

RUSSELL STAPLES

Henri Monnier and the Establishment of the Adventist Church in Rwanda

God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, and the growth of the Adventist Church in the small Central African country of Rwanda has been one of the most remarkable developments in the history of Adventist missions. There are few places on earth where the enthusiasm of the lay people spreading the gospel overflowed all bounds, and growth was so rapid, and concern for care of the new converts so great, that responsible church administrators advised the local leaders to slow down the movement. It seemed as if a flood tide had been loosed and everybody wanted to become a Christian, and yet, there was nothing shallow or superficial about the movement. This is precisely what took place in Rwanda in the 1930s and early 40s. David Barrett reports:

Adventists came in 1919 although they were unable to establish themselves prior to 1921. Nevertheless, progress was rapid thereafter, and the Adventist community is now second in size only to the Catholic Church.

Newer missions have been established, but all remain small. Except for Adventists who are found in all parts of the country, Protestantism is characterized by a regional orientation.

Church statistics 1970: Catholic 1,684,095, Adventist 200,000, Anglican 161,899. Population 3,679,000. (Barrett 1982:589)¹

The major features of the establishment and growth of the Adventist Church in Rwanda are described in this article by relating the remarkable life story of Henri Monnier, who entered Rwanda with D. E. Delhove in 1919. Justification for this approach is found in the fact that by the mid-1930s Adventists in Rwanda were often called *Abanyere*, meaning

the people of Munyeri—the Kinyarwanda pronunciation of Monnier. In addition Monnier was given the name *Rukandirangabo* meaning “The mighty one—the shield bearer.” However, this is certainly not meant to imply that Monnier worked alone. Delhove was the effective leader of the Adventist missionary venture in Rwanda, and in due course, a growing number of very dedicated missionaries joined them.

Henri Monnier, 1896-1944, was born in Pieterlen (Berne, Switzerland), to parents who had become Adventists in 1890. According to an older brother, Vital, his father was “an elder in the church and had a remarkable gift of speech: a trait that Henri inherited.” The family moved to Chaux-de-Fonds a few years after Henri was born and he attended the small Adventist school at Tramelan. His father specialized in manufacturing luminous watch and clock dials. Henri went to England in 1915 to escape the draft, sold watches, established a dial manufacturing business and married an English lady, Winifred Maddams, who had formerly been an officer in the Salvation Army. According to Vital, Henri did not attend Stanborough Missionary College and had no more than eight years of education. He was an enthusiastic Adventist and after he met Delhove, much to the surprise of his family, sold his prosperous business and prepared to accompany Delhove to Africa on missionary service.

David Ellie Delhove 1882-1947, who operated a shoe manufacturing business in Belgium became an Adventist in 1906 under the ministry of Elder J. Curdy. After study at Watford College and Caterham Sanitarium in England, he was called to assist A. A. Carscallen at Kamagambo in Kenya. Leaving his wife and two little daughters behind he left for Africa in 1913. War broke out before his family could join him, and when conscripted for military service in the Belgian army he decided to accept a noncombatant role in Africa rather than returning to Belgium. He served as an intelligence scout for the Belgian command and travelled widely in Rwanda and the Eastern Belgian Congo. He thus became well acquainted with the country of Rwanda and its peoples and with several of the Belgian authorities (Delhove 1984:5-9). He was granted a military furlough to Belgium in 1918, was reunited with his family, and then went to England where he studied pharmacy and established a relationship with the Monniers. The burden of his heart was to return to Africa as a missionary to the people he had come to love. He shared this passion with the Monniers and they decided to accompany him to Africa.

Rwanda: Mission Background

Before describing the Delhove-Monnier experience it is necessary to present a brief political and religious history of the country they were about

to enter. The 1884 “Scramble for Africa Conference” at Berlin dealt with both political and missionary issues. Germany, which exercised colonial authority in neighboring Tanganyika, was accorded responsibility for Rwanda. Recognized Mission Societies were accorded liberty to establish stations and erect buildings, in the African colonies (Neill 1987:359). The White Fathers, who had suffered severe loss during the civil war between the British and French in Uganda over both political and religious fractions entered Rwanda in 1890 with the hope of establishing a state church. However, to their dismay, Dr. Kandt, the German Resident, invited the Lutheran *Bethel bei Bielefeld* Mission to commence service in the country. Under the direction of Ernst Johanssen they entered in 1907 and established several stations. Then the calamity of the First World War struck. Belgian military rule was established in 1916 and the Bethel missionaries were forced to depart. That is when Delhove, a Belgian citizen, entered the service of the Belgian command and travelled widely in Rwanda (Delhove 1984:7-9).

