

Annual Congo Council Meeting

Each succeeding year at least one new major problem affecting evangelical mission work in Congo seems to present itself at the annual meeting of the Congo Protestant Council. This year was no exception at the gathering held February 13 to 19 at Leopoldville, the growing capital of Congo Belge. The problem is mentioned hereinafter.

Fourteen representatives of eleven missions were present, most of whom were entertained at the Union Missionnaire Hospitalière with Mr. and Mrs. J. Palmer Hern as host and hostess. This hospitable institution where increasing hundreds of missionaries have found shelter, food, rest and companionship as they travel through Leopoldville, is rendering a splendid service. There is nothing else like it in all Central Africa. It is not directly an adjunct of the Council, but its six sustaining missions are all Council members, and it was the spirit of cooperation and union engendered by the Council and the Congo General Conference since the latter's inception in 1902 which made the establishment of such a missionary home for travelers possible.

The councillors as they gathered at this important government and commercial headquarters had two special reasons for rejoicing at local progress. First, because the American Baptists had reoccupied their large historic and beautiful mission grounds at Léo-Ouest after an absence of years, and had thus taken their place again shoulder to shoulder with the British Baptists in the capital city; and, second, because during the past year the Council's secretariat residence had been constructed.

The developments of recent months in the missionary occupation of Matadi and Leopoldville, the two large centers of western Congo Belge, form a splendid

testimony to the spirit of oneness and cooperation which is so noticeably dominant in all evangelical work in Congo. It has not been adequately noted heretofore in our columns, we believe, and its brief recital here can form a fitting introduction to the story of the yearly meeting of that Council whose sole purpose is to labor in that spirit for the advancement all together of the Kingdom of God in Congo.

For years there had been three of Congo's oldest missions installed in Matadi, the only western port of the colony, 90 miles up from the Congo's mouth. Transport and business necessities had principally placed and held them there, but of course all were active in evangelism, in which the finest spirit reigned. The fact apparent to them all however was that three missions were not needed for Matadi's evangelization; that one would be enough and could do it better. So when transport and business conditions changed as they have been doing in this fast-developing colony, the American Baptists and the British Baptists, earliest workers at Matadi, arranged gladly to withdraw and turn their work over to the competent Swedish mission, which thereupon secured from the government a greatly enlarged and improved site and began new buildings which have given it a much more efficient physical property. The three missions propose to unite in building a new church there. Since the change, a real mass movement seems to have begun among the Native population of the city, and the work is in all respects most encouraging.

The American Baptists then encompassed the reopening of their Leopoldville work, in the western part of the city some five miles from the center of the British Baptists' efforts, and this with the close

cooperation which exists between these sister missions makes for a great strengthening of the Protestant impact in the capital. Thus is not only Matadi adequately cared for, but Leopoldville's greater needs will be more nearly met. This entire adjustment is indicative of Congo's missionary spirit and policy. They are now but two points in Congo Belge where more than one mission is at work: Leopoldville, and Elisabethville (American Northern Methodist and Seventh Day Adventists), both places being large and needy.

The Council's headquarters have been established upon a piece of very attractive land sold to the C.P.C. by the A.B.F.M.S. for one dollar at Léo-Ouest. A substantial and comfortable building has been erected at a very low cost, thanks to the generosity of the Belgian contractor, M. Jules Provost, who consistently maintained his usual high grade of construction and finishing even when knowing no profit would accrue on the job. Mr. and Mrs. Ross and their three children moved into the new residence at the end of September 1930, quitting a dwelling generously supplied them until then by the A.B.F.M.S. The helpfulness of this mission in getting the Council established could not have been greater: land, temporary occupation of residence, office space, garage, storage, etc., were all given freely or at nominal cost, together with other important aids, including the increase of its annual grant to the Council's budget to an amount 50% larger than that of any other mission. All this is immensely appreciated by the Council, and especially by its secretary who has enjoyed more closely than any other one the full fragrance of this spirit.

The first preoccupation of the Council at its February meeting needed to be its office bearers. The minutes concerning these read in part as follows:

Presidency. Announcement was made of the regretted inability of the Rev. E. Cartwright, C.B.M., to accept the presidency of the Council and the Congo General Conference, to which he was elected in 1928. A committee was thereupon appointed to consider the Council offices. It later reported, and the report was accepted, that Rev. Herbert Smith, D.C.C.M., be elected president; and Rev. J. M. Springer, C.M.C.M.E.C., be elected vice-president.

Secretaryship. Sincere regret was felt and expressed that the Secretary feels he must leave Congo at the end of this present term for a period of at least 4 years. By unanimous standing vote Mr. and Mrs. Ross were requested to reconsider the matter, which they did but without seeing any other solution to the problem of their children's education. They expressed their willingness however to stay on another (fifth) year this term if possible, until 1933.

Rev. H. W. Coxill was then asked if he would accept the position of co-secretary to which he was elected in 1929, and he accepted. A letter was read from the chairman of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (the London home board of the C.B.M.) stating that this board does not feel it has the right to stand in the way of this acceptance, and wishing Mr. Coxill every blessing in it. It is understood that Mr. Coxill will assume the position and duties of full-time secretary about June 1933.

