

MISSION PATERNALISM FACTOR IN SELF RELIANCE OF CONGO MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH

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This reflection is the fruit of many classroom discussions during the course *Church and Mission* at the Christian University of Kinshasa. Students asked that the presentations used in the course be expanded in order to allow others to benefit from the reflections. Among these, we think particularly of Congolese Mennonites who have chosen to serve Christ, and of those who are preparing for such service in the Congolese context, where the idea of taking responsibility for one's own life is a daily reality. It is in this context that we are all called to live out our Congolese and Christian identity.

All of us are aware that the Democratic Republic of Congo is overflowing with many natural resources, few of which ever profit Congolese themselves. These resources can be used to bring greater independence, but no one can doubt that as long as Congolese Mennonites are not aware of their dependency in almost all areas of life, it is unlikely that there will be a solution to the problem of paternalism.

In this reflection, I will offer no ready-made solutions, but will rather share the results of my personal research. It is left to each reader to deepen their reflection on how they are living and how they would like to live, while remaining faithful to the Mennonite Church. My reflection is simply a recognition that Congolese Mennonite Brethren face enormous difficulties in taking responsibility for the work of the Communauté des Eglises de Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC). It is also a call to live as responsible adults rather than continuing to live as children.

Paternalist and Dependency Philosophies

From the time of their arrival in Congo, Mennonite missionaries presented an unclear vision that was not understood by the local Mennonite

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churches. The missionaries worked under the principle that *mission* was the monopoly and privilege of their churches or their countries of origin. In their activities they did not distinguish between tasks of bringing the gospel and of bringing western civilization. The good news was presented as part of a system that favored dependence on the outside. As a result, Congolese Mennonite Brethren remained in a state of dependence on the American and Canadian Mennonite Brethren churches for a long time to come. While *autonomy* was welcomed as an indication of independence in the early 1970's, the Mennonite Brethren churches of Congo in many ways remained children tied in a relationship of financial dependence to a single organization in the West.

In such a situation, a true sense of freedom and responsibility could not develop among Congolese Mennonite Christians. The churches found themselves in the position of an "*only child, because in general it was not possible for them to have any real contact with other churches ... dependant on the same mission organization.*"¹ Le Robert dictionary defines paternalism as "*a patriarchal or paternal method of management... a tendency to impose control, domination under the guise of protection.*"² In many ways paternalism was in fact a form of domination. It was imposed by the colonial powers, but Christian missionaries practiced it as well. The case might even be made that paternalism is a doctrine inspired by Christianity. In any event it must be acknowledged that paternalism, this particular form of domination, governed relationships between Western mission organizations and the African churches, between foreign missionaries and national Christians. Because new churches were not taught to depend on God and their own capacities, they did not take on the missionary task. This relationship between mother and daughter churches continues to our day.

Perceptive and critical African thinkers have often viewed missionaries in a negative light due to their paternalistic attitudes. There is no doubt that paternalism was a characteristic of the activity of most Mennonite missionaries working in Congo. In the paternalistic view, Congolese were born with limited capacities and should not be given any responsibility. Some scholars believe that

¹ L. Newbigin, *La mission mondiale de l'Eglise*, Paris, Sociétés des Missions Evangéliques de Paris, p. 62.

² P. Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analytique de la Langue Française*, Paris, Société de Nouveau Littré, 1976, p. 1249.

Darwinism had a strong influence on the Western mentality, including that of missionaries.³

In mission relationships the word “*paternalism*” has several different meanings. First is the relationship between two individuals of different status. This is the case of a father and a son. The father and his son have a relationship in which the father is superior to his son. It is the father who gave life to the son, and as a result the father has a certain power over his son. But this relationship between the father and the son is expected to eventually develop toward the independence of the child. At some point the father must relinquish his control over his child, and assist him little by little to one day become a father to his own children, and such is the case with each generation.