The Delhove and Monnier families embarked for Africa in March 1919. After their sea voyage to the Belgian Congo, a long trip up the Congo River, long journeys on foot, and then up to lakes Tanganyika and Kivu, they landed at Kibuye in Rwanda five months after their departure from England. Rubengera, one of the former Bethel missionary stations was only four miles away. A section of the station was being used as a military post but Delhove, who had established a positive relationship with the Belgian authorities during the war, obtained permission to temporarily occupy several of the buildings. They went there without delay, and none too soon, for Winifred gave birth to a baby girl named Olive on Aug. 24. A month later Clara, the third Delhove daughter, was born.

Getting Established

Delhove and Monnier paid a visit to General Brassel, the Belgian Resident, at Kigali and inasmuch as the German missionaries had been denied permission to return to Rwanda, they were granted permission to occupy the Bethel stations. The Delhoves settled in at Kirinda while the Monniers remained at Rubengera, but also continued working at Remera. Then tragedy struck. Mrs Monnier, who had not been well since the birth of Olive, passed away and was buried at Kirinda. Mama Delhove took care of little Olive and Monnier moved to Remera. He and Delhove, anticipated permanent residence at these stations and set about restoring the buildings and gardens and establishing positive relationships with the Christians in those communities.

After about twenty months of hard work, they experienced a disconcerting blow. They were informed that the Bethel sites had been granted to the Presbyterian *Societe Belge de Missions Protestantes au Congo* (SBMPC) (Twagirayesu 1982:760). However, they were granted permission to search for suitable sites and relocate. All the work of repairing the buildings and planting groves of timber and fruit trees was lost. But they had established very positive relationships with a number of the former Bethel converts. Several of these decided to leave with them and formed their first corps of teachers and workers. This group of workers contributed much to the establishment and development of Adventism in Rwanda. Several of them subsequently returned to visit their families and friends at the now Presbyterian missions and led them to join the Adventist Church. In addition, a couple of them became Monnier's assistants in his translation work.

In 1921 the Delhoves established a mission station at Gitwe, which in due course became the center of Adventist work in Rwanda. A. A. Matter, a former Swiss missionary from Kenya, joined the group and accompanied Monnier to establish a station in the Eastern section of the country. It was at that time that the group suffered a third setback. After serious work in establishing a station at Kabangiri, near Lake Mohasi, they were advised that the Eastern section of the country had been granted to the British for the construction of the Cape to Cairo railway and they had to relocate.

After a prolonged search, they found a suitable site at Rwankeri in the northwest of Rwanda at an elevation of about 7,600 feet, in full sight of Mt. Karisimbi, and moved there with several Rwandese co-workers. Monnier set up residence in a small pole and thatch hut and they commenced erecting the mission buildings. The Matters left on furlough shortly after the transition, but Monnier remained there alone for two full years.

It was doubtless during those early years of solitude, when in grief at his loss of his loving wife, and in devotion to his task, that he identified with the local people and learned to speak Kinyarwanda as if it were his mother tongue. There was much work for him to do. In addition to establishing positive relationships with the community he took the physical duties of establishing a mission seriously. Men who were with him during those early years at Rwankeri speak with respect and awe about the way he made bricks with his own hands and stayed up at night when they were firing the kilns. They also describe the way he taught them to lay the bricks, saw and smooth wood, and make doors and windows. Due to the difficulties of his hard work, and living alone, his health suffered. Delhove, on a visit from Gitwe, strongly advised him to leave on furlough, take a course on tropical medicine, find a wife, and not fail to return.

