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The Impact of the Kimbanguist Church in Central Africa

The thrust of this paper is to demonstrate how an indigenous African Church made a strong impact on the people and survived through almost 40 years of repression by colonial authorities to emerge in the 1960s as a widespread Church. Her organization and socio-economic activities, developed without overseas assistance, her sincere desire to cooperate and to have fellowship with other Christian churches after her legal recognition in 1960, are proofs of the vitality that is characteristic of this Church.

This discussion of the Kimbanguist Church requires a brief examination of how Christianity entered Black Africa and specifically Black Central Africa. This must be seen in the context of Africa's colonial past. The 19th Century brought new efforts to extend mission work into the heart of the "Dark Continent." This is the century of strong Protestant missionary activity in Africa. But it is also the time when European Powers divided Africa.

The birth of the Kimbanguism in the early 20th century was received by the mission churches as a mixed blessing. At first, it was regarded as the fruit of the Baptist Missionary Society's effort; two months later, it was looked upon by Roman Catholic missionaries, and later by the colonial establishment, as a threat to their interests in the colony.

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The harsh persecutions and massive deportations that followed never succeeded in destroying the wind that had already blown into neighboring Angola and the French Congo. The enthusiasm and the genuine faith that Simon Kimbangu aroused among the natives, the memory they retained of his preaching and teaching throughout the tortuous years of persecution, and the effort of the Kimbanguist Church leaders to consolidate and to extend the Gospel to other people (i.e., the Pygmies), are events and facts that we propose to evaluate in this paper.

The first part of our presentation deals with the discovery of Central Africa and the early attempts to evangelize Black Africans. The second part deals with the evangelization of the Kongo in the 19th century and the birth of the Kimbanguist movement. The last part will evaluate the Church's strategy and her unconventional missionary approach to the growth of the Church. Let us turn first to the discovery of Central Africa.

I. The Discovery of Central Africa

I. Antecedents and Beginnings

To speak of the discovery of Central Africa is to speak of the penetration of European powers into the heart of the continent. The scope of this paper will not allow us to deal in detail with the intriguing and eventful history. At the same time, we must locate Central Africa.

Today, Central Africa is made up of Gabon, Tchad, Rwanda, Burundi and the Cameroon. Angola is often considered a southern state, although her early history is tied up with the history of Zaire (at least the lower region) during the period of the Old Kingdom of the Kongo.

Attempts to penetrate into the heart of Africa were many, but in most parts they were unsuccessful. Two factors seemed to motivate these attempts: (1) Europeans' desire to do away with what were at that time their

Arab middlemen or intermediaries; and (2) the discoveries of the Black African kingdoms and empires on the coast. Ki-Zerbo shows that this turning point in the history of Africa occurred on three fronts:

- (a) in Songhai (Mali and Timbuctou),
- (b) in Ethiopia, and
- (c) in the Kongo.¹

It was this last front that facilitated and precipitated the European struggle to discover the interior, and the subsequent division of Africa.

2. The Kingdom of the Kongo Discovered

The ancient Kingdom of the Kongo was discovered by the Portuguese explorer Diego Cao around 1482/1483.² The Kingdom of the Kongo was then made up of the northern part of Angola, the lower part of Zaire (what is now known as Bas-Zaire) and the western and south-western regions of the now Popular Republic of the Congo. When Deigo Cao returned to Portugal in 1484, he took with him four men so that they could learn Portuguese and be used later as interpreters. Between 1483 and 1486, Diego Cao returned to the country. He reached inland as far as Matadi and went to Sao Salvador, the capital city of the Kingdom, where he met the King Nzinga Nkuwu. Friendly contacts were made, and friendly relationships with the King of Portugal were established.³

At this time, the basin of the Kongo was not yet explored and European attention had not been awakened to the potential value of this region of Africa. However, in 1591, an Italian geographer, Filippo Pigafetta, published a book whose translation into major European languages made the Kongo known in Europe.⁴

Until 1581, Portugal was to remain the master of Angola and enjoyed a monopoly of trade, including the trade in slaves. But from 1581-1640 Portugal was annexed by Spain, following the extinction of the Aviz dynasty.⁵ Having lost Portugal as their traditional supplier of spices, the Dutch

came to the coast of Africa and took possession of Luanda in August 1641.⁶ Seven years later, in August 1648, Portugal took back Luanda from the Dutch, thanks to Portuguese warships that had been dispatched from Brazil. Thus, Portugal remained the undisputed master of Angola. Further progress into the interior of the Kongo was made by early Catholic missionaries.