In this understanding a relationship based on paternalism must evolve into one of autonomy; the dominated party becomes fully independent, and the father’s role progressively gives way to the son’s. From the beginning the father should put into place a system of apprenticeship that will allow the child to progress through adolescence, adulthood and fatherhood. The child thus understands that to be an adult means to take up one’s responsibility or “*mission*,” and to develop one’s capacities. A father who refuses to teach this sense of responsibility to his son commits a serious error. It is no different with a young church.⁴

In its relationship to a mission agency, the local church should learn through collaboration with the mother Church. Such would be an improvement on previous eras. In politics it is common to prepare for succession, for the one who will replace the current leader. Initially it is the father who holds all of the power and is the dominant party, superior to others. But he must quickly go beyond that to understand that he needs to assure the survival of his line by gradually preparing the one who will one day succeed him. Without such preparation a violent succession may take place.

There is a second more negative aspect of paternalism, namely the view that the person before you is inherently inferior, and incapable of any progress. Africans were often seen as children or as beings of lower intelligence. The

³ M. Schipper de Leeuw, *Le blanc vu en Afrique*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1973, p. 110.

⁴ L. Newbiggin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 58.

witness of one Christian missionary confirms this: "*These unfortunate over-grown children don't understand that it is only for their own good, and for the salvation of their souls, that it is sometimes necessary to deal harshly with them.*"⁵

The missionaries were of the opinion that these childlike Congolese lacked intellectual capacity. The Apostle Paul, in his letters to the young churches, addressed the Corinthians as "*little children in Christ,*" but he did not see that as a normal state of being. His point was that they did not have the right to conduct themselves as little children, but rather should act as adults. A view of another person as inferior in all aspects of life is a very negative view. It amounts to a systematic superiority complex that an individual maintains toward those with whom one lives or works. The other is considered as a child, an inferior being, who can do nothing alone and who at every moment must be helped and provided for by those who consider themselves superior.

In this second kind of paternalism a father continues to act on behalf of a child, regardless of the child's age or education. The child remains eternally dependent, one for whom the father must do everything throughout the child's life. Without the presence of his father, the child is unable to survive. Such an approach inevitably becomes a major obstacle to the development and growth the child. While from a spiritual point of view a new Christian should spend some time under the guidance of elders, the final goal of becoming an adult must always be kept in view.⁶

In the past Congolese Mennonite Brethren churches were relegated to being simple receptacles for the converted, while the role of mission was reserved for the mission agency. This represented the most serious possible wrong committed against the Congolese churches. In the relationship with the CEFMC, mission was the responsibility of the mission agency, rather than being a responsibility shared with the local churches from the start. As Arthur Judson Brown said, "*As the more intelligent natives become more civilized, they should be used as helpers, Bible readers, and aids in evangelism, with the role of elder being given to the most capable, among them.*"⁷

The attitude of paternalism has been a characteristic of European or

⁵ M. Schipper de Leeuw, *Op. Cit.*, p. 110.

⁶ A. J. Brown, *Le missionnaire et son oeuvre*, Paris, Librairie Fischbacher, 1910, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Western civilization; the colonial enterprise itself was founded on an assumption of the superiority of whites over blacks. The father must do everything for the child, not in order to bring the child quickly to a point of independence, but to forever maintain this state of inferiority and thus justify the need for the presence of the father at the child's side. The father remains father – that is to say superior – and the child remains forever a child. The child can never be a parent in his own right.

This philosophy of the superiority of the white over black was taught in all the schools of Europe and North America from the 17th to the 21st centuries. A rationale for this philosophy was even found in the Bible. To justify exploitation in general, the slave trade, and colonialism in Africa, it was claimed that blacks were the descendants of Shem, the son cursed by his father Noah, and thus condemned to remain inferior to whites.

