Evaluating Missionary Work

Introduction: Missions and Colonialism

The judgment that missionary work is inherently bad is now the accepted orthodoxy in much of Europe and North America. I have taught missions in an Evangelical seminary for the past 24 years, and most of my colleagues endorse the missionary task of the church. I have preached often in local churches deeply involved in the sending mission of the church in Canada and the USA. I have served on the board for OM Canada and heard many testimonies of God’s work throughout the world. God’s mission is clearly alive and well, but I am aware that the larger society around me does not share this conviction.

The essential secular objection to the missionary task of the church is that it is inherently colonial. There are real problems in missionary history, in which the church has been compromised by its connection to the colonial powers, and these problems are all that many people can see. To give one example, in the mid-1800s, the Chinese government fought two wars with Britain and France to prevent Western merchants from selling opium to Chinese merchants. Britain and France won the wars, forcing the Qin dynasty to open China up for the opium trade. Incidentally, they also opened the way for missionaries to go into the interior.[[1]](#footnote-1) As Stephen Neill put it almost 60 years ago, “That Christian work seemed so plainly to enter in the wake of gunboats and artillery was to be a permanent handicap to it in China.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the case of Brethren in Christ missions, the first missionary party went to the Matopos primarily because Cecil Rhodes granted them land in the heart of the hills. The British South Africa Company (Rhodes’ company) had recently defeated the Ndebele people in a brief war and taken control of the country. They saw the missionaries as allies in pacifying the local population: in Rhodes’ words, “Missionaries are better than policemen, and cheaper.”[[3]](#footnote-3) One wonders what connection the people who lived in the Matopo Hills perceived between the missionaries and the colonial settlers.

Given the easily observed history of missions, then, one can see our complicity with colonialism, but rejecting Christian missions is a foolhardy response to the real problems of our history. Among many witnesses we could call on, I note four in defense of the value of Christian missions: A Canadian journalist for the CBC, Brian Stewart;[[4]](#footnote-4) a social scientist and academic, Robert Woodberry;[[5]](#footnote-5) an English journalist, Tom Hiney;[[6]](#footnote-6) and finally a church historian who comes from a missionized country in West Africa, Lamin Sanneh of Gambia.[[7]](#footnote-7)

I will not develop descriptions of these witnesses more fully, but I note them briefly in order to show the general scope of their work. The further task of adjudicating the morality of missions is beyond the scope of this article. I seek only to show that one can value the contribution of Christian missions and that the larger society’s simple dismissal is unfair.

Stewart notes that he began his career convinced that the church was irrelevant. Here is part of his introduction:

Now mind you 40 years ago we young journalists were pretty cocky (imagine that!). We thought ourselves good at sousing out how the future would enfold. For instance, we were certain that: the Cold War would outlast our lifetimes; the Soviet Union would just get stronger, they well might beat the Americans to the moon, but thank heavens at least, never threaten Our Canadian Game, hockey; the Beatles, who we'd just seen on Ed Sullivan’s TV show, would disappear into oblivion by Christmas; and as for Hollywood, well certainly it had produced its last biblical film—no market for them in the future. And then, the old institutions: the monarchy would be gone long before the end of the century, but then so would most of the Church, except for the Pope, of course, who needless to say would be yet another Italian.

Of course! Most of the church would be gone, but the church did not disappear; it changed its appearance and the centre of its strength, but it did not disappear.[[8]](#footnote-8) Stewart describes the growth of a kind of admiration in his evaluation of the church, and then adds this statement:

Now I came to this admiring view slowly and reluctantly. At the start of my career I’d largely abandoned religion for I too regarded the Church as a rather tiresome irrelevance. What ultimately persuaded me otherwise, and I took a lot of persuading, was the reality of Christianity’s mission, physically and in spirit, before my very eyes. It wasn’t the attraction of great moments of grandeur, although I admit covering this Pope on six of his early trips abroad, including his first one to Mexico and then epic returns to Poland, certainly shook any assumptions I had of Christianity as a fading force. No, the millions upon millions gathered was impressive, but I was more moved by quiet individual moments of character, and courage that seems to be anchored to some deep core within Christianity.

