

German Unification Church Missionary: Burkina Faso is the School of My Heart

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Looking back on my childhood, I think of the secure family atmosphere to which my grandparents and relatives contributed. My father's work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs required him to be transferred regularly from one country to another. And so, my family and I moved often. For us children, too, this meant leaving our school and friends and having to find new ones in the next place. In moments of loneliness, I asked myself many questions. I was interested in social projects and dreamed of a better world.

At the age of seventeen, I left home to start my training as a nurse. I often wondered why there is so much misery and suffering. Although I was absorbed in my training, I still desired to meet people who wanted to create a harmonious world.

One day, during the third year of my training course, a friend and I travelled to the city of Bonn. In the pedestrian zone, a young woman approached passers-by to introduce new ideas for a better world. How amazed I was because she spoke of happy families and a harmonious society where God was involved in everything. This new worldview, which I had never heard of in the church of my childhood. I attended a one-week seminar and was shocked to realize how much God was suffering being separated from His children. That statement and its plausible explanations could only come from someone special, and I understood that the Second Coming of Christ had taken place.

I was not the only one; other seminar participants had the same realization. Then I remembered that, at the age of seven, shortly before my Holy Communion, I had a dream about the return of Christ on earth and had promised to God: if Christ comes during my lifetime, I will follow him. On the second day of the seminar in the training center, I resolved to honor this resolution. That day was a big turning point in my life. Eventually, I left nursing school and joined the Unification Movement.

I felt the desire to spread this great news, but very few were receptive to it. Consequently, my mother decided to research what her daughter had discovered.

She attended a seminar to understand the teaching, then read the Divine Principle and concluded: "Reverend Moon is the prophet of the twentieth century." Those were her words!

My African Family

After being only three months in the movement, I was prepared to become a missionary to a foreign country. I felt strength and carried by the spirit of True Parents. I will never forget Paul Werner's prayer shortly before our departure when he shed many tears like a worried shepherd who sends his sheep to the 'wolves'. Saying goodbye to my family was the hardest part.

A few minutes before I drove to Frankfurt airport, my sister called to say goodbye. She had sent me clothes and encouraged me. As previously mentioned, the presence of True Parents' spirit now surrounded

me like a protective cloak that never left me. I was on a night flight via Paris to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Another missionary, Werner Elias, travelled with me and disembarked in Niamey, Niger, in the middle of the desert. I continued to Ouagadougou on my own. On the plane, I wondered who else would get off with me. I made the acquaintance of a fellow traveler who was to be welcomed by the German Embassy staff; so I clung to her. Here as well, my impression was that I landed in a desert. When I took the first step out of the plane, a hot wind hit me as a welcome greeting. The young German and the embassy employee took me to a hotel. It was all so unfamiliar with sandy roads, all indistinguishable from each other. My first desire was to find out more about this country.



Back in town, I suddenly saw two white women. Immediately, I rushed to them. They were friendly, helpful, and happy to invite me to lunch the next day. It turned out that they were missionaries of a Protestant mission center, *Assemblées de Dieu*. In the evening, they invited me to stay with them.

I felt so much gratitude. For me, these Christians were like a bridge to the Africans. I started to work in their infirmary and thus made contact with the local people.

Soon, however, these missionaries were asking uncomfortable questions. It got to the point that they even prayed for my 'conversion', which made my position on the ward quite uncomfortable.

After three weeks in the country, the American missionary arrived. True Parents had prepared all American missionaries through in-depth lectures. Through him, I understood even more how much this mission was close to the heart of True Parents. Together, we looked around for a place to stay and were soon able to rent a house in the suburbs of Gounghin.

To get to know our new surroundings, we went to town every day. At the university, we engaged students in conversations and invited them to our lectures. In the evenings we taught many guests. The American brother spoke in English, and I translated it into French. A few showed great interest in our ideas.

The first girl I ever met was the adopted daughter of the director of the Ministry of Interior, who later became of great help to us. I visited her regularly, and introduced her to the Divine Principle. Although her understanding was perhaps not that deep, she was always helpful. Later, when she got very sick and died. I had looked after her for months, and her family never forgot this. Therefore, we became very close.

