

# **B H S** Autumn Newsletter

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Welcome to the Autumn 2008 edition of the newsletter. In this edition we are glad to include both reports of events past, and news of things to come.

From the point of view of the newsletter itself, the most important news of what is to come is that we are ending the production of the newsletter in this form. Many of you already receive the newsletter by email, and we are hoping to take that method of communication further.

We will have one more newsletter in this format, in spring next year. After that, we will be developing an on-line newsletter, which will be accessible from the website. This will mean that we can update it more often, use the newsletter to include links to other sites of interest, and make the whole thing much more colourful and adventurous.

There will be more news in the spring edition. In the meantime, we hope that you enjoy this edition. Our thanks to the various people who have provided material both for this time, and over the years.

Ruth Gouldbourne. [ruth@bloomsbury.org.uk](mailto:ruth@bloomsbury.org.uk)

## Centenary Conference of the Baptist Historical Society

Birthdays are a time for looking back and looking forward. Members of the Baptist Historical Society were doing that at their centenary conference, held in the attractive setting of the IBTS in Prague, 16-19 July, as they focused on the theme, *Baptists and the World: Renewing the Vision*.

The tone of the meeting was set the first evening with the opening lecture by Bill Leonard, Baptist historian and Dean of the Divinity School at Wake Forest University in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Speaking on 'Conscience and Dissent in a Believers' Church: Renewing a Baptist Global Identity', Leonard suggested that in a world where the identity of the church is easily hidden in secular culture, one of the most enduring aspects of Baptist identity is the concept of un-coerced faith grounded in the power of conscience which leads inevitably to dissent. Conscience linked to un-coerced faith means that people can be trusted to interpret Scripture aright within a community of faith. Furthermore, Baptists, as a dissenting group, have always felt obliged to speak up for minority groups in a majority culture. The challenge to think again about what it means to speak out of a 'Christ-arrested' conscience and the need for Baptists to stand for the right of everyone to have a 'voice' (no matter how different their

opinions) led to lively discussion which continued long after the session ended.



Six other main speakers addressed the conference. These included Tony Peck on 'Baptists and Religious Freedom in Central/Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'. Keith Jones and Ian Randall also took pan-European themes, while Toivo Pilli narrowed the focus to Baltic Baptists, a region which had particular support from Britain in the last century, and their focus on mission. From the United States Karen Bullock returned to the 'Enduring Vision'. Linda Wilson illustrated the role of women in Baptist life by the work of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer, lecturer and editor, Marianne Farningham. In addition, seventeen shorter papers offered reflections on our past and future through studies of Baptist individuals and Baptist life in local or regional settings in various parts of the world.



The conference brought together a diverse group of women and men, ranging in age from 23 to 80, from Europe, North America, Australia and Japan, and including local pastors, lay enthusiasts, theologians, professors of history, and college principals. Enough were old friends to generate warm fellowship from the first evening. This happy gathering of Baptists from different cultural contexts set the stage for stimulating discussion on Baptist life and faith, past, present and future.



# Amsterdam 400; EBF Big Event

In the early 1600s a group of religious refugees from England gathered in the back room of an Amsterdam bakery to pray and study the Bible together. By 1609 a group of them had formed what we have come to know as core Baptist convictions, especially the necessity of a believers' church, separated from state control and practising believers' baptism. From these modest beginnings the Baptists spread through England, North America and Europe and beyond to become a world-wide movement with a community of around 100 million members today.

European Baptists will celebrate this significant 400th anniversary in Amsterdam from 24-26 July, 2009 in the splendid surroundings of the RAI Centre in Amsterdam. Baptists do not

only want to review their historical beginnings at this celebration event, but also seek to discern God's calling on them for the future. Like that first small group of believers in 1609 they will be challenged to 'dare to be different' as they face the challenges of today's secularised society as Christian believers.