Stewart describes missionaries facing the death squads that have made life so difficult for the peasants in Central America. He speaks of missionaries in the heart of Central Africa and working beneath the surface of society in the Middle East. Whatever else one thinks of Christian missions, missionaries are usually the first on the scene in the crisis areas of our world, and as Stewart reminds us, it is missionaries who often alert the world to the gravity of these crises.

Robert Woodberry takes a different approach. He analysed societies around the world in countries that were under the rule of the European colonial powers, especially in the 19th Century. He summarizes his findings with these words:

Both historical and statistical evidence suggest that CPs promoted democracy, although often through indirect means. In all five contexts analyzed—Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, European-settler colonies, and mission territories—Protestantism is associated with democracy. Comparative historical analyses show that CPs consistently initiated and spread factors that past research suggests promote democracy: mass printing, mass education, civil society, and colonial rule of law. In cross-national statistical analysis Protestant missions are significantly and robustly associated with higher levels of printing, education, economic development, organizational civil society, protection of private property, and rule of law and with lower levels of corruption (…).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Woodberry’s conclusions are disputed in the literature,[[10]](#footnote-10) but I note two factors. One, his conclusion is that “conversionary Protestants” promoted democracy, “often by indirect means”. The objection noted in the above footnote is to the idea that missionaries *caused* liberal democracy, that they deserve primary credit for the growth of democracy. Woodberry does not make so bold a claim. Two, his actual claim – that the work of missionaries has helped promote a better civil society – appears to me to be well-substantiated. The popular case against missions is clearly not as clear or as strong as it seems within Western society.

We come to the English journalist, Tom Hiney. In 2000, Hiney published a study of the first generation of missionaries with the London Missionary Society. He makes a penetrating statement in this connection as he summarizes the work of this pioneering generation:

The colonial-era missionary movement involved thousands of European missionaries; 1,327 from the LMS alone between 1795 and 1944. To speak of missionaries as a whole is as inaccurate as speaking of ‘natives’. There were good ones and bad ones – ones who spoke of compassion and hope and those who spoke of hell. It was by and large the bad ones who had nervous breakdowns and left. [[11]](#footnote-11)

Hiney closes his study with these words:

The make-up of the society’s missionary force was inevitably varied, but while maniacs and vain men may have appeared from time to time among its ranks, such men rarely in fact lasted long. A year spent in the searing heat of the Kalahari, or the dawning prospect of a lifetime to be spent on a Pacific rock, with no shoes, and rats the size of goats – these realities of a pioneer missionary’s lonely life were generally enough to drive bad candidates back home. Those who stayed on, often for the remainder of their lives, needed humility as well as courage to survive.[[12]](#footnote-12)

These three examples – Stewart, Woodberry, and Hiney – are perhaps sufficient to make the case that missionaries and missionary work are not simply evils fatally compromised by their association with the colonial enterprise. Lamin Sanneh’s work, then, is almost conclusive. Sanneh was born in a Muslim family in The Gambia, West Africa. I met Sanneh in 1991, when he was visiting the ESJ School for World Missions and Evangelization at Asbury Theological Seminary. He spoke to our small group of missiology students and described his journey from Islam to Christian faith. In his writing, he remains both firmly Christian and appreciative of the contributions of Islam.

I heard Sanneh speak again at a meeting of the American Society of Missiology (ASM). The ASM met at Wheaton College in June 2015, and Sanneh brought the opening plenary address. He described the response of other members of the academy as he did his doctoral research (at the University of London in the U.K.). They expected him to conclude that missionaries were agents of colonialism, consistent with the orthodoxy I have referred to above; instead, he kept finding more and more evidence that missionaries, so far from being agents of colonialism, were one of the primary sources for critiques of the colonial project.

Sanneh explores this dynamic in *Translating the Message*. He describes the missionaries’ commitment to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular language in each place that they worked, and he observes the way that this commitment elevated the local culture. The colonial authorities assumed that their culture was the one that the local people needed; the missionaries, however, elevated the local culture as the one that they – the outsiders – needed. Sanneh contrasts the approach of Christian missions with the approach of the Islamic mission. Christianity operates on the vernacular principle, elevating each culture it enters. Islam operates on an Arabacizing principle, relativizing each culture it enters.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Our witnesses, then, suggest that the history of Christian missions includes human failures and successes. Missionaries were products of their time, and they were also bearers of a transformative gospel, one that has indeed changed the world. This judgment leads, I suggest, to a further point as we study the history of missions, and especially as we tell our own story within the missionary work of the Brethren in Christ Church. In our evaluation of our own history, we must embrace both the failures that come from our association with colonialism and the successes that come from God’s Spirit at work within the larger mission of the church.

