

FINISHING THE JOB:
TRANSFORMING THE ZAMBIAN CHURCH FROM A MISSIONARY SENDING TO
MISSIONARY RECEIVING CHURCH

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Zambia was one of the last African nations to be “effectively missionized.”¹ The story of the Christian mission effort in Zambia, as it does for the majority of that region of Africa, begins with David Livingstone. While Livingstone did not spend an extended amount of time in Zambia, the news of his travels awakened Europe to the needs of the people and land. It was in Zambia, on May 1, 1873, that Livingstone died on his knees in prayer. It was in Zambia that his heart was buried. Plymouth Brethren Frederick Stanley Arnot spent 18 months (1882-1884) trying to establish a mission station in the land before moving on. François Coillard, a Frenchman serving with the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, established the first lasting missionary effort in 1885. Before the 19th century ended, representatives of the Dutch Reformed (1889), Free Church of Scotland (1889), Roman Catholic (1898), and Primitive Methodists (1899) had all established works in the nation.

While Christian mission got off to a late start in Zambia, progress was rapid. By the middle of the 20th century, representatives from nearly every major branch of Christianity and the major sub-Christian groups established a presence in Zambia.² One begins to understand the success of Christian mission work when current demographic statistics are compared to another nation.

Table 1. Religious Demographic Comparison of Two Nations

	% of National Population Christian	% of National Population Roman Catholic	% of National Population Evangelical	Annual Christian Growth rate	Annual Evangelical Growth rate
Nation A	77.6	21.2	28.9	.5	.8
Zambia	86.9	28.6	25.7	2.6	3.2

¹ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 525.

² In terms of membership, the Seventh-day Adventist and Jehovah’s Witnesses represent the 4th and 7th largest denominations in Zambia.

Nation A is the United States. At the dawn of the 20th century, there were a handful of believers in Zambia. At the dawn of the 21st, Christians are nearly 90% of the population. By nearly any estimate, Great Commission work has succeeded in Zambia.

Great Commission work has succeeded in Zambia by nearly any estimate, except, perhaps, for the Lord's. While the work of the Great Commission may never be fully done, Jesus gave the distinguishing characteristic of its maturity: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Great Commission work is not finished when people are evangelized, or baptized, or disciplined. Great Commission work is finished—or at least matured—when those evangelized, baptized, disciplined believers are themselves observing all that Jesus commanded the apostles. One of those commands, the last of those commands, is the command to perpetuate the work of the Great Commission around the globe. This is the work that needs to be done in Zambia because this is the work the Zambian church is not yet doing in the world.

Christianity in Zambia is now generational. There are Zambian believers who have Christian grandparents, great grandparents, great-great grandparents in their genealogy. The church in Zambia is aged, but not matured. Indeed, when it comes to the level of international missionary work, one Zambian pastor-educator described the church as being in infancy.³ In correspondence and conversation with multiple Zambian pastors and educators, the refrain became predictable: "I know of 2 or 3 Zambian missionaries." Precise data is difficult to come by. *Operation World* can only vaguely estimate "hundreds now serve cross-culturally within

³ Dean of Students at International Bible College of Zambia Lawrence Chibuye, interview by author March 24, 2015.

Zambia and...neighboring countries.”⁴ The beginnings of a stirring are evident, but the church in Zambia has not yet risen to the challenge of embracing the great work Christ handed over to his apostles.

Why has the Zambian church at large not engaged in international missionary work? One missiologist describes the failure of the Zambian church to catch the missionary vision as the “greatest puzzle and...indictment of mission work in Africa.”⁵ It is not much of a puzzle, but it is an indictment. The Zambian church has not engaged in foreign missions because foreign missionaries never thoroughly intended it. In over a century of mission work, missionaries constantly presented missions as something Zambians were to receive rather than to do. If the Zambian church is going to begin the journey toward foreign missions, one of the first steps will be the repentance of foreign agencies and missionaries content to keep Zambia as part of “the field.” Zambian believers do not have a vision for world evangelization because Western missionaries never presented it to them.

Western missionaries still have a strategic opportunity to help spur on the Zambian church. Zambian Christianity’s most pressing need is not for Western church planters, but for further theological education and training of Zambian pastors. Recognizing this, most foreign mission agencies have transferred their ministry focus from church planting to theological education. To expand the vision of the Zambian church, Christian colleges and universities must expand their own vision to include the training of Zambian missionaries.

