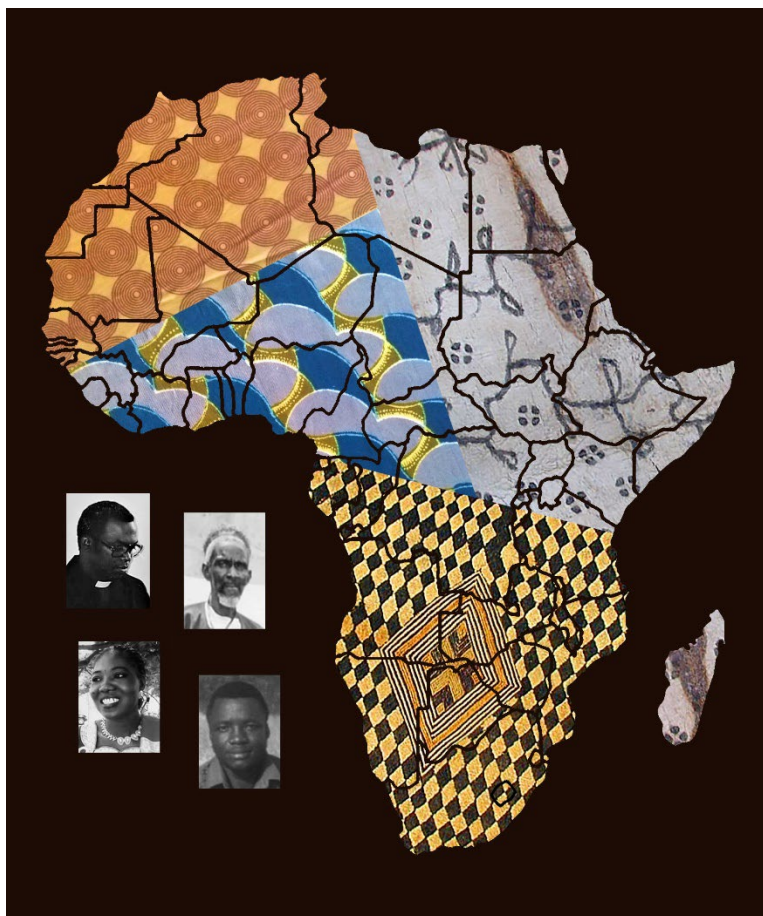


# JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

Vol. 7, No. 2/3 (April-July 2022)

Focus: Anabaptist-Mennonite  
Movement in Africa  
DOUBLE ISSUE  
BILINGUAL



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# JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

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DOUBLE ISSUE - BILINGUAL  
(ENGLISH)

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The *Journal of African Christian Biography* was launched in 2016 to complement and make stories from the online *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* ([www.DACB.org](http://www.DACB.org)) more readily accessible and immediately useful in African congregations and classrooms.

Now published quarterly, with all issues available online, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will include biographies already available on the website itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the DACB itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the JACB plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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- a. Kassilé Traoré (Burkina Faso, EEMBF) before his conversion in 1996, wearing his bulletproof shirt. Photo taken in Kotoura during the ceremony of his consecration to the brotherhood of the dozos.
- b. Mrs Cécile Coulibaly (Burkina Faso, EEMBF) in 2018.
- c. Rev. Dr. Floribert Matungulu Givule (Congo, CEFMC) in 1991.
- d. Tiéba Traoré (Burkina Faso, EEMBF), surrounded by his family, ca. 1985 (at or shortly before his baptism), in Kotoura. From left to right: Karidja (Traoré’s second wife) with her sons Emmanuel (held) and Arouna (standing in front), Tiéba Traoré (seated), Mariam (Traoré’s first wife) with her children Daniel (held), son Amidou (yellow shirt) and daughter Abibata. Photographer: Anne Garber Kompaoré.
- e. Transfer of powers between the former Secretary General and Legal Representative of the CEFMC and the Reverend Kimbila Antoine, in 2019. Left to right : Mgr Milenge, 2e Vice-president de l'ECC, Révérend Pelende Damien (former LR of the CEFMC from 2004 to 2012), Brother Kufutama Kafair (current Community Financial Officer), Révérend Kimbila Antoine (current GS & LR of the CEFMC) et Révérend Kaputu Georges (current Community Evangelist of the CEFMC). Absent: Pastor Mambakila Gérard, LR from 2012 to 2018.
- f. Musicians at the 40th anniversary celebration of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso (EEMBF) in 2018 in Orodara.
- g. Église évangélique mennonite d’Orodara (EEMO, a congregation of the Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso, EEMBF) in 2018.

## Introduction: African Mennonite Stories of Conversion, Mission, and Renewal

In 2019, a group of Anabaptist-Mennonite historians from around the world gathered for a symposium under the auspices of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA) in Goshen, USA. Unanimously, they affirmed that “[a]s followers of Jesus Christ our history connects us, reminds us of the Spirit’s activity among us, and calls us forward into the future.” Today, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) member churches exist in 25 countries in Africa, and African Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in 2018 made up 36% of the 2.13 million baptized Anabaptist-Mennonites worldwide.<sup>1</sup> This special issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography*, intentionally released in both English and French just prior to the July 2022 MWC Assembly in Indonesia, offers stories of the Anabaptist/Mennonite church as it took vibrant shape in Africa and became a source of renewal beyond its borders, contributing richly to a global Anabaptist movement.

At the core of this issue are seven biographies and two church histories. The stories come from western, central, eastern, and southern regions of the continent, with stronger representation from Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burkina Faso. The Christians in these stories experienced the power of the gospel as it entered into confrontation with other powers. They took courageous action to demonstrate the authenticity of their own conversion and boldly shared the good news with others both far and near.

In Burkina Faso, after Kassilé Traoré experienced Jesus’ saving power in a dream, he destroyed his cherished bullet-proof shirt, donated cattle for the church’s needs, and publicly danced in church despite his advanced years. Cécile Coulibaly founded a women’s choir that helped a struggling congregation to take wing. Tiéba Traoré joined with his friends to share the gospel in neighboring villages. In Tanzania, Bishop Zedekiah Kisare led his congregations in the wake of the East African Revival, and later carried the revival message to brothers and sisters in the global North. And in Congo, young Floribert Matungulu received strength to cross a river to escape from the bombs of nearby war, though he could not swim. Later, he became a respected professor who contributed to peace within families and within Congo’s Mennonite Brethren Church. Esther Mbombo wa Tshipongo mobilized other women for service and evangelism even when this earned her the opposition of her husband and his family. Daniel Mbele Manteka guided his children into faith while planting dozens of churches and serving as a missionary among people of a different ethnic group. Dancers and choir directors, church planters and evangelists, bishops and professors, each of these African Mennonites actively contributed to building up the people of God in their own contexts while leaving a testimony that integrates them into a global body.

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<sup>1</sup> Mennonite World Conference, “MWC Global Statistics – 2018,” [https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website\\_files/directory2018statistics.pdf](https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/directory2018statistics.pdf)

Through the entire issue runs the thread of shared remembering in relationship. The stories themselves were created within contemporary relationships of collaboration between authors and editors in Africa and North America, as well in conversation with previous accounts, which to a greater extent were authored and/or controlled by Mennonites from the global North. At the same time, many stories touch on or directly address the legacy of the encounter between African Christians and Mennonite missionaries from the global North, reflecting on both painful and joyful episodes from this historically formative relationship.

For example, Anne Marie Stoner-Eby, an American Mennonite who spent many childhood and adult years in East Africa, presents a beautifully layered analysis of Tanzanian Bishop Zedekiah Kisare's autobiography that features both Kisare's painful experiences with American Mennonite missionaries during the colonial era, and his experiences of reconciliation and empowerment as he became a leader and preacher of revival to Tanzanian and American churches. Kisare's autobiography itself took shape within the context of an intercultural collaboration and friendship with second-generation American missionary Joseph Shenk. Morena Rankopo reflects on the benefits of shared learning and partnership between North American Mennonite missionaries and African Independent Churches (AICs). Paul Ouédraogo's history of the Orodara congregation of the *Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso* (EEMBF) depicts a lively multi-ethnic church that grew and flourished despite being painfully sidelined during a shift in the church-planting strategy of the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM). Maurice Matsitsa reviewed and updated a history of the Mennonite Brethren church in Congo co-written more than a decade earlier with his mentor, historian Kikweta a Mawa Wabala Jean-Claude, whose extensive historical research into the early years of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo was tragically cut short when he died in 2019. This historical account is now available in French for the first time. Matsitsa's updates, faithful to the spirit of the original, emphasize the power imbalances between Congolese Mennonite Brethren and North American missionaries and the latter's reluctance to share financial and decision-making power. Matsitsa calls for financial autonomy for Congolese Mennonite Brethren while emphasizing the contribution of early missionary strategies to financial dependency as well as the ongoing need for North-South partnerships. All these accounts reflect the sensibilities of a new generation of historians of the church in Africa, who confront the legacies of the missionary encounter with a courage and truthfulness born from commitment to membership in a global church.

In addition to historical narratives, the issue contains a variety of resources to facilitate the ongoing writing and telling of the stories of the church in Africa. In a case study of the use of biography in church history courses in West and Central Africa, I show that as African theology students work with those in the global North to tell the life stories of African Christians and to showcase their missionary initiative, they are contributing to more equitable methods of knowledge production and to the important work of shared telling and remembering of the stories that make us all into members of a global church. The issue also includes a book review by Bruce Yoder, notes on recent books and dissertations of interest by Beth Restricks, and a variety of

practical resources – interviewing guidelines, article templates, and information about relevant initiatives, publications, archives, and grants – to support those who wish to contribute biographies to the DACB and congregational histories to the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), or to engage in more in-depth historical research about the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in Africa.<sup>2</sup> The full statement of affirmations and commitments developed at the 2019 ISGA symposium rounds out the issue.

How can you use this volume? All issues of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* are freely available for local printing and distribution at <https://dacb.org/journal/>. These stories are meant to be read, pondered, and disseminated in discussion groups, church history classes, private devotions, and sermons. At the same time, consider making a contribution of your own to telling the stories of African Mennonite women and men. You do not need to be a trained historian to do so, but only to have in mind a Christian (a now deceased clergy- or layperson) whose contribution to the church in Africa you wish to make known. Use the practical worksheets to plan your research and to begin to write their story. To go deeper, dig into the resources and links and join in a broader international conversation about the stories of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Africa.

I pray that this volume can inspire more storytelling, more honest reckoning with painful episodes in our shared story, and, for both African and non-African Mennonites, a stronger sense of belonging to a global Anabaptist movement that continues to offer, on six continents, a powerful witness to revival, to peace, and to the gospel's power.

Anicka Fast  
Guest editor

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<sup>2</sup> Through a collaborative arrangement between the DACB and GAMEO, all biographies of Mennonites published in DACB will also appear on GAMEO with no further action needed by authors.



## **Traoré, Kassilé Abdoulaye**

**c. 1936 to 2017**

**Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso (EEMBF)**

**Burkina Faso**

### **Birth, Childhood, and Difficulties**

Traoré Kassilé was born around 1936 in Kotoura in the province of Kénédougou. His mother's name was Ndjofon, and his father's name was Konré. Kassilé was a Sénoufo Tagba, that is, of the Tagba ethnic group, and he spoke Sicité (a dialect of Sénoufo) and Dioula. He understood some French but did not speak it. As he was first a Muslim, he also had a Muslim name, Abdoulaye. He kept this name after his conversion. He had three brothers and two sisters.

Kassilé had three wives. The first, Tchitilo Dissa (known as Sita), was from Kangala. The second, Tétala Traoré (known as Karidja), was from Kotoura and died early, around 1998. The third, Alimata Ouattara, was also from Kotoura. Kassilé had about twenty children. He also took care of the children of his brothers who had died young. His grandchildren from his sons numbered about twenty. As for the grandchildren from his daughters who married in the village, there were nearly thirty.

Kassilé suffered during his childhood, because his mother, after the death of his father, went to remarry elsewhere. He lived with his uncle in Kangala, and another woman raised him. He did not go to school. He was sickly, and he even had a foot that was a little deformed because of an illness. Kassilé's older brother was in the army. When he returned from his military service, the family reunited because Kassilé and his brother brought their mother to the village to be with them. Kassilé's profession was tailoring.

### **The Circumstances of Kassilé's Conversion**

Kassilé converted in 2005, at about age 69. His conversion was a long process with many steps. He began by changing his attitude toward the faith of his first son Mamadou. Mamadou, a nurse and a Christian, had begun praying since 1991 for his father's conversion. At first, Kassilé opposed his son's faith. But as a result of Mamadou's prayer, he finally wrote a letter to his son saying that he accepted his faith. In the letter, Kassilé said he would no longer oppose Mamadou's choice to follow Jesus. Kassilé acknowledged that he himself had been the first to betray his father (who had been a hunter and fetishist) by adopting Islam. Logically, if his son now abandoned Islam to become a Christian, he could not blame him. He gave him the freedom to continue following his Jesus. But he strongly recommended that his son visit him every month.

Mamoudou obeyed this recommendation from Kassilé. On three occasions, Kassilé was amazed at how easily his son found him during his visits, to the point where he told his son that Christians must have a secret. Otherwise, he could not

understand how his son could find him at these places without any prior communication. His son always answered that it was Jesus Christ who had arranged these meetings.

Kassilé continued to be thirsty to discover who Jesus was. For example, he enjoyed interacting with the Christians of Kotoura. He appreciated their songs of worship, and when these Christians told him that this worship would continue even in heaven, he kept this in his thoughts. On at least five occasions, he made the decision to go and convert and even made his way to the church, but each time he stopped at the door and turned around. Each time, something told him that he was already old, and that it wasn't worth it to associate with children who did nothing but sing, play instruments, clap and dance. Each time, he turned back. Kassilé's conversion finally occurred at the home of his son Mamadou in Sindou. Mamadou had visited Kassilé, who was ill, in Kotoura. When he wanted to go back to Sindou, an inner voice told him not to leave without his father, otherwise he would not come back to find him alive. Since Mamadou had had a revelation that his father would not die without knowing the Lord, he took this seriously. Kassilé, who was prepared for the trip with his son, left without question.

When he arrived at his son's home in Sindou, Kassilé had a dream one day. In his dream, he was on his way to Maon. When he arrived at the Kotoura-Kangala-Maon crossroads, there were men repairing the straw roof of a house. Kassilé heard a wail and turned around to see what was going on. As he entered the vestibule of the house, a hut with two doors, he saw that a young man was tied up next to a large fetish inside a piece of an earthenware dish. People were putting up the roof, after which they were going to slit the young man's throat. Kassilé reproached the men that their roofing work was not good. He asked them why they would not sacrifice an animal instead of the young man. At these words, two lepers came out and barred the two doors of the vestibule. They said to him, "Everyone who passes by here has seen the young man tied up and has not said anything. But since you cannot pass by without keeping quiet, you will be the one to have your throat slit instead of him." Kassilé began to cry out to Jesus in Senoufo: "Jesus, come save me! Jesus, come save me!" While he was shouting, a man came down into the house, stopped between the lepers and Kassilé, and told him to leave the house. He was a man dressed in white, with a long, very white robe and beautiful hair – an indescribable man. When Kassilé went out, this man stayed with the lepers. It was then that Kassilé found himself in his bed. Then he saw Jesus – who looked like the one in the Jesus film – at his bedside with his arms outstretched. Jesus said to him, "Look. If I hadn't come, you would have died today. I came to save you. Look at my hands." Kassilé saw the blood falling in big drops from Jesus' hands. Then Jesus said to him, "Will you accept me now?" Kassilé said, "Yes." Jesus answered, "Your son has spoken to you about me, but you have never accepted me. If I had not come, you would have died. Even your grandson has told you about me." After seeing all this in the dream, Kassilé woke up in his bed.

It was after this that Kassilé made the decision to convert. Pastor Bado led him in prayer. Afterwards, he went back, converted, to his home in Kotoura.

## The Impact of Kassilé's Conversion

Back in Kotoura, one day Kassilé sent a letter to his son telling him to choose a date with Pastor Bado to burn his fetishes, including a genie hut that he had. At this hut, a ram was sacrificed every year. And the hut was obviously without a door. That is, there was a semblance of a door, but it was completely sealed off. It looked like a stone, which no one could lift by himself. Under this big stone, there were fourteen rams' skins, not counting the rotten ones. These were the rams' skins that were sacrificed every year at the genie's house. All these skins, the genie's house and the fetishes were indeed destroyed.

Seeing the destruction of his fetishes, including his genie hut, the people of the village were astounded. Everyone was astonished. Knowing Kassilé, some people said that he would not be able to stand firm in his faith. Others even said that if he managed to spend a year with Jesus Christ, everyone in Kotoura would convert. But by the grace of God, Kassilé lived with the Lord for twelve years. Kassilé's commitment after his conversion turned out to be genuine. Before his conversion, Kassilé had been particularly fond of his bulletproof war shirt. He had demanded that, according to custom, his son Mamadou wear this shirt on the day of his father's death, to express that he was his worthy son. He even threatened him, saying that Mamoudou might well be a Christian, but if on the day of Kassilé's death he did not wear this shirt, his father would come back to haunt him! But when Kassilé converted, he got rid of that shirt. This had an impact on another of his sons, named Tiéba, who, wanting to obtain this garment, found it in a well, spoiled and eaten away by termites. This was a sign to him that his father had truly converted.

Kassilé's sincere conversion led some of his family members to follow Jesus. His two wives who were still alive, Sita and Alimata, were converted. In his family, a man named Brama also converted.

Kassilé also witnessed his faith to those around him. For example, he gave a Dioula Bible to an elder in the Kotoura church to give to one of Kassilé's children on the day of his death. He wanted this gesture to serve as a testimony to this young man, and for him to understand that Kassilé his father was encouraging him to follow everything in this book so that he would be converted to Jesus Christ.

Throughout his Christian life, Kassilé actively participated in the life of the church by regularly paying his tithe. He also gave gifts and donations. He donated an ox to the church about four times in a truly selfless way. In doing so, he was blessed more fully by the Lord.

Kassilé's testimony was an encouragement to many people, who were impressed to see someone who was willing to believe despite his advanced age. Except when he was sick, Kassilé never missed a Sunday service at Kotoura. The church members thought that if someone like him, despite his age, could get up and dance in church, it showed that there was something important in the Gospel. They learned the lesson that one must be committed to the matters of God with all one's

heart. Whether you are a child, a youth or an elderly person, these matters concern everyone.

Similarly, many people thought that the Christian faith was a matter for the poor only. But Kassilé left a notable impact, for everyone knew that he was wealthy. Before his death, he had nearly three enclosures of oxen that others pastured for him in the fields between Sokouraba and Moussodougou. People also believed that the whites gave money or wages to those who could get someone to convert. Even his own sons said that the Christians had deceived their father into the Christian faith in order to get the price of his conversion. But Kassilé's testimony made people understand that it was not misery that led him to the Lord. On the contrary, when God calls, we come to him from the position we are in. It is true that he was poor at the beginning of his life, but before his death there were many who were indebted to him.

Kassilé did not found a church, but he remained in the Kotoura church until his death. Once a year he visited Pastor Bado of the Sindou church, with whom he had been converted.

### **Kassilé's Death**

Before Kassilé's conversion, a marabout who predicted the future told him that he would die at age eighty. When his son Mamadou heard this story after his father's conversion, he prayed, "Now that he is in Christ, Lord, may he not die at eighty. Even if it's one more year, may you give him that." In 2017, Mamadou heard the Lord say to him, "As you asked me to lengthen his life, I answered you. But this will be his last Easter." Indeed, Kassilé became ill. After having been treated in Kotoura, Sindou, and finally in Bobo-Dioulasso, he could no longer bear the illness. Thus, Kassilé breathed his last on October 19, 2017 at the Bobo-Dioulasso hospital. It was a victory of sorts, because he died at the age of eighty-one, exceeding the marabout's prediction. His burial took place on October 20, 2017 in Kotoura with dignity and honor.

Kari Traoré

### **Sources:**

Traoré, Mamadou. Retired nurse and Kassilé's first son. Interviewed by Kari Traoré on December 17, 2021, in Sindou, Léraba province, Burkina Faso. Mamadou is in the process of compiling all the events of Kassilé's life in order to write a book about his Christian life, but the writing is not yet completed or published.

Traoré, Seydou. Kotoura church elder, friend and brother-in-law of Kassilé. Interviewed by Kari Traoré on December 18, 2021 in Kotoura, Kénédougou province, Burkina Faso.

Traoré, Daouda. Pastor of the Kotoura church. Interviewed by Kari Traoré on December 18, 2021 in Kotoura, Kénédougou province, Burkina Faso.

Author's discussions with Kassilé during his life.

This article, received in 2022, is the product of research by Kari Traoré, pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Saraba, and Master's student at the l'Université Chrétienne LOGOS de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, under the supervision of Dr. Anicka Fast.

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## **Traoré, Tieba**

**1958-1994**

**Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso (EEMBF)**

**Burkina Faso**

Tiéba Traoré, evangelist and church leader, was born in 1958 in Kotoura, Kénédougou Province in western Burkina Faso. His father, Kunandi, was the chief of the village of Kotoura. Kunandi had two wives and 14 children. Tiéba was the sixth of 10 children of the chief's second wife. Tiéba was born into a family of mixed religions. His father was a Muslim, and his mother was an animist.

There were no Protestant Christians in the area and only a small number of Catholics. In 1982, two missionaries from the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), Anne Garber and Gail Wiebe, arrived in Kotoura. As the village chief, Tiéba's father offered the women hospitality and assigned Tiéba, who had attended school until the third grade, to accompany the women and serve as their Senoufo-French interpreter.

Soon after the missionaries arrived, Tiéba, curious about God, was happy to hear the good news of salvation. On October 15, 1983, after months of reflection on matters of faith, the missionaries invited him to an evangelization campaign in Orodara. When Tiéba heard an evangelist from neighboring Ivory Coast give his testimony of conversion from Islam, he was the first to go forward and commit his life to Jesus. Back in his village, Tiéba told his two wives that he had become a Christian. His first wife, Mariam, decided to convert as well. But his second wife refused. Rumors had spread within the village that those who converted to Christianity did not honor the dead. So his second wife said that she would not

convert so that she could participate in the funeral of her parents. On May 19, 1985, Tiéba and four others were the first Christians to be baptized among the Senoufo people.

Following his baptism, Tiéba lived a godly life and proclaimed the Word of God. One day, a thief came to steal his millet. When Tiéba learned this, he gave more millet to this thief instead of hurting him. This act deeply moved the thief, and his testimony spread throughout the village.

Tiéba was a motivator and a rallying force. He organized the youth of the village into groups who contracted for work in the fields. During their fieldwork, he preached the good news of salvation to his friends. He also initiated many church activities. As a pioneer, he visited all the believers in their homes to encourage them in their faith walk.

In 1985-1986, when the AIMM missionaries returned to North America for home leave, Tiéba and his companions were persecuted in the village. It prevented them from holding meetings, and two recently converted men, Mamadou and Seriba, were banished from their families. But even during this discouraging time, Tiéba continued to keep the church alive. A newly converted blind man by the name of Babali permitted the Christians to meet at his home.

Eager to undertake evangelization initiatives in surrounding villages such as Kankala and Sayaga, Tiéba asked the missionaries for help by showing the Jesus film. The missionaries, however, did not agree with this idea. But when a Christian prefect was assigned to the village, he decided to help Tiéba bring in an evangelization team who presented the Jesus film. Even though few conversions resulted from this campaign, Tiéba was not discouraged because he believed this was what Kotoura and other villages needed. Over time, hundreds of people saw the Jesus film.

In 1986, missionary Gail Wiebe married and returned to the United States. Anne Garber met the Bible translator and Apostolic Church pastor Daniel Kompaoré and later married him. Concerned about the church's future following the missionaries' departure, Tiéba asked the AIMM to send new missionaries to continue the work in Kotoura, but none could be found. But in 1993, Joël Traoré, a Christian from Kagala, Ivory Coast, arrived in Burkina Faso. The same year, another Christian man, Larito, also returned from the Ivory Coast to his village in Sayaga. Larito quickly began to mentor the new believers in Sayaga. Tiéba felt encouraged by the arrival of these two brothers. As a result, the Christians of the three villages – Kotoura, Kangala, and Sayaga – joined in evangelizing in the neighboring village of Sokouraba. Tiéba and Joel regularly visited the new Sokouraba converts.

In March 1993, when the Assemblies of God planted a church in Koloko, Tiéba and his companions realized that it was necessary to collaborate with other denominations to win the Senoufo area for the Lord. Thus, they participated in the organization of evangelization campaigns in places like Sokouraba and Maon.

Tiéba continued with his projects of strengthening souls and winning new souls for the Lord. In December 1993, Tiéba and his companions confronted a great challenge following the death and burial of Babali. Tiéba conducted the funeral. At around the same time, he organized an evangelization campaign with the support of

Youth With a Mission. To feed the guests, Tiéba slaughtered a sheep. During the same week, however, he became sick while teaching and went to the hospital. Tiéba, the hero of the faith of the Senoufo area, passed away on 22 February 1994 at the age of 36.

Local non-Christians said that since Tiéba had not offered a sheep sacrifice to his father at the time of his death, his father had drawn Tiéba's soul into the realm of the dead. The Christians, who did not believe in this, deeply mourned the loss of their role model in the faith. The medical staff said that Tiéba had died of meningitis.

The faith of the Christians cooled in the area after Tiéba's death. Some even abandoned their faith. But God watched over the church so that it would not die. As a result, the church in Kotoura continued to grow, first under the leadership of elders and then of pastors Mamadou Traoré and Daouda Traoré. As one of the first congregations of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Burkina Faso, it is a legacy to Tiéba Traoré's life and witness.

Josué Coulibaly

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## **Coulibaly, Massié Cécile (née Poda)**

**1970-2021**

**Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso  
Burkina Faso**

Cécile Coulibaly could be described as a woman orchestra! She learned to sing, to dance and even to play the drum after her conversion. She became Mrs. Cécile Coulibaly following her marriage to Pastor Coulibaly Abdias, and she was committed throughout her life to the worship of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Cécile Poda was born in 1970 in Nioro-Nioro in the province of Poni, in the southwestern region of Burkina Faso; she was the youngest of a polygamous family of eight children. Her father was a *garde de cercle*, the equivalent of a policeman in Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. Her mother was a housewife, preparing and selling *dolo*, a local beer made from red sorghum.

The young Cécile Poda accompanied her parents to their various postings, particularly in Mossi and Senoufo countries, before they retired to Bobo-Dioulasso. She expressed herself in the two main languages of the country, Mooré and Dioula, in addition to Lobiri, her mother tongue.

