SIM INTERNATIONAL: CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN COMMUNITIES WHERE HE IS LEAST KNOWN

By Elsie Froment, PhD

Introduction

SIM International was established in Canada as a Canadian mission. Roland Bingham, the founder, came to Canada from Britain as a teenager and established the mission as a young man.[1] He lived and directed the mission from Ontario.[2] When he established the mission in 1893, the Canadian population was less than 5 million people.[3] Of the Evangelical Triangle of Britain, Canada, and the United States, the United States had a population of over 62 million[4] and Britain had a population of almost 40 million.[5] Canada held its own in the number of missionaries it sent, both at home and abroad. Proportionally, Canada sent out more missionaries than either the United States or Britain.[6]

Today SIM International has over 4,000 missionaries, including missionaries from 70 countries.[7] It is a vibrant enterprise.[8] Historically it has been involved in evangelism of unreached areas, medical mission, elementary and secondary

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[1] Bingham's father was a smoker, and he made Roland promise he would never develop the habit. His mother's shop sold tobacco. When he told his mother, he could not sell it as a matter of conscience, his mother replied that as long as he remained at home, he would have to sell it because it was an important part of their income. Bingham decided to leave home for Canada. J.H. Hunter, *A Flame of Fire: The Life and Work of R.V. Bingham, D.D.* (The Sudan Interior Mission: Hazell Watson & Viney Limited, 1961), 47.

[2] Ibid., 297. Bingham was buried on December 8, 1942, following a funeral service at Cooke's Presbyterian church in Toronto.

[3] The 1891 Canadian census counted 4,795,175 people (echerche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Result?ApplicationCode=27&ProvinceCode=BC~MB~NB~NT~NS~ON~PE~QC&DataSource=Genealogy|Census&DataSourceSel=Genealogy|Census&ST=SCB&).

[4] The 1890 United States census enumerated 62,979,766 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1890_United_States_census).

[5] The 1891 United Kingdom census counted 37,740,283

[6] Alvyn Austin, "'Toronto the Good': The Canadian Roots of the Sudan Interior Mission," in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 38.

[7] https://www.sim.org/about-sim-international/

[8] Interest in missions has waned since the turn of the last century. In 2017, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada did a study of church support of missions. They found that those who attended service regularly and read their Bibles supported missionaries, but they comprised only 49 percent of church goers. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Report 3: Canadian Evangelicals and Mission Priorities, (https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Communications/Research/Canadian-Evangelical-Missions-Engagement-Study/Report-3-Canadian-Evangelicals-and-Mission-Priori), 1-84.

education as well as vocational and theological education, and missionary journals. More recent initiatives include media outreach, recovering from trauma,[9] and opposing human trafficking.[10]

The argument of this paper is that the mission was preoccupied with spreading the Gospel to unreached peoples. The last commands of Jesus on earth became the passion of Rowland Bingham and his successors.

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt 28:17-20 NIV)

Unreached peoples mattered to the founder of the mission. Through successive leaders, the mission created tensions with other faiths as the evangelization of unreached people was always more important than the cultural work in which the mission might be engaged. Colonial and later governments would have liked SIM to concentrate on such activities as medical missions and education, and the mission did serve in these ways, but evangelization of unreached people was always the guiding purpose of SIM International.[11]

Early History

Bingham's family followed the evangelical Anglican tradition. His family consisted of eight boys, of which he was the second, and one girl. When he was three years old,

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[9] Missionaries with appropriate training are working through SIM networks in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America to address wounds from war, abuse, poverty, and displacement. (https://www.sim.org/ministries/for-freedom/; https://www.sim.org/ministries/trauma-healing/https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/; https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/ethiopia/)

[10] The risk of human trafficking is very real for many people in the countries and communities where SIM works. SIM is committed to responding to the injustice of trafficking and exploitation and sees this as a natural expression of our discipleship in action. Our mission states that "we cross barriers to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ"; human trafficking is one of the most significant barriers we have to cross for people to be able to hear God's good news. As we reach out in Jesus name in very practical matters of safety, we lay a path to share the gospel. Protecting the vulnerable and those most at risk of exploitation, creates a safe environment where the gospel can be heard and Christ can be known (https://www.sim.org/ministries/for-freedom/0.

[11] Premillennial theology became popular at the end of the nineteenth century. Premillennialists believe that after all nations hear the Gospel, Jesus will come. D.L. Moody, A.J. Gordon, A.B. Simpson, and Rowland Bingham were premillennialists. Gary R. Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations: A Short History of SIM* (Grand Rapids MI: Credo House Publishers, 2018), 26-27.

his family moved to Kent. Before Bingham's father died, he asked his children one by one if they would meet him in heaven. Roland promised, but he had no peace. The clergyman in charge of the school where he taught from age 13 began to introduce High Church practices. In reaction, Bingham became a Dissenter and the clergyman dismissed him. On holiday, Bingham heard the Salvation Army, a new organization, giving assurance of sins forgiven. He went forward at a Salvation Army meeting, and the speaker helped him to see it is by faith that sins are forgiven. "With the sense of sins forgiven there came a joy that had to find expression in witnessing and in service."[12] A woman observed how he read scripture to his mother and brothers and sisters after he had assurance of his salvation.[13] She burst into tears and asked how she might be saved. Bingham now had an unexpected soul on his hands and all he could do was tell her how he came to Jesus. He realized that he could be used to bring salvation to others. About this time, at the age of sixteen, he moved to Ontario, in Canada.[14]