⁴ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 895.

⁵ Yusufu Turaki, “Evangelical missiology from Africa: strengths and weaknesses,” in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*, ed. William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 278.

Theological education in Zambia is available in a variety of delivery formats. There are traditional, residential, semester based Bible colleges and Universities. Theological Education by Extension (TEE) is widely used: enabling pastors already serving to receive training while remaining in their local church ministry. Fitting between these two, are residential colleges operating in a condensed “block course” style with classes taught over the course of one or two weeks. Western missionaries are heavily involved in each of these forms of education.

Each of these avenues of theological education share a paucity of instruction on missions. This should not come as a surprise for TEE programs. Such programs are intended for men who are already pastors and who desire to be better pastors. Most residential Christian colleges, however, only offer one or 2 courses on missions in a four-year degree program. The one exception to this was the Theological College of Central Africa (TCCA) in Ndola, Zambia. Students at TCCA have the option of majoring in missions in the Bachelor of Theology program.⁶ Where are Zambian missionaries going to come from when the colleges preparing men and women for Christian service offer no more than one course on missions in the course of a 4-year program? The Lord could certainly speak to these stones and raise up sons of Livingstone, but that is not how he tends to operate. If schools do not even offer the possibility of training Zambian missionaries, how shall they be sent?

Foreign missionaries working in theological education must labor to expand the amount of courses focused on cross-cultural missions. Such an expansion will increase the possibility of Zambians embracing the call of the Great Commission. There will be an important side-benefit as well. With increased exposure to biblical teachings and global needs, those Zambians who

⁶ Program includes 22 hours of missions related courses.

remain to serve the church in Zambia will be better equipped to share the vision with those they minister to. “Biblically we cannot separate missions from pastoral ministry or indeed any other part of church life.”⁷

Foreign missionaries do not carry all the responsibility of vision casting. They do not even carry the primary responsibility. Whether or not they were ever challenged with the need for global missionary work, Zambian pastors have the same Bible that Columba and Anskar; Zinzendorf and Carey; Moffat and Livingstone had. Global evangelization is not a Western, imperialistic, colonialist, or foreign concept: it is biblical. Zambian pastors must present the Great Commission as something Jesus expects and empowers his followers to do. “Birthing the vision for missions” is the most important function of the church.⁸ Pastors are the ones who must deliver and maintain this vision. Pastors can cultivate a missionary vision through preaching missionary sermons, inviting missionaries to speak, and making prayer for missions a regular part of the worship service. Pastors should be looking for potential missionaries in their congregations; planning special classes on missions; organizing seasons of prayer; and engaging in local and international mission work. Pastors must “expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.”

The relationship of church and school is symbiotic; both must take the first step together. Colleges and universities will find it pointless to create missions programs for students who do not exist. Pastors will find it pointless to nurture and grow the desire for missions when there is no avenue to grow that desire to maturity. The churches and schools

⁷ Andrew Abah, “Theological Education in Missions,” in *Evangelical Christian Missions: An African Perspective*, ed. Peter Vumisa (INSERV, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 5220.

⁸ Peter Vumisa, “The African Missionary,” in *ibid.* Location 2183.

connected denominationally or organizationally⁹ must move in concert with one another. Since many schools utilize Zambian pastors for faculty, this should certainly not be difficult.

Zambian churches and schools embracing the glorious responsibility of calling Zambians to participate in Great Commission work face a daunting obstacle. The challenge that every pastor, every educator, lists as *the* reason mission work is not being done by Zambian believers is money. In 2014, the United Nations listed Zambia 141st out of 187 nations in terms of human development.¹⁰ For 2013, the per capita GNI of Zambia was just over \$1,800.¹¹ How are pastors to motivate financial commitment to missions when many in the church barely make enough to live on? How are pastors themselves to be motivated to encourage such giving when many Zambian churches do not even support their own pastor? Should those very pastors be expected to exhort their congregations to support sending someone overseas with the gospel? How would churches unable to support their own pastor engage in such a program even if they wanted to? Ethiopian Air is not going to accept 5 cows and a chicken for passage to India.