From elementary school to apprenticeship, Cécile Poda did not have the chance to go further in school; she stopped at first grade. However, she later attended evening classes to obtain her primary school certificate. She then attended decentralized Bible classes to deepen her biblical knowledge and build up her budding faith. In addition, she started to learn the weaving, knitting, and sewing techniques that would help her in her future endeavors.

### **Conversion**

Cécile's parents were Catholic, but they also kept their foot in the door of traditional religious practices. Because her parents were always busy with their work, Cécile and her siblings did not receive the parental affection that every child needs. This situation led Cécile to move in with her uncle, Michel Poda, who was an evangelical Christian. It was in this family that Cécile met the Lord, an encounter that transformed her life.

She was baptized in the Christian Alliance Church in Sarfalao. It was in this church that Cécile learned everything: choral singing, solo singing, musical instruments, etc. She caught the attention of a choir director named Michel Drabo who introduced her to Mande vocal techniques and rhythms of the balafon and the djembe. In this genre, Cécile became successful. The leaders of the Maranatha Institute noticed her musical gifts. They also hired her as a nanny for the students of the Institute.



## **Marriage**

The young pastor Abdias Coulibaly, who had just been appointed pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Orodara, was looking for a soulmate with whom to enter full-time pastoral ministry. At the time, Cécile was working at the Maranatha Institute as a baby-sitter, while taking classes herself. It was there that her future husband, in search of a perfect match, noticed her.

The engagement process was handled by carefully selected and trusted people. In such a situation, it is necessary to negotiate the agreement of the parents even if they are not Christians. It is a time for advice, and the future bride and groom did not deprive themselves of it! After all these consultations, the various agreements were obtained to celebrate the marriage on May 5, 1994.

## **The beginnings of the Coulibalys' ministry**

The early dates of the pastoral couple's ministry were not easy: a church of about ten members with no fixed income was a trial and a challenge to overcome. The pastoral couple had to work part-time to make ends meet. Pastor Coulibaly worked in a bookstore while providing pastoral care. During this time, Cécile carried out income-generating activities to support the family and especially to ensure the reception of the guests who came to see the pastor. There were moments of doubt, but the couple stood firm, relying on the Lord.

It was at this point that Mrs. Coulibaly began to hold numerous rehearsals, singing songs of praise to the Lord with some of the women who attended the church. As the group of women sang and danced in honor of the Lord, the other women were inspired to join in. Her husband was encouraged by such a commitment from his wife and became more involved himself. Their ministry took off.

Mrs. Coulibaly was known for the quality of her voice, the dexterity of her dance steps in honor of the Lord, and her industriousness. She made and sold handicrafts, as well as juices and cakes made from local agricultural products. She set up a business selling cloth to both poor and wealthy women, which was a real success.

But there was a problem. Mrs. Coulibaly still had no children after twenty years of marriage! In Burkinabè society, such a situation could provoke a divorce. But the couple chose to remain faithful to the Lord despite everything. This is an example of extraordinary fidelity, especially for Cécile whose husband was a pastor.

## **The Death of Cécile Coulibaly**

When Cécile Coulibaly left her house on that fateful day of September 24, 2021, she did not know that she would never return to this home, which she had worked hard to build together with her husband in Sector 6 of the city of Orodara. Mrs. Coulibaly had gone to the church that day to rehearse the songs for the next Sunday's worship service.

According to Mrs. Awa Traoré, one of Mrs. Coulibaly's lieutenants, the rehearsal ended around 5:00 p.m. and she was about to go home when the tragedy occurred. When she started her motorcycle, she fell and lost consciousness. She was immediately taken from the church to the hospital in Orodara, only about four hundred meters away, but it was too late! The chronic asthma from which she had been suffered for a long time had unexpectedly taken its toll on her.

The death of Mrs. Coulibaly sent shock waves through the Mennonite churches of Kéné Dougou and also through all the evangelical churches in Orodara. From the church to the hospital, via the morgue, then back to the church, a dense crowd followed the funeral procession to the church for the wake.

Cécile Coulibaly was buried on Saturday, September 25, 2021 after a tribute was paid to her by the church of Christ in the presence of a crowd of witnesses from all over Burkina Faso and Mali.

## **The Heritage of Cécile Coulibaly**

In such a situation, it is difficult for people to speak; sobs and tears are the first expressions of their deep sorrow. But a few days later, testimonies about Cécile Coulibaly's life and death poured in from everywhere: from the women in the Evangelical Mennonite Church, and from other evangelical churches in the city of Orodara and surrounding areas.

For her husband, Pastor Coulibaly, Cécile was a woman of faith and commitment, a trustworthy woman who was able to manage the modest financial resources of the household. Some described Cécile as a hard-working woman. She always told the truth, did not hold grudges and was ready to ask for forgiveness. She was not easily discouraged in the face of adversity. Others emphasized that she was generous and sympathetic to the problems of those around her. Business partners found Cécile to be a loyal customer who paid her bills on time.

So was Cécile Coulibaly an angel in human form? No, of course not! The pastor himself answered this question: "When Cécile gets angry, you have to use appropriate techniques to calm her down. She often lacks patience!"

In conclusion, the life and death of Mrs. Cécile Coulibaly leaves a posthumous legacy of enthusiasm for the Lord's work, generosity in action and

faithfulness in times of trial. This Amazon of faith has taken flight to be her Lord, who rewards the faith placed in him.

Paul Ouédraogo

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This article, received in 2022, is the product of research by Paul Ouédraogo, Master's student at the Université chrétienne LOGOS de Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, under the supervision of Dr. Anicka Fast.

# History of the Église Évangélique Mennonite d'Orodara<sup>3</sup> (EEMO) 1978-2022 – Province of Kénédougou, Burkina Faso

By Paul Ouédraogo

The Église évangélique mennonite du Burkina Faso (EEMBF – Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso) is composed of some twenty local churches, of which the Église évangélique mennonite d'Orodara is a founding member. This narrative focuses specifically on the local church in Orodara, but its story will also illuminate the history of the larger Mennonite church in Burkina Faso.

In 1978, the first missionaries were sent by AIMM (Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission) to Burkina Faso. This mission was composed of two American couples, Loren and Donna Entz and Dennis and Jeanne Rempel, who arrived in Orodara to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of the Kénédougou province. A second wave consisted of two single women, Gail Wiebe and Anne Garber, who arrived in Orodara to work in the village of Kotoura in 1982. Other missionaries arrived later.

Brother Siaka Traoré, now a pastor, came from Moussodougou to Orodara in 1979 to join the missionary team. Following this contact, he was converted. He was baptized in 1980. In the years that followed, he and other new Christians joined the missionaries to form a Mennonite community in Burkina Faso.

In 1983, Brother Paul Ouédraogo, already converted since 1977, arrived in Orodara. Having befriended Siaka Traoré, he became involved with him in the management of the evangelical bookstore La Colombe, and continued while Brother Siaka was away for theological training in Bangui.

Other brothers and sisters also joined the nascent community. Among those who contributed to form the nucleus of the Église évangélique mennonite d'Orodara were people such as Tera Abel and his wife Mariam, Traoré Assetou, Traoré Tohalama, Traoré Brama, Bassolé Frédéric with his wife Jacqueline and their children, little Traoré Dramane, big Traoré Dramane, Traoré Sétou, Sanogo Moussa, Ouédraogo Thierry (a schoolteacher in Orodara), and Coulibaly Abdias.

One might ask when the local church in Orodara actually began. Several answers have been given, but we retain the one proposed by Kumedisa Erik and his colleagues: “The first AIMM missionaries arrived in 1978 and the church was planted in 1983.”<sup>4</sup>

It was a multi-ethnic, multi-actor church whose identity would later be defined as evangelical Mennonite. It was a church formed by brothers and sisters who

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<sup>3</sup> Translation: Evangelical Mennonite Church of Orodara.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kodzo Badasu, I. U. Nsagak, and Erik Kumedisa, “Mennonite Churches in Western Africa,” in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, ed. John Allen Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, Global Mennonite History Series (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 261.

joined with Western missionaries. The group first met in the homes of the missionaries.

The present site of the local church in Orodara, where meetings began in January 1984, was turned over to it in 1983 by the Christian Alliance Church, which had been there since the 1970s. The first pastor to be installed by the missionaries in 1985 in agreement with the Burkinabè was Drabo Youro Jean from Banzon. It is after his departure in 1989 that Coulibaly Abdias was appointed pastor to replace Pastor Youro Drabo. At that time, in the 1980s, worship services, baptisms, the Lord's Supper, and other ceremonies were celebrated with simplicity in the style of the Mennonite missionaries. The languages used were French and Dioula, which continues to this day.

The activities of the EEMO included worship services, community support in cases of death and illness, evangelism, training, and edification; and, in collaboration with the Office de développement des Églises (ODE – the development arm of the Protestant churches of Burkina Faso), animal husbandry, provision of inputs, mills, and a village pharmacy. All these activities had limited success due to the lack of competent resource persons. However, the evangelism component produced conversions that have maintained the sustainability of the work to this day.

But contrary to all expectations, between 1986 and 1987, the mission changed its strategy of intervention. This new strategy resulted in an upheaval in the relationship between the nascent church and the mission. With this new missionary strategy, each missionary was to select an ethnic community in the province of Kénédougou, establish a missionary station there by first learning the language, then creating the alphabet of this language, and finally evangelizing the population through this local language. But for the local church in Orodara, which had not been founded according to this plan, this change brought confusion. What was to be done? Should they break up or continue? How should they proceed and with whom? All these questions remained unanswered and the members of the church in Orodara continued to meet, pray and exhort each other. The mission-church collaboration was troubled until this missionary strategy was abandoned, which allowed the collaboration to resume in the early 2000s in the present form of the Partnership Council.

## **The Church in Orodara Today**

The number of members has grown noticeably. In 2020, the EEMO had 257 members. In addition, it had founded two branches – one in Kourignon (40 Christians) and one in Sipiki (50 Christians).

The church has a pyramidal organization with five departments: Teaching, Evangelism, Social Services, Resource Management, and Fellowship. It is through these five departments that all preaching, training, seminar organization, evangelism, outreach, and pastoral activities are carried out. The church in Orodara remains the flagship for other Mennonite evangelical churches in Burkina Faso in the Kénédougou province and beyond.

The Église évangélique d'Orodara has many stories to tell and to draw upon, but there is no archive to preserve these stories for present and future generations! The former members of the church from that period are still alive; perhaps now is the time to put in place a mechanism for collecting, organizing and managing the archives before it is too late.

**Current address :** Église évangélique mennonite d'Orodara, secteur n° 3 de la commune urbaine d'Orodara, B.P. 85, Orodara, Burkina Faso

**Current pastor:** Coulibaly Abdias

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Yanogo, Félix O., Jean-Baptiste Roamba, Benjamin Yanogo, Emmanuel Kabore, Théophile Kambou, and Gabriel Kambou. *Historique de la Fédération des Églises et Missions Évangéliques du Burkina Faso, 1961-2011*. Edited by Félix O. Yanogo. Ouagadougou?: unknown publisher, 2011.

# Building a Church Locally and Globally: The Ministry of Zedekiah Marwa Kisare, first African Bishop of the Tanzanian Mennonite Church

by Anne Marie Stoner-Eby

In July 1985, the first African bishop of the Tanzanian Mennonite Church, Zedekiah Marwa Kisare (ca. 1912-1999), signed copies of his autobiography in Lancaster, Pennsylvania at the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Mennonite missionaries in what was then Tanganyika.<sup>5</sup> This was Kisare's sixth visit to the United States. He had previously traveled to the US for "fraternal visits" hosted by the Lancaster mission board in 1961, 1967, 1972, 1974, and 1978,<sup>6</sup> staying in Mennonite homes, speaking in Mennonite churches, and attending mission and church meetings. In addition, Kisare had worked with dozens of American Mennonite missionaries during his 50 years of church leadership in Tanzania, becoming a bridging figure between American Mennonite missionaries and Tanzanian Mennonites. In 1979, a new American missionary in Tanzania described Kisare as one who "understands Americans, and... also understands local people."<sup>7</sup> Upon Kisare's death in 1999, his obituary was published in the local Lancaster paper and a well-attended memorial service was held to commemorate his passing.<sup>8</sup>

Although Kisare was more fluent in Swahili than English, his autobiography appeared in English only.<sup>9</sup> The project was initiated by Joseph Shenk, a second-generation Mennonite missionary who had developed a son-like relationship with

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<sup>5</sup> "1,000 Celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> Year in Overseas Mission Work," *Lancaster Conference News* 5(12): 1985, p. 1. Kisare's autobiography was entitled *Kisare, A Mennonite of Kiseru: An Autobiography as told to Joseph C. Shenk* (Salunga, Pennsylvania, 1984). The Tanzanian Mennonite Church goes by the name of Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania (KMT). American Mennonites of Lancaster Conference, Pennsylvania founded the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in 1914, and arrived in their first foreign mission field, now Tanzania, in 1934. The Mennonites established their stations in what is now the Mara Region of Tanzania, east of Lake Victoria and just south of the border with Kenya.

<sup>6</sup> See *Missionary Messenger* (the magazine of the Lancaster Mennonite mission board, hereafter *MM*) August 1961, p. 4; January 1968, p. 5; August 1972, p. 16; March 1974, p. 5; and Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 132. Kisare also visited the US in 1990 (see *MM* January 1991, p. 21).

<sup>7</sup> Joe Bontrager, "On Anthropology and Brotherhood," *MM* December 1979, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Intelligencer Journal*, August 20, 1999, p. B-3; Dorca Kisare-Ressler, e-mail to author, November 12, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> A 50-year history of KMT was published first in Swahili in 1985. See Mahlon Hess, *Pilgrimage of Faith: Tanzania Mennonite Church, 1934-83* (Salunga, Pennsylvania, 1985).

Kisare during his eight years of missionary work under Kisare's bishopric.<sup>10</sup> Shenk wanted an American audience to hear the story of this African Mennonite bishop who was creating a completely new, non-Swiss-German narrative about what it meant to be Mennonite. He spent three months with Kisare and his wife Susanna in the summer of 1983 and wrote the manuscript in time for the Jubilee celebration.<sup>11</sup> Because of their relationship, Kisare trusted Shenk to put his story into English. He wrote in the acknowledgments, "I am grateful to Joseph C. Shenk, a son in Christ, who has given of himself to translate my Swahili into English. I have put myself into his hands, trusting him to record faithfully the intent of the words of my story."<sup>12</sup>

The inability of Kisare to write his own English autobiography reflects one of its themes – the negative effects of the "colonial mentality" on the missionaries, who had arrived in Africa during the colonial era.<sup>13</sup> Despite the pleas of Kisare and other African leaders, the American missionaries long refused to teach them English, arguing that "you cannot preach the gospel to natives in English."<sup>14</sup> It was not until 1963, twenty-seven years after Kisare had first begun his mission education, that he finally had the opportunity to study English seriously at the newly-opened Mennonite Theological College. He learned to read English scriptures and have a sense of English sermons, but his "spoken English remained broken and [he] was embarrassed to use it."<sup>15</sup>

Given this history, Kisare's decision to craft his life story for an English-speaking audience is significant and reflects his belief in a global church. To his American audience, Kisare emphasized the value of his cultural heritage and the negative effects of colonial rule. He directly addressed the challenges Africans faced when working with American missionaries and pointed toward strategies to ensure continued interaction. Fundamentally, however, Kisare's autobiography is about the power of Revival – its climax is the arrival of the East African Revival among Mennonites in Tanzania in 1942.<sup>16</sup> Only Jesus' blood saved the mission and brought

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<sup>10</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 9-10 (Joseph Shenk's preface). See also Verle Rufenacht, personal communication, October 31, 2010, Lancaster.

<sup>11</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 9-10. Shenk described the process of writing the autobiography this way: "I became a guest of the Kisares at Shirati, Tanzania, in 1983, for three months... Every morning the Bishop gave me two hours in his home, a fresh tablecloth spread on the dining-room table, the appropriate passage from *Daily Light* read and commented on, prayer for each other and for the day's work, followed by the Bishop's reflections on his life. Daily at 10:30 a.m. we were served sweet milk-tea or millet gruel. As the manuscript took shape, we spent time reading it together." (Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 10).

<sup>12</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 73. With certain exceptions, European colonial rule of Africa lasted generally from the 1890s to the 1960s.

<sup>14</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 103. He felt that "if I had had a fourth year of English study, I would have begun to use it comfortably in conversation" (p. 103).

<sup>16</sup> For other Revival auto/biographies from Kenya and Uganda, see Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya: An Autobiography, 1902-1973* (Nairobi, 1985) and Festo Kivengere with



everyone, whether African or American, Luo or Bantu, into fellowship.

Kisare was born around 1912. In his autobiography, he described “happy boyhood years” and a childhood of security and comfort. Amidst his father’s twelve wives and many more children, Kisare was specially singled out, receiving love and attention from both his parents. He ate well and enjoyed the privilege of milking his father’s cows, roaming the savannah herding his father’s goats, and hunting quail with his knobkerrie.<sup>17</sup>

Kisare described his polygamous upbringing and the rituals of the diviners, used to protect Luo family villages from illness or drought, without judgment.<sup>18</sup> For Christian readers, he provided an obvious connection between Luo culture and Christianity when discussing how misfortune “caused by a broken covenant between the village and an ancestor” had to be made right by the sacrifice of a “spotless white sheep.”<sup>19</sup> Kisare’s studies at the Mennonite Theological College beginning in 1963 affected his understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture. He took classes in African Traditional Religion with Don Jacobs, an American missionary who had just received his Ph.D. in anthropology.<sup>20</sup> Kisare wrote,

Through these classes I came to put all ethnic religion on one level, whether it be Nilotic, Bantu, Swiss-German, or Jewish – the lot of them are only guides to life in terms of the insights of people’s ancestors. All of them tie people up in ethnic regulations which are a barrier to the discovery of freedom in Jesus. Salvation is not found in ethnic religion, although ethnic religion may point the way to salvation. Salvation is found only through the blood sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. This same saving blood pushes over the ethnic walls which separate one people from another. Jesus’ sacrifice provides the linkage which makes all peoples one new people.<sup>21</sup>

With his sympathetic portrayal of his Luo childhood, Kisare presented his cultural heritage as just as valuable or worthy as the Swiss-German cultural heritage of the American missionaries.

Kisare’s autobiography also described the American missionaries’ “colonial mentality.”<sup>22</sup> Kisare spent three years (1936-1939) at the Mennonite mission school.

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Dorothy Smoker, *Revolutionary Love* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, 1983). See also Derek Petersen, “Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya,” *Research in African Literatures* 37, 3 (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 16-24.

<sup>18</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 16-20, 24-27. Kisare’s ethnic heritage is Luo, but in the Mara region there are many ethnic groups, which is one reason why it was still available for mission work as late as 1934. In this region, a significant distinction is made between Nilotic peoples (including the Luo) and the Bantu peoples (including most others).

<sup>19</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 103; Don and Anna Ruth Jacobs, interview with author, August 17, 2010, Lancaster.

<sup>21</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 73.

Although the mission had two pick-up trucks, each school term he and his wife and baby were expected to make the tough two-day, 38-mile hike to the Bible school from their home at Shirati.<sup>23</sup> Until student housing was built, three of the African students and their wives were expected to share the car garage. Two couples slept on the roof of the tool shed installed in half the garage, while Kisare and his wife and baby slept in the bed of the pick-up truck that took up all the remaining space. If the truck wasn't back by bedtime, the Kisares didn't have a bed, and if it returned dirty from hunting, they had to clean it first.<sup>24</sup>

Kisare pointed out that the colonial mentality affected missionary thinking about African culture. He argued that the assumption that Africans needed to become Western affected the missionary presentation of Christianity and its relationship to African Traditional Religion:

Up to this time [1963] the missionary approach to our African heritage was to say that it was all savagedom, *ushenzi*. There was no effort to connect the gospel message to our traditional faith. It wasn't only the Mennonite missionaries who swept all of that aside. Very few missionaries of any other denomination looked seriously at Africa's traditional faith. This was part of the colonial mind-set about Africa. Trustingly, we accepted the missionaries' assessment of our traditional beliefs, and we actually thought that as Christians we had cleansed ourselves of all traditional influences.<sup>25</sup>

This mentality also reinforced the missionary control of leadership positions and decision-making in the mission and church. The missionaries organized church councils on each mission station to make decisions on issues in each of the church districts. Although Africans participated in these councils through church elections, the missionaries still set the overall policy at yearly conferences where mission officers were elected. No Africans were allowed to attend these meetings or see the reports, and the language of the meetings was English, which the missionaries had refused to teach the Africans.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most difficult effects of the "colonial mentality" for Kisare personally was the missionaries' limit on education for Africans. Kisare, along with the other students at the Mennonite mission school, was hoping to continue his education, "but the missionaries wouldn't budge on this point. They had no interest in giving us an education beyond the ability to read, write, and do simple sums. Preaching the gospel was the mission's objective, period."<sup>27</sup> Missionaries thought that three or four years of elementary school was "all that was necessary for a 'native' to

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<sup>23</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>25</sup> Kisare *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p.103.

<sup>26</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 68.

be a good church worker.”<sup>28</sup> To Kisare, it felt like the Mennonite missionaries were preventing Africans from reaching European colonial standards, which enabled them to keep Africans out of their “village.”<sup>29</sup>

Kisare emphasized that the problems caused by the “colonial mentality” led to division between the American missionaries and the Africans. The missionaries had power resulting from their “education, money, and equipment. They not only had these things; they knew how to get them. We wanted these things too.”<sup>30</sup> Not only were missionaries and Africans separated, but various Luo-speaking extended families were divided too as they competed with each other to access the power of the missionaries. By 1942, eight years after the arrival of the missionaries, things were not going well:

Elam Stauffer, our bishop, was an alert leader. He knew that things were not going well in the church. He knew that as a missionary he was far away from us. His leadership was broken. He knew we were gossiping about each other, that we were full of hypocrisy, that there was sin among us, that there was no love in the church. He couldn’t help the situation. We couldn’t help him.<sup>31</sup>

However, the problems caused by sin did not have the final word. In the 1940s, revival swept across Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya, reaching most Protestant missions in what became known as the East African Revival.<sup>32</sup> And in 1942, this revival transformed the Mennonites in Tanzania. Kisare saw these events as the touchstone of his life and made the Revival the climax of his narrative.<sup>33</sup> At the Shirati station in Tanzania, the arrival of Revival was dramatic:

[A] great cry burst from every heart. In a moment the whole church was filled with weeping. It was as when you strike a match to petrol: suddenly with a great whoosh the whole congregation was struck down! It was like the explosion when the sizzling fuse ignites dynamite, whoom! It was like the cry at the death of a king, everyone in a moment weeping out of the empty lostness of his soul. “Woe, woe is me! For I am undone.”<sup>34</sup>

Weeping was followed by a time of confession, forgiveness, and being set free as everyone “felt Jesus’ great love for us. The blood of his sacrifice on the cross took

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<sup>28</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 74. See George Ronald Anchak, “An Experience in the Paradox of Indigenous Church Building: A History of the Eastern Mennonite Mission in Tanganyika, 1934-1961” (dissertation, 1975) for the missiological ideas the American missionaries brought with them.

<sup>29</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>30</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> For a scholarly introduction to the East African Revival, see Kevin Ward, “The East African Revival of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Search for an Evangelical African Christianity,” in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008), pp. 365-387.

<sup>33</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 78.

away the sin and jealousy and pride and self-righteousness that had made us enemies of each other, that had kept us from working together.”<sup>35</sup>

The effects of the Revival were as dramatic as its arrival: “We on the Shirati station set about straightening up our lives both among ourselves, African and African, and between ourselves and the missionaries. It was a time of great joy and freedom.”<sup>36</sup> During this time, both Africans and Americans were transformed. Kisare described the change he saw in Bishop Elam Stauffer:

God’s light from heaven shone on him and he saw his Swiss-German self-righteousness. He saw that the way to freedom is to repent of his self-righteousness. He saw that the blood of Jesus from that sacrifice on the cross can set people free, bringing them into a new relationship with God and with each other. Our bishop, Elam Stauffer, came back to us at Shirati changed. He was a free man. He saw us differently from the way he had seen us before.<sup>37</sup>

Kisare emphasized that Jesus’ sacrifice brought all people together in a new way. Americans and Africans, Bantu and Nilotic peoples, as well as Luo-speaking families who previously considered themselves members of only their fathers’ villages experienced new fellowship. This fellowship extended beyond Mennonite country. Through the Revival, Mennonites became connected with Christians across denominations and across East Africa. Kisare rejoiced that “everywhere... we were recognized as brothers of the same new village. It was wonderful to go to a place where you had never been before and to be welcomed as dear, honored relatives.”<sup>38</sup>

Kisare explained that the “Holy Spirit gave us the insight that... it was sin which kept us concerned only with our own earthly families, our ethnic villages. The Holy Spirit showed us that Jesus’ sacrifice made it possible for all of us to be brothers and sisters in the same village.”<sup>39</sup> This insight applied to both Americans and Africans. As Kisare and the American Mennonite bishop, Elam Stauffer, came to love, respect, and honor each other, their new identity in Christ relativized each individual’s ethnic heritage:

It was only possible because of Jesus’ blood that Elam Stauffer and I were able to recognize each other. Without that sacrifice he was nothing to me. If he was just an ethnic Mennonite holding to the ways of his Mennonite ancestors, holding to his Swiss-German heritage, then he was no different from what I was when I held to the ways of Kisare’s village. My ethnic heritage was as rich and meaningful as his. An ethnic heritage may be a blessing to us. But there is no salvation there, no new village, no church. Ethnicity alone leaves us separated from God and from each other. It is only through Jesus’ sacrifice that we can become sons of God

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<sup>35</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 79

<sup>36</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 77

<sup>38</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 82

<sup>39</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 81.

and can live within his blessing. It is only through Jesus' sacrifice that we can call each other brother.<sup>40</sup>

The effects of Revival were obvious. However, they did not completely eliminate the effects of the "colonial mentality" that had served to separate the Africans and American missionaries in harmful ways.<sup>41</sup> For example, the lack of early missionary commitment to education led to some of Kisare's darkest days even after the Revival. Because the missionaries had not allowed him to pursue further schooling, he was unable to become a certified teacher after World War II, when education standards were raised. He was unable to pass, despite private study, the Standard Eight exam, which would have qualified him to receive training for the teacher certification now required by the government. Without certification Kisare was no longer eligible to be a teacher, which had been his profession and identity up to that point. This was a devastating period for Kisare, who then left Shirati in 1949 to teach at a backwater bush school for eight months. However, it was there that he discerned a call from God to full-time ministry, which shaped the rest of his life.<sup>42</sup>

The revival period spilled over into the nationalist era which included the journey from a mission church to an independent church of which Kisare became the first bishop beginning in 1966.<sup>43</sup> About this transition, Kisare wrote,

In 1960 freedom was in the air. The United Nations was pushing England to give us our independence. People began to think in radically different ways. The church too would become independent. Africans would become responsible to administer the church's programs. There was even talk of an African bishop. These were new and exciting ideas. They were also sober ideas because the future was upon us, and no one had been getting ready for the future.<sup>44</sup>

While Kisare had the pastoral experience and theological training, the American missionaries had not adequately prepared him for the administrative responsibilities. It was on this point that Kisare came closest to criticizing the missionaries in the post-Revival period:

Looking back now on those years [at the Bible School], I praise the missionaries for putting the emphasis at the right place. But I think the emphasis on evangelism would have been strengthened if they would have more seriously worked at teaching English and administration. The main skill we teachers developed in the students was preaching. Building up the church requires skills and gifts in addition to preaching.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 82

<sup>41</sup> See also Anne Marie Stoner-Eby, "Effects and Limits of the East African Revival on the Mennonite Mission in Colonial Tanzania, 1930s-1950s," presented at the Conference on Faith and History, October 2010, Newburg, OR.

