



10 ❖ A well-ordered pastor

Some people are largely products of their environments, and others shape their own lives and their environments. Pierre Khelendende is one of those people who succeeded in imposing himself on his surroundings.

Pierre Khelendende was born in 1920 in a village near the Kandala mission station, to a peasant family that followed indigenous religion. Until his death, he never displayed the slightest regret about his origins. On the contrary, he was taken as a model by others of his generation despite his rural background. He followed a path similar to that of others who became Christians in that period. Many began as domestic servants, gardeners, or menial laborers. A missionary hired Khelendende as a cook when he was still a young boy. Khelendende was highly sought after for his construction skills, as well. He was baptized in 1940 and married Christine Ganji, a fellow Christian, in 1944. They would have four daughters.¹

Khelendende diligently followed the missionary's biblical training and was consecrated by him. In this period, the mission needed teacher-evangelists. These lay people had as their main task the establishment of churches in villages distant from the mission station. Although he was only semiliterate, Pierre Khelendende went out to preach and teach the word of God. As the first black Christian teacher in the region, he had some influence. Despite his limited instruction,

photo—Christine Ganji and her husband, Pierre Khelendende

1 See “All I have to give is a daughter” (chapter 75).

Rev. Khelendende had a deep sense of responsibility and an exceptional spirituality. He captivated villagers by his moving and illuminating sermons, and many people converted to Christ as a result.

Khelendende became an example to others, especially for his instinct for what was beautiful and true. Propriety and elegance were his great preoccupations. “A pastor,” he said, “ought to be well-ordered and disciplined in all things, because the God he serves is a God of order.” As someone who loved justice and equality, he had much admiration for all the converts. Without any disdain toward anyone, Khelendende led a life of service and sharing. He spent his time visiting villages to spread the good news and shared the fruits of his evangelization with those who accompanied him, following the example of Jesus among his disciples.

Pastor Khelendende, like others in his position, made sacrifices and was convinced that God would bless from heaven the work of those who trusted him on earth and who worked firmly for him. He said that true happiness was clearly defined in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1–12.

Mennonite missionaries never fully resolved the logistical and material aspects of evangelists’ lives in their formation of individuals. The missionaries did not want to encourage dependence or attract people into this ministry simply in the hope of a secure salary, so they did not put evangelists on the mission payroll. Instead, missionaries contributed to a congregation’s treasury, as did other members, and congregations decided how to use these funds and whom to pay. But the missionaries’ refusal to pay regular salaries to their recruits was a point of tension. Many of God’s servants prominent in those early years worked under difficult circumstances. This was true of Pastor Khelendende. Having traveled great distances on foot in search of lost souls and then suffering the burdens of age, he died in poverty in 1988. Khelendende left good memories of his spirituality to the entire church and all those who had known him.

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