

Acad. Roy. Scienc. d'Outre-Mer  
Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer,  
T. IX, 2015, col. 127-129

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ENNS (*Frank John*), Missionary (27.01.1895-20.07.1975).

Frank Enns was born to Johan and Eva Pauls Enns, the descendants of pioneering immigrants who had first converted the rolling prairies of midwestern America into productive wheat fields. He married Agnes Neufeld in 1925 and soon thereafter they applied as candidates for missionary service with the Congo Inland Mission, a new inter-Mennonite organization founded just thirteen years earlier in January 1912.

Arriving in the Belgian Congo in October 1926, they were assigned to a new mission post situated in the Province of the West Kasai which had been started only three years earlier. It was named Nyanga in honour of the chief of an adjacent village. Situated amidst a large, hardy ethnic group known as the Baphende, this became the setting for the unfolding of a remarkable missionary career.

Enns' farming background and love of the soil soon manifested itself in a variety of ways. As the new station was mapped out, right angle roads and paths were bordered with young mango trees which soon began to provide welcome shade and abundant fruit for the growing population around the new mission post. The Enns had early established their own large vegetable garden which supplemented their diet of imported and indigenous food. As a primary school was developed on the station, Enns soon saw to it that each student was assigned an individual plot of ground for the cultivation of personal gardens. It is not surprising that, with passing time, Nyanga became the location of a large-scale farm launched by the Mission where there was experimentation with various strains of cassava and the cross-breeding of local goats and poultry with imported European stock in an effort to increase needed protein in the local African diet.

Three children were born to the Enns' household. Their first child was a son whom they named John. In the tribal tradition of the Baphende people among whom they lived, parents are named for their first born child. Thus it was that Frank Enns became known as "Sh'a Yone" and Mrs Enns as "Gin'a Yone", *i.e.* the father and the mother of John, names which entered into the vocabulary and lore of the Baphende of the entire region.

If there is a descriptive statement which best captures the stance and spirit of Frank Enns, it would be: "He was a man of vision". He saw literacy as crucial to

the long-term stability of an African Church. Thus he was a strong supporter of an expanding educational system of the Congo Inland Mission. In time Nyanga became the location of a growing cluster of educational institutions. By the 1950s and 60s, the Nyanga secondary school had attained the reputation of being one of the better ones of the broad Protestant community of the Congo. Indeed it became the springboard for numerous young people who, diplomas in hand, pursued post-secondary education elsewhere in the country.

But it was especially in the area of mission/church relations that Enns' visionary nature was most noted. From the earliest days of his career he insisted that it was the African converts themselves who must be the evangelists of their own people. With a perfect grasp of their language, proverbs, idioms and tribal lore, converted Africans who had experienced God's transforming grace in their own lives became compelling communicators of the Good News of God's love for everyone. Pressing African converts into the service of their own church, Nyanga became the hub of a spreading network of regional centres which featured simple bush schools, chapels and clinics under the direction of African staff.

Meanwhile, in the presence of a steadily growing church, Enns early incorporated African Christians into local committees seeking their counsel and giving them voice in decisions made which affected the life of their emerging church. At the level of the broader programme of his Mission in the country, Enns consistently pushed his colleagues to prepare for the time when they would need to yield position and authority in favour of a truly autonomous African church.

Frank and Agnes Enns drew their remarkable missionary career to a close in June of 1960, nearly thirty-four years after their first arrival. It was an occasion of both lament and celebration on the part of the African population. A special day of festivity was organized. At one point they both were placed upon "gipoyes", *i.e.* chairs lashed to shoulder-born frames on which they were taken for a trip around the station they had founded and developed so effectively, the while being applauded by the distinctive trilling sound of women ululating which is so familiar to any who have lived in rural Africa.

In 1965, when Nyanga Africans heard of Agnes Enns' unexpected death following routine surgery, an invitation was sent to the States urging Frank to return to spend yet a bit more time with them in his African "homeland". A year later he did so and began an additional period of

ministry among his beloved Nyanga Baphende. With a bicycle and simple camping equipment he made forays into the African bush in a variety of directions from his base at Nyanga sitting with villagers around their camp fires, Christians and non-Christians alike, listening, teaching, encouraging, counselling and praying with them. Finally, at the age of seventy-four, Sh'a Yone took his final departure from the Congo.

Frank Enns died on July 20, 1975. When news of his passing arrived in the Congo, a large crowd of Nyanga Christians gathered on a tennis court under a towering tropical tree in front of the house that had been his home. Since they could not be present at his American home in person to express their condolences and to witness to their sense of loss, they spent the entire night around a camp fire singing hymns of faith, recounting personal experiences they had had with Sh'a Yone during his years among them and periodic times of spontaneous prayer.

The son of a Kansas wheat farmer, Frank Enns, pursued a life-long commitment to his sense of divine call and, in the process, left an indelible impact for good upon the Baphende people of the West Kasai.

28 June 2002.

J. Bertsche.

*Sources:* WEAVER, W. B. & BERTSCHE, H. E. 1938. *Twenty-five years of Mission Work in the Belgian Congo*. Chicago, Congo Inland Mission. — LOEWEN, M. J. 1972. *Three Scores: The Story of an Emerging Mennonite Church in Central Africa*. Elkhart, Congo Inland Mission. — BERTSCHE, J. 1998. *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*. Elkhart, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.