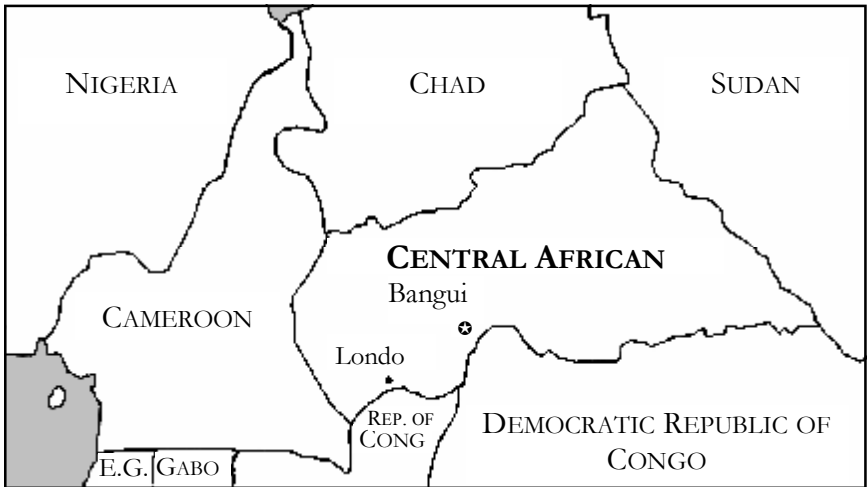


Peter Wallace Dunn

Journey to the Center of Africa



First Impressions

The Barnabas Venture

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First Impressions



Londo Training Center

THE BARNABAS VENTURE

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Missions; Education

Photographs by Peter Wallace Dunn.

Title page photo: The Londo training center was established by the Eglise Coopération to educate Pygmies in crafts, agriculture, literacy, and theology. It is a good example of Africans helping other Africans.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	3
Preface	4
Part One: Electronic Mail	5
Chapter One: On My Way to Bangui	5
Chapter Two: La FATEB	7
Chapter Three: Londo	19
Part Two: Anecdotes and Reflections	26
Chapter Four: Anecdotes	26
Chapter Five: Challenges Facing the Church in French-Speaking Africa	32
Addresses	36

Abbreviations

BEST - Bangui Evangelical School of Theology = FATEB
CAR - Central African Republic
DCR - Democratic Republic of Congo
FATEB - Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui = BEST
NT - New Testament
OC - Overseas Council for Theological Education and Missions
OT - Old Testament
SIL - Société de Internationale Linguistique

Preface

From November 8-December 6, 1998, I taught and traveled in Central African Republic. Here are my first impressions about the people, the customs, and the challenges facing the Church in French-speaking Africa. Part One is an edited version of electronic mail to my wife, Cathy, and to other correspondents. Part Two consists of anecdotes and reflections about Africa.

I wish to thank those who supported this venture both financially and prayerfully, many of whom must go unnamed; however, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Bill Armerding of Overseas Council, to Rev. Dr. David Sherbino and the congregation of Woodbridge Presbyterian Church, to the students, faculty, and staff of FATEB, and to Dan Duke of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Above all, I thank Cathy for her continual support of and commitment to my teaching in Africa.

In the name of the Lord,
Peter W. Dunn
Concord, Ontario
January, 1999



Part One

Electronic Mail

CHAPTER ONE

On My Way to Bangui

November 2, 1998

Dear correspondents:

On November 6, 1998, I leave for Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR), to teach two courses on the Book of Acts at Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST)—in French, Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui (FATEB). This is the beginning of a new chapter in my life and the culmination of many preparatory events over the course of my last sixteen years.

In the Fall of 1982, I left the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where I was a petroleum engineering student, to pursue a calling to overseas missions. First, I enrolled at Northwest College of the Assemblies of God in Kirkland, Washington; after graduation from Northwest in 1985, I pursued further theological studies at Regent College, and later at the University of Cambridge, where I received a PhD in 1996. After two years of teaching at a local seminary in an adjunct capacity, I did not know where to turn next. For a few months, I considered campus ministry.

Another opportunity for ministry came up one day in January (1998) when my pastor, Dr. David Sherbino, invited me to a breakfast of Overseas Council (OC) for Theological Education and Missions. The director of OC, Bill Armerding, asked qualified instructors to consider short-term teaching in theological institutions overseas. One school with which OC was in correspondence was BEST, and it caught my eye, because by teaching there I could make use of the French I learned during a two-year stay in Switzerland while a doctoral student. I also had a friend in CAR, Dan Duke, a Wycliffe Bible translator, who works amongst the Pygmies. When Dan was back in the US a few weeks later, he said over the phone that he could speak on my behalf to the people at BEST.

On the evening of Sunday, July 19, after months of searching for the will of God, Cathy and I were praying about the next step I

should take. I suggested that perhaps I could go overseas to teach on short-term missions for OC, as many as three one-month trips per year. She said I could do that as long as she could have a cat. We believe that divine confirmation for this decision came Monday morning (July 20) when I received an e-mail from Dr. Judy Hill, Professor of NT and Greek at BEST, asking me to teach a couple courses on the Book of Acts, one to students with Greek and the other to students without Greek. A couple of visiting professors had cancelled and they needed someone who could fill in. I agreed to go, and David Sherbino said that Woodbridge Presbyterian Church would back the project. In addition, I have the fund raising help of Bill Armerding and OC.

In the meantime I have been preparing my courses on Acts and brushing up my French, which is a little rusty since its been about four years since we left Switzerland. To keep her company, Cathy has adopted a cat, Bailey, who has the sweetest personality—I even like her. I will leave November 6 and return December 9. After the three-week course on Acts, I will visit Dan's work in the jungle. And we will return to Paris together and spend a couple days sightseeing. Then he returns to Indiana for a furlough, and I will come back to Cathy.



Cathy and Bailey

BEST has asked me to return again in March and teach two courses on Matthew. The advanced students, whose studies have been delayed because of the unrest in CAR, need this course to graduate in July, 1999. I will to return if sufficient funds can be raised.

CHAPTER TWO

La FATEB

Monday, November 9, 1998

Dear Cathy:

I received your e-mail message, and I am elated because this means I will have e-mail at my next door neighbors, Paul Schmidt, FATEB's accountant and his wife Phyllis. I sign on to their Internet account here in Bangui, and I can check my e-mail address in Canada. Make sure you check your e-mail often because I will probably send you something daily. Paul says all he wants for the Internet time, is for me to bring him a box of potato chips the next time I come to Bangui. It is so warm and humid here that I can't stop sweating until it cools at night.