The first step in mobilizing the Zambian church to commit financially to missions may be teaching about the biblical responsibility churches have to support their pastor.¹² It is a hard, uncomfortable work for a pastor to tell his church they should be paying him what he needs to live. The clarity of biblical passages expressing God's will should strengthen pastors in this task. Those who spiritually benefit from the ministry of another "owe it to them" to offer material

⁹ E.g. United Church of Zambia and United Church of Zambia University College; Baptist Fellowship of Zambia and Baptist Theological Seminary of Zambia; Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia and Theological College of Central Africa; Christian Council of Zambia; Reformed Church in Zambia and Justo Mwale Theological University College; Reformed Baptist Churches and Lusaka Ministerial College, Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary, The Copperbelt Ministerial College;

¹⁰ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2014-human-development-report.html>

¹¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>

¹² Another subject matter which foreign missionaries failed to adequately teach.

blessings (Rom. 15:26-27). Those who labor in the gospel have “the right” to expect payment that relieves them of the need for working for a living (1 Cor. 9:4-6). Such payment is commanded by the Lord (1 Cor. 9:14). Those “taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches” (Gal. 6:6). Those who labor in preaching and teaching deserve this (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Pastors do not need to embellish or exaggerate these passages—they just need to preach them in the power and confidence of the Holy Spirit. Once this foundation is established, Zambian pastors will be able to build upon it the expectation to financially support mission work as well.

Foreign agencies should examine what role they play in perpetuating pastoral poverty. Many organizations no longer send church planters but support national pastors and church planters. This seems like a wise stewardship of money. Why spend thousands on an American missionary when you can spend hundreds on a Zambian one? Is this really a responsible way to support Zambian pastors? A pastor not supported by his church does not feel especially responsible to it; nor does the church to the pastor.¹³ Foreign mission agencies giving regular financial support to Zambian pastors enable disobedience to the Scriptural commands given to the church to support her pastor. Without careful oversight, such outside support can also encourage laziness in the pastor. Why labor too hard to grow the church if you know you are going to get paid comfortably anyway? Such a practice also serves to hinder the growth of the Zambian church into a missionary sending church. Churches which do not support their own pastor cannot reasonably be expected to support missionaries.

¹³ Max Ward Randall, *Profile for Victory: New Proposals for Missions in Zambia* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1970), 178.

Poverty is not merely an absence of possessions. Poverty is “a loss of meaning, purpose, and hope.”¹⁴ Expectations for Zambian mission work must be tempered. British churches remained largely unengaged in missions until the early 1800s. American churches remained largely unengaged until the early 1900s. If Christians living in the prosperity of empires find it difficult to give of their wealth to missions; how much more those who have little-to-no wealth to begin with? Zambians should not expect or be expected to send thousands upon thousands of missionaries to the foreign field. But what if 30% of the population gave 10% of their income to support sending international missionaries? That would be approximately \$438,000 for foreign missions per year. The Zambian church must embrace the responsibility to support those they send out and to send out no more than what they can adequately support.¹⁵ It should do so in the confidence that the Lord of the harvest will increase their ability as they use what they already have.

Poverty can no longer be an acceptable excuse. In the fullness of time, God did not send his son to be born in a palace. The Lord did not give the Great Commission to bankers. The Widow and Macedonians are not praised for the amount they gave, but for the sacrificial nature of their gift.¹⁶ The creation of a will for missions cannot happen if the Great Commission is considered impossible to fulfill. If the problems of the world are hopeless, or can only be solved by politics, technology, and wealth; then missions is not needed. If we think God’s sole

¹⁴ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 51-52.

¹⁵ Larry E. Keyes, “The New Age of World Missions: Two-Thirds World Missions” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), D-224.

