



Central African Missions: A History

BEGINNINGS

In 1915 two British men, William F Burton and James Salter, set out from South Africa on the last leg of their pioneering trip to the Belgian Congo. They had teamed up with two others in South Africa: Joseph Blakeney (from USA) and George Armstrong (from South Africa). Together they travelled up Africa, sharing the difficulties, encouraging each other.



It was not an easy journey. Conditions were primitive, transport difficult, and disease a constant problem. One of the party, George Armstrong, fell victim to black water fever, and died near Bukama, Belgian Congo before they ever reached their final destination.

Eventually three finally arrived at Mwanza in the Belgian Congo, their final destination. But even here problems continued. Joseph Blakeney became ill and had to return home within one month of arriving. So, that first Christmas, 1915, only two remained, Burton and Salter.

SPREADING OUT

But from the steady work of those two pioneers, Burton and Salter, the work grew. Very slowly at first. Day after day was filled with language study, the practical tasks of house building, furniture making, etc. and the problems of living in a vastly different culture.

Progress was achieved, though; slow but steady.

As news of the work spread amongst the Pentecostal churches in Europe others offered to travel to the Belgian Congo and help, enabling more to be done and the work to spread. These missionaries mostly came from Great Britain, but others too came from USA, Switzerland, South Africa, and elsewhere.

Over the subsequent decades the work grew and grew. More mission stations were opened and new tribal areas reached. Thousands of Congolese became Christians. Churches sprung up in village after village. And as the increase continued, a system of churches developed naturally, with African pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc., independent of any foreign denominational grouping. God was pouring out His blessing on the land.

HANDING OVER

At first the control of the churches was in the hands of the missionaries, but over the years more and more was given over to the Congolese. This climaxed when, just before the country became independent from Belgium in 1960, the responsibility for the whole church was handed over 100% to the Congolese. From that moment it ceased to be an African church with missionaries in control, but became an African church with Africans in control. Missionaries no longer directed the church, they were servants of the church, assisting in specific areas and advising in others.

At first the missionaries' links with the new church group (at that time called Communauté Pentecôtiste au Zaire - CPZ) were very tight. With the passage of time, and with changes within the church structures decided upon by the Congolese themselves, those links are not so tight. The majority of the work done by our missionaries is still with that church grouping, but more is being done with others too

BURTON AND SALTER

William F P Burton, a founder of the work, was brought up in Surrey but spent seven years electrical engineering in Preston. James Salter, the second co-founder of the work, was born in Preston and it was there the two men met. They attended regular Bible studies under Thomas Myerscough the founder of the Preston Pentecostal Church (AOG). It was there they decided that they should obey the Bible command, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." (Mark 16:15) In particular they felt burdened to take the gospel message to the inhabitants of Central Africa.

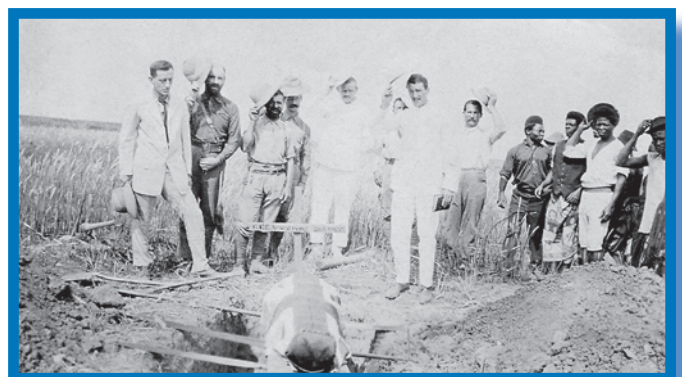


During May 1914 Mr. Burton set sail from England for South Africa. He spent approximately a year in South Africa gathering information, experience and much sound advice concerning what to expect on reaching the Congo. Then in 1915 Mr. Burton joined up with Mr. Salter, who had travelled out to Africa by then, and two other friends 'Daddy' Armstrong and Joseph Blakeney. Together they set out for the Congo, arriving there in July 1915. [Photo shows the group of four before they set out. Left to right: Salter, Burton, Armstrong (seated) and Blakeney.]