Some of my students are very bright and may be doctoral material. The need here for NT professors is acute because Africans love the OT, and few go into NT studies. FATEB will soon have three resident African professors of OT and still no African for NT. The students are respectful and helpful but don't seem intimidated by me. African culture is more traditional, and therefore, respect for authority continues to play a role. One of the visiting professors, Moussa Bongoyok, from Cameroon, says that I should use "tu" with my students while they will all say "vous" to me. The leveling of society that occurs in Europe and Quebec is thus not happening here with respect to *tutoiement*. But I can't do as Moussa suggests. So I say "vous" to the students unless



Essita and Elisée Ouoba
from Burkina Faso

Elisée is working on a master's thesis on the historicity of the Lukan writings based on Luke 1.1-4. He hopes to do doctoral studies in New Testament.

I happen to slip. Another missionary professor says he does the same thing; so at least there is a precedent for the teacher showing as much respect to his students as they do to him. We are also

supposed to wear long pants when teaching (women professors must wear a skirt or dress). Shorts would be considered a sign of disrespect to the students.

Elections are going on here and flatbed trucks full of campaigners will drive past the school with loudspeakers blasting music and propaganda in Sango, the national language. This happened even at about 12:30 in the morning. It seems a little intimidating to be shouted at so early in the morning.

Tuesday, November 10

The students seem to respond well to me, and two have wanted to see me in person about their master's theses. Other, first and second year students, say that I should come back next year so that they can take a course from me.

There is a very nice Dutch family here: Benno van den Torn, a professor of systematic theology, his wife, Berdina, and three young boys. They know Dan Duke, and that is how FATEB learned about me. We ate lunch at their house today and discussed the problems of Europe, North America and Africa. I brought up, guess who? Neil Postman [See his critique of television, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*]. I mentioned how TV commercials mold children into perfect little consumers, and Berdina exclaimed that she was very happy to raise her children in Africa away from such influences. Some of her friends back in Europe cannot understand why she would raise her children in such a dangerous place; but she says that here in Africa there may be more danger to the body due to sickness and civil unrest, but in West, the danger to the eternal souls of her children is far greater, due to consumerism.

Nobody wears a Tilley hat [see back cover] here but me: and I feel really silly.

Wednesday, November 11

I am getting a little tired, standing up on a concrete floor for four hours and talking to people all day long. I will really have to relax on the weekends. On the other hand, I am doing less in my lectures than what I had planned. So I now have no fear of not

having enough material.

At the house of the administrative director, Philippe Doukofiona, who is in charge of hospitality for visiting professors, we get to eat cake for breakfast! Chocolate cake on Sunday and sponge cake on Tuesday.

Thursday, November 12

I haven't had the time or energy to take pictures yet, but a first year student says he is a good photographer, and I will probably have him come take pictures of me and my class.

The liter bottle that we took camping is really coming in handy. I take it to class with water or Tang in it, and it is usually close to empty by the end of my teaching. I am finding that my French is sufficiently fluent, and I am much relieved about that.

The students are all married and almost all have children, some as many as nine. I said to them that they have to give one or two of them to us who have none (they thought that was funny).

Apparently the peace in CAR is a veneer. I was told that the *casques bleus* (UN troops) are keeping order. Ethnic violence poses a dilemma for Christians and even the students at FATEB—when



About 500 school children attend grade school at FATEB. Teachers' strikes caused students of FATEB to start their own school and now many from

it breaks out, it is also necessary to keep Christians from killing each other, if possible.

Friday, November 13

I have finished the first week of courses and feel greatly relieved that it is now the weekend. It is not such hard work, lecturing four hours per day, and I have been taking a siesta after lunch. People say that sufficient rest is an important defense mechanism against malaria, so that your immune system remains strong. It is rainy season here. Today there was big storm with lightening very close and lots of rain. Being the *saison de pluie*, there are mosquitos in Bangui, but not nearly as many as in Algonquin Park in June. So if one is careful, one can avoid getting bitten [I later found that to be untrue!].

I feel welcome by those who provide hospitality: We often eat with the van den Torns, with Paul and Phyllis Schmidt, with Philippe and Germaine Doukofiona, and with Ken (who is in charge of the new building project) and Judy Landrud. I say “we”, because I share most of my meals with Moussa Bongoyok who is a convert from Islam. He is 32 years old and already an important church leader in Cameroon. He is at FATEB to teach a three-week course on Islam in the African context. According to Moussa, Islam is a grave problem for African church, but if Christians lived with greater integrity, Islam would make less progress. You would like Moussa very much—he is full of the gentleness of the Holy Spirit. The Christian fellowship that Moussa and I share is a great consolation to us both as we are separated from our families.

I met with Dan Duke’s colleague Dominique Kosseke, who popped by at 8:00 pm last night to ask me to go to SIL tomorrow to speak on the radio with Dan, who is in Londo. Dominique and I talked for about an hour, mostly about the Pygmies. I have now caught the bug to go and see them. According to Dominique, Londo is deep in the forest and therefore, the Yaka language is relatively pure there. He spoke of the savagery of the *grands noirs* (tall blacks) against the Pygmy, by enslaving him and his family to menial labor. Londo, however, is isolated enough to provide some refuge from villagers (tall blacks). So at 8:00 am Benno will take

me to SIL.

Saturday, November 14

Dear correspondents:

I arrived a week ago in Bangui on Sunday morning and after breakfast attended a French service at a large Baptist church at which Philippe Doukofiona, the administrator of BEST, is a pastor. I was able to stay awake the whole day so that I would sleep through the night and be fresh enough to teach Monday after two night flights (Toronto to Paris, Paris to Bangui). I was very pleased with how the teaching went as the Lord seemed to give me back my ability to speak French immediately. I was worried about that, because the last time I returned to a French speaking country it seemed to take almost a week to get my tongue back.

My meals are served at the homes of missionaries, who are resident here on the BEST campus, or of Philippe and his wife, Germaine, who are from the north of CAR. In this way, I am able to make good friends here in a very short time. In particular, I take nearly all my meals with another visiting professor, Moussa Bongoyok, a graduate of BEST from Cameroon, who is here to teach a course on Islam.

My courses are going well. The students are intelligent, serious, and very respectful. They don't even start shuffling papers when it is time to go, which means I have to monitor my watch or risk keeping them past the hour. Four hours a day of teaching is a rigorous schedule here, since the heat has a tendency to slow you down.

I was able to speak via radio to my friend, Dan Duke, who is involved in a translation of the Pygmy language Yaka. I will have the opportunity in two weeks to visit him in Londo, the village deep in the forest where the project is taking place. I met one of his collaborators, Dominique Kosseke, who is a Central African. He tells me that this is one of the first projects where Africans have been engaged by SIL (Société Internationale de Linguistique) to translate the Bible into a new language. They are able to endure better the climate and other conditions which are often difficult for Western missionaries. Dan is there as their consultant, while

Dominique and another Central African, Jérôme Sitamon, are the leaders of the project. Please pray for the Pygmies. They are living in terrible conditions in the forest. The villagers, whom they call "Tall Blacks" ("les grands noirs"), exploit and enslave them. The Pygmies often believe insults the grands noirs, who call them animals and their language gibberish. But by the power of the Gospel, the Pygmies are learning about God's love.