<sup>42</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>43</sup> Although Kisare began his duties immediately upon his election as bishop in February 1966, he wasn't ordained until January 1967 (Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 107).

<sup>44</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 102.

<sup>45</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 102.

During Kisare's bishopric, the church expanded into Kenya, and became established in Tanzania's Mara region, as well as in Mwanza, Biharianulo, Tabora, Arusha and Dar es Salaam.<sup>46</sup> However, Kisare found his "greatest fulfillment" as bishop not in administration but in evangelism:

My greatest joy has always been in seeing men and women come into right relationship with God. I am always looking and praying for God's breaking into our congregations through the Holy Spirit bringing men and women into a right relationship with each other and with God. This is why I never tire being on the road, spending endless numbers of weekends visiting the churches, preaching and teaching the Word.<sup>47</sup>

During trips taken for his demanding duties as bishop, Kisare experienced recurring attacks of pain and pressure in his chest which made breathing extremely difficult.<sup>48</sup> In 1974, he finally experienced healing at the hands Edmond John, brother to the Tanzanian Anglican archbishop in Dar es Salaam.<sup>49</sup> Kisare's healing freed him to lead an ethnically diverse group of church leaders from North America and the many ethnic groups of the Mara Region.<sup>50</sup> However, the challenges of heading a large church organization were a source of ongoing stress. Kisare had to manage big plans and limited funds, the expectations of church members, the incorporation of young people, and international relationships with institutions in the United States and missionaries in Tanzania. Kisare coped with his "problems and difficulties" and his "frustrations" by remembering Jesus' sacrifice for him on the cross and the examples of Paul, who was unafraid to confess his weaknesses, and King David, who held on to God as his fortress amidst all the difficulties he had as king.<sup>51</sup>

Kisare oversaw the transition from a church where American missionaries were in charge to one where these missionaries served under the leadership of Africans. Patience was required because Kisare did not want to lose his relationship with the missionaries, nor the connection with the wider body of Christ that they represented. He wrote, "We cannot be isolated. No part of the world belongs exclusively to only one ethnic group. We must learn from each other."<sup>52</sup> He also reflected on the difficulties a frustrated missionary could cause for the African church:

A frustrated missionary makes us uneasy because missionaries are such powerful people. They write letters to their friends and to the agencies supporting our work here. They can influence how our overseas partners see us. When missionaries are so frustrated, we cannot reason with them anymore. They see things only their own way. If there are many missionaries in one place, they can form a power bloc. None of us are

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<sup>46</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 110.

<sup>47</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 115-117.

<sup>49</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 115-124.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Shenk, "When Jesus Confronted Zedekia Kisare," *MM* (December 1999), pp. 18-19.

<sup>51</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 154.

<sup>52</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 148.

present at their get-togethers, a symbol to us of their exclusivity. So they decide what to do, and they then expect us to do things their way... Such a situation is very difficult and requires great patience because if we react rashly, then our overseas partners will more easily listen to their missionaries than they will listen to us.<sup>53</sup>

By laying out for his American audience the challenge that working with missionaries could pose for the new African church, Kisare did not intend to discourage them from coming. Rather, he was trying to sensitize them to potential problems and point to a positive way forward.

In addition to the challenges, Kisare also discussed one of the opportunities he received as bishop that he particularly appreciated: the opportunity to travel.<sup>54</sup> Kisare remarked, “I love to travel to see new places and to discover how people in different cultures do things.”<sup>55</sup> In addition to his numerous trips to the US, Kisare attended Mennonite World Conference assemblies in The Netherlands and Brazil. He also visited Anabaptist/Mennonite churches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Somalia.<sup>56</sup> Kisare was particularly impressed by the church in Ethiopia. He found the young people there especially “alight with the glory of God’s Holy Spirit within them.”<sup>57</sup> During his first visit to the US, along with a Tanzanian preacher and furloughed American missionary, he went “everywhere preaching the good news of God’s saving grace,” and rejoiced in bringing the Revival message to the sending church.<sup>58</sup>

Kisare’s life story provides a window onto the struggles and accomplishments of a twentieth-century African church leader and illuminates his efforts to build not only a local church but a global church as well. By orienting his autobiography toward an American audience and centering it on the Revival, Kisare was expressing his aspirations for a global fellowship characterized by authentic collaboration and communion that surpassed ethnic identity. Kisare’s life encompassed the history of the first sixty-five years of the Mennonite Church in Tanzania. He helped build the first Mennonite missionary house and stood in the lake translating for Bishop Stauffer during the first Mennonite baptismal service. He personally experienced the negative effects of the missionaries’ refusal to give him more than an elementary education or teach him English. He was one of the first four Tanzanians ordained pastor in 1950 and part of the first class at the newly established Mennonite Theological College in 1963, later becoming its first African principal. He

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<sup>53</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 148

<sup>54</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, pp. 127-139.

<sup>55</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> The Anabaptist churches in the Congo are mainly Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren. In Zimbabwe, they are mainly Brethren in Christ.

<sup>57</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> For more on how the East African Revival spread to Mennonites in North America, see John C. Yoder, “David W. Shenk – Missionary, Professor, ‘Saved One,’ Friend of Muslims,” in *Mennonites and Post-Colonial African Studies*, ed. John M. Janzen, Harold F. Miller, and John C. Yoder (New York: Routledge, 2021), 40–50.

served as the first African bishop from 1966 till 1993, overseeing the growth of the church from 7,000 members to 24,000 members.<sup>59</sup> Through it all, he clung to the moment in 1942 when he experienced the power of revival to transform relationships between Americans and Africans, Bantu and Luo through the grace of Jesus' saving blood.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For Kisare's retirement date, see MM April 1993, p. 13. For the statistics, see MM January 1968 and MM March 1991.

<sup>60</sup> Kisare, *Mennonite of Kiseru*, p. 153.



## **Mbele Manteka, Daniel**

**1915-2011**

### **Communauté des Églises des Frères mennonites au Congo (CEFMC) Democratic Republic of Congo**

Daniel Mbele Manteka was born on October 25, 1915 in Swa-Yamvu Kitiba. He was the fourth son of Manda Manteka and Yinda, from the territory of Kasongo-Lunda in the Bandundu province (now Kwango province) in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Mbele Manteka believed in God and was baptized in 1939 at Kimvwamba, the Protestant mission of the Communauté Évangélique des Frères Mennonites du Congo (CEFMC) in Panzi. In 1940 he married Louise Mayinga and the couple received the nuptial blessing. Mbele Manteka and his wife had nine children.

Mbele Manteka completed his primary education in 1937 at the Catholic school in Panzi. He then attended the American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM) teacher training school in Panzi. He also attended the AMBM pastoral school. He began his ministry in 1948 at the Mbandu mission in Kisadi, where he was in charge. In 1955 he was consecrated, thus becoming the first ordained pastor in the area. Thereafter, he exercised a pastoral and teaching ministry.

When Mbele Manteka began his ministry, the AMBM missionaries saw that he was capable, because in his area he worked hard, well, and with integrity, even though he was alone. The missionaries trusted him because he was a man of great understanding on all levels.

Mbele Manteka became a missionary among the Baluwa-Bayaka people in the area of Swa-Tenda and Kizamba in the Holo tribe who came from Angola. He also established more than twenty-five Protestant churches for the CEFMC (4th community of the Church of Christ in Congo). He even penetrated the Kasa area for the expansion of God's work.

Mbele Manteka suffered in his work of expanding and planting churches. He risked fierce animals such as elephants, leopards, lions, snakes, and others. Sometimes he got sick while traveling to evangelize. But God protected him.

In 1972, he relocated the CEFMC Protestant mission from Kisadi to Mbandu, where it remains to this day. He did this because Mbandu is more central than Kisadi. After planting the first church in Kizamba, he called Rev. Abraham Moyo Boloko to lead this part of the Kizamba area as pastor. Mbele Manteka was accompanied by Mr. Roy (a white non-Mennonite Canadian missionary).

Mbele Manteka sent several people for theological training, such as Ngwesi Pelo, Séraphine Nduwa Kimwanga, Ndala Pasi, Maurice Bilembi Batumenga, and others. He also contributed to education by opening elementary schools in the region. When he did all this, he was visited, accompanied, and encouraged by Arnold Prieb, John Esau, and other missionaries of the Mennonite Brethren Mission (MB Mission – the new name of the AMBM).

Mbele Manteka participated in the opening of the Mankete Institute at the CEFMC Mbandu Protestant Mission, and the opening of the Nzasi-Mwadi Bible

Institute under the management of John Esau. He was a member of the CEFMC Central Executive Committee. He became the chief representative of the CEFMC in Baluwa-Bayaka.

As a father, Mbele Manteka was gentle and easily understood the concerns of his children. He did not like his children to be far from the word of God. He required all his children to be Christians, to pray and to share the same faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and this was successful. He guided his children in good ways, and one of his children became a pastor in a CEFMC church.

In his spiritual life, Mbele Manteka was worthy of the word of God. He supported the apostle Paul's recommendation in 1 Timothy 3:1-5. He wished no harm on anyone. He advised others to follow his good example. Before he died, he called Pastor Matthew Malunga, blessed him, and gave him his rod. Now Pastor Malunga has been consecrated as a servant of God and is working in Angola.

Mbele Manteka was firm about the word of God. He did not want anyone to joke with his ministry. If anyone (such as government officials) took his ministry lightly, he would curse them, and the effects would be apparent.

Pastor Daniel Mbele Manteka died in 2011 at the age of 96, following an illness.

Michel Ardan Kayibanda Nkandi

## **Sources:**

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This article, received in 2021, is the product of research by Michel Ardan Kayibanda Nkandi, a third-year undergraduate student at the Université chrétienne de Kinshasa (UCKin – Christian University of Kinshasa) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, under the supervision of Dr. Anicka Fast.

## **Mbombo wa Tshipongo, Esther**

**1936–2006**

**Communauté évangélique mennonite (CEM)**

**Democratic Republic of Congo**

Esther Mbombo wa Tshipongo was a strong and generous woman whose dedication to the church sometimes made her the object of criticism and conflict. Someone who knew her said, “Her only response was to suppress her tears and devote herself to reconciliation, even if she wasn’t at fault.”

Many people remember Mbombo wa Tshipongo, who passed away in 2006 at the age of seventy, because she was an influential figure in both the Evangelical Mennonite Church (Communauté évangélique mennonite – CEM) and the ecumenical group Church of Christ in Congo (Église du Christ au Congo – ECC).

She was brought up in a Presbyterian family in East Kasai and married Pierre Tshiamala. Shortly after their marriage they moved to Bujumbura, Burundi, where the first five of their nine children were born. They left Bujumbura in 1962 and moved back to Mbuji Mayi in the newly independent Congo.

In Mbuji Mayi, Mbombo wa Tshipongo continued to attend a Presbyterian church until 1967, when the couple bought their own property. It happened to be near Sangilayi, the first congregation of what is now the CEM.

Mbombo wa Tshipongo was intrigued by two things about the CEM. First, she had enrolled her children in the CEM secondary school, and she liked the daily worship services at the school. Second, she valued the Bible teachings of Pastor Mathieu Kazadi at the Sangilayi congregation, which she attended sometimes because her former church was far from her new home. She decided to become a member of Sangilayi and to be baptized according to Anabaptist practice. Mbombo wa Tshipongo was baptized, along with those of her children who had attained the age of reason, and she became an active member of the congregation.

Mbombo wa Tshipongo immediately joined the choir and amazed people not only with her singing prowess but also with the generosity of her service. She was a woman whose personal circumstances were difficult, but she took on responsibility for welcoming new people in church, often by presenting them with a chicken that she provided herself. The church authorities quickly gave her responsibility for congregational protocol. For several years she attended to welcoming and seating people, cleaning the church, and taking care of children during services.

Several years later Mbombo wa Tshipongo founded and directed a woman’s chorale. This choir still exists five years after her death. When she was still young, she became president of the women of Sangilayi and then of all the CEM women of East Kasai. A woman of unshakable faith, she did her utmost to devote herself to the cause of women who came to her in time of trouble. In happy or sad developments, she was often the first to respond. She always made it a point to be present at gatherings, whether they were in town or far from town.

Mbombo wa Tshipongo was a fervent evangelist and advocate for Anabaptism. She brought a number of women to the church, including some former Presbyterians who recognized their affinity with Anabaptist teachings, thanks to her teaching. She sustained and encouraged the faith of her peers, telling them, “I exhort you, my children, you who have studied more than I, to dedicate yourselves to the service of the Lord, because it could happen, one never knows, that I could leave this place or leave this world.”

All of this activity came at the price of some friction in her own household – with her husband, Pierre, his family members, and with other women. Because of the time she dedicated to the Lord’s service, her frequent absences and late arrivals at home, some called her stupid or unfaithful. But Mbombo wa Tshipongo never conceded. She always said, “God is everything to me.”

On one occasion she came home late at night after being delayed on the job. Some of her group decided to accompany her, in order to protect her from harassment by her husband. After they vainly appealed to Pierre, who refused to talk to his wife or open the door for her, Mbombo wa Tshipongo kindly sent away her defenders, telling them, “If Pierre won’t open up for me, I’ll spend the night in front of the door.”

Whatever worries, criticism, false accusations, and insults her husband, his family, and others subjected her to, Mbombo wa Tshipongo stayed firm and persuasive. Her faith radiated throughout the neighborhood, in the church, and in her household. To justify her comings and goings, she would retort to Pierre’s relatives, “I do everything that is needed for the family. I feed you, I educate your children. Beyond everything that I do for the family, I have the duty to work for the Lord as well.” She eventually led her husband and two of her sons to Christ.

Mbombo wa Tshipongo was an indefatigable mobilizer of women. Her competence in leading women led to her elevation to the rank of vice president of the women of CEM. These new duties once again brought her the approval of the women and confirmed her as an established Christian. She set herself to evangelizing and exhorting the women of East Kasai, reminding them that she would not be with them forever.

Mbombo wa Tshipongo was preoccupied by the quest for peace within the CEM, as it was torn apart by leadership conflicts between Pastor Zacharie Nkumbi and Pastor André Ntumba. She tried in 1993 to reconcile the two. Although she was roughed up by partisans of the former when they invaded the church, she didn’t hesitate to forgive her abusers during the reconciliation meetings organized by CEM in 1998 and 2006. She was a partisan of nonviolence and never returned evil for evil, whether in her official duties or her married life.

The authorities of the East Kasai Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) asked her to join the Thousand Voices, an ecumenical chorale that brings together women from all Protestant groups. There, she played the role of hymn conductor. Her influence was so great that she is still remembered in all large church gatherings.

But Mbombo wa Tshipongo’s greatest contribution to the ECC was a lesson of justice and truth, which unfortunately caused her biological brothers and sisters to

reject her. One of her brothers was in a leadership conflict with the then-president of the East Kasai ECC which also involved the Presbyterian church. Because of this, her brothers demanded that she leave the Thousand Voices chorale. But she refused, saying, “If we really are Christians, we can never divide ourselves based on ‘tribal differences.’”

Esther Mbombo wa Tshipongo passed away in 2006. Benjamin Mubenga, president of CEM, recalls how much she is still missed. Noticing that no food had been provided for participants in a recent denominational meeting, he declared, “This lack of food makes me think of Mbombo wa Tshipongo, who never spared the effort to mobilize women to provide food in such a situation.”

Jean Félix Chimbalanga

This biography is reprinted with minor changes, with permission from Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, from Jean Felix Chimbalanga, “I’ll Spend the Night in Front of the Door,” in *The Jesus Tribe: Grace Stories from Congo’s Mennonites 1912-2012: A Project of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission*, ed. Rod Hollinger-Janzen, Nancy J. Myers, and Jim Bertsche (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012), 176–79. The original article can be found at

[https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/images/d/d4/I’ll\\_spend\\_the\\_night\\_in\\_front\\_of\\_the\\_door.pdf](https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/images/d/d4/I’ll_spend_the_night_in_front_of_the_door.pdf)

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## **Matungulu, Givule Floribert**

**1945-2019**

**Communauté des Eglises des Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC)  
Democratic Republic of Congo**

Floribert Matungulu Givule was born in 1945 in the Katembo Kikhomba area north of Mungindu, in the Kwilu district, formerly Bandundu province. His father Kulutu-A-Giwangwa was a farmer in the village of Kibo, a village with a Protestant religious population. His mother's name was A Gukumina-A-Nzovu. Matungulu was the youngest of her five children. Matungulu lost his mother when he was five years old. He was raised by his aunt Kotshi-A-Giwangwa, the younger sister of Kulutu-A-Giwangwa.

Matungulu received his primary education at the Protestant school of the American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM), now the CEFMC school in Kibo.

He was advised to continue the rest of the classes from third to seventh grade at the AMBM mission in Kafumba.

Matungulu made the decision to accept Jesus Christ in Kafumba, following the preaching of Rev. Ndjimbo Timothée on the passages of Haggai 1:13 ("I am with you, says the Lord") and Jeremiah 42:11 ("for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand"). He was baptized in the Kwilu River in Kafumba, on December 12, 1958, by Rev. Ndjimbo Timothée.

Matungulu was a docile, but also courageous child. During his childhood, the Mulelist rebellion broke out in the Kwilu region (1963-1965). One day, Matungulu went fishing in the Kwilu River. Suddenly, he heard bombs exploding and fled. Although he could not swim, he was given a spirit of courage. He decided to cross the Kwilu River, and God helped him reach the other side. When he arrived at the village of Katembo Kikhomba, he found the inhabitants fleeing the rebellion. Matungulu's father took the family to hide in the forest. As they left, they encountered the rebels, but by God's grace the rebels spared them and showed them another way. They were then able to hide in the deep forest.

After the rebellion, Matungulu continued his secondary education in the AMBM school, now Mbandu, in Kikwit where he obtained his state diploma in 1970. He got married in a religious ceremony in Kikwit on August 22, 1976, to Alphonsine Munganga, now a pastor of the CEFMC. The two spouses were always very attached to each other. The couple had four sons: Guy Matungulu, Muller Matungulu, Julie Matungulu and Joël Matungulu. In 1972, Matungulu was assigned as a teacher at the CEFMC Bumbu elementary school in Kinshasa. He was the pioneer of the Léopard primary school in Camp Luka (now Londzo) in the Commune of Ngaliema in Kinshasa.

In 1982, Matungulu understood the importance of doing higher studies at the Institut supérieur théologique de Kinshasa (ISTK), now the Université chrétienne de Kinshasa (UCKin). He did a preparatory year at the Faculté de théologie protestante du Zaïre, now the Université protestante du Congo (UPC). In 1984, he obtained an undergraduate degree in theology from the ISTK.

At the end of his undergraduate studies at ISTK, he returned to Kikwit, where he was assigned as chaplain to the Mbandu Institute. In 1985, he returned to Kinshasa for graduate studies at the Faculté de théologie protestante. During this time, he taught at the Centre universitaire de missiologie (CUM). In 1986, he obtained his *Licence* in Protestant Theology and became an associate professor of higher education at the Faculté de théologie protestante. He was ordained to the pastoral ministry on November 28, 1988.

Matungulu had other ambitions in his ministry. In 1992 he went to study at Rhodes University in Graham Town, South Africa, and in 1994 he received a master's degree. He then taught at Wesley International Bible College in Nigeria for two years. Returning to Kinshasa in 1996, Matungulu began his doctorate at UPC. In 2003, Matungulu reached the pinnacle of his studies by obtaining his doctorate in theology.

Rev. Dr. Matungulu taught at the Faculty of Evangelical Theology at UCKin from 2004 until his death, and was dean of the faculty until 2018. He was also a visiting professor at the l'École internationale d'évangélisation (International School of Evangelism), now the Centre universitaire de missiologie (CUM). From 2016 to 2019, Matungulu was in put in charge of scientific research in Bandundu by the then Minister of Higher Education and Universities of the DRC, Théophile Mbemba. He exercised this responsibility mainly in the city of Kikwit. In 2005, he was secretary of the Partnership Council of the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) in Congo, a partnership body between Mennonite churches in the DRC and those in North America and Europe. He was also pastor in charge of the Paroisse Missionnaire de Kintambo (a parish of the CEFMC) in Kinshasa from 1987 until his death. Matungulu died in July 2019 after a short illness.

Matungulu is remembered for his Mennonite spirit. Calm and gentle, he was a peacemaker, a unifier and a comforter in his community. He played a key role in some family reconciliations, such as promoting peace between Kikweta Mawa Wabala and his siblings. He loved his community, encouraged responsible partnership with the mother churches, and was the bearer of solutions that respected Mennonite doctrine. He contributed to the re-establishment of community structures on new foundations, especially by helping with the redrafting of the community's legal texts. During a conflict in 2004 within the executive committee of the CEFMC between the outgoing legal representative (Rev. Ndunda Gilbert) and the newly elected legal representative (Rev. Pelende Tshinyam), he served as an advisor to Rev. Ndunda in favor of the unity of the community. Finally, he left a legacy of many writings and trained leaders at all levels.

Malebe Mubwayele Abdon

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This article, received in 2022, is the fruit of research by Malebe Mubwayele Abdon. He holds a DEA (Diplôme d'études approfondies) in Evangelical Theology, and is a lecturer at the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of the Université chrétienne de Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.



# The Mennonite Brethren Church in the Congo

by Jean-Claude Kikweta A Mawa Wabala and  
Maurice Matsitsa-N'singa (2010)<sup>61</sup>

The history of the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of the Congo (CEPMC) begins with the story of an individual from North America who obeyed the call to serve God in the Congo. The story soon becomes intertwined with the stories of many Congolese who served the Lord Jesus Christ in environments full of political, social, and economic struggle. In the past several decades the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been characterized by numerous political conflicts and wars. It is estimated that more than five million people lost their lives between 1998 and 2007 because of wars.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile the whole world watched the situation with seemingly total indifference. In spite of the difficult conditions under which the Congolese live, the CEPMC has become one of the largest national conferences within the global Anabaptist family of faith today. The factors that have contributed to this fast growth include Bible and Christian literature translation, training of village evangelists, medical work, and the establishment of Bible, primary, and secondary schools.

The history of the CEPMC began through the commitment and determination of North American missionaries to bring the Good News to peoples previously unreached by the gospel. In the early twentieth century, a desire arose among North American Mennonite Brethren to travel to Africa to proclaim the gospel. These missionaries faced many difficulties. In some cases, missionary organizations and associations were reluctant to support them. The risk of disease, death, and a hostile natural environment made missionary organizations reluctant to send their candidates to Africa to die. In the face of this reluctance, some Mennonite Brethren missionaries decided to work for other agencies that were prepared to face the realities of Africa. Aaron and Ernestina Janzen became the first such Mennonite Brethren missionaries to go to the Congo to proclaim the Good News.

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<sup>61</sup> An earlier version of this chapter first appeared as Kikweta A Mawa Wabala, Jean-Claude, and Maurice Matsitsa-N'singa. "The Mennonite Brethren Church in the Congo." In *The Mennonite Brethren Church around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, edited by Abe J. Dueck, 150–71. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010.  
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<sup>62</sup> Benjamin Coghlan et al., "Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis" (International Rescue Committee, 2007),  
<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/661/2006-7congomortalitysurvey.pdf>.

## The Pioneer Period (1913-1942): Aaron and Ernestine Janzen

The Janzens came from the Mountain Lake and Carson Mennonite Brethren churches in Minnesota. They sensed a call to bring the gospel of God to the unreached peoples of Africa. The Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions was unwilling to become involved in this part of the African continent where other missionaries had already died, especially in Cameroon. Therefore, the Janzens accepted an appointment under a new Mennonite missionary association, the Congo Inland Mission (CIM). The CIM sent them to East Kasai Province, where they joined other missionaries who were already working there. The Janzens left the United States in November 1912 and arrived in Kasai in January 1913.<sup>63</sup> They served the CIM faithfully and gained valuable experience in missionary work in Africa.

During their missionary service in the Congo from 1913 to 1922, the Janzens remained in close contact with Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States, especially those in Mountain Lake and Carson. They hoped to leave the CIM to begin a work with the Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1920 the Janzens requested permission from the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America to leave CIM and create a new Mennonite Brethren missionary station. Unfortunately, the Conference did not consent to the Janzens' proposal, despite the various reports and appeals showing the urgent need for American churches to bring the gospel to the Congo. The Janzens did not give up, however. At the end of their assignment with the CIM, Aaron Janzen took his pilgrim's staff and went to other parts of the Congo to search for a place to bring the gospel and begin an independent missionary work.

The Janzens chose the western part of the Kasai province. Helped by the Luba people, they arrived in Kikandji in 1922 and began a first mission station. Several local people became actively involved with the work of church planting. These included Ndjimbo Kubala Timothée, Kayembe, Nzelenga Philippe, Nganga Paul, Jacques Kapumba, Senzele, and others who joined the Janzens, first as students and later as collaborators.

Kikandji, which was the Janzens' first missionary station, was not the ideal location for missionary work in the Congo, and so they had to find another location. They chose the site of Kafumba, ten kilometers from Kikandji. Several factors determined the selection of this new site for the headquarters, including the rich vegetation and soil, the potential to carry out high-yield agricultural activities, and the navigability of the Kwilu River for transporting agricultural and commercial products. The construction of the Kafumba station started in 1923 and ended in 1924, when the Janzens and all the Congolese workers left the Kikandji station to settle in the new one.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa* (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1947), 9.

<sup>64</sup> Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 13.

Numerous tribes occupied the Kafumba area, including the Pende, Mbala, Songo, and Kwese. Because of the Janzens' efforts, the new station became a major missionary center and attracted many people in the region. The people benefited from many social and religious services provided by the missionaries. The Janzens built classrooms for the primary school and a Bible school to train future leaders in order to bring the gospel to nearby villages. They also built a health center, a maternity clinic, and a printing press for the production of biblical literature. Everything needed to facilitate the well-being and development of the population was realized on the Kafumba station.

