

For national reconciliation and rebuilding...

A Broken Congo's Only Hope: Biblically Grounded Believers

Last November the Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC, formerly called Zaïre) held its second election since the fall of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, and since a decade-long civil and regional war that killed as many as 5 million Congolese in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Incumbent president Joseph Kabila was declared the winner with 49 percent of the vote.

International observers charged that a seriously flawed polling process and multiple vote-counting irregularities rendered the results suspect. Nevertheless the Congo's Supreme Court confirmed the tally, pre-empting any review of the electoral process. Joseph Kabila, who came to power after his father, Laurent Kabila, was assassinated in 2001, promptly took the oath of office. Three days later, Étienne Tshishekedi, who declared *he* had won with 54 percent of the vote, took his own separate oath of office!

It sounds like a farce, but it's actually a tragedy.

Operation World calls the Congo a failed state. Its territories, it points out, "have no centralized government, no connectedness between the vast and far-flung regions, almost no functioning infrastructure, and no single language or culture to unite its many diverse peoples. More than five million people have lost their lives through war, violence, starvation, and the virtual collapse of the health system. The wars of the 1990s and following embroiled the military forces of seven nations and provoked the rise of local inter-ethnic conflicts and warlords. Around 1.3 million people in the east of the country alone have been uprooted from their homes. . . . Those interned [in refugee camps] are vulnerable to militia attacks, disease, and sexual predation, living with little or no resources for anything beyond mere survival."

The most notorious current warlord is Joseph Kony, who launched more than 300 attacks last year on civilians not only in the Congo, but also in the Central African Republic, Uganda, and South Sudan with his ironically named Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

How did the Congo get to be such a basket case?

Until European and American explorers began their penetration of "the dark continent" in the 1870s, the tribes of the vast Congo basin—except for occasional raids by Arab slave traders—remained their own separate universe. But three years after famously locating David Livingstone in 1871, Welsh explorer Henry Morton

Stanley, financed by U.S. and British newspapers, followed the Congo River from its source to the sea. The river's great cataracts made this a hazardous, two-and-a-half-year expedition. By 1885, King Leopold II of Belgium had managed to finagle Western recognition of the Congo area (larger than the United States east of the Mississippi River) as his private property! His abusive exploitation of its people to profit from rapidly rising demand for that novel commodity, rubber, led Belgium to make it a national colony in 1908.

The Protestant missionary era in the Congo was launched when C.T. Studd, a British cricket star while at Cambridge University, after years of missionary service in Asia, in 1913 turned his attention to Africa. Once Studd focused the attention of the church on the Congo, missionaries poured in. Protestant missions brought schools and hospitals, and rapidly rivaled the Catholic institutions previously launched under the Belgians.

College Church's passion for missions is deeply entwined with the Congo's volatile history.

After World War I, four of the five children in the church's Winsor family invested their lives in the Congo. Amy went first in 1921. Then Earl married Mary Park, and the newlyweds embarked for Africa in 1926, accompanied by a third Winsor: Rachel. Two years later, Paul Stough, a World War I veteran, headed for the Congo, restored a lapsed engagement with Rachel, and married her the following year. During the years between the two wars, Bill, Jim, and Phil were born to the Stoughs, and, to the Winsors, Faith (Haddock) and a brother.

During the 1940s, both Rachel Stough and Mary Winsor died. In the meantime, however, two more single recruits had signed on with the Africa Inland Mission. In due course, Betty Quackenbush and Ada Rury became, respectively, second wives for the widowed Paul Stough and Earl Winsor.

The close of World War II allowed missionaries to begin taking long-delayed furloughs. En route to Alexandria, Egypt, to embark on a steamship, the Stough family's young Phil contracted polio (at the same time that Betty's appendix ruptured!). Phil, hospitalized for six months upon disembarking in New York, is convinced that his deliverance from the then-deadly disease can be explained only by the vigorous intercession effort mounted by College Church's Women's Missionary Prayer Group. In 1947, Paul Stough filled an interim pastoral vacancy at College Church before returning to Africa as AIM's Congo field director. Earl Winsor directed education for the Belgian authorities in the AIM sector, and represented the mission to them.

But in 1960, a nationalist movement led by Patrice Lumumba wrested power from the Belgians and brought independence. One year later, Belgian paratroopers and

forces from Katanga, the mineral-rich southern province, kidnapped and executed Lumumba. The chaos of that fighting and secessionist struggles that followed caused most expatriates to flee. Both the Winsors and the Stoughs were evacuated three times, the first two times the Winsors crossed briefly to Uganda and Kenya, the Stoughs returned to the U.S. The third time, the Winsors shifted to Kijabe, Kenya, where Earl taught in the school for Kenyan girls, and the Stoughs managed the AIM guest house in Nairobi. (After retiring, Earl Winsor served in College Church administration during a pastor-less stretch, and Paul Stough served as visitation pastor for a couple of years.)