I haven't seen much of Africa yet, but I am not here as tourist but to work hard teaching. It is important work, as Moussa is a good example: Among the many hats he wears are that of a professor, a pastor, an evangelist, and a campus leader. Since there are so few trained leaders, those who graduate from BEST will return to many responsibilities in their home countries. BEST provides them with a theological base which will help them to be effective in ministry in their many roles. Thus, I really feel that my skills, as a theologian and as a speaker of the French language, are needed here as nowhere else in the world. I can have a greater overall impact in Africa than in North America where there are a hundred PhD's for every professorial post: my students here are the evangelical leaders in their respective countries on whose shoulders the Church of the next generation will rest. While FATEB would like eventually to be independent of teachers from the West to complete their programs, Moussa says that the number of French-speaking Africans with doctorates in theology can be counted on two hands. It will take some decades before FATEB is totally independent.

Dear Cathy:

I hope you and the cat are doing well. The Africans think its funny when I mention Bailey. They really don't fuss much about cats, whose role is to catch mice. But Moussa tells me that Muslims consider cats to be almost divine, since they believe that each of their seven souls will reach a different level of paradise.

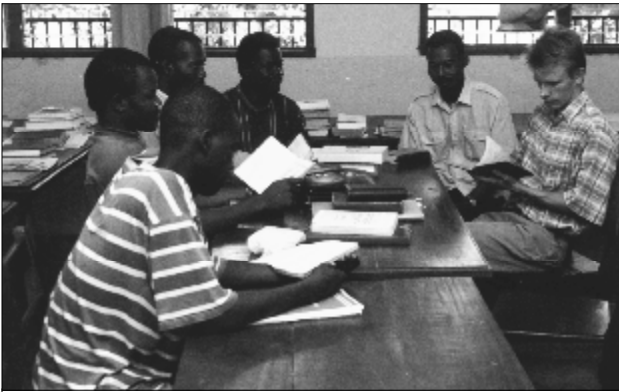
I have two sermons to prepare, one for chapel Friday in French, and one for some English speaking missionaries at a mission here in town. I will probably get an old message off the computer.

Sunday, November 15

Today I went to a Pentecostal church where Moussa preached, challenging the church to become active in evangelizing Muslims, who make up Half the population of Africa. Christians must first overcome their fear and hatred of Muslims before they can share the Gospel with them. He used the text of the woman at the well of Samaria to show how Jesus overcame racial hatred. Moussa has a way with words, saying to the young people: “Don’t say to the Lord, when He calls you, ‘Here I am Lord, send my grandmother.’”

I am very glad that you have Bailey. I would feel bad if you were home completely alone. Moussa laughed when I said that I feel sorry for Bailey that she is home alone while you are at work. Usually, Africans don’t think to much about the feelings of animals.

This evening, I preached at the Evangelical Mission in



Professor van den Torn with students

English, Friday in Chapel in French; next Sunday I will preach in English at a Baptist church in the morning and at a Pentecostal church in the evening. So I joked with

Moussa that here I preach more in three weeks than an entire year in Canada.

Some guys were playing basketball just before we left for the Mission, but I was already sweating buckets without doing anything, so I didn’t join them. The missionaries here complain how they really feel very cold when they return to Europe or the States. I was even told by Judy Hill (resident professor of NT) that as you live in a tropical country, your capillaries migrate farther out in your skin so that the feeling of cold is more acute (she was serious, so there is probably some sort of truth to that). But people here are more sensitive to cold; one night it cooled

Journey to the Center of Africa down to about 24° C, and I was finally not sweating. Moussa felt a little chilly and showed up for supper in a ski parka.

Monday, November 16

It was a good day in class. We discussed how to apply the biblical text which really took some time, though I had the impression that the students weren't learning anything that they didn't already know. But they seem to like to take their time and digest a subject.

Tuesday, November 17

Two students asked me if I would come back as a resident professor. I don't think that they would ask me to do that if they didn't like me. I just got done talking with a student from across the border in DRC (formerly Zaire). They really are having a great deal of success attracting people to the church in Africa, but the number of qualified teachers is really minimal.

Today I lectured on the Jerusalem church. I find that, because students ask lots of questions, it takes much longer to get through material than what I think it will.

Wednesday, November 18

It took me another two hours to finish the lecture on the church of Jerusalem. My students are not interested in cramming information into their heads. One has to go a little slower here. People don't walk fast but stroll slowly. It is undignified to hurry. They think there is something wrong with you if you do.

I talked to my only woman student today. She is from Rwanda and her name is Alivera Mfitumukiza. Because of the fighting in Rwanda, her church cannot pay her school bill and that of her husband. It is a lot of money for a African church to support a student at FATEB, and that is one of the reasons surely that there aren't more students here. I asked her approximately how much was owed and she said between the two of them about \$4000 US (\$2000 ea.); FATEB will deny them their diplomas until the bill is paid. She asked if there were Christian women in North

America who would be willing to help a poor *femme pasteur Rwandaise*. I said perhaps something could be done but couldn't make any promises. Thus, the financial needs at FATEB are profound. The wars going on in French-speaking Africa are causing a great deal of poverty amongst Christians.

Moussa says hello!

Thursday, November 19

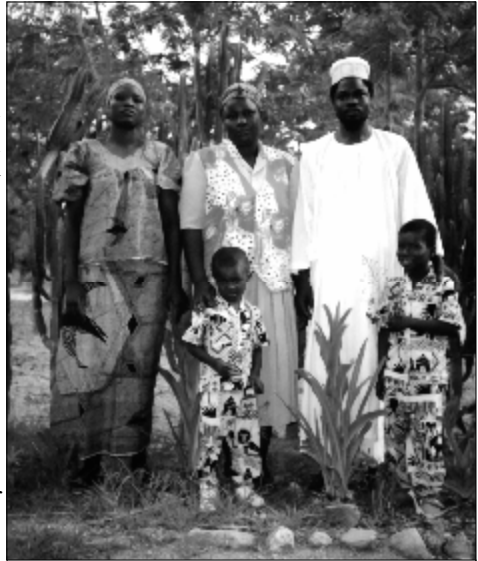
I hope you and the String Retriever are doing well. I am fine. I rest each afternoon, since no student seems to dare come to my house during the siesta time, even though I said they could. Africans have a very strong sense of tradition. Moussa, for example, will not violate a African custom, even if I insist that I wouldn't be offended. I am a couple years older than he, and he treats me like his older brother. I always must take food first from the dish. I was supposed to eat the chicken gizzard; when I offered it to him, he refused because it would be considered impolite to try to usurp my right as the older brother. The Africans won't come to me between 2:00 and 4:00 pm; so I may as well get some sleep.

