

## Chapter 11

### **The God of Pygmies and Presidents** *- Changing a Nation through Prayer -*

Over the last twelve years I have been involved in developing an indigenous mission movement in Central African Republic. The quiet prophetic murmurings of God as we have sought Him in prayer have proved to be the foundation on which this work has been built. The following account tells the story of one such “murmur” which led to an incredible encounter in the forests of Africa in April 2000.

In the month leading up to the trip I had the conviction that I should write up in French all the revelation God had given over the years for mission building in the country. It would be a tool for the Polytechnic that Anatole (the key African leader) and the “*Nations En Marche*” (the French name of the mission) team were launching that October. I ended up with a 100 page A4 document of book proportions! This has since been published and is selling well in France and beyond.

During our last ‘prayer day’ before the trip we sensed much warfare and the beginnings of breakthrough. Through prophetic prayer we overheard the following,

***“I am the God of Pygmies and Presidents.”***

This brought release and encouragement in praying for the destiny of the Central African Republic.

Armed with this promise and several teaching packs plus the originals, I left for Charles de Gaulle airport where I was to rendez-vous with Philippe Monod, a former Swiss missionary to that land who had worked amongst the Pygmy people. Philippe’s plane from Switzerland was late so I decided to check-in anyway. Imagine my dismay when the lady at the desk kindly informed me that my passport was out of date! There was no way they would let me travel without a valid passport! I felt so stupid! I then decided to get all the books and manuals I was carrying out of my bag to pass on to Philippe when he arrived.

*“At least they’ll be able to arrive”*

I thought.

As I opened my bag I saw clothes that were not mine. It slowly dawned on me that, by mistake, I had taken the wrong bag from the train! My bag, with the precious cargo of manuals, was probably lost somewhere in Lyon, while I had the clothes of some unfortunate holidaymaker! It was about 11.30 p.m. My ticket was also non-refundable! I was informed that because of the delay of Philippe’s flight, he had been embarked directly from the runway, so I couldn’t even get a message to him. Everything was closed.

I began to feel depressed. I wandered into a vacant waiting room to share the floor space with a few lonely, homeless people. I felt so useless! The enemy shouted into my ear,

*“That’s the end for you! God’s confirming He doesn’t want you in C.A.R.!”*

He mocked the word about the Pygmies and Presidents.

*“That’s a joke now!... An impossibility...”*

he seemed to say. A host of other failures seemed to crowd in on me and I hit rock bottom. I just laid on the floor and cried out to the Lord! It was midnight.

As the hours passed, I felt the Lord gently take hold of my heart. He lifted me out of the pit and raised me to a place of hope and faith.

*“Don’t worry”... “I’ll take care of everything...”*

he seemed to say. As it says in *Genesis*,

*“There was evening, there was morning”.*

**God always takes us from darkness to light, to new beginnings.**

And God did take care of everything. He led me to an incredibly helpful railway assistant. She did so much more than duty and phoned around to trace the missing bag, which they found in Lyon. Usually I would have had to wait and pay the costs of re-transportation, but she arranged for the bag to be shipped back on the next train to the airport without cost! It would be here by ten o’clock!

Then there was the passport problem. I had two hours to get from the airport to the Swiss consulate in Paris (I have Swiss nationality) to see if they would help. It took ages to get there but wonderfully they prolonged my passport in the space of fifteen minutes!

And the ticket... Having got my bag and passport sorted I went to Air France. For an extra £50 they were able to put me on another departure for Bangui, (capital of C.A.R.), for the Saturday night. (My original flight was for Thursday night.) I would only lose 2 days. In the space of 3 hours, God had worked everything out in a most miraculous way. As I boarded the flight on Saturday night I felt it was *“Resurrection Day!”*

Imagine my delight on arriving in Bangui on Sunday morning to discover that the congress actually began Monday for a week and not over the week-end as I had wrongly assumed. I had lost nothing by the delay!

After the morning service at “*Fondation Jerusalem*” (Anatole’s lively church), we made hectic preparations to travel to the Pygmy conference - the fruit of our pioneer efforts the years before, which was to be held in the equatorial forest some 3 hours from Bangui. For the last few years the “*Nations En Marche*” team had been working on establishing an autonomous indigenous outreach to the unreached Pygmy peoples in the area, as well as co-ordinate the work already established among the people by other denominations and missions.