¹⁶ Mark 12:41-44; 2 Cor. 8:1-5

purpose is to bless our nation with money to spend on self rather than a responsibility from God to help others; we do not understand that he who would save his life shall lose it.¹⁷

Rather than using poverty as an excuse, the Zambian church should consider possible advantages to poverty. Zambian Christians share with Africans (and others) a lack of power, i.e. poverty. Going with the gospel will therefore demonstrate that the power of the gospel is not dependent upon the powerful of this world. Zambians can be a living missiological testimony to the truth of 1 Cor. 1:25-31. Inherent in the Zambian missionary's ministry is the declaration that the gospel demands sacrifice; that the gospel is worth sacrifice. Inherent in the Zambian missionary's ministry is the demonstration that God does not need gold to spread the gospel.¹⁸

From a base of responsible stewardship, Zambian churches can begin to build toward mission engagement. On the journey to reaching the world, Zambian believers should be challenged with the mission needs of Zambia. Believers in eastern provinces are likely in close proximity to Muslims. Churches and schools could offer training on Islam and Muslim evangelism.¹⁹ Believers in the Copperbelt are likely in close proximity to Chinese. Churches and schools could offer training in Chinese culture and worldview. As citizens of the capital city, believers in Lusaka can come into frequent contact with expatriates of multiple nations.

Wherever they are, Zambians should open their eyes to who has come to them.

¹⁷ Ralph D. Winter, "Reconsecration to a Wartime, Not a Peacetime, Lifestyle" *ibid.* D-289.

¹⁸ Tite Tienou, "The Training of Missiologists for a African Context," in *Missiological Education for the 21st Century: The Book, the Circle and the Sandals*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry, Charles Van Engen, and Edgar J. Elliston (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 99.

¹⁹ With respect to Muslim evangelism, the Zambian church does not have to look very far for practical advice and encouragement. The Evangelical Baptist Church in Malawi made progress in evangelizing the Muslim Yao tribe. Zambia and Malawi are neighboring countries that are already in the habit of communication and sharing.

Even in a nation that is over 80% Christian, there are groups of people who have never heard the gospel. Zambian believers should be challenged to reach these unreached people groups in their own homeland. The Joshua Project lists 3 unreached people groups in Zambia:²⁰

Table 2. Unreached People Groups in Zambia

Group	Population	% Christian	Belief system	Location
Gujarati	25,000	1.0	Hindu (74%)	SW
Jew	2,000	0.0	Ethnic Religions	Lusaka
Swahili	27,000	0.0	Islam (100%)	NE border with Tanzania

Zambian pastors and educators should work together to mobilize the Zambian church to reach these groups with the gospel. Such work among the Swahili and Gujarati carries with it a double benefit. The Zambian church would be reaching an unreached people group within their own nation: eliminating costs associated with traveling and living internationally. Poverty is not an obstacle to reaching them. Such work would also prepare men and women for mission work among other Muslim and Hindu people groups. The Lord has providentially placed representatives from the two largest religious blocs of unreached people groups in Zambia.²¹ Work among the Swahili and Gujarati would expand the gospel in Zambia and serve to facilitate international gospel-growth as well.

What steps should be taken to intentionally grow the Zambian international missions effort? Preparing for this requires sober examination of the world's needs and Zambian

²⁰ <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/ZA>

²¹ Unreached Muslims- 1.4 Billion. Unreached Hindus- 1.0 billion.

capabilities. Such consideration immediately eliminates the deputation model of raising support. One of the greatest drawbacks of the deputation model of support raising is that in some places it actually works. For American Christianity, that is often all that matters. Though it is changing, few have bothered to ask, "Is this best?" Plenty of urban churches in Zambia have members living in financial comfort, but the deputation model severely limits missions involvement from the thousands of village churches filled with subsistence farmers.

The more effective route for the Zambian church would seem to be the denominational model. This is not to say that Zambians can simply say, "Let's just do what the Southern Baptists do." Nevertheless, some adaptation of that model would allow for immediate financial involvement of any church willing to participate. Some Baptists have already united for just such an effort. In 1995, 18 churches formed The Baptist Fellowship of Zambia "to impact the world for Christ and empower [Baptist churches and institutions] to respond effectively to spiritual and social needs."²² The Fellowship has now grown to 1,800 member churches.²³ While they currently only have 3 missionaries, with one serving outside of Zambia, at least the foundation is in place to send out more as the Lord raises up laborers for the harvest.

Nevertheless, whether by deputation or denomination, Zambian pastors, educators, and mission organizers, must recognize the fact that utilizing such traditional means to send out laborers with 4 year Bible degrees is not going to accomplish anything the global missionary movement has not already accomplished. Zambian missionaries with nothing more than a Bible degree are not going to go anywhere Western missionaries with a Bible degree have not gone

²² <http://baptistfellowshipofzambia.org/fellowship-news/>

²³ The above listed website gives the figure of 1,200. Luke Buleya, current Executive Secretary, gave the figure of 1,800 in private correspondence May 8, 2015.

or could not go. Morocco and Somalia, Iran and Yemen, North Korea and Cambodia are not eagerly waiting to grant missionary visas to Zambians.