David Dix, currently a College Church elder, also has roots in the 1920s missions thrust to the Congo, His grandparents, Earl and Helena Dix, went to the Congo with AIM, succeeded by his parents, Don and Alene Dix. A school classmate of David's at Rethy Academy in the Congo and then for high school boarding at Rift Valley Academy in Kijabe, was Greg Stough. Later, as an engineering student at John Brown University, David connected with Bill Stough Jr. That led to David's being invited to spend the summer of 1980 with the Bill Stough family, then on home assignment. David and family are still here!

Mobutu Sese Seko led a military coup in 1965, ushering in for a generation a more stable but extremely corrupt regime. But in 1996, Rwandan civil war and genocide led competing Rwandan and Ugandan armies to invade the Congo, overthrowing Mobutu's government. Laurent Kabila marched into Kinshasa and named himself president, launching the current political dynasty.

In the half century since the Congo won independence, its transportation infrastructure has deteriorated. Accessing isolated areas is costly, and Missionary Aviation Fellowship and AIM Air flights are indispensable.

The eastern and northeastern areas of the Congo, where AIM's work is concentrated, still experience regular violence from a patchwork of rebel forces and militias. The UN peacekeeping force of 19,000 soldiers there is impossibly overstretched. "Missionary involvement" in the Congo, *Operation World's* 2010 edition reported, "is reduced to a mere fraction of what it once was, due to war, instability, and the breakdown of communications and government."

Bible translation remains a major unfinished task. Early on, the profusion of tribal languages led to concentration on the four trade languages widely used in the Congo. But these, while useful for basic transactions, don't connect with one's inmost feelings as does one's mother tongue. The trade-language approach is now acknowledged to have limited gospel penetration and stunted development of indigenous Christian lifestyles, music, and worship. Dr. Alo Dradeb'o Nguma, late president of the evangelical seminary in Bunia that AIM was instrumental in founding, summed it up: "If we have problems in our country, it is because the

gospel has not penetrated to the heart. If it has not penetrated to the heart, it is because we have not given it to people in their heart language.”

David and Karen Bradley, our missionaries specializing in Bible translation for the Congo, and serving with Wycliffe Bible Translators from Nairobi, have reported that there are some 120 languages in the eastern half of the nation. At least half of these languages lack any Scriptures and also differ too greatly from any neighboring tribal language to allow their Scriptures to help fill the void. [The Congo’s western half, served by Wycliffe from two other out-of-country offices, is working with a roughly equal number of languages.]

The Bradley boys (Dave’s brothers Mark and Scott are also College Church members) were raised in Mexico, where their parents served as Wycliffe translators. Dave’s first nine grades of schooling were in Mexico, with summers spent in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where the brothers’ parents taught in the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, accredited through the University of North Dakota).

After graduating from Wheaton College, Dave taught high school for two years and served in a Christian camp in Wisconsin for another five, before sensing that he, too, belonged in linguistic work. He took the SIL undergrad course in North Dakota, then the masters-level course in Texas (accredited by the University of Texas, Arlington). That is where he met Karen, from Maryland. Both felt drawn to Francophone Africa. So since she was already fluent in French, Dave spent a year in France, acquiring the language while Karen completed her SIL course. Dave and Karen were married in 1990, spent a few months in Switzerland and France, and proceeded to Africa, beginning with an internship in Cameroon. They moved to the Congo in 1992 to work with Wycliffe’s Eastern Congo Group (ECG) and eventually began to supervise translation work in the Omiti language.

During the Congolese war years, access for expatriates was severely restricted, and even when obtained, security was often lacking. These roadblocks convinced the Bradleys and their Wycliffe colleagues that the traditional approach of assigning an expatriate family to invest several decades in analyzing and preparing initial translation of Scripture for a single language was inadequate for meeting the overwhelming need in a timely manner. So the ECG shifted to an aggressive new approach. Now the expatriate missionary assignment is 1) to identify and recruit available and capable Congolese to prepare draft translations from French Bible texts, 2) to train and equip them, 3) to coordinate simultaneous work in several languages, and 4) to check their Congolese partners’ work with them against the wording of the Bible’s Greek and Hebrew original languages. In 1996 the Bradleys shifted to Nairobi; from there Dave travels periodically to several centers for consultations in French with his Congolese translation colleagues.

Ten eastern Congolese teams are now translating the Scriptures into ten of its languages. The New Testament has been completed in one. David calculates that two others will complete the New Testament within two years; another four will require five to six years. He envisions an eight-year timeline for the remaining three. To the extent feasible, several teams work simultaneously on the same Bible book, and—where the target languages share common features—the translators work in parallel, observing how others are dealing with similar issues.

While the rest of the Bradley family remains in Wheaton on home assignment, Dave is preparing to return to the Congo in April to do translation checking with one team, now translating the Books of Ephesians and 1 and 2 Peter into Budu-Koya. From the other end, Dave's Congolese colleagues, Freddy and Anzabati are finalizing the schedule, and travel and meeting logistics. They've also obtained a letter of invitation from the Congolese church leaders (the basis for obtaining Dave's visa) and sent that, plus the draft translation of the Bible chapters, to Dave. Dave says he is very encouraged by the way these two, plus Anzetaka and Enzoga, the two Budu-Koya translators, have taken ownership of the project.