The story of how Bingham received his call to Africa is well known. He had heard Adoniram Judson Gordon, founder of Gordon Conwell Seminary, speak in 1891 and had surrendered his life for missionary service.[15] When he was 20, after he spoke at a meeting in Toronto, Margaret Gowan invited him to lunch to tell him of her son's missionary vision. Her Presbyterian family had emigrated from Scotland years before and she had a daughter who was serving with China Inland Mission. Her son, Walter Gowan, was in England raising funds and trying to interest mission boards to send missionaries to the interior of Africa. Mrs. Gowan said the need was very great because there were 60 to 90 million people there who would not hear the gospel if no one took it to them. That was a burden Bingham could not shake off.[16] When he met Tom Kent, a college chum of Gowan's, they decided to join Gowan in Africa.[17] The three founders of the Soudan Interior Mission met in Britain.[18] Without a mission board to send them, they decided that the need was great and they would go regardless.[19]

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[12] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 44.
[13] Ibid. 46-47.
[14] Austin, "'Toronto the Good,'" 44.
[15] Roland Bingham, D.D., *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee: The Story of the Sudan Interior Mission* (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1943), 14.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 17.
[18] At that time, "[t]he Sudan stretched 2,500 miles from the Nile to the origins of the Niger River." (Barbara M. Cooper et al, Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes, 67).
[19] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations,* 31.

They booked their passage from Liverpool and sailed on November 4, 1893.[20] At Lagos, the missionaries told them that "they would never see the Sudan; your children will never see the Sudan; your grandchildren may." Aware that missionaries had also tried to persuade David Livingstone that he should not explore the interior of Africa, they prayed and determined to persevere.[21] They made plans for the journey. Bingham had malaria and the others decided to leave him at the coast and undertake exploratory travel. Mary Jones, a housekeeper who gave all she had, provided the funds for that trip.[22] But white people in general were not prepared for the climate of Africa. Government people and missionaries who went to Africa succumbed to the climate before the introduction of quinine. The death toll of white people was horrendous. Walter Gowans died of dysentery at Zaria in November 1894.[23] Tom Kent died of malaria in December 1894.[24] Sorrowing for his partners in mission,[25] Bingham returned to Canada to establish a proper Board.[26] Once there, Margaret Gowans spoke words Bingham would not forget. "I would rather have had Walter go out to the Sudan and die there, all alone, than have him at home today, disobeying his Lord."[27]

In Canada, Bingham further prepared for mission work by upgrading his medical skills and attending New York Missionary Training Institute (Nyack Bible College), founded by A. J. Simpson.[28] He took a church in Newburgh, New York State, and married Helen Blair of Aberfoyle, Ontario in 1898.[29] Helen was active in his publications and wrote a book, *An Irish Saint*, which continues to be in print.[30] She was fully committed to the mission activities of her husband. The date the Board was established is unclear, but it appears to have been in 1899, when the Binghams moved from Newburgh in New York State to Toronto.

The move resulted in the Sudan Interior Mission being established as an interdenominational mission. The Binghams decided to live by faith and not by

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[20] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 18.
[21] Hunter, *Flame of* Fire, 52.
[22] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 20-21.
[23] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 59.
[24] Ibid., 60.
[25] Influenced by the theology of A.B. Simpson, Gowan and Kent believed that they would receive divine healing. Bingham gradually gave up this theology and eventually permitted the use of quinine to combat malaria in missionaries. Gary R. Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 44.
[26] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 25.
[27] Margaret Gowan spoke these words in August 1895. Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 33.
[28] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 65.
[29] Ibid., 66.
[30] Helen E. Bingham, *An Irish Saint* (Toronto: Crossways Christian Communications, Inc., n.d.)

salary from the board. They established a fund for home needs and a fund for missions.[31] Gowan had been Presbyterian, Kent was Congregational, and Bingham was Salvation Army and later Baptist. Over one long night, Bingham wrestled with the problem of a Presbyterian woman who had given to establish a Baptist church and decided that the Sudan Interior Mission would be interdenominational. He explained the position many years later. God has saints in all evangelical denominations, he ministers to them all, and his greatest blessings are when his saints unite in service. The unity of the Spirit implies that sectarianism is anti-scriptural (1 Cor 3: 3-5), sectarian rivalry has been costly, and the great mission societies make sectarianism impractical. Finally, denominationalism is a stumbling block on the mission field.[32]

Three SIM missionaries were sent in 1899 but came home ill.[33] Within two weeks, Bingham got malaria again and the doctor ordered him back to Ontario. The young men assured him they would carry on but followed him back on the next boat.[34] In Toronto, he met with the Council. He and the Council were greatly discouraged.[35] But within six months, four more men, E.A. Anthony, Charles Robinson, Albert Taylor, and A. W. Banfield were ready to go to Africa and to lay down their lives there. "The great commission still stood, and he who had given it remained, saying, "Lo, I am with always, even until the end of the age."[36] Of the four men sent in 1900. Anthony and Robinson were sent home ill, Taylor died, and only Banfield survived.[37] He learned the language quickly and became a representative of the Bible Society and the founder of The Niger Press.[38] Bingham stayed in Ontario and made trips to Africa periodically.[39] After that, missionaries went to Africa continuously.[40]