After dealing with legal matters in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) and appointing a legal representative, they were given leave to settle at Mwanza Kasingu. They then set off from Elisabethville to travel some

150 miles by train, 150 miles tramp through the forest. 150 miles down the Congo River by steamer and finally another day's tramp through the forests.

When they reached the river steamer, Mr. Armstrong, affectionately known to the other members of the party as 'Daddy' Armstrong because of his more mature years, was attacked by malaria which developed into blackwater fever. Sadly, he died before the party reached Mwanza. [See picture - shows 'Daddy' Armstrong's burial.] Mr. Blakeney returned to South Africa after only a few weeks in Congo, thus leaving Mr. Burton and Mr. Salter to start the work amongst the Baluba tribe, alone but for God.



WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

In some parts of Congo Belge European officials and traders had begun to influence the inhabitants; however in much of the country white people had never been seen until the missionaries arrived. Mr. Salter gives the following description of the conditions in a letter written during 1915 - their first year in the Congo:-

'In our parish, which at the present is one of about 200 miles radius of the mission station and 400 miles to the north west, there are no other Protestant missionaries. We are up against sin in its vilest and most hideous forms. The name 'Baluba' means the lost people, and one may say a more fitting title could not have been adopted. Lost morally and spiritually. Yet, with a love that is heaven born, we are willing to spend and be spent for them, daily yielding ourselves to God a living sacrifice on their behalf. What a holy enthusiasm grips one, as the opportunity presents itself of speaking to a company of them of the wonderful, the only and glorious theme, Jesus. How, as one kneels in prayer with them, a deep sense of the presence of God, and a mighty wave of intercession sweeps over us, whilst at the close of these soul gushings, they usually respond with a fervent 'Amen', which word they have learnt from us

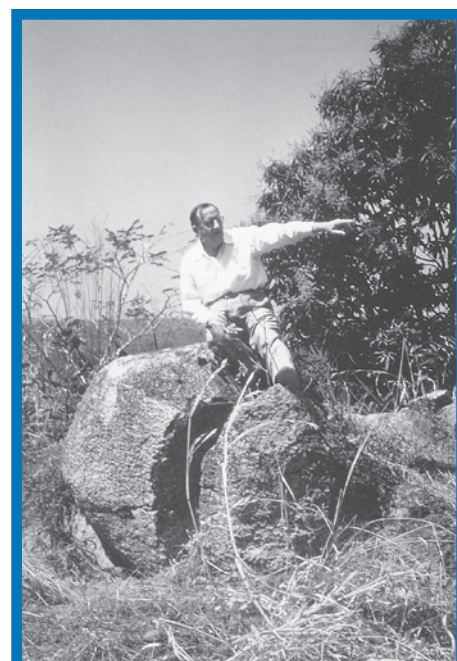
THE KILUBA LANGUAGE

Many seemingly insurmountable difficulties faced the missionaries upon their arrival in Congo. Not least of these was the language barrier. They had three Luban grammars for reference but none of these seemed in the least similar to the Kiluba spoken around Mwanza. Therefore the missionaries had to get busy with their notebooks picking up words and phrases from the children who sat and played around them. Those who were in closest contact with them were quickest to understand the missionaries' meanings and would act as interpreters for them.

The account of Mr. Salter's first attempt at preaching is an interesting one. A meeting had been arranged and Mr. Salter had decided to preach on a subject which included a description of Pontius Pilate. He was trying to tell the people that Pilate was a bad ruler, the word for ruler being 'mulopwe' which can mean chief. After telling them about 'chief-bad-man', the chief who was there showed much displeasure by gritting his teeth. The two preachers therefore closed the meeting shortly after and returned to the camp. The same afternoon the chief sent some chickens and other food thinking that he had been called a bad ruler because he had not been providing them with food.

The two pioneers gradually gained confidence in the new language and started to talk about God with the workers who helped them. One evening, a young lad called Nyuki who had been helping them, came to ask them how he could become one of God's sons. The missionaries were able to explain to him how Christ died for his sins and that if he trusted in Him he could become a son of God, and later the missionaries were able to kneel and pray with him. This first convert was a great encouragement to the missionaries after all their hardship and difficulties, and within a few days he brought others. (Photo shows Nyuki who became a life-long loyal pastor and evangelist.)