A student (the photographer) has asked if he could buy my camera. I said I would have to look at what is available in Canada first, because my complete system of base and lenses is way out of his price range. I might be able to find a good used base for a reasonable price which I could bring in March. The students all want computers. But I warned one student not to spend too much money on a laptop because they are so expensive to fix. One problem with using expensive technology is that the Africans think that they can't be scholars without it. Then when you say that they can do it without all the technology, they think that you are doing things by a double standard: one for the white missionary, one for the African, which has often been a problem in colonial Africa. I need to think about how to train pastors who will return to conditions where they may not even have electricity, how much less the possibility of repairing a faulty computer.

Friday, November 20

I have come to the end of my second week here, and students still seem very happy with my teaching. I let students work in the library yesterday and today, and I spent most of my time trying to trouble shoot the outlines of their exposés in individual meetings.

Moussa says hello! He gave me a picture of himself and his family: his wife Priscilla, two boys (Elisée and Moise), and sister (Tequem).



Moussa Bongoyok and Family

Saturday, Nov 21

I met a pastor from Northern CAR (400 km away), who is staying with Philippe and Germaine. It is nice to eat with them, because they serve more indigenous cuisine and eat according to African custom: the men eat together, the women eat by themselves, and again the children eat away from the adults. They say it is quieter that way and the children prefer it too, since they can act childish without getting in trouble with the adults.

Moussa said that he would take me to the market to buy a couple shirts. He should be able to get a better price than I could get alone, since they tend to up the prices on non-Africans.

Saturday afternoon: I went to the market of the artists today with Moussa who very strictly bargained with the salesman; and he was able to bring down the price of one garment by fifty per cent. I now have an African shirt and also a shirt and pants ensemble.

Ken Landrud took Moussa and me together with two Congolese (*Zairois*) down to the market for barbecue beef (pronounced *shweeya*) and we went back to their place to eat it.

Ken speaks Lingala fluently and obviously enjoys himself with the Africans. Afterwards we were about to go our separate ways, when the Congolese introduced themselves. Puzzled about his I asked Moussa, who told me that in Africa you don't ask people their names: it's impolite, especially if someone is your superior. But having eaten together, one is nevertheless obliged to introduce oneself and learn the other's name. The same thing happened at breakfast this morning when I met the pastor. They introduced him as a pastor, but it wasn't until after the meal that I learned his name (Pierre) and he mine.

Monday, November 23

The students started their exposés today. From what I gather, the marking system is harder here than in Canada, but my students are still all passing.

Sunday I preached in English at a Baptist church in the morning and at a Pentecostal church in the evening. I was only sure that one person really understood me, a student from Uganda. Many of the others seem to be trying to learn or to improve their English.

I am having trouble keeping up with all the requests for me to bring computers or Bibles, or to place people in contact with North Americans. There are so many needs, how do you keep up with them all?

Tuesday, November 24

In three days I leave for Londo to see Dan. The time is short. I am looking forward with a little dread to seeing Dan Duke. I am hoping that I won't be bitten by a monkey and get a new strain of Ebola or AIDS, or that no one will ask me to eat monkey meat. But at least if I have to eat monkey, I will have a story to tell when I get back!

The student who wanted to buy my camera came today saying he is without a scholarship and has four children at home who sometimes go hungry because of the lack of money. I told him I would pay him to take pictures of me in the class (that way he could earn 2000 African Francs for helping me, and I don't have

to *give* him anything). I paid him 1000 tonight and I'll pay him the rest tomorrow. With that he should be able to feed his family for at least a week. [Later, I learned from the van den Torns that students commonly lack the means to feed their families. Male students, however, benefit from a certain African custom: If a man arrives at a friend's or a relative's house at meal time, the host is obligated to feed him. But then he returns home well-fed, feeling ashamed that he still has nothing for his hungry loved ones.]

Thursday, November 26

I go to Londo tomorrow and we will be out of e-mail contact for a few days. I should think that you shouldn't worry about hearing from me before Thursday next week. I celebrated American Thanksgiving with about thirty other Americans at the US Ambassador's residence today.



Dr. Dunn in class

CHAPTER THREE

Londo

Tuesday, December 1

We arrived in Bangui today, and it was a great trip. Dan is well. I was warmly greeted by the Pygmies and the church in Londo. They gave me the opportunity to preach Sunday morning. Monday I spoke briefly to the church in a conference and then answered questions for an hour or so. They lavished us with gifts such that it will be difficult to get it all in the airplane.

I am very happy that I had a chance to go to Londo to see first hand the difficulties facing the Pygmies face and the work that the Lord is doing there. I can't wait to talk to you in person about it!

Wednesday, December 3

Dear Cathy:

I have decided that if I am going to help this country in any area other than theological education, it will be in the project with the Pygmies in Londo. I have had many other requests for help; everyone seems to need something. But Dan says go slowly, learn more about the country and the people before committing yourself: otherwise it is easy to get burned.

I went to FATEB to meet with students and with the Faculty to discuss my future relationship to the school. They asked me to give my testimony. I mentioned how I have come in contact with Africans both at Regent College in Vancouver and in Switzerland, and this is one way that the Lord made me interested in Africa. I also mentioned how I dreaded being exposed to malaria because of the death of our friend Samuel [A Zairean student in Switzerland who returned to tell his family of his engagement to a Swiss woman; he died of cerebral malaria four days after his return to Europe.]

Dan is leaving for Paris Saturday and will meet me at the airport Monday morning. I really wish that I wasn't stopping in Europe, because I really do want to see you. Dan will be taking some things back to the US for me: A Pygmy crossbow with poison darts and a Pygmy guitar.

January 2, 1999

Dear Correspondents:

Since my last update, two weeks of courses flew by. Students worked on research projects on various historical and hermeneutical questions concerning the Acts of the Apostles. I am very pleased with their overall performance and convinced that the academic work being done at Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST) is on par with graduate theological institutions in the West. The class size was very small (eight students per class), which allowed for a good amount of one-to-one interaction, including private instruction on their research projects. I spent some class time and many hours outside of class meeting individually with students and advising them on how to improve their papers. My involvement at BEST seemed to be a good match between my skills and their needs; I am confident also that I have established a good rapport with the students and faculty there.