In the colonial context whites often viewed Africans as “*impulsive, without any sense of responsibility, unintelligent and incapable of following an undertaking through to its conclusion, or to resist the attraction of immediate gratification.*”⁸ To delineate differences between white and black, social segregation was implemented. White and black did not eat together; they did not spend free time together. It must be said that this colonial philosophy of the era was also that of the Western churches. They accepted it in order to justify colonialism and the mission enterprise. Since black people were seen as inferior beings without religion or civilization, it was necessary, given the technical and cultural superiority of the West, to bring them Western religions (Protestant and Catholic Christianity).

Thus the work of colonization and the work of evangelization -- through the various missionary societies of the Protestant and Catholic churches -- accompanied each other in Africa,. Missionaries sent to Africa, while being Christians, were first and foremost citizens of their countries, and thus partisans of the contemporary ideologies of their societies. They were prepared to meet the challenges of the task of being a missionary on the field. They were given a double responsibility of being ambassadors of their civilization and ambassadors of Christ. These missionaries were encouraged to create new Christians in their

⁸ J. Maquet, *Africanité traditionnelle et moderne*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1967, p. 103.

own image. *"In addition to the mission of evangelization that falls to them, they will be also given the mission of civilization itself."*⁹ Thus it is not surprising that they used the same weapons as their colonialist colleagues along with the spiritual weapons in order to initiate and implant the mission presence.

In fact, this problem is nearly always raised with respect to the work of Western missionaries in countries of the Third World. It is reflected in their attitudes and orientations with respect to the democratic organization of churches, the Western idea of time, the physical design of churches, the structure of worship services and church music, dress, housing, etc. In summary, the missionaries can be criticized for imposing a Christianity that was strongly acculturated to Western civilization. They should have avoided deculturalizing, depersonalizing and alienating Africans, because in so doing the missionary undermined the cultural foundations of societies that were to that point still strong. Their paternalistic philosophy and spirit of superiority towards Africans was the ongoing basis of missionary action in Africa in general and in Congo in particular. All of the activities undertaken in the mission field were initially conceived and elaborated on the basis of this philosophy. It is for this reason that the kinds of relationships that the missionaries maintained with the Christians they had evangelized were always overshadowed by a spirit of paternalism.

If in fact paternalism was the basic philosophy of missionary activity in Africa in general, what then was the attitude of Mennonite missionaries in Congo? How did Mennonite missionaries specifically accept or reject the philosophy of the time? It is undeniable that the Mennonite missionaries working in the Congo were not without fault in this area. They too were imbued with paternalism, and it was the working philosophy among Mennonite missionaries. Paternalism provided the orientation for the activities of Mennonite missionaries in Congo.

Concerning the Congolese Mennonite Brethren churches, this issue must be placed in its historical perspective. How did the missionaries act toward Congolese who became Mennonite Christians through their missionary work? To answer this question properly, we need to look more closely at the history of the missionary era from 1920 to 1971. This history can be divided into three

⁹ B. Geffe, "Evangile et Culture"; in *Christ Seul*, n° 8-9, Août-septembre, 1976, p. 2.

periods during which paternalistic practice by the missionaries underwent some changes, reflecting the political, social, and cultural changes in the Congo. Let us examine these changes to better understand the paternalism of Mennonite missionaries.

Initial Era of Mennonite Missionary Practice 1920-1945

The first period was from 1920 to 1945. This was the period of the initiation and development of Mennonite missionary work in Congo. The year 1920 marked the beginning of a mission station at Kikondji by Aaron Janzen. This station was moved to nearby Kafumba four years later because the initial site was physically unsuitable for the development of the missionary work. This period ended in 1943, when the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions took over responsibility for the work from Aaron Janzen. The important points to note from this period are the following:

1. Throughout the period Aaron Janzen and his team had full financial, administrative, and spiritual independence in their work. They were supported by a number of Mennonite churches in the United States and Canada, in particular the home church of the Jansen couple in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and several friends who supported mission work throughout the world.¹⁰ However the required finances for the construction of Kafumba was in large part the result of the personal efforts of missionaries and the Congolese Mennonites at Kafumba. There were plantations of coffee, pineapple, manioc, corn, palm oil processing, and goat production.¹¹