Monnier left for Switzerland soon after the Matters returned and fulfilled all of these recommendations. He married Olga Pavlov, a nurse and Bible worker who was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, but who had moved to Switzerland. Monnier earned a diploma in tropical medicine, which qualified him to receive free medicine for the mission from the Belgian administration. He returned to Rwanda with his new bride toward the end of 1924. Witnesses describe the joy and happiness with which they were welcomed at the mission. The community organized a grand celebration at which they “sang and sang and danced and danced.” During his absence the Matters had made many improvements at the mission and expanded its work. Miss Marie Matter, a pharmacist who had accompanied her brother on a self-supporting basis, had opened a small clinic that was highly effective in breaking down barriers and in strengthening the bond with the local people.

The team settled down to serious business—erecting more buildings, preparing teachers, opening a school and four out-schools with five African teachers, and commencing evangelistic work. Henri began his serious commitment to translating the Bible. Writing to his brother Vital in November 1924, he described how busy he was during the day and that his nights were spent translating the Book of Acts. He concentrated on Acts because, at Kirinda, they had found a Kinyarwanda translation of the four Gospels made by the Bethel missionaries.

The Gitwe Year, 1925-1928

Delhove was called to establish a new mission in Burundi in mid-1925 and the Monniers were transferred to Gitwe where he directed the work until the Delhoves returned in mid-1928. Several important developments took place during these three years.

First, in 1925 H. E. Guillebaud, a Cambridge educated linguist, arrived at Kabale with a commission from the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) to translate the Bible into Kinyarwanda. Both Delhove and Monnier had established positive relationships with the SBMPC and CMS missionaries and visited them during their travels (Twagirayesu 1982:1080). Guillebaud, upon making contact with the Protestant missionaries and informing them of his mission, invited Monnier to join the translation group because of his mastery of Kinyarwanda.

Second, Monnier was invited to teach the young Tutsi at the court of Musinga, the Tutsi *mwami* (king), at Nyanza. The religio/political situation in Rwanda was extremely complex at that time. The Belgian authorities had established a system of indirect rule and placed pressure on the *mwami* to execute their policies. The White Fathers, who had established

many stations and converted many Hutus, but had failed to reach the Tutsi, were also placing a lot of pressure on the *mwami* to support their work. In reaction to these pressures, the *mwami* turned to the local Protestants. Inasmuch as Gitwe was the station closest to Nyanza, Monnier was invited to teach the essentials of Christianity to the young members at the court. Once a week, for much of his time at Gitwe, Monnier rode to Nyanza on his small motorcycle and conducted classes. At the outset, only the group at the court attended, but in due course the surrounding chiefs and others joined them. The *mwami* often attended, and at times more than two hundred were present. Geoffrey Holmes, of the CMS reported: "We need a worker at Nyanza. Thus far only an Adventist European visits once or twice a week" (1927:22). Later the CMS missionaries were also invited to the court (Linden 1977:167, 185).

Monnier established a positive relationship with the *mwami* and his son, Rudahigwa, who was appointed to replace his father in 1931. We do not know if there were any direct conversions of the court group—group pressure would certainly have prevented individual conversions—but many of the others who attended joined Bible study classes. It is too bad that more is not known about these visits and what Monnier taught. It is well known that he kept a diary, but unfortunately, this too has been lost.

As a result of these visits the Catholics took the Protestants seriously and the stage was set for considerable Catholic/Protestant tension. In order to curb Protestant expansion the Vicar Apostolic ordered the erection of temporary structures within the areas that had been assigned to the Protestant missions (Linden 1977:168). In due course Monnier, as did members of the other Mission Societies, contacted the Belgian administration staunchly protesting these incursions into their designated territory. Linden refers to these incursions as the "defiantly planted flags of the religious scramble" (1977:168).

Monnier gained other benefits from his connection with the *mwami* court. While living alone at Rwankeri he had learned to speak the local dialect, but was now accorded the opportunity of learning the official court Kinyarwanda. This made him of inestimable value to the translation committee. Second, discussion with the young men at the court gave him the opportunity of deepening his understanding of the Banyarwanda culture and religion. One can almost observe his understanding of the traditional culture and religion growing as one reads the articles he wrote for church papers. Writing from Gitwe, he describes some features of the traditional religion.

