

666

the antichrist's

almanac

2000 ONLINE EDITION

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Uganda cult killings claim 924 lives
Movement for the Restoration of the Ten
Commandments of God (AFR)

"Religious fanaticism has clearly produced, and in all probability will continue to produce, enormous amounts of bickering, fighting, violence, bloodshed, homicide, feuds, wars, and genocide. For all its peace-inviting potential, therefore, arrant (not to mention arrogant) religiosity has led to immense individual and social harm by fomenting an incredible amount of anti-human and anti-humane aggression."

- Albert Ellis, US author and psychotherapist

On 17 March, 2000, hundreds of followers of a Christian doomsday cult burned to death in a church compound located in a remote Ugandan village.

Two weeks after the fire, police were still sifting through rubble, fused bodies and nearby sites in an effort to discover how many cult members died.

The final figure in March was up to 1000 dead.

Sources claimed almost 600 died in the inferno while up to 400 had been exhumed from four fetid mass graves.

Hundreds of victims were children ...

Initially the church deaths were treated as a mass suicide but this was discounted after bodies were found showing victims had been stabbed or strangled.

Investigators said many members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God were burned alive on St Patrick's day during morning mass.

The church was located within a Christian compound at the village of Kanunga, 350 kilometres from Uganda's capital, Kampala.

Evidence suggested that scores of worshippers were caught by surprise and tried to escape the inferno.

Charred remains were stacked on top of each other in front of the church's windows and doors, indicating a panicked rush for the exits.

Outside the church, investigators found several corpses buried beneath fresh cement in pit latrines.

"We found five bodies on the surface and when we shone a torch there were more underneath," said public health officer Richard Opira.

"They haven't been wounded so we think they were strangled or maybe poisoned.

"We are now digging up bodies in the vegetable patch ..."

Pathologists revealed that at least six cult victims, whose bodies were found in the latrine, had been severely beaten two weeks before the fire.

They also revealed that the victims' faces had been doused in battery acid, making identification impossible ...

Police spokesman Asuman Mugenyi said the deaths at the church appeared to be a combination of suicide and murder.

"It is being regarded as suicide of the leaders and murder of the others," he told reporters.

"We are treating it as both murder and suicide because there were children involved."

It was later revealed that many of the cult members had been lured unsuspectingly or unwillingly to their deaths ...

The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God cult was formed in 1984 by former politician and Roman Catholic priest, Joseph Kibwetere, 68.

Kibwetere told his followers that he had tape-recorded a conversation between Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

During the recording, Mary supposedly said the world would be destroyed because its people were not adhering to the Ten Commandments ...

In 1987, Kibwetere was joined by Clebonia Mwerinde, 40, a former nun and prostitute, whose father provided the land on which the church compound was built.

It was said Mwerinde owned a huge farm, several shops and vehicles, and that she travelled frequently around Africa to evangelise and recruit new members.

"The only thing that made Clebonia really happy was making money," her sixth and last husband, Eric Mazima,

said.

"She also used to enjoy spending it - on dresses, eating and drinking. She was a strong and clever woman, but she was never a church-goer."

In 1988, Mwerinde, like Kibwetere, claimed the Virgin Mary had appeared to her in a vision - just a few weeks after her illicit banana and beer business ran into financial difficulties.

She told her and close colleagues not to follow mainstream Catholic religious ceremonies ...

It was not known whether Mwerinde and Kibwetere were among those who died during the killings or blaze.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported Kibwetere's charred body was identified by people in the gutted church in Kanunga.

Another source suggested Kibwetere may have escaped by crossing the nearby borders with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Nobody knew the whereabouts of the former nun ...

It was claimed that at one time Kibwetere and three other cult members were suspended from the Catholic Church over a theological disagreement.

According to Gerard Banura, a theologian at Makerere University, Kibwetere objected to receiving communion while standing, preferring instead to be on his knees.

Banura said the Catholic Church, the first Christian church established in Uganda, was partly to blame for the rise of the

cult and others like it in the area.

"Somehow the official (Catholic) church made a mistake by isolating these people," Banura said.

However, the Catholic Church distanced itself from the cult, saying the group's defected leaders had rejected church warnings about visions and direct communication with God.

Roman Catholic bishops warned churchgoers about being misled by "obsessed leaders into an obnoxious form of religiosity completely rejected by the Catholic Church".

