



73 ❧ Benjamin Mubenga's quest for peace and development

Benjamin Mubenga wa Kabanga is current president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo (CEM). He was born in Mbuji Mayi to Christian parents, though his mother and father each belonged to the church of their choice: his father to the Catholic church and his mother to the CEM.

His early education was also mixed. He did seven years of primary school with CEM and then finished at a Catholic school and continued his secondary education at Catholic schools. Benjamin's high school diploma was in science, the biology-chemistry track. Perhaps a poor Catholic student, Benjamin would opt for the CEM, the church of Georgette, his mother. Two factors would dictate young Benjamin's choice: the fact that he lived near the CEM congregation Dipumba Plaine, of which he is the pastor today, and his mother's habit of taking him where she went.

Benjamin Mubenga's conversion to God isn't easily separable from his entry into the Chorale Evangélique Butumbi bua Yepowa, his own creation. His membership in the choir, his membership in the Dipumba Plaine parish, and his attachment to God succeeded in convincing Pastor Zacharie Nkumbi of Benjamin's calling to serve the Lord and led to his receiving an educational scholarship for theology (1988). Benjamin married Béatrice Ndaya Tshishimbi in 1990. The Lord would bless their union with six sons and two daughters.

photo—Benjamin Mubenga and his wife, Beatrice Ndaya

After studies that he undertook with some difficulty because he was otherwise unemployed, Benjamin got a degree from what is now the Christian University of Kinshasa, followed by a theological graduate degree from the Protestant University of Congo. He then studied evangelism and church growth at the International Center for Evangelism. But the Mennonites who had fostered him seemed to have abandoned and forgotten him. Nevertheless, Mubenga founded a congregation in the sprawling outskirts of Kinshasa known as the Cité Mama Mobutu and put himself to work preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ from 1990 to 1995.

As a delegate to the General Council of the CEM in 1995, he had the opportunity to come back to Mbuji Mayi. He came back alone, leaving his wife and two children in miserable conditions and at high risk. Unable to return to Kinshasa—his family would eventually join him in Mbuji Mayi—Benjamin became a member of the Sangilayi Bipemba parish. Pastor Pascal Blaise Misakayabo¹ placed him at the head of its intercessory group. The effectiveness of Benjamin's work there led the pastor to name him assistant pastor. From that point on, he assumed as well the role of office director to Pastor Misakayabo, who was then the president of CEM.

In 1997, to his surprise, Benjamin was consecrated pastor at the end of the ordinary General Council held that year. He was named pastor of the Muindila parish in Mbuji Mayi, where he worked for several years. Moreover, he also worked as national director of the church's department of evangelism, missions, and Christian education (1995) and revolutionized a lot of things in the young people's meetings as well as in those of the adults. His warmth, commitment, and courage earned him the appointment of district head of the East Mbuji Mayi CEM.

These virtues of his are still apparent, and the leaders and faithful of the CEM grew in their trust for this servant of God, of whom they said: "Here's the man the CEM needs to rebuild itself in this time when nothing seems to be working."

When President Misakayabo was on one of his trips to the USA, in 2004, Pastor Benjamin seized his opportunity as interim leader to bravely resist his own Bakwanga tribal brothers, who had shamelessly, and with the complicity of certain authorities of the state, despoiled and already built on land where he had grown up: Dipum-

¹ See "The desire to belong to one body" (chapter 59).

ba Plaine. Mobilizing men, women, and young people, Benjamin Mubenga fought with great energy to defend the lands of the CEM. He asked them to pledge with him that “whatever happens, the lands of Dipumba, Tshidiendela, and Bupole, the only physical heritage that today testifies to the visibility of the CEM, will never be taken from it, not one bit of them.”

Benjamin won the battle over Dipumba Plaine, on which the encroachers had already built houses. Things would have happened similarly for Bupole, if it hadn't been for the noticeable complicity between the Bakwanga and certain members of the CEM. Meanwhile, the Tshidiendela case is still in the courts, where, it can be said, the CEM has the advantage.

With a view to achieving complete visibility for the CEM, Benjamin Mubenga, who was then national head of evangelism for the CEM, founded the Group of Mennonite Partners, which built and repaired church buildings, broadcast a religious program on Kasai Horizon Radio and Television, and carried out other initiatives. Basically, Benjamin gave a hand to all the lifeblood activities of the CEM, and the CEM became talked about.

In 2005, enjoying the growing trust of the faithful of the CEM, Benjamin was elected president/legal representative of the CEM, at the close of the General Council held in Dipumba Plaine.

Benjamin has since explained his vision for the flowering of the CEM, to return it to its place in the sun. His policy is to support others' talents, as he did with a number of individuals and young pastors. On mission to Kimande, in North Katanga Province, in his role of evangelist, Benjamin founded circles of CEM followers in this non-Mennonite area—a North Katanga mission field. He has brought a number of converts to the church, including his own brothers and sisters.

At the Church of Christ in the Congo, the ecumenical umbrella group where he is regional vice president under the Presbyterian Dieudonné Mbaya, Benjamin Mubenga is characterized by trenchant wisdom in the resolution of intra-community conflicts. Yet, because of certain excessive ambitions in certain of his collaborators looking to better position themselves, he is confronted with internal conflicts that are often unjustified.

In spite of all that, by pacifist and nonviolent means, he always seeks peace for his own denomination and for others as well. His pas-

toral style is to get out of the office and into the field. Taking no account of risks, he takes either a motorcycle or a vehicle to travel to faraway spots for pastoral visits and to follow the progress of various development projects for the CEM. Day or night, he never spares himself effort in going to the service of the Lord. His courage is clearly evident.

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