



28 ❁ We baptize you in the name of Pierre Mulele

At the arrival of the white missionaries, Elie Falanga was one of those curious young people who always wanted to know what was going on in his village. He was born in 1907 in Mukedi. He began to learn to read around 1927 and followed the path to baptism in 1934. After primary school, he spent two years at the teacher training school, became a teacher, and later, in the mid-1950s, was trained as a pastor. He married Marthe Mishindo, and they had ten children.

One of the first Mennonite pastors ordained in Bandundu Province, Rev. Falanga lived a stable and exemplary life. He had a reputation as a good educator not only on the spiritual and moral plane but also pedagogically, so clear and precise were his directives.

A humble man, Pastor Elie Falanga never resisted when the church needed him in this or that situation. Because of his dynamism and dedication to the good in every situation where he worked, God raised him to the position of recording secretary of the denomination and denominational evangelist. Under his leadership, the Mukedi district prospered and was greatly extended. He was a great administrative advisor. In all the big meetings, people listened to him attentively. He preached forgiveness, justice, and tolerance.

But that is not the whole story about Rev. Falanga. Around 1962, most of the Kwilu district was hit by the rebellion led by Pierre Mulele. These rebels, whose ambition was to overthrow the government,

photo—Elie Falanga

had to operate far from the government's armed forces. Lacking logistical support, they set up camp near rural villages and intermingled with the villagers. They carried a mortal hatred for teachers, priests, and pastors, whom they considered accomplices of the central government. Their mission was to destroy shops, schools, hospitals, and even churches.

One morning they showed up at the Mukedi station. They ordered the church to be closed down, worship services to cease, and all church dignitaries to be evicted. At first, no one dared resist them—except Pastor Falanga, who considered this act an outrage against the Divine. Braving all their threats, at the risk of his life, Pastor Falanga energetically refused to obey. His attitude encouraged even those who had lost hope of surviving.

The offended rebels arrested him, along with his fellow Mukedi pastor, David Kidinda. They humiliated the two by dunking them in the river, saying, “You baptized people in the name of your God, and we baptize you in the name of Pierre Mulele.”

This treatment did not affect the faith of the two pastors one bit. As the Bible says in Hebrews 6:10, “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”

At the end of the rebellion, Pastor Falanga, along with others, reorganized the life of the church and brought hope back to the believers. This man of God took part in awakening the conscience of the military men who were charged with pacifying the zones under rebel control.

Pastor Elie Falanga encouraged everyone to persevere in the way of salvation. He opened the way for a number of younger people to find a calling, and he trained them and served as a role model. He died in 1999 at Mukedi. Remembering his courage and accomplishments, the Christians buried him in front of the church.

Jackson Beleji