2. Another observation to make is that of the independence of Aaron Janzen with respect to those agencies funding mission work, in this case the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions. Aaron Janzen did not receive any financing from the mission board. He felt free to undertake any action or physical development at Kafumba. The mission board did not exercise any administrative or financial "paternalism" over the work of Janzen at Kafumba. He alone was the master, the one who conceived and determined the approach and orientation to use in the missionary work throughout the period. He was free of any pressure

¹⁰ H.T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions*, Hillsboro, Kansas, The Mennonite Brethren, Publishing House, 1954, p. 308.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

coming from donors or financial supporters. He was an administrator, funder, and legal representative of the work at Kafumba.

What then were the consequences of the absence of the “paternalism” of the mission agency in the work at Kafumba from 1920 to 1943? Those who lived at Kafumba during that time know of the extraordinary development of the mission work achieved by Aaron Janzen during this period. One can cite in passing several concrete facts which demonstrate the rapid growth of the mission work at Kafumba. The station included a permanent infrastructure of primary schools, a Bible school, dispensaries, maternity, missionary lodging, workers housing, a church, brickyard, plantations of coffee, and a factory for palm oil.¹² Evangelization took place in neighboring villages. In each village Aaron Janzen developed a school and a church for worship, and he placed a catechist there to assure teaching and preaching.

3. Social development took place in Kafumba in the areas of medical work and employment. The population of the region of Kafumba benefitted from the side effects of the missionary action of Janzen. Local people earned money by working in the fields, doing other agricultural work, and working in the palm oil factory. Basic medical care was available to those who were sick, providing relief to them in their illnesses. Young children came to the school to learn.

4. In the spiritual realm the missionary work of the Kafumba mission station went well beyond the borders of the mission complex. It reached far and wide. Other Protestant churches working in the Kwilu area did not hesitate to come to see and take inspiration from the work and the example of Aaron Janzen at Kafumba.

Nevertheless, while Aaron Janzen was himself freed from the unfortunate paternalistic tendencies that the mission board might have imposed, his own attitude toward Congolese Mennonite Christians at Kafumba and in the villages was not perfect. Instead he was faithful to the philosophy of his time. For him, Congolese Mennonites at Kafumba were inferior beings compared to missionaries. It was inappropriate to treat them in the same way as whites. Several examples illustrate this paternalistic attitude.

The construction of the station at Kafumba was based on a philosophy of

¹² Ibid.

segregation into two areas. There was an area for the whites, with all the comforts that one would find in Europe—well traced paths embellished with flowers, fruit trees, lawns, and permanent housing; on the other hand, an area for Congolese Mennonites where such amenities were not found. Blacks were not allowed to spend time in the missionaries' area without a valid reason. And the missionaries for their part rarely came to the African area except for special events. Between the two areas was a neutral zone that contained infrastructure such as the church, school, hospital, maternity, printing press, office, garage, workshop, etc.

This neutral zone was the only place where there were natural encounters between the African and the white communities. It was thus evident that the paternalistic attitude that considered blacks as inferior beings, not deserving the same conditions of life as whites, led the missionaries of Kafumba to build a society of separation between blacks and whites, with all of the consequences that entailed. In the mind of the missionary, there was unity in Christ, but in the social realm, everyone had his or her own place and civilization.

This superiority complex on the part of the whites also led them to establish separate schools for Congolese and their own children. Schipper de Leeuwen was correct when he noted that "*Father Hus, in **Heart of Aryenne**, taught African children a different catechism than the one he taught to his sole white student, Solange, who received separate instruction. According to Father Hus, a few rudimentary aspects of catechism would suffice young natives, who were primarily threatened by an eternal hell where they would receive the vengeance of an unchanging God.*"¹³

Paternalism toward the African was also expressed by the missionaries' opinion that Africans lacked necessary intellectual capacities. The missionary wanted Christianity to result in submissiveness and respect from converted Africans. Thus in order to maintain authority over Africans and obtain their passive obedience, they at times counseled colonial authorities to punish Africans with blows from the whip.