Another obstacle which faced the missionaries was the need for a translation of the scriptures. By 1921 the four Gospels and the Book of Acts had been translated by Mr. Clarke of the Brethren Garenganze Mission with the help of other missionaries including Mr. Burton. [The Garenganze Mission worked on the east of the Congo River where the language was very similar to the Kiluba spoken around Mwanza - Ed.]



SPREADING OUT

The one desire of the two pioneers was to spread the gospel message to as many people as possible and once they had a good grasp of the language and the Scriptures in Kiluba, they held many services. At first these services were in the open air, but soon they had a small nucleus of Christians and held their services in a small church building which they had built.

Their main method of evangelising was to go on treks in the surrounding country. On these treks they took with them a few Christian young men and would set off for weeks at a time to tramp through the forest visiting many different villages. In each village they held open air services and in the evenings sat around the camp fires and talked with the villagers about God. The Christian young men who accompanied the missionaries were soon able to preach and tell people about Jesus Christ, so relieving, in part, the heavy burden which the missionaries had to bear.



The general reaction of the Africans was one of welcome and eagerness to hear the gospel and the Word of God which the missionaries brought. The little chapel at Mwanza which held a hundred and twenty people soon had to be enlarged to hold another two hundred, as people came from miles around to hear the gospel.

A SECOND CENTRE

Ngoimani was a valley to the north of Mwanza and was the site chosen for the next small centre and village church. The missionaries first started to build a house where they could live when teaching and evangelising in the area. The account of the difficulties experienced during the building of this house is a story on its own. These difficulties included a tornado blowing down the half built house, a thunderstorm setting fire to the house and many other setbacks. Finally when the house was completed, Nyuki the first convert was sent there as an evangelist. At Ngoimani the Christians experienced much hardship and persecution, but Nyuki stood firm through it all. Eventually this village became a centre of the work in this area with smaller churches being started in the villages round about.

MAZANGA - AN EARLY CONVERT

An early convert in this area was a man named Mazanga. He had plotted and schemed in many ways against the Christians and in particular against an evangelist named Mudishi. Mazanga would lead the village dances, singing insulting songs about the white man's God. When Mudishi heard of this, he gathered all the believers together and also sent word to the missionaries and they all prayed very earnestly about this matter and for this particular man. One day Mazanga came with the villagers dancing and shouting outside the village church whilst the Christians inside were praying for him. He stepped to the door to shout some fresh insult, when he heard someone pray aloud for him. Mazanga could not understand, these people who should be hating him were praying for him. Gradually his dancing lost its brilliance and zeal, he tried to shake off the thought, but could not forget that the Christians were praying for him. After many days of prayer, the evangelist went to visit Mazanga and told him that God loved him and that all the Christians had forgiven him. Finally Mazanga was overcome by the love which the Christians showed towards him and he too became a

Christian. The news of his conversion spread through all the area and many others were influenced by the gospel.

The extension of the work at Ngoimani was one of the first outreaches, but soon many more villages were influenced by the gospel; evangelists were established and churches built. Some villages were fortunate to be visited by the missionaries once in six months, and the supervision alone of the many churches demanded more helpers from the homeland. People in England, South Africa and other parts of the world heard the call of God "Go into all the world and preach the gospel", as the two pioneers had done in the early years of this century. By 1928 there were twenty missionaries working on eight stations. The distance between Kipushya, the most northerly station, and Kabondo Dianda, the most southerly station, was 300 miles

CONGOLESE EVANGELISTS

Many of the Christians were inspired to become evangelists. These evangelists travelled to villages many miles from their homes, because they too wanted to tell as many people as possible about the gospel. They either walked the long journeys or sometimes they used bicycles. When the inner tubes of their bicycles became punctured beyond repair, the preachers would pack the tyres with grass, and ride on. Often a village chief would ask the European missionary to send an evangelist to his village, and as soon as one was available, he would be sent there to proclaim the gospel.



These evangelists were trained by the missionaries on the mission stations. They were taught to read and write, and most important, they were taught to study the Bible, as the responsibility of an evangelist in a village was to look after both the church and also a village school. The church services included Bible studies and prayer meetings as well as gospel and communion services. The village school was a primary school, and attendances varied according to the season of the year. When crops such as millet and cotton had to be brought in, the children helped their parents, and when the weather was bad, there would be no school held. This primary education was taken a little further at the schools in the main villages, and to complete their primary education, the children had to gain places at the mission station schools.

