

# Cuthbert, Maurice (b. 1919)

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Maurice Cuthbert was the son of pioneer missionary to East Africa, William Cuthbert. He became a missionary and church administrator in East, Central, and Southern Africa.

## Early life

Maurice Cuthbert was born in Southampton, England, around the year 1919.<sup>1</sup> His parents William and Florence Cuthbert served as missionaries in the South British Conference based in Southampton. William Cuthbert served as the departmental secretary in charge of field missions.<sup>2</sup> In 1922, his father accepted the call to become a missionary in Kenya and moved to Gendia with his family, which included two sons, Raymond and Maurice. Maurice Cuthbert was only a baby. He later moved to Tanganyika with his parents when his father was placed in charge of various mission stations in the Lake Region. Cuthbert learned to speak Kiswahili and became fluent in the language. When his father resigned from the ministry in 1931, the family moved to Eldoret where his father took up land at Lemook and became a farmer. Their farm bordered the Nandi Reserve and most of their farm workers were Nandi.<sup>3</sup> He now lived the life of a settler child.

## A Lifelong Lesson for Maurice

Once, in 1937, Cuthbert's mother, Florence, openly confronted their farm foreman, Kili araap Randich, from whom she had ordered some eggs. It turned out that some of them were bad. Kili pleaded his innocence saying that he did not know about the bad eggs as he had only been sent by his wife to deliver the eggs. Florence Cuthbert was extremely annoyed and let it out on Kili even throwing one of the rotten eggs at him. This was a great insult to a Nandi man who took great pride in his manliness.<sup>4</sup>

Kili araap Randich ("son of Randich") who was a tall, massive figure kept his cool in the face of the insult, quietly turned and walked away. Young Cuthbert, then in his mid-teens, quietly observed the altercation. Then he joined the harangue and followed after Kili with more words, something many colonial children were accustomed to do. Cuthbert appears to have acquired the habits of settler children who were known to be particularly unruly and boisterous, especially towards their African workers.<sup>5</sup> This time, however, Kili lost his cool and with the stick he was holding, hit Cuthbert hard on the head leaving a deep gash. He calmly walked away as

the bloodied lad wailed dreadfully in pain. His mother came to his rescue, vowing to make Kili pay for his act. She rushed him to the hospital in Eldoret. After receiving stitches, he spent a number of days recuperating in hospital.

Kili araap Randich quit his job and left the farm, returning to the safety of his home deep in the Nandi Reserve. The beating deeply traumatized young Cuthbert and, perhaps seeing the errors of his youth, his character underwent a transformation after the experience. He was changed and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He was baptized into the Adventist Church in September 1938 after an evangelistic campaign organized and conducted by, among others, his father.

In 1939, he joined the King's African Rifles to serve in the army during the Second World War. While in the army he once wrote to *The Advent Survey* thanking them for sending him copies of the magazine, *Signs of the Times*, which he and his fellow officers had enjoyed.

## Tragedy on the Farm, Moving to South Africa

Tragedy struck the family when he returned after the war in 1945. In June, his father was killed on the farm after a nasty fight with one of his workers. The worker had failed to follow certain instructions and William Cuthbert physically confronted him. The worker, Chepsiror araap Butuk, holding a machete, fatally stabbed Cuthbert. Butuk, seeing what he had done, fled from the farm and took his own life. After the death of her husband, Florence Cuthbert sold the land and left with her sons for South Africa. Maurice Cuthbert enrolled at Helderberg College to study for the ministry. He took after his father, becoming a missionary. After his training, he returned to Kenya and became actively involved in the church, rising to become the secretary and treasurer of the South Kenya Field (now Conference) through much of the early 1950s.

## Work as a Missionary

In 1955, he left Kenya for Tanganyika where he continued to serve as the secretary-treasurer of the Tanganyika Mission based at Busegwe Mission some twenty miles from Musoma in northern Tanganyika. As mentioned earlier, his father had been an active minister among the Nandi, bringing to the Adventist faith a number of Nandi who went deep into the Nandi Reserve spreading Adventism. One of those who became an Adventist from Cuthbert's work was Philip araap Kili, the son of Maurice's attacker Kili araap Randich. Before coming to work as a foreman on the Cuthbert farm, Kili araap Randich had been the foreman at David Sparrow's Ndege Farm. Although he did not become an Adventist, his son joined the church.

In September 1958, Philip Kili attended the East African Youth Congress held in Nairobi. Philip was the district youth leader and came with a large delegation of young people from Nandi. The congress, which brought in delegates from the entire Eastern Africa Union, was attended by Maurice Cuthbert, a delegate from Tanganyika.

It was here Philip met the now grown Cuthbert and instantly recognized him. After introducing himself and reminding Cuthbert of the incident on their farm, Cuthbert was deeply emotional and they embraced each other in love bringing to closure their dusky past. Cuthbert was excited to meet his assailant's son and Philip touched the scar from the unfortunate incident.<sup>6</sup>

They were amazed that God had brought them together into the Adventist family in spite of their completely different backgrounds. In a way, Kili's father had "led" Maurice Cuthbert to Christ because it was the turning from which he decided to take a closer walk with Jesus. Philip and Cuthbert became close friends from then on.

## Further Missionary Work

Maurice Cuthbert remained at Busegwe until shortly after Tanganyika's independence in 1962 when he left for South Africa. He continued in denominational employment and took a job at the Sentinel Publishing House in Kenilworth, Cape Town, where he served as the sales manager. He was ordained in 1963 and moved to Johannesburg where he continued to work for the Church doing mainly administrative duties. He became the auditor for the South African Union in 1966 and served until 1969 when he moved to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where he served as the education secretary in the Mashonaland Field. He was based at the Inyazura Mission during this time. His wife also became a licensed missionary at the Mashonaland Field. At the time, the Cuthberts were the only non-African workers in the entire field.

In 1971, Cuthbert again moved north to the Zambia Field where he worked as the secretary-treasurer at Chisekesi, Zambia. This was the first time he was working in an independent African nation. He also joined the board of the Mwami Hospital and Leprosarium in Zambia. In 1979, the Cuthberts moved back to South Africa and lived in the Transvaal, still working for the Church. Cuthbert served as the auditor of the Southern Union. He retired in 1984 and moved to England where he lived out his days. His daughter Denise also moved to England where she worked for the Adventist Risk Management service in St. Albans.

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### SOURCES

Ancestry.com. *UK, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

Sang, Godfrey K. and Hosea K. Kili. *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to Western Kenya*. Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1921.

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### NOTES

1. Passenger list from November 1928 when the Cuthberts left England (apparently a furlough) indicates Maurice was 9- years old, which would make his birthdate 1919 (Ancestry.com. *UK, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012).
2. "South British Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1921), 80.
3. Godfrey K. Sang and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017), 32-34.
4. *Ibid.*, 33.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Philip Kili, interview by author, July 2015.

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