The Amsterdam 400 conference provides a unique opportunity for the EBF family to come together in larger numbers for the first time since 1994. Inspiring speakers have been invited to draw on the past by exploring Baptists beginnings and yet help cast the EBF vision for the future. All this will be done in a context of lively worship which will draw on the full richness and variety of worship traditions within the EBF. The Amsterdam 400 event will also offer a full programme involving seminars, music, drama, and art. Focus areas will allow informal conversation and learning together on mission, religious freedom and human rights, theological education and Baptist history.

Young families will be especially welcome with a programme for children aged 12 and under.



## **THE BOBANGI HYMNBOOK. Part 1**

On the first Sunday of their time at Bolobo, in the then Belgian Congo, new missionaries would attend morning worship. It would have been strange if they had failed to do so but they could have produced a legitimate excuse for they would not have understood a word of the service! It was all in Bobangi, the local language.

Fortunately, they knew most of the hymn tunes and so were able to mime, possibly giving some of the inhabitants a false impression of their linguistic abilities. This state of affairs continued for about a year while they were learning the language and slowly the cloud dispersed so that they could sing both with the spirit and with the understanding also. This was the experience of my wife and me.

In the years that followed and even up to the present day, we came to appreciate the richness of the Bobangi hymnbook and to be thankful for those pioneers who translated so many hymns into that mellifluous language-“lokota zeni be”-a beautiful tongue.

The pioneers in Congo, as everywhere else in “missionary lands” had to learn many different languages in order to converse with the local people, preach the Gospel to them, translate the Scriptures and provide materials for worship. The edition I now possess, entitled “Nzembo li bonyambe”- literally “Songs of godliness”, (1) contains 568 hymns in Bobangi and appeared in 1961 as a revision of previous books. John Garside, the “senior man” at Bolobo, had asked me to supervise it and I still regard this as an honour.

Next to the translation of the Scriptures, production of hymns in the local vernacular has always been a priority for missionaries. If reading and writing proved to be culture shocks for the national population, corporate singing in worship must have been another. Up to that point, African singing had been of the “call-and-response” variety, usually restricted to the work situation. One person, either a man or woman, would

sing a line and others would respond either repeating it or making a suitable response. This enabled them to work more efficiently. "Much of riverine music was used to accompany paddlers in canoes. A soloist contributed various topical allusions to which the crew responded, thus urging the paddlers on. Many of the tunes were very musical (although these were never recorded. One wonders who would have had the time or technology to do this). The subjects varied-the exploits of a chief or comment on towns passed on the journey" (2). A. E. Scrivener, one of the pioneers at Bolobo, adapted one such tune to the words 'Ngai s'esengo, ngai s'esengosolo',-"I am joyful, I am joyful-truly!" and this appeared as no. 514 with the African tune "loyembo lo bwengo"- "the song of the canoe", in the 1923 edition, although to my knowledge we never sang it.

Converts entered a new mental world when they believed. These white men and women who had come among them actually wanted to learn their language! They made marks on a piece of paper with a wooden stick and then spoke to the paper. They also said that it spoke to them. More surprisingly, they even sang to the paper! For them all, men and women together, to sing the same words from a book, for "pleasure", must have been a quantum leap in their experience. They must also have been amazed that the missionaries knew so many different kinds of new songs. Yet from the beginning, the Gospel has touched people's lips when it entered their lives and it was not long before they were singing and making melody unto the Lord in their hearts.

