

PREFACE

This volume is a transcript of an oral history recorded with Oscar W. McConkie Jr. on 8 January 2019 in Salt Lake City, Utah. This interview is part of an ongoing project to document the history of the Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The interviewers were Matthew K. Heiss, an employee in the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, who is writing a history of the Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also present was McConkie's wife Judith S. McConkie, who makes some comments in the course of the interview.

Oscar W. McConkie Jr. is the chairman of the law firm of Kirton McConkie. He represented the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in many of the negotiations for obtaining official recognition for the Church in Zaire, which later became the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

McConkie discusses the origins of the Kirton McConkie law firm and its work for the Church, his early contacts with Africa, his efforts for official recognition of the Church in Zaire, miraculous occurrences that happened during the process, and the final step of meeting President Mobutu Sese Seko. Judith McConkie adds some comments at the end of the interview, recalling memories of speaking to the Jamaican Parliament and of Oscar quoting the Doctrine and Covenants in the meeting with Mobutu.

This interview was transcribed by Sheila Johnson. Carol Oertli, a Church-service missionary serving in the Church History Department then listened to the interview, while reading through the corresponding transcripts, both to correct typing errors and to do some minor copyediting. She also created a table of contents and preface, and then I forwarded the material to McConkie for review and approval. He completed his review of the text and returned it to me. The minor changes and clarifications that were made have been incorporated into the text of the oral history.

The transcript has been edited to remove false starts and words that might have been transcribed incorrectly. Therefore, the transcript differs slightly from the audio recording. Readers with questions about the transcript should also consult the audio recording.

As historical documents, copies of both the interview recording and the final typescript of this oral history will be preserved in the Archives of the Church History Department. As in the case of all other oral histories on file in the Archives, neither the Church nor the Church History Department assumes any responsibility for statements of fact or opinion found in this volume. Oral history is only one form of historical documentation and should be used in conjunction with other relevant records and documents. Statements found in interviews should be evaluated and used in accordance with the rules that govern the use of other historical materials, both primary and secondary.

Matthew K. Heiss
Church History Department
July 18, 2019

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CHURCH HISTORY DEPARTMENT
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

INTERVIEWEES: Oscar W. McConkie Jr. with comments by Judith Stoddard McConkie

INTERVIEWERS: Matthew K. Heiss and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

LOCATION: Salt Lake City, Utah

DATE: 8 January 2019

MH: Let me just start with a quick introduction. Today is the 8th of January 2019. My name is Matthew Heiss, and I work as a historian for the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm in Salt Lake City, Utah in the home of Brother Oscar W. McConkie Jr.

And we are focusing specifically on your experiences helping to get the Church legally recognized in what was then Zaire, and what is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With me is my companion, Jeff Bradshaw, who is writing the history of the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo that will go into the temple cornerstone.

And let me just start with a question of context. You mentioned before we started that you were the attorney for the Church, for the Missionary Department, and this is before the Church had its own Office of General Counsel. So why don't you tell us your connection to the Church, and what actually took you to Africa?

OM: The First Presidency of the Church called in a very able young lawyer, by the name of Bill Kirton—Wilford W. Kirton Jr.—and they said to him, “We would like you to be the general counsel for the Church.” And Bill Kirton said to the First Presidency, in essence, “If this is a call, of course I accept it. If this is a job offer, I refuse.” [*laughter*] And the First Presidency said to him, “Why would you do a thing like that?” And he said, “Because I don't think you should have general counsel of the Church in-house. You want to have legal counsel—you don't want somebody who's on your payroll. You want some outside legal counsel. What you need is a firm to represent you.”

And so the next week, they called Bill Kirton back, and they said, “We would like you to develop a law firm to represent the Church.” Bill said, “Okay.” So Bill came to me—I

was in the stake presidency with him, and we were very close friends. And so he came to me, and asked me if I wanted to join in with him and represent the Church. And I said, “No, I’m not interested, thank you. I don’t want to work for the Church.” And so he came back to me again, and asked me, and I said no. And he came back again and asked me, and I said no.

MH: What were your reasons for saying no?

OM: I didn’t want to work for the Church. I had a big law practice myself, I was independent. I didn’t want to be a Church employee. And so he came back the fourth time, and he said, “President Tanner and I think you should come over and join with me in a law firm at the direction of the Church.” It had never been explained to me like that before. President Tanner wants me to come over; yes, I’ll come over. So this was the beginning of the law firm Kirton and McConkie. And so we developed a law firm to represent the Church, and that’s how all this got started.

JB: I’m really sorry to interrupt the flow for a second, but I wonder, is there a way we can easily turn off the fire? Because it’s making a lot of noise.

MH: Yes, we’re getting some background noise.

JB: I just wanted to bring it up here at the beginning, in case that would be a help.

MH: No, I think that’s good. Do you want to show us where it is, and we can—

OM: No, I can take care of that. No trouble at all.

MH: It adds to a lot of nice ambience, but it does make some noise. [*McConkie laughs*] Oh wow, that’s so much better.

OM: Is that better?

JB: That’s better noise-wise. It cuts down on the ambience, though. [*laughter*]

OM: I’m sorry about that.

MH: No, that’s awesome.

OM: So, we now have a Church firm, and I represent the Missionary Department, and President Kimball hears that I’m going to go to Africa. So he calls me up, and he says he

got a letter from a Mandungu Bula Nyati and it's an interesting letter because it's on the letterhead of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and so President Kimball says, "While you're over in Africa, look up this man"—

JB: I think maybe Reverend M'Baki [M'Baki Dingana] was the one who wrote that letter?

OM: Oh, right. It was M'Baki.

JB: Bula was the comrade of Mobutu,¹ I think.

OM: All right. This was M'Baki who wrote this letter. And so he said, "While you're over in Africa, will you find this guy?" Now this is what we knew about Africa—I was just five thousand miles from where this guy was. That's how much we knew about Africa. I said, "Sure, I'll look him up." So Judy and I flew over to Africa, and we had this letter, and I found the guy.

It was a miraculous sort of thing in finding him anyhow, but we found the guy, and I got acquainted with him. And he said yes, he was the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and would I like to see the president of the Church? I said, "Yes, I'd be delighted to meet the president of the Church." So he took me in, and introduced me to the woman who was the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Africa. And I told him who I was, and I was a lawyer, and I was sent over to make some inquiries as to what could be done; and that he didn't represent anybody. But we became good friends, and miraculously got together, and that's how our work in Africa began.