We should also note in passing that the educational processes put in place for training Congolese was not the same as that reserved for whites. At Kafumba, the only option after primary school was a Bible school where students

¹³ M. Schipper de Leeuw, *Op. Cit.*, p. 110.

would go in order to become pastors and teachers. Beyond these two schools, the station had no other structures for developing the intellect. As noted, the education reserved for Congolese at that time was not equal to that of the children of missionaries. That is why, after the independence of the Congo, when the missionaries returned to their countries of origin, the crisis of transferring responsibility was very substantial because the people chosen to direct the church were poorly prepared for this task. Clearly, delegation of responsibility is necessary for the church because it helps to develop skills and talents, improve understanding, and increase the satisfaction that each person finds in their work. But the way in which it occurred with Congolese Mennonites did not allow those placed at the head of the church to operate in a responsible way with respect to the tasks assigned.¹⁴

It is clear that some missionary Christians refused to delegate tasks to Congolese because of the training of the latter was inadequate. They believed that Congolese were incapable of accomplishing the work. The missionaries had little competition in their roles, yet they feared that their superiority would not be acknowledged. They feared that they would not have sufficient time to prepare properly the Congolese for the task. We note that during the period of Aaron Janzen, no Congolese Mennonite was involved in the administration or the oversight of missionary work. All was decided, directed, and implemented by the missionaries. Congolese Mennonite Christians were like children, expected to follow the letter of what missionaries decided. It was a matter of blind obedience; disagreement was severely reprimanded.

Second Era of Mennonite Mission in Congo 1945-1960

A second period in this history was from 1945 until 1960. This was the era when the mission agency took control of the work of the Aaron Janzen. The financing of all mission work in Congo became the responsibility of the agency. This decision was accompanied by a loss of administrative authority on the part of Aaron Janzen. From that time everything was decided in United States and Canada - from missionary personnel matters, to material and financial needs. The missionaries were required to provide a report, and await the pleasure of the

¹⁴ A. Kuen, *L'organisation de l'Eglise, Saint-Légier, Emmaüs, 2002, pp. 23-24.*

authorities from the office that was now called BOMAS (Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services). In this context, it goes without saying that paternalism was experienced by the missionaries who were at Kafumba as well as being practiced on Congolese Mennonite Christians. Everything was financed by BOMAS. Congolese were required to make a contribution that was called "tithes". But this contribution was so insignificant that it had no perceptible impact on the decision-making chain of command. Congolese were spectators. They watched the missionaries direct, and make decisions according to their own action plan.

With the approach of independence in the country in 1960, the winds of political change in the country, and the desire of Congolese to take in hand their own destiny and direct the future of their own country, were also felt in the church. Congolese Christians became aware of the plague of missionary paternalism. Voices were raised everywhere among the Protestant churches noting the position of superiority of Christian missionaries over Congolese. The latter called for the Africanization of the church. *"The church in Africa cannot become European. It must discover its own language, symbols that respond to the sensitivities of Africans, to their way of understanding the world, of speaking, and of relating to each other. Rather than advocating the westernization of African Christians, the missionary should be looking for aspects which could give birth to and indigenous Christian culture. The missionary must not impose a particular form of culture on anyone. He must to the contrary adapt to the ways of thinking and of life of each particular people, and communicate his message in the unique way of each culture."*¹⁵

These winds of change did not leave Congolese Christians untouched. They too called for participation in the whole life of the Church, including in areas of administration and finances. Niles noted in this respect that *"the problem of our churches is that of administrative and financial economy."*¹⁶ No church could be truly African if it were not also independent. The problem of missionary paternalism could not be resolved without resolving the financial question. If the Congolese Mennonite churches wanted to become financially independent, they would need to move beyond the paternalist system.