For the past 24 years, I have taught a course on the history of Christian missions. I am by training a missiologist, a generalist in missions theology, history, and strategy. As such, I do not approach the history of missions as a true historian, but rather as one trained in the social sciences and theology to examine and promote the missionary task of the church. Therefore, I have taught my course as a “lessons from history course”. I draw the lessons from scripture, theology, and anthropology and then examine them by looking for them in the historical record. To put it another way, I interview the historical record and ask if the principles that missiologists derive from theory actually work in practice.[[14]](#footnote-14)

“Lessons from History”

We begin by considering the lessons or principles that I elucidate in class and drawn from my own study of missiological theology and of the social sciences. Once they have been stated, we can use them to evaluate the historical record. I state them here in two broad historical periods and then draw them together into a summary.

From the missionary work of the church preceding the modern period (that is, before the 1800s), I note the following:

1. The gospel crosses and destroys dividing barriers.

2. Evangelization belongs to everyone in the church.

3. Mission requires courage and holiness; deed and word are inseparable.

4. The gospel belongs in every culture: it is worldwide. Even though contextualization carries the threat of syncretism, the gospel belongs in the vernacular.

5. The gospel challenges all other powers in this world.

6. When the church and the state become one, the church loses. Christian mission requires complete loyalty to God alone.

7. Some mission efforts fail, but even failure succeeds.

8. No matter how creative we are, the mission still belongs to God, who alone can redeem the world.

From the modern Missionary era (that is, the past 200 or so years), I note the following:

1. Age is not the crucial factor in missionary work.

2. If age is not the essential factor, God’s call is essential.

3. Christian mission requires the best candidates the church can offer.

4. We are called to faithful living more than we are to success.

5. Holistic mission is essential.

6. Indigenizing mission is essential. The best missionary work takes the local culture completely seriously.

7. True indigeneity (or contextualization) is controversial.

8. Language learning is basic to good missionary work.

9. Missionary work requires courage and faithful persistence.

10. The gospel is already present in the cultures of the world; a basic task of the missionary is to uncover it, to find “eternity in their hearts” in the local culture.

11. Real missionary work requires courage and purity.

12. A real genuine love for the people helps to overcome many mistakes that the missionary makes.

13. God calls the church everywhere to the world everywhere.

14. God’s call is the one indispensable prerequisite for missions.

The above list was developed over many years of teaching the missions history course. I have removed some duplications as I reproduce it here, but a certain amount of circling back to key themes remains. We can use this repetition to group the principles into primary themes.

A sifting and grouping of the above principles yield four basic categories. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, and the order in which they appear does not indicate which is most important.

* We strive for an indigenous church: The gospel crosses barriers, belongs in every culture, is fully at home in every, at least partly because God is already present in every culture (what the author of Ecclesiastes calls “eternity in the human heart”).[[15]](#footnote-15) Indigenous mission (defined below more fully) is essential and controversial.
* We strive to be and plant a missionary church: At one level, every Christian is a missionary; at another level, God calls some to do special missionary work. When God calls, we give our best people so to go from the church everywhere to the world everywhere.
* We hold word and deed together in holistic missions: Missionaries must be consistent witnesses, so that all we do and say proclaims the gospel. Although it does not show up significantly in the above lists, this area also includes the importance of keeping evangelism and what is sometimes called social action together in an indivisible whole.
* God is the source and doer of mission: God is our King, and complicity with the secular state subverts the gospel. God is the author and bearer of mission, whose call is indispensable. We follow faithfully, with courage and persistence, knowing that God’s love flowing through us can overcome a multitude of human errors.

This overview of principles – holding together (in reverse order) discipleship, holism, the missionary nature of the church, and indigeneity – can easily descend into platitude. One way to avoid such platitudes is to consider the way that they have functioned in the historical record – that is, in real life. In the remainder of this essay, I seek to examine these four broad themes with the early years of Brethren in Christ missions.[[16]](#footnote-16) As I interview the historical record, my question is: “How well did the lives of the first generation of BIC missionaries bear out the four broad themes I have stated?”

