martyrs' Shrine was not completed until 1975. Its official opening was on June 3 of that year by the Pope's Special Envoy, Sergio Cardinal Pignedoli, in the presence of President Idi Amin. Several hundred-thousand Christians gathered that day.

We left early because the ceremonies were delayed due to the late arrival of Idi Amin. Still it was a stirring testimony to the deep faith and love of the people that they were willing to walk eight miles (some had walked the whole night from longer distances away). I had made an appointment to meet Oscar in Kampala, so I had to rush back to the city. I had missed my first opportunity of seeing Idi Amin.

*To be continued next week....*