The convention and the mission work is totally funded by the Africans themselves. This was the first time such a self-funded conference had ever happened in C.A.R. The delegates either walked or took precarious bush taxies to the conference. About 150 folk were regular attendees at meetings with a total of 360 being present. The convention split between the Pygmy peoples themselves and those seeking to work amongst them.

It was encouraging to see the site the African missionaries had set up, all built by hand from natural resources costing practically nothing. Several mud huts and a meeting hall made up the complex. This was probably as far as you could get from the Western style missionary convention.

Various Pygmy clans gathered around their fires as delegates arrived from different areas of C.A.R. I’d brought with me a manual tape player equipped with testimonies in the “Baka” Pygmy dialect. Although the language wasn’t the same as their’s, it was a great ice breaker and the Pygmy families had great fun guessing where the guy on the tape was from. As usual, the millions of mosquitoes, flies and other creepy crawlies also turned up for the convention, no doubt inspired by the promise of fresh “white man’s” blood, a change from the usual routine of Pygmy corpuscles.

The congress began with an all night prayer meeting! Each delegation took an hour, with every session trying to outdo the others in noise and passion. I don’t think there was much hope of sleep for those who retired to bed!

Monday began at 5 a.m. with the morning prayer meeting of one hour - night and day tend to blend in such an environment ! A couple of hours was given to breakfast and wash before beginning the first service at 8 a.m. Various meetings and workshops took us to 12 am when a delicious meal of “boule”(manioc) and “coco” (green weed) was served. Siesta till 3 p.m. when proceedings resumed till 5.30 p.m. Another dose of “boule” before an evening session in Pygmy style, including testimony and dancing around the fire.

With their polyphonic voices, noble traditions and tribal worship songs they seemed to be tapping into some ancient wisdom and grace long lost to the peoples of the “modern” world. I’m quite tall, so my antics at Pygmy worship and dance produced much hilarity, especially as I was followed around the fire by a host of tiny Pygmy ladies. I was like a clumsy duck leading his little ducklings behind !

Needless to say, all this made up a beautiful symphony of worship to God, and the time spent among the Pygmies was truly a glimpse of heaven on earth. A small corner of paradise. The pioneer history of the establishment of the work is inspiring.

The mission team is led by a great guy called Benjamin Lessy. He explained that in January 2000 one of the Pygmy ladies died. A famous witch doctor (feticheur) proclaimed that by his spells he would raise the lady back to life. It was all bluff and he failed. Benjamin felt that this was now an opportunity to challenge them that God could raise the dead. He moved out in faith and prayed over the lady asking God to bring her back to life. The Lord heard his prayer and resurrected the lady!

Another Pygmy man testified that he had come to the Lord because of the kindness the missionary team had shown him. He had found a wild-boar in his animal trap. He thought that it was dead but, as he touched the animal, it was very much alive and seriously injured him before escaping. He lay bleeding in the forest. Maggots began to eat away at his wounds. The Pygmy's wife alerted the mission team who went out to look for him. By the grace of God they found him and nursed him back to health. He would have died without their intervention.

Another Pygmy man testified with his son. A few months back his son had broken his leg. The Pygmies have no resources to care for such things and usually the child ends up crippled. However the team were able to send the boy to hospital in Bangui where he was well cared for. He can now walk perfectly.

The Pygmies were the earliest inhabitants of Africa. There is something very special about them. From *Matthew 25*, which speaks of honouring "*the least (or smallest) of these brothers of mine*," we sensed that the Pygmy people offered some kind of **redemptive opportunity** (or *condemnation opportunity* !) for the Central African Nations. Their very **vulnerability** was an **opportunity for blessing** or curse. (See chapter on "Vulnerability"). As we worshipped together, it became apparent that the Bantu people of Central Africa had badly treated the Pygmies and needed to put things right.

A number of folks, representing the various Bantu clans, knelt in tears as they confessed their own sins and the sins of their fathers towards this people. Something seemed to break in the heavenly realms because of these prayers.

The Pygmy worship took on a new dimension and the songs of this "particular" people seemed to pour blessing and healing afresh on the land. I could easily see how God was "*the God of Pygmies*", but where were we to find any "*Presidents*" in the midst of this forest away from civilisation ?

Over the next days the presence of the Lord was very real. He wanted to lead the nation into a measure of greater healing.