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[31] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 26-27.
[32] Ibid., 106-108. The main issue in Bingham's mind was the mode of baptism. He put it off until he baptized the first converts. The first converts were baptized by the Church of England who decided to baptize by immersion. A Presbyterian followed suit. This became the general practice on the field, and a theological controversy was avoided.
[33] Austin, "'Toronto the Good,'" 52-53.
[34] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 27.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 28.
[37] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 51.
[38] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 89.
[39] Though Bingham could have made more trips, these are all that can be verified. Bingham made visits to Africa in 1900, 1915, 1929-1935, and 1937. Ibid., 78, 84; Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 52, 83.
[40] Quinine came to the attention of Bingham at this time. The British government sent Major Ross to find the source of malaria. Major Ross blamed the illness on the mosquito. Bingham adopted the use of quinine and there were no more missionary deaths from malaria. Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 33.

The mission went through several names in the early days. In 1898, it became the Africa Industrial Mission.[41] The model for the mission was the industrial school – colonials who desired hospitals and schools rather than running these services themselves hired missionaries to provide them. The work was expected to be self-supporting in that the missionary would be overseer of workers. But missionaries were in Africa to evangelize.[42] Therefore, in 1905, the name was changed to Africa Evangelical Mission.[43] "Due to an incomplete union with the Sudan United Mission,"[44] in 1907, it returned to the original name of Sudan Interior Mission.[45]

Though he established an interdenominational mission, Bingham clearly was a fundamentalist. In 1910, with Elmore Harris of Walmer Road Baptist Church, Toronto Bible College (now Tyndale University), Chair of SIM, Henry Frost (China Inland Mission), and Rowland Bingham (SIM), moved against modernism in churches and seminaries. "This was the opening salvo of the 'church wars' that consumed Canadian (and American) churches for the next fifteen years."[46] As a fundamentalist, Bingham accepted the common premillennial view that the gospel must be preached to all nations and then Jesus would return.[47] Therefore, the mission clearly understood that their purpose was preaching the Gospel to unreached nations.

All Mission Activities Were to Reach the Unreached

Medical Missions

Andrew Stirrett was a successful businessman in Toronto, Ontario.[48] He joined the mission in 1902. Stirritt had read Bingham's pamphlet, "A Plea for the Central Sudan" and felt this great untouched field must have the Gospel.[49] He was a pharmacist who had completed his medical degree, but his entrance papers prevented him from receiving it. At Bingham's suggestion, he studied tropical

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[41] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 146.
[42] Austin, "'Toronto the Good,'"
[43] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 147.
[44] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 83.
[45] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 147.
[46] Austin, "'Toronto the Good,'" 41.
[47] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 26.
[48] The author of the His Will blog was invited to Nigeria. He prepared for the journey by reading Douglas C. Perry, *Stirritt of the Sudan* (https://www.hiswillblog.com/tag/andrew-p-stirrett/).
[49] Ibid., 34.

medicine before his journey to the field.[50] He sold his practice and gave all his property, stocks and bonds to the mission, worked his passage across the Atlantic on a cattle-boat, and sailed from Liverpool. The mission was reluctant to admit him because he was 37 years old.[51] The Council told the field superintendent to accept him on probation.[52] Dr. Bingham recalled that when he visited the field in 1914, it was as important to Dr. Stirritt to preach the Gospel, especially to the Hausa and to Muslims, as it was to care for his patients.[53] Thus, the medical work in Africa began.

Dr. Tom Lambie had been a missionary in Ethiopia with the United Presbyterian Church.[54] He was skilled at relating with political leaders, such as Regent Haile Selassie, later Emperor Haile Selassie. Lambie built the first hospital in Ethiopia. Bingham saw this new field as an intake field for Australian and New Zealand workers because they would not have to travel to England and then to Africa.[55] Selassie presented the mission with its first leper site, gave money toward the buildings, and came to the opening.[56] Lambie paved the way for Bingham to enter Ethiopia, and, in 1927, Lambie's Abyssinian Frontiers Mission merged with the Sudan Interior Mission.[57]

On the long trek from British East Africa with Bingham, Lambie preached the Gospel.

> We are earnestly praying that this expedition may be the means of opening large areas of southern Abyssinia to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are millions of people who have never heard of Him, and who, humanly speaking, unless the light is brought to them through the efforts of missionaries of the Sudan Interior Mission, will never hear of Him...Oh, that we might be led to find the exact places that are most suitable for mission

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[50] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 38.
[51] Ibid., 46.
[52] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 37.
[53] Ibid., 38.
[54] F.P. Cotterell, Đr. T.A. Lambie: some biographical notes, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies,* Vol. 10No. 1 (January 1972), 43.
[55] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 111.
[56] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 181-183.
[57] E. Paul Balisky, "Dr. Thomas Lambie: Pioneer Missionary in East Africa," in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 267.

