

Announcement: BookShare, Logos, Amazon, Overdrive, Olivetree, [PDF versions available]

Growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Monique Misenga Ngoie Mukuna persevered through many challenges: political turmoil and violence, misogyny and patriarchy, lack of community resources and personal loss. As she carved out a life for herself, her family, and her community, she kept seeing the same story played out for women vulnerable and trapped in poverty. Every system was stacked against them. So "Maman" Monique committed to take action in every sphere she could: through education, the local and national church, and international cooperation. In 1999 she joined with other Christian women to start the nonprofit *Femme, Berceau de l'Abondance*—Woman, Cradle of Abundance.

The very personal story of Maman Monique opens a unique window on the lives of women in Congo, across Africa, and throughout the Majority World. In *Cradling Abundance* she recounts her remarkable experiences as a gifted student and teacher, successful businesswoman, local and denominational church leader, visionary social activist, and matriarch for her extended family. With stories of other African women woven in, this narrative presents a panoramic view of Christian women at work at every level of the church and community. We see the resistance they face even within their own congregations and families, as well as how their faith leads them to oppose injustice, discrimination, and suffering. Professor Elsie McKee introduces the autobiography of her friend Maman Monique (translating it from conversations in French and Tshiluba), then provides helpful historical background and textual notes throughout, along with a study guide to additional cultural information. For anyone interested in how lay women lead in Christian ministries, what it takes to start a pioneering nonprofit, or how empowering women is critical to the health of communities, *Cradling Abundance* is a unique and gripping resource.

REVIEW OF CRADLING ABUNDANCE

Based on careful research, interviews, and personal engagement, this beautiful, poignant, and unique book narrates the life and witness of Maman Monique, a remarkable Congolese woman and world Christian leader. We hear Maman Monique's story of suffering, struggle, perseverance, and triumph in her own voice and the voices of her co-workers, thanks to the unobtrusive and illuminating editorial accompaniment of her friend, ElsieTshimunyi McKee, Princeton Seminary professor, scholar, and teacher of the church who spent the first 18 years of her life in the Congo as granddaughter and daughter of missionaries. The solidarity in God's mission shared by Monique and Elsie has generated a compelling "grounded" account of the peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they moved out of colonial subjugation, through civil war, ethnic conflict, and poverty, and—thanks to courageous women like Maman Monique and her collaborators—toward a more just society where all children, women, and men are honored as equal recipients and agents of the "cradling abundance" of God in Jesus Christ. - Thomas John Hastings, Ph.D.

Thomas John Hastings, Ph.D. is Executive Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center at Princeton Theological Seminary and Editor of the International Bulletin of Mission Research (SAGE).

A SOUTH AFRICAN WOMAN AND THEOLOGIAN-PASTOR'S COMMENTS ON CRADLING ABUNDANCE

“The fight for women’s rights has both a long history and future. Many are still involved in this struggle today, and others will be tomorrow. In *Cradling Abundance*, Maman Monique offers unique insight into how women were seen and treated in the DR Congo, as well as surrounding nations she visited. Thus she doesn’t only tell her own story, but the stories of other women she met. These stories, woven together, create a tapestry of women’s lives in central Africa that confronts readers.” “While reading the book a friend asked, ‘Tell us what *Cradling Abundance* is about in four words.’ I answered without hesitation, ‘Women abuse, women empowerment.’ ... However, this book is about so much more. It is a story of how God used Monique, with other women, to speak boldly against the injustices women and girls suffer. Moreover, it’s a story about how she **did something** about the injustices. She acted so that women could be economically, spiritually, educationally, and socially empowered.”

excerpts from Amanda Pungula, “*Cradling Abundance Tells a Story We Must Hear, and Heed*,” *Christian History*, TGC, March 11, 2022. Read the whole article at:

<https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/cradling-abundance-tells-a-story-we-must-hear-and-heed/>

BOBonBOOKS Review Feb. 4, 2022

Summary: An autobiography of a lay leader in the Democratic Republic of Congo, describing her work with women addressing their education, helping them develop usable skills, and addressing the gender violence and health issues they face.

Maman Monique, as the author is spoken of, is an amazing woman. As a student of twenty, she was on a transport home when stopped by an illegal military barricade, with soldiers intent on confiscating their luggage. Instead of complying, she demanded to see their orders, knowing such barricades to have been declared illegal by President Mobutu. They all were permitted to leave with their luggage, and when they arrived home, the others told her father, “She is a man!” Her father told her, “That is good! You must always be like that.”

This is the account of how this Presbyterian lay leader in the Democratic Republic of Congo fulfilled her father’s words, to the betterment of many other women in her country. She narrates her life from childhood, her student days, her marriage to Tatu Mukunu, her work as an educator and entrepreneur. Her big business idea was making clothing, the wraps women wore and other accessories. First she learned to do this herself, and then to train other women. Her work grew as she was asked to lead women’s ministry with her church.

It became ever clearer that the way to empower women in a highly patriarchal society was for women to be educated and equipped to earn their own living through training in practical skill, having access to microloans, and learning how to run a business, all this out of her home in the early years. She expanded her work by launching Woman, Cradle of Abundance/FEBA to both educate and advocate more effectively.

This is hardly a story of going from success to success. Her accounts describe the setbacks of political upheavals, opposition from other church leaders, often protecting the misappropriation of funds. Yet she met these challenges with faith and strengthened others, eventually giving leadership to women's groups in a network of African countries, and engaging in efforts for the restoration of neighboring Rwanda. We also see the structures of patriarchy at work in stripping women of economic resources, barring their empowerment and inflicting sexual and physical violence against them, not only in the culture, but sadly in the church as well.

Yet she persisted. The hardest blow was the death of her own husband, and being stripped of family belongings by his family, a cultural practice. She is forced out of leadership in her church.

Amid all this Elsie McKee, a Princeton Theological Seminary professor becomes a friend, supporter, and advocate, help Woman, Cradle of Abundance to expand its work. McKee also translated this narrative from Maman Monique's French into English. Having never heard Maman Monique, I can only speculate, but McKee translates but doesn't get in the way. One has the sense of sitting in a room as Maman tells her story—there is a distinctive voice to this narrative that carries both the faith and force of this woman who has done so much to empower other women. I'm glad to have been able to listen to her story and grateful for the woman who gave us her story in English without getting in the way of a good storyteller.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received a complimentary review copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

Announcement from Christianbook

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