With these people, everything that happens is supernatural. Therefore, they must do their utmost to gain the favor of the gods that cause "bad luck." There is a true God they believe, but they do not

care much about Him, for He in His goodness will not do them much harm. There is a world of bad spirits . . . whom we may rightly call their god . . . that can harm them. It is composed of their people who have passed away . . . [and to whom] they must make sacrifices to appease the wrath of any bad spirit. (1926:12)

In response, Monnier worked to create a Christian community which could provide social and moral support for new Christians when they were no longer welcome in the communities of their birth. “A little church has been organized . . . [since] surrendering is not a light matter. It means the sacrifice of old friends, an old association must pass to make room for a new class of people, all striving together for eternal life. No more pagan fears, no more mystical worship. . . . Jesus is all to them” (12). Because of his grasp of the local language, culture and religious beliefs of the people, Monnier was uniquely qualified to communicate the gospel in ways that engaged the local consciousness.

Bible Translation

A conference on the translation of the Scriptures, presided over by the Rev. Roome of the British and Foreign Bible Society, met in Kirinda on April 11-20, 1927. The participants included H. Guillebaud of the CMS, E. Durand, J. Honore, and A. Lestrade of the SBPMC, and H. Monnier. Monnier and Mrs. Guillebaud functioned as joint secretaries. Notice the report of that meeting:

We began with the orthography . . . [as to] how the native sounds should be written. . . . Then we discussed transliteration . . . [of] words for which there is no Kinyarwanda equivalent. . . . Then came a list of religious terms such as words for God, the Holy Spirit, angel, demon. . . .

So far I have simply summarized what we discussed but to give any idea of the wonderful working of God in this conference there is more to be said. . . . A feeling of real mutual regard and friendship sprang up. (Guillebaud 1927:8-21)

It was wonderful that Monnier, with limited formal education and without a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew functioned so well with this highly educated group. Bible translation subsequently became a major part of his missionary service. It is quite incredible that he managed to fulfill his designated translation assignments as well as the missionary responsibilities of erecting buildings, directing the mission and its workers, teaching classes, writing course outlines, and organizing evangelistic bands.

On January 24, 1928 while attending a conference at the Gendia Mission in the Congo, Monnier was ordained. In August of the same year he attended the Missions Council at Marienhöhe in Germany attended by leaders from the General Conference, and missionaries from other parts of Africa, the Far East, and Persia. While there he gained a wider view of the outreach and methodology of Adventist Missions in other parts of the world and returned home enriched and encouraged (Bartlett 1928:5, 6).

Return to Rwankeri

The Delhoves returned to Gitwe in 1928 and the Monniers moved back to Rwankeri where he worked for the remainder of his missionary service. The Adventist Church in Rwanda was granted *Personnalite Civile* by a royal proclamation on July 18, 1928. The legal representatives of the mission listed in the document were D. E. Delhove, A. A. Matter, H. Monnier, and M. Duploux (Coronet 2005:255). This was encouraging and gave them a new confidence in dealing with the authorities and other mission bodies.

The work of the church had expanded considerably by 1929. C. W. Bozarth, who had recently been appointed Superintendent of the Rwanda mission, reported on his first visit to Rwanda that there were now six missionary families, sixty-eight local workers, and thirty-one village schools centered around three mission stations with an enrollment of 2,417.

At Rwankeri “every Sabbath about 1,500 attend . . . services and the influence of the mission has gone out many miles in every direction. . . . A spirit of evangelism is getting hold of our European and native workers. The month of July of each year is given over to evangelistic work. . . . We are looking forward to a great harvest of souls” (Bozarth 1929:20, 21).

Soon there was another great setback. In 1928 and 1929 there was a dreadful famine. More than 35,000 died and 70,000 emigrated to Uganda (Linden 1977:168). Apparently, the Tutsi chiefs hoarded their own food supplies and denied the Hutu workers access to those resources. As tension and opposition to the chiefs rose, the Belgians encouraged the *mwami* to visit the provinces and drum up support. The *mwami* crossed the Nyabarongo River in 1929 “in defiance of the tradition of the ‘Yuhi’ kings” and received a warm welcome (170). Monnier was one of those who went to welcome him.

A few years, later after Musinga had been deposed and Rudahigwa had been elected as *mwami*, he also went north and, inasmuch as he had known Monnier well in earlier days, visited Rwankeri. He spent the night at the mission, ate with the mission group there, even though he was a Catholic. Both of these visits added impetus to the strong Adventist

movement and boosted the standing of Rwankeri and its programs of education and evangelism in the community. Monnier described the situation at Rwankeri in 1930 as follows:

We are surrounded by Catholics. . . . In a territory where we have only two European families they have between seventy and eighty priests . . . we have strong opposition and many obstacles.

