



20 ☘ Moise Musenvu, international evangelist

The man with the shaggy beard went about the countryside, carrying his raffia bag containing several tattered Sunday school posters. His favorite was one with images of the human heart. He was like the local clown that you often see in African villages. Many people called him crazy.

But Moise Musenvu was not crazy. If you asked him who he was, he would respond with a smile, “I am an international evangelist.” And he was. He was an evangelist without borders, a responsible human being who lived on what he earned.

Moise Musenvu was born around 1915 in a village a few kilometers from the Mukedi mission station. Simple curiosity drew him, like other children, to watch what the white-skinned people were doing in the neighboring village. At first these white people were considered ghosts and called *mindele*. Literally that means “comes from far away or from the beyond.”

Hired initially to haul water and then to break stones for the construction of the church, the boy was introduced to his first notions of reading and mathematics at the Mukedi station. After two or three years in elementary school, he spent several months at the Bible school organized to train teacher-evangelists. Quickly he astonished the missionaries by his memorization of Bible verses and

his eloquence in reciting them. He soon took responsibility for educating small children.

Moïse was baptized and then married Esther. Together they would have six children, three girls and three boys. Two of the girls had severe birth defects.

In that era the American Mennonite missionaries had trouble expressing themselves in French, although they were fluent in the dialects of the tribes they evangelized. Their difficulties influenced the speech of their first pupils, including Moïse. This man translated his thoughts literally into French without reference to grammatical correctness or proper tense. He might say, for example, “Christians not talk lie.”

Moïse Musenvu, a man of action and initiative, was a great hog farmer. After every butchering, he distributed part of the meat to little children and the needy. His family often reproached him for his great generosity to others while he neglected his own offspring, but he never showed any regret for that.

It was never enough for Moïse to be a farmer. He set his sights on the ideal expressed by Christ in Matthew 28:18–20, “Go and make of all the earth my disciples.” Moïse became an evangelist to the world that he knew, disregarding the limits of religious faiths and denominations. Humble, peaceful, smiling, comical Moïse would go to preach, in his poor French, to Catholics, Kimbanguists (an indigenous church), Muslims, and Protestants, all mixed together. With no means of transport, this spiritual vagabond covered great distances on foot. His trademark was the posters he carried with images of the human heart, symbol of the conversion of souls to eternal salvation.

Once he surprised the late President Mobutu with his mobility. The president, who was traveling by airplane, saw Moïse in a parade in Gungu, two days later in Kikwit, and a third time at Bandundu. He did not understand how this man could be following him around.

Perhaps the most important and surprising thing about Moïse was his absolute fearlessness and simplicity. He would show up in military camps, in prisons, in stadiums—everywhere. When he was asked who he was, he would cheerfully announce, “I am an international evangelist.”

Moïse played the *nguaya*, a traditional instrument, and through these local songs he brought traditional folklore into his spirituality. His local village church did not approve of this approach, and he was

not accepted there—but Mennonites were not well established in the cities at that time. This man greatly influenced the planting of Mennonite congregations in towns such as Gungu and Kahemba and in the city of Kikwit.

Moise hoped to get a jeep, which would have allowed him to cover all the Democratic Republic of Congo and neighboring countries as a true international evangelist. But he died in 1987, before that dream could be realized. He is still remembered fondly, especially by women and by children, now grown, who knew him.

Vincent Ndandula