As soon as the last student presentation was made and class pictures taken, I was picked up by Ruedi Haibucher in a Toyota Land Cruiser for my journey to the forest to see Dan and the Pygmies. We were accompanied by Anne-Marie Sitamon, wife of Jérôme, one of the two Central Africans responsible for the Yaka translation project. A Pygmy woman and two toddlers, who had come into Bangui two months earlier to have the boy's cut finger cared for in the hospital, would also accompany us. It took about five hours to travel the first 250 kilometers from Bangui through Mbaiki to Molokou, the last village on the edge of the forest. We arrived at nightfall to be greeted by a menacing thunderstorm, and the mayor of the village, Roger Ngoulou. Ruedi feared that a heavy rain would result in washing out the road and in trees blocking our way to Londo; but it only rained a little. The mayor put us up for the evening in the guest house (a mud brick house with a thatched roof, with three wooden beds), and fed us *gozo* (the national dish) and smoked antelope. Then, for some time, he asked me a number of questions about the Bible, for he had learned that I was a visiting professor at BEST. In addition, he pleaded with Ruedi for SIL to send literacy workers, blackboards and chalk to his villages, where he had established nine schools for

children since becoming mayor. But one thing became clear: the literacy and translation work in Londo amongst the Pygmies, 72 kilometres away in the forest, was in no way pleasing to the inhabitants of Molokou. They were angry and jealous that the Pygmies, who plant and harvest their fields and who carry their game out of the forest, were learning to read, while they remain illiterate. Later, we went down to see the children playing drums and dancing in the darkness of the night. As a gesture of peace, I offered to the mayor to carry some letters to Canada to mail to his brother living in the US (the mail system in CAR is not very good), and we picked these up on the way back to Bangui.

The next morning, we left accompanied by four Pygmies who had come down from Londo to help us clear the road of any trees that might have fallen. We had five adult Pygmies and two toddlers in the back seat of the Land Cruiser, and the three tall adults in the front. We made our way from Molokou up a narrow, overgrown path which had been cut out by loggers no more than ten years previously, but now abandoned by everyone except the Yaka project. The first 600 meters had large ruts of erosion from the rain, and it took us some minutes to repair the worst places so that the Land Cruiser could pass. Later, we cut some large trees with the chain saw; sometimes the logs were so heavy that it was necessary for all four Pygmies and three big people, using poles for leverage, to push them out of the way. We made the 72 km route in seven hours, which was a good trip, considering that in the past, the team has spent as much as three days to go this distance.

Upon arrival in Londo Saturday afternoon, Jérôme Sitamon led the Pygmies in a song of greeting in the Yaka language. My friend, Dan Duke, whom I hadn't seen since our sojourn in Switzerland in 1994, was also there, no worse for wear after five years in Africa – he had only a bit less hair than before. I spent the next week with Dan, who is a Wycliffe missionary working on the Yaka language project. He is a technical and exegetical consultant, on loan to the two Central Africans, Dominique Kosseke and Jérôme Sitamon, who are in charge of the Bible translation and literacy project respectively. Assisting them are two Pygmies, François and Barthélemy. Dan was now about to embark on a two-year study leave in Dallas to finish his Master's degree in linguistics. Pygmies from all over the forest were

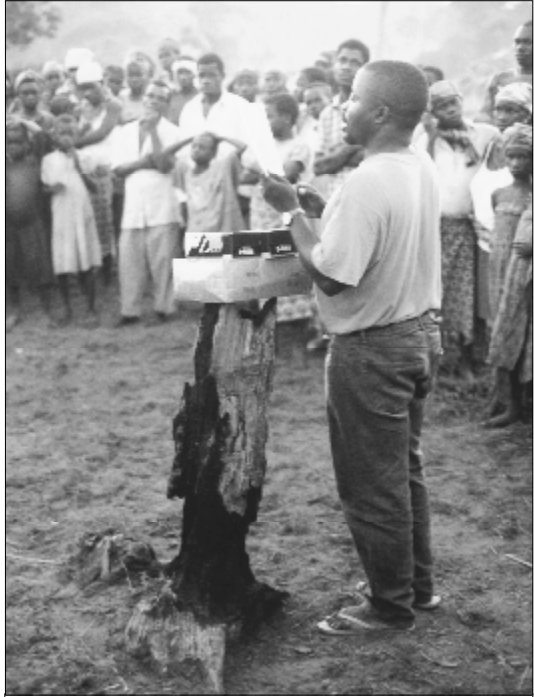
gathering for his going-away party. It was clear that Dan had become friends with the Pygmies and was well received in their midst.

Sunday morning, I preached from Acts 17, Paul's speech at Athens, in the local church; Dan translated into Sango, the national language of CAR, and Francois translated from Sango into Yaka. The church in Londo was planted over a decade ago by the Eglise Coopération of CAR, an independent Pentecostal denomination. After the service, four Pygmy men came for prayer and counseling, and Jérôme interpreted for us. The next day, the Pygmies gathered for a conference to ask whatever questions they might have of me. They asked me to say a few words and I discussed the theology of Bible translation: that God intends for all Christians to be able to pray and read the Bible in their mother tongues (cf. Matt 28.19; Rev 7.9f.). Thus, God, in these last days, is providing the Pygmies too a chance to read the Bible in their own language—a language despised and treated as gibberish by the tall blacks. I also emphasized that we are all brothers and sisters—that we all have a common father, Adam. This intrigued the Pygmies: “Why if we are brothers do the tall blacks call us animals?” “If the tall blacks call you animals, they are debasing themselves,” I said, “because they are your brothers. You must try to love those who exploit you, and I know it is impossible, humanly speaking, but if the Holy Spirit resides in you, then you can love those who mistreat you.” Barthélemy responded, “If this is so, then we need to preach the gospel also to the tall blacks.”

Later, to thank me for coming, Barthélemy added that they really enjoyed the opportunity to ask questions about the Bible and to learn about God's love for all people including the Pygmies, who during his whole life, have been abused by others. Not only so, but the forest, which was full of animals in his youth, now has been hunted out, and there is no longer sufficient meat for the Pygmies. It is in these troubles that he learns of God's love for his people, that the Yaka language was a gift from God to them. But now I am leaving to go back to Canada. He says it is as if a young man comes into the village and seduces a young woman; once she begins to fall in love with him, he leaves her in the lurch.

Later, the ceremony of Dan's departure was celebrated, during which came an historic moment: the announcement of the

publication of the first verses of the Bible, Luke 3-5, in the Yaka language. Not only so, but the translation team would also publish cassettes on which these chapters are read and set to Pygmy music; along with these, twenty wind-up cassette players will be distributed so that the Pygmies throughout the forest will hear and sing the first Scriptures in Yaka. Indeed, these songs are already being sung throughout the forest—the Gospel of Luke in the form of indigenous song—and like most Africans, the Pygmies love repetition. It seemed to me a most glorious thing: at this rate, by the time the Bible is published in its entirety, perhaps a decade down the road, the Pygmies will have already memorized most of it in song.