About 1953, two teacher training schools were set up by the mission, with government support, to give future teachers a two year course after their primary schooling.

Over the years, the tremendous growth of the work made it impossible for the missionaries to visit all the village churches regularly, therefore supervisors or overseers were appointed and the work was organised on a three tier basis. Thirteen central mission stations had been established by the Mission throughout the Baluba country, and these were staffed by European men and women missionaries. The villages around these central stations were split up into three, four, or even more, districts and each supervisor was responsible for visiting the village churches in his district and for the general oversight of the district. Finally each evangelist was responsible for the church and school in his own village or group of villages. The supervisors visited the churches regularly and supervised the work of about twenty or thirty evangelists. They reported to the mission stations at regular intervals bringing information and records to the missionary, and they also discussed particular problems which arose in the village churches.

INDEPENDENCE COMES

In 1920 there were 25 local workers. By 1930 the figure had increased to 216, to 578 in 1940, and to 794 in 1950. In 1960 there were 955 full time evangelists and pastors working in approximately the same number of churches. Records showed that in 1960 there were more than 40,000 registered believers, that is men and women who had turned from their spirit worship and put their trust in the gospel as brought to them by the missionaries. It is estimated that the population of the Baluba tribe was at that time about one million people. The majority of the converts were Lubans, although some belonged to the Basongi and Bekalebwe tribes to the north of the Baluba area.

Shortly before independence the Church leaders, in conference with the missionaries, decided to be known as "The Pentecostal Church of Congo (C.E.M.)" and that responsibility for the church should pass from the missionaries to the Congolese. This was providence as it meant that when independence did come soon after, with the evacuation of the missionaries, the church was already in Congolese hands. The first church leader was Jonathan Ilunga (who continued in office until his death in November 2004). (See photo.)

On June 30th 1960, the Belgian Congo was granted its independence. To the nationals, this meant that all European authority would disappear, together with the restrictions which it imposed, in fact, rumours were spread around that the white man's houses and cars would belong to the local people. Independence therefore brought much unrest, particularly to the Katanga province, and subsequently many difficulties and much suffering were experienced by both Africans and Europeans. Many lost their homes and possessions as various rebel groups swept through the country. Some villages, including church buildings and hospitals, were destroyed by fire and the villagers fled into the forests out of the way of the rebels. The Christians in these villages were often very badly persecuted because of their association with the white men, in fact many were martyred for their faith.



DIFFICULTIES

At the time of independence, there were about 65 European missionaries on the various stations out of a total staff of over 80. These missionaries were working on 13 stations throughout the Baluba country and in the bordering Basongi and Bekalebwe territory. Due to the fighting and unrest, all the stations, excepting Kamina, had to be evacuated leaving the Congolese Christians to continue the work alone, and thus carry the full responsibility for the running of the work.

The fighting and gang warfare which followed independence caused much poverty and distress among the people. One of the main tasks which faced the missionaries was to take in supplies of relief clothing and foodstuffs which were badly needed, and also soap and salt which were in very short supply. These supplies were taken in by road transport, together with Bibles and literature, and whilst ministering to the physical needs, the missionaries were able to speak to the people about their spiritual need and advise and encourage them in every way possible. (Two of our missionaries suffered martyrdom at this time. See below.)

A small group of missionaries were able to remain to work in Kamina and so make this the only European staffed mission station at that time. Some two years later, missionaries were able to return to the northern station of Kipushya and set up training schools and to enlarge the hospital work and leper colony.

POST-INDEPENDENCE

In spite of the difficulties and persecutions experienced in the work since independence, the national leaders reported that the rate of growth of the work had not fallen off but rather increased, about 300 new churches having been opened in the 1960s. The number of leaders had also increased and there were now about 1,300 evangelists and pastors. New areas were reached by the gospel and the original Field was extended to the north, south, east and west by local workers, largely without any help from missionaries. Whereas there were 13 mission stations staffed by European missionaries before independence, there were 30 stations by the end of the 60's, all staffed by Congolese personnel. In most places where the work expanded there were no other Protestant communities, or the towns were large enough for there to be no overlapping difficulties with other missionary societies.