Progress was reported in the organizing of the Katanga-Kasai regional conference to be held in Elisabethville in mid-September next. Dr. J. M. Springer, newly-elected vice-president of the Council, was asked to continue leading in its organization, and to preside.

The next Congo General Conference was fixed for June 1933, at Leopoldville.

The standing committee on education, through its secretary the Rev. W. D.

Reynolds (who has followed the Rev. S. E. Moon, recently gone on Furlough, in this position and in that of principal of the Kimpese union training institution), made a report, out of which and the resulting discussion the following points are, among others, to be noted :

A. The need of an improved and enlarged educational system in our missions, to cover completely out-station schools, station schools, central schools and advanced schools. The out-station (bush) school are the background and foundation of our evangelical school work and are not to be neglected. A 3-years' station school is good but not more important than good regular « refresher » courses for outstation school teachers.

B. The difficulties of preparing pupils for government examinations were discussed. Without this examination our pupils cannot enter government teaching service and there exert their Christian influence. At present this service is filled almost entirely with Roman Catholic teachers and the government schools, become practically Roman Catholic schools: a grave menace to our work because of the extremely hostile attitude adopted by the Roman Catholic missions.

C. The government school program has been adopted by some Protestant missions in Congo Belge, with, of course, the permitted addition of full religious instruction of all pupils. At some stations the present standard is already in advance of the government program; at many it is equal to the latter, requiring only slight changes to bring it into complete conformity.

D. Government inspection was discussed. Once the government program is adopted and in operation, inspection would seem to present little difficulty. For many Roman Catholic schools, priests are appointed official inspectors; for Protestant schools the same plan should be possible, always working in conjunction with the local educational director of the government.

E. Sunday school work was discussed at length. The C.M.A. had more than 75 district Sunday schools organized in its field. The Bolenge arrangements include special rooms, Native teachers previously prepared, graded classes, special songs, illustrated lessons, hand work, « Junior church », etc. Desire was expressed to have articles on Sunday school work in Congo appear in the columns of the *Congo Mission News*, and we hope contributions will be received on this subject. The invitation is general to provide such material for publication.

A most promising step has been taken by the arrangement for an inter-mission conference on Lingala, the widely-used *lingua franca* in Congo Belge, to be held at the B.M.S. station of Yalamba beginning August 3. A number of missions will send missionaries expert in the use of this hardy language. After needed agreements have been reached there, it is hoped that the invitation can be accepted to send a « Lingala » expert or two to meet with the « Bangala » users of northeastern Congo, and that as a result a single language of this type can be adopted for use in all desired Congo areas, instead of two as at present.

The International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa of which Miss Margaret Wrong is secretary (2, Eaton Gate, London, S. W. 1) is occupying itself with all efforts to promote Christian literature for Africa. It is issuing a quarterly bulletin which will be sent gratis to missionaries requesting it.

The secretary has been asked to undertake an important survey of self-support in Congo on behalf of the International Missionary Council, as proposed at the Jerusalem conference in 1928. The C.P.C. approved this provided the necessary expenses could be met, and in order to do this the American Congo committee has

kindly agreed to meet such expenses to the amount of \$ 200. Mexico, Japan and the Congo have been selected as the three fields in which this intensive survey will be made, from which it is hoped to draw material that will be valuable to the missionary enterprise all over the world.

A statement was made concerning abuses in connection with Native labor which have been reported to the Council and concerning the government labor commission recently out from Belgium studying the whole question of Native labor in Congo Belge. Reference was made to the sincere efforts of the central government to suppress all abuses, but the Council felt it necessary nevertheless to place on record a strong protest against the labor irregularities and injustices which have been brought to its notice.

The secretary was requested to collect further particular information regarding such matters and to present them in the most effective manner possible to the government, notably to the Commission for the Protection of the Natives.

A review of the present situation as regards religious liberty in the posts and areas of certain large concessions in Congo Belge was given. The facts reveal a decidedly serious condition.

A committee was appointed to consider the whole problem, and it later brought in a report in strong but measured terms, which was approved by the Council. It was agreed among other things that full statements of all such cases with carefully documented evidence be prepared, and that legal opinion be secured thereon.

It is urged that the principles involved be presented to the next meeting of the royal Commission for the Protection of the Natives as to whether the right of entrée is not to be afforded Protestant missionaries and their fully appointed Native helpers to the concessions of all companies in the colony for the purposes of

worship, religious teaching and spiritual ministrations.

We now come to the special and difficult problem referred to at the beginning of this account : Religious freedom, Native liberty of conscience and worship, and Roman Catholic aggressions. In one sense this is no new problem in Congo Belge ; but it is new at least in this way : that never before has the Conseil Protestant du Congo found itself driven, reluctantly and regretfully but by the lash of absolute necessity, to plan officially and unitedly measures of self-protection against the intrigue and grossly illegal aggressions of the church of Rome.

