



40 ❖ Mathieu Kazadi and the new Evangelical Mennonite Church

An older brother brought Mathieu Kazadi from the village where he was born to Ndjoko Punda in 1912, shortly after the first Mennonite missionaries arrived there. Mathieu was only a few years old. This little boy would become a founder of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo.

A missionary raised the young Mathieu and put him in school, while Mathieu served as a house helper. Mathieu Kazadi went through both the elementary school and the Bible school of the mission and became one of the early teacher-evangelists.

Mathieu also managed to acquire land, where he grew coffee and processed coffee and peanuts. He undertook these commercial ventures simultaneously with his responsibilities as evangelist and pastor, as well as teaching Christian ethics and other courses at the Bible school. In this role he had the responsibility to present a daily meditation in the morning prayer service. He devoted himself with all his energy to his duties, training students who would eventually become his co-workers. And as an itinerant evangelist from 1932 to 1940, he founded a number of churches in the area surrounding Ndjoko Punda.

Mathieu Kazadi was known for the way he proclaimed the gospel everywhere and in whatever circumstance: in airplanes, hospi-

tals, restaurants, and in every gathering of God's people. His main preoccupation throughout his life remained the preaching of the good news of salvation according to Anabaptist doctrine.

Fair, generous, hospitable, a defender of the rights of others and adept at linking deeds to the word of God, Kazadi succeeded in gaining the esteem of whites and blacks alike, which assured both the stability and the numerical growth of the Mennonite church in the Ndjoko Punda area. In 1958 and 1959, before the proclamation of independence of Congo, Kazadi was the first black Mennonite pastor to be elevated to the position of president of the Mennonite Church of Congo. The American missionaries took him to the United States, where all confirmed his qualities as a true servant of God.

But Mathieu Kazadi's greatest contribution to the church would come after independence. In 1961, Kazadi and his family left Ndjoko Punda, along with other members of the Baluba tribe who were expelled by the tribes indigenous to that region. They landed in what is now Mbuji Mayi after a long and painful journey that took them far out of the way, including to Bandundu Province and Leopoldville (now Kinshasa). In Bandundu Kazadi was briefly imprisoned for promulgating a "new doctrine" in the surrounding area.

In Mbuji Mayi the desolate family was taken in by a relative who was a Presbyterian pastor. The American Presbyterian Church had missions in Mbuji Mayi and the rest of South Kasai Province. Kazadi began attending the church and was asked to preach one Sunday. His preaching enchanted the faithful of the congregation. Time after time the Mennonite pastor preached and thus won the esteem of the Presbyterians, who continued asking him to speak. Soon the Presbyterians of Mbuji Mayi became well known because of his abilities.

After being installed in their own house on Mwene Ditu Avenue, Mathieu Kazadi and his wife continued to worship with the Presbyterians but in a different congregation. Many other displaced people joined him there, including a number who had carried out ministries in Ndjoko Punda. Soon that church was too small to hold all the displaced believers who were joining the local faithful. Kazadi requested and obtained from his son-in-law Jonas Munkamba, governor of South Kasai, the land for another Presbyterian church. But, having succeeded in gathering many Anabaptist and Presbyterian faithful in that place, he decided to abandon it, judging it to be too small for his vision.

Meanwhile, dissatisfied with Presbyterian doctrine, and wishing to return to Anabaptist doctrine, Mathieu Kazadi called a meeting in his home on April 24, 1962, to discern the possibility of creating a Mennonite church in Mbuji Mayi and in South Kasai. He invited his peers and Archie Graber, who had come to Mbuji Mayi for the management and distribution of MCC aid to the South Kasai refugees.¹

This was the beginning of the new branch of the Congolese Mennonite church that would eventually be named the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM). It took place almost exactly fifty years after the arrival of the first Mennonite missionaries in Congo and the founding of Congo Inland Mission.

This great man of faith, known affectionately as Kazadi Matayi, passed away in 1994.

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1 See “Feeding the refugees of South Kasai” (chapter 39).