The Northern section of Ruanda . . . did not show any advance until 1929 . . . but the spiritual life has become brighter and there is ground for sound hopes. . . . Remember this field in your prayers. (1930:5, 6)

More on Bible Translation

At the same time, Monnier was heavily involved with Mose Segatwa in Bible translation and attended several more conferences. Guillebaud reported the following regarding the ongoing translation work:

M. Monnier of the Seventh-day Adventists has been here twice for short visits and has given me a number of criticisms of the translation of the Gospels. Some of these, which affect not only the Gospels but numerous passages in the Acts and Epistles as well, seem to Samsoni and me to be entirely right and I am most anxious to adopt them. But M. Honorez does not agree at present and at his suggestion there is going to be a conference between him and Monnier and myself at Kabale . . . to discuss these matters. (1930:16-19)

A year later, he wrote: "As regards the Gospels, I am delighted to be able to tell you that M. Monnier . . . has just bought 500 more copies and that there is good hope that their station may buy yet another 500. We were led to spend a night at his station, Rwankeri, on our way from Shira to Gahini" (1931:6-9).

In his farewell letter written in April 1932, Guillebaud wrote:

Dear Friends of Ruanda: What great cause there is for thankfulness in the cooperation and friendly attitude of M. Honorez of the Belgian Mission and M. Monnier of the Seventh-day Adventists. As I look back to the atmosphere of opposition and suspicion that prevailed up to the time of the Kirinda Conference in April 1927, and during the first days of the conference itself, I cannot but feel lost in wondering praise when I consider the last few years and the present position. M. Monnier has been and is most appreciative of the translation work and most generous in waiving his objections where we disagree in order that there should be no hindrance to the translation. (1932:35-38)

A. C. Stanley Smith was appointed to carry on Guillebaud's work of translating the Bible. The Old Testament, Joshua to Malachi, with the exception of the Psalms, was still to be translated and he maintained the relationship with Monnier. He spent a weekend at Rwankeri and preached a Sabbath sermon on Hebrews 11. In 1957, when the entire Kinyarwanda Bible was published, the names of both of the Adventists involved in the translation process, H. Monnier and A. L. Hands, were entered in the flyleaf along with the other translators. In addition, a commemorative plaque was presented to Mrs. Monnier, in recognition of the outstanding contributions of her husband by W. J. Bradnock, Secretary for Translations, of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Revival and Growth

From the early 1930s onward, employing a three-phase strategy of health care, education, and community evangelism, the church began to grow rapidly. As education came to be more appreciated, the school system was expanded and each school became a center of evangelism for the surrounding area. Sheets of hand written hymns were distributed and the children learned to sing gospel hymns with great enthusiasm. Vespers were conducted on Friday and Sabbath evenings and the teachers also conducted church services at the schools.

Monnier produced a series of sermon notes and a baptismal manual the teachers could follow. The East African Revival, during which there was a general turning toward Christianity, took place during the mid 1930s, and Adventists maximized the opportunity. Preachers, teachers, and groups of enthusiastic laypeople were organized into groups and went out to assigned areas for a month or longer and engaged the community in inspiring meetings and Bible study.

Monnier was active in organizing and directing these groups. These revival meetings led to a wide expansion of the church, which while more rapid in the Rwankeri area, also took place around Gitwe and in Rwanda generally. Hutu and Tutsi were united in enthusiastic response to the gospel and to an underlying feeling that the Adventists were teaching and practicing the true gospel. The success and enthusiasm of these revival meetings evoked considerable, and sometimes vigorous opposition by Catholic clergy and chiefs.