¹⁵ D. A. Gilles de Pelichy, "Vers une culture africaine chrétienne", in *L'Eglise au Congo et au Rwanda-Urundi*, 1949, p. 60.

¹⁶ D.T. Niles, "L'Eglise indigène", in *Le monde Chrétien*, no 7, 1936, p. 79.

Conscious of their administrative and financial situation, it was at this time that the Congolese churches began calling for autonomous legal status. This legal status was the equivalent of independence for the churches in general and for the Mennonite churches in particular. Clearly, Congolese Mennonites recognized that they were still considered children, incapable of managing their own churches. To change this situation they called for legal autonomy. This was a way for Congolese to free themselves from missionary paternalism.

We note here in passing that financial paternalism was one of the aspects that was most resented. Everywhere, financial support came from the West. Africans did not feel implicated in the church implanted in their midst. For them, the church belonged to the missionaries, and they were simple worshipers. The church was in their eyes a foreign institution. In the area of finances, missionaries denied the Congolese both access to information and decision-making power. Congolese were marginalized in the church. They saw financial paternalism as the key that assured the domination of the missionary. That is why thousands of Christians rose up and demanded that this umbilical cord that perpetuated the inferiority of Congolese Christians be cut. The more revolutionary among them used the famous word "*moratorium*" on missions. For example, in 1971 John Gatu declared the following: "*the problems afflicting the churches of the Third World cannot be result in less all missionaries are recalled for a period of the least five years in order to allow each party to rethink and reformulate its future relations.*"¹⁷

Church Autonomy Efforts in Era of Independence 1960-1974

This brings us to the third period of the missionary era, from 1960 to 1974. Within the Mennonite churches of Congo, the fight against paternalism went on for several years before things changed. Throughout these years there were continuing demands for autonomy within the CEFMC – an autonomy that should have been a key strength of the church, as was the case in the country in general, which grew in the context of independence. The missionaries responded to these demands with the creation of a national church first called the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Congo (AEFMC) and later the Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Congo (CEFMC), following the

¹⁷ B. Geffe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

act of fusion which took place at Kwenge on 16 January 1971.¹⁸ Once fusion was achieved it legitimated the sharing of administrative power in the church between Congolese and missionaries. This was in a sense a theoretical independence, because in reality financial matters were still in the hands of missionaries. There was fusion of administrative structures but not of finances.

Since financial support came from the USA and Canada, the missionaries began to change their strategies with respect to financial support for Mennonites in Congo. They began gradually to divest themselves of the financial weight of support for Congo. Today financial support from mission agencies to Congo has become very limited and is almost non-existent. All the weight now falls upon Congolese Christians themselves. They understand that they need to take charge of their church.

This strategy of mission has led us to examine the consequences of paternalism in the growth of the missionary work within the Mennonite churches of Congo. The paternalist philosophy resulted in a number of negative effects, of which we note the following:

1. Paternalism maintained a relationship of inferiority and superiority between the two parties. This relationship did not favor those who were considered inferior because they had to always await the “manna” coming from their superiors. But the biblical experience affirms that “*when the manna was finished, the Israelites ate the fruits of their country*” (Jos. 5:12). The practice of paternalism cultivated and encouraged idleness and a wait-and-see attitude on the part of those who were being helped. Laziness, indifference, and nonchalance were encouraged in the paternalist relationship.

2. Paternalism did not encourage the development of a national church, because the church was considered as a foreign institution imported by the missionaries. It was never something that belonged to Congolese. The practice of paternalism impeded initiatives of the local church and blocked their development. Good ideas had difficulty finding ways of being applied, because everything depended on the attitude of the decision-makers. There were worthy projects conceived by Congolese Christians that were not funded because the process in place for receiving financial support was not adequate or realistic.

¹⁸ Statut de la Communauté des Eglises des Frères Mennonites au Congo.

