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A Brief Report on Congo

by Reuben Short

I visited Congo for a duration of one month. During that very month Congo suddenly experienced a rash of revolutionary reverses. Signs of emergence politically, economically, and socially suddenly turned to new tensions of uncertainty. Resistance on the part of the army and the public appeared to ominously convert to non-resistance and support of the National Liberation Committee.

The Committee identified as a potpourri of Lumumbists, Gizengists, and assorted other malcontents operates from Brazzaville capital of the former French Congo. It was pledged to liberate Congo-Leopoldville from the Adoula regime but the change of leadership does not appear to have tranquilized the momentum.

Last fall, the Committee found a vulnerable spot in the Kwilu where the Bapende and Babunda tribes have long bitterly opposed the provincial government. Through Pierre Mulele, the antagonism was sparked into a devastating revolt which the Congolese army and irate surrounding tribesmen have since brought under control.

Kivu was next. Through the Bafulero tribe's left wing administrative chief, Moise Marandura, a revolt was organized. The National Liberation Committee set up an Eastern branch in Burundi. Leader of the branch was Emile Soumialot, formerly a minister of justice in the short-lived left wing Kivu government. Beginning along Lake Tanganyika a full scale offensive was begun with a revolutionary government of the Eastern Congo organized at Bujumbura and Soumialot as President and Defense Minister.

Hundreds of Central Government troops defected to the rebels. Such defection is seen as a symptom of the sad state of the Congolese army. A military retraining program had been started with the aid of about 75 Belgian officers, but mostly from desks in Leopoldville. Now the news has it that the U.S. is showing concern.

The method now is not to burn villages, destroy bridges and dig up roads as in the Kwilu. Neither have they knowingly hurt Europeans or Americans. An exception to this was the shooting of Burleigh Law, Jr., a Methodist mission pilot, at Wembo Nyama while I was in Lulua-bourg.

Before I left we talked about plans for evacuation should this prairie-fire rebel movement continue unrestrained. Some feel the rebel hands would be harmless if not resisted.

Should the political situation finally resolve itself into responsible government, the road to recovery is a challenge to Mission. Should the political situation remain turbulent then the conscience of mission is in the refining fire in search for a proper and appropriate answer.

A combination team of knowledgeable, wise, and deeply committed people will need to assume responsibility for decision and action. The attitude of constituency, boards, CIM Board, staff, and missionaries will be in constant need of refinement to be properly responsible.

For this briefing time limits us to the major encounters so -- under the present existing conditions and circumstances where do we find ourselves as a church and what appears to be our role for now?

The Primary and Secondary Education System as it now Stands

Before independence there were virtually no Congolese trained as secondary school teachers. The handful so trained was desperately needed for government administrative positions. Missions and UNESCO suddenly tackled this problem. Moniteur schools converted to secondary and normal schools began to take root.

According to the UNESCO report, French speaking teachers from all parts of the world increased from 66 in 1960-61 to nearly 800 in 1963-64. These were employed by the Congolese government but paid one-third of their salaries in foreign currency by UNESCO.

In 1962-63, the nationalities represented were Haitians - 123, Belgians - 99, French - 85, and Lebanese - 60. Smaller numbers came from Spain, Italy, United Arab Republic, Syria, Greece, Afghanistan, Poland, Canada, Honduras, Viet-Nam, United States, Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, China, Luxembourg, Mexico, Rwanda, United Kingdom, Columbia, and Sweden. The secondary school at Goma has teachers from 15 countries.

The majority of the UNESCO teachers are assigned to State schools. In 1962-63, 116 were recruited for Catholic schools, 22 for Protestant schools, and 3 for other religious schools.

The Ministry of Education estimates that the need for foreign teachers will continue to grow until 1967 reaching a peak of 7,000 before leveling off as Congolese take their places.

A young Haitian teaching at Luluabourg asked, "Would you advise a colleague back home to come to the Congo to teach?"

He replied thoughtfully, "Several of my friends have asked me that same question. I usually tell them something like this - if you're interested in the money, don't do it. You need to have some kind of crusading spirit or a sense of mission. Otherwise, you won't last."

On December 5, 1961, a National Institute of Education was opened in Leopoldville. It is headed by a Congolese director, but the staff includes UNESCO experts from 12 different nations. Financial assistance comes from the Congolese government, United Nations, United States AID program and the British Council. It is known as Institut Pédagogique National. The past year had 207 students enrolled, only two of whom were girls.