MH: I think I read in your history that this man had actually received a Book of Mormon from Elder Charles Didier in Belgium?

OM: Yes, what happened was that he was in Belgium, and he had gotten a copy of the Book of Mormon from Elder Didier, and he had read the Book of Mormon; and he had some talk that one of the General Authorities had given, and with that talk and with the Book of Mormon, he organized himself a church. That's how that thing got started.

MH: Do you know if he had ever been baptized? There was a reference that he might have alluded to the fact that he was baptized?

¹ Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga was the military dictator and President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which he renamed Zaire in 1971) from 1965 to 1997. During that time, Mandungu Bula Nyati was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. After Mobutu left the country during a revolt, the new government changed the country's name back to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

OM: No, no. He was never baptized. He didn't know anything. But he had a letter from one of the General Authorities. I've forgotten who it was. Because he had written, and he had a letter, and he had read the Book of Mormon, and so with that authority he organized the Church. This was great for me, because this gave me an "in." They were a big group of people. They had a lot of people there, and they were sensational sort of people that had joined the church there.

MH: And how much Church doctrine, our Church doctrine, did they really know?

OM: None. No, they didn't know anything. [*laughter*]

MH: They had the Book of Mormon, they had the Bible...

OM: They had the Book of Mormon, they had the Bible, they had a letter from one of the Brethren that had written them, and that was about it.

MH: Okay, all right. I believe you might have met a few other of these "wannabe" Latter-day Saints when you were over there. There wasn't just this one reverend, but there were a few others?

OM: Oh, there were hundreds of them.

MH: His congregation?

OM: His congregation, yes.

MH: Okay, all right. So you observed them, and what did you go back and report? And how was your report received when you returned?

OM: I worked with them, and explained to them what the Church was, and what would have to be done. And they wanted to treat me like I was a minister sent to them. And I said, "I'm not a minister sent to you. I'm a lawyer that represents the Church. And I'm on a fact-finding mission over here to find out what's going on." They said, "Are they going to report back to you and tell you what that is?" [*brief interruption*] Who is it that's coming in? Jude? My wife, Judy and my daughter Claire.

JM: We're rushing in. It's dark in here. Can you see that?

MH: Every bit of light helps.

- JM: Okay, I did come to turn on the lights for you. [*laughter*]
- MH: You go back to Zaire in September of 1982, that's your second visit. I'm kind of wondering—this first visit must have set the stage for the second visit. The Brethren must have made a decision that they were ready to send missionaries in and wanted you to find out if you could get the Church registered. Is that right?
- OM: These people—some of them had legitimate religious experiences in what they were doing. And I was impressed by that, and I would report back to the Brethren as to what I found, and what these people were doing. And so when I came back, they sent me back over to do some more work.
- MH: Yes, so talk about that second trip. This is when the Brethren asked you to seek for official recognition by the government.
- OM: Yes, my job was to go over. I'm a lawyer. I'm going to go over there and try to get the Church recognized so that one, we could own property and do something there. And two, we had to get the people there willing to accept the gospel in order to change from their nothingness—but righteous people—into people that could be baptized members of the Church. That's what I did.
- MH: Were you aware of what had happened in Nigeria and Ghana, where there were these people who had found a Book of Mormon and started these congregations, and started printing letterheads that they were The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Ghana, and that kind of thing? Had you talked to Ted Cannon or Rendell Mabey when they got back?
- OM: President Kimball got a letter from one of these guys, and so he asked me to get in touch with them. That was my contact. Ren Mabey and Ted Cannon hadn't been over there at that stage of the game. And so they came over, independent of me, to do some missionary work.
- MH: Yes, in West Africa.
- OM: In West Africa. And so I became acquainted with Ren Mabey, and with Ted Cannon, and so I worked with them; but that was an independent thing.

MH: Well, one of the key issues that you wrote about in your history² was that you had to determine whether or not these people who called themselves “Latter-day Saints” had actually registered the name of the Church. Because if they had, it would have made it difficult for you to go in and either have to re-register, or have them un-register, so you could register the actual church. Do you remember that?

OM: I remember that that was one of my problems. I didn’t know what they had registered, and what they hadn’t registered, and so I had to find out what the—I was going to go over and establish an organization that would be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; so that it could own property, so that it could send missionaries, so that it could do missionary work, and that sort of thing. So I had to double-check to see what they had done, to make sure it was done right.

MH: And what did you find? Do you remember? It seemed to me that you got lucky, because they had not registered the Church the way you were going to, which meant you could do it without having competition.

OM: My recollection is, now that you refreshed my memory, is that they had not in any way done anything legally anyhow. So it was a bunch of good people who had good intentions, and who wanted to join the Church, but there wasn’t any Church, and they had not established a church.

MH: Do you remember a person by the name of Kala, who you might have had some contact with, who claimed to be the first member of the Church in Zaire? Kala, K-A-L-A.

JB: He said he corresponded with you, wrote you some letters?

OM: I have no independent recollection of a guy by the name of Kala.

MH: Okay, all right. Well, on your second trip you found an international law firm—Duncan, Allen, and Mitchell—and they seemed to be very supportive of your efforts to register the Church. Tell us a little bit about this law firm? Tell us what you can remember?

OM: Of course, they were interested in doing whatever I wanted. They were a law firm over there. They wanted me to hire them as a lawyer, and I did. And we had a guy who was, as I remember, he had graduated from one of the big law schools down on the coast. And so we had a guy who was an American lawyer, and I hired him.

² *And the Oscar Goes To. . . Glimpses from the Life of Oscar W. McConkie, Jr. As Told By Himself*, a privately published history in the Church History Library collection.

JB: Was that Richard Gittleman? Or he was later?

OM: No, Gittleman was later. But anyhow, I hired him to be of assistance with us. And that's all in the book, but I can't recall it now.

MH: I think I read in the book, too, that they gave you a discount because you were a church. So sure, they were interested in your business, but they also recognized that this was a religion, you know, you're not some billion-dollar company.

OM: That's right. They gave me a discount, but their fees were based on an international New York basis, and my recollection is the discount they gave me, I was still paying them four hundred bucks; which was New York fees, not Salt Lake City fees.

