



65 ❖ Trust in the Lord and tell the truth

In 1959 Samuel Kakesa¹ married Françoise Kafutshi, who like Samuel grew up in a Christian family from the Mukedi mission station, although Françoise's family had moved around because her father worked in a large Belgian palm oil refinery. She had a solid but somewhat limited education. She was nevertheless well prepared to accompany her husband on his rise to church leadership. After he ended his work as legal representative, Mama Kafutshi was elevated in 1976 to the function of president of the women of the Mennonite Church of (then) Zaire.

She says she did not campaign for this position but was elected unanimously by the men and women of the church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For twelve years she succeeded in leading the women in an impeccable fashion, with a level of instruction fitting even for those better educated than she was. Trusting always in the Lord, Françoise had only one motto: "Tell the truth."

In accordance with John 8:22, she believes that the truth will set you free. But she emphasizes that for Christians of all confessions, the truth must not be considered a system or an ideology, and still less a philosophy, but must be identified as a person, Jesus Christ. For her, to betray the truth is not only a moral transgression but an apostasy, a denial of one's faith.

photo—Françoise Kafutshi (right) assists a sewing student
1 See "An open Bible at rebel headquarters" (chapter 30).

Unfortunately, she notes, the trouble between Christians is a result of the fact that many consider the truth an abstraction. It is in the name of this truth that Mama Françoise contributed greatly to the emancipation of Mennonite women, piercing the convention of thinking of women as good only for motherhood, inferior to men, and condemned to submit to the laws of men. Because Mama Françoise did not tolerate lies and intrigues, she was little appreciated by men who were hurt by the truth, so she eventually left the women's leadership position in order to serve the church in other ways, without hypocrisy.

Her life has not been easy. She lost a large part of her family—father, mother, three sisters, her only brother, her daughter, and two nieces—in quick succession. She says, “Words fail me to describe the suffering that I endured in the course of these events.” But she concludes by saying she accepted everything the Lord sent her.

Today she continues to train Mennonite women in a nongovernment organization called Association of Rural Women for Development. She bitterly regrets the inordinate ambitions of men and women who no longer fear God and instead sacrifice the interests of the church to profit their own interests. She encourages women to persevere in prayer to save the church, which is in danger of disappearing because of the hypocrisy of those who divide the work of the Lord.

But in the end, this woman is a symbol of the awakening of the conscience of Mennonite women. During her administration at the head of the women, she taught a number of them that women have a great role to play in society, that they need to come out from under the antique notion that they are good only for childbearing, and that they should bring solid assistance to the household through work of all kinds.

Today, at seventy Françoise Kafutshi is a grandmother who continues to serve her church in the Lukolela congregation in Kikwit, where everyone recognizes her merits. Her ideas have released energies for women and men alike to take control not only in their own households but in the church as well. She continues to emphasize “the belt of truth buckled around your waist” (Eph. 6:14) against all forces, human and satanic.