All of the chiefs if they wish to remain chiefs must become Roman Catholics. One of the chiefs . . . had called for a school. Then when the school was opened . . . the White Father himself came right on to the hill and told the people that if they attended our school a great famine would come on them. The chief then being frightened turned on us . . . and threatened to burn the hut of the natives who took care of our

blackboard and slates unless they also turned on us. He threatened to punish all the scholars who attended our school. (Bozarth 1933:5-7)

Monnier was active in opposing and reporting improper incursions into the schools and revival services. On one occasion, in response to continuous serious conflict at Rambura in the Rwankeri district, the Belgian Resident came in person from Kigali to settle the matter. Lining up Monnier and the priest Vitalox and their supporters before him the Resident said: "I have come to let you know the view of the Belgian government on such matters. We give freedom to every denomination. Each of you is free to choose the faith you belong to." Then he addressed Monnier and Vitalox in turn and commanded each not to intrude on each other's territory (interview with Pastor Nsengiyumva). Both the CMS and SBMPC had similar difficulties with the Catholic Fathers.

Because Monnier was not at all reluctant to interact with the chiefs and White Fathers on the many occasions when they obstructed the functions of both schools and revival meetings, he was given the name *Rukandirangabo*. There were additional reasons for giving this name to Monnier. The general society in Rwanda was organized along the lines of a semi-feudal system, called *Ubuhahe*, in which the ordinary people provided labor for the chiefs. At times of stress such as that produced by a drought, or when for other reasons the days of labor demanded by the chiefs were increased, life was very difficult for the peasants. Under such circumstances, Monnier became a great protector of the people. He appealed directly to the chiefs, defended the rights of the ordinary people, and if unsuccessful appealed to the Belgian administrators to restore the generally accepted order. Hence, he was called *Rukandirangabo*, "the mighty man, the protector, the shield bearer."

The socio/religious status accorded Monnier added to the appeal and vibrancy of the revival. As the years passed the number of the month-long July revival meetings increased and also the breadth of their outreach. Enthusiastic singing added to the attraction of the revival meetings. The Kinyarwanda hymnbook of popular gospel hymns, many of them translated by Monnier, was published in 1932.

For the remainder of the 1930s, and well into the 1940s, the church continued to expand rapidly. This is revealed in reports published in denominational papers by church leaders who visited the area. Bozarth describes his visit to one of these new districts:

A week ago it was my privilege to visit with Elder Monnier a new interest in a district where our work has never touched before. On Sabbath, there were 1,200 people out to services. Between five and six hundred of these are now members of our Bible classes. Five months

ago, there was not a single Adventist in this district. . . . During our special evangelistic month some teachers with a few Missionary Volunteer members went into this district . . . [where] they met determined opposition. Several times their meetings were entirely broken up and many of the interested ones persecuted.

Never have I seen people so eager to accept and follow the truth. . . . In the Rwankeri district alone, there will be over 600 additions to the Bible classes for the last quarter of the year. (1933:5)

Fifteen months later, A. F. Tarr, secretary of the Africa Division, reported on a visit to the area:

On the Sabbath morning at Rwankeri we found gathered together for Sabbath School and church a vast congregation of 7,157—the largest gathering that has ever assembled on any of our stations in Africa. . . . The missionary volunteers have in a most remarkable way contributed to the up building of the work. So much so that the result of their labors has caused Brother Monnier great perplexity. He said, “The workers are unable to care for the large flock of new believers, and funds are not available to add to the force. . . . We have had great increases in souls with a budget cut year after year.” With an earnestness which cut to the quick, Brother Monnier stated: “I am not here to beg . . . but I cannot carry on the work with our actual budget.” (1934:13-14)

This was during the great financial depression and additional funds were not available, but the work continued unabated. Many of the volunteers were so enthusiastic that they neglected their gardens and concentrated on the ingathering of souls. Monnier feared that if there was another famine thousands would be utterly destitute. J. F. Wright, president of the Africa Division, described the Sabbath morning service at the camp meeting at Rwankeri in August of 1935:

Following breakfast Elder Evans and the writer stood . . . to watch the people as they came from the hills and the valleys. . . . As we used binoculars, we could see them coming from everywhere. They literally came by the hundreds . . . in one company . . . more than a thousand.

There is no question but that Elder Evans spoke to at least 18,000 people that morning. . . . I presume there has never been such a large gathering in the history of our work. . . . We were pleased also to see a number of chiefs present, who, prior to this time had been very bitter in their opposition toward us. Now some of them are becoming very friendly and they are offering to let us open schools in their districts. . . . On Sunday morning 145 were baptized after having been very carefully examined. (Wright 1935:5-6)

Five years later Elder Wright reported:

The next week-end brought us to Rwankeri. Here we found Elder Monnier with his usual smile . . . Strong plans were already formulated for the camp-meeting. Now talk about a very vivid thrill! Well we were given it here when almost 20,000 people came to the services on Sabbath. It is difficult... for anyone to visualize such a mighty con-course of people at a religious service.