As previously indicated, the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America was not willing to accept Kafumba as an official church mission field, although individuals could make donations that were transferred to the Janzens by the conference treasurer. Faced with this situation, the Janzens were obliged to look for their own financial support. Some support came from friends in Mountain Lake, Carson, and other places. In addition, they initiated agricultural programs and sold the products to help pay for the missionary work. The Kafumba site, with its fertile soil, was suitable for agriculture.<sup>65</sup>

The primary school and Bible school were very important parts of the Janzens' program. The purpose of the schools was to train local people to read and write. Those who were chosen to study at the Bible institute became helpers in the proclamation of the gospel. It was a very limited training. The language of education was Kikongo ya Leta.

The early Mennonite Brethren mission work in Congo functioned within the context of the Belgian colonial system. Protestant missions had to ask permission from the colonial state before they could settle in any area. To avoid conflict, the various Protestant missions worked together to assign each a specific area to evangelize. The Catholic Church was allowed to function freely throughout the country, but with zones for each congregation. After the independence of the Congo in 1960, each Protestant community could establish itself wherever it wanted.

The division of territory between the different missions/churches also meant a new strategy for providing social services for the Congolese population. A system of co-management of schools, dispensaries, and hospitals was established. This strategy was critical because the Congolese population was largely rural, and missionaries were very willing to go to remote parts of the country to evangelize.

In the co-management system, the churches were allowed to build schools, dispensaries, and hospitals. The government provided subsidies for building infrastructure, medicine, and school programs, and paid the salaries of teachers, doctors, and nurses. Furthermore, the churches were allowed to teach religious classes based on the confession of faith of the denomination managing the schools. In Congo, religious courses are mandatory, and the government pays the salary of the school chaplain.

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<sup>65</sup> Mawa Wabala Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (C.E.F.M.Z.)" (Masters thesis, Montpellier, Institut Protestant de Théologie, 1977), 89.

Bible translation and the production of Christian literature were effective means of allowing the local people to take evangelism into their own hands. The missionaries could control the evangelism agenda through Bible courses and discipleship training sessions. However, as soon as the Bible and the Christian literature became available in local languages and dialects, the missionaries lost control of the agenda. People could study the Bible in their own way and understand it from their own context.

A literature and translation service was soon opened in Kafumba. The local people were trained to help missionaries translate the Bible (especially the New Testament, but also some portions of the Old Testament), Christian education books, and school textbooks to be used at Kafumba primary and Bible schools. All this was done in order to evangelize people who could only understand or communicate in their local dialects. Congolese individuals, such as Nganga Paul and Ndjimbo Timothée, brought their expertise to this service in their work with Martha Hiebert, who arrived in 1928, and Kathryn Willems, who arrived in 1936. The translation of the New Testament that was begun in 1936 by Ernestina Janzen was sent to America for printing in 1943. Toward the end of the same year, the first copies of the New Testament translated into Kikongo ya Leta were published and distributed in Kafumba.

A health center and a maternity clinic brought much-needed medical care and helped to eradicate some of the endemic diseases in the region. The Janzens set up an orphanage for children in distress. Some prominent church leaders, such as Nganga Paul and Yongo Antoine, were raised in this orphanage.

Aaron Janzen was knowledgeable in agriculture, having learned this from his parents who came from Ukraine. Constrained by the lack of appropriate financial support, he initiated agricultural and horticultural programs to produce coffee, palm nuts and palm oil, and to raise goats. A furniture workshop, a sewing workshop, a brickyard, and a sawmill were established, which created jobs and products to improve daily living conditions.<sup>66</sup>

### **Missionary and Congolese Staff at Work in Kafumba**

A Congolese proverb states that “a single finger cannot wash the whole face.” The Janzens adopted the logic of this proverb. Although they did not receive any support from the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in America, the Janzens had earned the confidence of the brothers and sisters in their home churches. They kept in close contact with the churches in Mountain Lake and Carson, as well as with others who were interested in their work. During their visits to the United

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<sup>66</sup> Kikweta, 92–93; Givule Floribert Matungulu, “Mission Paternalism Factor in Self Reliance of Congo Mennonite Brethren Church,” *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 16 (2008): 17; Anicka Fast, “Let us ‘also work with our hands, so that the Lord’s work may be furthered’: A Disruptive Ecclesial Economy at Kafumba, 1922-1943,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2019): 448–50.

States the Janzens reported about their missionary work in the Congo and requested missionary staff and financial support for their field.

Some fellow church members from the United States responded positively to this call and supported their work. Others volunteered to work as missionaries in the Congo together with the Janzens. About ten missionaries, especially young women, joined the Janzens in Kafumba. Thus there were three categories of workers in Kafumba: missionaries, Congolese trained by missionaries and serving as support staff (teachers, catechists, pastors, specialized workers, nurses, joiners, etc.), and unskilled laborers.

In Kafumba, only missionaries occupied the various management positions. The Congolese were only there as implementing agents. Missionaries who helped the Janzens to expand their work from 1924 to 1943 included the Bendicsons, Elmer Hutchinsons, Abe F. and Mary Kroeker, Elizabeth Lemièrre (a Belgian citizen), Kathryn Willems, Anna Goertzen, Martha Hiebert, and Martha Manz.<sup>67</sup> Missionary couples never remained in Kafumba for lengthy periods of time. This was the case with Abe F. and Mary Kroeker, who spent a short time and then returned to Europe. Mr. Bendicson died in Kikandji when the Hutchinsons had just replaced the Janzens who had gone back to America in 1927 for a furlough. While the Hutchinsons were covering for the Janzens in Kafumba, Mrs. Hutchison died. Therefore, the Janzens had to return hurriedly to Kafumba. The Hutchinsons served with Unevangelized Tribe Missions (UTM), which worked in the Panzi and Kajiji regions. When the Janzens came back, Elmer Hutchinson returned to his station in Panzi.

Aaron Janzen worked extensively with the young missionary women until 1943. Ernestine Janzen died in Kafumba in September 1937. Congolese who helped Aaron Janzen in his work included Ndjimbo Kubala Timothée (the first Congolese Mennonite Brethren pastor to be ordained), Nganga Paul, Senzele Luc, Kufikisa Jean, David Kalama, Katuala Jonathan, Mabaya Jonathan, Kikweta Manasse, Bulamatadi Elie, Lumeya Nzash Gédéon, Kiwoma Jean, Manzumbu Stephan, Muzeba Nkieleb, Malwano Mwemo James, and many others.

## **Main Features of the Church from 1922 to 1943**

The Janzens developed an evangelistic endeavor in order to bring the gospel to unreached peoples. They shaped the work in Kafumba by considering the local population and its needs. During twenty-one years of hard work the reputation of the Kafumba station extended well beyond its borders to other regions. The church expanded because of the vision, ingenuity, experience, sacrificial labor, and determination of the Janzens. The church was mainly established in the rural areas. In their early efforts, the missionaries carefully avoided urban areas, as cities and

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<sup>67</sup> Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa*, 33; Fast, Anicka, "Becoming Global Mennonites: The Politics of Catholicity and Memory in a Missionary Encounter in Belgian Congo, 1905-1939" (PhD. diss., Boston University, 2020), 512.

commercial centers were considered privileged dwelling places for satanic spirits and therefore not conducive to evangelism. The church was largely insulated from the wider world. The curriculum of the primary schools and the Bible school in Kafumba was carefully controlled.

The church was also closely tied to evangelical and Anabaptist/Mennonite biblical values. Missionaries taught Mennonite principles even though the Congolese did not understand all the implications. This is the same issue that exists now. Even today, many Congolese Mennonite Brethren do not know what it means to be Anabaptist or Mennonite, and most are unfamiliar with the history of the CEFMC and its missionary heritage.

The church was also dominated by the spirit of missionary paternalism toward the Congolese. The missionary “father” made all decisions for his “sons,” who were unable to take on any responsibility. The natives of Kafumba accepted this and did not challenge the authority of the missionaries. The constraints of the Belgian colonial administration were also accepted.

The church did not tolerate indigenous customs and traditions because they were considered satanic. Yet this same church practiced separation between Black and White people within the missionary station. There was a neighborhood for Whites and another for Blacks. Nevertheless, the church was full of energy and dynamism because the training that the Congolese managerial staff received gave them an appreciation for the intellectual, psychological, religious, and cultural values provided by the missionaries.

Aaron Janzen and his team faced severe financial difficulties from 1938 and 1943. They frequently asked the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to take full responsibility for the missionary work to prevent it from closing. Thus, in petitions signed in November 1936, October 1938, and March 1943, the missionaries in Kafumba expressed their willingness to hand the missionary work to the conference.<sup>68</sup>

In 1943 Aaron Janzen reported the results of the work in Kafumba as follows: one hundred schools established in one hundred villages and led by more than one hundred teachers, a Bible school established in Kafumba, a health center, a maternity clinic, a literature service for the translation and production of Christian books, two thousand students attending primary schools in Kafumba and surrounding villages, and sixteen hundred active members in Kafumba and surrounding villages.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 77. Editor’s note: Other petitions were made to the MB Conference in 1919, 1927, 1930, and 1940. See Hans Kasdorf, “A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885-1984” (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 1986), 425–530; George W. Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Foreign Missions, Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1952), 138–41; Anicka Fast, “Becoming Global Mennonites: The Politics of Catholicity and Memory,” 493–94.

<sup>69</sup> Board of Foreign Missions, Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Foreign Missions, Africa*, 25, 34, 51, 57–61.

Janzen brought his contribution to this region by training teachers and evangelists, and by improving the infrastructure. He was able to link the gospel to the development of human wellbeing by establishing food self-sufficiency and showing the people that they could sustain themselves by the appropriate use of their resources.

## **A Second Beginning**

In 1933 a missionary couple from Canada, Henry and Anna Bartsch, began a second work in the Bololo region of the Congo, about 450 miles northeast of where the Janzens were working. They began their work under the Africa Missionary Society, an organization that originated with a group connected with the Winkler Bible School in Manitoba, where the Bartsches had been students. Although they spent about a year in Kafumba with the Janzens, they decided to embark on a separate venture along with several other missionaries. Despite the extreme hardships that they encountered, other missionaries joined them and achieved some success in evangelism, education, health, and in literary work. But by the time of World War II most of the missionaries had returned to North America. Renewed efforts were made in the years immediately following the war, after the Africa Mission Society work had been transferred to the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions. The Bololo station was moved to Djongo Sanga in 1946 and then transferred to another mission in 1949.

## **Transfer of Responsibility to the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America**

In 1943, under pressure from many Mennonite Brethren church members in the United States and Canada, the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America finally accepted full responsibility for the work in the Congo. Aaron Janzen handed his work to the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions in order to continue the establishment and expansion of the Mennonite Brethren churches in the Congo. This transfer of Janzen's work certainly brought some important changes in administrative management and overall funding.

First, the status of the church itself changed. It no longer belonged to Aaron Janzen and would no longer be tailored to his personal wishes.

There was also a change of leadership. The American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM), appointed by the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, became responsible for the Congo Church. The AMBM changed the working methods, strategies, and philosophy, setting a new direction and priorities. The top priority was evangelism, and other services were regarded as only supporting this primary objective. Janzen was appointed as the legal representative of this Congo Church. He was employed and paid by AMBM, as were all the other missionaries working in the Congo.

All the funding for the work came from North America. The AMBM took full responsibility for the equipment, finances, and human resources for the work. Many more missionaries came to reinforce the team on the field and to establish other congregations besides Kafumba. The goal was to extend the missionary work beyond Kafumba to regions previously unreached by the Mennonite Brethren. The Kafumba station became the headquarters of the Congo Mennonite Brethren Church and became the nerve center for all the Mennonite Brethren congregations. All evangelistic activity in the Bandundu province was developed and undertaken from Kafumba.

### Expansion (1944-1960)

The General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches continually reassessed its work in the Congo. Over time the AMBM devoted itself to continue and to expand the missionary work beyond Kafumba. To achieve this goal, the AMBM recruited staff and sent them to the Congo. A first wave of missionaries began with the arrival of Susie Brucks in 1944. From 1945 to 1948 other missionaries came to reinforce the work of evangelization. A second wave of missionaries was sent between 1951 and 1959 to reinforce the expansion and the establishment of other congregations in Bandundu.<sup>70</sup> New stations were created at Matende (1945), Kilembe (1947) and Kipungu (1948) in the Kwilu District. Besides these stations, the AMBM inherited stations from other missionary associations that experienced financial difficulties. These included Lusemvu (1951), Gungu (1951), Kajiji (1953) and Panzi (1952).

The Mennonite Brethren missionary outreach expanded from 150 to 450 kilometers around Kafumba and reached the Angolan border. By 1958 there were forty-nine missionaries, eleven Congolese pastors, 276 catechists, and nearly six thousand adult church members.<sup>71</sup> There was a Bible school, an EAP school (*École d'apprentissage pédagogique*), and over two hundred primary schools with a total of eight thousand students.

It is important to note that the missionary work of the AMBM again expanded to include education. The weight of this additional responsibility became heavy and the AMBM applied for subsidies from the colonial government. Therefore, with the help of other Mennonites, a teacher training school was established in Matende in 1953 to meet the state's requirements to receive the subsidies needed for the payment of teachers. This new training institution helped to meet the need for trained Congolese staff persons who were able to teach in the primary schools of the Church. Primary and secondary schools and medical institutions functioned as tools

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<sup>70</sup> A complete list of AMBM missionaries is given by Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 225–35.

<sup>71</sup> Kikweta, "Histoire de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Zaïre (C.E.F.M.Z.)," 119, citing E. M. Braekman, *Histoire du Protestantisme au Congo*, Collection Histoire du protestantisme en Belgique et au Congo belge ; v. 5 (Brussels: Librairie des Éclaireurs Unionistes, 1961), 243–44.



for evangelism. Each year, several hundred students and patients became Christians as a result of the witness of school chaplains, teachers, nurses, and doctors. More recently, many of the patients in the Kajiji hospital established churches in Angola after they returned there. These patients had the advantage of speaking the same language – Chokwe – as the people in the Kajiji region.

The opening of the Bible schools, first in Kafumba and then in Kikwit, Panzi, Nzashi Mwadi, and Kajiji, became an effective method of promoting evangelism. With time, the Mennonite Brethren Church joined the Mennonite Church in establishing a theological school in Kajiji which was later moved to Kinshasa and today is the Université chrétienne de Kinshasa (UCKIN). Graduates from Bible schools were usually willing to serve anywhere, whereas the graduates of theological institutes and universities often refuse to serve in places where social and economic conditions are more difficult. As a result, graduates from theological institutes tended to serve in the cities where they were also assigned to teach in secondary schools. They received additional income that the government pays to teachers and staff of parochial schools.

## **Independence**

The Congo (also known as Zaire and then Democratic Republic of Congo) became independent on 30 June 1960. This major event came unexpectedly and had repercussions for the country's political, economic, religious, and social life, affecting every sector of society. It brought about the Africanization of all positions previously filled by whites. Since the Belgians had not trained Congolese people to manage the country, the sudden advent of independence created political instability and insecurity throughout the country. This situation put the Mennonite Brethren missionaries into a state of fear and insecurity.

From the United States, AMBM instructed missionaries to leave the Congo via Angola in June and July of 1960. In the subsequent absence of the missionaries, the Congolese pastors became responsible for these parishes, despite the fact that they were unprepared for the responsibility of managing the stations and assets. In 1961 some missionaries returned to Congo to take up their responsibilities again. Under the direction of John Kliever, the church headquarters was relocated from Kafumba (where it had been since 1924) to the city of Kikwit. Security was evoked as the reason for the change. American Mennonite Brethren missionaries were no longer eager to stay in the countryside because it was less secure. Thus, American Mennonite Brethren missionaries began to settle in urban areas. Buildings for the AMBM's headquarters and the administrative center were constructed in Kikwit.

## **A Church with two Heads**

The Congolese Mennonite Brethren were in contact with other churches in which Congolese had already taken over the management of local congregations. They refused to remain completely under the supervision of white missionaries. Inspired

by the so-called “liberal” churches such as the Baptists (CBCO), they pushed their demands to the point of the “Congolization” or “Africanization” of the church. This led to the creation of the Association des Églises des Frères mennonites au Congo (AEFMC – Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of the Congo) in 1960.<sup>72</sup> The missionaries had come to acknowledge that the mission would need to collaborate with the local churches.

Despite this Congolization, the Congolese Mennonite Brethren were hampered by the lack of an intellectual elite that could co-manage with the whites. No missionary had considered the need to train them. Those who were to help the white man bring God’s good news were given an inferior education. They had to limit their training to being able to read and write. In this way, the philosophy of Mennonite Brethren missionaries sometimes reflected Belgian colonial policy.

The missionaries only reluctantly agreed to the creation of the AEFMC, with whom they would work. This was not a true partnership because AMBM contributed finances, equipment, and staff. Therefore, the AMBM led the church and held the power while the Congolese Mennonite Brethren contributed congregations and human resources. The Congolese implemented the decisions taken by the missionaries according to the principle that “the person who provides the money has the power.” True unity between the AMBM and the AEFMC did not exist.

To many, it seemed that the church had two heads, one consisting of the missionaries and the other of the Congolese. There was an imbalance between the two parties. The missionaries were led by the AMBM and the Congolese Mennonite Brethren by the AEFMC. Deprived of all financial and material means, the indigenous people had to submit to the orders of the whites even though the Gospel should have brought them together. Many missionaries pointed out that the church should not be divided. There should have been close fraternal cooperation between missionaries and indigenous people. However, the real power was on the missionaries’ side because they had the financial resources and the equipment, while the Congolese had almost nothing. Fellowship was often broken because sharing did not seem to be fair. Clarence Hiebert, writing in *Le Lien* many years later, noted that North Americans often referred to these “foreign Christians” as children of the North American missionary efforts. These issues are still on the mission agenda.<sup>73</sup>

This association continued to operate in this way until 1971, when the true merger took place between the mission (AMBM), and the national church (AEFMC). At the General Assembly held in August 1971, the AMBM handed over its missionary

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<sup>72</sup> Editor’s note: See « Points of understanding in the future relationship of the American Mennonite Brethren church and the Association des Eglises des Freres Mennonite [sic] au Congo », August 1960, included in full in Nzuzi Mukawa, “Relationship between the Mennonite Brethren Mission Services International and the Mennonite Brethren Churches of the Congo (1943-2002)” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 2003), 209–12. The same document can be found in the Multiply archives. See MB Mission Archives, A250-10-3, Box 8, File: Other materials, 1933-1976.

<sup>73</sup> Hiebert, Clarence, “Un cœur pour ceux qui n’ont pas entendu: Histoire de la mission des Frères mennonites,” *Le Lien des Frères Mennonites*, December 2000, 1–3.

work, begun in 1922, to the newly created structure, l'Église Frères Mennonites au Congo (EFMC), which would later come the CEFMZ and then the CEFMC (Communauté des Églises des Frères mennonites au Congo). The Ordinance No. 73-013 of February 14, 1973, modifying Law 71-012 of December 31, 1971 regulating the exercise of religious services made the CEFMZ into the fourth member of the Church of Christ in Congo (Église du Christ au Zaïre – ECZ). Subsequently, under this ordinance, the CEFMZ became a Congolese-led Mennonite Brethren church in Congo.

The language used to describe this shift depended on who was speaking. The missionaries talked about turning over the church administration to the nationals, while the Congolese spoke of getting their independence from the missionaries. Such language used by the Congolese Mennonite Brethren was similar to the political language used when the Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960.

The legal representatives of the CEFMC from 1971 to the present (2022) were as follows: Paul Nganga Diyoyo (1971-1974), Isaac Kilabi Bululu (1974-1984), Jean-Pierre Kusangila Kitondo (1984-1991), Norbert Masolo Mununga (1991-1998), Gilbert Ndunda Ngelego (1998-2004), Damien Pelende Tshinyam (2004-2012), Gérard Mambakila Kabemba (2012-2018), and Antoine Kimbila Misumbungu (2018-present).

## **The State of the Church at the time of the Merger**

The Mennonite Brethren church in the Congo was characterized by both strengths and weaknesses at the time of the merger between the mission and the church. It was a church with many services in areas such as evangelism, health, education, community development, literature, radio evangelism, Bible translation, and a correspondence Bible school. It existed in rural areas as well as in urban centers such as Kikwit and Kinshasa. The CEFMC was regarded as the foremost well-structured and well-organized Protestant church in the country. In Kinshasa, it was the first Protestant church to have a recording studio broadcasting sermons by radio in the Congo and beyond. The church was open to the world and had connections with other Protestant churches and organizations such as the Programme agricole protestant (PAP – Protestant Agricultural Program), the Centre d'accueil protestant (CAP – Protestant guest house), the Centre d'édition et de diffusion (CEDI – a literature distribution center), the Institut supérieur théologique de Kinshasa (ISTK – Kinshasa College of Theology), and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). It had begun training the church's executive staff at the graduate and postgraduate levels in order to meet community needs and to spread the gospel in urban areas. The church had a promising future with many young intellectuals and lay people. There was a new generation with a new mentality.

The Mennonite Brethren Church was also characterized by various weaknesses at the time of the merger. It was a church of the masses that were not involved in financial and institutional support. This was the logical consequence of the paternalistic policy set when the AMBM took responsibility for the church from 1943

to 1971. The child had to expect everything from his father; everything had to come from North America. The church failed to raise the living standards and to fight the misery and poverty of its members. The missionaries did not distribute the support that they received from the mission, and the meager salaries of their employees did not improve the living standards. Missionaries also discouraged initiatives taken by their workers to earn extra money. Missionaries sometimes described attempts by workers to earn more money as satanic. The church also lacked qualified executive staff in theology, medicine, and church administration. It had few leaders with experience in administration and financial management.

### **Congolese Lead their own Churches (1971-2008)**

The people trained in the Bible institute and pastoral school were the first to fill executive positions in the new church in order to continue the missionary work. They also had to nurture the fraternal relationship between missionaries and Congolese. The first Congolese team was led by Paul Nganga Diyoyo and was composed entirely of lay people. Paul Nganga was one of the people trained by Aaron Janzen in the Kafumba Bible School. He was a gifted man who had never served as a pastor. The first statutes of the CEFMZ (in Kikongo) never specified the qualifications for the people who should lead the Mennonite Brethren congregations. Laypeople could hold high administrative positions in the church. Many members of the Mennonite Brethren churches of the Congo held the first team in high regard. It was able to preserve unity between Congolese and missionaries and between the Congolese themselves, keeping the balance between the different ecclesiastical regions. This team also reduced the threat of tribalism, which was a major obstacle for the well-being of the national church.

This team was able to meet the challenge of evangelization by founding more congregations in the areas of Kinshasa and south Kwango and also expanding educational institutions. Primary and secondary schools were created for the education of the children of Mennonite Brethren church of the Congo. “The triumvirate” of Paul Nganga Diyoyo, André Charles Matsitsa, and Matthieu Mukoso Mbavu accomplished outstanding work at the administrative level of the church. Even though they were only laymen trained in missionary schools, the team made a significant contribution to the Mennonite Brethren church of the Congo. It was a creative team that led the church carefully and skillfully and avoided plunging the CEFMZ into chaos.

The second team served two terms at the head of the Mennonite Brethren church of the Congo. For the first time the church was led by a person with a bachelor’s degree in theology. Reverend Pastor Isaac Kilabi Bululu, a trained theologian sent to study in France with support from the mission board, led the team. The statutes were revised to define the qualifications of those who could lead the church. The first term of this second team was led in collaboration with a secretary general, Arnold Prieb, who represented Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services. Later, the structure began to change. The legal representative was also the secretary

general. For various reasons, missionaries began to leave leadership positions. The rise of tribalism, the mismanagement of the church, the lack of a clear vision, and the objectives of various legal representatives at times created serious conflict.

Evangelism remains the cornerstone and the most important work of this church. The number and the membership of the congregations is growing. Training leaders is a major concern. Theologians are trained in good colleges and universities with the support of their partners, such as ICOMB (International Community of Mennonite Brethren), MB Mission (formerly MBMS International, now Multiply) and the Prieb Foundation. Women are included in the development of these Mennonite Brethren congregations.

## **Evangelism and Mission**

The CEFMC does not deviate from the social purpose of its creation and existence, namely the proclamation of the word of God to peoples unreached by the Gospel. Strategies have been adopted to achieve this objective. Among these strategies, leadership training remains the primary concern. It currently has in its midst people with doctoral,<sup>74</sup> master's and bachelor's degrees in Theology and Missiology, who have studied at UCKIN, at the Centre universitaire de missiologie (CUM, founded by Professor Nzash U. Lumeya in 1990), at the Université protestante du Congo (UPC), and elsewhere. And as far as secular studies are concerned, the achievements of many sons and daughters of the CEFMC are sufficient proof that the CEFMC is working to encourage its members to move forward.

The second concern is and remains the extension of its missionary field throughout the DRC, both for the proclamation of the Good News of God and for the teaching of Mennonite doctrine. The statistical data demonstrates the great strides made by the CEFMC. According to J. B. Toews, in 1973 there were sixty congregations, and in 1975 there were a total of 18,086 members.<sup>75</sup> Reverend Mandono Biansi, former community evangelist, reported a sharp increase in the number of congregations between 2007 and 2008. There were 285 churches in 2007 and 387 in 2008.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, the CEFMC had 95,044 members.<sup>77</sup> This means that the CEFMC is one of the largest Mennonite Brethren churches in the world.

This increase in numbers requires a growing number of pastors. Each church region proposes candidates for theological training. Women are also committing themselves to pastoral service, and some women have been ordained as pastors. In 2008 there were a total of 427 pastors, and twenty of these were women. This is an exception to the practice of most other Mennonite Brethren churches

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<sup>74</sup> For example: Dr. Nzash-U-Lumeya, Dr. Matungulu Givule Floribert (deceased in 2019), Dr. Nzuzi Mukawa, and Dr. Müller Ndzunzi Kukedikila.

<sup>75</sup> Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, 166.

<sup>76</sup> Information provided by Reverend Damien Pelende, Legal representative and General secretary of the CEFMC, Kikwit, February 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Mennonite World Conference, "Global Map," 2018, <https://mwc-cmm.org/global-map>.

around the world. In 2000 the legal representative and secretary general, Gilbert Ndunda Ngelego, was the first leader of the CEFMC to accept the ordination of women despite pressure from the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC). This involved the ordination of the Reverend Pastor Charly Lukala. Later, Béatrice Kadi, Pombo Narri, Gislaine Tshitshi Tomisa, Marie Fumana, and Alphonsine Munganga were also ordained.