When my mother visited me in 1977, the director promised her that he would fully take care of me. Together with his wife said they were my African parents.

In June of 1975, another brother came. Now, all three of us were together. I had never been in contact with Asians before, and our relationship was uneasy at first.

Several months after our arrival, we tried to obtain official permission for our movement. We took all the documents to the Ministry of the Interior and waited for an answer. We had to wait a long time.

Every week one of us went to the government office to help speed up the slow process, but each time the

answer was: "Be patient." Then one day in February 1976, the moment arrived. A police superintendent summoned us and stated that we should stop all our activities and leave the country.

I do not think that I have ever felt as miserable as I did at that moment! When we got back to the center, so many thoughts were flooding through my mind. We wondered if there might be some solution. Our mission should not end so abruptly.

Then the idea came up to visit my acquaintance, the director of the Ministry of the Interior. In the past, he had already offered me assistance should any problem arise. So, I decided to pay him a visit and report what had happened. After a while he said that the Minister of the Interior – who had ordered our deportation – was a good friend of his. Full of hope, I hurried back to the center to bring the good news. The director kept his word, spoke to his friend who made it possible for us to stay in the country, however, not as missionaries. We felt so grateful, even if we were no longer allowed to work openly for our movement.

The fact that we could stay in the country meant everything to us. This experience brought me an awareness of the miraculous way in which God guided us.

Then the American brother thought about an economic foundation and presented us with several proposals. We experimented with pizza, which I sold from house to house in the residential areas where many Europeans lived. I have to admit that this activity required a lot of willpower. However, when I saw the immediate success, my courage grew. I will never forget how I sold the first twelve pizzas. Our first members later continued to develop this business. Our deepest desire was to find members because, after all, that is why we came. We had already invited and taught many young people, but no one had joined us yet.

Much later, I understood that God could send us the people who were actually prepared if we were to fully devote ourselves. We three missionaries also needed a solid foundation of unity.

Therefore, in October 1977, our Asian brother suggested studying the Divine Principle together, and I discovered a lot of new things. There were so many points I had never heard before, and every day I was deeply impressed. On this foundation, in November, we held our first weekend seminar with our new members. Now there were four cultures under one roof: Asian, African, American, and European.

Although we all shared the same foundation of faith, it was difficult to get along. Shaped by the Western world through rational thinking, I had trouble understanding the African mentality. They frequently seemed to agree but actually felt quite differently. I was surprised to discover that, by observing our facial expressions, they noticed right away when I was less satisfied. In that regard, Europeans are much less sensitive.

Before we went out, True Father had said, "If you succeed in creating unity then there is hope to unite the whole world." As missionaries, we were in the 'parent position', yet it was hard to achieve unity within the first three years. Nevertheless, gradually, we developed a great deal of respect for each other. Eventually, we achieved true brotherhood, which we will carry in our hearts forever.

In November 1977, my mother visited us. What a joy for me! Since I arrived in Burkina Faso, we have had a lively exchange of letters. With great interest, she continued to follow our missionary work, which I shared with her regularly. For years my parents always supported us.

On the occasion of True Father's 60th birthday, all missionaries met for a World Mission Conference in New York in early 1980. What a joy and excitement to meet True Parents for the first time! We waited with great anticipation and inner preparation but were told that True Parents probably could not come for safety reasons. There had been threats to their lives.

Luckily, two hours later, we suddenly heard that we could welcome True Parents. What an emotion! Tears ran down my cheeks like a waterfall, so that I could not see anything at first. I became aware of what True Parents had to endure! I want to mention that I was the only sister in Burkina Faso for the first five years; therefore, I felt called to express Heavenly Parent's motherly heart towards the members and thus was able to overcome my loneliness because a motherly heart embraces.