Missions as Discipleship

I will take them in the order given in the previous paragraph, beginning with discipleship. The title of Carlton Wittlinger’s seminal history of the Brethren in Christ shows the importance of this theme in our history: “Quest for Piety and Obedience”.[[17]](#footnote-17) The theme of piety indicates a desire for a deep, heartfelt experience of God’s presence. The theme of obedience indicates the necessity that this experience is expressed in all of life. Together, they find full expression in faithful discipleship.[[18]](#footnote-18)

My own sense is that the early BIC missionaries were indeed faithful disciples. The quote by Hiney above describes them well: “Those who stayed on, often for the remainder of their lives, needed humility as well as courage to survive.”[[19]](#footnote-19) One sees the depth of their commitment in the records that we have of their lives.

Consider two members of the first party. Jesse Engle was 60 years old when he and his wife led the first group of four missionaries to Matopo. Engle lived only a short time in Africa. He died in April 1900, after less than two years in the Matopo Hills. Wittlinger quotes Engle’s own words as he set out for Africa:

As for myself it would be a very small matter to decide to spend the short remnant of my life in Africa were it the Lord's will, but rather incline to the thought that after a few years more we will think of coming home …. The matter, however, is entirely with the Lord; my coming to Africa was no half-concluded step, but enough of clearness in the call to move me forward with an unconditional surrender even unto death; so now I have nothing to choose or dictate. The Lord will doubtless consummate all things well.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In her retrospective on the first years of the mission in Africa, Frances Davidson describes Engle’s death.

I… found Brother Engle speaking the Zulu language rapidly, seemingly unconscious of our presence. … All night we watched… far from his children, far from the comforts of civilization, with none of his family or relatives, save his devoted wife, by his side. As it became evident that the end was near, that heroic mother, who had been such a worthy companion in all his labors, stooped over and imprinted on his face a kiss for each of their seven sons in far-away America. At 5 P.M., April 3, he breathed his last.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In their disagreements over the place where they should begin their mission work, Davidson had found reason to be frustrated with Engle’s indecision.[[22]](#footnote-22) But in this matter of yielding to God’s will, they were at one. She describes his death with the appreciation of one who shared Engle’s faith fully. In many ways, Frances Davidson was Engle’s opposite – a woman, well-educated, strong-willed (one might say headstrong), finding any compromise difficult. It is speculation to say so, but I have the impression that Engle operated more from his heart and Davidson operated more from her head. But in one thing they were completely alike: their absolute commitment to follow Jesus.

Morris Sider has written a short biography of Davidson, in which he records her own memory of her call to go to Africa with Brethren in Christ missions.

[T]he Lord came to me, as it were in the midst of the class work, in the midst of other plans for the future, and swept away my books, reserving only the Bible. In reality He showed me Christ lifted up for a lost world. He filled me with an unutterable love for every soul who had not heard of Him, and with a passionate longing to go to the worst part of the earth, away from civilization, away from other mission bodies and spend the rest of my life in telling the story of the Cross.[[23]](#footnote-23)

As part of his work on Davidson’s life, Sider has edited her journals for *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, and the portrait that emerges from her own writings is of a woman who struggled hard with her own desires in order to obey what she understood God’s call to be.[[24]](#footnote-24) A typical passage concerns the decision as to the precise place the pioneer party would go to establish the mission. Here she describes the critical moments in February 1898:

Mr. Lewis telegraphed that we should not think of going to Bulawayo until we see them as it is very unhealthful now. This was somewhat of a disappointment to us as we are anxious to be there and about the Lord’s business. Bro. Engle has been out to see Mr. [Cecil] Rhodes and the rest of us felt to spend the time he was gone in prayer. I felt that the Lord wanted me to go up into the mountain [overlooking the city] to pray and fast. I felt so anxious since the interview was in reference to land for the Mission among the Matabeles; I did so want that God would rule the hearts of men, both of Mr. Rhodes and of us in the matter.[[25]](#footnote-25)

This theme of going into the mountains to pray is repeated at different points in her journals, usually when there was a difficult decision to be made or to be acted on. Taken with her call quoted above, the theme reinforces the impression that Davidson sought deeply to follow Christ faithfully. In this respect, they were not unusual in their generation of Brethren in Christ. Although we must be careful not to romanticize our forebears, we can fairly say that they lived in a period that took discipleship and piety seriously. In terms of the first theme of our four, then, they passed the test with flying colours.