In addition, a Department of Missions was created under the initiative of Dr. Nzash U. Lumeya and accepted by the General Assembly of the CEFMC in 1995. The CEFMC was willing to go beyond its national borders with the financial support of its main partner, MBMSI.<sup>78</sup> The two organizations have made agreements as a result of which the CEFMC sent Reverend Norbert Masolo Mununga to Luanda (Angola) to contribute his expertise in church administration. It also has a representative in South Africa with the Rev. Baudouin N'Sulunka. MBMSI provides financial and material resources and CEFMC provides personnel.

The CEFMC is presently establishing various congregations in the Bas-Congo and West Kasai provinces within the Congo. The CEFMC recognized the Mennonite Brethren Church of South Kivu as its ninth conference at the twelfth session of the General Assembly held in Kahemba from 10 to 12 October 2008.

## Leadership Training

The policy regarding the training of leaders has changed. The major concern of the CEFMC was training leaders, because the congregations were becoming more modern and urbanized. In large cities there were people with many different gifts so that the church was able to evangelize people in the cities. Beginning in 1971, some candidates were sent to receive training in theology. According to an agreement between the Mission Board and the CEFMC, financial resources were made available to the church for this purpose. Scholarship programs were also established at Mbandu High School (Kikwit), the nursing school in Kajiji, and the vocational school at Batela.

Apart from theological training, the CEFMC also became involved in the training of Congolese children by establishing primary and secondary schools. Large schools, such as the school in Kinshasa, were built. Schools were also built and funded by the Congolese government at the missionary stations.

Many people condemned the divisions and tribal character that developed in the Mennonite Brethren church of the Congo. Three church regions were created

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<sup>78</sup> Mennonite Brethren Mission/Services International. Editor's note: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America changed its name several times to Board of Missions, Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS), Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services (MBMS), Mennonite Brethren Mission/Services International (MBMSI), MB Mission, and finally Multiply. See Victor Wiens, "Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services International (Mennonite Brethren Church)," in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)*, 2010, [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Brethren\\_Missions/Services\\_International\\_\(Mennonite\\_Brethren\\_Church\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Missions/Services_International_(Mennonite_Brethren_Church)).

in 1979 (Kikwit in the north, Kinshasa in the west, and Panzi in the south) and subsequently serious tribal issues and a struggle for power began to take shape. Power in the church was often linked to tribal membership. In the northern region, the Pende and the Mbala tribes were in the majority and wanted to hold leadership positions of church at all costs. In the southern region, the Yaka and Tshokwe people fought for power. This tendency continues today. The election of a new legal representative and general secretary at the end of a term is often marred by the emergence of tribalism. The best candidate may not receive support because people want to support the candidate belonging to their own tribe. In 1984 two people who worked in the northern region of the CEFMC were sent back to their home regions to be ordained and then returned to continue their work in the North.

From 1984 to 2004 the leadership at the head office has been rotating between the three ecclesiastical regions mentioned above. However, since 2000 many voices have called for an amendment of the statutes and by-laws of the church. The system of regions has been discontinued and replaced by church conferences. In 2003 the three regions were divided into eight church conferences: Kafumba, Kajiji, Kikwit, Kinshasa, Kipungu, Gungu, Panzi, and Wamba. A ninth conference was approved at the twelfth session of the General Assembly held in 2008. Further divisions are likely. The Kajiji Conference is likely to be divided into two (Kajiji and Kahemba). Others, such as Panzi, may also be divided.

More theologians who have received training in administrative management, leadership, and governance are needed. Many leaders have no administrative experience when they complete their theological training. Often, they only have experience in leading small congregations.

The CEFMC still used Kikongo ya Leta as the language of administration. The Kikongo language was even used in the sessions of the General Assembly. The documentation produced by the CEFMC administration was therefore inaccessible to non-Kikongo speakers. Even the statutes and by-laws were in that language. The year 2000 brought new momentum under the leadership of the team headed by Reverend Gilbert Ndunda. These legal documents were translated from Kikongo into French, the language of administration in the DRC. The Legal Texts Commission was headed by Maurice Matsitsa-N'singa. Since then, the Central Executive Committee (COMEX) of the CEFMC has introduced the use of French during its meetings or General Assemblies.

As far as the CEFMC's archives are concerned, almost none exist. They are not well preserved, or the authorities are not inclined to think about them. The official and religious documents are scattered in many places. There is a partnership between CEFMC and the Mama Makeka Foundation, a non-governmental organization founded by Dr. Pakisa K. Tshimika Gérard. He is seeking to establish an archive, but this initiative is still in its infancy. Too often, church members do not have a sufficient interest in knowing their own community history. The few who do try to explore the subject are blocked by insufficient documentation.

## Development, Health, and Literature

The CEFMC has worked with other churches and the assistance of missionaries to create production units such as the Programme Agricole Protestant (PAP), Sadisa (a sawmill in Kafumba), and other projects funded by the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).

In the 1990s, a department of community health and development (Département de la Santé et du Développement communautaire – DESADEC) was created under Congolese leadership. However, the DESADEC did not last long. After several consultations with MBMSI, it decided to no longer support DESADEC. Several missionaries maintained that CEFMC could take responsibility for itself and that the church had reached maturity. This was the reason for MBMSI's disengagement from sending subsidies. No other service has replaced DESADEC. Many CEFMC projects have ceased. Bureaucracy is one of the major reasons why several projects have not been funded. The CEFMC is no longer able to create services such as the development department. These services are very expensive, and the church is unable to support them.

It is true that the CEFMC has reached maturity. It is one of the largest Mennonite Brethren churches in the world in terms of membership. But one thing is certain. Most members of the Mennonite Brethren churches of the Congo are unemployed and one-third of working members earn as little as \$40 to \$50 US a month. The financial resources of the CEFMC are very limited. The CEFMC is still a long way from being self-sustaining.

Agricultural development had greatly helped the economic welfare of Congolese Mennonite Brethren. Many members of the CEFMC believe that if the AMBM had stuck with the working philosophy and vision of the Aaron Janzen couple, much progress would have been made toward a situation in which the indigenous people themselves take financial responsibility for the church. Unfortunately, by imitating the paternalistic policies of the Belgian colonial administration, the AMBM did not push the indigenous people to be financially self-sufficient. The members of the CEFMC have retained a mindset of expecting everything from a powerful father who is supposed to provide everything for his child. This lack of real commitment by the CEFMC members is a serious problem that hampers the success of the work. The church is becoming more and more destitute because it lacks financial resources and equipment.

In the field of health, some CEFMC members such as Dr. Pakisa Tshimika and Dr. Denis Matshifi have played a leading role in the development of this vital sector of the community. However, the Kajiji General Hospital, established by missionaries, is dying out. The hospital no longer functions as well as it did when there were medical missionaries there. Although the CEFMC has its own doctors, it does not support them financially or logistically. The Congolese government is unable to pay the salaries of the health staff. In addition, many health centers were created in old missionary stations but had to be closed because of mismanagement and lack of medicines.



The CEFMC no longer has a resource and literature production and distribution center. Again, there is no funding for this program. The equipment left by the missionaries has fallen into disrepair or has become outdated. Currently there is a small bookstore. The funding for this service ended around 2000.

## **Partnership with MBMSI**

It is critical to take a look at the relationship between the CEFMC and its main partner, MBMSI (formerly BOMAS). When taking over the work of the Janzen couple, the AMBM (and later BOMAS and MBMSI) played a prominent role in providing the financial, material, and human resources that fostered the advancement of the Mennonite Brethren churches of the Congo. The money made available to missionaries working in the Congo, however, was not shared equitably. The white missionaries were the main beneficiaries. The Congolese who worked for the missionaries received poverty wages, a far cry from the supposed fraternity of the Gospel. In this regard, John Redekop has observed that MBMSI adopted the same policy as many other mission agencies. This policy stipulated that national workers should be paid according to local standards. Because this policy perpetuated the poverty of many, it was often criticized. "My heart tells me that they should be better paid, and my spirit recognizes that this could cause other problems."<sup>79</sup> This missionary spirit has created ill will at leadership and at lay levels.

The Congolese have taken their destiny into their own hands and will maintain some type of relationship with North America. However, the working philosophy has changed. It is now a purely Congolese church with a Congolese administration. The North American missionary agency, MBMSI, is no longer the boss of the CEFMC. The significant financial support provided to CEFMC before 1997 was substantially reduced following consultation between the two organizations. For example, around 1994 the Kikwit Bible Institute received over \$2,000 US; in 2008, it only received \$200 US, while the Nzashi Mwadi Bible Institute received only \$50 US.

As a consequence, the zeal and enthusiasm with which the Congolese pursued theological studies has greatly subsided. Around 1984, misunderstandings arose between the mission and the COMEX of the CEFMC, leading the latter to return the financial support provided by its partner. The relationship between the two partners has remained rocky. A desire for fellowship has remained central to these types of relationships. However, the relationship between the two partners is still unresolved and closer relationships need to be established.

## **The CEFMC from 2009 to 2022**

The CEFMC now has 85,955 members in 549 parishes in 14 ecclesiastical provinces.

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<sup>79</sup> John Redekop, "Les grandes questions de la mission d'aujourd'hui," *Le Lien des Frères Mennonites*, December 2000, 4.

The current team was selected in 2018 for an eight-year term. The Legal Representative and General Secretary, Rev. Antoine Kimbila Misumbungu, is accompanied by Rev. Georges Kaputu Nzila as Community Evangelist and Kafaïre Kufutama Koy as Community Treasurer.

The CEFMC has remained committed to its core purpose of evangelization. Since its administration has become fully Congolese, the church has continued to make progress in several areas.

a) Evangelism

The Community is working with all its means to extend its presence throughout the DRC. To achieve this, it focuses its efforts on the training of its leaders, especially in theological studies. The CEFMC now has 344 ordained pastors (including nine women) and 169 non-ordained pastors (including two women). Currently, due to lack of financial resources, there are not many Congolese young people willing to pursue studies in theology. The Arnold Prieb Foundation encourages and supports a few students who have the vocation and who are chosen by the leadership of the Community for their theological training. This same foundation is strongly committed to encouraging women to do graduate studies. For example, Pastor Consolette Mulonzo has begun her studies at the Protestant University of Congo (UPC).

CEFMC has one less doctor in theology following the death of Prof. Matungulu Givule in 2019. But Pastor Müller Ndunzi Kukedikila has completed his PhD thesis in 2021 and will probably replace Prof. Matungulu in the Faculty of Theology at UCKIN. With the help of the Prieb Foundation, Pastor Abdon Malebe has just completed his Diplôme d'études approfondies (DEA) at UCKIN and is preparing to do doctoral studies. It is necessary to seek financial means and international partners to encourage young people to prepare for the future.

b) Church legal texts

Several very important changes occurred at the last General Assembly held in Kikwit in Kwilu Province from September 16 to 18, 2021. The term of office at the level of the Central Office has been increased from six years (non-renewable) to eight years (non-renewable). The term of office at the level of the Ecclesiastical Province has been reduced from four years, renewable once, to six years (non-renewable). The Ecclesiastical Conference has also changed its name to Ecclesiastical Province, while the Urban Coordinator is now called the Provincial Legal Representative.

c) Community services

Despite meager resources, the team led by Legal Representative Gérard Mambakila Kabemba has made efforts to revive the activities of the Health Department, a vital sector of life. A doctor working in a Health Center supervises this department on a voluntary basis.

d) Education

This area is developing without many problems. The CEFMC has many primary and secondary schools, especially in the ecclesiastical provinces of Kikwit, Kinshasa, and Gungu, and to a lesser extent in other ecclesiastical provinces. All primary and secondary schools are supported by the Congolese state.

e) Guest House

The CEFMC is developing a profitable partnership with another Mennonite agency, AIMM (Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission). The latter has enabled the CEFMC to equip itself by building a guest house in the city of Kikwit (in Mbandu), and this helps the church to be self-financing.

## **Conclusion and Prospects for the Future**

The year 2022 marks 100 years since the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo. The CEFMC is a church with all the necessary assets for spiritual, financial, and material development. It has a large membership compared to other Mennonite Brethren communities in the world. Apart from its financial and material resources, the CEFMC has sufficiently demonstrated the quality of its trained leaders, who are succeeding in planting congregations throughout the country with the resources of its policy. That is why, in view of the globalization of evangelization and of the CEFMC, the CEFMC must remain open to its partners. Also, Congolese who have financial and material means and who proclaim the name of Jesus Christ can bring their expertise to bear to exploit their country's own riches.

The CEFMC needs to reflect on the lack of financial and material commitment from its members. It needs to rethink its approach to administration and management, and its way of working. It needs to rethink how to convince its members to give and support the church with substantial financial means. It must stop being "a big church with feet of clay." The CEFMC should lead its members to emulate some revivalist churches that are locally self-sustaining without outside financial support. It could follow the good example of the Kimbanguist churches in the search for financial means through the philosophy of "Nsinsani." This is a practice of depositing a basket in front of the members with an amount set by the hierarchy that must be reached. Such examples can be emulated internally in order to see the CEFMC take wing.

The problems of tribalism and mismanagement continue to afflict the CEFMC and impede its development. The existence of such conflicts creates problems within the church. Leaders must take measures to eliminate such problems.

Furthermore, the CEFMC must encourage its lay ministry (MILAPRO) to raise awareness and bring all members into a shared understanding that manna no longer falls from heaven. The time of Moses and the children of Israel is long past. In this regard, the CEFMC can work better than other Protestant churches of the Congo because it was founded by people who were good farmers, artisans, and businessmen. The church can use its legacy of expertise in agriculture and economics to effectively address the misery and poverty of its members. The church must take ownership of itself. It must not tire. That way, there is hope that this great community of Mennonite Brethren in the Congo will begin its upward climb in a very short time. Hand in hand, its members will be engaged in giving and receiving for the advancement of God's work.

**Book Review: *Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites*. Edited by Thomas Oduro, Jonathan P. Larson, and James R. Krabill. Global Perspectives Series. Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021. Paperback, 240 pp, 10.24 USD Kindle, 24.99 USD paperback.**

Review essay by R. Bruce Yoder

*Unless a Grain* comprises a collection of reflections which grow out of collaborative ministry initiatives between African Independent Churches (AICs) and North American Mennonite missionaries and service workers from 1960 to 2020. The forty-six contributions are diverse, with each author sharing his or her experiences, insights, and challenges from the AIC/Mennonite encounter. Certain themes emerge: the importance of shared experiences of biblical study, a sense of mutuality between co-workers, and the significance of inter-confessional ministries of reconciliation. The editors are mission practitioners and scholars who are well positioned to bring us this volume. Two are North Americans with experience of ministry among AICs, and the third is a Ghanaian AIC member who serves as principal of the Good News Theological Seminary in Accra, an AIC institution. The collection is preceded by an historical overview of the Mennonite/AIC story by Wilbert R. Shenk, whose professional career included both mission history scholarship and supervision of Mennonite missionaries who worked with AICs. A bibliography of resources written by AIC and Mennonite colleagues is at the end of the volume.

The editors invited contributions of “personal accounts of events, experiences, conversations or discoveries arising from the encounter between Mennonites and AICs.” They wanted material that would “cast light on the nature, texture, and significance” of this encounter. The inclusion of contributions from both North American missionaries and AIC members gives the collection a breadth it would not have if either party was absent. These reflections are not systematic treatments of missiological, historical, or ecclesial themes. Together, however, they provide important insight into this novel collaborative ministry. Fifteen additional reflections by outside experts assess the significance of these contributions and the engagement they describe for mission history and the world Christian movement.

The reflections are grouped thematically in eight chapters with titles that flow from the volume’s title. Titles such as sowing, growth, weeding, and harvesting highlight beginnings, developments, challenges, and results of Mennonite and AIC collaboration. The volume’s title is inspired by the biblical verse John 12:24, “Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jonathan Larson’s explanation of the title’s backstory in the Preface provides coherence to a volume that does not articulate an explicit thesis. One implicit thesis seems to be that the self-giving posture of North American Mennonite missionaries, who set aside their denominational and sectarian priorities, was a faithful and productive mission approach, despite its seeming incongruity with

traditional mission strategy. A second is that AICs, suspicious of foreign missionaries who had often labeled them sub-Christian, experienced fruitful partnerships when they took the chance of embarking on this collaborative ministry initiative.

The Mennonite/AIC engagement started in the last years of a post-World War II missionary expansion. Latecomers to the missionary movement, North American Mennonite agencies had established work in India, the Belgian Congo, and Argentina during the first two decades of the twentieth century. During the two decades after the war, they increased their international footprint significantly. By then Christianity had a long history in sub-Saharan Africa, and AICs were part of the mix. Mennonite mission leaders noted that the Christian movement was growing in Africa and that, while churches founded by missionaries had wide connections through denominational identities, membership in national councils, and participation with the International Missionary Council, AICs lacked such networks. Some were seeking to connect with western churches at the very time when Mennonite missionaries were looking for opportunities to establish new work in the region. In the face of such a prospect, secretary of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) Joseph D. Graber, under whose oversight the mission's collaboration with AICs started, opined that perhaps Mennonites were arriving on the scene by the providence of God "for such a time as this."<sup>80</sup> At that point Graber assumed that these independent churches would join the Mennonite fold, and some did. Among others, however, a novel approach of mission collaboration emerged, to which this collection testifies.

The post-war decades corresponded with the beginning of the post-colonial era, and Mennonite missionaries were conscious that new approaches were necessary. *Indigeneity* was an important goal. Missionaries wanted their work to result in churches that would flourish without dependency on western sources. They also were coming to believe that western missionaries had not articulated Christian faith in ways sufficiently meaningful within the African context. Contextualization would become an important priority in African theological discourse during the period of AIC/Mennonite engagement. *Identification* was another value of Mennonite missionaries. Recognizing that colonial attitudes had too often shaped missionary interaction with African Christians, they sought to participate fully in communities to which they were sent and to adapt to local patterns of life. Finally, missionaries suggested new ways to think about their role. Given the emergence of mature African Christian communities, taking on the role of a *fraternal worker* seemed to be as legitimate as the more traditional roles of pioneer preacher or church planter. The reflections in this volume demonstrate how the values of indigeneity, identification, and fraternal collaboration have been embodied in the Mennonite/AIC engagement. Those values allowed Mennonite missionaries and African Christians to work in ways that seemed fruitful and appropriate in the post-colonial era.

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<sup>80</sup> J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Elkhart, IN.

Several themes stand out across the volume. Nearly three-quarters of the authors, African and North American equally, mention occasions of biblical study, often as part of programs of theological education. Providing opportunities for such training was a typical priority for North American missionaries. AICs had fewer opportunities to train their leaders than did churches founded by western missionaries. Independent churches and Mennonites agreed on the importance of such training and began to collaborate, sometimes on programs of formal theological training and sometimes by participating together in less formal study. The AIC testimonies express appreciation for the acquisition of biblical study skills and the deeper understanding of Scripture that became possible. The North American reflections voice appreciation for the way collaborative study with African counterparts enriched their understanding of Christian faith. In a relationship in which there were significant differences in cultural and religious assumptions, the biblical story became a touchstone around which North Americans and Africans could gather to seek better understanding of Christian belief and practice. Studying Scripture together became a fruitful mission approach in the post-colonial epoch.

A second theme that nearly three-quarters of the contributors highlight is their experience of mutuality. Both North American missionaries and African Christians express their amazement and gratitude for the mutuality and respect that they felt in their engagement with each other, a significant achievement given the legacy of colonial rule and the context of Apartheid in South Africa, which spanned much of the period this volume represents. Some of the writers convey surprise that such was possible. It became possible as collaborators worshipped together, shared their lives with each other, and learned from each other. Over half the contributors highlight the importance of the relational nature of their collaboration, undergirding the mutuality theme. Eleven of the Africans and six of North Americans describe the relationships as friendships; they were more than co-workers.

One third of the contributors note the importance of peace and inter-confessional relationships. The ministry of Edwin and Irene Weaver to heal division and animosity among AICs, and between them and the mainline churches, in southeastern Nigeria was the beginning from which the Mennonite/AIC encounter developed. The focus continued in the years that followed and included fostering trust between white Mennonite missionaries and black AIC members in southern Africa, where suspicion between whites and blacks was high. The ecumenical focus of these testimonies is reinforced by the important contributions of colleagues from mainline churches. The groundbreaking work in Nigeria was only possible because a few Scottish Presbyterian missionaries advocated for the Weavers' ministry of reconciliation, helping convince other mainline churches who at first rejected the idea. Personnel of the Methodist Missionary Society in London, England put the Weavers in touch with Harry Y. Henry, Beninese president of the Methodist Church in the Republic of Benin (then Dahomey) and Togo, who was instrumental in establishing the Mennonite/AIC collaboration in Benin. The development of the Good News Theological Seminary in Ghana, which focuses on AICs, was a joint effort of Mennonite and Lutheran missionaries. Mennonites invested heavily in partnership

with AICs, but others who shared the vision labored alongside them and made important contributions.

This volume raises the question of the legacy of the Mennonite/AIC encounter. Together these reflections suggest an approach that might inform or even provide a model for future collaborative mission initiatives, in Africa and beyond. They also highlight dynamics that help explain the emergence of world Christianity as an interpretive framework, a way of understanding the Christian movement as the global ensemble of culturally and linguistically specific expressions of the faith and the transnational networks that inform and sustain them. This collection shows that Mennonite missionaries accepted AICs as authentic Christian communities when others were still hesitant to do so, and that their collaboration helped affirm and legitimize those communities. The encounter embodied in practice the perspective of world Christianity, which scholars have described and analyzed more fully in the last two decades. As such the Mennonite/AIC encounter can be seen as an example of changing realities that encouraged the emergence of the world Christianity framework. Finally, Mennonite/AIC collaboration birthed several African institutions that continue today and maintain links with individuals, congregations, and agencies on other continents.

The question of legacy is complicated by the highly relational nature of the Mennonite/AIC engagement and the diminished Mennonite missionary presence among AICs today. Several African contributors expressed regret that there were no longer Mennonites living and working among them. North American Mennonites do not send workers to collaborate with AICs in the same way they once did, although some connections are maintained from a distance. The shared work and life that many of these reflections describe would seem to be essential for a mission approach that is heavily reliant on building relationships and friendships. Without opportunities for long-term life and ministry together, replicating such an approach seems unlikely, and it is not yet clear what fruitful relationships and collaboration might look like in the new epoch.

This volume is a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in missiology, mission history, African Christianity, church history, or Mennonite studies. A minor addition would have been helpful. Adding the location and time period of each author's participation in Mennonite/AIC shared ministry, details which are present in only some cases, would allow the reader to place each contribution within the sixty-year span and eight-country spread of the story. Such is a minor issue, though, for a volume of rich narrative content that provides a sense of the nature, texture, and significance of the AIC/Mennonite encounter, just as the editors intended.

**Further reading about Mennonite/AIC collaboration (freely available online)**

- Frey, Nancy and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, 2015. *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*. Missio Dei 23, edited by James R. Krabill. Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network. <https://www.mennonitemission.net/resources/publications/Missio%20Dei/2/3-D%20Gospel%20in%20Benin>
- Krabill, James R., 1998. "Neither 'Reached' nor 'Unreached': The Response of One Mission Agency to Independent Churches of West Africa." *Mission Focus Annual Review* 6: 97-112.  
<https://palni.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15705coll31/id/273/rec/6>
- Shank, David, 2003. "A Decade with God's Mission among African-Initiated Churches in West Africa." *Mission Focus Annual Review* 11: 85-104.  
<https://palni.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15705coll31/id/279/rec/11>
- Weaver, Edwin and Irene Weaver, 1970. *The Uyo Story*. Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions. <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/files/2015/05/the-Uyo-Story.pdf>
- Weaver, Edwin and Irene Weaver, 1975. *From Kuku Hill*. Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies.  
<https://www.bu.edu/missiology/files/2015/05/From-Kuku-Hill.pdf>
- Yoder, R. Bruce "Weaver, Edwin (1903-1989) and Irene [Lehman] (1910- ): Pioneer Missionaries among African Initiated Churches." In *History of Missiology*, <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/>.
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**Book Excerpt:**

**Rankopo, Morena. "We Have Learned Together about Worship, Marriage, Prophecy, and Burnt Offerings." In *Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites*, edited by Thomas Oduro, Jonathan P Larson, and James R. Krabill, 110–12. Global Perspectives Series. Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021.**

My grasp of the history of the partnership between Mennonites and the Spiritual Healing Church in Botswana is limited, but here is what I understand. During the



period of struggle in the then called country of Rhodesia, there were cross-border incursions into northeast Botswana, so the base of operations of the Spiritual Healing Church was moved from the village of Matsiloje near the Rhodesian border to the town of Mahalapye. It was there that our church encountered a threesome of Mennonites who met with our elders. Our founder, Prophet Mokalleng, had prophesied that one day, white people would come to work with us. This meeting was taken to be the fulfillment of that foretelling.

What is unusual about this sharing was that it was a genuine partnership which was possible because the Mennonites were not planting their own churches here. Instead, they were partners with us. We would identify needs together and seek effective ways to address those needs. For me personally, I found that sharing to be collegial and respectful, an exchange of knowledge and skills. We have witnessed real changes in the quality of our church leaders, which is evident in those in senior leadership of our church.

One example is that we now have marriage officers across the church. It used to be that only mainline churches had such authorities. The AICs were excluded from this important function. That gap was closed through training led by the Mennonites and often in our own language, Setswana. A second example is the married couples' fellowship initiated by Sharon and Rudy Dirks. This fellowship helped us to reflect on our families of origin, on how to raise our children, and on how to build strong marriage bonds. We walked a long road in learning these things. Then in our turn, we held such workshops in other places to help others.

Third, I have been part of a Wednesday weekly class focused on understanding the Bible using study guides prepared by the Mennonites. These guides have greatly improved the quality of the teaching among our pastors, evangelists, deacons, and preachers. Their level of understanding has risen markedly, and they do not feel intimidated by anybody, which was not formerly true. Our preachers are now confident and thoughtful. Their greater ability and confidence are why the faithful have remained in our congregations.

Fourth, the establishment of the Tshepong Centre for HIV/AIDS counseling opened up discussion in our church about this crisis affecting our nation and helped us to grasp the principles necessary to address this issue, principles that apply to all aspects of our life.

Mennonites also learned about our practice of worship: no instruments, the clapping of hands, and, of course, our dancing. Our Mennonite partners had a challenge falling in with our rhythms. They also learned to appreciate the breadth of active participation in our gatherings and our culture of choirs.

In the experience of partnerships, often one partner has greater power than the other. But across the board in our sharing with Mennonites, we found a genuine collegiality and a principle of mutual respect that was worth noting. In our theological conversations, we had great interest in the notion of prophecy, a common practice in our churches. But Mennonites had limited experience of this phenomenon and could shed little light on our many questions. Our own elders are not able to explain these things to us or to articulate their background. As a consequence, the

next generation has little grasp of this spiritual gift. As a thinker, I would be keen to understand this distinctive of our church and to know its cultural and divine sources because in our past at key moments, the prophets operated in distressed circumstances to minister God's healing to us.