Testimony to this fact appears in other African literature. In "Things fall apart" (Chinua Achebe), he recalls pioneer missionary efforts in Nigeria. "The missionary ignored him and went on to talk about the Holy Trinity. At the end of it, Ononwo was convinced that the man was mad. He shrugged his shoulders and went away to tap the afternoon wine. But there was a young lad who had been captivated...it was not the mad logic of the Trinity that had captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul...he felt relief as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were

like drops of frozen rain melting in the dry plain of the panting earth.” (p.106)

Scrivener’s colleagues recognised his varied contribution to early missionary hymnology. In a Missionary Herald obituary of 1916, R. G. Glennie wrote, “Realising the need for songs, with his earliest knowledge of the language, he set to work to weave those hymns which have now been sung by two generations of the people. These early hymns have been revised at each successive printing and in the last issue of the hymnbook of the Bobangi there are 96 of his hymns”. (3)

“Nzembo li bonyambe” passed through eight editions, the first of which appeared as a small collection of “hymns and songs” in 1892, when the Mission was in its first years. It contained 66 hymns. In the main, and as one would expect from an introductory book, they speak simply of Creation and Redemption. Fifty-six of them “made it through to the final”, appearing in the last edition. Prominent among the names of translators is that of AE Scrivener (Ekanda) although that of John Whitehead also appears. He was soon to outstrip Ekanda.

An interesting feature of this first edition was its use of the word “Nzakomba”. We used to sing “Nyambe (the Bobangi word for God) na nguya azalisi molongo” no. -“God through power created the world” This appeared as “Nzakomba na nguya...” I had never seen or heard the word before. According to Mr Wangoy Ikamba-Mackenzie, (4) it is an old expression for the deity, denoting the greatness of the Supreme One who made all things. Later editions of the book replaced it with the better-known word Nyambe

The second edition, issued in 1895, had grown to 123 hymns containing also “Misikiso Zomu”-the Ten Commandments, with responses.

The third edition in 1900 came in a much bigger format and with stronger binding, testimony to the printing work which Scrivener did in addition to translation. Printing, though not so creative as translation, is equally necessary to the advancement of public worship and from the Hannah Wade Press at Bolobo there issued a stream of publications of many kinds, all intended to help the infant Congolese Church. Some of the pioneers could turn their hands to

anything! This book contained 322 hymns in 64 (sic) sections and contained several Psalms “Nzembo li ba-Juda”-“Songs of the Jews”, which did not reappear until the 1961 edition.

In 1911, the fourth edition came off the printer’s press. Now it contained 519 hymns in 69 sections. It looked more professionally produced, giving information about the tunes and also containing a lot of hymns about the future life!

The 1923 version was somewhat smaller in size, with the same number of hymns in 37 sections (the present arrangement), the last two entries being the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments. The 1933 edition consisted of 527 hymns with more information about tunes and authors, while the 1940 version contained 552 hymns.

Translation is an elusive, if not impossible task. Each language has its own ethos and structure. Word-for-word translation even in prose can never give the sense of the original. It is doubly difficult when one has to translate poetry. Nkasa was one of those who, before the appearance of the Good News Bible, had grasped the significance of and practised the art of “dynamic equivalence”. A General Committee Memorial of 1953 says of him that “being a musician he realised the importance of hymn singing and that, although he could translate devotional hymns, his main strength lay in the realm of doctrinal and praise material” (5)

Almost every hymn in the book was a translation of an English hymn. Every tune likewise was of European origin. This was inevitable. It would be many years before Congolese Christians began to produce truly African material. Thus, the hymnbook provides an interesting glimpse into nonconformist evangelical worship of the later 19<sup>th</sup> C. It follows the standard format of those times, beginning with the praise of God, the praise of Jesus, His titles, His life, death and resurrection, prayer to Jesus, salvation and the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel, Christian life and service, devotional hymns, hope and the life to come, concluding with a surprisingly large section of children’s hymns.

One of the biggest and most obvious differences between the original hymns and their Bobangi translations is the lack of rhyme in the latter. English hymns depend on rhyme. Much of their charm comes from it and this is largely how we learn and remember them.