Following Kibwetere's defection, the group operated a primary school for a time, housing about 300 students.

But the school was closed in 1998 when it was discovered that children were malnourished and made to sleep on the floor without mattresses or blankets.

The cult's followers, most of whom were disaffected Catholics, were commanded to communicate only by gestures, except when singing or praying.

The group's leaders wore white robes, while members who had given generously on recruitment wore green.

The remainder were allowed to dress only in black and were put to work in the fields or workshop without payment.

Disobedience was punished with canings or food deprivation.

"They made me work until I was exhausted," Emmanuel Bisgye told *Reuters* reporter Rosalind Russell.

"We were treated like serfs ... If we sold any food or any crafts we were not allowed to keep the money ..."

Former cult members said they were forbidden to have sex and that no children were ever born within the group.

It was alleged Kibwetere and Mwerinde preached that only those who heeded their apocalyptic message would go directly to heaven.

One source suggested that the deaths appeared to result from Kibwetere's prediction that the world would end on December 31, 1999.

Members were told that they would be delivered to heaven if they gave up all their earthly goods and followed the doctrines of the cult.

When this date passed without event it was later revised to December 31, 2000 ...

Local residents said that in the days leading up to the tragedy, members of the group feasted on beef and drank up to 70 crates of Coca Cola.

Following the feast, they visited local villages, apparently to bid farewell to family and friends.

Earlier, cult members had been seen in the community selling off everything from empty jerry cans and old clothes to houses and 200 head of cattle.

On the morning of March 17, the cult members were seen to file into their church in the belief, some say, that they were finally entering Noah's Ark to survive the three days of the apocalypse.

Sources said boards were nailed over the 17 windows from the inside and the church's three doors were nailed shut "to protect them and keep out the unredeemed".

Locals claimed they heard singing and chanting through the walls of the church before the fire was lit.

Police were puzzled as to why the group did not react when petrol, paraffin and sulphuric acid were sprinkled around the room shortly before the blaze.

One possibility is that they were given drugged or poisoned communion wine.

Witnesses claimed they heard an explosion shortly before the church was engulfed by flames.

Once the inferno began, there was no escape ...

In the aftermath, it was revealed that most cult members were burned alive.

"It is horror," farmer Faustine Tirenderana told *Associated Press*.

"It is just murder and horror."

Reverend William Magambo, the rector of a nearby Anglican church, called the deaths a product of "spiritual fanaticism".

The majority of those who died, he said, were illiterate and led astray by former Catholic priests who contrived the suicide plan.

Gerald Bifagye, a 32-year-old cult member who died in the blaze, told family members that the Blessed Mary was coming to take them to heaven on the day of the fire.

"If you are coming with me, come," he told his brother, Muteguya Gervis.

"If you are not, goodbye ..."

The San Diego Union on March 31, 2000 described the Uganda cult killings as "the worst modern-day cult-related mass killing".

"The toll surpasses the November 1978 Peoples Temple tragedy at Jonestown in the jungles of Guyana," it said.

"The Jonestown mass suicide and killings claimed 913 lives ..."

Catalogue of corpses

March 17: Blaze at cult church in Kanungu is initially treated as a mass suicide. Estimated death toll 330. Locals claim there were up to 600 people at the site at the time. No known survivors.

March 20: Six bodies are found in a pit latrine at Kanungu compound. Corpses show signs of mutilation and possible poisoning. Bodies prompt first suspicions that blaze may not have been suicide.

March 24: A mass grave containing 153 bodies is discovered at cult property at Rutooma, near Rukungiri. Some victims are found with ropes around their necks; others show sign of being stabbed or macheted. Authorities start treating Kanungu as murder.

March 25-29: 155 bodies are exhumed from the garden and beneath a bedroom concrete floor of the house in Rugazi of Fr Kataribaabo, a cult leader.

March 30: Mass grave found at Rushowja, near Rukungiri. Of 81 dead, all but three are women and children. As at other locations, all estimated to have been dead for about a month.

March 31: Police revise estimated death toll of church blaze up to 530, bringing overall tally to 925 - overtaking the 1978 Jonestown cult total of 913 deaths. They also identify another suspected grave site near Fort Portal.

April 1: Overwhelmed Ugandan authorities suspend search for further victims ...

Read on ...

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*"Civilisation will not attain to its perfection
until the last stone from the last church
falls on the last priest"*

(Emile Zola)

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