A letter just received from Elder Monnier reveals "that during July and August of this year 257 companies composed of our workers, and 1,458 lay-members, or Missionary Volunteers were out in the field. Their goal in soul winning was to win just over 3,500 souls to Christ during this six-to-eight-week period. . . . God is doing great things around the Rwankeri Mission! (1940:2, 3)

The revival continued and the church expanded and grew across Rwanda. This story about the church in Rwankeri area is important for two reasons. First, because there is quite a bit of direct information about membership growth in this area. Second, because of the concentration on the missionary experiences of Monnier, one of the very dedicated and effective missionaries who lived and shared the gospel of our gracious Lord in Rwanda.

Monnier's Final Days in Rwanda

There was a tragic change in the life story of the Monnier family during the next few years. The revival, increase in numbers attending the Bible classes, and growth and spread of the Adventist Church continued unabated. Then the Second World War broke out. In late 1939 his wife and family returned to Switzerland, but he felt that he could not leave his co-workers and the work that was progressing so rapidly, so he remained in Rwanda. In 1941, he obtained a *viza de retour* and joined his family in Switzerland. However, upon submitting papers for his return after a brief homecoming he was advised by the Belgian authorities that he was denied permission to return to Rwanda.

Upon pursuit of the matter, both personally, and by church officials, Governor Ryckmans advised that the administrators would be very happy to have Monnier return but not before the end of the war. When pressed for a reason he mentioned that it was well known that Monnier was a pacifist and that in the event of a German attempt to enter and take control of Rwanda he would effectively oppose conscription into the army. His influence was so great and widespread that the Belgian authorities felt it unwise to admit him while this threat continued. Thus, he was denied permission to return.

These were very sad and discouraging days for Monnier. He was offered a pastoral ministry in Switzerland, but could not settle down, and friends there said he seemed sad and discouraged. He was also offered other missionary positions in Africa but declined—his heart was in Rwanda.

Monnier's love for the Lord, his sense of responsibility to continue God's work, and his burden to give direction and meaning to the lives of the many who had responded to the gospel dominated his thought. How could his commission to fulfill the work of God be put aside so simply by earthly political situations? God's work could not be left half done. After giving the matter much thought and prayer, he decided to return to Rwanda. From one point of view this may be regarded as a rash decision; however, it is more fittingly recognized as an outworking of his overwhelming commitment to the Divine commission, which inspired and gave direction to his life. He travelled through the Congo and arrived at Rwankeri in 1942.

When the local people heard that Monnier was back there was enormous rejoicing. Thousands came to meet him. There were services with joyful singing to welcome and celebrate his return.

Much to his surprise, when Governor Ryckmans heard that Monnier was back at Rwankeri he contacted J. R. Campbell, superintendent of the Congo Mission, and requested that he transfer Monnier to the Gitwe mission, where he might be less influential. Monnier could remain there for a short period while he completed his assigned translation responsibilities; however, he was not to return to Rwankeri nor to preach.

These were very difficult and discouraging days for Monnier. He translated *Steps to Christ*, and some Old Testament books, and despite the restriction did conduct some local services; however, the local people reported he was not the vibrant glowing Monnier of former days.

To relieve the situation, Neal Wilson, then president of the Middle East Union invited Monnier to accept the position of superintendent of the Turkish Mission. Because of the war, Monnier proceeded directly to Lebanon without returning to Europe for his family. He arrived in Beirut in March 1944. Very sadly, he died of Typhoid fever on December 1, 1944 at the age of 48.

This tragic loss of one of Africa's, and of the Adventist Church's, very great missionaries—Rukandirangabo—is troubling to contemplate. However, we rejoice in the wonderful fruitful witness of his life, and believe that all things will be made plain in the Kingdom of grace.

Endnotes

¹ Building upon this solid foundation, the Adventist membership in Rwanda by year-end 2018 reached 920,102.

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