At the end of one powerful meeting, unbeknown to many of us previously, a young man stood up. He introduced himself,

*“My name is Jean-Serge Bokassa, the son of the former Emperor of C.A.R.”*

Jean Bidel Bokassa had been one of the most notorious Presidents, and finally, self proclaimed Emperor, of the nation. His claims to international fame came from a time was when he was known to have corrupted the French President Giscard D’Estaing with a gift of diamonds, and also through his insane violence which included rumours of cannibalism.

He explained a dream the Lord had given him. He had seen folks wanting to crown his father. However the crown, although sparkling, was fake gold.

His father’s reign had ruined the nation and had been violent and repressive. He explained how difficult it was for him. He wanted to honour the memory of his father who had not had an easy life. He explained how this former President had grown up an orphan after having witnessed the murder of his own father, whipped to death at the hands of a colonial rubber baron! He had also known the grief of his mother's suicide, discovering her hanged body. Bitter seeds sown into the wounded heart of a future tyrant. Serge, the son, wanted to ask forgiveness for all the wrongs and evil perpetrated by his father and family. The atmosphere was electric. Then, gradually, as the Lord led, representatives from each tribal group stood up and forgave, hugging Jean-Serge and exchanging prayers.

One man explained that he was the actual President’s cousin, representing the Patassé clan which was traditionally divided with Bokassa’s. The two men embraced, weeping and forgiving past hurts. Another was struggling to come forward. He finally managed to stand in front of Jean- Serge.

*“Your father killed my father”* he wept.

Some supernatural force at work gave him the strength to forgive. As he embraced Jean-Serge, the Holy Spirit came down on both men, sending them to the floor. Everyone in the hut was touched and in tears. It was a very profound moment. A brother from Cameroon felt led to anoint the very soil with oil as a sign of the deep healing that the Lord had accomplished through the prayers of reconciliation.

As this was going on, a mighty thunder storm tore open the heavens, and the rain came pouring down. It was a moving, majestic moment. Words alone cannot express the awe and deep joy that permeated the atmosphere. As the rain washed the land, I was reminded of the prophetic word God had spoken.

**“I am the God of Pygmies and Presidents.”**

This word has been a catalyst which has led to much change in the nation over the last years. A spiritual victory is being won and worked out in the heart and fabric of the country through the likes of Anatole Banga and the indigenous mission "*Nations En Marche*". They have been able to set up a small "Polytechnic" training school. Students have been able to start pioneer works amongst the Pygmy and Muslim peoples of Central Africa and others are now moving on to Chad and beyond as the work grows. Hundreds have come to the Lord, lives have been saved through the setting up of basic health care clinics, children are learning the skills of reading and the vision still burns strong for this holistic African gospel to spread further a field.

To understand the challenge of all this you need to take into account that C.A.R. is one of the poorest countries in the world with the highest incidence of A.I.D.S. in Francophone Africa. It has known severe political violence with at least 4 coups over the last 10 years with much fighting amongst the different ethnic groups. Only the prophetic prayers and sacrifice of the people of God have kept the country from falling into destruction, civil war and anarchy.

Recently the government has asked Anatole and "*Nations en Marche*" to be responsible for a national programme of literacy and reconciliation. The present Vice President is keenly aware of the possibilities this mission movement offers to the nation.

Over the years we have been able to pray with several of the Presidents. On our very first trip, having barely arrived in the country, we were granted an audience with David Dacko, the former President, who was an inspirational source of information concerning the history of the nation. I was also asked to pray with General André Kolingba who also had his stint as President following a coup and one of our team, Maguy Barthaburu, who has a distinct ministry of intercession for this nation, was able to pray with Ange-Félix Patassé (the recently ousted President) and his replacement, General Bozizé. She was also influential in giving decisive prophetic direction to the Vice-President, Abel Goumba.

Jean-Serge was a participant in a recent conference for peace and national reconciliation in Central African Republic, (September 2003). The meetings were televised and included African leaders from around the world. At a particularly tense moment in the proceedings, he stood up in the National Assembly of the Government, and spoke about his reconciliation experience with the Pygmies in the forest. Folks were deeply moved and it led to the reconciliation of two former Presidents who had been sworn enemies. At the end of his testimony the whole assembly stood up and began chanting. "We want prayer ! We want prayer !"

A prophetic "Rhema" word can have a "domino effect", and ripple through time bringing grace and healing.

God is indeed, the "*God of Pygmies and Presidents !*"