MH: In the middle of Africa.

OM: Yes, in the middle of Africa.

MH: It was also on this second trip that you met again with the Reverent M'Baki, and you learned that he had a school, and he had about twenty-three thousand members in fifty-nine different congregations. He had quite an extensive church.

OM: When you say twenty-three thousand, that kind of surprises me. Is that the figure you picked up out of my stuff?

MH: Yes. Now this was in fifty-nine different congregations or parishes.

OM: Yes, a guy had several parishes, and we worked with them to get some of them in the Church.

MH: It was also on this trip, your second trip, that you learned what you had to do; the hoops you had to jump through to get the Church recognized. And one is that it had to be approved by the president of the country, Mobutu. And then you had to have a certificate that the applicant was of a good moral character. How do you go about getting a certificate that says, "So-and-so has high moral standards?"

OM: Well, when we met with these people, in my judgment, several of the leaders were very righteous, good people who were attempting to do something. And when they did this, I met with them, and found some of them were respectable people in the community, and I had them do whatever was necessary to convince the government that they were of high moral character, and this is what they wanted to do.

MH: In your book you also write about the fact that those who would put their names on the application had to have four years of religious instruction from a school of theology. And I'm wondering—not many members of our church have that kind of thing, unless you count seminary and institute.

OM: That's right. I counted seminary, [*laughs*] which to you and me is “before school starts when you're young people.” But as far as they were concerned it was a “Seminary,” and that did the job for it. So I had people that had seminary training, it was super.

MH: Yes, okay. There were a couple of Congolese people who had been in Europe, whose names are—you might have to help me.

JB: Nkitabungi Mbuyi.³

OM: Who?

JB: Nkitabungi Mbuyi We should have a picture of him. And the others were Mucioko Banza and his wife Régine.⁴

MH: Here are the names.

JB: And do we have the picture somewhere? I don't remember.⁵

OM: Did Brother Mbuyi have anything to do with the fact that they were selected to sign the registration? Or was it your understanding that they were the only baptized Congolese members in the Congo at that time?

JB: These were the three, a brother and his wife, and another brother; who signed that they—they went over to Gittleman after the visit with Mobutu.

OM: I don't have any recollection. I can't help you on that.

JB: Okay, I wondered just why it was them who were selected.

OM: I can't give you an answer. My guess is that I found some people there who had been to Europe, and they may have actually been baptized in the Church at that stage of the game.

³ See MS 23897 in the Church History Library collection for Nkitabungi Mbuyi's conversion story.

⁴ See OH 4740 and OH 7687 in the Church History Library collection for the Banza family's background and history.

⁵ See the Appendix for a photo of the recognition ceremonies.

MH: They were, yes. So you drew on what you had to draw on.

OM: Yes. If I found somebody that was a baptized member of the Church, I was way ahead. Because then, “Did you ever go to seminary?” “Why sure, I graduated from seminary.” Well, that was a huge thing to the people over there. I understood it to mean that when they were fifteen they went preschool, and they graduated from seminary. But to the people over there, this was a big help.

MH: You made your third visit in September of 1985. Three years passed between the visits. I’m wondering why it was so long? Why did it take so long for you to get back? Do things just move slowly in Africa?

OM: Things move slowly in Africa, and it’s dirty, and I can remember—I shouldn’t say this. I have a vague recollection of writing to the Brethren at one time, and telling them not to send missionaries. And if they sent one of my boys I wouldn’t let them go. [*laughter*] That’s because I wanted to tell them how difficult it was to live in Africa, and the filth, and this sort of thing. So it wasn’t an easy job to find people that we could actually start a church with.

MH: And yet, three years later we’re working on getting a mission president, a North American mission president into Kinshasa.

OM: Yes, we found people who wanted to come in in the Church, and we had—I went over there once, and I was to meet Ted Cannon. By now, Ted Cannon and—what was his name?

MH: Rendell Mabey.

OM: Rendell Mabey had been over there, and I was to meet them. I got over there, and they weren’t there. They had left the country for some reason, figuring they could come back and meet me. But they couldn’t come back, because they wouldn’t let them back in. And so I’m over in Africa to meet two people, and they weren’t there to meet me.

MH: Was this in Ghana or Nigeria?

OM: I can’t remember.

MH: It would have been one of the two.

OM: Probably—I think they were in Nigeria and they went to Ghana, and couldn't get back in to Nigeria. And so I'm stuck. And there's nobody there. Nobody to meet me, nobody to see who I was.

MH: What did you do?

OM: I went to a European hotel, and somebody came up to me in the hotel, and poked me in the back, and said, "Would you be Oscar W. McConkie Jr.?" I said, "I sure would be. I hope you are..." And then I had one other name. I've forgotten who it was. And that's who it was. And these are miraculous things. And so we were able to get some people together.

MH: Yes, yes. On your third trip, there were two Americans there. Michael Bowcutt,⁶ and then a Dr. Larsen? Do you have his first name?

JB: Ron Larsen.⁷ He was there first, and then Bowcutt came later, I think.

MH: Yes, do you remember meeting with those Americans? And what role they might have played in helping?

OM: Yes, by now this is years that have gone by; and they've sent over—they sent like Ted Cannon and his companion were over there, and they were baptizing people by then. I mean, they were doing legitimate, real missionary work.

MH: Yes, up in West Africa.

OM: Yes, I'd done none of that sort of thing. But these people now were legitimately baptizing people, and I had done the legal work to establish the fact that they could exist as an entity, and they could own property, and they could preach the gospel. And so I'd done my legal work, and now we had a lot of actual missionary work going on.

MH: Yes, we did.

JB: Down in Kinshasa, though, I think your entry point was two folks from the American Embassy, two Mormons there. First of all Ron Larsen, and then Michael Bowcutt. Do you remember working with them in the embassy a little bit?

⁶ See AV 1212 and OH 13247 in the Church History Library collection for Michael Bowcutt's experiences in Zaire.

⁷ Michael Bowcutt's oral history indicates that Ron Larsen was the regional medical officer for the U.S. Embassy.