On other occasions, we have ventured with our Mennonite peers into delicate theological areas such as sacrifices and burnt offerings. We have asked whether honoring our ancestors can have a place in Christian church life. Our generation wants to dialogue about these things, but that desire has sometimes met with pushback from our older leaders for whom these are no-go areas and who prefer these things to remain ambiguous.

Another difficult area of partnership was engagement with women's groups who tend to resist systematic study of Scripture. They continue to rely on inspiration and spontaneity in their life together. But as a result, the women are also not as confident in their grasp of Scripture, which limits their capacity to lead in public gatherings like funerals.

A great challenge of our time comes from the "fire churches" – the Pentecostal megachurches. Many of their practices are even reminiscent of our own, though we tend to be more private in their application. In other respects, we have distinctive music and dance in our worship which our young people appreciate. On the one hand, we want to modernize our rituals for this age, but on the other, we do not want to lose our identity.

We are observing a shrinking of engagement with the Mennonites now, and those who have been beyond the reach of these interactions feel cheated. I recently returned from three years abroad in Australia where I was surprised to see abandoned church buildings, the effect of a growing secularism. In light of this trend, I am especially grateful and have broad affirmation for the partnership with the Mennonites that we enjoyed for its rare candor and balance. We share with our Mennonite kin the belief that it is at the initiative of individual members that the church lives. And we are sad to see the ebbing of the benefits that came from this partnership.

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# Biography as a Bridge within the Global Church

By Anicka Fast

## I – Introduction

Undergraduate students at Université LOGOS de Ouagadougou (UCLO) were initially taken aback in their African church history course when they learned that they would be expected to write a biography of a Burkinabè Christian, based on at least two interviews, and that this biography would be posted in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB). They spent a long time trying to convince me, on the second day of class, that this would be very difficult. Their church hierarchy might not allow them to publish a story about a church leader unless it was first vetted by them – a potentially endless process. The families might object. Interviewees wouldn't cooperate unless they had an official letter to show from the university administration authorizing the students to engage in research. They might not consent to being interviewed, or they might ask for money. And what was the DACB anyway – just another project conceived in the global North whose claims to relevance in an African context were more rhetorical than real? The obstacles seemed endless.

As I listened to the students, I recognized that their concerns were related, in complex ways, to their identity as African members of a global church. During the rest of the course, I sought to respond to these objections in various ways. As students engaged in practical exercises, listened to lectures about the history of the Christian movement in Africa and worldwide, and read biographies of African Christians from bygone eras, they progressively grew in confidence that they could do these interviews and write the story of a Burkinabè Christian. They practiced asking for consent and saw examples of consent willingly given. They read the stories of African missionaries, prophets, and martyrs who had baptized thousands, rooted the Christian message in African cultures and contexts, and courageously witnessed to their faith in the face of suffering, racism, and death. They wrestled with the painful links between mission and colonialism, while learning to situate European colonialism and the modern Protestant missionary movement as episodes within a longer, broader story of the church in Africa. They became familiar with the structure and vision of the DACB and its origin in conversations among North American and African scholars who felt deep concern about the lack of “basic reference tools” that contributed to an ongoing reliance on outdated intellectual maps which fail outrageously to reflect the “remarkable phenomenon” of Christianity’s “surge” in Africa, and which remain ignorant of the “men and women who served and

who serve as the movement's catalysts."<sup>81</sup> They sharpened their skills as interviewers by learning to ask good questions and recognize problematic ones. And they slowly began to see themselves as storytellers who had a contribution to make to a narrative of African Christianity in which the missionary initiative and leadership of Africans was – and always has been – central. At the end of the class, [twelve new French-language biographies](#) were posted in the DACB, the first ones for Burkina Faso. This brings the number of French-language biographies up to 525, or 18%, of the total of 2,948 biographies as of March 2022.<sup>82</sup>

In this course, and others taught since then at both UCLO and the Université chrétienne de Kinshasa (UCKin), biography was the tool that both helped students to remember differently and made them into storytellers generating new biographies. Biography served as a bridge between broad stories of colonialism, mission, and church renewal, and particular stories of individual missionaries and faith activists; between missiological theory and practice; between church history and mission history; and between Christians from North and South. The process of writing a biography was itself a complex relational process that helped to create new global church links. In each of these ways, the use of biography as a pedagogical tool helped to create new momentum for practices of “catholic remembering” – the construction of historical narratives that are infused by the archivists’, writers’, and tellers’ own ongoing commitment to the universal church.<sup>83</sup>

This case study aims to show how the production of biography in an educational setting, as part of a collaborative project such as the DACB, can function as a bridge, building new connections and contributing to more equitable methods of knowledge production within the global church. A first section develops the concept of catholic remembering and shows how biography can serve as a valuable tool to promote this ecclesial practice. A second section presents the detailed pedagogy of these church history classes, reflects on students’ reception of this teaching method, and identifies some of the barriers that continue to undermine students’ ability to become full participants in telling the stories of the church in Africa.

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<sup>81</sup> Jonathan J. Bonk, “Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent: The Dictionary of African Christian Biography,” 2008, <https://dacb.org/about/bonk-article/>.

<sup>82</sup> <https://dacb.org/resources/datasheets/>, accessed March 10, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed development of the concept of “catholic remembering,” see Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites: The Politics of Catholicity and Memory in a Missionary Encounter in Belgian Congo, 1905-1939” (PhD. diss., Boston University, 2020), 114–20, 596–99. See also Andrew F. Walls, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 155; Emma Wild-Wood, “Afterword: Relocating Unity and Theology in the Study of World Christianity,” in *Relocating World Christianity. Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of Christianity*, ed. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 338, 340.

## II – Biography as a tool for catholic remembering

As Andrew Walls pointed out several decades ago, for church historians from the global South to be visible and equal partners in creating and remembering the stories of the global church, they need space to develop research and writing skills, to access primary and secondary sources, to produce and publish, to share their stories, to develop networks of colleagues and to contribute to shaping academic agendas.<sup>84</sup> However, the enormous barriers that stand in the way of equitable academic conversations and exchanges within the global church have not diminished substantially since Walls identified these “structural problems.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the development of World Christianity as a vibrant new field of study, the newly global reality of the church has still largely failed to penetrate the old certainties and intellectual maps of Western academia. This results in the ongoing exclusion of global South scholars as equal participants in knowledge production, while global North scholars remain disconnected from the challenges of their global South colleagues.<sup>86</sup> It is indeed ironic that key stakeholders and actors, even within the increasingly well-defined field of World Christianity, are still primarily Western.<sup>87</sup>

When telling the stories of the church in Africa, African historians often bump against the inaccessibility of primary sources, which tend to be preserved by mission agencies in the global North, so continuing to perpetuate the false dichotomy between “mission” and “church.”<sup>88</sup> In this way, power imbalances within the domain of knowledge production become barriers to catholicity, both obscuring the central missionary role of African Christians throughout history and preventing African historians from telling accurate stories about the church’s spread on their continent.

Catholic remembering includes the dismantling of artificial barriers between “mission history” and “church history” as members of churches are

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<sup>84</sup> Walls, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” 156–58.

<sup>85</sup> Historian David Maxwell calls attention to the powerful political, economic, and religious barriers that, perhaps especially in Africa, undermine “the inspiring notion of being a member of the worldwide church.” – David Maxwell, “Historical Perspectives on Christianity Worldwide: Connections, Comparisons and Consciousness,” in *Relocating World Christianity. Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of Christianity*, ed. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 47–59. Maxwell refers to James Ferguson’s influential work on this topic. – James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>86</sup> Walls, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” 158.

<sup>87</sup> Afe Adogame et al., “What Is World Christianity?” (Panel discussion, Overseas Ministry Study Center Online Study Program event, Princeton Theological Seminary, November 4, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnVOMdrc6eA>.

<sup>88</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi and E. A. Ayande, “Writing African Church History,” in *The Church Crossing Frontiers. Essays on the Nature of Mission. In Honour of Bengt Sundkler*, ed. Peter Beyerhaus and Carl F. Hallencreutz, Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia 11 (Lund: Gleerup, 1969), 94; Walls, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies,” 149, 155; Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” 69–75.

recognized as missionary, and members of mission agencies are recognized as church.<sup>89</sup> It means ensuring equitable access to the sources needed to tell the stories of the missionary encounters that have shaped the church into a global body. It means paying attention, when telling those stories, to the concrete and everyday ways in which a catholic ecclesial imagination took shape as missionaries and local believers began to “recognize each other as one people,”<sup>90</sup> and recognizing how such an imagination was undermined or betrayed by allegiance to competing claims such as those of ethnicity, race, or nation-state.<sup>91</sup> It means developing practices of shared remembering, in which Christians from North and South together lament betrayals of catholicity in past and present, celebrate the ways in which boundary-crossing friendships – often on the margins of the official missionary action – have helped to shape a new, global people, and commit themselves to more equitable methods of knowledge production in the future.<sup>92</sup> If mission is “the activity by which the church seeks to render itself universal,”<sup>93</sup> and if memory and narrative are core elements that shape identity,<sup>94</sup> then remembering the stories of mission together through a catholic ecclesiological lens is part of how Christians from North and South can be “re-membered” into a global body.<sup>95</sup>

Biographies have great value in supporting the practice of catholic remembering. As Michèle Sigg has well laid out in an article about the essential role of biography in the DACB, biography is a “particularly pertinent and essential tool for historical research on African Christianity.”<sup>96</sup> Biography helps to fill in large gaps in

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<sup>89</sup> Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” 114–16, 598; Wilbert R. Shenk, “Toward a Global Church History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2 (April 1996): 54; Philip Yuen-Sang Leung, “Mission History versus Church History,” in *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 54–74.

<sup>90</sup> Kwame Bediako as interviewed in James Ault, *African Christianity Rising* (James Ault Productions, 2013).

<sup>91</sup> Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” 116–18.

<sup>92</sup> Fast, Anicka, 119–20.

<sup>93</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 65–67.

<sup>95</sup> For extensive discussion of “re-membering” in relation to historical memory, Eucharist, and the global church, see Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” 114ff. The term was first used by William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, *Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 229, and by John D. Roth, “Forgiveness and the Healing of Memories: An Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 573–88. See also Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 234–36. For seminal discussion of the role of dangerous memories in constituting a global church, see Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, especially chapters 5 and 8.

<sup>96</sup> Michèle Miller Sigg, “Pointillist History and the Essential Role of Biography in the Dictionary of African Christian Biography,” in *African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives, and Challenges* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2018), 20.

the historiography, each story like a dot in a pointillist portrait.<sup>97</sup> As Sigg points out, biography is not just suited to contexts where written sources are sparse, such as Africa; nor is it simply a stopgap measure to be set aside once the “real” histories are written. Biography is a methodology that helps to illuminate previously marginalized voices and so begins to shift powerful, received narratives.<sup>98</sup> Its engaging stories are particularly well-suited to illuminating the interplay between individuals and society, and they highlight the agency of individuals even within oppressive structures and systems such as colonialism.<sup>99</sup> Biographies produced in Africa can help to reveal the details of a missionary encounter, and their basis in oral sources provides the kinds of rich detail that can complement or challenge written documents created by European colonial or missionary personnel.<sup>100</sup> For example, they can challenge Western academic biases by grounding stories of supernatural experiences, or “good” Western missionaries, firmly in lived experience.<sup>101</sup> Biographies are also particularly excellent at illuminating friendship – a missional practice that has played a critical role in transforming Christianity into a global movement.<sup>102</sup>

My own research and teaching experience leads me to suggest three additional reasons, beyond these already convincing ones, to privilege biography as an essential tool in the development of more accurate and more catholic narratives about the church in Africa.

First, the process of researching, writing, submitting, editing, and posting a biography in the DACB is a relational process that requires collaboration between North and South and so helps to develop webs of connection within the global church. It requires a level of trust from African students that the DACB project will not perpetuate the downplaying of local knowledge and the privileging of technical expertise that overwhelm many of their interactions with well-intentioned Westerners.<sup>103</sup> The original research of the student, the editing and guidance of the professor, and the technical expertise of DACB staff in Boston all contribute to the finished product and open up the possibility for the DACB to be jointly owned by all these stakeholders. Being the author of a biography gives dignity to students, and so contributes in a small way to equalizing the power held by various participants in the

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<sup>97</sup> Sigg, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Sigg, 22.

<sup>99</sup> Sigg, 23.

<sup>100</sup> Sigg, 27, 31.

<sup>101</sup> Sigg, 31–34.

<sup>102</sup> See Robert, Dana L., “Global Friendship as Incarnational Missional Practice,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 4 (October 2015): 180–84; Mark A. Noll, “‘Give Us Friends’: Varieties of Friendship in the Christian Mission,” in *Unlikely Friends: How God Uses Boundary-Crossing Friendships to Transform the World*, ed. David W Scott et al. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 11 and other chapters in this volume.

<sup>103</sup> See Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, Problems of International Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially Chapter 2.

production of historical narratives.<sup>104</sup> The very methodology used in historical research thus becomes an ecclesial practice that can either support or undermine an imagination in which believers from North and South form a single church body, and together develop habits of memory from within “a vantage point of... unity.”<sup>105</sup>

Second, biography can serve as a powerful relational tool for opening up conversation about the unequal and painful power dynamics associated with the expansion of the church in Africa. There is something about personal stories that makes them into a privileged terrain for global church conversations and reckonings that may one day lead toward reconciliation. As students contemplate the choice of their biographical subject, they are confronted with difficult questions about who owns the story of this person, and who has the right to tell it. These are ecclesiological questions that touch on a deeper concern: who ultimately owns the story of the church? Bringing such questions to the surface is a first step toward catholic remembering, yet it can be painful for students to recognize the ongoing barriers that prevent the church’s stories from being jointly owned or valued. Moreover, biographies are deeply personal, since students often choose to write about someone who is known to them. This leads them to wrestle more deeply with the painful intersection and tension between the agency and contribution of a particular, loved individual, and the broader social and political structures of domination that hampered the missionary efforts of this precious person and undercut their attempts to bring about change, reconciliation, or *shalom*.

Third, biography is a form of remembering that helps to give an account of hope – something that Ugandan political theologian Emmanuel Katongole has argued to be a particularly “urgent theological task” in relation to Africa today.<sup>106</sup> Katongole shows that hope in a context of dehumanizing violence is “born from lament,” and proposes that portraits of individual believers, which explore the ways in which these individuals incorporate the spiritual practice of lament into their nonviolent activism, constitute “the unique form of narrative able to capture a movement of hope in Africa in its complex ecclesiological, theological, and practical dimensions.”<sup>107</sup> While not all Christians featured in the DACB have necessarily lived a lament-full existence, nearly all experienced suffering and opposition. Biography offers an opportunity to reflect on how these individuals were able to serve God faithfully in difficult contexts, and how their spirituality grounded them in this mission.

In all these ways, then, biography is an essential tool for a more catholic telling of the stories that shape the identity of a global church. Biographies of African Christians help to show the inseparability of mission history and church history as

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<sup>104</sup> Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” xii, 62–77.

<sup>105</sup> F. J. Verstraelen et al., “Afterword: The Ecumenical Development of Missiology: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, ed. F. J. Verstraelen et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 467.

<sup>106</sup> Katongole, *Born from Lament*, xvii.

<sup>107</sup> Katongole, xvii.



they highlight the central role of African missionaries in transmitting, appropriating, and contextualizing the Christian message across the continent.

But how, concretely, can biography be used in a classroom setting to support such efforts of telling and remembering?

### **III – Case study: Biography as a bridge**

#### **Pedagogy**

Many theological institutions in francophone Africa, including UCLO and UCKin, cater to the needs of busy pastors and professionals by offering courses in a modular system, with students coming to a campus for a few weeks of intensive lectures, and then returning to their ministry contexts and finishing assignments and papers prior to the next module several months later. This means that the teachers' input is limited to about 20 very intense hours, and then to communication by phone, WhatsApp, or email. At UCKin, the number of students who did not have e-mail access was very high, and even WhatsApp could not attain all of the students. Given the significant communication constraints, the long period between modules during which professional and pastoral duties are pressing, and the fragility of the university system that forces many professors to cobble together multiple teaching appointments for their livelihood, students and professors often have little or no communication with each other between modules. Thus there are few opportunities for feedback or course correction prior to the final deadline. In my courses, I deviated from this norm by compiling students' contact information to create a WhatsApp group for announcements and giving them a calendar of assignments with deadlines spread across the fourteen weeks prior to the final submission deadline. The major biography assignment was broken into several steps: (1) a planning assignment with a detailed plan for interviews, transcription, and analysis (due two weeks after class ended); (2) a first draft (after nine weeks); and (3) the submission of a corrected version to the DACB along with interview sound files and transcripts for archiving (12 weeks). I also assigned undergraduate students a book review and a short paper in which they were invited to reflect on what they had learned from the biography assignment. Master's students were assigned a 2,000-word contextual analysis and historical preservation plan in which they were asked to identify the current obstacles to the preservation and writing of history in their church context.

While laying out these requirements to keep students engaged and active during the weeks to follow the in-person module, I also tried hard to make every moment of my 20 in-person hours count. About half the class time of four hours a day was spent on lectures on African Christian history. In these lectures, my goals were to de-center European Christianity, to demonstrate the active agency of African Christians, to show the vitality of African efforts to inculturate their faith, and to trace the successive waves of independency movements from Ethiopianism to AICs to late 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostalism. In the choice of topics to cover and periodization, I

leaned heavily on work by Lamin Sanneh, Dana Robert, and Ogbu Kalu.<sup>108</sup> I also began to explore the work of Emmanuel Katongole and Stan Chu Ilo about the role of lament as a kind of remembering that sits with suffering, struggles amid ruins, and engages for nonviolent change.<sup>109</sup>

At the heart of each lecture was a time of discussion about specific biographies, during which students analyzed the complex intersection between the agency of these individuals and the ways in which they were limited by powerful social and political factors. They explored the meaning of conversion for these Christians and sought to articulate how these individuals had appropriated the Christian message, and how they had contributed to its contextualization. They pondered the ways in which individual life stories helped to illuminate broader historical themes, and considered how they would construct their own biographies in ways that authentically addressed the complexity of individuals' strengths and weaknesses while accurately reflecting their contribution to the African church.

The other half of class time (usually the second half) was devoted to practical exercises. During these sessions, students practiced oral history techniques that they would need to move their biography from an initial idea to a finished DACB entry. In pairs, they practiced recording and requesting consent. During a class role play, they experienced the impact of closed and leading questions and practiced asking open, neutral ones before writing up their own detailed questionnaires. We worked on developing appropriate questions to glean information about the challenges, conflicts, and even weaknesses that characterized the lives of the biographical subject, in order to produce balanced and non-hagiographical narratives. Additional sessions offered basic practice with interview transcription and invited students to articulate the criteria for an engaging, truthful, and well-written biographical narrative. We reviewed basic rules of citation in order to help students differentiate between their own story and the ideas gleaned from others, and to ensure the academic legitimacy of their contributions. For Masters students, I included an additional session about basic principles of archiving, as a way to help them assess and engage with barriers to historical preservation in their own contexts.

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<sup>108</sup> Key reference works that shaped my lectures include Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story*, 1st Africa World Press ed. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007) (available online at <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/21579>); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion 27 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Jacques Blandinier, *L'essor des missions protestantes* (Nogent-sur-Mame: L'Institut Biblique de Nogent : 2003); Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion: An Introduction*, Second (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Katongole, *Born from Lament*; Stan Chu Ilo, "Pandemic, Persecution and Poverty: The Trials, Tribulations and Triumph of God's People in Africa" (2020/2021 Annual Meeting of the Association of Professors of Mission: Mission, Persecution, Martyrdom and Meaning-Making: Instructional Strategies and Methods of Interpretation, Zoom, June 17, 2021).

During all these sessions, I relied heavily on the *DACB Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers*, and supplemented the manual with instruction sheets detailing interview and consent procedures, a project information sheet template to share with interviewees, and worksheets to assist them in planning their biographies and contextual analyses.<sup>110</sup>

Biographies served as the bridge between the lectures and the practical sessions. They were the link between my attempts to tell the truest story I could about the church in Africa, and a hoped-for future in which these students would tell an even better one. They opened up a path along which students could contribute to shaping the story of African Christianity in the future. They were the way in which African Christians' struggles and choices came alive. They were the "aha" moments.

Depending on their level, students read between seven and eleven biographies during the week-long class, and were held accountable through flash quizzes and by being called on to share their analysis of the readings with their colleagues. Most readings were done outside class time, but I included one out-loud reading of a short biography, because this auditory mode of transmission seemed to heighten students' awareness of what a biography was, and to deepen their appreciation of the individual's contributions to the church. These biographies, drawn from each major historical period (antiquity, 1500-1800,<sup>111</sup> precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods), illuminated the dynamics of the penetration, contextualization, and appropriation of Christianity in Africa, which often took place within a context and "logic of conquest,"<sup>112</sup> in a way that lectures never could. I chose biographies of both men and women, and included both individuals of vast influence as well as a few who resembled the students' own grandparents: lay Christians who were not necessarily prophets, bishops, or martyrs but whose contribution to the local church could readily be appreciated.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> The Manual is available in English at [https://dacb.org/resources/final\\_instr\\_manual.pdf](https://dacb.org/resources/final_instr_manual.pdf) and in French at [https://dacb.org/resources/frenchinstr-manual\\_web.pdf](https://dacb.org/resources/frenchinstr-manual_web.pdf). Additional instruction sheets and worksheets are available <https://dacb.org/resources/oral-history/>. Detailed instructions for submitting articles are available at <https://dacb.org/connect/submit/>.

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Isichei's "middle years." See Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*.

<sup>112</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et État en société postcoloniale*, Collection Chrétiens en liberté (Paris: Karthala, 1988), 40.

<sup>113</sup> Most of the biographies came from the DACB. These included Samuel Ajayi Crowther (A), George Grenfell (A), William Wadé Harris (A), Lydie Mengwelune, Prosper Augustin Hacquard, Simon Kimbangu (C), Paul Carlson (B), Joseph Malula (A), Marie Matie, Ouédraogo Tiga Pierre, Farma Mapan, and Emmanuel Kataliko. See <https://dacb.org/fr/sort/stories/>. I also found several rich French-language biographies elsewhere. A collection of biographies produced by the Bearing Witness project includes excellent narratives about Perpetua (d. 203) and Marcel (d. 298), shorter stories (not full biographies) about Congolese Mennonites Kasai Kapata and Samuel Kakesa, and a detailed narrative about Anabaptist churches in Nigeria responding nonviolently to Boko Haram. See Charles F. Moore and Timothy Keiderling, eds., *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly*

By anchoring the lectures in biographies, students deepened their reflection about the elements of a good biography and gained greater appreciation for the ways in which their biographies could contribute to the story of the African church. The juxtaposition of lectures with practical sessions, where students were confronted with the challenges of writing their own biographies, also helped to motivate them to critically analyze the biographies they read as a way of reflecting on the strategies and methods they would adopt in their own story. Finally, the process of having their biographies evaluated, marked up, praised, and critiqued, brought students into an academic conversation in which they were being challenged to meet the standards that would allow their voice to be heard in a global forum.

Three other elements of the pedagogy also invited students to consider new perspectives on the agency of African Christians in world Christian history, and so ultimately contributed to their engagement with the biographies of African Christians. First, I sought to elicit students' subconscious narratives about the reasons for the dramatic growth of the church in Africa. I began each module by sharing statistics and maps that depict the demographic changes within the African church, and inviting students to articulate, in one or two sentences, how things got to be this way.<sup>114</sup> Students would inevitably call out very similar answers, mostly variations on the theme of "Western missionaries brought the gospel, and after that there was an African church."<sup>115</sup> When I asked students how they felt about this story, several shared that it did not sit well with them. They believed it to be true, and yet it was an alienating narrative that caused them discomfort, awkwardness, and embarrassment, because they did not have a way to tell the story of the church on this continent without emphasizing its foreign origin, and they knew that this was a major turnoff for Africans considering conversion to Christianity. I challenged students to reconsider this received narrative in light of the lectures they would hear and the biographies they would read and analyze, and proposed that a truer narrative would more clearly depict Africans' central role as missionaries in the diffusion and appropriation of Christianity in every historical period. I then invited them to become contributors to that narrative through their own research and writing of biographies.

Second, I required students to memorize 35 key dates before the end of the in-class week, in order to give them a conceptual framework of significant events in

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*Discipleship* (Walden: Plough Publishing House, 2016). The French translation is available on archive.org: Charles E. Moore and Timothy Keiderling, eds., *Être témoin: suivre le Christ jusqu'au martyre*, trans. François Caudwell (Goshen, IN: Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, 2018),

<https://archive.org/details/TreTmoin>. An excellent 60-page biography of Alfred Diban, the first Burkinabè Christian, is available at the Librairie Jeunesse Afrique in Ouagadougou. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Alfred Diban: premier chrétien de Haute-Volta* (Colombelles: Ressource Editions, 1999).

<sup>114</sup> Some helpful infographics and maps are freely available from the Center for the study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. See

<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/>.

<sup>115</sup> "Les missionnaires occidentaux ont amené l'évangile, et par la suite il y a eu l'Église africaine."

the history of the global church as well as the church in their country. Knowing these dates helped them to situate each biography within a historical context.

Third, I enlisted students' help in identifying major stories about the history of the church in Africa that still remain untold, especially from the colonial and post-colonial periods. After giving them an overview of the existing historiography, and orienting them to the changing approaches toward writing African Christian history over the last decades, I listed some themes and stories which seemed worthy of further research and invited them to add to the list. This exercise captured students' imagination as they began to recognize both the significance of the work of previous historians and the immensity of the task that remained, while feeling drawn into this task as participants through their own biography assignments.

## Reception

Throughout the in-person class time and through the assignments, students were active in communicating what concepts and stories had resonated most deeply with them, and how they conceived of their own contribution to telling the stories of the church in Africa. Their feedback suggests that as a result of the course – especially the engagement with biographies – their interest in and commitment to catholic remembering grew in several specific ways.