> stations, and that the privileges might be given to us to open such stations and that workers and funds might be forthcoming to go to these "other sheep.[58]

Lambie had gone to Africa to preach.[59] When he built his hospital, he found he had an open door to share the Gospel with the Oromo who believed in Waaqa, the Creator,[60] and the Amhara who were of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).[61] He worried that his involvement in medical missions would undermine his vision for reaching the unreached.[62] Lambie supported indigenous church principles, a faith community began, and translations of New Testament books were produced.[63] Although he was able to establish four hospitals and two medical clinics, he and Mrs. Lambie faced opposition from the EOC[64] and from missionaries[65] who did not agree with their indigenous church principles.[66]

Ministry to lepers resulted in many conversions. Albert Helser, later General Director wrote, "it is a recognized fact that no class of people respond more readily to the Gospel message than the lepers, with all their physical and spiritual need."[67] Nevertheless, resistance to medical missions remained strong in Northern Nigeria. "...Christian medical missions faced significant resistance, especially when they were aiming at proselytization."[68] This resistance gradually broke down as leprosy spread

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[58] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 184-185.
[59] Thomas A. Lambie, *A Doctor's Great* Commission (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1954). Footnote from Balinsky, "Dr. Thomas Lambie," 101; Tibebe Eshete, "The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Ethiopia (1928-1970)," *Northwest African Studies*, Vol.6, No. 3 (1999), 30.
[60] The Oromo religion was Waaqeffannaa. It was a monotheistic religion that does not use any representation for the Creator. The Creator brings good and evil, creation is sacred, there is an ethical foundation on which all human action should be founded, and there is no concept of hell (https://www.waaqeffannaa.com/the-early-history-of-waaqeffannaa-ancient-faith-of-the-oromo-people/)
[61] The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), established in the fourth century, was the state church until 1974. It counted on a privileged status in society and was resistant to evangelicalism. It had influenced Ethiopian history by pioneering the idea of Emperors. Menelik II, Emperor of Ethiopia, "was willing to allow proselytization among the (Oromo), though not among the Christian Amhara." "SIM and Church Polity in Ethiopia," 484.
[62] Balinsky, "Dr. Thomas Lambie," 265.
[63] Ibid., 270-271.
[64] "The Egyptian Coptic Church was opposed to the entrance of missionaries, and raised every conceivable objection to the proposals of the Sudan Interior Mission" (Esme Richie Rice, *Eclipse in Ethiopia and Its Corona Glory* [London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., 1937]), 18.
[65] The indigenous church principles were articulated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. They describe the indigenous church as self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating (https://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/Issues/2014/Fall-2014/The-Indigenous-Church).
[66] Balinsky, "Dr. Thomas Lambie," 271.
[67] Paul Todd, "The Burden of the Sudan": How SIM & ECWA Approached Islam," in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 92. Note attributed to Paul Todd.
[68] Rueben Luka Shekarau and Daniel Olisa Iweze, "The Development and Social Impact of the Sudan Interior Mission's leprosy work in Bauchi Province, northern Nigeria, 1937-1978," *Social History* (2026) Vol.51, No. 1, 29.

in the Bauchi region. Patients were allowed to acquire such skills as sewing, shoemaking, and carpentry and to sell results of their work in local markets. These skills improved their psychological and mental well-being and resulted in new understandings of leprosy.[69] Tensions between Muslims, Christians and pagans did not disrupt the SIM's holistic approach to its leprosy work.

When Tommy Titcombe first came to Bingham's mission, he had been forced to leave school early to support his widowed mother. Bingham thought he should complete a course of study before he was accepted to the mission. He returned two years later, having completed the course of study, and applied again. This time he was accepted.[70] He was single when he went to Africa but soon married. In 1914, Bingham related:

> One of the touching things of my first visit was the appeal of one hundred women, who waited with one petition. They said: The missionary has taught us a lot, but he is a man. Do you have no white sister in your country who will come out and be a missionary to us women? ...[T]heir missionary had the promise of a certain young lady that some day she would come out and join him in his work....When [Mrs. Titcombe] had the language sufficiently she undertook what, for want of a better name, we called a "maternity hospital." It was just a large, clean hut. But it provided a wonderful boon. Scores of lives of mothers and of babies were saved there. Moreover, it did more to break the common practice...of murdering twin babies than any other agency...Girls and women by the hundreds today, are being taught by the white sisters.[71]

The medical work to women continued. Many female medical doctors volunteered for SIM, including the first female doctor, Dr. Francis Wakefield[72] and Dr. Shirley Chisholm, who carried on the maternal and infant work from 1953-1985.[73] The medical staff administered to the African people through their medical expertise, always keeping in mind their eternal destinies.

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[69] Ibid., 29.
[70] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 40.
[71] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 135-136.
[72] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 47.
[73] Barbara M. Cooper, "Maternal Health in Niger and the Evangelical Imperative: The Life of a Missionary Nurse in the Post-War Era," in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 289.

Education

The mission had many schools and colleges, but education was to make conversions. This was not the goal of education that colonial administrators wanted. The mission was frank about its goal. Conversions were paramount.