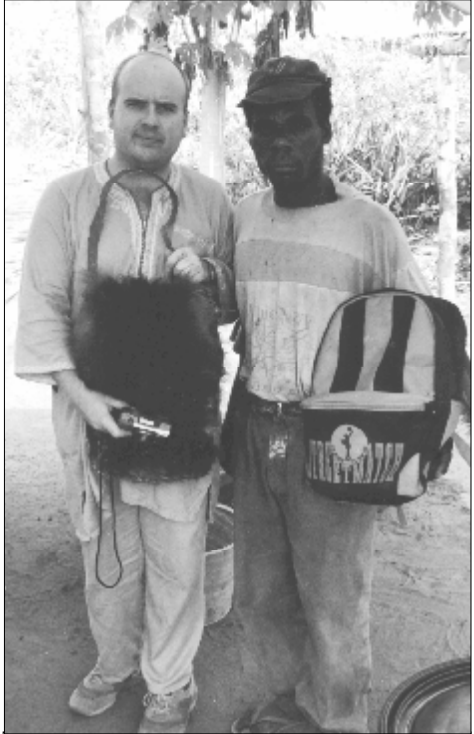
Dominique Kosseke presenting the Yaka translation of Luke 3-5 with cassette

What happened to me in Londo? God was working on my heart. It was a remarkable thing to see my lengthy theological education bear fruit in a real, concrete situation. For God is at work amongst the Pygmies. Not only are they neglected and abused by the tall people, both white and black, but they are living in miserable conditions: the forest, which for a time provided an excellent hiding place from one's oppressors, was never intended for human occupation. Chiggers eat their way into the feet of all the inhabitants of the forest, causing infections in children, who can lose toes and feet and often die. There are malaria and river blindness to be dealt with. The losers are invariably the children, causing an extremely high mortality rate: perhaps only about

twenty per cent of those born will make it into adulthood. Most of the children are naked—not out of choice, since the forest nights are chilly, but because there is a lack of clothing and shoes. Moreover, the forest is hunted out. The game which was once abundant has gone to fill the plates of those in the surrounding villages and in the city of Bangui. The forest itself is vanishing because of logging. The Pygmy must now seek new kinds of nourishment in a new, hostile environment, with tall blacks on all sides vying for the same resources.

I saw the remarkable suffering of the Pygmies and of those who go to serve them: Pastor Faustin Kolibo, who walks hundreds of kilometres to preach the gospel in the forest, once cared for his malaria-infected daughter on the path; the Sitamons and the Kossekés, who have helped the Pygmies in literacy and health care for over six years now, have left the comforts of the city and jobs, to risk their necks for the sake of the gospel out of love for a

despised people; my friend Dan, who was top of his class at the University of Indiana, has left the comforts of North America and flush toilets to learn to squat over a hole in the ground, has had malaria more times than he can remember, has faced parasites, pestilence, war, and bandits, and has eaten tree grubs, rotten porcupine or forest rat, when nothing else could be had. What makes these people willing to suffer so, if not God by his Holy Spirit, who in these last days has found a place in His heart for the most humble people on earth? He remembers the downtrodden



Dan Duke making an exchange with a pygmy: his knapsack for the Pygmy's home-made donkey hair sack

and afflicted, but the rich and powerful He sends away empty. The presence of the Holy Spirit in Londo is impossible to deny, especially in view of the great joy in the hearts of God's people, manifested in their singing and dancing.

Dan and I left for Bangui Tuesday; it was really a very short stay for me in Londo. I suggested to Dan that I might be able to come back as an exegetical consultant to the Yaka project, and he responded that that was one of his hopes in inviting me to Londo. The two Central Africans, Jérôme and Dominique, and their Pygmy collaborators, François and Barthélemy, would be able to make use of my services during Dan's absence; I could offer them training which would permit them access to the Greek text as they translate the New Testament into Yaka. In speaking with Dr. Mark Karan of SIL, academic director of the Yaka project, it was clear that SIL would welcome my help, but they could not justify allocating their own resources and personnel to get me to Londo. Thus, if the Lord is willing, when I return to CAR in March to teach Matthew, I will return to Londo for a week under the auspices of the Eglise Coopération, which would hire at my expense (or rather, at the expense of my supporters) a Land Cruiser. In this way, I would not be a lover who left his beloved in the lurch, but I would at least be able to return to see her once again.

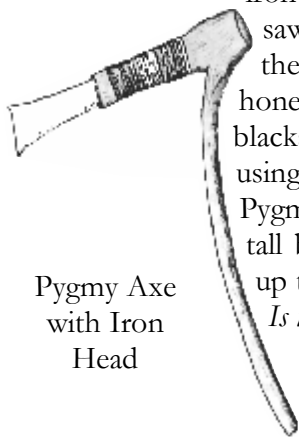
PART TWO ANECDOTES AND REFLEXIONS

CHAPTER FOUR

Anecdotes

Why do Pygmies live in the Forest?

Barthélemy recounted the following tradition concerning why the Pygmies live in the forest: Before, the Pygmies lived and forged iron in villages. But one day a Pygmy woman saw bees flying into the forest. She called all the Pygmies to follow the bees to find their honey. When they returned to the village, tall blacks had moved into their houses and were using their tools for forging iron. Thus, the Pygmies live in the forest, and to this day, the tall blacks make iron tools for them, requiring up to four times the market value.



Pygmy Axe
with Iron
Head

Is the Term “Pygmy” Politically Incorrect?

A friend asked me if the term “Pygmy” is politically incorrect. It might be, like “Eskimo”, which outsiders use to denote the different peoples (Inupiat, Yupik, Inuit), who are the aboriginal inhabitants of the far North. Nevertheless, I know of no other word as accurate as “Pygmy”, to describe the short, dark-skinned inhabitants of the tropical forests of Africa, who happen to make up several ethnic groups. The Pygmies of Londo call themselves “Aka”, but close by there are also “Bayaka” Pygmies, who speak another language. Indeed, even the name that the Pygmies use for the villagers, “tall blacks”, is politically incorrect: Shouldn’t it be “vertically unchallenged African-Africans”?

Food in Africa

I wanted to try various kinds of food which might shock people in North America. But unfortunately, I wasn’t in Africa long enough to eat anything really exotic; most everything was scrumptious, especially the papaya, the squash, and the beef, which is much leaner in Africa than here. I had the best fried liver ever, absolutely fresh, because meat in Bangui is generally served the day

the animal is slaughtered. I also had cow brains, served in a cucumber salad with a vinaigrette. This too was delicious, though I was better off when I didn't know what it was.