As conditions in the Congo became comparatively settled, the missionaries at Kamina and Kipushya realised that one of the great needs was going to be for more and better educated teachers and for Bible schools in which to train national evangelists and pastors.

KAMINA 2

Kamina town itself has three hospitals and so there was no need for any great medical work, although the dispensaries and maternities on the old stations continue to function under the supervision of Congolese Christian nurses. Rather, in Kamina the emphasis was placed on the training of evangelists, pastors and teachers to work on the stations and in the villages. The Teacher Training School, six miles out of town at Kamina 2, is attempting to reach a higher level of studies and includes a programme of evangelistic outreach as well as subjects such as carpentry and agriculture in order to prepare students for the life they will face in the villages.

In the mid 60's there were about 24,000 pupils attending the primary schools run by the church, although only small numbers of students could be accepted into the two secondary teacher training schools annually.

INDIGENOUS CHURCH

Another very important aspect of the missionary work is the distribution of Christian literature and Bibles. At Kamina the church had a bookshop where literature could be bought for distribution in the villages throughout the Field and where, for many years, they were selling over 1,000 Bibles and Scripture portions a month. From Kipushya a number of Christians worked as travelling salesmen, selling Christian literature in the surrounding villages.

It was the aim of the mission from the earliest days to establish an indigenous Church in the Congo, and today the work in the villages is completely in the hands of national leaders. Though the

independence era was a very traumatic one, those years played an important part in the bringing to fruition Burton and Slater's goal of an indigenous church.

TRAINING

From time to time, perhaps once a year, all the evangelists from the outlying villages met at the main stations for conferences, and for a time of fellowship when they could hear more of the Bible explained to them.

Initially each evangelist depended for his living on what he could grow or produce, but as the churches became established, the offerings from each church were pooled and each evangelist received a portion, for his wages. The offerings in some cases consisted of the produce given by each individual, such as manioc or peanuts from the gardens, or in the hunting villages, meat and skins, or fish in the fishing villages.

In the villages where there was a mission station, often over half the population were Christians, whilst in other villages, the Christians would live together in small compounds built near the church, and these were usually noticeably cleaner than the rest of the village, because of the change that had taken place in the Christians' lives and outlook.

RENOUNCING WITCHCRAFT



From the earliest days the missionaries insisted that the converts should turn from their gods, renounce all their spirit worship and burn their charms. Mr. Burton said in a recent talk:

“We demanded, just as God demands, a complete right-about-face and we looked to them to burn their charms, which often cost them months of wages, and to put their idols on the fire, and while the heathen stood around we would sing ‘All hail the power of Jesus’ name’ and ‘Crown Him Lord of all’. The secret society men brought out their regalia, the witchdoctors would bring out their feathered head-dresses, their rattles for calling the spirits, and many other things. They went up in a blaze. In Acts 19 :19 we read that the sorcerers brought out their books, worth quite a prodigious sum of money and they burned them. Following

their example, our believers have enjoyed watching the new converts throw their charms and idols on the fire and send them up in smoke.”

This made the converts put all their faith in God, and showed to them the uselessness of charms

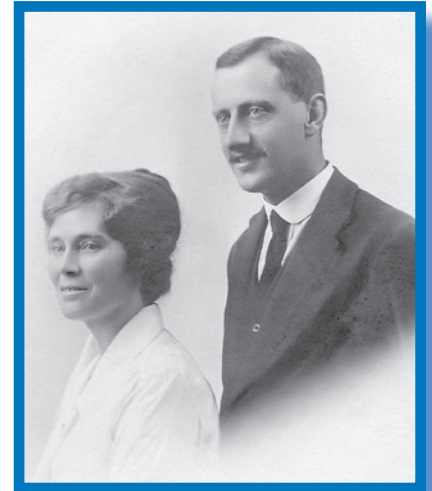
MEETING PHYSICAL NEEDS

The missionaries were very conscious of the physical needs of the people all around them. Whilst they believed implicitly in God's healing as promised in Mark 16:18, “they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” and which they saw in evidence by the healing of many bodies, they also realised that simple medical care would be another way in which they could show their love for the Africans. Therefore as soon as missionary nurses joined their ranks, the mission was able to open hospitals, and later build modern government subsidised hospitals. In the first place, hospitals were built mainly for the maternity work with smaller dispensary departments. Even in this work the gospel was given primary place.