All the deeper was my joy when, in 1980, the other brother's wife joined us. I will never forget the day we picked her up from the airport. When I met her for the first time, I had the feeling that I had always known her. But she was not a stranger since her husband had been working in this country for five years. Certainly, the move to Africa must have been challenging for her. She never showed the slightest discomfort, though. Of course, she couldn't say much at first, but her kindness won the members' hearts. She remained positive, despite difficult financial or political situations. Soon she was expecting her first child. Even after the birth of her first son, she continued to devote herself to the mission. We all loved the little boy's presence, and working with a sister was very fulfilling for me.

We went fundraising regularly and got excellent results. I was happy to experience the deep heart of this elder sister. The most important thing for me in this country was to find a native sister. The social situation of women in Africa is undoubtedly complex and diverse.

In 1980 we started Home Church activities. I chose a district in Ouagadougou where I visited one house after another and eventually met a student there. She was the first young woman who spoke openly to me about various topics, which was so valuable for me. One day I made this proposal to her.

I had prepared my heart for a long time, hoping that she would accept. Therefore, it was a huge shock to hear from her that she needed to support her family. Our tradition at that time was to expect new members to dedicate their life fully. From a human standpoint, of course, it was commendable that this young woman felt responsible for her family. I do not remember how I got home on my motorcycle that day as the tears were flowing down like rain, and I could barely see the road.

Actually, I had an incredible experience with God. Now I could better understand how He cared and suffered for His children. Over the years, however, we remained friends and keep in touch to this day. A few months later, I met another young woman.

She, too, had graduated from high school and was studying English. She showed interest in our teaching and took part in regular seminars. During the Christmas holidays, she fully agreed to my suggestion to become a member and wanted to participate in advanced seminars at the beginning of January. With these thoughts in mind, I visited her. When I got to her farm and enquired about her, she did not receive me that evening. Instead, her little brother came back with a letter. The letter said that she regretted not accepting my invitation, as she had just become pregnant and must now be responsible for her child. This was my second big disappointment with girls in Burkina Faso.

I was stumped. 'Is there not one young woman in this country who could walk this way?' Such were my prayers to God. Soon after, the first member in Burkina Faso suggested that I visit one of his contacts. I met her in her office and right away started a conversation. Her greatest wish was to attend our seven-day seminar.

However, this turned out to be problematic, especially since a young woman is not allowed to spend the night outside her family home. Moreover, she was engaged and had to take care of a child.

Nevertheless, she decided to come to the lectures. I was amazed because I had never seen such determination in a local woman before. The seven days were quite a struggle.

All I could do was to pray. Every day her fiancé came to the center to take her back; at first, very cordially, but later with more insistence. Nevertheless, with much determination, she endured and completed the seven days. We were overjoyed that she became one of the first members of our movement in Burkina Faso.

I had waited for the first sister for eight and a half years, so our relationship was exceptional. My heart was filled with deep gratitude. In September 1980, the American brother opened a photo studio with supplies he had purchased months earlier. It was admirable how he learned the technique from books alone. Since there was no color photo developing facility in Burkina Faso, we soon had many customers. They kept saying how good the quality of our workmanship was. The American brother passed his knowhow onto some members.

At first, it was challenging for both the teacher and the students. Later these brothers became excellent technicians.

On 2nd September 1980, for the first time, four members started pioneer missions in other cities. All had attended a 40-day seminar in New York and expressed their desire to take the message to other cities. It was moving when they shared their experiences on their return. How much God accompanied them! Although I was committed to my work in Ouagadougou, I felt the desire to marry and have a family one day. So, on 1st July 1982, my fiance Bernard and I attended the 2,075 couples Marriage Blessing ceremony in New York. It was a special moment for both of us. A short time later, Bernard told me that he was ready to join me in Burkina Faso; he was working in France at that time. I was very grateful for his decision as it would have been difficult for me to move back to Europe.

The highlight of our missionary years was the Marriage Blessing of our first Burkina Faso members in Korea, October 1982. A few months earlier, I joined a team of other missionary sisters to fundraise in Nigeria. We started in Kano, in the north of the country, and travelled through all major cities down to the south. We sold framed laser prints to wealthy Nigerians and Europeans who were company owners.