3. The Kingdom of the Kongo Evangelized

It is not an overstatement to affirm that the Kingdom of the Kongo was the first state to receive the gospel in Black Africa. It is well known that Christianity entered Africa from the North with the conversion of an Ethiopian finance official in the first century A.D. (Acts 8:26-39). That Christian. The evangelization of the kingdom went very well, especially under tantalizing question is how far south, i.e., into the heart of the continent, did the Church go in those early centuries?

It seems that only in the sixth century, when the Orthodox mission (Melkite) was supported by the emperor Justinian and the Jacobite mission (Monophysite) supported by his wife, Theodora (ca. 543 A.D.) did the Church in Nubia made some progress toward the South.⁷ Unfortunately, the Moslem conquest interrupted the progress of the Nubian Church and it never reached as far as the Tchadian heartland.⁸ Although we know that there were Portuguese missionaries in Ghana by 1471 (in the Shama region), the evangelization of the Gold Coast was not undertaken until 1880 by the Fathers Morean and Murat, who founded a mission station at Elmina.⁹

The evangelization of the Kongo which started already in 1491, as it is shown by Father F. Bontinck,¹⁰ remains convincingly the beginning of Christianity in Black Africa. The first penetration into Black Africa is traditionally divided into two major periods:

(1) from 1483 (but preferably 1491) until 1622, when the work of the missionaries was carried on under the Padroado of the King of Portugal; and

(2) from 1622 (after the Holy See had created the Congregation for the Spread of the Gospel until 1835.¹¹

From the baptism of the King of the Kongo, Nzinga Nkuwu on May 3, 1491 (the King took then the Christian name: Dom Joao) and with the subsequent baptism of his court officials, the kingdom became Christian. The evangelization of the kingdom went very well, especially under the King Dom Alfonso I who succeeded to his father's throne.

In the opinion of specialists in African history and African church history, the first evangelization of the Kongo ended in failure.¹² The Christian faith was superficially received and as soon as the missionaries left the country, people returned to their old ways of life. The causes of that failure are many, but Father Francois Bontinck, a professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Kinshasa, Zaire, mentions the following:

1. The high death rate among the missionaries.
2. The insufficient number of missionaries for such a large country where means of communications were slow and difficult.
3. The slave trade that caused the disintegration of the Kingdom.
4. The conflict between Padroado and Propagande (i.e. the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith).
5. The almost impossibility of educating a local clergy.
6. The total lack of female religious orders.
7. The superficiality of the faith of those who were baptized at that time.

It is nevertheless true that the missionaries themselves must bear a share of responsibility for the failure. Many of them did not comprehend the African culture and confused European culture with the truth of the gospel. Some are known to have actively participated in the slave trade, thus forsaking a genuine proclamation of the gospel.¹³

After this period, it took 30 years (from 1835 to 1865) for the Catholic missionaries to resume work in the Congo, while the Protestant missionaries inaugurated their missions in the Kongo, for the first time, around 1874

and 1880.¹⁴ In the history of Christianity in the Kongo, this is generally called the *second* evangelization of the Kongo. It is to this period that we should now turn.

II. Political Developments and the Second Evangelization

1. Political Developments

The nineteenth century can truly be called the century of the exploration of Central Africa. It was also a century during which Africa was torn to pieces, divided and finally conquered. The exploration of David Livingstone (1813-1873), a Scottish missionary, explorer, and physician, contributed much to European knowledge of Central and South Central Africa. According to Brockman, Livingstone set his feet for the first time on African soil on March 11, 1841.¹⁵ He is also known to have traveled widely in the territory east of the Kongo (Zaire) between 1867-1871, and we owe to him the discoveries of the then lakes of Tanganyika (April 1867), Moero (November 1867) and Bangewelo (July 1868).¹⁶