> Our mission did not go in for education, even on a small scale. The whole program was "Evangelize," which was good, yet when the eyes of men and women, boys and girls, are opened by the gospel, it is a God-given desire that they want more and it is the Mission's business to direct that education through thoroughly Christian channels. It took us a generation to learn this, much to the loss of the Mission and its work.[74]

The policy continued wherever the mission had stations. "Being above all a 'faith' mission, the first priority of Sudan Interior missionaries was to 'seek first the kingdom of God,' to evangelise, to establish churches, and then in the fulness of time to let schools develop...under the auspices of the newly established native church."[75]

> The Sudan government's permission to open mission stations in the southern province of the Upper Nile was contingent on the mission providing education in their area of operation. The main goal of the SIM, however, was to establish local churches, and it had little interest in providing any more education than was needed to establish the gospel in vernacular languages.[76]

Missionaries thought that "responsibility for education really lay with the government."[77]

The Importance of Literacy in Education

Given the responsibility of managing schools by colonial administrators, however, they used education to develop a readership for the Christian scriptures.

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[74] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 141-142
[75] Lilian Sanderson, "The Sudan Interior Mission and the Condominium Sudan, 1937-1955, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. VIII, 14.
[76] Douglas H. Johnson, "Tacking to the Winds of Change: The SIM and Education Policy in South Sudan, 1937-1954, in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 147-169.
[77] Lilian Sanderson, "The Sudan Interior Mission and the Condominium Sudan, 1937-1955, 14.

> The education policy of the Mission in the main recognizes no greater responsibility than teaching an illiterate population to read and write so they can use the Holy Scripture for themselves and teach extensively those Scriptures. Because the greater bulk of the people in the Central Sudan are illiterate, teaching must go hand-in-hand with evangelism.[78]

Missionaries used gramophones and magazine pictures to interest Africans in the Gospel. The magazine pictures seemed to attract them the most.

> Once an African had expressed some interest in what missionaries were preaching, SIM missionaries sought to direct them, young and old, male and female, toward the Bible. But to learn from the Bible you needed to be able to read...So, to become a Christian, Africans had to make a commitment to learn to read. The association in the minds of SIM missionaries between literacy and Christianity was so clear and direct that in their stories they recognized a display on the part of the African of a desire to read as the first step on the path to Christian conversion.[79]

John Hall and Gordon Beacham arrived in 1917 at the invitation of the colonial administrator to minister to the Tangale in northeastern Nigeria.

> The Tangale converts soon discovered that the new faith they had embraced had a Great Commission which mandates every believer to evangelize their incumbent generation. The SIM taught the converts the biblical principles that every "convert is a witness." Realizing this, the converts became quintessential evangelists and within a short time transformed Tangale society. All graduates of the literacy classes eventually were commissioned to be teachers and evangelists.[80]

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[78] Musa A.B. Gaiya, "SIM's Hausa Mission: Ministering Among Peoples on the Margin (Yan' Babu Class) in Northern Nigeria" in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 126. Quoted in Turaki, *An Introduction to the History of SIM/ECWA*, 138.,

[79] Ibid., 348.

[80] Rueben Goje Maiture, "SIM and the Tangale Factor in the Christianization of the Hausa of Northern Nigeria 1915-1976 in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 454.

African evangelists brought the Gospel to Kano, which had been the objective of Gowan, Kent and Bingham since the early days. [81]

Establishing Churches

The mission excelled at establishing churches.[82] The early missionaries supported establishing of churches. They also were more open to African participation. In the early years, the SIM founders worked in tandem with African evangelists.[83] Bingham made several attempts to recruit black missionaries.[84] But recruitment of black missionaries ended after 1907. From 1907 on, all missionaries were white and Bingham did not mention black evangelists in his writings.[85] However, the vibrancy of the African church grew.[86] Bingham mentions that Tommy Titcombe's work was particularly fruitful. In 1914, Titcombe arranged an annual Bible conference at which 100 converts were baptized. The church building, which held a thousand converts had been paid for by them and the missionary offerings amounted to $2,500, though the people were paid a wage of 24 cents and the women earned half that amount.[87] In that tribe, thousands of converts were baptized.[88]

The harvest had begun. Gordon Beacham[89] and John Hall worked with the Tangale tribe. Bingham recalled that the people could recite the first three chapters of Matthew without a break.[90] He listened to their testimonies, amazed that these people who had been cannibals had had a new heart given to them.

> The last time I was in this tribe, again I preached in the one church in the morning and had the communion service there. Then I went over the six miles to other for an evening period. The missionary in the latter place chided

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[81] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 29.
[82] Amos, Koggie, Zamfara Iveh, and Tim Greysbeek, "'That was the beginning of Great Things at Miango'": Brra Kwe Tingwe and the Origins of Christianity in Miango, Nigeria, 1913-1936," *International Bulletin f Missionary Research* Vol. 239, No.3 (July 2015), 133-136.
[83] Greysbeek, "Issues of Race and Diversity," 207.
[84] Ibid., 207-208.
[85] Ibid., 208; Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*; Rice, *Eclipse in Ethiopia and its Corona Glory*.
[86] The Muslim North was protected by British colonial administrators. Paul Todd, "'The Burden of the Sudan: HPw SIM and ECWA Approached Islam,'" in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018),
[87] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 42.
[88] Ibid., 45.
[89] Gordon Beacham succeeded Rowland Bingham as General Director of SIM.
[90] Roland Bingham became General Director of the mission in 1915 and Guy Playfair was appointed Field Director. With an overwhelming burden for the unreached, he directed the mission until 1942. Of course, Bingham had been functioning as the head of the mission since 1894, after Walter Gowans and Tom Kent died. When Bingham died, a new General Director was sought. Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 45.

