

# WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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The Editor does not accept responsibility for views expressed by the writers. Communications may be sent to WORLD DOMINION PRESS, FOUNDER'S LODGE, MILDMAY CONFERENCE CENTRE, LONDON, N. 1, and 156, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, and 632-634, CONFEDERATION LIFE BUILDING, TORONTO. Published Quarterly. Annual Subscription, 4/6, post paid; Single Copies, 1/2, post paid. The next number of the magazine will be published on the 21st June, 1935.

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# Self-Propagation in Spanish Guinea

'NAZARA'

During a short visit to Kribi, a port of the French Cameroun, immediately north of the frontier of Spanish Guinea (usually known as Rio Muni, from the name of the river which flows through it), I saw that the visits of African evangelists from that station to the Christians in Spanish Guinea could not be much longer continued. The difficulties in getting permission to cross the frontier were too great. Since then a resident missionary and his wife have been sent to Benito to care for this now promising field.

The following article has been gleaned from information taken from *The Drum Call*,\* one of the most interesting of all missionary papers edited and printed on the field.

UNTIL three years ago, the prospect for evangelical missionary work in Spanish Guinea was dark and discouraging. To-day the field is rich in opportunity and promise. Now for the first time doors that were closed have been thrown wide open.

For more than eighty years the Presbyterian Church in the United States has conducted work in Spanish Guinea (Rio Muni) and the Cameroun. As early as 1865 its pioneers were trying to get into the interior with the Gospel. In 1893 the way opened, neither in Spanish Guinea nor in Gabon where they had sought it repeatedly, but in the Cameroun.

So through all these years the work in Spanish Guinea has been confined to the little strip along the coast where the beach people live. Over the forests of Spanish Guinea reigned a great darkness at a time when, in the neighbouring jungles of the Cameroun, the Light was breaking with swiftness and glory. The growth of the Church in the Cameroun is a story of one of the most wonderful triumphs of the Spirit in the annals of modern missions and forms a striking contrast to contemporary conditions in this little colony of old Spain where, for so long, tribal feelings continued to run high and undisciplined restlessness reigned. Yet gladly would the missionaries along this coast have put their lives in jeopardy to take the Gospel

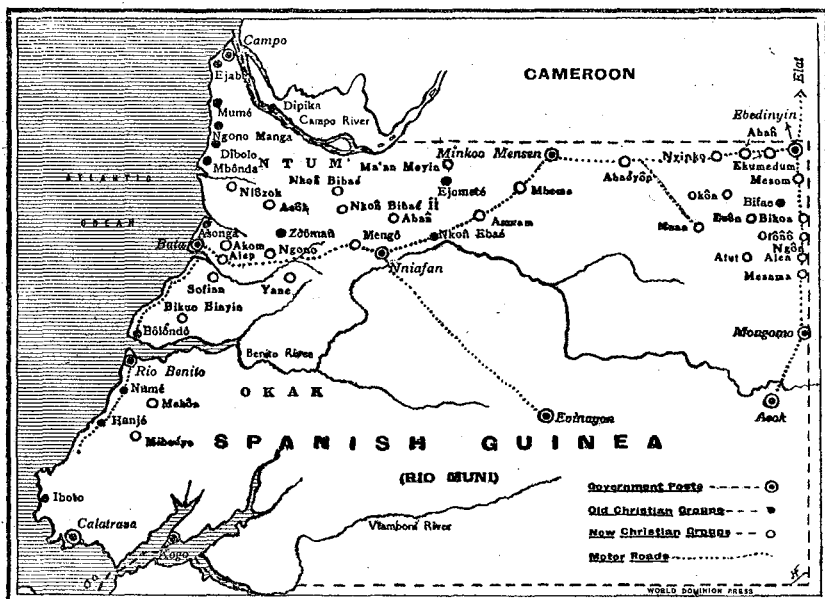
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\* (The magazine of the W. African Mission of the Presbyterian Church in U.S.A.)

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inland. Very formidable obstacles, however, were encountered in the Spanish officials, behind whom in those days stood the Roman priests. The beach tribes, in spite of teaching and exhortation, consistently refused to shoulder any responsibility for the evangelizing of the interior tribes whom they despised as 'bushmen.'

The outlook was most discouraging, and all the while, north in the Cameroun, the mission was faced with ever-recurring calls from the regions beyond until it became



apparent that the four missionaries were no longer justified in the comparatively small and confined area of the Spanish Guinea coast. The mission entrusted that work to three native pastors and the missionaries were withdrawn.

But what was happening in the interior of Spanish Guinea during the years of the Mission's withdrawal between 1923 and 1931? Four significant occurrences must be noted.