During this period, the occupation of Central Africa became a burning issue in Europe. In September 1876, King Leopold II of Belgium called an international geographical conference whose main objective was to expand the exploration of Central Africa. European national committees were then formed. The French committee called on Savorgnan de Brazza and gave him supervision of their expedition which was to reach the Congo in September 1880. De Brazza met with the Congolese Chief, Makoko, and signed a treaty with him, thus securing the territory on the western bank of the Congo river for France. Further explorations to the north and to the west gave to France Gabon, the Middle Congo, Oubangui, Chari-Tchad, the territories that formed what was called French Equatorial Africa at the close of the 19th century.¹⁷

During the same period, H. M. Stanley left Banga-Moyo on the Indian

Ocean in November 1874, and reached the estuary of the Congo River in August 1877. Stanley was in contact with King Leopold II of Belgium and served his interests. In 1878, the king created another exploratory group called the Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo. In the meantime, Stanley, on a second expedition, following the Congo River upstream, reached the pool which was to bear his name (Stanley Falls). He got into fierce competition and conflict with de Brazza in terms of territorial claims that swiftly brought on a struggle between Belgium and France. In 1882, the Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo became the International Association of the Congo.¹⁸ Its main objectives were to conduct reconnaissance missions in the Congo and to study the ways in which the Congo basin or the central low land could be occupied.

However, before long Britain had to denounce Leopold's plans in the Congo. Since so much was at stake, the Berlin Conference was convened from November 15, 1884 to February 23, 1885. The major items on the agenda were: (1) How to find a solution to the difficulties raised for the occupation of the Congo; (2) How the European powers should come to agreement, in general terms, on African issues. Through clever maneuvering and concessions King Leopold II secured the support of United States and Germany in his effort to isolate Great Britain. The King of Belgium reached some sort of agreement with France that left England alone, or at least with Portugal on her side. At the end of the conference, the International Association of the Congo was recognized as an autonomous state and subsequently the Congo was proclaimed independent until August 20, 1908 when it became a Belgian colony.¹⁹ By this time the borders were already fixed. The Congo settled the southern border with Great Britain in 1884, thus separating Katanga from Zambia. Already in 1886 and 1891, Angola (a colony of Portugal) had settled border disputes with France, Germany, and Great Britain respectively.²⁰

Today the old Kingdom of the Kongo is but a thing of the past. Its territory was broken up and divided between the Portuguese, (in Angola),

the French (in Congo Brazzaville) and the Belgians (in Congo Leopoldville, now Zaire).

The evolution of the political situation in the Congo from 1908 until 1960 cannot be fully examined here. Although the colonial administration was set up and the country divided into six provinces, it is reported that France and Great Britain never relinquished the thought of taking over the Congo from Belgium. They dreamed of dividing it between themselves. In the meantime, Germany, whose territories were separated by the Belgian and British colonies, wished to eliminate those obstacles in order to facilitate travel and communication between her eastern and northern possessions.²¹ The First World War (1914-1918) changed the whole scene, as France, Britain and Belgium were forced under the circumstances to fight against a common adversary, Germany. When the latter was defeated in Africa in 1916 and 1917, her possessions were divided between Belgium (which took Rwanda and Burundi), France and Great Britain (which divided the Cameroon and Togo) while the Eastern African German possessions, the Union of South Africa and South-Western Africa, went to Great Britain.²² This briefly portrays the picture of Central Africa up to the 1960s, when political independence began knocking at the doors of many African nations.

It is against the political background we have briefly reviewed that the second evangelization of the Congo took place. We should therefore consider some aspects of this second phase of missionary work in the Congo in particular.

2. Some Aspects of the Second Evangelization of the Congo

Those who have studied the evangelization of the Congo, especially Father Francois Bontinck, divide this second phase into three main periods. Following closely the political developments that we just sketched above, the first period runs from 1885 to 1906; the second period, from 1908 to

1960 (the period during which the Congo was a Belgian colony), and the third period — after the political independence in 1960 until today.²³

It must be indicated, however, that the Roman Catholic Church resumed her missionary work in the Congo in 1865 when French Spiritan Fathers took over the “Apostolic Prefecture of the Congo” from the Capuchin Fathers. Although, the Portuguese did not trust them when they first landed in March 1866 at Ambriz, Fathers Carrie and Vissecq are reported to have succeeded four years later (12 May 1880), in reaching Boma, in the Congo and in 1885, they settled at Kinlaw, near Banana.²⁴ Earlier attempts by de Brazza to get them to evangelize or to begin mission work in 1883 at Stanley Falls (presumably because they were French) did not succeed. Nevertheless, on March 17, 1886, they founded a mission station at Kwamouth.²⁵