I asked Moussa if there are people in Africa that don't like liver. He didn't know anyone. In fact, he said that it is a favorite meat of children. When eating *shweeya*, barbecue beef strips cooked in the open market, Moussa said that the tougher pieces are the favorite of men, while the tender pieces are, like liver, for children. When I told him that many North Americans don't like liver, he said, "You live in such incredible abundance that you can be so picky about food!"

We had barbecue chicken one day, and Moussa said that I should eat the gizzard. I don't mind gizzard, but by time he offered it to me, I was already quite full. So I offered it back to him, but he refused because it was my prerogative, as the elder, to eat this piece. Gizzard is the favorite part of the chicken and reserved for the most respected member of the family. Moussa told me that a man once took his son to the police and asked them to punish him. The police asked, "What is the charge?" The father replied, "He killed a chicken and ate the gizzard without offering it to me!" Well, Moussa said that the police formally warned the son never to do such a misdeed again, otherwise they would beat him.

In central Africa, food is normally abundant because the soil is rich. The main staple, manioc, from which we derive tapioca, grows abundantly. To prepare manioc, one digs up the roots and lets them dry in the sun. Then, they are pounded into a flour-like powder which will keep for a long time. Manioc flour is combined with water and cooked to make *gozò*, a starchy paste, like really thick cream of wheat. Africans eat it with their fingers, taking a mouthful and dipping it into a meat sauce heavy in palm oil. Manioc leaves are also eaten, and they look and taste very much like spinach.

Africans will eat almost any kind of meat, even for example, elephant and hippopotamus. But they also eat locusts, crickets and tree grubs (*chenille* in French). I tried this last delicacy, though I could only swallow one of them. It had a texture very much like shrimp, except with its crunchy spines still intact. One of my favorite dishes was the deep yellow meat of the fish from the Ubangi River, which flows into the mighty Congo River.

My friend Dan Duke has more exotic stories about food than me. In Londo, where meat is becoming scarce, he has eaten monkey, forest rat (which I tried too and it is not so bad), donkey, gazelle, and porcupine.

Gorilla is a rare delicacy for the Pygmies. One giant Pygmy (about 6', 1" because his father was a villager) told me of how he was attacked one day by a gorilla while out hunting. He had scars, where the gorilla had made huge slashes on his arms, to prove his story. He barely escaped. But he and his hunting companions managed to kill the beast before it killed them. And along comes a game warden: as you may know the gorilla is protected. The warden said, "Why did you kill this gorilla?" The Pygmy said, "It was self-defense. The gorilla attacked us first!" At that, the warden accompanied them back to Londo, where a large share of the meat was cut out for the warden, who was so pleased that he lent his rifle with ammunition to the Pygmy for two weeks.

Thin or Fat?

In Western culture, it is only a recent phenomenon that the vast majority of people think that thin is beautiful. Fashion magazines display the emaciated bodies of young women who starve themselves to become the ideal of Western beauty. However, a look at paintings from the Renaissance, for example, will prove that at an earlier time in our culture, the opulent woman was esteemed. Fortunately for the Africans, the newer, "thin-is-in" trend has not yet caught on. They look upon those who are skinny as unhealthy and unhappy. Indeed, many in Africa that are excessively thin are suffering from AIDS and probably only have a few months to live. It is no mistake that Kenyans call AIDS the "slimming disease". Africans prefer the fat body, which is a sign of well-being and prosperity. Eating disorders are thus rare.

Because I was suffering from traveler's diarrhea, I went on a two-day fast on my way to Londo, and I had lost about five pounds. I told this to Jérôme Sitamon, and he exclaimed, "Now your wife will be happy to see you." I commented that he must know then that a thin body is a Western ideal. He said he learned it a number of years ago when working side by side with an American Peace Corps volunteer. He said to the woman one day, "You are nice and fat!" She immediately became irate. He

defended himself, "I was only trying to compliment you!" She retorted, "But you insulted me!"

Hurry up and Wait

My students loved taking their time to reflect on the material they were learning, and it sometimes took me over twice as long to finish a lesson with them as with Canadian students. This is in accord with the African culture in general, where people walk and work at a much saner pace. Moussa told me a joke to this effect: A European once came to Africa for a safari and hired porters to carry his baggage. As they were making their way into the wilderness, the European drove them hard and they made a two-day journey on the first day. The European was quite pleased with himself, for he thought that he could reach his destination in half the time. On the morrow, he found the porters seated on the baggage; when he ordered them to get up and get going they refused to budge. He shouted at them, he tried whipping them, but to no avail. Finally they said to him, "You don't understand. Yesterday you drove us so hard that our souls were left behind. We will now have to wait here for the entire day so that our souls can catch up to us."

The lesson of the story is one which Westerners coming to Africa must learn. Take it slowly. Don't push yourself. According to the African mentality, if you go too fast or work too hard, your soul will say, "That's enough of that, I'm leaving". And without the soul, the body will soon die. Indeed, malaria, the most deadly disease in the world, attacks when a person is worn down. So there is a lot of time-tested wisdom in that little joke about the porters.

Magic and Metamorphosis

Many people around of the world believe in metamorphosis, the ability to change one's shape into the form of an animal. While saying nothing about this practice, the Bible nevertheless condemns the occult practices which are associated with it (see Deut 18.9-13). One missionary related how, in a testimony, a Pygmy thanked God who saved him from committing sexual immorality, from stealing tools from his neighbors, and from changing himself into animals. Another missionary recounted how in a certain place in Africa, a man was hunting an antelope

and had aimed his rifle at it for a long time before shooting. When he finally pulled the trigger, he saw a man screaming in pain: he had shot this man who was in the form of an animal. The hunter helped his victim to a hospital where he was saved. The police asked the hunter why he shot the man. He merely indicated that the man was an animal at the moment he pulled the trigger, and then, he changed back into a man. The police, satisfied with this account, told him that he did the right thing by taking him to the hospital, and all charges were dropped.

In the West, we are often very skeptical of the powers of the occult. I am told that in the past many missionaries simply told the Africans who complained about the powers of evil that it was their imagination. As a result, the new converts would be forced to fight magic with magic, because the missionaries failed to stress that Jesus is more powerful than the evil spirits who were troubling them. Thus, many Africans remain bound to the practices associated with evil spirits and the ghosts of dead ancestors. But we should have all faith in the power of God to defeat the enemy; Jesus says (Luke 10.19): "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

God Loves a Cheerful Giver

In the Eglise Coopération of Londo, I was introduced to a liturgical custom which I think would be wonderful to practice here too. At offering time, a basket is placed at the front on a small table. Then, one person, a man or a woman, begins a song accompanied by the large bongos. Then, each donor dances to the back of the church and then to the front down the middle aisle to drop their offering into the basket. Of course, such a practice might be difficult to square with what Jesus said about not letting your left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matt 6.4), but I thought it was great fun and it really made the offering a joyful event.