Often it is possible to retain this feature in European translations. For instance, the chorus to the French version of the well-known Easter hymn “Thine be the glory” goes “A Toi la gloire, o Ressuscité, a Toi la victoire pour l’éternité!” This also applies to other European languages that are German or Latin-based. The structure of Bantu languages, however, makes it practically impossible to find suitable rhymes and so one must try to convey the equivalent meaning. Thus, “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear” becomes “Yesu, Yee Moning’o biso, Yee akololinga be” or “Jesus is our Friend, he loves us very much”

One of the signs of Whitehead’s hymns is their style. Idioms abounded and made their singing a delight. Line after line would contain hardly any verb. In my second Bobangi examination, (do missionaries still take language exams?) I was asked to translate a verse which began “Mw’elemb’eke mpe Yesu pwe” It speaks of the Return of the Lord Jesus yet there is no verb in it. Literally, it says “A little while and Jesus ‘pwe!’”- an idiophone which describes a sudden outburst or manifestation, yet the meaning of the words is obvious. Similarly, Nkasa made use of the many idiophones which Bobangi contains. For example, the chorus of “bringing in the sheaves” became “Ngo (the involuntary expulsion of breath when one lifts a heavy load) na mbolo be”- “laden with fruit”-an expression which resonated with many a Congolese man or particularly a woman’s daily experience. Scores of such colourful expressions enriched the books, helping Congolese Christians to worship in an authentic way. Likewise, many verses show how a skilled translator such as Whitehead could produce idiomatic Bobangi without conjugating any verbs. Thus, the first verse of “While shepherds watched their flocks by night” appeared as:

Bakengeli o esobe bwa,  
Na mbata zo-zo-zo,  
Nde n’eko ntom’e ncengi pwe,  
Mpe liti longo wo.

(Nzembo li bonyambe. No. 97)

A literal translation would be:

“Shepherds in the field sitting down,-‘bwa’ (an indeclinable expressive adjective)  
And sheep all around,

But at midnight, an angel of light, ‘pwe’  
(another indeclinable adjective-“rapid or  
sudden coming out”)  
And darkness ‘wo’ (another indeclinable-  
gone!)”.

The English version needed at least three verbs. The Bobangi version used hardly any.

Other missionaries’ attempts seemed more prosaic. However, one must not judge the latter too hardly. In their childhood, they might never have dreamed of writing anything let alone hymns. Their efforts prove the power of the Gospel to release or produce gifts previously hidden.

Notes:-

“Nzembo li Bonyambe” imprimé a LECO (Librairie  
Evangélique au Congo”) for the Eglise du Christ au  
Congo, Section Baptiste du Moyen Fleuve, Bolobo-  
Lukolela.

2 Missionary Herald 1911

3 Missionary Herald 1917.

4. Mr Ikamba-Mackenzie is the son of Pastor Ikamba Salomon of the Basengele district of the Bolobo area. He married Miss Georgina Mackenzie, a BMS nurse and came to live in England. Over the years he has maintained a lively interest in his own people and supplied me with much information about the later situation.

5 Missionary Herald 1953

Fred Stainthorpe

# **Baptist Contributions, 1609-2009**

## **A Call for Papers**

The Baptist History and Heritage Society invites submissions for papers for its 2009 annual conference to be held June 4-6 at First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Alabama. The society is seeking innovative and engaging paper presentations on the following themes:

**Ethnic Contributions to the Baptist Experience**

**Baptist Contributions to Social Justice**

**Baptist Contributions to Missions and Evangelization**

### **Submission Guidelines**

Each proposal should state, as fully as possible, the purpose of the paper. Include a preliminary outline and a brief list of sources that will be used.

Proposals should not be more than 800 words in length. Proposals should include a title for the paper, followed by the author's name, position, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

Proposals must include brief biographical information about the author.

Proposals may be submitted via e-mail, fax, or United States mail. The deadline for submissions is **November 26, 2008**. Proposals must arrive on or before the deadline in order to be considered. Decisions about proposals will be made by December 14, and notification to participants will be forthcoming shortly after that date.

Send all proposals to:

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This arrived just in time to be included in the newsletter—apologies if it arrives too late with those of you who receive the newsletter by post. But perhaps the date of the conference might be useful.

