

March, 2006

Dear Partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

You may know that Laban Ministries International in Congo is made up of 100 national staff members. Many of these dedicated, intelligent, articulate, materially poverty-stricken beyond belief yet super rich in faith, God-honoring men and women are just two generations from cannibalism. Did you know that?

When Dr. and Mrs. Laban and Marcella Smith set foot on African soil in 1938, they spent the next 9 years pioneering the mission stations of Kajiji and Iwungu. In 1947, while at Iwungu, Jim vividly recalls seeing 7 men walking towards their home. They were sent by Chief Kuma-Kuma—imprisoned hundreds of miles away to the south—from the villages of Longo (meaning Holy) and Nkara, and they pleaded with Laban to come tell them of Jesus Christ. What makes it so incredibly dramatic is that the people over whom Kuma-Kuma was chief were sacrificing their beautiful babies to pay for their sins.

They knew that blood had to be shed, and when news got back to Chief Kuma Kuma that Dr. Smith was telling people that God had a Son, Jesus Christ, who had already sacrificed His life as THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE FOR ALL SIN INCLUDING THEIRS, and that only through His blood could we have eternal life, it pricked his heart and whet his spiritual appetite for more. You see at that time, the Bayanzi Tribe would take their most beautiful baby girl, place her on hot burning coals, and wait for her to scream. The screaming that followed was a welcome response because this was a religious ceremony to them, and the screaming—the louder, the better—would insure, they felt, hearing in the ears of their dead ancestors, whom they believed had the power to bless their crops, heal them of their diseases, help them give birth to more children, and overall bless their lives. When the screaming ceased and the baby was dead, they proceeded to cut her to pieces and eat her. So what relief, what pure joy, what sheer ecstasy Kuma-Kuma, undoubtedly felt as the truth sank in, and he began to realize that God had sent His Son, so they no longer would have to sacrifice their children.

Jim continues: Six weeks after the meeting with the 7 men from Longo and Nkara, Dad loaded up his International Panel Truck and made the 65 mile trip to these villages. He was accompanied by national pastors, including Pastor Toma, an evangelist. Dad entered the village of Longo, and the crowds began to wrap around him and the team. They were eager to hear about God's Son, who was given by the Heavenly Father to die for the sins of the world, and Dr. Smith, my dad, made it very plain to them that He had died for THEIR SINS. They listened with bated breath for each word coming from his mouth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, his beating, His suffering, being nailed to the cross, the spear into His side, and shedding His blood for the sins of the world and Bayanzi people.

Dad spoke several times that first day, going first to the village of Longo and then to the village of Nkara, the father and the mother villages of this tribe. These were a people who knew that they were sinners because of their past. One of the hundreds who responded that day confessed a few days later how she had killed 12 children from other clans in the village, and she pointed to the parents of each child whom she had poisoned. Secret killing was not an unusual thing among this tribe because they believed the spirit powers of the other clan would become theirs after they killed one of the other clan's members. Nothing was done to her because so many of the others in the village had

done the same thing. After Dad and the national pastors and evangelist had spoken in the afternoon and in the evening that same first day, the joy, the glory of the Presence of the Lord just filled the air. Late into the night, even toward morning, Dad and Pastor Toma, as they walked through the village, could hear the new believers sharing with their relatives the news of Jesus Christ, God's Son, the forgiveness of sins, and how simple it was to have this new life. Just ask for it. It was beautifully contagious.

Word spread quickly. Other villages cried out for Dr. Smith and the team to come to them, and for six weeks Dad traveled to well over 50 villages. One of the sure signs physically of conversion is the bringing of fetishes, which for the most part consisted of a large squash dried and cut in half and filled with dirt, goat manure, and an antelope horn with a red parrot feather in it—filth—and that is what they worshiped. Usually it was kept under the father's bed. But now instead of filth, Jesus Christ the Holy One of God became their focus of worship. The fetishes were burned. I personally saw the smoke ascending from 5 foot piles of this refuse. Burning your fetishes was never done prior to this. The ancestors taught for years never to burn them because the fetishes were "heirlooms" from the ancestors, literally passed down from generation to generation. But God. . . Thousands were responding. God was answering Dad's prayer of August 31, 1939, when he wrote in his diary, "I have covenanted with my Lord for 10,000 of these precious people. Lord, I thank for the fire that you have kindled in my heart, and may it never go out."

The Belgian Government could not believe the intensity of excitement and how the people were changing; so they asked Dr. Smith not to baptize anyone for 2 years, "and you will see that at the end of that time very few will be interested in whatever this being 'born again' is all about. Very few will want to be baptized." Two years later, thousands seeking baptism came to the new mission station of Nkara, and 7 of the national pastors and evangelists interviewed each one. Then Mom and Dad talked to over 2,000 people personally about their salvation before each baptismal service. They didn't want to baptize just anybody, but to be sure in their minds that those being baptized had truly accepted Christ. During this time, the joy, the uncommon sensing of the Presence of the Holy Spirit was such a stark contrast to their past. To watch and hear the singing that was breaking out all over was beyond description. Songs like "There is Power in the Blood" and "By and By" were being sung so frequently. I especially remember 800 of the women, anticipating baptism, coming up and going down the new road to the mission station 8 across locked arm in arm and 10 rows deep singing "What Can Wash Away My Sin, Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" and "There is Power, Power, Power in the Blood." They were sensing the reality of sins forgiven, new life in Christ, the assurance of Heaven.

I sat in the little boat that Dad had made in 1949, and I saw with my own 7 year old eyes 1200 people being baptized by 7 national pastors on 4 different occasions. They began at 8 in the morning, and ended at 2 in the afternoon, all recorded by Dad on a 78 rpm disc, the same "By and By" now recorded on Selah's Hiding Place and Greatest Hymns albums! Oh! the singing breaking out across the lake in the valley. What a testimony as thousands sat on the hillside watching. In a period of 5 years, God answered Dad's request; 10,000 people accepted the Lord, and 4 large baptismal services plus many small baptismal services took place in the villages. For the big baptismal services, people would walk 50 miles to be baptized by the evangelist and national pastors in the lake that was formerly a grave of warriors from Mpene who fought with Longo over ownership of Nkara.

Now, fast forward 56 years to 2006. Two generations have passed since then. Longo is alive and

well. Nkara, once a place of death and human sacrifice in the little forest in front of our home--a graveyard of dead men's bones after cannibalism had taken place--has been transformed into a life-giving center, a lighthouse for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Tens of thousands more have responded to Christ through Laban graduates.

One of those graduates, a Bayanzi, is a man by the name of Pastor Mboma. He speaks 5 languages, including English. He translated the Book of Colossians into Kiyanzi, the first ever document written in the Kiyanzi language. He is Program Director for Radio Glory. He teaches various subjects in Laban Bible Institute at Nkara. He loves his wife and 5 children. He is Assistant Vice Director of Laban Ministries, Congo. Think about this. His grandfather lived among those who ate human flesh! Perhaps he even tasted of human flesh! He is the fruit of your labor! Truly, Mboma is an illustration of the mighty things God promises to show us that He speaks of in Jer. 33:3. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened at all, that it cannot save, nor His ear dulled with deafness that He cannot hear." God placed eternity in the hearts of the Bayanzis. He called Dr. Smith by putting Congo on his mind until he was compelled to go in 1938. "He lifts the needy from the ash heap." Ps 113:7 He makes all things new. All praise and glory belong to you Lord, our Mighty God. You are our righteousness, consecration, redemption, and wisdom, I Cor 1:30, and how we rejoice in the truth of Dr. Smith's favorite verse, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."