- OM: Yes. When I went into these places, the first thing I would do when I went into one of these places was go into the American Embassy to see if there was anybody there that would know us, or help us, or this sort of thing. The American Embassy was always very helpful to me in what we did.
- MH: Yes, yes. On this third trip, you began to work with a man named Bula—Mandungu Bula Niyati—who had been corresponding with Elder John Sonnenberg, a Seventy up in Frankfurt. Why was Elder Sonnenberg involved? And talk a little bit about this Bula, who plays, I think, a key role in helping you meet the president?
- OM: Mandungu Bula Niyati had been in the United States. And he had a very exaggerated view of what The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was, having been in the United States and having had some people in the Church help him in governmental affairs. And so he thought these guys were running the country. I mean, they were big shots. And so he had a very exaggerated view of the Church, and he was very, very helpful to me in getting the Church established down there.
- MH: Well, he seemed to have some connections with the government.
- OM: He did. I don't think you could say that he was the president or the vice president, but he knew the people who were. And he had the contacts and that sort of thing, and he was very, very helpful.
- MH: Yes, yes.
- OM: I ought to be able to recall some of the really unusual circumstances we had with Mandungu Bula Niyati, because he was very, very helpful to us.
- JB: As I recall, he introduced you to the Minister of Justice. You wanted to meet So-and-so, and he said, "Let me talk to his boss, or his boss's boss."
- OM: I needed to talk to the head man here, so he could take me to the head man. But when he took me to the head man, it was not me talking to the head man. It was the head man talking to this big shot from the United States who was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who ran things in the United States, sort of. *[laughter]*
- MH: So they had a little bit of a hidden agenda, then. They had some great expectations that—
- OM: Well, I was introduced to them in the best possible light.

MH: Didn't hurt the Church.

OM: It very much helped the Church. It very much helped me in what I was trying to do.

MH: Yes. So on your fourth visit—

OM: Mandungu Bula Niyati came over here to the United States, sat here on the couch where you are. And I said, "Bula, I don't want to just sit here and talk with you. I'm going to take you down to Temple Square." And so we went down to Temple Square. And when we get down to Temple Square, we see all these people with badges on them, and they all have different languages. And Bula saw those languages, and with each person that he saw their little badge, and the country they were from, he spoke to them in the language of their little badge. I said, "Bula, how's your Russian?" We hadn't met a Russian. And he says, "As a matter of fact, Oscar, it's a very much better than my English." I mean, these guys were bright people. So that's how Mandungu Bula Niyati got along on Temple Square. He knew everybody.

MH: Did he also get to meet with some of the senior Brethren?

OM: Oh sure, sure. I've forgotten who I took him in to see, but I took him in to see some of the Presiding Brethren here. By now, we were sending people over there. And we were doing missionary work.

MH: Okay. Well, it was on this fourth trip—and that's the one that we have the picture of.⁸ Where you're with David M. Kennedy and President and Sister Hutchings. And that's when the legal recognition is granted for the Church. You get an audience with the president of the country. Tell us about your memories of that. That's a pretty spectacular moment in Church history for the DR Congo.

OM: Well, by now, we're a big outfit over there. We are something. Bula took me in to see the top man in charge of religions—and we now had legal counsel guiding us as to what we had to do in order to be fully recognized, and own property, and preach, and that sort of thing. And so we got ourselves legally recognized over in Africa at that time. But by that time we were a big going concern.

MH: In their minds, in their eyes?

OM: And in our minds. We had people that were in the Church here that were doing things.

⁸ See the Appendix for this photo.

JB: Maybe backing up a little bit, there was a time when David Kennedy came over, when you had that famous meeting with Mobutu.

MH: Mobutu, the president.

JB: And that was before there was anything established, but you were well along with the legal thing. So tell us about how that came to be? Also including how David Kennedy happened to be there? Because I had understood that he was just kind of passing through, that the Lord kind of arranged things there for you.

OM: No, no, no. David Kennedy was an ambassador. I mean, he was a legitimate United States ambassador-at-large. And the Lord sent him over. He didn't know it, but the Lord sent him over there to help us, because when he got over there and they met with a United States ambassador-at-large, they over in Africa knew they were dealing with a big shot; and so they were giving him all kinds of deferential treatment. And he's a Saint. And he let us use him as a Saint.

MH: One of the key components of getting registration was our doctrine of common consent. Because there was a requirement—I think the local representatives had to be voted into office, or sustained by the local members, and it kind of flies in the face a little bit of having prophets, seers, and revelators chosen by the Lord. But you found that the doctrine of common consent satisfied that registration requirement.

OM: That's right, that's right. I was over there, and I not only was a lawyer, but I know more than most people about the Church anyhow. And so when they talked to me about the fact that this was a church that was run from a hierarchy in Salt Lake City, I said, "No, no, the people are run by what we call 'the law of common consent' down here. And nobody in this area is ever going to preside over anybody without having the common consent, or the acceptance of the local people." So that was a matter of my understanding of the gospel, and making it fit the way I wanted it to fit legally.

MH: Well, and they needed to hear that. That was an important—

OM: That was an important, that was an important thing. And if they had been talking to our lawyers over there, our lawyers wouldn't have enough sense to know that. You have to know what the Church is all about in order to utilize that sort of an argument.

MH: What was it like to meet the president at his—

JB: Could I quickly change the battery? Because it seems like this is a critical juncture here.

MH: Yes, yes, yes. You got a spare battery in there?

JB: I do. I've got two spare batteries. We're prepared.

MH: Are you doing okay? This is great.

OM: This is great. I took Judy with me, and we went to see the president.

MH: Just a minute. We want to get this on camera. We still have the recorder going, but we want to—

JB: You're talking about your meeting with Mobutu? Is that where you're headed? At his palace up in the North that he flew you into?

MH: Just a minute. We're almost—there you go.

JB: Thanks. That's close enough.

MH: Are you ready?

JB: Just a second here. Okay.

OM: We went to see the president. And after we saw the president, I said to Judy, "Who does the president remind you of?" And she said, "He reminds me of your brother Bruce." And that's true. Because he walked in, and he controlled the area. I mean, he was "it." And he liked Judy. Judy said, "You're going to have to excuse me. I've got to go to the ladies' room." And two of his bodyguards got up to go with Judy—

MH: To the restroom?