Financial decisions were situated very far from where the projects would be carried out, and thus were detached from the local reality.

3. The practice of paternalism impeded creativity, innovation, and reform of institutions, because even when the need for change was acknowledged, it was necessary to obtain the approval of those who supplied financial support and directed the mission. It was always necessary to satisfy the requirements of the decision-makers, otherwise one would be sanctioned.

In the context of the local church, paternalistic thinking prevented an understanding of the real objective of the missionary work. It is not possible for a church to become independent unless it is itself able to assume responsibility for all aspects of church, including that of mission. In a church, paternalism is rocky ground where seeds have great difficulty growing. One can clearly say that the paternalist system impedes vocation, ministries, and the spiritual growth of Christians, because it does not allow everyone to participate in the work of the church with the gifts that they have.

We return to the history of the missionary period that was brought to a close by the period of autonomy in which the CEFMC now entered. The development of an autonomous church did not mean that missionaries could no longer collaborate with the church. The CEFMC understood autonomy in terms of mission. Autonomy for the church was a way of escaping the state of dependence in which the church had always been captive. This autonomy could only be understood as a recognition and respect for direct relationships with the mission agency. Confronted with a paternalist dependency, the CEFMC had to develop an awareness of its own values based on its own social context. Often obstructed by poverty, the Church found its way in response to the relevant religious developments. The contemporary social realities of a context act in a powerful way on a young church when it does not have a ready channel for progressing and bringing about social change.¹⁹

We would like to believe that to be autonomous means to take oneself seriously, and to at times think carefully through issues and take appropriate independent action. Autonomy involves being free of the domination of others, and being responsible. With its autonomy, the CEFMC should have established

¹⁹ G. F. Vicedom, "Milieu social et jeunes églises", in *Le Monde non Chrétien*, no 20 p. 445.

as its goal the development of a church authentically rooted in the Congolese context and capable of self development. And the mission agency, on its side, needed to simply intensify its relationships with the CEFMC consistent with the philosophy of church development that the mission agency was supposed to encourage. We do not mean by this that the CEFMC should have become an extension of the American church. It should instead grow in its own soil, becoming ever more authentic and independent.

In writing of the young African church, Dolvo underlined that each people needs to free themselves from all humiliating servitude that is unjust and contrary to human dignity, which might be imposed upon them by other people. According to him, when the church works for justice on the behalf of those who are oppressed, that does not mean that it is being unjust towards those who dominate.²⁰

When a church is dependent upon foreign missions, it is constantly in need of the guidance and direction of its parents for its continued existence. Currently, instead of remaining in this condition of childhood, the Congolese Mennonite churches are able to use their own means to contribute to the implementation of projects at the level of prayer groups. In this way members learn that hard work is the key to all progress, and they can truly become people created in the image of God. They will be liberated from a social and economic situation that alienates them.²¹

In a dependent church, nothing seems possible without outside support from partners. Even those things that the church could do with their own resources, they want them to be done by someone else. However experience shows that *"a church that functions only with funds from abroad is built on a foundation of sand, and when a storm arrives, it will not survive."*²² Is it possible to live as a Christian without receiving assistance from outside sources? There are churches in which this question does not arise; where autonomy has worked so well from the very beginning that Christians have never counted on outside help. Unfortunately that is not how it is in the Congo.

²⁰ Chr. Dolvo, "Le Jeune Eglise en Afrique", in *Le Monde Non Chrétien*, no 7 ? 1948. p. 851.

²¹ Mushila Nyamankank, "La Mission de l'Eglise aujourd'hui", in *Revus Congolaise de Théologie Protestante*, no 10, 1998, p. 229.

