

11 ❖ Daniel Khumbi, Christian nurse

The gospel brought by missionaries and evangelists transformed the lives of many people from small villages, making them see their lives in new ways. People who were transformed in turn brought these changes to other people in ways that over time grew to have great value and importance for the community. These believers often carried out this work of evangelism on their own without pay, in their free time, because of their love for God and for their neighbor. They strove for exemplary conduct, doing their best to treat others as they would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). Daniel Khumbi is an example of this.

The brief story of the life of Daniel Khumbi begins with his primary schooling at the missionary station of Kamayala. If this boy from the village of Nambulu in the district of Kahemba had not enrolled at the primary school of Kamayala, his life would doubtless have passed unnoticed.

Daniel was drawn to medical work, so at the end of his primary schooling he went to work for Papa Joseph Kambembo, a nurse in the dispensary, as a room attendant. At that time, the missionaries cared for the health of both the Christian and the indigenous populations and provided medical training in each town in connection with a hospital supervised by one or two doctors. Daniel Khumbi received medical training under the supervision of the family doctor of Muke-di and became a nurse himself.

Daniel Khumbi showed great ability in his work. Because of this dedication and his exemplary conduct, he was invited to the hospital at Kajiji, situated approximately 100 kilometers from Kamayala. He turned down that request, however, because his parents preferred that their son work not too far from them. He married Ruth Makanga and they began their family life.

Little by little Daniel Khumbi initiated another ministry at the dispensary in Kamayala. After completing the medical tasks entrusted to him by Miss Bertha Miller, also called Mama Sadisa, Daniel Khumbi would meet with the patients as a chaplain. Seeing their suffering, he walked alongside them, sharing the pain of their illnesses.

It is necessary to explain at this point that most people, including many Christians, continued to be attached to traditional customs that were the foundation of African society. Daniel knew that in traditional society it is especially painful to watch a loved one suffer and die. With such passages as Job 14:13–15, he would comfort patients and their families by teaching them to know God and to know that God uses his omnipotence to give life even to the dead.

Many times the patients were also divided in their minds about the possible cause of their illness: it could be a natural illness resulting from a lack of hygienic conditions, or it could be the result of a curse caused by the anger of their dead ancestors. Transforming the dispensary into a parish, therefore, he brought people the good news of God's love for them and put them in touch with pastors. Many were baptized after their recovery.

Daniel Khumbi died in 1956, leaving Mama Ruth Makanga a widow with seven children.¹ The entire church has kept alive their memory of him not only as a gifted nurse but also as a loving Christian who extended to others a helping hand whenever possible.

Vincent Ndandula

¹ See "Mama Ruth, mother of orphans" (chapter 12).