First, their engagement with biographies led students to a growing awareness of African missionary agency throughout history. These narratives convinced them that Africans had not been passive recipients of Christianity, and that the story of the church in Africa could not be told without reference to these innumerable African missionaries.<sup>116</sup> The biographies were a “source of much inspiration,” one student emphasized, noting that the feats accomplished by these African Christians gave him faith that the current generation could also “achieve such exploits.” “Africans themselves can and must invest in the foundation of the church and missions on the continent, for they are capable of doing so,” declared another. Yet another marveled at his new sense, after reading biographies of early Burkinabè Christians, of being surrounded by unsung heroes. “Our fathers have done many things,” he concluded. Students were inspired by the biographies of Kimpa Vita and William Wadé Harris, both of whom played a leading role in different contexts – and with differing degrees of faithfulness to today's standards of Protestant orthodoxy – in expressing Christianity in a way that retained continuity with African primal religions. The biography of Harris led one student to exclaim that this really was “an evangelization of power and of spiritual strength.” He and his colleagues could clearly

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<sup>116</sup> Emphasizing the role of African missionaries in the pre-colonial period (1792-1885), following the lead of historians such as Ogbu Kalu and Andrew Walls, also helped to bring this point across by differentiating between the strong African initiative and inter-racial collaboration that characterized this period and the more heavy-handed role of white missionaries, increasingly influenced by racist and colonial ideologies, that took root during and after the Scramble for Africa.

see why Harris' approach was a game-changer, constituting a threat to French colonial domination while differing from that of both West African returnees and European missionaries.<sup>117</sup> In short, students began to embrace a new story, one in which the vitality and growth of the church in Africa could not be explained primarily as a response or even a reaction to Western initiative.

Second, students directly linked this dawning awareness of the missionary impact of African Christians throughout history with a sense of obligation or calling to participate in making these largely untold stories more broadly known. After a week steeped in the stories of desert monks, Ethiopian fortresses, Kongo prophets, West African evangelists, and outspoken Catholic bishops, one student lamented that because these stories remained largely unknown, the church in Africa seems to be "like a canoe that passes without leaving a trace." He and others expressed the sense that "the Church has a great responsibility" to tell such stories for future generations. One marveled that "God wants to use us to unveil" the stories of the "Africans that God used," while another felt that ongoing silence about these stories would be "guilty" and that it was critical for "we ourselves to become actors" in making these stories known.

Third, well-written biographies opened up space for students to explore and wrestle with the unequal and painful power dynamics associated with the expansion of the church in Africa. One of the biographies with which my Burkinabè students engaged deeply was that of Alfred Diban, the first Burkinabè Christian (1875-1975).<sup>118</sup> His life story, written by his eminent historian son Joseph Ki-Zerbo, clearly illuminated Diban's heroic and decisive influence in the founding of the first Catholic missions in Mossi territory, while equally clearly showing how Diban's influence was circumscribed or rendered invisible by colonial domination, by the general social upheaval that accompanied colonial conquest, and by the attitudes of superiority of French Catholic missionaries who cast him into the role of an assistant or catechist. My Protestant students could well appreciate Diban's deep sense of satisfaction at having his apostolic contribution recognized by the pope, while resonating with the dramatic battle scene at Toma, when Diban chose to claim allegiance to the French White Fathers despite his compatriots' understandable choice to associate all whites with colonial conquest, and despite the white priests' relative unawareness of how Diban and others were protecting them. The students' engagement with this story clearly shows how effective biographies can be in highlighting the contribution of an individual even within powerful and oppressive political and religious systems.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, Andrew Walls' excellent biography of Samuel Ajayi Crowther led students to a painful confrontation with the implications of Crowther's betrayal

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<sup>117</sup> David A. Shank, "Harris, William Wade (A)," in *Dictionnaire biographique des Chrétiens d'Afrique*, 1994, <https://dacb.org/fr/stories/liberia/legacy-harris/>.

<sup>118</sup> Ki-Zerbo, *Alfred Diban*.

<sup>119</sup> Sigg, "Pointillist History," 23.

by young white colleagues.<sup>120</sup> It was in response to this story that one student reiterated his conviction that Christianity in Africa was foreign – one should not pretend, he insisted, that Africans were the main actors, if their founding of Ethiopian or independent churches was ultimately a reaction to white racism. This led to a profound and extended class discussion about racism within the missionary movement, which I believe would not have occurred without the impetus of Walls' empathetic, detailed, and careful treatment of Crowther's life story. Well-written biographies effectively showcase African initiative without losing sight of moments of betrayal and domination and structures of racism and discrimination. In this way they open up space to remember a painful past, a prerequisite to addressing ongoing inequalities.

The process of writing a biography also seemed to serve as a step toward a deeper reckoning with past conflict. An undergraduate student wrote an excellent biography in which he alluded only very indirectly to a conflict between his subject and an expatriate missionary. A few months later, he came to see me and said he was now ready to more openly document this conflict. Our subsequent discussion left me with the impression that the relational process of writing a story and having it edited and posted online through an inter-continental collaboration helped him to feel safe in taking a further step toward confronting painful stories of conflict within the missionary encounter in the past. Somehow, engagement with biographies – whether through reading or through researching and producing them – opens up space for necessary lament and wrestling with the tragic persistence of a social imaginary of violence and domination, even as these stories provide a hopeful account of how particular ecclesial communities managed, against all odds, to “exemplify, in ordinary ways, the promise of a new future.”<sup>121</sup> Seeing my students engage with these difficult stories left me more convinced that the legacy of unequal or abusive encounters still needs to be addressed in a more satisfactory way, and that it is only through the confrontation and repentance of the misuse of power that took place within those encounters that healing can take place. Somehow, the telling and the remembering need to take place in a way that is itself catholic – that brings people from North and South together to the table.

Finally, the process of reading and writing biographies helped students to feel connected to a broader, universal church. One evangelical pastor confessed that he had gained a whole new appreciation for Catholic missionary efforts and for the Catholic church as a whole, after learning about the Catholic Kongo kingdom, the efforts of the White Fathers to cross the Sahara Desert, and the courageous witness of Congolese bishops. He felt embarrassed to have tarred all Catholics with the same brush in the past, and now recognized that many of their missionary efforts were

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<sup>120</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Crowther, Samuel Ajayi (A),” in *Dictionnaire biographique des Chrétiens d’Afrique*, 1992, <https://dacb.org/fr/stories/nigeria/legacy-crowther/>.

<sup>121</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, “A Different World Right Here: The Church within African Theological Imagination,” in *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2005), 177.

worth emulating. Another expressed his sense that the narrative of the African church to which he had been exposed during the class was related to his own identity as part of a broader ecclesial body. This story “talks about us, about our origins,” he mused.

As students articulated their heightened sense of responsibility for telling the stories of the church, several appealed to the deeper connection they now felt with the universal church as a motivating factor. One reflected on his sense of indebtedness to a previous generation of historians. “If others hadn’t worked, we wouldn’t have any history now,” he remarked, and concluded that, “The church has a large responsibility...There are many areas to explore... The material is there... Determined people are needed.” Another emphasized his new sense of obligation to collect and tell stories. “I feel compelled to do something for future generations,” he mused, “so that the thread is not lost.” In various ways, reading and producing biographies nourished a sense of recognition – an idea that these are “our” stories and yet they connect us to others. These responses illustrate the powerful role of narrative in shaping identity and so in contributing to the “re-membling” of the global body of Christ.<sup>122</sup> As students seek to identify the “connecting threads” of history, they are also connecting themselves, as a new generation of storytellers, with the mostly Western biographers who have gone before, and so integrating themselves into a web of rememberers. Could this “thread,” I wondered – this connection between the stories that have been told and those that remain to tell – be one of those fragile yet crucial links in knitting together a global family of faith?

## Challenges

Although I was animated by a desire to help students overcome some of the barriers to full participation in global academic and ecclesial conversations, there were many ways in which these courses did not or could not adequately contribute to this goal. I mention several of the main challenges I faced both in order to call forth creative ideas for overcoming them, and as a way to emphasize the need for more deep-seated structural changes within the field of World Christianity.

First, students’ writing quality was often very poor. Biographies needed extensive editing in order to bring them to an acceptable standard for submission to the DACB. I was dismayed to realize that, within the proliferation of theological colleges in francophone Africa, many students are not learning the basic skills of research, writing, and critical thinking that can allow them to be contributing authors to the DACB, let alone legitimate and accepted participants in global conversations at a higher academic level. I was also not able to require nearly as much reading as what would have been considered normal in a global North context, although I did keep trying to find ways to help students engage with written materials. It was a challenge for me to find the right balance between teaching students academic skills (and so

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<sup>122</sup> Roth, “Forgiveness and the Healing of Memories,” 588. See also Fast, Anicka, “Becoming Global Mennonites,” 109.



taking away time from a focus on history), and editing the biographies for them so that, at least, their stories could be heard.

Second, especially in Congo, many students found it difficult to get access to interviewees. While I urged them to only choose biographical subjects whose families were fully on board with the idea of their loved one's life story being documented and published online, several students experienced the frustration of indirect refusals from interviewees who set up meetings and then repeatedly failed to show up, requiring them to change subjects at the last minute. Students often got a runaround from interviewees who wanted to be paid for the information they provided. Writing biographies, like any other historical narrative, raises difficult questions about power and ownership of others' stories. I gave significant attention to the question of fully informed consent, urged students to choose biographical subjects carefully and to arrange interviews early enough to allow for sudden changes, and included exercises in asking for consent that helped students to understand the power dynamics involved. Students needed training in order to explain the purpose of their research to interviewees without raising unnecessary suspicion, and, equally importantly, without intimidating or strongarming potential interviewees into an uninformed consent. I noticed that it seemed to be easier for students to get consent to write the stories of women, even as my all-male students tended to choose to write about men, so I introduced a quota-based signup sheet that required at least half of the students to write about women, indirectly reducing difficulties with interviewee consent. Ongoing careful attention to questions of consent, power, and ownership remains essential, both to ensure that stories in the DACB are based only on freely and willingly shared information, and to reduce the barriers of suspicion that prevent people from feeling included and empowered by participation in the DACB project.

Third, communication with students was challenging because of technological limitations. Although access to the internet is increasing, I found that interaction by e-mail was not an easy mode of communication for many. Most students now have smartphones, which greatly facilitated the ability to record interviews and send the sound files to me via WhatsApp for archiving. However, some went home to areas where only an SMS could get through, and a significant number were unable to send me assignments in Word format, which made it difficult for them to interact with my edits to their biography. Those who had stable access to WhatsApp and to a laptop were advantaged over other students. For the latter, I relied heavily on text messages in WhatsApp for questions about their biographies, which I would then integrate into a Word document myself. At least in part because of these technological difficulties, some students dropped out before the final assignments were due.

## **IV – Conclusion**

Within a global church framework, history must be seen as a practice of remembering rightly in a way that helps to re-member us into a global body. As I have taught these courses in West and Central Africa, I have found that biography provides a powerful way to work at this task.

Biographies serve a crucial bridging function within the global church. They bridge big stories and little ones, and connect theory and practice, making history intensely personal. They are a kind of story that allows for remembering of pain and betrayal while still showcasing Africans' missionary initiative. The production of biographies is a relational process that brings people together in conversation between North and South. Existing biographies, used as course materials, generate new biographies. As stories are added, momentum grows, which is part of the process of weaving new webs of connection across boundaries within the global church. And most importantly, biographies offer a way for more Africans to become tellers of their own stories without losing sight of broader belonging to a global church. In all these ways and more, the reading, hearing, and telling of biographies in an ecclesial-academic context contributes to the shared remembering of the painful yet beautiful story of God's action on this continent.

## Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Mennonites in Africa

Compiled by Beth Restricker, Head, BU African Studies Library, and  
Anicka Fast, Guest Editor

### Books

Hollinger-Janzen, Rod, Nancy J. Myers, and Jim Bertsche, eds. **The Jesus Tribe: Grace Stories from Congo's Mennonites 1912-2012: A Project of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission**. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012. ISBN 10: 0936273496; ISBN 13: 9780936273495.

Freely available in English and French on the Global Anabaptist Wiki, [https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Global\\_Anabaptist\\_Wiki](https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Global_Anabaptist_Wiki) 7.00-10.00 USD on <https://www.aimmint.org/books.html>, or via [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0936273496) or [Abebooks.com](https://www Abebooks.com)

**Description:** The culmination of a project sponsored by Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and marking the centennial of Mennonite witness in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this collection consists of brief stories of Congolese Mennonite Christians who had life-changing encounters with Jesus and became witnesses to God's grace in their lives. The stories reach from the earliest days to the present, illustrating courage, struggle, and faith amid enormous cultural pressures, and reflecting African interpretations of Anabaptist beliefs in nonviolence and forgiveness. ([Abebooks.com](https://www Abebooks.com))

John M. Janzen, Harold F. Miller, and John C. Yoder, eds. **Mennonites and Post-Colonial African Studies**. Routledge, 2021. ISBN-10: 0367474328; ISBN-13: 978-0367474324. 146 USD via [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0367474328).

**Description:** This book examines the evolution of post-colonial African Studies through the eyes of Africanists from the Anabaptist (Mennonite and Church of the Brethren) community. The book chronicles the lives of twenty-two academics and practitioners whose work spans from the immediate post-colonial period in the 1960s to the present day, a period in which decolonization and development have dominated scholarly and practitioner debate. Reflecting the values and perspectives they shared with the Mennonite Central Committee and other church-sponsored organizations, the authors consider their own personal journeys and professional careers, the power of the prevailing scholarly paradigms they encountered, and the realities of post-colonial Africa. Coming initially from Anabaptist service programs, the authors ultimately made wider contributions to fields of study such as comparative religion, church leadership, literature, music, political science, history, anthropology, economics and banking, health and healing, public health, extension education, and community development.

The personal histories and reflections of the authors provide an important glimpse into the intellectual and cultural perspectives that shaped the work of Africanist scholars and practitioners in the post-colonial period. The book reminds us that the work of every Africanist is shaped by their own life stories. ([Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

## Theses and Dissertations

Fuller, Clare James. **We Trust God Will Own His Word: A Holiness-Mennonite Mission in Nigeria 1905-1978**. Thesis, MA Theology. McMaster University, Divinity College, 2003. Free access at <http://hdl.handle.net/11375/12132>

**Abstract:** Under the revivalistic example and persuasion of German Methodistic groups in the mid-nineteenth century, scattered groups of Swiss-German Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in North America came together in a union called the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in 1883. This denomination deliberately drew closer to mainstream evangelicalism of a Wesleyan holiness type. Valuing “aggressive evangelism,” and trying to serve widely located Anabaptists, the denomination supported foreign missions but did not have any mission sending structure until 1905. By then several dozen young members, men, and women, had volunteered and joined nondenominational holiness movement missionary societies. When A. W. Banfield resigned from service in Nigeria with one such mission in 1905, some Mennonite Brethren in Christ Conferences led by the Ontario Conference organized themselves to send him and his wife back to Nigeria to start the first foreign mission of the denomination. A stronger organization, the United Missionary Society, was constituted in 1921, supported by all but one of the Annual Conferences. In Nigeria, the mission selected the Nupe people along the middle Niger River and slowly added mission stations, eventually serving about nine people groups in the west and north of Nigeria. A Nigerian church, the United Missionary Church of Africa, was organized as part of the indigenizing policy of the mission after the Second World War, but the mission retained leadership and ownership in key areas until moved to turn over control by mission board policies and the nationalizing mood of Nigeria through the 1970s. Nigerians converted through or serving with the mission became the leaders of uneven periods of growth, although overall the church has grown tenfold since the 1960s to average Sunday attendances of over 52,000 by 1999.

Mukawa, Nzuzi. **Relationship between the Mennonite Brethren Mission Services International and the Mennonite Brethren Churches of the Congo (1943-2002)**. Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity International University, 2003. Not available online.

This dissertation examines the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren Mission Services International, which is located in the United States of America and Canada, and the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Congo from 1943 to

2002. It focuses on three main issues: structure, personnel, and finance. The research project investigates and analyzes how the Mennonite Brethren Mission International handled these issues, as well as how it influenced the relationship between the two organizations, the Mennonite Brethren Mission Services International and the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Congo.

The method used in doing this was content analysis. A range of materials written by various participants in the Mennonite Brethren Mission Services International was examined, including Board policies, recommendations, resolutions, field reports, exhibits, and missionary correspondences located in the Mennonite Brethren Archives in Fresno, California. In addition, four periods were chosen as a framework for this analysis: the beginning and expansion (1943 to 1960), a period of transition (1960 to 1965), a period of independence (1965 to 1989), and a period of interdependence (1990 to 2002).

The outcome of my research was as follows. I saw a commitment from both parties to work together despite some pressures that arose as the church moved into the fourth stage of the relationship. In addition, we learned that this relationship has been troubled by inequality due to the unilateral structures that have been put in place, as well as to the one-way flow of resources.

My research suggests some recommendations for the future of the relationship which aim to reverse these negative situations. Firstly, the Mission and the church should come up with structures of interdependence that would bring the power to the middle, allow the process of decision-making to be shared, and foster a two-way flow of financial and personnel resources. Secondly, this research suggests that a biblical model of working together be incorporated, one which is based on the economic Trinity and the Pauline principles of relationship with the church at Philippi.

This study also suggests some ingredients for successful relationships. They include understanding, sharing, interdependence, and trust. In addition, some suggestions for avoiding pitfalls are proposed, such as not underestimating cultural differences, avoiding taking short cuts, and refusing to keep going when there is no end in sight.

Lastly, this research expresses hope for the future of relationships between the two bodies. Since they are committed to working together and to serving one another in order to accomplish the goal of extending the Kingdom of God in the world, this relationship will grow and become a testimony to the Anabaptist world as well as to the whole community of the body of Christ.

Schroeder-Dorn, Jill Michele. **Development of Mennonite music in the Congo: A study in musical thought**. Ph.D. Thesis, Music. 2012. University of Northern Colorado.

Free access at <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations/251/>

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine musical thought among members of the Congolese Mennonite Church. Established and governed by missionaries, the music practices of the Church were initially modeled after Western

services, which consisted of church choirs and four-part hymn singing. Congolese who chose to convert to Christianity had to adapt to a new musical system, which included not only properties of musical sound, but also concepts surrounding the music making experience, including what music is and what it has the power to accomplish. The church has now been in existence for over one hundred years, and musical changes have occurred in both sound and concept. This is an examination of those changes, with focus on the development of current forms and practices, the function of each form in the worship service, surrounding influences, and the points of debate that occurred with each stylistic shift. Additionally, the nature of music making and the boundaries between the sacred and profane are discussed. This was accomplished through traveling to DR Congo and employing the ethnographic techniques of interview and observation. Fifty men and women from thirteen different congregations were consulted, and observations occurred at choir rehearsals and church worship services, all within the city of Kinshasa, which is both the capital of DR Congo and its largest city. As a result, four categories of music were identified, as well as descriptions for their development and function in the worship service. A timeline was created from 1911 to the present, demonstrating the shift from one style of music to four styles of music. The timeline also encompasses surrounding influences and the topics for debate that accompanied each style change. Music making and musical thought were determined by numerous factors, both musical and extra-musical. The overarching purpose of music making has not changed from the mission era, but the boundaries that were initially established by missionaries were later challenged by Pentecostal churches in Kinshasa, especially churches in the revivalist movement. Additionally, in the midst of change, Congolese Mennonites continue to write their own songs and explore sonic possibilities, creating sounds that are distinct to each congregation and choir.

Yoder, Robert Bruce. **Mennonite Missionaries and African Independent Churches: The Development of an Anabaptist Missiology in West Africa: 1958-1967.** Ph.D. Thesis. Boston University, 2016. Free access at <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/18650>.

**Abstract:** This dissertation analyzes Mennonite missionary engagement with African Independent Churches in West Africa. The engagement between missionaries and indigenous churches gave rise to a novel mission interaction with a non-western form of Christianity. It led to the early development of mission strategy and theory from an intentionally Anabaptist perspective. Based upon close analysis of archival material, the dissertation examines the extended encounter between missionaries and Independents in southeastern Nigeria between 1958 and 1967. It places the encounter within the context of the religious history of both groups and outlines the influence of the experience on subsequent mission work. This case study sheds new light on the emergence of African indigenous Christian movements and western Christians' interaction with those movements during the period of decolonization and African nationalism.

The history that this study constructs shows that the religious and missiological assumptions that each party brought to the encounter complicated their relationship. The Independents' religious history led them to expect missionaries to establish traditional mission educational and healthcare institutions that would reinforce their well-being. Missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver and their colleagues were hesitant to do so, since their experience in India had convinced them that such institutions caused dependency on foreign funds and impeded indigenization. They focused, rather, on encouraging better relationships between estranged Independents and mission churches, capacitating Independent churches through biblical training, and reinforcing Independents' indigenous identity. Yet some Nigerian Independents insisted on a traditional mission relationship and its accompanying Mennonite identity. Missionaries borrowed mission theory about indigenization from the wider missionary movement, but applied and modified it over time, finally incorporating it into an Anabaptist missionary approach for work in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and the Republic of Benin.

This study suggests that while relationships between streams of the Christian movement are conditioned by their different religious histories and cultures, they nevertheless generate missiological insights. Through this engagement missionaries articulated an Anabaptist missiology that became influential throughout Africa. In turn, the Mennonite missionary presence enabled some Nigerian Independents to network successfully with the world Christian movement via their Mennonite affiliation.

Fast, Anicka. **Becoming Global Mennonites: The Politics of Catholicity and Memory in a Missionary Encounter in Belgian Congo, 1905-1939.** Ph.D. Thesis. Boston University, 2020. Free access at <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/41379>

**Abstract:** This dissertation examines the first three decades of a missionary encounter that began under the auspices of the Congo Inland Mission (CIM – later renamed as Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission [AIMM]) in Belgian Congo. As Africans, North Americans, and Europeans entered into relationship with each other through mission, they developed an identity as global Mennonites. They began to embrace a catholic ecclesial imagination – that is, a commitment to shared membership within the church as a political body capable of transcending competing claims of race, ethnicity, gender, or nation-state. Using both an ecclesiological lens of analysis and a global history framework, this dissertation traces the ways in which ecclesial institutions, practices, discourses, and performances functioned to support or undermine a social imagination that embraced expatriate missionaries and local believers within a single church, in both its local/congregational and trans-local manifestations.

During the period covered by the dissertation, expatriate and Congolese Mennonites struggled to define what the church was, and to determine who could participate in it and how. Factors that helped to promote a shared ecclesial imagination among Congolese and expatriate believers included an inter-

denominational vision, faith mission principles and practices, Pentecostal revivalism, a Mennonite congregational polity, shared experiences of work and worship, and friendships that crossed boundaries of race and gender. However, CIM missionaries' assertions of ethnic Mennonite control over mission strategy and structure, and their complicity with colonial labor exploitation, promoted a two-tiered understanding of the church that entrenched racial segregation and squelched the aspirations of white missionary women and Congolese evangelists. An ecclesiological lens of analysis thus offers new insights into the relationship between missions and colonial regimes, into the role of mission in American Mennonite denominational formation, and into the interactions among gender, race, and ethnicity in mission.

The dissertation traces the contested memories of early CIM "pioneers," such as Alma Doering, Aaron and Ernestina Janzen, and L.B. and Rose Haigh, and retrieves the missional agency of the many Congolese Mennonites who worked alongside them. In this way, it both uncovers the struggles for catholicity that shaped the missionary encounter at its inception, and calls attention to the ways in which such struggles continue to play out on the terrain of memory and knowledge production, coming to light through the competing efforts and uneven ability of Congolese and North American Mennonites to tell stories about their shared past. The historical narrative at the core of the dissertation thus serves as a case study for a broader exploration of theological and historiographical themes of memory and catholicity in relation to mission. The dissertation develops an ecclesiological framework for the study of the missionary encounter in which an explicit commitment to catholicity guides the task of writing world Christian history. It identifies ways in which such an ecclesiological mode of remembering can contribute to greater unity and catholicity within the global church.



## **Guidelines for Writing a Biography:** *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*<sup>123</sup>

In preparing a biographical study for inclusion in the Dictionary, please ensure that your article includes information on as many of the following categories as possible. The author should integrate this information into an article between 500 and 3000 words long.

1. Given name(s) of Subject. As necessary, provide explanations of these names.
  - Baptismal names
  - Kinship names
  - Nicknames
2. Family names. If there is more than one spouse, list the children under the appropriate mother or father.
  - Ethno-linguistic group
  - Kinship group
  - Father
  - Mother
  - Wife/Wives
  - Husband/Husbands
  - Children
  - Grandchildren
3. Life story
  - Date or approximate date of birth
  - Place of birth: village, city, province, nation
  - Unusual circumstances associated with birth
  - Formative experiences, such as illnesses, personal misfortunes, tragedies, visions, etc.
  - Education, degrees (including dates)
  - Conversion (including date, if applicable)
  - Calling and/or ordination to ministry (including date)
  - Date or approximate date, place, and circumstances of death
4. Nationality/citizenship
5. All languages spoken by the Subject
6. Church affiliation
  - Catholic
  - Orthodox; Coptic
  - Protestant (Conciliar, Evangelical, Anabaptist)
  - Independant (African initiated, Spiritual, Pentecostal/charismatic)
7. Names, locations, and descriptions of churches begun or served by the Subject

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<sup>123</sup> Adapted from <https://dacb.org/connect/submit/>

8. Ministry details: location, length of service, notable events, short-term and long-term impact. (Please provide detailed information wherever possible, including anecdotes, stories, and hearsay.)
9. Continuing influence and significance of the Subject
10. Publications, reports, writings, letters, musical compositions, artistic contributions by the Subject
11. Sources of information about the Subject

*Unpublished sources*

- Eyewitness accounts (give names and addresses of storytellers who are or were eyewitnesses; include details of their relationship to the Subject)
- Oral and anecdotal (give names and addresses of storytellers wherever possible, and include details of their relationship to the Subject)

*Published sources:* Include full bibliographic data wherever possible:

- Book: book title, author, publisher, year of publication
- Book chapter: title of chapter, author of chapter, title of book, name of editor of book, full publication data
- Article: author of article, periodical title, date of periodical, page numbers of article, place of publication

12. Other pertinent information

13. Author attribution

For proper credit to be given to you as a contributor, please include:

- Your name and address
- Name and address of the church with which you are affiliated
- Name and address of affiliated educational institution or mission agency (the participating institution)
- Name(s) of individual(s) chiefly responsible for researching the story of each subject
- Name and position of the person supervising the research
- Date on which the story was submitted

*For example: This article, received in \_\_\_\_\_(year), was researched and written by \_\_\_\_\_(your name), \_\_\_\_\_(your function), \_\_\_\_\_(your level) student at \_\_\_\_\_(name of your theological institute / university) in \_\_\_\_\_(city, country), under the supervision of \_\_\_\_\_(name of your teacher or research supervisor).*

## **E-mail all submissions to:**

Michèle Sigg, Executive Director  
*Dictionary of African Christian Biography*  
E-mail: [dacb@bu.edu](mailto:dacb@bu.edu)  
[www.dacb.org](http://www.dacb.org)

## **West Africa**

Dr. Protus Kemdirim, Regional Coordinator  
Email: [kempro54@yahoo.com](mailto:kempro54@yahoo.com)

## **Southern Africa**

Dr. Jurie Van Wyk, Regional Coordinator  
Tel./Fax No. 27 (0)51 7530422  
Mobile 27 (0)72 4272934  
Email: [jurievanyk@mweb.co.za](mailto:jurievanyk@mweb.co.za)

## **N.B. For questions related to biographies of African Mennonites (prior to submission), contact:**

Anicka Fast, DACB Technical Advisor  
Specialist in Church History and Missiology – Francophone Africa (Mennonite Mission Network)  
Tel/WhatsApp: +226 64 81 71 70  
E-mail: [anicka.fast@gmail.com](mailto:anicka.fast@gmail.com)

For more detailed information and instructions, please consult the following links:

*DACB Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers:*

[https://dacb.org/resources/final\\_instr\\_manual.pdf](https://dacb.org/resources/final_instr_manual.pdf)

Additional instruction sheets and worksheets:

<https://dacb.org/resources/oral-history/>

Detailed instructions for submitting articles:

<https://dacb.org/connect/submit/>

## Interview Procedures – DACB Oral History Project

### THE PRE-INTERVIEW

- Arrange a short meeting with the person. Give the person the information sheet and give him or her time to read through it (and/or read it with him or her).
- Verbally explain the purpose of the interview:  
“This is an oral history project. The goal is to collect memories of a Christian leader in order to develop an account of his or her life, ministry, and role in the origins and development of the African church.”
- Agree on a date and a quiet location, with minimal noise and interruption, for the interview.

### THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- Don’t forget to bring paper and pens/pencils to take notes; recording device, extra charger/battery if possible.
- Ask the person if they have any questions. Assure the person that they can contact you or your teacher with any concerns. Assure the person that they are free to participate or not and that they can change their mind at any time. Ask the person if they are ready to begin.
- Test the sound before the interview (if possible, avoid areas where traffic or wind distorts the sound).

### DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. Begin recording.
2. Say: “Today is \_\_\_\_\_ (date). I am \_\_\_\_\_ (your name). I’m in \_\_\_\_\_ (location) with \_\_\_\_\_ (full name of interviewee) who was born in \_\_\_\_\_ (birth year). We’re going to talk about the life of \_\_\_\_\_ (name of biography subject).”

*(For example: “Today is January 15, 2021. I am Lucie Lutete, and I’m in the CMCo church building in Delvaux, Kinshasa with Mrs. Marie Mutondo, who was born in 1958. We’re here to talk about the life of Daniel Manteka.”)*

3. Ask for verbal assent:  
 “Do I have your permission to record this interview? Thank you. At the end, we will discuss how the information gathered during the interview will be used. You will be able to specify what I am allowed to do with this audio file. Even if you would prefer that I delete it, I will respect your choice.”
4. Continue by asking the questions in your questionnaire (aim for a discussion of about 45 to 60 minutes).
  - Begin with demographic questions: names of subject’s family members, life history (places lived, education, church work), affiliations.
  - Move on to open questions to solicit longer stories.
  - Take some notes (discreetly) to help with analysis later – e.g., 10:30 conversion story; 15:45 conflict with older son; 1:00:25 consent.
5. Before stopping the recording, ask for detailed consent:  
 Say: “We’re going to stop here. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and your memories. Now, you can tell me what you’d like me to do with this recording. It belongs to you. No one can do anything with it without your permission.”
  - “May I use this recording as a source for a story about the life of \_\_\_\_\_ (subject’s name)?”
  - “May I quote your words, using your real name, when I write this story about \_\_\_\_\_ (name of subject)?”
  - “May I archive this recording and its transcript in an archive, where it will be accessible to researchers (possibly on the internet)?” (That means that researchers will be able to consult it and quote from it in their own research.)
6. Stop recording.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

- (immediately) Note down the full name of the interviewee, the location, the date, and the name of the person conducting the interview. Also note the interviewee’s contact information (with their permission) so that you can give them a copy of the sound file and/or the biography. Take a photo of the person if they are OK with this.
- (the same day) Take some time to write down your impressions of the interview: highlights, key elements for your biography, phrases to quote – it’s infinitely easier to remember these things on the day of the interview than to have to listen to it all over again to find them.

- (the same day) Save the file on your computer with the name of the interviewee and the biographical subject (e.g., TRAORE\_Diane\_Interview\_2021-04-02\_Biographie\_SANOGO\_Elsa.mp3). Save any related documents (the photo, your transcript, your notes...) in the same place with a similar name for easy sorting (e.g., TRAORE\_Diane\_Transcription\_Interview\_2021-04-02\_Biography\_SANOGO\_Elsa.txt, TRAORE\_Diane\_Photo\_2021-04-02\_Biography\_SANOGO\_Elsa.jpg).
- (after completing the transcription) Transfer a copy of all these files to an appropriate archive, to the library of your university/Bible Institute, and to the interviewee.

*Procedures developed by Anicka Fast, 2021; also available at <https://dacb.org/resources/oral-history/>*

## Project Information Sheet

### Oral history project for the biography of \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

You are invited to participate in an oral history project conducted by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher). The goal is to gather your memories of this Christian leader in order to write an account of their life, ministry, and role in the genesis and development of the church in Africa.

I plan to use the data collected (the recording of our interview) in several ways:

- 1) The interview will serve as a source for an account of the life of this person. This story will be submitted to the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB) (<https://dacb.org>) and as an assignment in a course at (NAME OF BIBLE INSTITUTE OR UNIVERSITY), "COURSE TITLE" (DATE OF COURSE).
- 2) The interview will be kept in an archive accessible to any researcher (possibly on the Internet). Other researchers will be able to consult it and cite it in their research.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer questions that make you uncomfortable. There is no cost to participate. You will not be financially compensated for your participation.

You have the right to decide how, and if, this recording will be used. During the interview you will have the opportunity to communicate your detailed preferences regarding the use of your data. At all times, your personal data (e.g., address, telephone number) will remain confidential.

Do you have any questions? You can contact the following people for further information:

_____ (researcher name)	_____ (telephone)	_____ (WhatsApp)	_____ (E-mail)
_____ (professor name)	_____ (telephone)	_____ (WhatsApp)	_____ (E-mail)

Thank you for your participation in this project!

## Conducting a good interview

### What *not* to do:

- Do not force your beliefs or opinions on the narrator.
- Do not force responses to sensitive questions.
- Do not ask leading questions or closed questions (see examples in the charts below).
- Do not draw attention to the recorder.
- Do not make a lot of noise.
- Do not argue with the narrator.
- Do not make the interview very long so you and the narrator get very tired.
- Do not dominate the interview by giving long answers to questions the narrator asks you.

### Choice of questions

Some closed questions are necessary at the beginning of an interview (e.g., “What is your name?”). For the most part, though, choose neutral and open questions (and not leading and closed questions).

LEADING QUESTIONS	NEUTRAL QUESTIONS
You must have been happy on election night.	How did you feel on election night?
You didn't like Mr. X, did you?	Tell me about Mr. X.
What do you think of Mr. Jones' outrageous behavior?	What did Mr. Jones do then?

CLOSED QUESTIONS	OPEN-ENDED OR EVOCATIVE QUESTIONS
Where were your parents born?	What did your parents tell you about their lives?
Did your family have gatherings?	Describe your family gatherings.
What holidays did your family celebrate?	How were holidays celebrated in your



	family?
Was religion important to your family?	Tell me about religious observances in your family.
Did you and your friends play games as children?	Describe some games you played as a child.
When did you finish school?	How did your formal education end?
Were you in the service during World War II?	Tell me about your life during World War II.
Did you get a job after the war?	Tell me what you did after you got out of the service.
Did you like your job?	How did you feel about your job?

Text from p. 29-30 of *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. "Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers," 2015.

[https://dacb.org/resources/final\\_instr\\_manual.pdf](https://dacb.org/resources/final_instr_manual.pdf). This material is adapted from *Voices: A Guide to Oral History* by Derek Reimer (Victoria, BC, Canada: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1984).

## How to Write a Congregational Entry for the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)

A good congregational entry provides basic factual information, with highlights of major events in the congregation's life. For the GAMEO, the style of writing should be direct, factual and succinct. The length for a congregational entry should be 400-500 words. A longer entry for an older "mother" church could be about 600-750 words.

### Elements to be considered for a congregational entry

1. Current name of congregation, city in which located (if not part of name), province, region, and country.
2. Origin of the congregation – dates of first meeting, date of formal organization, reasons the congregation was begun, names of person(s) considered to be the founders.
3. Milestones in congregational life – baptisms, new buildings, or relocations (with dates), first pastor, congregational name changes (with dates), changes in primary language of worship (with dates), divisions within congregation (with a succinct statement of reasons), major programs initiated (e.g., a school, nursery school, refugee program) that have their own identity.
4. Particularly interesting anecdotes that would be of interest to persons outside the congregation.
5. Describe characteristics of the congregation: leadership style, particular mission and/or service emphases (be specific, e.g., program for street youth, day-care center, etc.), worship style (e.g., traditional, contemporary, etc.), language(s) of worship.
6. Pastoral leaders, including dates of service (the list may extend beyond the "senior pastor" to other men and women who have devoted the bulk of their time to leading the church). Indicate whether or not pastors are paid. (This could also be put into a table form displayed with "Additional information" and could be expanded to other leadership persons in the congregation, e.g., women's group leader, youth leader, elders, treasurer, moderator/church chair, etc.).
7. Denominational affiliation (provide brief explanation for any change or withdrawal of affiliations) and the years of affiliation.
8. Membership statistics at five-year intervals. If the congregation includes multiple cultural/language groups, this could be indicated with approximate percentages, e.g., 50% Luo, 50% Maasai.
9. Closure of the congregation (if applicable) – dates of last meetings, reasons for congregation's closing, details of merger (if joining with another congregation).

10. Current address and phone number of the congregation if active (omit phone number if congregation no longer exists; never use a personal phone number). Provide directions to the meetinghouse if there is not a street address. If the congregation is in rented quarters, state the name of the school (or other facility) and its location.
11. Name(s) of current congregational leader(s).
12. Location of congregation's archives (local or denominational archives).
13. Published and unpublished sources (this is not to be exhaustive); encyclopedia articles do not need citation of particular annual meeting minutes, for example, but could refer to the congregation's "Annual reports."
14. Web address if congregation has a web site.

Not all elements need to be in every congregational entry, but each element should be considered. Controversial aspects of a congregation's experience should not be ignored but dealt with in a factual and balanced manner.

Congregational entries may be accompanied by up to two photographs – for example, of the building (current or original), of a leader/founder, or of an important event in the church's history. Photos should be accompanied, if possible, by information on photographer, name of person(s) in photo, and date of the photo.

## Structure of the Entry

The congregation's name should be used in most paragraphs.

The paragraphs should generally follow the sequence of 1-9, though this can be altered as seems best.

The last paragraph contains current basic factual information on address and phone number and leadership.

Elements 12-13 should be in a separate section titled "Bibliography" and placed after the last paragraph.

If you have questions, please contact Associate Editor Sam Steiner at [samsteiner@gameo.org](mailto:samsteiner@gameo.org).

All submissions are subject to the editorial process of the GAMEO Editorial Board.

## Examples

For examples of existing articles about African Mennonite churches, see [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete Kristos Church](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete_Kristos_Church) (Meserete Kristos Church) or

[https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Communauté_des_Églises_de_Frères_Mennonites_au_Congo) (Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo – English-language article)

Slightly adapted from <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Help:Congregations>

# Helpful Resources for Research on the History of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement in Africa

Compiled by Anicka Fast

The following list of digital collections, journals, and teaching materials is clearly incomplete: for example, it does not feature all the journals or archival collections that specialize in Anabaptist/Mennonite history. (For a very complete listing of events, grants, journals, and research centers geared toward Anabaptist-Mennonite scholars from various disciplines, consult the helpful page of the Anabaptist Mennonite Scholars Network at <https://uwaterloo.ca/toronto-mennonite-theological-centre/anabaptist-mennonite-scholars-network>.) Rather, it is a selection of resources that are freely available and accessible online; of journals that are open access and/or that regularly feature African Mennonites and accept submissions in both English and French; and of teaching and training materials that seem likely to be of value to African Mennonites. Exploring these resources can be a way to join in and foster an international conversation with nodes in Africa, Europe, and North America. Do not hesitate to address queries to the e-mail addresses provided!

## 1. Digital collections (archival materials and secondary literature for historical research)

### Anabaptist Mennonite Digital Library

<https://archive.org/details/anabaptistmennonitedigitallibrary>

This collection of documents on archive.org is made available by various Anabaptist-related churches, archives, and universities in North America and includes hundreds of primary and secondary sources related to Anabaptist history and theology. More will be added in the future.

Highlights include:

*Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches*, the final report of the Global Anabaptist Profile, a joint effort of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). This survey of 24 MWC member churches from five continents offers basic demographic information and detailed information on how believers live out their commitment to be followers of Jesus Christ in their particular contexts. For more information about the project, see <https://www.goshen.edu/isga/gap/>.

*Congo Missionary Messenger*. This magazine of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), later renamed to *Zaire Missionary Messenger*, then *AIMM Messenger*, was published from 1929 to 2004 and contains rich historical data about AIMM's work and about

churches associated with AIMM in Congo, Burkina Faso, Lesotho, Botswana and South Africa. High-quality, searchable digital files will soon be available on the site.

### **Bibliographie anabaptiste francophone**

<https://histoire-menno.net/bibliographie/>

The most comprehensive bibliography of documents on the Anabaptist movement in French, updated regularly by Professor Claude Baecher (Ph.D. in theology, University of Strasbourg, retired). It is intended, along with some Anabaptist primary sources, to facilitate the study of Anabaptism by French-speaking students and others interested in Anabaptist-Mennonite history and thought. In section IV-D you will find a bibliography of French-language resources on the Anabaptist church in Africa, including a list of theses by Congolese Mennonite students. To suggest additions to the bibliography (e.g., to add the title of your thesis or dissertation) submit the full reference via the Contact page (<https://histoire-menno.net/contact/>) under the heading “Questions sur les archives” with the note “for the bibliography.”

### **Bibliothèque numérique anabaptiste**

[https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Bibliotheque\\_numerique\\_anabaptiste](https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Bibliotheque_numerique_anabaptiste)

An ISGA initiative to make French-language Anabaptist-Mennonite theological and historical resources available to users around the world. The Board of Éditions mennonites (a French publishing house) has graciously granted permission to freely reproduce all of the *Cahiers de Christ Seul* (booklets on Anabaptist theology and history published between 1980 and 2000). Expect to see this collection online by about May 15, 2022. Please bookmark this page and don't miss the many other resources that will be added in the future!

### **Biographies of Mennonites in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB)** <https://dacb.org/sort/stories/>

You can sort by language, country, tradition, author, etc. Existing DACB biographies of African Mennonites include the following:

- DR Congo: Timothée Djimbo Kubala (CEPMC), Simon Lusoki Kituku (CEPMC), Abraham Moyo Boloko (CEPMC), Pierre Mwatende Kayenda (CMCo), Daniel Mbele Manteka (CEPMC), Floribert Matungulu Givule (CEPMC)
- Ethiopia: Desta Azeb (MKC), Gutema Beyene (MKC)
- Burkina Faso: Tiéba Traoré (EEMBF), Cécile (Poda) Coulibaly (EEMBF), Kassilé Traoré (EEMBF)

Submit your biographies to Dr. Michèle Sigg, Executive Director, at [dacb@bu.edu](mailto:dacb@bu.edu).

## **GAMEO (Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia Online)**

<https://gameo.org/>

GAMEO is an encyclopedia with nearly 17,000 entries that provides reliable, freely available English-language information about Anabaptist-related churches, institutions, and individuals. The vast majority of articles in GAMEO focus on individuals and churches in North America, but the involvement of MWC and ISGA as partners in GAMEO is beginning to stimulate more global content. Via [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=World\\_Mennonite\\_Membership\\_Distribution](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=World_Mennonite_Membership_Distribution) (or click on ‘Mennonite World Statistics’ on the home page), readers can find articles on Anabaptist-related churches in many countries. The editors appreciate receiving articles in English or French, especially biographies and short articles about a particular congregation or church family. Contact Samuel Steiner, Associate editor, at [samsteiner@gameo.org](mailto:samsteiner@gameo.org) with your submissions. And see the various article templates at <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Help:Contents>. Slightly adapted instructions from GAMEO for an article about a church congregation are also available in this issue.

## **Global Anabaptist Wiki (GAW) – <https://anabaptistwiki.org/>**

The GAW is an interactive and collaborative information sharing community of Anabaptist-Mennonite groups from around the world run by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA). By setting up the GAW, the ISGA hopes to help individual groups: 1) post and preserve electronic archives; 2) develop their own historical profile; and 3) become better informed about other groups in the global Anabaptist fellowship. There are pages dedicated to the Mennonite Church in 22 African countries (from the above link, click on Africa on the interactive map to browse these pages). This wiki is a user-generated global archives – it relies on people from around the world to post primary sources related to their churches. Here are some examples of items from the DR Congo, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso pages:

- A collection of sermons from the Église évangélique mennonite de Ouagadougou (EEMO), recorded by Bruce Yoder
- A 1997 article by MKC member Muktar Bedru, “Non-formal Theological Education – The Meserete Kristos Church Experience,” which describes in detail the extensive grassroots theological training program of the MKC.
- A 2012 centennial history of the CMCo by Franck Tshidimu Mukendi (PDF format)
- The full text of *The Jesus Tribe: Grace stories from Congo’s Mennonites 1912-2012* (biographies of Congolese Mennonites [CMCo and CEM] written in honor of the CMCo centennial celebration)

Browse the wiki and consider adding material of your own. Photos, scans of historical documents, and audio and video files are all welcome. For help, contact Kristen Swartley, ISGA's Administrative Assistant, at [isga@goshen.edu](mailto:isga@goshen.edu).

### **Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID)**

<https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/>

This site contains archival descriptions and photographs from the collections of Mennonite-related archives across Canada and the United States. Relevant collections for African Mennonite researchers include papers of the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite Board of Missions, among others. To consult these papers, researchers must usually visit the relevant archive in person, but an increasing number of photographs are available on the site.

A selection of records from AIMM's work in Burkina Faso and Congo have been digitized and some have already been put online. Keep an eye on the following pages: Burkina Faso: <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/burkina-faso-3> (Selections from this subseries are digitized and available.)

DR Congo: <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/congo-inland-mission-7> (Selections from this subseries will be online soon.)

### **Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission – <https://mbhistory.org/>**

The MBHC is a funded ministry owned by the US Conference and Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches. The Commission works with a network of four Mennonite Brethren archival centers. One of its goals is to foster historical understanding and appreciation of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada, the United States, and globally. The Commission's Executive Secretary, Jon Isaak, also fluent in French, has worked to digitize and make available several dozen books related to the history of the Mennonite Brethren, including stories of their missionary work in Congo. Browse and download these books at <https://mbhistory.org/books/>. Read biographies of Anabaptist-Mennonites around the world, including the biographies of Pascal Kulungu, Nzelenga Philippe, and Kasai Kapata from Congo, at <https://mbhistory.org/profiles/>. The Commission awards annual grants for research projects and archival development, and stipends for GAMEO articles, which are open to Mennonite Brethren and Mennonites from around the world. For example, the Commission awards two grants of up to \$2000 each for the development of new Mennonite archives. Apply by April 30 of each year.

<https://mbhistory.org/opp/archival-dev/> For more details or questions, contact Jon Isaak at [Jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca](mailto:Jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca).

## 2. Magazines and journals that feature African and global Anabaptists (and welcome submissions)

### ***Anabaptist Witness* Journal and Blog**

Blog: <https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/blog/>

Journal: <https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/>

*Anabaptist Witness*, a publication of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Mennonite Central Committee (US and Canada), Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Mission Network, appears twice a year in print and online as an open access journal. It seeks to foster a global Anabaptist and Mennonite dialogue on key issues facing the church in mission. The editors welcome submissions from a variety of genres (sermons, photo-essays, interviews, biographies, poems, academic papers, etc.). French and Spanish submissions are welcome. For the journal, send your submissions to editor Jamie Pitts (preferably in response to the most recent call for submissions) at [jpitts@ambs.edu](mailto:jpitts@ambs.edu). Blog posts can be submitted anytime.

### ***Christ Seul* blog – <https://www.editions-mennonites.fr/christ-seul/>**

*Christ Seul* is a magazine published by the evangelical Mennonite churches of France. On their blog, you can access many articles online, even if you don't subscribe to the magazine. Search for "Burkina," "Congo" or "Zimbabwe" and you will find a number of interesting articles written by Mennonites living in or having visited these countries. To submit an article to *Christ Seul*, contact the editor, Sylvie Kremer, at [contact@editions-mennonites.fr](mailto:contact@editions-mennonites.fr).

**The Francophone Network of Mennonite World Conference** offers a collection of articles in French that focus on the life of Mennonites in various French-speaking contexts around the world. These articles appear on the MWC website, and on Mennonite websites or newspapers in Quebec (*Le Lien entre Nous* newsletter), Switzerland ([menno.ch](http://menno.ch)), and France (*Christ Seul* magazine). Read the articles on the MWC website at <https://mwc-cmm.org/fr/group-stories/3616>. Several stories focus on Mennonite churches in Congo and Burkina Faso. To submit a story, contact Jean-Paul Pelsy, series coordinator, at [jppelsy@free.fr](mailto:jppelsy@free.fr). For a brief history of the Francophone Mennonite Network (French only), see <https://www.centre-mennonite.fr/reseau-francophone/>.

## 3. Teaching materials – to learn more about Anabaptist history and theology

### **Centre de Formation à la Justice et à la Paix (CFJP)**

<https://formation-justice-et-paix.com/>

The CFJP, housed at the Université de l'Alliance Chrétienne d'Abidjan (UACA), grew out of a collaboration among various institutions offering French-language



Anabaptist theological and biblical training and wishing to offer French-language Anabaptist training online. A steering committee is working on plans to develop master's degrees and doctorates. Since May 2021, the CFJP has been offering free lectures on the theme of "Justice and Peace." Listen to all past lectures at <https://formation-justice-et-paix.com/233-2/>. Sign up for more trainings/webinars in the future by clicking on Inscription. Contact the Center at [centrejusticeetpaix@gmail.com](mailto:centrejusticeetpaix@gmail.com).

**MWC Teaching Resources** – <https://mwc-cmm.org/teaching-resources>

Resources to help local and national churches reflect on Anabaptist identity and mission, produced by MWC's Faith and Life Commission. Several videos (recordings of webinars, yearly overviews, worship services) are also available at <https://mwc-cmm.org/publications-resources/videos>.

**TransMission Project** – <https://www.affox.ch/fr/projet-actuel/>

As part of its TransMission project, the Affox production company is creating a short film (about ten minutes long) each year from 2020 to 2024 and a feature film in 2025 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. The films focus on the Anabaptist church in different countries around the world, addressing such themes as creation care, refugee ministry, relations with Muslims, and spiritual maturity. They are available in several languages, including English and French. The 2020 film (on Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia, also available with Amharic subtitles) and the 2021 film (on Mennonite-Muslim relations in Indonesia and the Netherlands, also available in Bahasa Indonesia) are already available on the website and on the YouTube channel ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVVJ6fBnTZ-nwy-Ep\\_F4uMQ/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVVJ6fBnTZ-nwy-Ep_F4uMQ/videos)). Study guides are available at <https://www.affox.ch/downloads/>. For more information: [info@affox.ch](mailto:info@affox.ch).

### **What is an Anabaptist Christian?**

<https://www.mennonitemission.net/resources/publications/Missio%20Dei/1/What%20is%20an%20Anabaptist%20Christian>

In this 2008 booklet, Palmer Becker, a lifelong Mennonite pastor and educator, attempts to summarize Anabaptist understandings in three key statements: (1) Jesus is the center of our faith; (2) community is the center of our lives; and (3) reconciliation is the center of our work. Available for free download as *Missio Dei* pamphlet 18, from Mennonite Mission Network.

## “Power and Preservation: Enabling Access to the Sources Behind Our Stories”

### Affirmations and Commitments

As historians, archivists, and church and mission leaders from around the world, we gathered in Goshen, Indiana (USA), from June 17–19, 2019 for a symposium convened by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. Together for the first time, we gained a new recognition of each other as allies in the effort of preserving the sources behind our stories. As a group, we affirm the following:

1. As followers of Jesus Christ our history connects us, reminds us of the Spirit’s activity among us, and calls us forward into the future.
2. The task of telling and preserving our stories is urgent because of the deterioration of records and the loss of oral memory.
3. We share rich resources:
  - A deep commitment, vision, and desire to promote preservation and access
  - A wide variety of technical skills and expertise
  - Imagination and creativity
  - Broad networks and established relationships
  - Individual spheres of influence
  - Records, stories and experienced storytellers
  - Human, institutional, and financial resources
4. Archives play a crucial role in helping us to understand the inseparability of the stories of church and mission.
5. Equitable access to sources is necessary because we share the ownership of our stories.

We recognize the various significant barriers to preservation and access:

- Borders
- Financial constraints
- Language
- Limited skills in preparation and the management of historical resources
- Lack of information
- Difficulty of international collaboration
- Restrictions on access by those in power
- Institutional weaknesses and lack of commitment

We commit to the following:

1. To foster habits of preservation throughout the global Anabaptist-Mennonite community.
2. To look for new ways to deepen our collaboration across continents.
3. To engage in new and continued efforts to preserve sources and to promote

access.

4. To nurture enthusiasm within our communities for the tasks of collecting sources and sharing stories.
5. To make space for diverse narratives that are well-researched, well-sourced, and justly told.
6. To mitigate the barriers of language.
7. To encourage our leaders to dedicate resources for institutional support for this task.
8. To encourage the continued writing, rewriting, and publishing of the history of the church.

We call on our leaders to support us in these commitments.

Francois Tshidimu (Congo) – Mennonite Church

Jayaker Yennamalla (India) – Mennonite Brethren

Ursula Giesbrecht (Paraguay) – Archivist / Menno Colony

David Irala (Paraguay) – Mennonite Brethren / IBA -- Marturia Project

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Danang Kristiawan (Indonesia) – GITJ

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Jaime Prieto (Costa Rica) – Assoc. of Mennonite Churches in Costa Rica / Historian

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Wilbert Shenk (USA) – Fuller Theological Seminary

Karl Stutzman (USA) – AMBS Library

Jan Shetler (USA) – Prof. of History, Goshen College

John Lapp (USA) – Mennonite Mission Network

Hannah Keeney (USA) – MB Library and Archives and Fresno Pacific University

Abe Dueck (Canada) – MB Historical Commission

Frank Peachey (USA) – MCC Archives

Lola Gingerich (USA) – AIMM Archives

John D. Roth (USA) – Prof. of History, Goshen College and ISGA

Grant Miller (USA) – ISGA

Laura Miller (USA) – Student, Goshen College and ISGA

Read this declaration online at [https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website\\_files/power\\_and\\_preservation\\_statement\\_en.pdf](https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/power_and_preservation_statement_en.pdf)

## List of Contributors

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