First of all, little evangelical communities appeared in the heart of the colony. In the early twenties large numbers of the Ntum people came from the Cameroun seeking new town sites in Spanish Guinea. Among them were Christians who, settling in their new homes, continued the observance

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of the evangelical Christian forms of worship. Other groups owed their origin to the activity of spiritually strong women, who, widowed in the Cameroun, returned to Spanish Guinea to live among their own people. Unable to read, they opened up the treasures of the Word stored in the heart, gathered groups of thirty to sixty about them and taught them of the Way of Life. Each morning at day-break they held community prayer meetings, and on Sundays they conducted in their own way little services of praise. They were tireless in their witness for Christ. Of all this the Mission at the time was unaware.

Then again, about 1923, there was the matter of the signboard which the Spanish rooted up. For years it had stood on the main trail into the interior approximately ten miles from the sea. It bore a warning to this effect: 'Europeans venturing beyond this point do so on their own responsibility.' The action of the Spanish authorities marked the full growth of the resolution on their part to open up the interior to commerce and coffee plantations. They began a motor road. Traders and coffee planters followed swiftly over it. So, too, did the Roman Catholic priests who had heard of the growing evangelical communities. The little groups of Christians had to meet this new tide. In the heart of the district the priests established their first interior station. Many of the worshippers fell before the batteries that were turned upon them, first of persuasion and deception, later of abuse and intimidation. But the leaders never flinched. After the first onslaught they braced themselves in their faith and stood firm. Of all this too, the Mission, at the time, was unaware.

A change was taking place also among the beach peoples. The Lord was bringing them to see what they had not wished to see during the years of the missionaries' residence among them, that a self-centred Church cannot possibly thrive; that in service for others there is newness of life. The largest Church along the coast, visited time and again by deputations from the struggling groups of the interior asking for aid, at last turned its attention inland and appointed catechists to help them. The influence upon the

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Church itself and its example to the other beach Churches were most salutary.

And last of all there was a great change in the political situation ; the fall of the monarchy and the inauguration of the Republic of Spain in 1931. Providentially coincident with this event, two scouts of the Mission made a trip through the Spanish Guinea hinterland from the eastern border to the sea, down along the coast, and back up through the bush again. Everywhere—in the bush and by the sea—they were warmly welcomed. They took back to the Mission a report in which they strongly urged it to re-occupy the land.

In May of 1932 Spanish Guinea was re-occupied by a missionary pastor and his wife. They returned to find that the narrow coastal strip, to which formerly the missionaries were confined, constitutes to-day but a very small fraction of the land that lies everywhere most invitingly open. For the present their energies are directed, roughly speaking, to the upper half of the colony—an area 60 miles broad and 150 miles long, embracing, it is estimated, two-thirds of the total population. Were they really alone the field would be, of course, hopelessly large. Little more can be done by the missionaries than to keep on the march of visitation among the widely scattered groups and to confer periodically with the very capable leaders who have applied themselves with singular devotion to the task. Largely because of them we can say now, as we look out over these 9,000 square miles, that the prospect on the whole is most encouraging.

The Christian communities fall naturally into three geographical groups ; Beach, Central, and Eastern ; each with peculiar problems, all with cause for thanksgiving. Let us look briefly at each group in turn.

The Church along the beach, as we have already noticed, gives reason for thanksgiving. It is a self-supporting Church. Among the five established Churches there are approximately 1,000 believers—baptized Christians and catechumens—who receive no financial aid. On the contrary, they are sending and supporting evangelists

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among the unevangelized tribes at their back doors. Three of the five coast Churches are engaged in this type of 'missionary' work. Within the past eighteen months five young men have been chosen and commissioned for such work. There are to-day in the coast area twenty preaching points—fifteen old and five new—and the significant fact to remark is that the fifteen old ones are old indeed, all of them occupied fifty years or more ago.

'We praise God for the new vision He has given the beach peoples during these past few years. The leaders are happy in the new-found joy of service for those whom they once despised, and they rejoice to see the response on the part of the bush peoples near them who, in increasing numbers, are coming to worship with them during the seasons of reunion and communion. To some of us it seems incredible that these men and women of the neighbouring forests have been so near and yet so far from the gracious influences of the Gospel. What also affords us pleasure and gives us hope for the future of the beach Church is the fact that the leaders are seeking for more young men of suitable character and soul-winning energy that they may commission them also for service in the many towns that are still calling for help. We pray that in all this new endeavour rich blessings may come upon all the Christians of the beach communities, for they need a deep and rich spiritual blessing, and a new power to withstand and counteract the inimical forces among them.'

The attack upon their high evangelical standards comes mainly from two sources. First, the commercialism along the coast. Among the Europeans business is always and everywhere first. The Natives are quick to sense this and to adopt in turn this false emphasis. Competition here compels shops to open on Sunday, which is not true of West Coast areas in the care of the British and the French. As a protest against this practice four Christian clerks have this past year resigned their positions as head clerks in several prominent European firms. Then again, the nominal Roman Catholicism of the majority of the beach people has a degenerating effect upon the

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Evangelicals. Many have dropped down to this level. This is especially true of the young men and women who, as in all coast communities of any consequence, are beset by constant and terrible temptation. They have found it an easy thing to render lip service to the Romanists without any change of life. Too many of them remain calm, unconcerned and unconverted, in the assurance of salvation through the Church. The effect of all this upon the evangelical groups, especially during the years of the Mission withdrawal, when the Romanist priests had constant and unopposed access to them, has not been slight. We thank God for the elders and the sturdy leaders who shepherded the flocks during those troubled years and for the vision that He alone can give them—a vision first of purity and then of peace.

