



41 ☞ A prophet among his own people

One of those present at the founding of what would become the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo (CEM) was Isaac Tshibangu. Like other Baluba refugees from the tribal conflicts, he and his family arrived in Mbuji Mayi in 1961, having left everything behind in Ndjoko Punda.

Isaac Tshibangu was then in his mid-fifties, married, and the father of eight children. After a few years of Bible training he had become an assistant to the evangelist Archie Graber¹ and Pastor Joseph Ngalula. His role was to teach the word of God to new pupils. He did this until he was ordained in 1946 as an elder of the Ndjoko Punda church. As such he worked at nearly all of the Mennonite mission stations in the following years, until he was forced to flee the region in 1961.

The Mennonite refugees in Mbuji Mayi didn't stand around with their arms folded, as far as spreading the gospel of salvation was concerned. Tshibangu met with Mathieu Kazadi, Graber, and others in Kazadi's home on April 24, 1962, to form the Mennonite Evangelical Association of South Kasai, which would become the CEM.² He was named treasurer of the new association. Without any support from outside, this new association began establishing congregations.

photo—Isaac Tshibangu

1 See "Let's see if Archie is available" (chapter 13), and "Feeding the refugees of South Kasai" (chapter 39).

2 See "Mathieu Kazadi and the new Evangelical Mennonite Church" (chapter 40).

Tshibangu made a major contribution in opening schools under the association, when it was accorded civil status in 1966.

Isaac Tshibangu had brought a number of his clan brothers into the church at Ndjoko Punda, who were subsequently ordained as pastors. Likewise, he had evangelized many other families who were influential members of Congo Inland Mission churches. In particular, he had taken charge of a number of young single men. As they found wives, the new families significantly augmented the numbers of the faithful at Ndjoko Punda. Like Tshibangu and his family, these families had been forced out of the region by the conflicts. They now became the core of the new church in South Kasai. Isaac himself was ordained as a pastor by Mathieu Kazadi in 1968.

Unlike many pastors whose children escape their control and religious aspirations, Pastor Isaac succeeded in bringing all his children into the Mennonite fold, at least so long as they were living under his roof. One of his sons, Elder Hubert Tshibangu, former national administrative secretary (1995–2005) and current treasurer of the CEM, testifies that Pastor Isaac Tshibangu was a man of unshakable faith. Hubert sees the hand of the Eternal in the fact that his father engendered so many spiritual, as well as biological, children. He says his father showed them all the way of faith, and they have never left this path. He testifies that they remain in service to the Lord in this church where they were born, married, brought their children, and continue today.

Isaac Tshibangu passed away in 1992 but left his children, his clan brothers, and many other people to carry on the work of God.

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