

# ***A Lesson From F. Kefa Sempangi***

F. Kefa Sempangi founded and pastored the 14,000 member Redeemed Church of Uganda, which became a target of Idi Amin's persecution. Leaders from Libya and Saudi Arabia contributed to the extermination of Christianity and attempted to turn Uganda into a Muslim state. Colonel Qadhafi's Libya alone contributed 30 million dollars. The money came from the Jihad, or "Holy Land" fund.

In the last three months of 1972 over 90,000 perished. Ultimately the number of dead would surpass 300,000. Death became so common that one day Bro. Sempangi saw soldiers kicking a man to death with a casual arrogance. No one seemed to notice or care. Public workers went on mowing, golfers played on to the next hole, and young people walked on down the street.

So many thousand died that often their bodies were strewn along the street unattended for days. No one could be certain who would be next. Each greeting and each farewell held a special significance. You never knew if you would see your friends alive again.

One day Bro. Sempangi went calling on the Okelo family. They had just visited his church. He found their plush carpet covered with blood and excrement. Broken teeth and eyes pulled from their sockets were scattered throughout the room. On a table in the center of the floor were three human tongues laid out in a row, as if on public display. The only survivor was a 12 year old boy who had escaped the soldiers by hiding under a bed.

Ultimately they came for Bro. Sempangi himself. It was Easter Sunday 1973 when five Nubian assassins followed him home from church. Their faces were scarred with the distinctive tribal cuttings of the Kawa tribe. Through a face twisted by hatred their leader said, "We are going to kill you . . . if you have

something to say, say it before you die.”

Trembling with fear the Holy Spirit somehow emboldened him to say: “I do not need to plead my own cause, I am a dead man already. My life is dead and hidden in Christ. It is your lives that are in danger, you are dead in your sins. I will pray to God that after you have killed me, He will spare you from eternal destruction.”

Shocked and surprised by these words the assassins not only spared his life but promised to guarantee his safety. After a series of escapes by the narrowest of margins Kefa and his family fled to America where he completed a seminary degree and became director of the Africa Foundation, Inc.

After his first year in America Bro. Sempangi noticed a difference in his Bible study. In Uganda he read his Bible without time for argument, discrepancies or doubt. In the security of his new life, however, he was able to have the luxury of analyzing and speculating about the Bible. He came to enjoy abstract theological discussions and found them intellectually refreshing.

The biggest change, however, came in his prayer life.

“In Uganda,” he said, “ I had prayed with a deep sense of urgency. I refused to leave my knees until I was certain I had been in the presence of the resurrected Christ. It was not just the gift I needed. I need to see the Giver. I needed to know that the God of orphans and widows, the God of the helpless, heard my prayers. Now, after a year in Philadelphia, the urgency was gone. When I prayed publically I was more concerned to be theologically correct than to be in God’s presence. Even in private my prayers were no longer the helpless cries of a child. They were spiritual tranquilizers, thoughts that made no contact with anything outside of themselves . . . “

The recognition of this dangerous lukewarmness caused Kefa Sempangi to fall to his knees and ask forgiveness for his sin of

unbelief. The dangers of materialism are in some aspects more threatening to the Christian life than dangers of overt persecution. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches can choke the Word so that it becomes unfruitful.

This is a lesson we can learn from F. Kefa Sempangi.

(Adapted from A DISTANT GRIEF, by F. Kefa Sempangi)