SIMAO TOCO: AN ANGOLAN PROPHET

BY

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Introduction

The first Baptist mission to the Zombo people of north Angola was established by Thomas and Gwen Lewis and John Pinnock, missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society, in 1899. The first convert, Garcia Mayungulu, was baptized in 1906 and when four others were baptised the Kibokolo Baptist Church was formed in 1910. By 1923 membership had grown to 189. During the 1920's and 1930's the Kibokolo Church experienced rapid growth so that by 1938 membership had passed the 2,000 mark and the chiefs of over 80 villages and towns were clamouring for teacher-evangelists.

According to Portuguese law the Baptist Church had no legal existence apart from the mission, so a continuous missionary presence was maintained by the B.M.S. until the missionaries were ordered to leave by the Portuguese authorities in 1961. Even so, during the years of growth the missionaries had encouraged the church to be self supporting and, in consequence, a strong and capable African leadership had emerged.

The prophet movements of the 1920's which had their origins among the Kongo churches in the Belgian Congo, following the brief activity of Simon Kimbangu, did not make very much impact on the Kongo and Zombo churches of Angola. The statistics of the Kibokolo Church indicate that not a single member left to join the prophet movements during that period. In fact it was not until the refugee period (1961-1975) that many Angolans, by then in Zaire, were attracted to Kimbanguism. However, the movement started by Simão Toco was different. In its early period it attracted many Zombos who had gone to live in Kinshasa and later made considerable impact in a number of places in Angola.
Simão Goncalves Toco was born on 24th February 1918 at Sadi, a small town on the road from Maquela-do-Zombo to Kimbata, close to the frontier with the Congo. From 1926 to 1933 he attended school at the Kibokolo Baptist Mission. 'He was a very bright pupil, so far in advance of the rest of the children, that the mission supported him in a three year course at the Liceu Salvador Correia in Luanda from 1934-37.' During his stay in Luanda he participated in the life of the Methodist church.

From Luanda he returned to Kibokolo and taught at the mission school and for a year, during the absence of the Portuguese headmaster, he took charge of the school. He also organized evening courses for adults. With the return of the Portuguese headmaster, Toco was transferred to Bembe, the third of the B.M.S. stations in Angola, where he taught 1939-43. Though not a qualified teacher, he was permitted to teach by the Portuguese authorities provided his work was supervised, from time to time, by the Portuguese headmaster at Kibokolo. At Bembe, according to David Grenfell, 'Toco worked steadily and well and had a great influence for good amongst the boys and young men of the district.'

In 1943 he was given six months leave in order to get married to a Kibokolo girl, Mollie, who was the daughter of Pedro Sadi, the Secretary of the Kibokolo Church. Although the date had been fixed and the preparations made by the respective families, Toco did not appear for the wedding and never returned to his work as a teacher. Instead he went to live in Kinshasa. A dispute over his pay and conditions of work may have been the cause of his discontent. Emmanuel Kunzika (a former associate of Toco who was later to emerge as the leader of ALIAZO, the Zombo political party) suggested that he quarrelled with Bruno da Silva, the Portuguese headmaster.

In Kinshasa Simão Toco became active in the Baptist churches and organized a Bible study class encouraged by Ronald Salmon, a B.M.S. missionary, who had previously worked in Angola. He became secretary of various mutual aid societies, which is a clear indication that he was a trusted member of the Zombo expatriate community. He also formed a very successful Zombo choir which sang regularly in the Kinshasa churches and for some time there was no hint of a break with the church.

In 1944 he organized a voluntary association of mainly Zombo expatriates in Kinshasa which became known as 'Nkutu a Nsimbani' (Nkutu