CHAPTER FIVE**Challenges to the Church in French-Speaking Africa***Numerical Growth and the Need for Leadership Training*

Central Africans themselves praise the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century missionaries who came from the West to Africa, shipping their belongings in a wooden box large enough to be buried in. It did not take long for many of them to succumb to malaria, yellow fever or one of a host of other tropical maladies. It is in the blood of these martyrs of the Faith that the seed of the African church is sown. One of my students told me of the deep gratitude that the Africans feel toward the missionaries who risked



A Pygmy Adolescent in Londo

their necks to evangelize Africa. In CAR, about eighty per cent of the population claims to be Christian, and the vast majority of these are Evangelical or Pentecostal, while the Roman Catholics remain in the minority. Though the number of Christians vary from country to country in French-speaking Africa, the Church has nevertheless seen great numerical growth in many of these countries, including Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Randa. For this growth to be sustained, there is an on-going need for leadership training, so that the gifted and concerned leaders of Africa have the wisdom which only theological reflection can provide. Church leaders in French-speaking Africa feel themselves to be decades behind in theological education as compared with evangelicals in English-speaking Africa. One reason for this is that there are not as many French-speaking evangelicals in the West to support what is going on in Africa: very few evangelical Christians live in French Switzerland, France, Belgium and Quebec, the main areas of the West where French is spoken. While this means that the Church in French Africa remains relatively independent of the West, which is not a bad thing, it also means that there are few French speakers to draw from who have the qualifications to teach in place like FATEB. But the need for training is acute on a number of clear fronts:

Shamanism

As indicated above (see “Magic and Metamorphosis”), superstitious customs are deeply entrenched in the daily practices of many African Christians. Clear training in the Bible concerning in the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of evil is crucial to rooting out this problem.

Islam

Oil-rich Arab countries are pouring money into sub-Sahara Africa in an attempt to spread Islam. While money aimed at development, jobs, and education creates fast conversions to Islam, the proselytes themselves are often only superficially attached to the religion. Nevertheless, there is a need for diligence

on the part of Africa church leaders to confront this issue, and training is crucial, so that African Christians can answer the theological challenges of Muslims, such as disputes concerning the nature of the Godhead (the Trinitarian question) and the reliability of the Holy Scriptures. FATEB plans to create an Islamic department in the years to come in order to confront this acute need.

Sexual Immorality

Estimates as to the number of people who die of AIDS on a daily basis in Bangui vary greatly. It would be impossible to know for sure. For example, one of my students, Gaspard Seidi, a Central African pastor, says that about twenty people in Bangui die daily of AIDS: over 7000 deaths a year in a city of only 500,000. On the other hand, I heard estimates of over 150 daily deaths from AIDS in Bangui. Whatever the case may be, the Africans themselves see this devastating plague as a disaster which bodes evil for the decades to come, for the perishing adults are leaving children orphans and the old destitute. In Africa, homosexuality is shunned and rare, and so AIDS spreads largely because of heterosexual promiscuity. Often, people dying of AIDS respect Christians that both preach and practice sexual abstinence or monogamy; and the dying admit that it would have better if they too had followed the Biblical code.

But the church is not always successful in preaching sex only within the bounds of legitimate marriage. A vast number of Christians live in common-law marriage. Their marriages, having never been sanctioned by the church or by vows of fidelity, do not create sufficient stability, making unfaithfulness and serial marriage common. The problem is caused by the dowry system; often the young man has no means to pay the bride's price to his lover's parents—so they live together and raise children without the protection of legitimate marriage, dreaming that one day, they will have sufficient money to regularize their union. Church leaders face the challenge of how to change the dowry system, a deeply entrenched African tradition, to make it possible for the church to sanction the marriages of its members.

Nepotism and Ethnic Favoritism

Favoritism according to family and ethnic group is a rampant and acute problem throughout French-speaking Africa. While such problems always existed, colonialism exacerbated them by giving favors to small ethnic groups in an effort to divide and rule. Rwanda, formerly a Belgian holding, is a prime example of such policies. The Belgians favored the minority Tutsis, giving them education and jobs. The majority Hutus seethed and languished under this system. When independence and democracy came, Hutus came to power and ethnic violence eventually broke out. In 1994, Rwanda saw a genocide of about 750,000 people, when the extremist government incited the Hutus to slay their Tutsi neighbors. Where was the church in all of this? Evangelical missiologists had praised Rwanda as a model of achievement. During the massacre, ethnicity clearly figured more prominently than Christianity. In CAR, where eighty per cent of the population is Christian, ethnic violence broke out between northern peoples, who have gained power in democratic elections, and the southern Yacoma people. According to one missionary who was in Bangui at the time, about 800 men, women and children were slaughtered in a single day in the Yacoma district of Bangui. The church during this time struggled to contain ethnic hatred within its own ranks, as even Central African students at FATEB felt alienated from each other.

Nepotism is rampant in Africa, as those in power bestow offices in the government and in the church to close relatives, who may or may not be qualified. This injustice leads bitterness on the part of those who are not favored. Church leaders in Africa face the continual challenge of bringing the love and justice of God to corrupt systems of management; only by applying consistently and correctly the principles of Bible will anyone ever hope to overcome such systemic corruption.

I realize that nowhere in the world is the Church perfect, at least not until Jesus establishes his physical reign on this planet. Christians in the West are too often self-indulgent and complacent. We, like the Africans, are profoundly influenced by the obsessions of the surrounding culture. On the other hand, I was also impressed by the commitment, the deep love for the

Lord, and the integrity of many of the African Christians whom I met on my trip.

My hope is that having read this book, the reader can understand why I love Africa, and why I am moved by the Spirit of the Lord to do my part, however small, in training the leaders of the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in French-speaking Africa. I count it a great privilege to be used of God in this way.

ADDRESSES

You can support the various projects mentioned in this book by sending your tax deductible donation, indicating specifically the nature of your gift.

To support the work of Dr. Dunn at BEST, Canadian donors should make cheques payable to the Canadian Centre for World Mission and in the memo line write “The Barnabas Venture”. American donors should contact Dr. Dunn for instructions.

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French-speaking central Africa is at the same time one of the richest and one of the most troubled areas of the world—Rich in character, in culture, and in love for God, yet troubled because of poverty, AIDS, and ethnic violence. In November, 1998, Peter Dunn flew to Bangui, capitol of Central African Republic, to teach the Book of Acts, and later, he traveled to the heart of the tropical rain forest, home of the Aka Pygmies. Dr. Dunn recounts his first impressions of central Africa, of its people, its customs, and of the most significant challenges facing the African Church.



Drinking from a vine
in the African rain forest

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