Because of the fierce competition between France and King Leopold II, as indicated earlier in the struggle between de Brazza and Stanley, their respective agents, King Leopold II sought and got support from Pope Leo XIII for Belgium missionaries to be sent to the Congo. French Catholic missionaries who had to leave Congolese territory, crossed the Congo (Zaire) river to the French territory in order to make way for the Belgium missionaries.²⁶ Similar hostilities are reported in Rwanda (ca. 1918-21) against German Protestant missionaries, and earlier in Gabon against the Presbyterian missionaries.²⁷ This illustrated that the missionaries, in fact, served the interests of their governments. All of them, but especially the Catholic missionaries, were the pawns of the colonial powers.²⁸

While the Roman Catholic missionaries dominated the earlier centuries of the missionary work in the Old Kingdom of the Congo, the Protestant missionaries came on the scene, especially in Zaire, before the proclamation of the Congo Independent State. In this respect, the pioneering work of the Livingstone Inland Mission is to be commended. Henry Craven and a Dane named Strom landed in Matadi and established a mission station at Palabala in February 1878.²⁹ The Livingstone Inland Mission

(L.I.M.) was followed shortly thereafter by the London-based Baptist Missionary Society (B.M.S.) which was already working in Cameroon. Robert Arthington had made a grant of 5,000 £ to the London Missionary Society to begin mission work around Lake Tanganyika, and 1,000 £ to the Baptist Missionary Society for work in the lower region of the Zaire River.³⁰ George Grenfell and Thomas J. Comber reached Zaire from Cameroon in January 1878, but the establishment of missionary activities did not start until 1879, when W.H. Bentley, J.S. Hartland and H.E. Crudgington were added to the team.³¹ Further progress inland, following the Zaire River, was made possible thanks to missionary boats or steam-boats, and many mission stations were established.

When the Livingstone Inland Mission could not continue its work because of scarce resources, it left its stations to two other missionary societies: The American Baptist Missionary Union (A.B.M.U.), which inherited six mission stations and later changed its name to the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (A.B.F.M.S.); and the Svenska Missions Forbundet. This took place in 1884.³²

Following these missionary endeavors was the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C.M.A.) whose missionaries reached Banana in 1885 and succeeded in establishing a fruitful station at Boma in 1888.³³ These Protestant missionary societies, along with many others mentioned here, extended their work and their activities inside Zaire, that is, to the northern and eastern parts of the country.

A pattern which is common among different Catholic orders and different Protestant missionary societies is settlement within a specific geographical or ethnic environment. This pattern of geographical jurisdiction marked greatly the religious and educational development of different regions of Zaire. Another important observation which we need to make at this point concerns the methods used in evangelizing Africans. Have the missionaries learned a lesson from the failure of the first evangelization? That remains to be seen.

In the Roman Catholic missions, three approaches appear to have served for the propagation of the Gospel. These approaches were at first directed toward the youth.

(1) The school colonies (*colonies scolaires*) were established, first by Father Camille Van Ronsle, who bought back children who were enslaved. The school colonies were established by the Jesuits and the Order of the School at Boma (in Lower Zaire), Kimwenza (in Kinshasa) and Makanza (in Equateur, now Mbandaka).³⁴ Children were taught well and given a military discipline under a Belgian sergeant and eventually many were drafted to serve in the colonial army (*force publique*).

(2) The second method called "Chapel Farms" were initiated by Father Emile Van Hencxthorven in 1896. They were mission stations located near one or several villages so as to make the missionary's influence felt among the villagers who did not live in the station. It was believed that the first method which concentrated its resources and energy solely on the youth in schools did not reach the adult population. So the Chapel Farms, with their chapels which served both for worship and classrooms, dormitories, stores or warehouses, cattle-herds, etc., were more directed toward gaining the trust of the adult population of the nearby villages. However, when young men from these newly-formed communities were married to girls coming out of school colonies organized by the female religious orders, new homes which did not have ties with or roots in traditional villages were springing up.³⁵

(3) The third method was called "School chapel" and was introduced first by "les Peres-Blancs (White Fathers)", a Catholic religious order founded by the Bishop Lavigerie. In Kasai, this method was extensively and successfully used by the Scheut Order under Father Cambier.³⁶ It aimed at establishing a chapel in a traditional village, holding religious services, and instructing natives in the catechism, prayers, etc., thus preparing them for baptism and for Christian matrimony. This method made an impact

on villagers as the missionary kept in permanent contact with the people and made a direct appeal to them.