Most of the time, they welcomed us with much enthusiasm. It was wonderful to get to know this vast

country and its people. With the money earned, the first eight members could then travel to Korea for the Blessing.

Although the previous months had been quite troublesome politically, the coup d'état in Burkina Faso on 4th August 1983 caused deep concern. I had not expected such a situation. However, we experienced God in new ways. I would like to add here that Bernard came to Burkina Faso in May 1983.

The then director of foreign missions had asked him to set up a machine tool workshop in Ouagadougou. Bernard had the appropriate training as an engineer.



However, when the change of government occurred, that workshop project was relocated to Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That meant Bernard would not stay in Ouagadougou. Honestly speaking, this hit us hard. We had so many plans in Burkina Faso, and now we should pursue a new course! Thus, Bernard went to Kinshasa. However, I could not bring myself to leave my country immediately. Besides, I did not want to leave the brothers and sisters alone during the country's crisis.

Moreover, it was difficult for Bernard – who had barely gotten accustomed to Burkina Faso – to go alone to a new African country. Yet, he understood my heart, and we both agreed to accept this temporary separation.

The general political situation made us missionaries quite nervous. That is why we sent the young members to the neighboring country. Since the borders were officially closed, the brothers had to find alternative routes and walk for several days. Later, some of them said that they remembered True Father's long march as he fled from North to South Korea on foot.

Because of the military occupation, the situation was quite dangerous. For weeks we lived in uncertainty because we did not know the direction the government would take. That is why we had hand-luggage ready, just in case. The slogans on the radio and the rumors in town drove me almost crazy. Sometimes I could hardly sleep at night because of gunfire.

Counterrevolutionaries were arrested in the middle of the night. For me, there was one moment of panic when I wanted to leave immediately.

One day I dreamed about True Mother coming to Burkina Faso and spending two days with me. She did not speak much, but her tranquility, patience, joy and quiet yet alert, attentive, informed and concerned demeanor greatly impressed me! "The national situation", True Mother said, "will be tough but surmountable." Today I can testify that she correctly assessed the situation at that time. Weeks later, after the situation had calmed down, we again started organizing seminars on a regular basis. We had many new guests, and it was necessary to teach our thoughts as clearly as possible so that these guests could apply the Divine Principle in their daily lives as future members.

Just as He Gives, God Can Also Take

In the summer of 1984, we had to make preparations for my departure from Burkina Faso. This was a

great internal struggle. I had lived there longer than anywhere before, and it was painful to leave all my brothers and sisters alone in this delicate situation. In addition, there was still a lot to accomplish. Some members came to me, questioning if I could stay. It was so difficult for me that I wrote a letter to our director asking him whether there might still be an opportunity to continue working in Burkina. In his reply, he thanked me for my work in Burkina Faso and said that Bernard's mission in Kinshasa was vital. I then started praying to finally make up my mind. After my sincere forty-day prayer condition, the other missionary brother and I had a conversation. He said, "Just as He gives, God can also take." That was precisely what I needed to hear! I could now accept this internally, and once I made that final decision; I also discovered a change within the members. They came to me and encouraged me, which touched me deeply.

Reflection

Looking back on these precious years in Africa, God, our Heavenly Parent, walked with me side by side. I am so grateful for His constant guidance and protection. I was always warmly welcomed by every family, even when meeting them for the first time.

Saying goodbye to Burkina Faso was very hard, but God kept His promise. Bernard and I discovered a whole new culture in our new country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa). Every African country is so unique. A great number of young people had joined our movement resulting in dynamic activities. It was Father Moon's great desire to provide technical education for Africans. I will never forget the first members who had shown me their deep hearts. Yes, this connection remains forever!

Besides, we were very happy that our first three children were born in Africa. As a family in Kinshasa, we discovered the Africans' love for children. I lived in Africa for twenty-one years. Of course, I have not been able to express everything yet. I have always maintained a connection with this continent. In 2009 my children expressed the desire to see Africa again. So, we travelled together to Burkina Faso and met the families with whom we had shared so much. What a happy reunion that was!