I.P.N. graduated its first class in June of 1964. At full production it should graduate about 100 students annually.

The school situation has much to be desired. Some 70% of the pupils leave school before completing four years. Only 9% obtain primary school certificates (six years). Some schools in the cities and on mission stations are fairly well equipped, but the usual bush school consists of poles and a thatched roof. Very often no tables, chairs, desks or benches, no blackboards, chalk, notebooks or pencils, few textbooks and no visual aids. About 90% of the primary schools are operated by the missions with government assistance.

The church is responsible to appoint the School Directors who are approved by the State and responsible to hire teachers and relay their pay to them from the Legal Representative who applies to the government for the necessary subsidy. This puts the church, at this moment, in a most strategic spot. Her strength or weakness is spotlighted.

In the CIM church area the appeal is for secondary help at Bakwanga, a secondary school at Kamayala, Banga, and Charlesville, more help at Kalonda and Nyanga, and, of course, Mukedi and Kandala will need something when the door opens.

The Medical Program

This is a twin operation of service and training. Dr. John Zook expresses deep regret that medical personnel is bogged down so deeply in a service program that there is little time for a training program. Mrs. Zook has a class for nurses, but here is an area for full time workers. We are too short of help to achieve as desired in this twin operation. The capacity of the Tshikapa hospital has far greater potential than can possibly be achieved by two doctors and two nurses with about 25 Congolese helpers.

The Kimpese training school will offer some help but can never substitute for the needed bedside care now needed. We must do something here if we can and as soon as possible.

Other stations want doctors which could greatly enhance our witness. Along with doctors there is need for nurses.

The Church as I See It

Bringing into being, developing, purifying, and inspiring the church is the most difficult of our assignments. Partly because often the results are so abstract to be unobservable and because of the pernicious moral and spiritual failures that require attention and which have long-lasting unsavory results. Yet the church is the organ responsible for all other mission involvements.

The service angle of the church is readily accepted and deeply desired. Africans are in charge of the Mutena, Banga, Charlesville, and Kalonda dispensaries with general oversight exercised by the mission medical corps. The primary schools are operated by Africans, but the basic responsibility rests with the church and the Legal Representative.

This makes the church more than a spiritual and moral body seeking to develop qualitatively and quantitatively. It mires the church into affairs that tend to secularize her very existence--not by intent, but by diversion. The school system having the better trained leadership tends to intimidate church authority which consequently paralyzes discipline and slows propagation.

For this reason there is need for a strong, dynamic church offensive. We can contribute by sending in more path evangelists to evangelize, make disciples, and train and inspire local pastors. The plague of low motivation will need counter-measures. Then we will need to raise the standard of training for theological students to be comparable to secular training. For this we need some more missionary spiritual leaders of strong evangelistic and pastoral courage and fervor who will face this problem in a person to person encounter.

Statistics on the church are currently wanting. Bakwanga reports a membership of 6,260 with 5 pastors, 3 deacons, and 4 overseers. In 1963, 270 were baptized and there remained 99 baptismal candidates. Their primary schools had 2,120 registered pupils and 150 were enrolled in a United secondary school. Total offerings for the year were 245,000 francs or about \$700.00 American money.

Disruptions, scatterings, and Congolese inefficiency make other statistics unavailable. Attempts at such statistics have thus far proved futile. The Bakwanga church seems to have suffered most but appears now to excel in spiritual vitality. Here a new church building has been built and is almost ready for occupancy.

Some Other Needs

It is generally concluded that there is a real challenge before us. To meet it, we will need to increase our missionary staff at the rate of 10% annually for the next three or four years. We have spread ourselves out beyond our current ability to meet the bare necessities of the African church program. We ought to provide for this area a little better.

Travel is a real problem. I am investigating the possibility of better air travel service for our area. We could possibly save the cost of at least two surface vehicles annually by having a plane stationed at Tshikapa. Eleven hours to go to Mutana compared to 14 minutes by air serves as a stimulant for air.

It will be many years before the African church emerges to notable strength and becomes significantly self-propagating. Missionaries are loved and wanted by the church and requests are urgent for additional help. Let us not become weary in this program.

Conclusion

I have called attention only to a few of the encounters and needs. I thank God for the vision of responsible leaders and missionaries who have initiated a total thrust program. Some of these I have not mentioned for the sake of time, but they are no less important. We need now to more fully participate and realize the possibilities of this vision.