To a large extent, the Protestant missionaries adopted these methods. They are also reported to have directed their efforts to the conversion of slaves and former slaves when African free men distrusted them early in their work.³⁷ The Protestant mission stations had villages for their believers, workers and school children separated from traditional villages. Eventually the aim was to reinforce Christian faith and values among their converts, but as it turned out, the negative aspects did not take long to be manifested. Father Francois Bontinck puts it this way:

But as such villages were being multiplied, and built on Missions' land, some negative aspects of the system appeared clearly. Populated by strangers, these villages quickly became ghettos, exercising no more influence on the neighborhood; their inhabitants were considered as 'the slaves of the Father' (i.e. the priest) and their upkeep burdened heavily the budget of the missionary.³⁸

The official report of the colonial government criticized the farm chapel method in 1905, stating that children were detained against their parents' will and exploited for the benefit of the missionaries.³⁹ Professor Mengi Kilandamoko has shown that the Congolese who lived for a long time in Protestant missionary stations, or who grew up there, were alienated from their culture. They learned to live, think, eat and dress like white missionaries. They were cut off from the traditional environment and often refused permission to visit their relatives.⁴⁰

Further, Professor Mengi states:

After the evening break (i.e., from day-long work) the indigenous people read the Bible, sing the hymns of the missionaries. The African music, dance and songs are forbidden. But from the missionary post one hears the songs and the music of the (traditional) village and the Kongo people living at the

missionary station suffer by being unable to participate in the life of their own community.⁴¹

This alienating experience made people who lived in traditional villages distrust their fellows who lived in the missionary stations. They called them "Muntu Mundele," or "Mundele Ndombe," a black living like a White, or a Black who has European manners.

We should indicate, however, that in spite of this, the quarters of the white missionaries were different, better, and segregated from those of the native Christians who lived within the mission compounds.

It is clear that the second evangelization of the Congo created new problems in the country. Religious and denominational differences, with their defined geographical jurisdiction, reinforced antagonism and tension in the already divided society. Missionaries had to depend on the graduates from their chapel schools or school colonies to recruit catechists and teachers to help their effort to effectively evangelize Africans in traditional settings. It was in such a context that Simon Kimbangu received his elementary education from a Baptist Missionary Society post.

Another factor which should be noted is the blatant contradiction which existed between missionary teaching and preaching and the facts of real life under colonialism. Here is how Professor Mabika Kalanda puts it:

1. The country was under Belgian colonial domination with all the forms of exploitation and oppression of the people.
2. The poverty and the wants of the colonized existed side by side with the affluence and the luxury of the colonizer.
3. The gospel message of liberation was contradicted by the reality of the exploitation of the land by the colonizer.
4. Christian love was contradicted by the racial discrimination and hatred which were (nurtured and) left by the Arabs.
5. The wooden statues were being burned while people were asked to bow down before the statues made out of clay.

6. People were taught that all people are born equal and are freed by the blood of Christ, nevertheless, they lived in different quarters.

7. The missionaries were not healing the sick, no longer prophesying, nor raising the dead as the Lord Jesus Christ did, and his apostles after him.⁴²

Bearing this in mind, let us now turn to examine the birth of the Kimbanguism and evaluate its impact.

III. The Birth of Kimbanguism

Kimbanguism owes its name to a native of the village of Nkamba, named Kimbangu; a Kikongo name which means "he who reveals the hidden things." Kimbangu was born on the 12th of September 1887 at Nkamba. His mother died when he was very young and he was brought up by his Aunt Kinzembo. As a young boy, he went to the mission station of the Baptist Missionary Society (B.M.S.) and attended its elementary school, although he only went as far as the fourth grade.

On July 4, 1915 Simon Kimbangu and his wife Kuilu Kiawanga Marie were baptized and celebrated a Christian wedding.⁴³ They had three sons, Kisolokele-Lukelo, born on February 12, 1914, Dialungana-Kiangani, born on May 25, 1916, and Diangienda Kutima, born on March 22, 1918. The younger son is the actual spiritual leader of the church.