We turn now from the beach Churches to view the interior. One of the beach Churches, as we have seen, carried on as best it could, while as yet the missionaries had not arrived, and ministered to the little groups of believers along the motor road that led out from it. To-day these groups have been gathered up—a dozen or so of them in a circle of a forty mile radius—into a Church, the first Church to be organized and established in Spanish Guinea in more than fifty years. These are the many little groups that sprang up and struggled along, led by untutored men and women, in forest clearings, sorely beset by inimical influences and forces. To-day, by the blessing of God, young men with the Bible and a hymn-book in their hands have gone to their aid. Many calls keep coming from other towns. As young men qualified for this work volunteer, these towns too, we believe, will be occupied. A spiritually strong Native is in charge of this field as pastor of the Church and moderator of its session. Look well at him. He is an exceptional African of the West Coast. Of him it can be said that as schoolboy, catechist, teacher, elder and pastor he has never had to be disciplined by a Church court for any cause whatever. And this in a land where Church discipline is strict among the evangelicals and all is known. As the Natives say, what is whispered under the house-eaves is bruted aloud from the palaver house. Because

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the Church is new and rapidly expanding it is not entirely self-supporting; it goes forward in faith, and always hitherto the Lord has met the need.

There are adversaries. The Roman Catholic hostility is very marked, especially among the Okak tribes. The Okak people have never been friendly toward the Ntum, comparative newcomers. Naturally they are suspicious, therefore, of the missionaries who for many years have worked among the Ntum to the north in the Cameroun. But the venom with which young Okak men poison the minds of many is not natural. This is implanted and the seeds of it are being constantly and widely strewn. Slowly, however, we see signs of weakening among some of the Okak and we do not doubt that the Gospel of love will increasingly be apprehended in all its matchless beauty in spite of the present torrent of blind and bitter denunciation. The people are not stupid; already it is manifest to many who have given thought to the matter that between the religion of their fathers and that of the Romanized people of this land there is little essential difference save for some substitutions—the white priest for the medicine man, and the rosary and crucifix for the heathen fetishes. But the pity of it is that there are many others who do not see this; or seeing it, choose to go their easy way, for piety and the practise of virtue are beyond their wish and inclination. 'Our adversaries are largely those who, with us, name the name of Christ. Our prayer is that more and more of them may do so in sincerity against the day when the Lord, who knoweth them that are His, will reveal whether each in his place has or has not departed from iniquity. And if, to some in other lands, these words that we have written appear uncharitable, we beg forbearance—they are not indeed our words at all, but what we, who speak the language of the people, hear them saying time and again among themselves.'

And now to venture farther inland. Some ninety miles up the motor road another Church is soon to be organized. Not that the organization will be anything, but the spiritual ferment has so spread as to make it advisable.



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There are in the north-eastern section of the colony to-day more than a dozen strong Christian communities. Every visit among them results in many conversions and decisions for Christ. Just last month a group of strong Christian leaders, young men all of them, under the leadership of a visiting native pastor, travelled sixty miles beyond their homes and back, bringing in more than fifty souls as a result of the Lord's blessing upon their personal testimony. Two of those young men graduated some time ago from a Bible-school in the Cameroun, came back to their homes in this land and on their own initiative began preaching. It is their spirit of earnest consecrated endeavour that is reflected in that field and has marked the Christian communities there since 1924 when they first came to the knowledge and attention of itinerating missionaries on the Cameroun border.

'We trust that we have made it clear that it is the blessing of God upon the labours of the people themselves, and their ceaseless and constant expenditure of devotion, that has made possible both the present broad geographical outlook and the hope that we have for the future of the work. The evangelical Christian of Spanish Guinea is a man of faith who feeds upon the Word. He is a man of prayer who often in the quiet hour has seen earth's green horizons lift and heard the Spirit's voice. He is a man of works who seeks in them to voice his praise and to plead his cause. Out of his poverty and his want he brings his offering and his gifts. See him by the sea in the person of the elders who stood firm during all the years when the missionary was absent ; see him in the person of the battered believer in the bush despised and ridiculed during the years when of earthly help there was none at all ; see him in the person of these young leaders fresh from school and overflowing with a living message—and you see miracles of grace. Let the progress of the Church here in the past few years be to us another marked example of the way the Lord has chosen again as He has chosen in the past to work through simple, sometimes unlettered, men and women to the glory of His name. No outline of the work as it is to-day would be complete or adequate without this word of tribute to the evangelical Christians of Spanish Guinea.'