> me, saying, "You gave them the morning last time, why didn't you give us the morning this time? If you had been here you would have had fifteen hundred by actual count in your meeting. Tonight, you will have only some eight or nine hundred. You see, so many people like to go out on Sunday afternoon and evening to preach the Gospel in the surrounding towns and villages, that you will have a small crowd tonight."[91]

Bingham and his missionary colleagues had longed to go to the Muslim North in Nigeria, but they had been confined to the pagan tribes of the South by the British colonial government. The British had a policy of not disturbing the Muslim North with missionaries.[92] The harvest was great in the South and many thousands turned to Christ. Instead, the need was met by African evangelists. "Within three months, four of their own best men were sent up into the Moslem provinces to the north as the first foreign missionaries supported by them. Since then some seventy other native workers have been sent out in full-time service."[93]

Eventually SIM, in conjunction with its African counterparts, developed denominations. In a letter sent to his mother in 1893, Gowans observed that many churches in Africa were not only self-supporting but missionary. By "missionary," he meant self-propagating.[94] The Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) emerged in 1954 in Nigeria,[95] the Evangelical Church of Niger Republic (EERN) was recognized by the Nigerian government in 1961,[96] and the Kale Heywet Church, heavily influenced of the Addis Ababa Youth Centre, emerged in Ethiopia.[97] Since 1938, Bingham had been steadily moving toward an indigenous church, encouraged by West African Field Director C. Gordon Beacham.[98] After Bingham died on

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[91] Ibid., 59-60.
[92] C. Brad Faught, "Missionaries, Indirect Rule, and the Changing Mandate of Mission in Colonial Northern Nigeria: the Case of Canada's Rowland Victor Bingham and the Sudan Interior Mission," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society,* XLIII (2001) 147-169.
[93] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 61.
[94] Corwin, "The Emergence of Denominations and Related Endeavours,"188.
[95] Indigenization culminated in the establishment of ECWA in 1954. Ibid., 192.
[96] Adda Mahamane, "History and Challenges of the Evangelical Church in Niger, 1923-2013: The Case of the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN), in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 238.
[97] The Kale Heywet Church had over 7,000,000 members. Tishebe Eshete, "The Early Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church," *Pentecostal Studies* 12.2 (2013), 162-182; The Kale Heywet Chuch soon developed a network of organized churches. Jason E. Craig, "Haile Selassie and the Religious Field: Generative Structuralism and Christian Missions in Ethiopia," a Thesis submitted to The Temple University Graduate Board in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts, 2010, 68.
[98] Geysbeek, "The Emergence of Denominations," 189.

December 4, 1942, indigenization continued in the 1950s, in an atmosphere of African nationalism.[99] Indigenization occurred in ECWA before EERN.[100] As members of ECWA, believers have found it difficult to achieve the civil rights of owning property, building churches, and freely living as Christians.[101] ECWA as a denomination has grown beyond Africa.

SIM missionaries believed the Gospel empowered the people to whom they were preaching.[102] Beyond conversion, "ECWA churches jointly called for constitutional guarantees of political representation, equality under the law, religious liberty, and equal rights to education, employment and promotion."[103] NERN churches continually combatted poverty amongst its members, including emergency food, well digging and tree planting.[104] However, NERN churches were left to govern themselves as SIM missionaries withdrew from churches, schools, development projects, and Bible schools.[105] Now NERN "must demonstrate a new strategy in order to mobilize the resources which allow it to arise in its new situation and continue the ministry."[106]

Colonialism and Culture

The attitudes of the founders reflected the attitudes of their culture. Gowan's guide was Tom Coffee, "a Western-educated Christian of the Kru ethnic group from Liberia who they envisioned would facilitate the trade of cattle and palm products between Lagos and his hometown of Sasstown to sustain their work."[107] When Gowan died at Girku, Coffee buried him in a cornfield outside the village and reached the coast, where Bingham heard the story.[108] Bingham refers to Coffee as a

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[99] Ibid., 191
[100] EERN needed to take on a national image to survive. It was recognized by the government on January 31, 1961. Mahamane, "History and Chellnges of The Evangelical Church in Niger," 237-238.
[101] M.E. Dadang, "125 Years of Serving in Mission (SIM) in Nigeria: A Missiological-theological Appraisal of Missionary Work." *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 63.
[102] When Laurie Davidson arrived in Ethiopia with the liberating army, she was astonished to find that the church in Ethiopia had grown from 150 believers to around 10, 000 believers. *Eyewitness*, Issue 87, 11.
[103] Paul Todd, "The Burden of the Sudan," 99.
[104] Addo Mahamane, "History and Challenges of the Evangelical Church in Niger, 19230-2013: The Case of the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018), 242.
[105] Ibid., 244.
[106] Ibid., 248.
[107] Tim Greysbeek, "Issues of Race and Diversity," in Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 206-207.
[108] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 24.