Zambian mission leaders should embrace their unique position in the global mission movement. The Zambian mission movement is being born at just the right time. Pastors and educators leading the Zambian movement are in the strategic position of being able to start fresh without the hindrances of models and bureaucracies that are largely in maintain mode. The Zambian church is ready to begin obedience to the Great Commission in ways that will emulate the methods of the first great missionary: Paul the tentmaker.²⁴

There are at least 6 practical reasons the Zambian church should adopt tentmaking as its foundational mission strategy.²⁵ This is the only effective way to enter and establish a presence in countries closed to missionary church planters. Self-supported missionaries can also be effective in “open” countries among those who are put-off by professional clergy. Utilizing tentmaking helps expand the mission force and presence. How long it would take an American missionary to raise support to “just” be a solid member of a church: to be a Sunday school teacher, a financial secretary, a deacon, a nursery worker? Via tentmaking, a solid core for church planting can go from home-to-field in as long as it takes to get the paperwork filled out. Financially, tentmaking solves the cost problem for the home church. Missionaries can labor for years with minimal financial cost to the church. Tentmaking is ideal for developing nations with unstable or devalued currency and for missionaries from those countries going to more

²⁴ Passages that speak to Paul’s method of self-support include Acts 18:2-3; 20:24; 1 Cor. 9:6-12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8. Such frequent mention demonstrates Paul did not consider this practice incidental to the success of his mission.

²⁵ Ruth E. Siemens, “Tentmakers Needed for World Evangelization” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), D248-9

developed nations. Finally, the very existence of the global job market speaks to the church's responsibility to utilize it. Would the God of the ages put us in such a time as this to stand idly by as men and women travel sea and land to fatten one more bank account?

Theological educators should joyfully embrace an emphasis on tentmaking. Such a missionary force needs a different curriculum than what is currently offered. Frankly, such a missionary force is more likely to be drawn from schools like the University of Zambia and Copperbelt University than 4-year Christian colleges and universities. Christian colleges and universities should therefore focus on developing educational programs that supplement a secular degree. One such program to emulate would be "The Gateway to the Nations" program offered by Africa School of Missions in South Africa.²⁶ Prospective missionaries who have spent 4 years, or more for those needing advanced degrees, should not be expected to spend another four years pursuing a degree they will ultimately have to keep from their C.V. Will a one-year program focused on principles and practices of missions offer enough theological and pastoral education? Probably not.

Pastors must be honest and brave enough to tell prospective missionaries that a 4 year Bible degree might not be the best thing for them. Theological educators should be bold enough to say what they have to offer is worth more than their own paycheck and the student's degree. An emphasis on tentmaking will necessitate centering theological education in the most unlikely of places: the church. Pastors and educators should be willing to give of their time and expertise to offer special instruction to groups of people pursuing tentmaking

²⁶ Brochure for program available at <http://www.asm.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Gateway-to-the-Nations.pdf>

opportunities. Pastors and educators will have to come to agreement about which is more important: the study itself, or the recognition for completing the study. What does the field need more: men and women trained in the Scriptures or a diploma saying men and women are trained in Scriptures? One of these can survive quite well without the other. Educators must work within the Zambian church to grow the global church. They must accept that the only payment they receive for this labor is likely to be the eternal variety.

François Coillard, the first “permanent” missionary to Zambia proclaimed of the work, “We have not only stations, but we have—graves. We have taken possession of the country by our graves.”²⁷ It is time for the Zambian church to rise up and claim new lands for Christ and the gospel. Pastors and educators must work together to expand the vision and create the expectation for Great Commission obedience. Pastors and educators must work together to shape the Zambian mission movement according to the needs of the field rather than the traditions of the church. Pastors must sacrifice those the Zambian church has great need of—secularly able, financially stable professionals—for the greater work of taking the gospel where it has not been. Theological educators must sacrifice making a living from teaching in order to teach so others might live. Missions is sacrifice, but “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

²⁷ C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. 3, 1878-1914 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 152.

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