Missions as Holism

Were they as good at holding word and deed together? This theme is more difficult to assess. The separation between word and deed (or between evangelism and social action) is one that pervades the North American church since 1900. Many Mission agencies have surmounted the divide and see the value of holistic mission, but in much of the supporting constituency, especially among evangelicals, many people still see social activity as less than true missionary outreach. To analyse this dynamic in the Brethren in Christ experience, some background is needed.

Edinburgh 1910

The Great Century of missions[[26]](#footnote-26) culminated in the World Missionary Conference of 1910 at Edinburgh, Scotland. As one might expect from the missionary period involved, Edinburgh 1910 was not a conference on the theology of mission, but rather “a conference to design the *strategy* for a final campaign”.[[27]](#footnote-27) It was the continuation committee to the conference, the International Missionary Council formed in 1921, that developed a theology of mission in a series of councils, such as Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram-Madras (1938). Initially this theology was evangelical, but that changed under the influence of the Hocking Report (presented at Jerusalem 1928) and the rise of the fundamentalist-liberal controversies of the early 20th Century. The resulting split led to a situation in which Evangelical and mainline churches stood on opposite sides from each other.[[28]](#footnote-28)

World Council of Churches vs Lausanne

On one side of the divide, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed in 1948 at Amsterdam. The IMC merged into the WCC in 1961 (New Delhi), becoming the Commission of World Mission and Evangelization (CWME). On the other side of the divide stood the Evangelical missionary movement, centred in the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE). Drawing inspiration from such evangelical leaders as Billy Graham, LCWE grew in conscious distinction separately from the WCC.

Within these two movements, the conciliar/ecumenical (WCC) and the evangelical (LCWE), we see a broad sweep of theological thinking. The WCC shifted from a strong evangelistic mandate at Edinburgh 1910 towards an increasing emphasis on God’s work in the world: what we have sometimes called social action. Mexico City 1963 and Uppsala 1968 marked the height of this move, as the ecumenical movement moved away from an awareness of the church’s place in mission to an emphasis on the world as the locus of God’s saving activity. Although the statements made contain important truth (neither God nor God’s reign can be contained within the church; “the wind blows where it pleases”), they left those in the church unsure that the church had any place in mission. Not surprisingly this period coincided with a strong emphasis on God’s activity in this world through liberation movements, especially against colonial governments. In this context, Nairobi 1975 served to bring the ecumenical movement back to the value and necessity of evangelization.

During the same time, the evangelical movement was moving in an equal and opposite parabola. In reaction to the perceived social gospel, evangelical missions emphasized conversion to the point of ignoring God's action outside the personal and inward. Just as the ecumenical churches wondered where the church belonged in mission, evangelical missionaries increasingly began to wonder where the church belonged in the world.

Diverging and Converging Streams

Lausanne 1974 marked the results of this wrestling. In adopting a series of declarations, the Lausanne Covenant[[29]](#footnote-29) brought an unprecedented degree of unity and clarity to evangelical missionary thinking. What is most striking about this movement and the following meetings, however, is the degree to which the opposite parabolas taken by the ecumenical and evangelical movements have begun to converge.

The WCC took a parabola away from personal conversion towards God’s action in the world’s structures; evangelicals took a parabola away from the social gospel towards personal conversion. Both are returning from the extremes they had taken and discovering much common ground. If we examine the Roman Catholic statements (such as *Ad Gentes*), we find a third parabola with its own characteristics, also converging with the conciliar and evangelical churches. This convergence includes an emphasis on the gospel and its action in each person, an emphasis on the impact of God’s reign on the structures of the world as a whole, and an awareness that human society is a whole and that the gospel addresses the whole of society.

Some prominent issues raised by this convergence are the inculturation of the gospel in every society, the place of the community of faith in the process of evangelization, and the relationship between Christianity and other faith traditions. Today the old church-mission tensions have faded, and social action has been reunited with evangelism.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Some parts of the ecumenical movement continue to focus entirely on social issues and refuse to recognize personal involvement with the gospel itself. Some in the evangelical movement also remain committed to a personal, private faith so that they will not speak at all with liberal Christians. To a significant extent both extremes have capitulated to a reductionist view of the world that is a child of the Enlightenment.[[31]](#footnote-31) In place of the separate compartments for life as envisioned by the Enlightenment, we recognize that life is a whole, physical and spiritual.