"black boy" and did not name him although he clearly was an adult at the time of the founding.[109]

SIM missionaries lived in mission houses with annoyances to which the men and women on the mission stations paid little attention. Bingham's biographer recorded that in one guest house, there were bats, rats, cockroaches, and lizards. "Most of the missionaries see little of the big game and are seldom troubled by them, but they see a lot of little things that can play havoc with the nerves and wreck the morale."[110]

SIM missionaries lived on mission stations The missionaries were in Africa because of a scriptural mandate. They established hospitals and schools, taught hygiene, and trained employees for a common cause.

Some missionaries did believe Western ways were better. For example, slavery had been abolished in the British Empire in 1834 and the United States in 1865, but it persisted until 1942 in Ethiopia.[111] Guy Playfair, a missionary in Nigeria and later General Director remembered:

> Up to the time of the British occupation in 1900, the Egbe or Yagba movement was decidedly a movement of the Holy Spirit. It began before I reached the field in 1910...the Yagba people suffered greatly from slave-raiding, both from the Yoruba people of the South and the Nupe slave-raiders of the North, and many were the terrifying stories told by some of these who had escaped from their captors, as well as those who escaped after the white man came.[112]

The early missionaries, including Walter Gowan, could not abide slavery.[113] They came to Africa not to own slaves, but to offer the Gospel to the unreached.

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[109] Bingham, *Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee*, 24; Tim Geysbeek, "From Sasstown to Zaria: Tom Coffee and the Kru Origins of the Sudan Interior Mission, 1893-1895," *Studies in World Christianity* 24.1 (2018), 46-63.
[110] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 109-111.
[111] "After the Italians were expelled, Emperor Haile Selassie returned to power and officially abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, by making it a law on 26 August 1942. Ethiopia later ratified the [League of Nation's] 1926 Slavery Convention in 1969. Following the abolition of slavery in the 1940s, freed slaves were typically employed as unskilled labour by their former masters." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Ethiopia)
[112] Hunter, *A Flame of Fire*, 142.
[113] "A few days later [the Emir of Kano] sent a string of slaves, which gift Gowans indignantly refused." Ibid., 59.

Before judgment is passed on the attitudes of the missionaries, more research needs to be done concerning their hierarchical and racial viewpoints.[114] SIM historian and archivist Tim Greysbeek argues that, while the first missionaries did not exhibit these ideas when they first went to Africa, race and other factors had a profound effect on all missionary activities due to the later influence of scientific racism and social Darwinism.[115]

> I argue that race, in addition to class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, education, theological orientation, personality, and other factors affected missionaries' ideas and behavior. Race influenced the missions' architecture, aesthetics, education, evangelism, fund-raising, gender roles, labor practices, language policies, leadership choices, medical work, politics, promotional work, recreation, recruitment, residential patterns, social life, definition of family, relations with churches, and writing of history... I identify overall shifts in many missionaries' attitudes about race since the mission was founded, and examine how notions of race affected just one aspect of the mission's practice – membership. In doing so, I overview how race has slowly gone from marking difference and separation to being a factor that SIM officially celebrates.[116]

Andrew E. Barnes argues that the pages of *The Sudan Witness* from 1923-1945 do not show that missionaries, in tandem with colonialism, "killed" indigenous culture, as anthropologists led by John and Jean Comaroff believe.[117]

> The more important point to make is that it is the absence of data that prompts scholars to take for granted the validity of the anthropological critique...[J]ournals such as *The Sudan Witness* can help to provide the data needed to counter the critique. As the stories in the journal illustrate, SIM missionaries showed very little interest in either the destruction of African culture or the colonization of the African mind. Missionaries were preoccupied with Christian conversion, which as understood by a faith

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[114] Tim Geysbeek, "Issues of Race and Diversity," in Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 205.
[115] Tim Geysbeek, "Issues of Race and Diversity," in Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 205.
[116] Ibid., 203.
[117] John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), v. 1 "Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa" (1991); v. 2. "Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier" (1997). Note cited in Andrew E. Barnes, "Shadow and Sunlight": Images of Christianization from the Pages of *The Sudan Witness* 1923-1945," in *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Past and Present*, ed. Barbara M. Cooper et al (Addis Ababa: Africa World Press, 2018),359.

> mission such as the SIM, involved the recruitment and training of African evangelists to go out and preach Christianity to their people...[M]issions were not committed to the destruction of African cultures, but to the construction of Christian versions of these cultures.[118]

SIM Today

The spread of the Gospel by the SIM continues unabated.[119] The international aspect became reality as the Andes Evangelical Mission (South America) joined SIM in 1982. International Christian Fellowship (South Asia) joined in 1989, Africa Evangelical Fellowship (South Africa) joined in 1998. Middle East Christian Outreach (Arab countries) joined SIM in 2016.[120]

The merger of Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) and Serving in Mission (SIM) provided a blueprint for mission mergers. SIM also included the story of its mergers, except the MECO merger, in its short history of SIM called *By Prayer to the Nations*.[121]

SIM International maintains sending agencies in many countries. In Canada, the sending agency is in Scarborough, Ontario.[122] The East Asia sending office does not publish its address. Sending offices also are located in Penshurst in Australia, Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Strasbourg in France (France and Belgium), New Delhi in India, Gyeonggi-do in South Korea, three sending offices in South Africa, Londrina in Brazil, Quito in Ecuador, Asunción in Paraguay, Cambridge and Belfast in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Howick in New Zealand, Biel in Switzerland, and Charlotte in the United States. Some offices serve multiple countries. In Germany SIM partners with DMG Germany. While the mission is active in many countries, not all publish their addresses.[123]

As SIM moved beyond Africa, it has changed its name several times. It became SIM International in 1980, Society for International Ministries in 1992, and Serving in Mission International in 2002.

