

African Diary

BAPTIZING TOUR THROUGH FRENCH AFRICA

RECENTLY Mr. Harold Jackson, head of the Black African Department, and I completed our first baptizing tour through French Africa.

During eight days of travel and visiting, we were able to counsel a total of forty-six potential sons of God in Zaire and Cameroon.

The tour was a joint effort of the French Department and the Black African Department. All requests for personal counseling were directed to the Geneva office, and a schedule of appointments was prepared by Mr. Bernard Andrist and his staff.

Before its independence in 1960, Zaire was called the Belgian Congo. Its capital city, Kinshasa, formerly known as Leopoldville, was the first leg of our tour.

The people of Zaire are primarily Bantu, though many other tribes, including pygmies, live within its vast borders. In addition to French (the official language), five other languages are spoken.

Late afternoon, as the sun hung low over lush tropical hills, we landed at Kinshasa, cleared customs, took a car into the heart of the city and checked into the Intercontinental Hotel. This modern, developed area of the sprawling city is in dramatic contrast to the bulk of Kinshasa. Most of the 1½ million people in the city live in shanties.

During the next two days, we counseled 22 Africans in our hotel suite. After introducing everyone, we took photographs, and presented recent news about God's Work. We scheduled one hour of personal counseling for each person. Often we counseled continuously for twelve to thirteen hours. It was a pleasure to see their thirst for more knowledge of God's way. It was obvious God had opened their eyes to see the truth.

Having waited years to speak to a representative of the World-

wide Church of God, most had volumes of questions to ask. We tried to answer as many as possible and referred them to our French office for the answers to questions covered by literature.

It's not easy for most of those we counseled to obey God. There are always the influences of tribal religions and ancestor worship. There is also the overwhelming obstacle posed by the six-day workweek. This requires workers to work five-and-a-half days per week. The extra half day is on the Sabbath. Even school is held on the Sabbath. In Zaire we were told the government would provide work on Saturdays for anyone who thought he had nothing to do. There are windows to wash in governmental buildings, streets to clean, and other types of mandatory labor.

If any chooses to observe the Sabbath and refuses to work, he risks losing his job and not being able to find another.

This is a frightening situation for them because it could mean starvation and death. There are not always welfare services to fill their needs.

One man who dared to faithfully obey God lost his job as a clerk. He earnestly expected God to deliver him from the consequences and save his job. And God did just that! Three times this clerk lost his job for observing God's Sabbath. Each time it was immediately given back to him. God does not forget His promises!

In Douala, Cameroon we counseled 24 readers of the French *Plain Truth* (*La Pure Vérité*). As in Zaire, there is no

French broadcast. People learn of the magazine by word of mouth and request their own free subscription.

We ran into a language barrier when we counseled two women of the Bassa tribe of Cameroon. They did not speak English or French, only their tribal dialect — Bassa.

In order to communicate with them, Mr. Jackson addressed them in English. Then I translated his conversation into French, and another member of the Bassa, who spoke French as well as his tribal tongue, translated my French into Bassa. The elderly ladies responded through the same channel in reverse. In spite of the language barriers, it was evident that they were indeed ready for baptism.

Besides the two Bassa women, we baptized two men — for a total of four in Douala.

It is not unusual for women in Zaire and Cameroon, as well as much of Africa, to change their religion automatically if their husband changes his. Even a fiancée automatically changes to the religion of her future husband. This is a tribal tradition we encountered. We counseled one young man. His future bride had begun to study God's Word and keep His laws because her fiancé had begun to follow the way of Christ.

God is blessing His Work in French Africa. By word of mouth hundreds of Black Africans have learned of the way of God and written for *La Pure Vérité*, the French version of the Correspondence Course and other literature.

Africa is a potential gold mine. Its millions of people are a vast natural resource that God has begun to tap for His divine purpose. God is calling out a few now so they, in turn, can teach billions when Christ's rule is a reality in the world tomorrow (Rev. 20:4; 2:26).

— Henry E. Syphrett