²² A. J. Brown, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

CEFMC's Moral, Spiritual, and Financial Autonomy Challenges since 1971

Since achieving autonomy in 1971 at Kwenge, the CEFMC has continued in a state of immaturity. It is dependent on others. The church forgets that it is called to grow in all areas: moral, spiritual and financial. Despite efforts of the mother churches of America and Canada to promote the work of the CEFMC, our churches are not growing. They are strong in foundational principles, but often they have a mentality that inhibits growth. Their greatest concern is self-preservation rather than welcoming others.²³

Missionary activity in Congo has created in the church a generation of dependent Christians. They remain in this state of immaturity, not knowing how to take responsibility for themselves. They do not give adequately to accomplish the work of the CEFMC. The legacy of paternalistic dependency has resulted in Congolese Mennonite Christians stagnating, hand outstretched toward others. To recover from this weakness, the CEFMC needs an appropriate and responsible leadership.

If previously the practice of paternalism pushed Congolese Mennonite Christians to withdraw into themselves, bound by a respect for customs and fears, today they must abandon this stance and free themselves from everything that has held them back in the past. Each Congolese Mennonite Christian must be a committed member wanting to contribute fully to the well-being of his or her local church. The paternalistic system must be opposed in favor of sharing and partnership relationships, because partnering with other churches can orient us toward broader horizons while allowing us to see the world as a whole. This is what can help us to go beyond ourselves, to develop, and to renew ourselves in order to pass on what we have received, and to accomplish the work of the church.

The Congolese Mennonite Brethren Church, if it wants to be financially independent, must find for itself the necessary resources for the life of the Church. There is a need to cultivate among its members a sense of responsibility. The dependency model has not helped Congolese Christians to support the central structures of their church with the funds necessary for its development. The error has been that for a long time Congolese Mennonites have been

²³ A. Krol, *Survol de la croissance de l'Eglise*, p. 32.

dependent on the mother Church. This has resulted in a mentality of perpetual receivers that has left the church powerless to take responsibility for itself.

It is a consequence of paternalism that leads the Congo Mennonite churches to act like state structures, having to mobilize its members to play a role in the development of their church. For the development of the church, professor Diawaku encourages the leaders to call upon the participation of individuals at the local level. This approach insists on an engaged development by the oppressed and the poor. For him, consciousness-raising must be a process that allows individuals to analyze their own situation in order to understand through their own efforts their self-alienation.²⁴

We cannot conclude this reflection without thinking about the future of our relations with the mother church. It is possible to maintain good relationships with the churches of the North, while taking on our own shoulders the responsibility for sustaining certain activities in our churches by ourselves as Congolese. What is needed at this time is that the Mennonite churches of Congo go beyond the system of dependency to relationships of partnership and interdependence, where each party brings its contribution according to its possibilities. It is time that the Congolese churches wake up from their sleep. In their semi-conscious state, they stretch out their hand to someone else to receive rather than trying to free themselves in order to become churches committed to contributing to their own development.

We dare to think that a self-sufficient church in terms of personnel and financial resources will not need to walk alone in order to become an authentic independent church. Freed from outside dependency, the church will have already taken the critical step: that is each member rising to his or her responsibility. For this reason, the Congo Mennonite churches require enlightened leadership that encourages its members to participate actively in maintaining the church.

In their relationships with the churches of the North, the responsibility and the privilege of each part of the church must be commitment. If our Mennonite churches in Congo are poor in financial resources, they are rich in

²⁴ Diawaku dia Nseyila, *L'Eglise et projet de développement communautaire théorie et praxis ecclésiales pour la promotion humaine en Afrique Noire*, in *Revue Congolaise de Théologie Protestante*, no 11, 1997, pp. 62-63.

members. But for many of these members, the work of the church is not their concern. It is something that others do for them rather than something they must do. Those who look for ways to avoid responsibility for their own church, according to Newbigin, are a strange breed. Their church does not belong to them.²⁵ Each Congolese Mennonite Christian has the responsibility and the great privilege of taking part in this work. It can be done through giving gifts, through active service, through intercession, through financial support, and through teaching.

²⁵ L. Newbigin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.