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[118] Ibid., 341-342.
[119] Gary Corwin, "From Anywhere to Everywhere – Together!" *EMQ* (July 2015), 244-245.
[120] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 66-141.
[121] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, 66-141.
[122] The Canadian address is Servants in Mission Canada, 10 Huntingdale Blvd., Scarborough ON M1W 2S5, canada.info@sim.org.
[123] This may be an incomplete list of sending agencies for SIM.

Conclusion

While many of the General Directors came to Africa from the United States, the current General Director is Joshua Bogunjoku of Nigeria. The first General Director of SIM was Rowland Bingham of Canada. Bingham passionately expected, for forty-eight years, that the African continent would accept the Gospel and develop their own churches. His goal was to develop a mission that would reach the unreached with the Gospel. Other fields of work were carried on, such as medical missions and education, but the desire of the founders and the missionaries always was to bring the Good News of Christianity to African hearts. Once the missionaries had proclaimed the Word, African evangelists carried it and evangelized their people. They developed self-supporting denominations and continued to be faithful despite severe persecution.[124]

Having gone through many name changes, the mission now works in many countries around the world. The sending countries are global, the work of the mission has changed somewhat, but the purpose and mission statement remains the same:

> Convinced that no one should live and die without hearing God's good news, we believe that He has called us to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in communities where He is least known. Therefore, compelled by God's great love and empowered by the Holy Spirit...We cross barriers to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ, expressing His love and compassion among those who love and die without Him. We make disciples who will trust and obey Jesus, and become part of Christ-centered churches. We work together with churches to fulfil God's mission across cultures locally and globally. We facilitate the participation in cross-cultural ministry of those whom God is calling.[125]

Canada once sent more missionaries proportionally than any country in the Evangelical Triangle.[126] Now Canada now is considered a secular country. SIM

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[124] Christians in Nigeria and Ethiopia are subject to severe hostility, kidnapping, discrimination, church burnings, and execution. (https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/nigeria/) (https://www.opendoorsus.org/wwl/ethiopia)

[125] Corwin, *By Prayer to the Nations*, Appendix B Purpose and Mission, Core Values, and Vision of SIM, 345.

[126] The Evangelical Triangle includes the countries of Britain, Canada and the United States. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

considers Canada to be the organization's biggest mission field.[127] Joel Gordon, director of ministry partnerships and innovation at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada notes that,

> "We have many Christians coming from Nigeria where there's 10,0000 to 50,000 people in a church. They're coming with ideas, and gifts, and energy, and vibrancy, and music and other ways of living out the gospel in the Canadian context in order for us to be more effective in reaching all people.[128]

The missionary endeavour of Serving In Mission International is now a global enterprise. Bingham's and the succeeding directors' oversight of the mission was effective in that many Christians live in Africa[129] and Brazil.[130] It is appropriate that Africans and Brazilians should proclaim the Gospel to the "nones," to those people in Canada who do not relate to the name of Jesus, except in its cultural manifestations.[131]

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Froment, Elsie. "SIM International: Called to Make Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in Communities Where He is Least Known." Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca (November 15, 2026). Peer reviewed.

Appendix 1: General Directors, 1893-2026

Walter Gowans, 1893-1894, Canadian
Rowland Bingham, 1915-1942, Canadian
Charles Gordon Beacham, 1942-1944, Canadian
Guy Playfair, 1944-1957, United States
Albert Heiser, 1957-1962, United States
Raymond Davis, 1962-1975, United States

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[127] Julie Fitz-Gerald, "Rethinking Global Mission," *Faith Today Magazine* (January-February 2024), 2.
[128] Ibid., 3.
[129] In Africa, evangelical Christians are 23 percent of the population, or 115 million people (https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95072016000200002).
[130] In Brazil, evangelical Christians are 26.9 percent of the population, or 47.4 million people (https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/06/religion-brazil-census-2022/).
[131] Thiessen, Joel. "Evangelism and 'Nones' and 'Dones in Canada'" Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca (retrieved Date Accessed). Peer reviewed.

Ian M. Hay, 1975-1993, Nigeria (Scottish descent)
Jim Playddemann, 1993-2003, United States
Malcolm McGregor, 2003-2013, Scotland
Joshua Bogunjoku, 2013—present, Nigeria

Appendix 2: Mission Name Changes

Soudan Interior Mission, 1893
Africa Industrial Mission, 1898
Africa Evangelical Mission, 1905
Sudan Interior Mission, 1907
SIM International, 1980
Society for International Ministries, 1992
Servants in Mission, 2002