Operation World asks how a country with over 90 percent of its population professing Christians, can be so prone to "systematic rape, unspeakable mutilation and brutality, cannibalism, witchcraft, occult practices" and abuse and abandonment of thousands of children. Veteran missionaries are keenly aware that superficial, nominal belief, with an admixture of traditional African religious beliefs, is their primary challenge. *Operation World* spells out the challenge: "Large numbers have no clear grasp of repentance and faith in Christ nor of salvation by grace and not works. . . . There is a notable lack of biblical knowledge in most churches."

Bill and Ruth Stough have increasingly devoted their career, begun in 1957, to dealing with this glaring deficiency. They've developed two manuals designed to guide instructors in teaching a curriculum promoting discipleship and disciple-making. The targeted student audience is future pastors being trained in the 49 AIM-related Bible schools in the Congo. The manuals have been prepared and produced in French and Arabic, in Lingala and Swahili, the two trade languages understood throughout northeast Congo, and in some ten other Congolese and Rwandan tribal tongues. Typically Bill and a Congolese colleague have helped launch the two-year course by conducting a one- to two-week training session for prospective instructors. The curriculum has also been introduced in the Central African Republic. Recently an English version of the manuals has been added, and the curriculum has been introduced in Uganda and Kenya.

Although officially retired to Wheaton in 2008, Bill and Ruth continue to spend more time in Africa than the U.S.! For the near future, Bill is planning an initial visit to Chad plus a return tour to the Congo. Bill and Ruth's son, Bill Jr., is carrying on the

ministry his parents launched. He began in 1990 in the Congo itself, and then in 1996 married Laurie McKenna and transitioned to work with the significant Congolese exile population in Uganda. (Bill's younger brother, Tim, and his family are part of our church family here.)

Recently Dave and Karen Bradley shared with our congregation how gospel ministry holds the best hope for the Congo's reconciliation. They recounted how their colleague, Bagamba Araali, has worked with Dave in the Bible translation effort since 1994. He, his wife Banage, and their four young children belong to an ethnic group complicit in flagrant inter-ethnic violence. About ten years ago their home village, Bogoro, was caught up in a brutal cycle of attacks and retaliations. Several thousand people (more than 60 percent of the village) died, including dozens of their own family members and friends. Because Bagamba and Banage were living in the town of Bunia, about 15 miles away, they escaped the direct violence.

Now, six or seven years later, Bagamba and his family have returned from five years in England, where he earned a Ph.D. in socio-linguistics. Rather than looking for a comfortable professorship at a western university, they returned to the Congo to help meet its tremendous needs. Although overt violence has subsided over the last several years, inter-ethnic hatred still runs deep. Despite public pressure and personal emotions that cried out otherwise, Bagamba and Banage determined to take a stand for love and forgiveness. Over the past two years Bagamba has organized and led peace conferences in Bogoro and surrounding villages, applying practical biblical teaching to the trauma so many have lived through.

Last June, in a conference conducted in the Bogoro region, Bagamba reports, "the Lord gave us a surprise: Young people from both sides agreed to come face to face and promise peace to each other in the name of Jesus Christ. . . . Not all elders have yet openly expressed their official backing, although none has opposed the move. We have invited 60 elders (30 from each side)."

Bagamba made the scriptural principles culturally relevant by adapting a local peace-making custom. "Traditionally, whenever two enemy ethnic groups decided to make peace, they conducted a ritual called *omukago*, establishing blood brotherhood. We wanted to stay as close as possible to that ceremony, but inserted Christian content into the ritual. Instead of the exchange of blood between community elders, we used a large cross, representing the blood of Christ. We asked elders to show their commitment to the alliance by lifting up the cross while youth from the two communities stood under it, and one of many clergymen surrounding the teenagers prayed. They then shared a meal together.

"Instead of the expected 500 people, nearly 300 more—mostly uninvited—attended. Now we've received visits and calls from many who want us to start peace education in their villages, too. Our prayer is that the Lord would . . . bring

peace through the gospel where weapons have failed." This month, Bagamba just informed the Bradleys, members of both ethnic groups have decided to erect a concrete cross midway between their two main villages, a visual reminder of the reconciliation achieved.

To learn more, read these books, found in our library:

Grubb, Norman P., *With C. T. Studd in Congo Forests*, Zondervan, 1946

Dix, Earl with Bonnie Palmer Young, *Earl Dix: Adventurer for God*, Horizon House, 1987

Dowdy, Homer E.*, *Out of the Jaws of the Lion*, Harper & Rowe, 1965

Roseveare, Helen, *He Gave Us a Valley*, InterVarsity, 1976

Adolph, Harold Paul, *From Death to Destiny: I Should Have Been Dead*, Vantage, 1990

*Susan Dix's father