Simon Kimbangu was appointed a catechist and sent to do his work at his native village of Nkamba. Through unusual spiritual experiences, visions, dreams and auditions, Simon was called by Jesus Christ to preach and heal his people, because, as it is reported, "My servants (i.e., the white missionaries) are unfaithful." Simon rejected the commission, feeling himself not well enough prepared or educated; he believed that he was unworthy of the mission being thrust upon him. In order to get away from these calls, he fled to Kinshasa and sought a job. The situation of being unpaid for three consecutive months, however, forced him to go back home. There Christ was waiting for him. His time had come.

1. The birth of Kimbanguism

On April 6, 1921, Kimbangu was forced against his own will to enter the house of Nkiantondo, a lady who was ill in the nearby village of Ngombe - Kinsuka.⁴⁴ Laying hands on her and praying, Simon Kimbangu healed her in the name of Jesus Christ. The fire was set ablaze and the news of the healing spread quickly. Kimbangu began to be called a healer, a magician, a miracle worker. Nkiantondo herself accused him of witchcraft. Already in the evening of the same day, people gathered to see and to hear Kimbangu preach. As a village catechist, he was known to be a preacher; a good preacher. By this miraculous event, a healing by a mere prayer and the laying on of hands, something strange and new happened that made people wonder and marvel.⁴⁵ The seed was sown, and the occasion is what is generally called the "Pentecost of Nkamba."

As the news spread and many people from different parts of the country and from what was then called the French Congo began flocking to Nkamba, carrying with them the sick and sometimes the dead, Simon Kimbangu had no more time to do any other work. He was preaching and healing all day long, everyday. Bibles and hymn books were bought as never before. Simon Kimbangu did not baptize, but the converted people, those who accepted Christ under his ministry were invariably sent to be baptized in the mission churches located nearest their homes or villages. This flood of new converts benefited the Protestant missions most. At first the B.M.S. missionaries were joyous and did help Simon or send him assistance.

The Catholic missionaries, on their part, were jealous of the success of their Protestant counterparts, who, by the way, were strangers in the Catholic country. Thus, the Catholics put pressures on colonial authorities to stop Kimbangu's activities. They were alarmed as Africans were leaving their jobs without the permission of their white masters, and the sick were being taken out of hospitals by their relatives to go to Simon Kimbangu. White business groups joined Catholic missionaries and together they persuaded the colonial authorities to do away with Simon Kimbangu.

Early in June, the first attempt to arrest Simon Kimbangu was aborted. From that point on, Kimbangu went underground, preaching and moving from village to village, mostly at night, in the area around Mbaza-Sanda. It is during that trip that most of his prophecies and predictions were given. Earlier, however, he prophesied that the Kimbanguists will receive songs from heaven (or from angels) and that they would welcome in fellowship people coming from everywhere in the world in the name of Jesus. He also predicted that in spite of the persecution, Christ will overcome the enemy; that the Black people would become white and the whites become Black, implying a reversal of power relationships in the future. This prophecy, among other things, caused Kimbangu to be charged with seeking to overthrow the colonial rule in the Congo.

Many other prophecies cannot be recounted. Those interested will need to read the history books or other texts written by the Kimbanguists, or learn some of the songs which foretell many coming events.

2. The Reception of Simon Kimbangu's Preaching

Simon Kimbangu was a powerful preacher. Combined with his gifts of healing and prophecy his preaching attracted huge crowds to his religious gatherings and worship services. He preached against the practices of fetishes and sorcery, against lascivious dancing and against violence. Having a solid background in the Baptist tradition, Kimbangu stressed personal integrity and moral purity. And he lived his faith; that is, he practiced what he taught.

His fellow countrymen received his message with enthusiasm. They trusted him and came to believe that Africans too can serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And they saw more in Simon Kimbangu's brief ministry than they had seen in all the years of white missionary work. So people threw away their fetishes, refrained from polygamy, and accepted the Christian faith. A few years later, some white Protestant missionaries recognized and bore

witness to the positive impact of Kimbangu's preaching. For example, Walder Anders wrote in 1922:

During the last year, a spring wind of spirituality has blown over some of our zones of ministry. In many villages, people have forsaken their idols and have begun to seek the Lord...⁴⁶

The same author said again:

The words of Kimbangu had a powerful and miraculous effect...they extended over the whole country and carried along with them idols...on sides of the roads. Idols and bags of sorcery (or witchcraft) thrown and abandoned bore witness to the radicality of the movement. Faith in idols crumbled as by a spell.⁴⁷

Looking at the effects, or results of Simon Kimbangu's preaching on African life, and how quickly people abandoned the old ways of life to embrace the Christian faith, Father Irean wrote: "...neither you nor I would have, in fifty years of work (i.e., as missionaries) accomplished such a marvel, considering the deep attachment that centuries have wrought in the Black population."⁴⁸ It is not necessary now to go on multiplying such testimonies from some white missionaries, for the majority of them sided with the colonial authorities in an attempt to crush this spiritual revival from the very beginning.

It was on June 9, 1921, just two months after Simon Kimbangu began his healing ministry, that the first attempt was made. After going underground for a few months, on September 12, 1921, Kimbangu voluntarily surrendered himself to the colonial agents at Nkama and was arrested. He was tried without the benefit of a lawyer, condemned, and his movement banned.⁴⁹ Two of his sons, the elder and later the younger, were sent to a school colony in Boma (eventually for brainwashing). Kimbangu's followers were arrested and deported from the country. For almost forty years, the movement and its adherents sustained and survived one of the most atrocious repressions of modern times. The fact was that the

colonial authorities could not subdue in any way the spirit that Kimbangu had raised among his own. Kimbanguism spread all over the then Belgian Congo (Zaire), French Congo and Angola. Today we see that deportation of the Kimbanguists as providential; a way of spreading the teachings of Simon Kimbangu and expanding his work where he could not have personally gone. The deported persons came into contact with people in the places where they suffered exile. When these new hearers were converted, they were arrested in their turn and deported to other parts of the country or to other countries. For example, the Congolese (of Brazzaville) were deported to Gabon, Tchad or to the Central African Republic. This is originally how the Kimbanguist Church so easily reached other countries in Central Africa.

Kimbanguism spread and reached far and wide without the geographical, ethnic, or tribal limitations which we saw in the white missionary churches. It went straight to the people and confronted them in their cultural setting. S.A. Floden saw the spread of the Kimbanguism and its results as a blessing, because, he said, it added more than fifty percent more converts to the membership of his congregation.

3. The Official Recognition and Organization of the Kimbanguist Church

In 1956 many missionaries recognized that the memory of what Simon taught and preached had not died in the minds and hearts of the African people. They knew that many of their churchgoers were Kimbanguists. Accordingly, they challenged them by saying that if they did not act out of hypocrisy they should get out of their churches and go found their own. So they did walk out and began their own separate and open meetings.⁵⁰ In the years that followed Kimbanguist leaders and young intellectuals began to put pressure on colonial administrations for recognition. With the winds of political independence blowing across Africa, and particularly in Zaire at the time, the Belgian colonial government was forced to lift the ban

on Kimbanguism on December 24, 1959. As Simon Kimbangu had predicted in 1921, Christ had finally overcome.

But it did not take long for white missionaries to react against such a recognition. They resorted to another form of persecution. Early in 1960 Kimbanguist children were kicked out of missionary schools; patients who were known to be Kimbanguists were refused admission to the missionary hospitals. The Kimbanguist Church was forced, so to speak, to make a hard choice: to create her own schools, health facilities, and centers out of nothing, without planning, without budgets. Today, the Church has schools and health centers all over the country, and a modern hospital (dedicated this year on May 20, 1988) with a capacity of 250 beds in Kinshasa kimbanseke). By the grace of God, the Church has been able again to meet the challenge. Already in the years 1958 and 1959, it had set itself to work defining its structure and elaborating statutes and principles of church government.

Today different social groups are engaging in church activities such as youth groups, choirs, women's association and so on. They also engage in socio-economic and socio-cultural activities such as farming. Most of these activities are financed in two ways: (1) by collective giving through group competition in a system of fund raising which we call "Nsisani", or (2) through free labor, the work of volunteer church members. I would like to emphasize that this practice is unique in the sense that the Kimbanguists in the Popular Republic of the Congo can come to Zaire either to compete for "Nsisani," or to work on the farms; and the Kimbanguists of Zaire can go to the Popular Republic of the Congo to do the same. In this way, the Kimbanguists know no frontiers when it comes to the way they should carry out their Christian duties.