OM: To the ladies' room. And Judy said, "I'm going to the ladies' room. I'm not going with you to the ladies' room." And they said, "You're not going anywhere without us." And it was Judy who said to them, "Well, you're going to get some new systems around here. The first one is, I'll tell you when I'll go, and we'll tell you who goes with me."
[laughter]

MH: Oh, that is awesome. That is awesome. Did you get a sense that Mobutu might have had a hidden agenda? Or do you think he was just welcoming you for the sake of religious tolerance and freedom?

OM: No, he wanted to become a bigger shot than he was. And he saw in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—which he had seen in the United States, and had this very high view of what we were—he thought all of this would help him. Sure, he had a hidden agenda. It didn't make the slightest bit of difference. It was a huge help to us.

JB: Did you have any sense of what he was after, with the conversation with David Kennedy, for example?

OM: No, only the fact that he wanted to be a big shot in their country.

MH: Yes. There was another person that you worked with. So there was Bula, who kind of helped you get that meeting, and there was a Captain Bueno who was sort of an aide-de-camp. Do you remember dealing with him? Captain Bueno?

JB: A friend of the Church, also. He kind of walked behind Mobutu and carried his briefcase and such a lot of the time.

OM: Yes, but he was a government official. He was a government official, and he was hugely impressed with the ambassador-at-large from the United States who was there. And so he was there to help. He was just kind of a flunky to help the government people any way they wanted. But he turned out to be very friendly to us, largely because we had an ambassador-at-large from the United States of America who was there representing us.

MH: Sure, sure. You mention a fellow by the name of Kasogi, who had briefed the president on the Church. Kasogi is not Bula and is not Captain Bueno. Was there another person that you dealt with whose name was Kasogi, that would have told Mobutu about who we are?

OM: I don't have any recollection about him.

MH: Okay, okay. Your meeting with the president was four hours long, and I believe you even were given a meal while you were there. Just give us a sense of what it was like to be with this head of state for that amount of time.⁹ I mean that's a pretty long audience for a church getting started.

⁹ McConkie's unpublished autobiography says "At 7:40 [a.m.], Bula picked us up in the three cars and drove us to President Mobutu's private plane. We were flown to [Gbadolite]. . . to where the president was vacationing. He had a summer retreat on the equator where we were to be his guests. We were taken to the smaller of two residences, which was quite lovely. President Mobutu met us there since he had other guests in his home. He was a charming and gracious host. We were served elaborate and delicious hors d'oeuvres and soft drinks. Ambassador Kennedy began by explaining the purpose of our visit. President Mobutu wanted to first discuss some political issues he had with the United States. Kennedy handled the situation as a professional. It was a delight to watch him at work." (*And the Oscar Goes To. . .* pp. 140-143.)

OM: One of the reasons that we had dinner with him, and that he took care of us is that he liked my wife Judy. Judy is a beautiful American woman, and he liked to be with her. And he had us to dinner at his house. And he would explain to Judy about, "You're now eating such-and-such."

MH: Whatever, yes. Was he speaking English to you, or were you doing it through a translator?

OM: No, every place we went we had English speakers. Every place we went. Now I suppose more of the people spoke French, but nearly every place we went we had English speakers.

MH: I also read in your account that the press was there, the media was there, and that this appeared in the radio and in the newspapers, and perhaps even on TV; that is was kind of a big event.¹⁰

OM: Yes, this was a huge thing because members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were meeting with the heads of state here in Africa, and this was a big news media, all of which was helpful to us in the long run. It didn't make any difference initially in our work, but in the long run it helped us.

MH: Tell us about what happened the next day, when you were with the lawyers finalizing the registration. And this would have been Gittleman and Associates?

OM: Yes.

MH: Talk about the follow-up.

JB: You had the Congolese members there with you.

OM: Yes, we had the local people, we had our lawyers there who had been trained in the United States. We were doing what needed to be done with the local people. And there wasn't anything unusual, except for the fact that clearly the good Lord was making it possible for us to get registered when nobody else ever got registered.

¹⁰ "We were treated to a scrumptious meal with a choice of 10 or 20 [entrées]. It was regal. After dinner David Kennedy presented the president with a porcelain figure of a seagull and told him the story of the gulls saving the Saints. We spent four hours with President Mobutu. He had TV cameramen join us. Reporters interviewing Kennedy learned the president had promised to recognize the Mormon Church in Zaïre." (*And the Oscar Goes To...* pp. 140-143.)

JB: What do you see that really gives you the feeling that the Lord was with us? What stood us out to you the most in terms of the Lord's hand in the events?

OM: Well, the fact that the president decided to invite us to dinner, and then took four hours to have dinner with us. And had the thing on national television, made a big deal about it. All of this indicated to me that the Lord was moving this thing along.

MH: At the end of this trip, David M. Kennedy gave you a blessing, and I'm wondering if you recall that? And if it's not too sacred, if you could share a little memory from that experience?

OM: This is a good illustration of what a big shot David Kennedy is and was. I mean, here was a guy who was an ambassador-at-large for the United States of America. That means that wherever he went in this world, he was an ambassador for the United States of America. I didn't know there was such a big shot. And that's what he was. And he and I became close because we were doing exactly the same thing.

And so here the ambassador-at-large, when I'm about to leave—and we'd had some good success in doing what we were doing—he said he'd like to give me a blessing. And so he gives me a blessing largely in measure of being an instrument in the Lord's hands in a legal sense, that had such a huge thing to do with the spiritual development of the people there. This was an ambassador-at-large blessing, but it was a blessing more akin to one of the General Authorities, if he'd been there and seen what we had been doing. They would have given me that type of a blessing. But this was Ambassador-at-Large Kennedy, and he gave a very spiritual blessing of thanksgiving of what the Lord had accomplished.

MH: That's beautiful.

OM: And in which, in the blessing, I had had part of, not just as a lawyer; but as a Saint.

MH: So what's interesting is Zaire becomes the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it is one of the fastest-growing areas of the Church. In April, they'll be dedicating the first temple there, in Kinshasa. When you were there, could you have even imagined that they would be building a temple in Kinshasa, and that there would be several missions, and thousands upon thousands of Church members?

OM: No, no, no. This is an evidence of the miraculous way in which the Lord's kingdom runs. When I went to Kinshasa, Judy and I were the only Saints in Kinshasa. And now, and we're talking only what, thirty years ago?

MH: Yes.