At Providence University College and Seminary,[[32]](#footnote-32) this recognition is reflected in the name of our missions conference, “Missio Dei”. One saw this convergence a few years ago, when George Verwer spoke for our missions conference in 1999, followed by Tony Campolo in 2000. Verwer is known for his evangelistic emphasis and Campolo for his social conscience. I took each of them to the airport after the conference. I asked Verwer if Operation Mobilization’s present emphasis on justice ministries represented a change from its beginning.[[33]](#footnote-33) He agreed that it did. The next year I remarked to Campolo that he and Verwer – whom I thought represented opposite ends of the Evangelical spectrum – sounded a lot like each other. He said, “We should! We’re in weekly email contact with each other.” Some congregations and individuals still retain the separation between evangelism and social action, but the major agencies have moved beyond it (at least for the most part).

With this background, we return to the question: How did the early BIC missionaries do with the idea of holistic missions? Did they hold social and spiritual together in an indissoluble whole, or did they prioritize one over the other? As the above survey suggests, the question is to some extent anachronistic. Engle and Davidson and the other early missionaries did not think in terms of controversies from later in the 20th Century. At the same time, they took concrete actions that reflected their priorities. What do those actions reveal?

Their letters home make it clear that evangelization was their first priority. In 1900 (the second year of the mission), Frances Davidson described their work visiting in the surrounding countryside. She reported on the progress made by the newly-baptized converts, setting beer aside, but still struggling with smoking tobacco. She observed that beer was used regularly for work parties; it made the people convivial, but resistant to preaching.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This description is followed in the pages of the *Evangelical Visitor* with many similar accounts of trips into the area around the mission. In my own life with the mission, I remember accounts of “village visiting”, as these trips came to be called. Combined with evangelistic preaching in almost every church service, these trips into the surrounding countryside reflect the priority BIC missionaries placed on conversion. The place given to the new converts’ struggle with beer and tobacco is also instructive. These personal sins did not engage the structures of society, so that they are easier to preach against than social issues.[[35]](#footnote-35)

We might conclude, then, that the BIC missionaries emphasized the spiritual rather than the physical, but the conclusion would be premature. They did not think or express themselves in our terms, and we see more clearly what they thought by looking at their actions. One of the pioneers’ first actions was to begin a school, in which venture Frances Davidson took the lead. She sometimes felt that teaching in the school took her away from her first love of direct evangelism, but they recognized the necessity of literacy as part of the evangelistic effort. [[36]](#footnote-36)

This recognition was common in this era. Writing in the early 1900s, Samuel Zwemer argued for the priority of an evangelism firmly joined to social action: “The Gospel is the only hope for the social uplift of the world, and since Christian missions have always been prior to real and lasting social progress and have shown their power for nineteen centuries in every part of the world, it is evident that the fields presently unoccupied have a claim on the Gospel.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

In the language of the day, Zwemer argued that civilization and Christianity must be held together: One could not advance civilization (pursue social betterment of the people) without Christianity (evangelizing the people). In a similar way, David Livingstone had called for an open door for Christianity and commerce in order to eradicate the slave trade in East and Central Africa.[[38]](#footnote-38) The BIC missionaries did their work in this context, when bringing “Western civilization” and preaching the gospel were separate activities only for those who did not want the gospel preached. Colonial authorities might want to develop the country without preaching the gospel, but missionaries preached and developed as two arms of the same venture.

The ministry of H.P. Steigerwald, who came to Zimbabwe with his wife in 1900, illustrates this holism. He immediately set about building the institutions that gave the BIC work at Matopo, Mtshabezi, and Wanezi its distinctive character. Erecting brick buildings – homes, churches, schools; laying out and developing the farms; providing rudimentary medical care when possible: All of these and more ministered to the whole person, not just to the spiritual.[[39]](#footnote-39)

My own assessment of the early missionaries and holism is that their actions were more holistic than their theology. It is precisely this attention to the whole range of human life that led to the institutions central to the shape of today’s BIC Church in Zimbabwe, which includes farms at the original mission stations, hospitals and clinics, a bookstore that has been one of Zimbabwe’s primary sources of school supplies, and a variety of schools. The evidence cited here is not extensive, but a thorough examination of the picture should reveal the same result.[[40]](#footnote-40)

