



42 ❧ An heir to the missionaries

Felix Shakatanga was one of the pioneers whose names were linked with the birth of early Mennonite missions in Bandundu Province. However, he began his Christian life through contact with Canadian Baptist missionaries who came to Congo and set up a mission at Shakenge, not far from his native village.

Evangelism was accompanied by classes to educate teacher-evangelists to spread the gospel. Shakatanga began his studies with other young people of his generation. He soon attracted the attention and affection of the missionaries, who found him a studious and courageous pupil because in his spare time he worked in their homes. In return, the missionaries supported all his school expenses.

Around 1938, after primary school, he received several years of biblical training. Upon returning, Felix Shakatanga became a valuable liaison between the mission and the indigenous population. A competent religious teacher, he took an active part in evangelizing the territory in company with other Congolese colleagues.

In 1958–59 the winds of independence were blowing in Africa, and the Congo, in its turn, stepped into the dance. Expatriates felt threatened and prepared to return home. In this climate of insecurity and trouble, the missionaries handed over to Shakatanga all the legal documents having reference to the Shakenge station. Among these was a letter giving him power of attorney and permission to

negotiate handing over the Baptist mission of Shakenge to the Mennonite mission, AIMM.

The years following independence did not make that task easy. In 1964 the Mulelist/Jeunesse rebellion broke out in Bandundu Province and destroyed Shakenge station. This rebellion also scattered those whom the departing missionaries had put in charge. At the end of the rebellion, Rev. Shakatanga and others, including Simon Mukanza,¹ contacted Mennonite missionary Ben Eidse, who was living in Kamayala and evangelizing a great part of the surrounding territory.

The proposal of a merger was accepted by Eidse, who sent teacher-evangelists to back up Shakatanga. Eidse was also able to arrange the transfer of some government school subsidies, which had supported the Baptist mission schools, to the new administration.

After the destruction of Shakenge, however, Ben Eidse suggested moving the mission to a different place. Shamwana was chosen. Thus began Rev. Shakatanga's great mission of evangelism for the Mennonite Church of Congo (CMCo). His contribution was great, including the founding of the church districts of Mukoso, Maziamo, and others.

In denominational leadership gatherings Shakatanga maintained that the church must not only satisfy the spiritual needs of the believers but also must pursue favorable conditions for people's total development. Many young people who were better educated found Rev. Shakatanga and his ideas old-fashioned and conservative, but that didn't bother him. He represented the original, conservative stock of nonviolent doctrine. Sometimes adopting a dictatorial approach, he knew how to train the young in theology and the Bible.

Rev. Shakatanga was a visionary and worried about the future of the denomination because of tribal divisions and inordinate ambition on the part of young leaders. On the other hand, he could be somewhat full of himself, often exhibiting a superiority complex as a direct heir of the white mission. For example, after the CMCo had installed shortwave radios at its stations, Rev. Shakatanga was in the habit of taking his time on the radio, talking to one station after another, ignoring the agreed order and call times.

Nevertheless, he remains an example of religious vitality and deep-rooted faith, despite the difficult working conditions in which

1 See "Uniting the Mennonite communities" (chapter 55).

he developed. His life is a lesson to young servants who get sucked in by a taste for comfort and ease.

This man who died at the threshold of the centennial affirmed that “Christianity and the Christian faith are a certainty that show that Jesus is really the Son of the living God.”

His conviction was sure: Those who approach God and serve him in righteousness will live in paradise. “For the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity” (Ps. 37:11; NIV).

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