The report of the commission of inquiry appointed by the Council at its 1930 meeting to hear and record on the spot evidence concerning the grave difficulties experienced from Roman Catholic sources at the Protestant station of Sundi Lutete in the District du Bas-Congo, Congo Belge, was read ; and further statements of terrible injustice, bitter persecution and unbelievable cruelty on the part of Roman Catholic priests against Protestants were heard by the Council. A committee was appointed to consider the whole serious question and report, which it later did as follows :

That the highest government officials of Congo Belge be presented personally and surely a carefully measured statement concerning the seriousness of the conditions that have existed and do still exist in certain sections of the colony because of unbridled Roman Catholic aggressions and the lack up to this moment of all redress. The government should be informed that certain Catholic priests by intimidation of chiefs, cruel flogging of men and women, kidnapping of women and children, destruction of Protestant houses of worship and other property,

and other utterly lawless acts, not only violate (a) the right to liberty of conscience and religious worship on the part of the Natives, and (b) the right of missions to fair and impartial treatment; but that they also (c) menace the peace and welfare of Congo Belge, diminish the respect for the government and its laws and its authority in the minds of the Natives, and thus are provoking situations which may become very serious for the Government, for which Protestant missions can in no way be held responsible.

A small group of Councillors was named, empowered and implemented to proceed on behalf of the Council in this very serious matter, and it is the hope of the whole Protestant group that the higher government authorities will find themselves, in the face of the mass of conclusive evidence now available to them, desirous and able to render justice and stop recurrences, which the lower officials have not done.

Every effort will be made to meet the grave situation caused by the unbridled, unchristian acts of the church of Rome without recourse to Belgian free public opinion, but should such recourse be unhappily rendered unavoidable by the impotence of the government in the face of powerful Catholic political influence, we are convinced that free public opinion in Belgium will be profoundly shocked and outraged at the lawless excesses indulged in and permitted in Congo in the name of religion.

Approval of an innovation in the *Congo Mission News* was given by the Council. Heretofore, throughout its 19 years of existence, no advertisements have been accepted. In recent times requests from prospective advertisers have been received, and this together with need for additional revenue for an enlarged paper led the Council to approve the acceptance of selected advertising.

The first advertisement to be accepted by the journal appears in this issue.

The cover space hitherto devoted to the list of Protestant missions and stations in Congo has grown insufficient for the purpose, and the Council decided that hereafter this list will not be published. Instead, periodically the secretary will prepare and issue separately to any so requesting a complete list of Congo Protestant missions and stations, with postoffice addresses.

The financial situation of the Council still is a cause for uneasiness. It has the handicap of having to establish itself on a somewhat broader and more expensive basis just at the time when world depression has curtailed funds for nearly everything. Had it not been for the generous assistance in 1930 from Dr. John R. Mott to the extent of \$ 1,000.00 (Fr. 35,000.00), the deficit at the end of the year would have been extremely serious. Even as it was there was still a deficit of some Fr. 3,000.00. The 1931 budget prepared by the Council does not balance by nearly Fr. 24,000.00, after every item of expenditure had apparently been pared to its minimum, so the financial prospect is not at all good for the end of the year unless outside gifts or increased member grants make up the difference.

The Council was desirous of wide publicity being given to the matter of annual memberships, open to all evangelical Christians interested in African missions who would pay Fr. 175.00 (£1 or \$ 5) or more per annum toward the work of the C.P.C. Free subscription to the *Congo Mission News* will hereafter be given to all annual members.

A large number of other matters of importance were treated by the Council, full report of which is made in the minutes

which have been sent to all Protestant stations in Congo, home societies, and others. Of them all, however, none was more vitally important than the call to prayer printed elsewhere in this issue.

The situation in Congo for the Protestant missionaries and Native Christians is fraught with grave difficulties. Month after month and in some places year after year, patience, forbearance, forgiveness of gross injuries has been the Christian rôle of the Protestant men and women, white and black. Every opportunity has been given the Catholic church to bring its Congo demeanor more nearly into line with the teaching and example of Jesus. But as elsewhere when it feels it has the power, it domineeringly refuses to do so. It relies on political intrigue, on social domination, on economic constraint to compel grudging acquiescence in its claims to temporal and spiritual monopoly. It is

thus at the moment all-puissant in Congo. But that it cannot remain so on such a basis is amply proven in history—and never more clearly than by contemporary developments in Italy, Spain, Jugoslavia, Malta, and other former Catholic strongholds. Based on such worldly craft it can never withstand the faith and prayers of earnest Christians, and it is to such prayer that friends of Congo are called.

It is a matter of great thankfulness to our Heavenly Father that now, when a time of great testing appears at hand, our Protestant forces in Congo march so closely shoulder to shoulder. For 53 years they have been side by side. For 20 Years they have been hand in hand in the Congo General Conference. For 19 Years they have been intimately linked in the Congo Protestant Council. They have a oneness in thought and a solidarity in action not excelled upon any other mission field of the world; and it is well.

Women's Page

Edited by Mrs. D. CHRISTY DAVIES
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IS IT TRUE?

more manageable than the girls, and much keener to advance; hence they are the path of least resistance for the workers. Is this true?

4. I am told that the women