



23 ❖ Two leaders in Wongo territory

In their evangelistic work, the missionaries encountered great difficulties in certain territories that were entrenched in indigenous spiritual and magical practices. In such territories, certain individuals were key to opening these groups to the gospel. André Yumbu and Jérémie Ndjare served as such leaders among their people, the Wongo, one of the smaller tribes in the Kwilu district of Bandundu Province. This was in the general territory served by the Mukedi mission.

André Yumbu was born in 1910. In his youth, Yumbu accompanied his father on big game hunts and smaller hunts, during which he tended traps in the Loange River. Although his parents followed indigenous religion, they believed in God, “Zambi wa Mpungu.” This is what prompted André’s father to tell him about the arrival of white missionaries in Mukedi, and in time to send the boy to the mission to study.

André went through primary school there and was baptized at the same mission in 1937. He married and had ten children. He was hired as a teacher at the mission station that had received him and opened his horizons. Shortly thereafter he was employed as a supervisor of the Wongo schools.

As the premier intellectual in Wongo country, he was named chief of the Kilembe sector, a government position, at independence. Because of his skills, he served in this capacity from 1960 to 1972. He

photos—Jérémie Ndjare (left); André Yumbu (right)

was loved by all of his people for his patience, spirit, and sense of responsibility. This counselor and honest educator also proved to be dedicated to the welfare of other people outside his tribe.

Just as he was appreciated for his administrative skills, Yumbu was also recognized by the church for his irreproachable conduct, competence, and sense of responsibility. The Mennonite Church of Congo (CMCo) put him in charge of planting churches in Wongo territory. The means he used to do this were no more or less than the preaching of the message of salvation to indigenous peoples. Aside from believing in a supreme being, the Wongo were completely ignorant of the gospel. It was Yumbu who brought them the good news. His exceptional courage aided the success of his mission.

As André Yumbu was rising as an administrator and church leader, Jérémie Ndjare, another Wongo tribe member, was beginning three years of study at the Kalonda Bible Institute. He had hardly finished in 1963 when he was ordained a pastor in response to the burgeoning interest in the gospel in Wongo territory. For ten years he devoted himself to converting souls among his tribe and others as well. He then returned to his birthplace, Banga, and assumed an administrative leadership position in the church.

Ndjare was devoted to his ministry and saw the need to further his education to better meet the exigencies of evangelization in the rapidly changing environment of post-independence. He went to Kinshasa for studies that ended in 1980, and then returned to his district. His church elected him head of the Kalonda district from 1982 to 1985. At the end of his term, in all simplicity and humility he took on the role of chaplain at Tshikapa general hospital and worked there until 1997. At an advanced age he was called on to head yet another church district of the CMCo.

Christians sought out and appreciated Ndjare for his works and his character as a peacemaker. During this time conflict arose over the succession to leadership of the community. But Pastor Ndjare fought with all his strength to maintain unity in the community torn apart by tribal differences.

He never stopped preaching that Jesus Christ, who is head of the church, was not attached to a single tribe. If Jesus had been attached to a tribe, he pointed out, we would not be in his service today. Taking himself as an example of membership in a minority tribe, his

message was that in Jesus Christ tribe, ethnicity, and other differences no longer have meaning.

Through their evangelization and church planting, André Yumbu and Jérémie Ndjare brought the number of church districts in the region to six. Currently the CMCo is widespread among the Wongo. Among these Mennonites are evangelists, deacons, elders, and pastors whose mission is to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ. These people cannot speak of the development of their church without remembering these two leaders and examples.

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