



62 ❧ Bisonsa Bimpe, sorcerer's daughter

Three pastors found the young woman dancing on a tabletop. “They found me acting indecently and saying insane things, when they called me to them,” says Bisonsa Bimpe. “I came down quickly from the tabletop where I was unabashedly dancing, still dancing as I responded to their call. As soon as I arrived at their level, they asked me to kneel, and they prayed for me. Right then, they told me to take them to my house, where they again prayed for me.”

After this act of deliverance, the men involved, including Jean Marie Kanyinda, with whom Bisonsa was already acquainted because she had grown up with him, promised to come back the next day to take her to prayer meeting. And so they did. The servants of God, all Mennonites from the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM), came back to Bisonsa's house and took her to the morning prayer service organized at the house of Mama Tshilanda Musadi, member of the Kashala Bonzola congregation in Mbuji Mayi. The day after that they did the same and continued to do so until the time when they took her to a service at the church. It was, she says, a very odd conversion.

Bisonsa Bimpe was born in 1947. Her parents were great fetishists who didn't believe in God but instead believed in the power of spirits and spells. Her father, she says, was one of those who used that power: “Once they finger you, you die without any other form of trial.” The farthest Bisonsa Bimpe went in school was her fifth year

photo—Bisonsa Bimpe

of primary education, which she was not able to finish because her father was made to retire; as a result his whole family had to move to Bena Kalenda, his native village.

An imposing woman, Bisona Bimpe was the object of much respect, as she had a lot of property. But curiously, her property began to dwindle progressively from the day she decided to consecrate her life to God, and especially when she began to attend church: "It seemed to me a chance for me to minimize myself and lower myself with regard to my attitudes and the crudeness of my language," she admits.

In 1972, three months after joining the Kashala Bonzola congregation, Bisona Bimpe was named a deaconess, and all of the parish finances were entrusted to her management. But she was not baptized until 1975, after having spent three years in the church. For four years, Bisona Bimpe performed without fail her duties as deaconess. She then served two years as vice president of the congregation's women's group, beginning in 1979. In that position, Bisona began to evangelize her delinquent friends in order to bring them to Christ. Today some of these women are still part of the church; some have abandoned the Anabaptist faith for the Catholic faith; and others have followed different leaders into different congregations. Similarly, she won many people to Christ at the city market, including Jacqueline Kalenga, currently national vice president of the Mennonite Women's Union.¹ Bisona evangelized her own family members, including a younger brother whom she helped when he was falsely accused of the murder of his friend, who was actually killed by bandits.

Named to the leadership council for the women of the Mbuji Mayi churches in 1982, Bisona Bimpe worked on settling differences in the homes of Christians as well as conflicts in the parishes, with the hope of procuring peace for all. However, her principal role was to exhort members of the leadership committee to live in peace and harmony and lead exemplary lives in order to bring their husbands to Christ if they weren't part of the church. Because of her fervor and commitment to the service of the Lord, Mama Bisona became vice president and then president of the Mbuji Mayi CEM women city-wide, a post she held until 2009.

1 See "She saw CEM in a vision" (chapter 63).

Because of changes and conflicts in the CEM over the years, Bisonsa had begun to worship at a different CEM congregation. A few years later, she left this church over a disagreement with the pastor after a misunderstanding on the subject of a family in difficulty. At the invitation of her daughter, she began to attend another church, not part of CEM. After attending her daughter's church for three months, she had a vision of a man dressed in a white cassock, sitting in the vehicle in which she was riding. He said to her: "Come back to your first church and don't be angry, for a mother should not harbor endless anger." Because she didn't heed the message, a week later the same man appeared to her again, with the same message. She then returned to the CEM, attending a third congregation, where she has been for five years.

Bisonsa Bimpe grounds her faith and her discipleship on God's response to her prayers of intercession. She says, "All the difficult questions posed to me have been resolved by God after intercessory prayer addressed to him." As an example, Bisonsa cites the case of Romains Mbikayi and her children, whom God liberated from "wildness and barbarity." She affirms: "For all these problems, God answered my prayers and those of his servants, for all my children who were wild have calmed down. What's more, God has protected my life even though I was wealthy and lived a dirty life."

Today, Bisonsa Bimpe believes herself to be blessed, all the more so since her conversion and that of her brothers and sisters led to her father's conversion. Papa Nzolo converted to Christianity at an advanced age in 1996. He exclaimed: "What pleasure is there for me in not entrusting myself to God, if all my children have done so?" He passed away ten years later, having lived more than a hundred years.

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