

## Pioneers behind the Iron Curtain

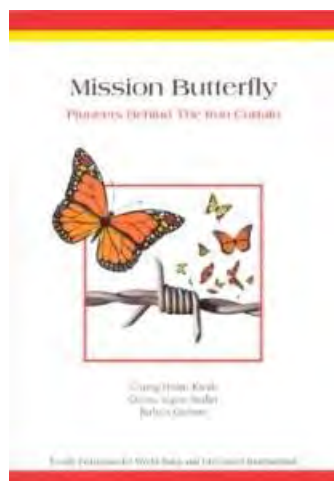
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The Unificationist community, let's face it, is rather small. Compared to many of the more established religious communities around the world, we're not insignificant, but we are certainly minnows. That's not to say small isn't important. As the Biblical David demonstrated, a small shepherd can defeat the champion fighter against the odds. As to a certain extent I believe that the Unification community has beaten the odds to catalyse a transformation across the globe. And this is due in no small part to our community's missionaries.

Yesterday was the 40th anniversary of the commission of missionaries to 120 countries around the world. 173 brave young men and women from Germany, Japan and the USA were mobilised on 1st May 1975; by the end of the year the Unification Church was working in 127 nations around the world. This heart to sacrifice the best – sending the most dedicated members away from communities that were themselves barely beyond the pioneering stages in order to serve and love nations that had no contact with our movement's activities – reflects God's heavily sorrowful heart to send his beloved children on the most difficult paths. Such decisions are not taken lightly, indeed considering that some of these missionaries became martyrs in their mission nations. Apart from some [reference to the missionaries in speeches](#), I don't know of any collection of stories from the missionaries, or even published personal testimonies from individuals.



A publication I do know of, however, is the anthology of European missionaries who, at the height of Communist expansion, crossed the Iron Curtain to pioneer the Unification faith in nations that were unbelievably intimidating and inhibitive. *Mission Butterfly: Pioneers Behind the Iron Curtain* is an invaluable survey of the lives and experiences of the young Europeans, mostly Germans and Austrians, who courageously gave up their lives, pretending to abandon their faith and dissociate from their beloved church communities, in order to enter Communist countries without any attachments and without any suspicion of missionary purposes. I have a really soft spot for this book: my father is British and my mother is Polish, so within my DNA I embody both western and eastern Europe. I was frequently moved to tears while reading this volume. Frequently my Slavic ancestors may have been excited or agitated by the descriptions of life under Communist rule. As one missionary, Hildegard Bantan observed,

'Polish people tend to get really fired up if the situation is difficult or even hopeless' (p. 126). I felt myself getting fired up by the descriptions of the realities faced by the missionaries and the populations they were trying to save.

Some of the missionaries found it incredibly hard to communicate. Not necessarily because of the language barriers – Martha Kral, a missionary to Poland, explained that 'Grammar is not as important as heart' (p. 111) – but because of the restricting culture that made it very dangerous to speak about spiritual or religious things. Nevertheless, even as a prisoner, Milos Klas found that he could make a difference to the prison culture in what was then Czechoslovakia:

Nobody ever shared anything with the other inmates. However, there were four Unification Church members imprisoned in my cell and each time we received a parcel we invited or fellow inmates along and offered them something. After a few months, some of the other prisoners started doing the same thing. (p. 31)



*In prison, but with an unimprisoned heart*

Anton Unhnak spent 3 years and 8 months in the same prison. He 'left prison as a poor man but rich in experience. [He] understood that the Communist prisons and labour camps were not invented by God, but by Satan, who tried to enslave people and destroy them' (p. 35). One sister, Marie Zivna died in the same prison, the first European martyr of the Unification Church. Such was the serious threat to the missionaries who risked everything for the sake of bringing news of True Parents and the Divine Principle to the suppressed citizens of the Communist bloc.

Somehow I felt that I wanted to be a missionary behind the iron curtain at that same time, and I wonder

what areas need pioneering today. Am I courageous enough to go beyond the front lines established between good and evil in society today and pioneer a path for God where evil is dominant? Can I risk my reputation and my life, and even my family, in the attempt to transform hell into heaven? One thing that I gleaned from *Mission Butterfly* was the valuable importance of the fellowship that the butterflies, the fellow missionaries, had with each other, and how supportive these bonds of heart were. Milos Klas explained that the reason he initially accepted the Divine Principle content was ‘primarily because of the friendship which exists among the members. [He]’d never met a group like them before’ (p. 29). Ingrid Hausender explained the devotion she had for her fellow missionaries:

As a pioneer, my self-confidence strengthened and an awareness of my responsibility grew. I also learnt to greater appreciate our brother-sister relationships. We always prayed for each other and developed a strong sense of solidarity. (p. 146)



*Strength in numbers*

These bonds were all the more important considering that most ties had been severed with the church community when the missionaries originally volunteered. What I can learn from this is that in order to find strength to pioneer whatever field of human activity in my contemporary circumstances, the bonds of heart I share with my fellows of faith can be vitally important in sustaining me and filling me with God’s love. Sometimes I do wonder why we need a church community at all, as my feeling is that True Father never wanted to establish a new religious community, and

God doesn’t really care for sectarian denominationalism. Yet I keep returning to the need for a church, for a community, because God created human beings to grow and flourish in the context of community, and it is with the support of like-minded and committed people that I will be able to receive encouragement and inspiration, as well as returning praise back to God and True Parents, for the wondrous miracles that we might be able to do in our age. I don’t believe the miracles listed in *Mission Butterfly* are resigned to the pages of history and that miracles can happen today, albeit different miracles in a different context.

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