OM: And now there are hundreds of thousands of people in Africa who are members of the Church. I mean, it's a miracle. No, nobody could have ever dreamed that this would develop the way it has.

MH: So I've got one more question. Do you have another question that you want to—

JB: No, go ahead.

MH: This one might feel a little bit presumptuous, but with Jeff here, it may actually turn into reality. If you had an opportunity to give the Congolese Saints a message based on your experiences helping the Church get started there in their country, what would you like to tell them?

OM: Well, what I would tell the Saints in Kinshasa is that they are instruments in the Lord God's hands, and that they are a part of the great miracle that's happened, and that they should have a sense of achievement in everything they've done.

MH: Beautiful, beautiful. Thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

OM: Oh, thank you.

JB: Is there anything else you'd want to add? I think that was a beautiful closing, but sometimes you might be prompted by the Spirit to add something?

OM: I just have never been able to get over the fact that thirty years ago, Judy and I were the only people in Kinshasa, and that there are now several hundred thousand people in Africa.

MH: And they just created a new mission. There are two missions in the city of Kinshasa itself. Just in Kinshasa. Is that right?

JB: That's right.

OM: It's absolutely a miracle. And I think of some of the experiences that those early people— they weren't members of the Church. They were nothing. And God was working with them, and they were developing all of this.

JB: You know the three members that signed the registration certificate? They came back to Congo, not of their own free will. Circumstances, visa problems, other things; and they were unhappy to be there. They didn't know why they were there. [*McConkie laughs*]

MH: But it was necessary. They were necessary to be there.

OM: If I had taken the time to read this before, I would tell you about miracles after miracles. Like this guy poking me in the back, saying, "You would be Oscar W. McConkie?" and I said, "I trust that you're So-and-so," and he was So-and-so.

MH: Was his name Reed Clegg?

OM: I can't remember. [*laughs*] I can't remember, but there were just all sorts of miraculous things that were happening.

MH: Well, even finding this congregation on your first trip, in a city of one million people.

OM: Yes. Well I will say this, that it was very apparent to me that getting converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an easy thing to do among these people. And Judy used to say to me, "Of course, they've been waiting twelve thousand years in order to get it." But you could tell that they were prepared.

MH: They were a believing people?

OM: They were a believing people.

MH: And that's probably why it's still the fastest growing place in the Church right now, I think.

OM: Sure.

MH: Yes, beautiful.

OM: Well, if I had read those pages first, I would have been able to tell you more of the spiritual experiences, but it was very apparent that it's the God of Heaven who's running this outfit.

MH: Yes, that's right. And if that's an extra copy for us, we will have that copy on file down in the Church Archives.¹¹

OM: All right. I'll give you—

MH: Are you sure? We can digitize it and give it back to you, if you want.

OM: I just think—

MH: Did you ever give a copy of that to the Church? I don't think you did.

OM: No, no, I never did. As you read this, as you can tell from the heading and the "Oscar Goes To . . .," it's clearly a family-oriented thing, and there will be a lot of stuff in it that you'll wonder about. But this chapter 11 goes on in detail about how the Lord worked His will down there.

MH: We would be honored to have a copy, thank you. All right, let me turn this off.

[McConkie's wife Judith enters the room and they begin to reminisce.]

OM: Where was it that we went?

JM: We were in Jamaica.

OM: We got a letter from Jamaica, and they were upset about some matter that the LDS Church was doing. So President Kimball said, "I want you to go, and go to the Parliament in Jamaica." And I said, "We've got a lawyer down there, and he can take care of it." And President Kimball said, "I told you I want you to go to Jamaica." So Judy and I went to Jamaica and appeared before the Parliament. And I was making a presentation, and I thought the presentation was just great. But I wasn't getting anywhere with them. The questions were worse, and they were getting after me, and I was answering them and it didn't make any difference.

And so Judy is there with me. She knows nothing about this. And I said, "Our next speaker will be Judy McConkie." And Judy sat there and I said, "Tell them about your family." And so Judy says that she's got five boys that went on missions around the world. One went to Japan and learned Japanese, and learned to love the Japanese people; and the Japanese people learned to love him, and all of this sort of thing.

¹¹ *And the Oscar Goes To. . . Glimpses from the Life of Oscar W. McConkie, Jr. As Told By Himself*, a privately published history found in the Church History Library collection.

And she went through all of that with each of the five boys, and then she said, “Now the reason we’re here is we want some of those missionaries to come to Jamaica, so you’ll learn to love them and they’ll learn to love you; and they’ll carry that love back to their homes with them, and the whole country will get acquainted and love Jamaica.”

And after she said this, the next question—and these had been tough questions. The next question to me was, “Mr. McConkie, I was in Salt Lake City last summer, and I saw on Temple Square a monument to the seagulls. Wouldn’t you like to tell the Parliament why...” and just started to toss me wonderful questions, and this sort of thing. And we got ourselves established in Jamaica because Judy had enough sense to do what I wasn’t able to do.

JM: That and the good Lord. [*chuckles*]

MH: That’s beautiful.

JM: The good Lord had a lot to do with it.

MH: That is beautiful.

JB: Is there anything else you’d like to say about your time with Mobutu or in Kinshasa?

JM: Thank you, this is wonderful.

OM: Tell them about your personal experience with Mobutu, or with Niyati.

JB: Bula.

JM: Bula? Oh, he was beautiful. These people have been waiting twelve hundred years for the gospel, and they are very receptive. They wanted to immediately be baptized. Oscar’s told you that story, has he?

JB: I don’t think he told us that one.

JM: He didn’t tell you about his Doctrine and Covenants revelation?

MH: No, tell us.

JM: Oh, not like Oscar can tell it.

MH: We didn't ask.

JM: What?

MH: We didn't ask.

JB: We'd like to hear it from you.

JM: Well, you know when we went in, they were just so responsive, and they immediately wanted Oscar to baptize them. And Oscar said, "No, that's not why I'm here." He poked Oscar on the chest, and he said, "We Africans demand to know about the Prophet Smith. He's not just for you Europeans." And Oscar read from Doctrine and Covenants where it said—

OM: I've got the guy poking me in the chest in Africa, saying, "We demand to know more about the Prophet Smith. He's not just for you Europeans. He's for us Africans." And I'm thinking, "Joseph, he's just been in jail. He's just been out of jail, and he doesn't know if he's got a ragtag group of people in the Church or not, and the Lord says to him, 'The ends of the earth will inquire after thy name.'" And I'm thinking, "If I don't know anything else, that section of the Doctrine and Covenants is true. I just saw it fully fulfilled before my eyes, when these people demanded to know more about the Prophet Joseph."

