

## 22 ❖ Paul Djoko, Christian elder and chief

Elder Paul Djoko's life shows how the Christianity of the missionaries was woven into a culture that was both traditionally African and dominated by colonialism.

In theory, the colonial authorities required all children to learn to read and write, but to provide the schools they depended on the missions—initially the Catholic missions and later the Protestant ones as well. If village authorities were caught resisting the invitation to send their children to a village school, they could be punished.<sup>1</sup> In that era of the whip, no one was inclined to accept public flogging and the heavy fines imposed for serious infringement of the law.

It was in this context that studies began for Djoko, who was born in 1910 of parents who were members of the Pende tribe from the territory of Tshikapa. Because he was attending a mission school, being a good student also meant memorizing a certain number of Bible verses. Upon finishing studies, one obtained a certificate and then was expected to convert to Christianity. In 1930, Djoko was a man doubly crowned. He had just completed his studies, and he had just been baptized.

Professional life opened before him, with all its suffering, obstacles, and responsibilities. The Bible declares in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make for him a helper like

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1 See “A Mennonite evangelist tied to a corpse” (chapter 1).

him.” And so Paul married Thérèse in 1932. Together they had six children. For a woman in African society, birth is experienced as a happy event, because the child increases the power of the lineage. To have many children is a great blessing; to have none is a misery.

Paul was employed as a teacher-evangelist from 1932 to 1934. Then he decided to leave that role and become chief of his village as well as a judge in the traditional court of his sector. Both roles were strongly tied to ancestral traditions.

As paradoxical as it may seem, he showed a great attachment to Christian faith, participating actively in the life of his local church. He was ordained deacon in 1965 and elected to serve as an evangelist by the district. Often ignoring his role as village chief, he traveled up and down to several villages to evangelize people there with the good news of salvation, to create prayer cells, and to encourage the population to build churches and schools in the areas under his ministry.

Weakened by diabetes, he died on August 28, 2003. His local church, of which he was a full member, organized a funeral worthy of a Christian, because in all of his life—including the exercise of his traditional role—he was humble and God-fearing, his behavior above reproach.

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