

Angola Revisited

— *T. Ernest Wilson*

Through the help and good offices of Brother Charles Shorten I was granted a 90-day visa to visit Angola from June till August 1982. I landed in Luanda the capital on June 2nd. There are four companies of African believers meeting in Luanda, representing four different language groups, Portuguese, Umbundu, Chokwe, and Songo. Many of these believers are refugees from assemblies in the interior. Along with Brother Shorten I had ministry meetings with all four groups. The Chokwe-Songo group is building a substantial chapel with their own labor and funds.

From Luanda, Brother Shorten and I went by plane to Saurimo in the interior. It is a strategic center with 36 assemblies in the vicinity. I had meetings in a number of them. Here we met Brother Roy Wood and Donald McLeod who were also in the country on a 90-day visa. They had just returned from a visit up north to the diamond area and to Camashilo where a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit has been going on for more than 40 years. No missionary has ever been able to settle there permanently, but Brethren Maitland, Louttit, McLaren, Leonard Gammon, McLeod, Wiseman, Allison, and David Long have been able to pay prolonged visits over the years to preach, teach, and guide the work. On this latest visit the brethren reported continued expansion. They reckon that here are approximately 150 companies of believers in the diamond mine area and about 90 in Camashilo. This is, in total, a completely indigenous work, self-supporting and self-propagating.

George Wiseman met us at Saurimo and brought us to Biula in the Chokwe-speaking area. He kindly took me to many of the assemblies in the district, including Luma-Casai where we were married 55 years ago. Doris Pitman and Marjorie Beckwith along with Mrs. Wiseman carry on an important medical and Emmaus correspondence work at Biula, at the same time paying periodical visits to Luma where there is no resident missionary. George Wiseman spends most of his time preaching and teaching among the assemblies over a wide area. We had the great joy and privilege of visiting and having a meeting with the assembly at Boma, where the work among the Chokwe people started in 1905. Dr. Leslie Biér and many honored fellow workers labored here for many years.

The mission station, chapel, printing press, schools, hospital, and missionaries' homes were bombed and destroyed in 1979 and no missionary has been there since. Brethren Wiseman, Wood, McLeod, and I went together. We found the assembly intact but without a meeting place, meeting in the open air under the trees. We had a meeting with them and tried to comfort and encourage these suffering saints. Sama- kwamba, an elder who has been with the work from the beginning, is still alive and active, although 90 years old! The believers told us of many assemblies along the railway line as far as the frontier at Teixeira de Souza, still carrying on testimonies.

From Biula I returned to Saurimo and Luanda. My great burden was, if at all possible, to visit Bié where we had spent the last 20 years of our service in Angola. The plane service to Silva Porto (now called Kwito) had been suspended but Charlie and Betty Shorten and I were able to get seats on a plane to Huambo, and from there to Kwito by road. Bié has been the scene of intertribal guerrilla activity since the change of government in 1975. All four mission stations, Chilonda, Capango, Chitau and Monte

Esperanca have been destroyed and looted and many of the African Christians killed. Others had to flee for their lives into the bush where they died of privation and hunger.

The road from Huambo to Kwito had been mined. Trucks had been recently blown up and people killed. But two African brethren, Amadeu and Eliseu Pinto took the risk and came to fetch us in an old battered Land Rover. Both men previously had hit mines on the road and although they escaped with their lives they both had ruptured ear drums from the explosion. (On the way back to Kwito the Land Rover broke down and we had to be towed in by a Portuguese truck!) We had a warm and emotional welcome by about 70 elders and leaders from the assemblies who had come to meet us. The brethren there had erected two chapels, one at Kwito itself and the other at Kunje about seven kilometers distant. This one seats about 700 people.

Brother Shorten and I had a week of ministry meetings with them. There were two sessions each day lasting two to three hours each. On the Lord's Day there were 1300 people at the gospel meeting, 700 inside and 600 outside in the open air. In the afternoon 37 believers were baptized in a nearby stream. We heard many harrowing stories of what had happened to some of our lifetime friends and children in the Lord. Most of my contemporaries are gone, but younger men have taken their place and are faithfully carrying on the testimony. Little groups of believers meeting simply in the Lord's name are springing up all over the country. From Bié we returned to Luanda where I spent the last two weeks of my visit to Angola. On the last Lord's Day at the gospel meeting in the Portuguese- speaking assembly, two African young men waited behind and professed faith in Christ. This was an encouraging climax.

Many parts of Angola today are comparatively quiet and there is an open door for the Gospel and teaching. But in other places, especially in the center and south, it would be very difficult if not impossible to go and do any effective work. Mined roads and guerrilla attacks are the reason. But we feel Saurimo should be occupied by a couple called and fitted by the Lord. Two languages are necessary, Portuguese and an African language. They badly need help at Buila, especially a brother able to minister and teach the Word. There is need everywhere but these are acute. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest!

Over 55 years ago Ernest and Elizabeth Wilson were married on the mission field and started their joint missionary careers. Now residing in New Jersey, they remain active in the Lord's work. Ernest is recuperating at present from a recent heart attack.

*Reprinted with permission
CMML Missions Magazine May 1983*