At the same time, the Brethren in Christ commitment to separation meant that BIC missionaries from the beginning did not see dealing intentionally with social structures as part of the preaching the gospel. Their actions were holistic, but spiritual ministry remained the primary focus of their work. In Ronald Sider’s terminology, they were committed to the spiritual side of a “one-sided Christianity”, but their actions were more holistic than their theology.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The Centrality of Mission in the Nature of the Church

The theological principle that mission is central to the nature of the church rests on the way that Jesus established the first church. One of the Apostle Paul’s great concerns was to open the door of the church to Gentiles as well as Jews, which was primarily a missionary concern. One can argue that if the church is not engaged in missionary outreach, preaching-living the gospel to the world around the church, it is not fully the church of Jesus Christ.[[42]](#footnote-42) One would expect missionaries to see this centrality clearly, and the early BIC missionaries were no exception.

In the years before the BIC overseas missionary effort began, BIC settlers from Pennsylvania moved to Kansas in the late 1870s. In her study of the Kansas BIC churches, Wilma Musser notes the missionary aspect of this movement. Ministers sent to work with them were referred to as “missionary brethren”.[[43]](#footnote-43) It is no surprise, then, that the engine of overseas missionary work began to gain power first in Kansas.

As one reads through the pages of *The Evangelical Visitor*, one notices not only many reports about the activity of the early missionary effort, but also one sees many articles advocating for a missionary consciousness. The effort to persuade people that missionary work was essential to the life of the church was especially strong in the earliest years, in the 1890s leading up to the first venture to Matopo Mission. People such as Rhoda Lee, whose impassioned speech led to the first offerings for overseas missions, wrote for *The Evangelical Visitor*, seeking to persuade the larger church to extend their vision from North America to the world.

One can only speculate what was happening around dinner tables and in casual conversations throughout the church at this time, but it is reasonable to believe that viewpoints both for and against were discussed informally. At least one person took matters into her own hands and left for a foreign mission field. Hettie Fernbaugh has the distinction of being the first Brethren in Christ missionary in Africa. So a note from the editor in the first issue of the *Evangelical Visitor* in 1895 states:

From a letter received from Sister Hetty [sic] Fernbaugh, dated December 18, 1894, we learn that she arrived safe in New York City, Sunday morning the 16th, and expected to take steamer for London on the 19th on her way to her destination at Morocco, Africa. She seems in good spirits and has a praise for the Lord on the way to her work in the African mission field. She expects to write again after arriving at her destination. She earnestly craves the prayers of God’s people in her behalf, and we trust that all will remember her in their devotions. We shall watch with interest the work she is engaged in and we expect to publish from time to time such reports as we may be able to obtain, for the satisfaction of those interested.

In the June 1 issue Hettie herself wrote directly to the home church in “From a Missionary in Africa.” She followed up with “A Letter from Morocco” in the next issue. Her insights are of the sort that we might expect from someone who had no previous exposure to the world outside of North America, with a worldview bounded by the BIC of the end of the 1800s, for she was breaking new ground. She went from Abilene, Kansas to Mequinez (Meknes), Morocco with the Gospel Missionary Union in late 1894.

Lee also wrote an article for the *Evangelical Visitor*, which began by noting the informal conversations that were taking place: “Of late, so much has been said, pro and con (mostly con), in regard to foreign missions, that I feel moved to present a few facts to show the work that is actually being done at home and abroad for the promulgation of the Gospel, and the hastening of our Lord’s coming.”[[44]](#footnote-44) She was hardly an unbiased reporter of such conversations, but she was surely correct in reporting the basic reason given against foreign missions: that the church has work enough to do at home.

She also expressed the basic reason for supporting foreign missions: “It is also true that the spirit for home missions begets a spirit for foreign work, and vice versa. For instance, a Christian who testifies for Christ, and works among the sinners at home, is sure to ‘lift up his eyes and look on the fields’ and ere long his mental vision reaches out to heathen lands and he exclaims, ‘The world is the field,’ and then and there is born a desire to spread the light.”

Lee’s emphasis on home and foreign missions as an indissoluble whole anticipated the way that missiologists describe the missionary task today. Like the Protestant missionary movement in general, the mission work of the BIC developed in two streams, as home and foreign missions. In contrast, missiology today speaks of one task without the geographic distinctions of the past. Rhoda Lee’s article uses quite contemporary language.

