

## **MISSION OPPORTUNITIES IN COMMUNIST AFRICA**

**By Richard Chowning**

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Marxist doctrine is not new to Africa. Since independence Ghana (1957) and Tanzania (1961) have attempted to be Marxist models for the rest of the continent. Few followed their ideology, but many followed their rhetoric. Current changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have pushed their way into Africa causing one Marxist country after another to change its political and economic policies. Angolan rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi, predicted the wind of change could not be stopped. In January, when the gale began to blow, an African editor warned, "No more packaged free lunches are going to come from the traditional European and American donors."

This change is of supreme importance to Christian missions. Five Marxist countries currently in transition deserve greater study and prayer.

### **ETHIOPIA**

Economic and ethnic problems have placed Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in grave danger. Since 1977, Soviet advisors and their thousand Cuban troops have given the opposition much to think about. Changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a fierce civil war, and another drought which has reached catastrophic proportions have placed Mariam in a most uncomfortable position; for example on March 5, 1990, he told the Marxist Workers Party that he wanted a free market and other social changes.

Foreign missionaries were expelled from Ethiopia in 1978. The policy could change soon. When the doors open, particular attention should be paid to the Guarge (one million) and the Kaffa (230,000). Both are classified by M.A.R.C. as unreached people groups. There are already more than 25,000 members of the Churches of Christ in Ethiopia.

### **CONGO**

This small country, population two million, has pulled far back from its Marxist rhetoric in recent months. On Congo Television a commentator recently said, "the Congo is no longer a red spot on the map of Africa." In 1978, thirty religious groups were banned. The ban has now been lifted and new religious bodies registered.

Unlike most of Africa, the Congo is 48 per cent urban. Brazzaville (650,000) and Pointe Noire (350,000) have large populations of animists.

In the Bateke tribe north of Brazzaville, the second largest people group in the Congo (330,000), 85 per cent are followers of the animistic faith of their forefathers. The tribe is without a translation of the scriptures and provides an excellent opportunity for a pioneer work.

### **ANGOLA**

Fifty thousand Cuban troops have begun to pull out of Angola. As a result, the U. S. State Department, rebel leader Janas Savimbi, and President Dos Santos have all predicted the fifteen year civil war will end this year.

Missionaries have been restricted from evangelizing in some areas of Angola and the civil war has made it difficult to enter others. Peace would open the country to missionaries.

Fifty per cent of Angola's nine million people are followers of animistic religions. The Chokwe tribe (550,000) are predominantly followers of their traditional religion. In their initial work,

denominations have found receptivity among these people who are located just northeast of the capital, Luanda.

## **MOZAMBIQUE**

In January, President Chissano told villagers north of Maputo that the rebel forces of Renamo have no reason to oppose his government because it is no longer Marxist. Of the country's fifteen and one-half million people, 500,000 were killed in the war and over a million are in refugee camps in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Renamo has finally agreed to meet face-to-face with the government. The U. S. State Department expects an end to the war in 1990.

The country is extremely receptive even though the Portuguese limited the influence of the Protestant missions and the Marxist government closed its doors to missionaries until 1982. The government now grants visas to missionaries. Less than twenty per cent of the population claims to be Christian, and the majority of these are Roman Catholic. The Makua tribe (1,300,000) has less than a twenty per cent Christian population. Patrick Johnstone, in *Operation World*, calls the Makua "the largest animistic unreached people in Africa, possibly the world." Their neighbors to the south, the Lomwe (1,000,000), have even fewer Christians. Both tribes are in rebel held territory and have had little exposure to the gospel.

Nampula, the third largest city (300,000), and administrative headquarters for both the Makua and Lomwe people is an urban priority.

The Churches of Christ presently have more than thirty congregations in an area south of the main road linked Zimbabwe with the port city of Beira.

## **BENIN**

This narrow west African country of four million people offers the greatest potential for a pioneer. The government's Marxist rhetoric scared away many potential missionaries even though its regime in reality has welcomed them. Recently President Kerekou has publicly renounced his former Marxist stance.

On a research trip to Benin last summer, four customs officials encouraged us to begin work in their country. Villagers were extremely friendly and begged us to come live among them.

Cotonou, Benin's largest city (near 1 million), still has need for church planting.

The Fon people are the largest tribe in Benin (1.2 million). They are more than 90 per cent followers of a traditional religion. Shrines soaked with blood of sacrifices are everywhere. The Fon translation of the New Testament scriptures were completed by S.I.L. in the summer of 1989 and will first appear on the market in the last quarter of 1990.

## **COURSE OF ACTION**

The immediate need is for teams to work among the above mentioned people. The teams could expect to plant over fifty congregations each in ten years. Large congregations could be begun by teams that would take on the challenge of the cities of Pointe Noire, Congo; Cotonou, Benin; and Nampula, Mozambique.

Congregations need to begin to pray that they can be the channels of material and spiritual support for those who are preparing to go.

Pray that as the armies of this world find peace, the armies of Christ will wage a holy war: a war waged by teams of evangelists.