Notes

1. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire*. Librairie Hatier, Paris, 1978, pp. 187ff.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 183F. Botinck, "Premiere Evangelisation du Zaire" *Telema*, no. 21 (Jan-Mars), 1/0, p. 26 suggests early August 1483 as the date Diego Cao reached the mouth of the Kongo River.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 31. The title of the book is: *La Relatione del Reame di Congo e Della Circonvicine Contrade*, (i.e., the report on the Kingdom of the Kongo and the surrounding regions).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 30; Tshimanga Wa Tshicongu, *Histoire du Zaire* Editions de Ceruki, 1976, p. 27.
6. Bontinck, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
7. Paul, de Meester, S. J. "Use eglise florissante Retrouvee au Soudan." *Telema* no. 21 (Jan, Mars) 1/80, pp. 29-20.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
9. J. Dubois et S. R. Nata Masala, "Queques signes de Vitalite des Eglises d. Afrique." *Telema* no. 22 (Anvil-Juin 1980). 1, 2/80, p. 57. This is confirmed by the fact that the church in Ghana celebrated the centennial of the evangelization of the country in 1980.
10. F. Bontinck, "La Premiere Evangelisation du Zaire," *Telema* no. 21 (Jan.-Mars 1980), 1/80, p. 27.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
12. Marie-Louise Martin, *Simon Kimbangu, un Prophete et son eglise*. Edition du soc. Lausanne, 1981. p. 41.
13. Martial Sinda, *La Messiamisme Congolais et Ses Incidences Politiques*. Edition payot, Paris, 1972, pp. 30-31, states that Father Ribeiro is known to have sold cult objects so he could have money to buy slaves.
14. Marie-Louise Martin, *Opt. cit.*, p. 38; Fr. Bontinck, "La Deuxime Evangelisation du Zaire", *Telema* no. 22, (Avril-Juin 1980) p. 36.

15. *Dictionnaire Encyclopedique Quilled*. Librairie Austide Quillet, Paris, 1979, p. 3884.
16. Brockman, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*; Tshimanga Wa Tshibangu. *Histoire de Zaire*. Editions du CERUKI; 1976 p. 6.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 267 (vol A-Bk), 1466 (vol Bt-Cos).
21. Tshimanga Wa Tshibangu. *Histoire du Zaire, opt. cit.*, pp. 63-65.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
23. Francois Bontinck. "La deuxineme Evangelisation du Zaire," *Telema* no. 22, (Avril-Juin 1980), 2/80, p. 36.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.
27. Peter Falk, *La Croissance de L'Eglise en Afrique*, Institute Superieur Theologique de Kimshasa, 1985, pp. 231, p. 97; see also p. 333.
28. F. Bontinck, "La Deuxieme Evangelisation du Zaire, *op. cit.*, P. 37.
29. Peter Falk, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 341; 93-94.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-344.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 345. Mengi Kilandamoko, "L'Evangelisation Missionnaire", Ph.D. thesis, Universite Laval 1982, pp. 64-68.
34. F. Bontinck, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 4 2.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44.
37. Peter Falk, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 85.
38. F. Bontinck, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
40. Mengi Kilandamoko, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 85.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 100.

42. Mabika Kalanda, *La Reuise en Question. Base de la Decolonisation Mentale, Remarques Africaines*, 1965, p. 180.

43. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'Histoire du Kimbanguisme* editions Kimbanguists, Kinshasa, p. 19. However, one should read Chapters 1 and 2 to get a fuller view of the situation at the beginning of Simon Kimbangu's work.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

45. Faith healing and the laying on of hands is an instituted ministry in the Kimbanguist Church as a reminder that Simon Kimbangu's prophecy is being realized.

46. Walder, Anders "Ngunzarorelsen I Kongo" *Ansgarius*, 1922, p. 69. cited by Munay, M. M., "La Contribution du Kimbanguisme a la Consolidation du Christianisme au bas Congo," *Zaire Afrique*, no. 121 (1978), p. 23.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

48. See Munay, M. M., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

49. In order to get a feeling of inhuman treatment and atrocities that Simon Kimbangu suffered, one needs to read the book : *La Passion de Simon Kimbangu*, by Jules Chome.

50. Tradition has it that in some places missionary churches were almost empty as result of the exodus of Kimbangu's followers.