## **Celebrating 400 years.**

**Whether we are able to go to the Gathering in Amsterdam or not, as historians, it is good to take note of such an important date—and to find ways of celebrating it.**

**Here are some suggestions, courtesy of (and adapted from) Charles DeWeese, the Executive Director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society in the USA.**

**1 Plan a special Sunday celebrating our story and history**

**Use readings that have shaped our identity, such as Matt 18;19, Rom 6;3-4, 1 Pet 2;4-5,9-10**

**Sing some of the historic hymns;  
Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our Father God, thy name we  
praise**

**Tell the stories of some Baptist pioneers—from 400 years ago, or in our own generation.**

**2 Organise a birthday party for the young people in the church—and talk about why it matters.**

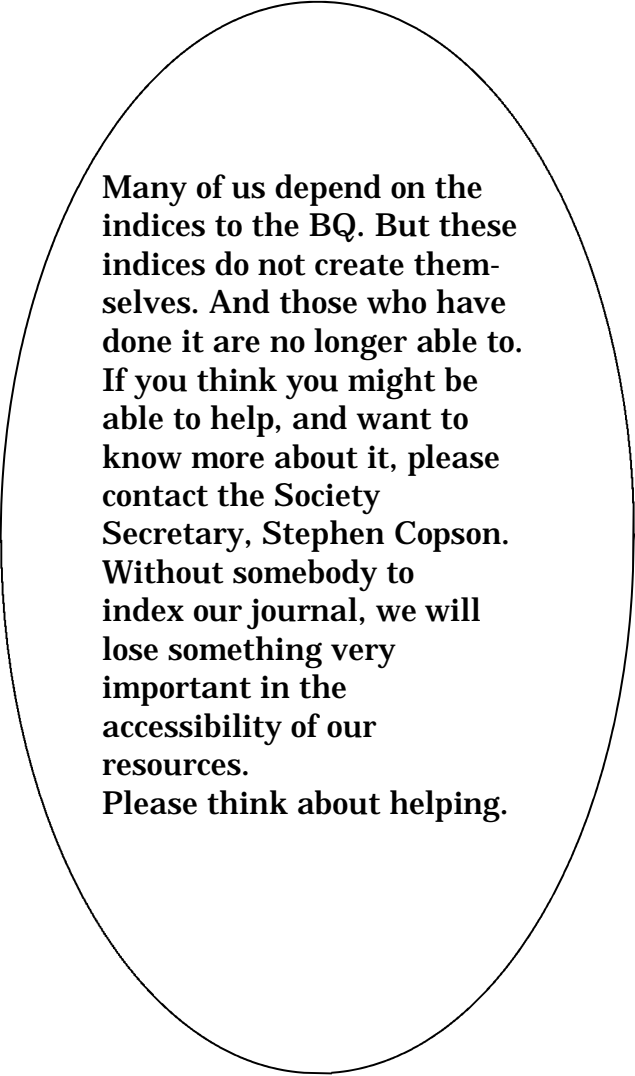
**3 Write a play, pageant or monologue that tells the story of the beginning, and that tells the story of the early days of your own church.**

**4 Prepare and publish a booklet telling the highlights of your own church's story, and the way in which these have linked with the wider Baptist themes— Lordship of Christ, need for personal faith and believers' baptism, authority of Scripture, congregational interdependence.**

**5 Do some work on oral history with the older members of your congregation (If you need help with this, please contact Ruth, address on the back)**

**6 Locate, organise and preserve your church's records.**

**If you do undertake some celebration, let us know about it. We hope we might share some of the stories and picture in the next newsletter.**



**Many of us depend on the indices to the BQ. But these indices do not create themselves. And those who have done it are no longer able to. If you think you might be able to help, and want to know more about it, please contact the Society Secretary, Stephen Copson. Without somebody to index our journal, we will lose something very important in the accessibility of our resources. Please think about helping.**