MH: That's beautiful.

OM: A pretty good story.

MH: That is awesome.

JB: Could you just clarify for us? Who was it that asked that question? What are the circumstances?

MH: Was it Bula who was tapping you in the chest?

OM: Oh, we were meeting with the president . . .

JB: Mobutu?

OM: Mobutu.

- JB: This was during the meeting with Mobutu?
- OM: This was during the meeting with Mobutu, and this guy is poking me in the chest saying, “I demand to know more about the Prophet Smith.” And that scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants came to my mind, and I don’t whether all the rest of the Doctrine and Covenants is true, but that section is. *[laughter]*
- MH: Oh, that is beautiful, that is beautiful. Sister McConkie, can I get your full name? Now that you’re a participant here, I need to have you sign this legal document that was prepared by a famous downtown firm. What’s your full name?
- JM: Judith Stoddard, S-T-O-D-D-A-R-D, McConkie. My sister-in-law, Amelia Smith McConkie, Bruce’s wife, was—
- OM: Amelia.
- JM: She was Joseph Fielding Smith’s daughter. She’s Joseph F. Smith’s granddaughter. She’s the great-great-granddaughter of Hyrum Smith. And one day it wasn’t real easy, and I said, “Oh I’m not a McConkie, I just married a McConkie.” She says, “Don’t you ever say that again,” she said, “I want you to know you are a McConkie.” I said, “Well, coming from a Smith McConkie, that’s really good. *[laughter]*.”
- MH: Oh my gosh. It’s a lot of pressure, isn’t it?
- JM: It’s a lot of pressure being married into the McConkie family, let me tell you. They’re wonderful.
- MH: May I ask what year you were born?
- JM: I was born in 1930. Or in 1830, I can’t remember. *[laughter]*
- MH: You’re doing well for having been born in 1930.
- JM: We’re just old and dumb around here. *[laughs]*
- JB: Would you mind if we take a picture? If this is the time? If we take a picture of the two of you on the couch?
- OM: We’d be delighted.¹²

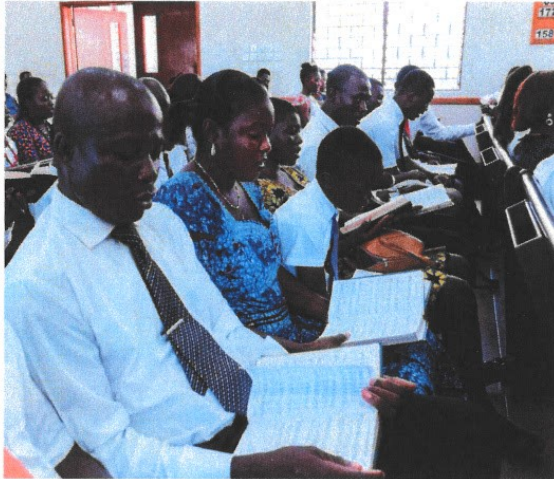
¹² See the Appendix for the photos of the McConkies.

Appendix



Left to right: Mr. Minani (Zaire intelligence service), David M. Kennedy, Banza Wa Mutombo Mucioko, Oscar W. McConkie Jr., Nkitabungi Mbuyi Dieudonné, Banza Mbuyi Régine, Jean Hutchings, Judith McConkie, and R. Bay Hutchings outside the Intercontinental Hotel (now the Pullman Hotel) in Gombe, Kinshasa on 13 February 1986. The photo was taken prior to their departure for the offices of Gittleman and Associates to continue formalities for the official recognition of the Church.

History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Congolese members started to write to Church headquarters requesting missionaries as early as the 1960s and 1970s. Reverend M'Baki Dingana was one of these early Congolese who wrote to Church leaders. American and European members living in the country were the first to establish early branches of the Church. In the late 1970s, Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Church at that time, authorized Martin E. Christensen of the Switzerland Mission to put "these Congo Saints [members] under the jurisdiction of his mission."

Mbuyi Nkitabungi was an early Congolese convert to the Church. He was baptized on July 19, 1980, while studying in Brussels, Belgium. Following his baptism, he began correspondence with the Church, hoping to establish the Church in his home country. Nkitabungi later received a mission call to Birmingham, England. While this was going on, Oscar McConkie, a legal representative for the Church, visited Zaire in 1982. He discovered a few groups who had registered under the name of the Church. In September 1985, the first Zaire congregation met in Limete, with 205 people in attendance. This started a process that resulted in the arrival of Ralph Bay and Jean Hutchings as the first missionaries to Zaire in February 1986. The first district of the Church in Zaire was organized on June 12, 1986, with Robert L. Backman as acting district leader. In June 1987, Elder Hutchings was called as

the first mission president in Zaire. In September the sons of Banza Muchioko, who joined the Church in Switzerland, were baptized, becoming the first people baptized into the Church on Zaire soil.

On August 30, 1987, Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Twelve, assisted by Elder Alexander B. Morrison of the Seventy, dedicated the country for the preaching of the gospel. In the same year, the work spread to cities such as Lubumbashi, Likasi, and Kolwezi. As the 1980s came to an end, Church membership had reached 1,400.

The 1990s began with the calling of the first members from Zaire to serve as missionaries in the Zaire Kinshasa Mission. In 1992, the mission president, Homer LeBaron, met with Etienne Tshisekedi, the then minister of culture and arts in Zaire, and presented him with a triple-combination scripture set, which contains part of the holy scriptures of the Church. At the end of 1995, Church membership had reached 5,300. On November 10, 1996, the first stake in Kinshasa, Zaire, was created. Wa Mushihi Jacques Muliele was called as president.

In 1997 the name of the country changed from Zaire to Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and in the same year, on September 7, 1997, the Lubumbashi Stake was organized, with Nzembelenge Kefa Milambo as president.