Before the dispensary opened, and the nurses and their helpers started work, a short gospel service was held, so that non-Christians coming to the hospital for treatment received, first of all, the answer to their spiritual need and then they were helped physically.

MISSIONARY WORK ON THE RIVERS

Teddy Hodgson was one of the first missionaries, and he, together with Harold Womersley, opened a mission station at Kikondja on Lake Kisale. He was quick to realise that an ideal way to help the local inhabitants and an easy means of transport was to use the waterways. The first boat constructed was of timber sawn from local trees, and was fitted with a 5 h.p. paraffin engine which could reach 8 m.p.h. and was named the 'Dyese' (which means blessing). This was immediately a huge success and was used to evangelise both up and down the Congo River for 150 miles, as well as on the lakes and for many miles up the Lovoi River and the Lufira River.



In villages where no mission work had as yet been established, use was made of the gramophone to play gospel hymns, and this was a source of wonder to the people. In later days a slide projector was used on the boat to throw pictures on to an improvised screen suspended from the trees. This, the onlookers considered to be real magic and it opened up the way for the preaching of the gospel.

THE LION KILLER

Mr. Hodgson was a very practical man and many times on his river trips or on inland journeys he would provide food for the villagers by shooting wild animals or crocodiles. He also shot many marauding lions which used to ravage the live-stock and sometimes attack the inhabitants, and he became one of the world's record lion killers (although he only killed to protect the villagers.)



By profession he was a cabinet maker, but the necessities of missionary life introduced him to medical work, and it was very common for him to bind up the limbs of the wounded, mutilated by wild animals, or by accidents. It was also a common thing for him to extract teeth usually without any anaesthetic whatsoever. All these things endeared him to the hearts of the people and it is not surprising that there was soon a nucleus of believers in each of these riverside villages.

PROBLEMS

The condition of the lakes in the dry season made it difficult for them to be navigated by the "Dyese" with its small engine and also the timber of the boat was attacked by tropical parasites. Teddy Hodgson therefore, with much personal labour constructed "L'Evangile" of steel plates riveted together and powered by a new engine sent out from England. This boat was larger, and so he was able to take a number of believers with him on the river trips. Two other bigger and better boats followed, the "L'Esperance" and "L'Evangile II".

Some 22 years after commencing this work on the rivers, Teddy Hodgson reported that when he first went on his river trips there was fearful anticipation at reaching each village, there was difficulty in buying food in the villages, the villagers were suspicious and the missionary was lonely. Now on the 150 mile stretch of river there were 30 locally built and supported churches and 2,000 registered

Christians. Food was often brought as a gift offering and in fact on one occasion the boat returned home with two pens full of live fowl which were carried on the roof. The reception was now with singing and banging of drums at every landing, and instead of being lonely, it was difficult to isolate oneself from the crowds and often at nightfall whispering needy would come to the lighted port-holes to tell of their troubles and seek help.

Teddy Hodgson's sole purpose in all his work and activities on the lakes and rivers, was to try and demonstrate to the people his belief that Christ was a living person who was personally interested in their lives, and that if they would turn from their spirit worship to worshipping Jesus Christ, then their lives of hatred would be changed into lives filled with love for their fellow-men.

The period following independence in 1960 was one of civil war. One of the tasks that faced missionaries during this time was the distribution of relief supplies. These were taken in by road, together with Bibles and Christian literature. Teddy Hodgson was able to return several times to his own mission station at Kikondja. Although the troubled times resulted in many road blocks by the authorities, and unfortunately sometimes by gangs of thugs, Teddy Hodgson was so well loved by the people in the area that he was able to continue his work.

However, as the situation deteriorated Teddy Hodgson was evacuated to Kamina by the U.N.O. soldiers. During that period, he and Elton Knauf, a missionary colleague from New Zealand, went on a mercy trip to the Lulungu area, a locality where Elton Knauf was well known, but not Teddy Hodgson. They were stopped by a marauding gang. Because they knew Elton they were willing to allow him to leave, but not Teddy. Elton would not leave his colleague, and, sadly, they were both murdered. Two lives given to the Congolese people ended, martyred in their land of adoption.