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Unearthing the bodies of the murdered cult members

By Anna Borzello in Kampala

Press reports say some leaders of the Ugandan religious cult held responsible for the death of hundreds of its members last month had links with a notorious Australian doomsday cult.

The Australian cult, called the Marian Work of Atonement or Our Lady of the Ark, has aroused concern in Australia because of its apocalyptic nature.

It is headed by 49-year-old William Kamm, who has also adopted the pseudonym "Little Pebble".

He currently runs a community of several hundred full-time followers in Nowra, New South Wales.

Mr Kamm visited Uganda in October 1989 and gave lectures about his faith over four days at the then police officers' mess in the capital, Kampala.

Cult leader in audience

The British newspaper, The Guardian, reported that those in attendance included the leader of the Ugandan cult, Joseph Kibwetere and his wife, Teresa.

Their own cult, the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments (RTGC), had been established for less than three months at the time of the meeting.

Mr Kibwetere, along with five other cult leaders, has since been accused of murdering at least 330 people in a fire at the cult

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headquarters in Kanungu, western Uganda on 17 March.

Minutes

A further 395 bodies were later found in three properties used by the cult elsewhere in western Uganda.

Police have issued warrants for their arrests, but it is not known if the leaders are still alive, or whether they died with their followers in the fire.



The church where they died

According to the minutes of Little Pebble's visit which have been seen by the BBC, the German-born cult leader was on his second trip to Africa (he visited Kenya in 1988).

“Jesus and Mary have sent me to Uganda to bring unity”

”

Australian cult leader

During his seminar, Little Pebble stresses the validity of heavenly visions, the fallibility of bishops - and his own claim that he would one day become Pope.

"I wish to encourage people of Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya to continue fighting for the truth concerning apparitions," Little Pebble told his congregation.

"The main reasons Jesus and Mary have sent me to Uganda is to bring unity amongst the seers and among the people of God."

He went on to assert that apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Masaka District, Central Uganda, were authentic.

Listed as a seer

The Kibweteres are both known to have shown keen interest in these visions and to have visited the shrine in 1987, before starting their own cult.

Little Pebble's cult shows many similarities with the now notorious RTCG, including the reliance on Marian visions and the importance of the Ark.

The RTCG cult manifesto also pays homage to Little Pebble, naming him as one of ten listed 'seers'.

Police among victims

The documents strengthen concerns that the cult was able to operate without raising suspicion because it was aided by local officials.

Five former policemen are known to have died in the fire at Kanungu, while the Assistant Resident District Commissioner in charge of Kanungu has been arrested by police on suspicion that he prevented investigations of the group.

President Yoweri Museveni has already ordered a commission of inquiry into the cult killings.

In the minutes of the Little Pebble meeting, Mr Kamm welcomes "government officials" to the police officers' mess - but does not name them.



President Museveni ordered an inquiry

Police have said that any meeting held in the mess would have to have been authorised by the office of then Inspector General of police.

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