In 2005, the Church launched several efforts to help members and the community become self-reliant. Some of the programs included those designed to help fund education, provide career training, and host career improvement meetings. In 2012, the Church began the first phase of the Kinshasa water project, projected to help 500,000 upon completion.

On June 30, 2010, the Democratic Republic of the Congo Lubumbashi Mission was established, the second in the DRC. By the year 2012, the 10th Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Binza Stake was established. In 2016, the Democratic Republic of the Congo Mbuji-Mayi Mission was created, with the first mission president being Alfred Kyungu, a native Congolese.

The Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Temple was announced in October of 2011 by Thomas S. Monson, President of the Church at that time. In February 2016, the

Church broke ground to begin construction. About 800 people were present at that groundbreaking, including key community leaders and Church members. The temple will be dedicated and become operational from April 2019 and

will serve seven countries in the surrounding area, including Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Gabon, and the DRC.



REPUBLIQUE DU ZAIRE



Kinshasa, le

Conseil Exécutif
Département de la Santé Publique
et des Affaires Sociales
CABINET DU COMMISSAIRE D'ETAT

ARRETE N° BUR/CE/SPAS/A/ 0033 /87 PORTANT AGREAS-
TION DE L'ASSOCIATION SANS BUT LUCRATIF DENOMMEE "EGLISE
DE JESUS-CHRIST DES SAINTS DES DERNIERS JOURS

LE COMMISSAIRE D'ETAT

Affaires Sociales;

N/Réf. :

Réf. :

Objet :

Le Commissaire d'Etat à la Santé Publique et aux
Affaires Sociales;
Vu la Constitution de la République du Zaïre;
Vu le décret-loi du 18 septembre 1965 relatif aux
Associations sans but lucratif;
Vu l'Ordonnance n° 86-117 du 12 avril 1986 accordant
la personnalité civile à l'Association Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints
des derniers jours au Zaïre";
Vu le dossier de demande d'agrégation introduit par
le président de ladite Association qui accepte de se conformer à l'esprit
de l'arrêté n° 81-00018 du 10 novembre 1981 complétant et modifiant
l'arrêté ministériel n° 0043 du 10 janvier 1967 fixant les conditions
d'agrégation et de subvention des associations sans but lucratif;
Vu l'arrêté départemental n° 81-00018 spécialement
en ses articles 1er et 2;

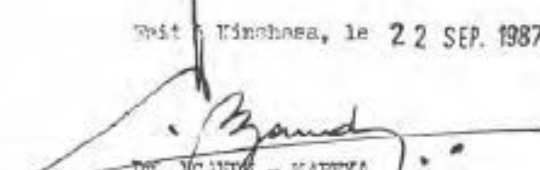
Sur proposition du Secrétaire Général aux Affaires
Sociales;

A R R E T E :

Article 1er : L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des derniers jours au
Zaïre est agréée en tant qu'Association sans but lucratif.

Article 2 : Le présent arrêté entre en vigueur à la date de sa signa-
ture.

Fait à Kinshasa, le 22 SEP. 1987


DR. NGANDU - NKANYAMBA
Secrétaire de l'Ordre National du Léopard.

 L'EGLISE DES MORMONS AUTORISEE A S'INSTALLER AU ZAIRE

GB. DC-LITE, 13/2 (AZAP) - L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ des saints des derniers jours connue sous l'appellation de "l'Eglise des Mormons" vient de recevoir l'agrément du maréchal Mobutu Sese Seko pour exercer son ministère au Zaïre, a annoncé à la presse l'ambassadeur David Kennedy, délégué de cette communauté, à l'issue de l'audience que le Chef de l'Etat lui a accordée mercredi à Gbadolite.

M. Kennedy, qui avait déjà rencontré à New-York le Chef de l'Etat à ce sujet, a été dépêché de l'Etat américain de l'USH par le chef des "Mormons" pour solliciter en faveur de son église l'autorisation de s'installer au Zaïre. Le Guide dont on connaît l'attachement aux libertés, en l'occurrence celle des cultes, a accédé à cette demande.

M. et Mme Hatchines qui accompagnaient M. David Kennedy resteront au Zaïre où ils vont prendre contact avec les autorités compétentes sur les modalités pratiques de l'installation de leur communauté, pendant que M. Kennedy regagnera les Etats-Unis.

Celui-ci a indiqué en outre qu'il a examiné avec le maréchal Mobutu divers projets de coopération entre l'Eglise des Mormons et le Zaïre. Il n'a toutefois pas précisé la nature de ces projets.

MOFAP : 173 COMITES SECTIONNAIRES DU HPR POUR LE SEMINAIRE DU 15 FEVRIER

KINSHASA, 13/2 (AZAP) - Le département de la Mobilisation, propagande et animation politique (MOFAP) vient de sortir une liste supplémentaire de 21 comités sectionnaires du HPR des entreprises para-étatiques et privées devant participer au séminaire de formation politique et pratique prévu le 15 février au Palais du peuple.

Sur la liste additive figurent notamment les comités sectionnaires du HPR de l'Agence Zaïre-Press (AZAP), de l'OSPP, du DNIPN, de l'AMIZA, de l'I.N.P.E., de Eata-Zaïre, de l'AGSTRAM et de l'Institut géographique du Zaïre, qui devront s'ajouter aux 152 comités sectionnaires déjà retenus pour le même séminaire.

Le séminaire du 15 février permettra au département de la MOFAP de vulgariser d'une manière générale, à l'intention des cadres des organismes retenus, les grandes orientations de la politique économique, sociale et culturelle du pays telles que contenues dans le discours présidentiel du 5 décembre 1984, afin de sensibiliser chaque organisme et chaque entreprise à participer efficacement au développement national.

(AZAP)

L.Y.K./III.

Azap. bulletin quotidien
13-02-86
 ↳ AGENCE ZAIRE Presse

de 11

**JOURNAL OFFICIEL
DE LA
REPUBLIQUE DU ZAIRE**



Bureau du Président-Fondateur
du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution,
Président de la République

PREMIERE PARTIE

**Bulletin des lois et actes
du Président-Fondateur du M.P.R.,
Président de la République,**

**du Congrès,
du Comité Central,
du Bureau Politique,
du Conseil Législatif,
du Conseil Exécutif et
du Conseil Judiciaire**

N° 11

1er Juin 1986



Oscar



Oscar and Judith McConkie, January 8, 2019