One can see how the missionaries valued the missionary nature of the church not just in the way they advocated for their own mission, but also in the kind of church they established. The common definition in mission studies of an indigenous church is the three-self definition, with a fourth self often added: An indigenous church is one that is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (or self-extending).[[45]](#footnote-45) In my own missiological training, we were taught the addition of a fourth self: self-theologizing. We discuss the importance of indigeneity in the final theme; here, we consider the relevance of self-propagating for the centrality of mission to the church’s identity.

The first two “selfs” may be missing in any given situation. A church may experience financial hardships and need help from other church – much as the Jerusalem church in the book of Acts needed help to deal with their financial hardships; yet that church belongs to its own context fully. A church may even need outside leadership for a time for a variety of reasons, without negating its indigenous character. But a church that really belongs to its context and grows in the soil of its own culture will almost always extend the gospel naturally, as part of its very nature.

Did the first BIC missionaries plant a self-propagating church? Did they assume from the beginning that the new converts would be the best hope for bringing the gospel to the Ndebele people in general? I think that the answer is yes. It is not clear to me that they thought of the question in the terms I have been using, but they turned to people such as Ndhlalambi Moyo and Sitshokupi Sibanda from the start, both to translate for them into the local language and to preach the gospel on their own accounts.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The way that the category of “evangelists” grew faster than that of ordained minister[[47]](#footnote-47) may reflect the BIC understanding that missionary outreach – evangelism – was basic to their Christian identity. They clearly held that extensive spiritual training and growth was necessary for one to be ordained, but equally clearly they believed that all new converts could and should give witness to the gospel. At the same time, their slowness in ordaining the local people to ministry, effectively retaining power in the hands of the missionaries, served to retard the growth of the church, including the church as a missionary force.

Our evaluation of the first missionaries, then, regarding the missionary nature of the church must be mixed. At the formal level of belief, they held missionary outreach as central to the identity of the young church. At the level of actual practice, however, the lack of local leadership had the effect of diluting that desire that the new converts would bring other converts into the young church. This mixed assessment brings us to the final theme of indigeneity.

Towards an Indigenous Church

We need some understanding of indigeneity before assessing the work of the first missionaries. A commonly held understanding among missiologists is the necessity of two basic principles held in tension: the pilgrim principle and the indigenous principle.[[48]](#footnote-48) Stated simply, the pilgrim principle acknowledges that “this world is not my home”: Our citizenship is in Heaven. The BIC have held this principle as part of their identity enshrined in the doctrine of separation.[[49]](#footnote-49) The indigenous principle acknowledges that the church can be fully at home in every culture.[[50]](#footnote-50) The pilgrim principle critiques every culture; the indigenous principles affirms every culture.

In missionary terms, then, the pilgrim principle means that the church is not bound to one ethnicity but can go anywhere, and the indigenous principle means that when the church enters a new culture it can use the forms and patterns of the new culture. It is not bound to the culture of the missionaries. The question then becomes: How did the first BIC missionaries do in terms of planting an indigenous church?

The doctrine of separation means that they found it relatively easy to live out the pilgrim principle. They knew that the gospel and the church belong everywhere. They also articulated a clear sense that the society from which they came was in rebellion against God, so one might guess that they were free of Western cultural assumptions. That guess would be incorrect. The doctrine of separation meant that they also held that new converts had to leave the Ndebele or Tonga cultures in which the first missionaries worked. Their attitude towards beer-drinking is illustrative of this attitude.

The Temperance Movement was gaining strength in North America at this time. Various articles in *The Evangelical Visitor* reinforced a comprehensive rejection of the use of alcohol and tobacco. Given this attitude towards drinking beer, imbibed from cultural currents in their own society, the missionaries could not see anything worth redeeming in the practice of beer-drinking in Zimbabwe. As a result, they forced new converts to cut themselves off from their own culture in order to join the church.

Beer-drinking in Ndebele culture carried several positive functions. When a work party would come together in a village to clear the fields or bring in the harvest, they would seal their work together by drinking beer together.[[51]](#footnote-51) When a traveller stopped by a village after a long day’s journey, beer was a special part of showing hospitality and creating good relationships. Sitting together drinking beer, the men would exchange news and gossip, deepening the bonds that held them together.[[52]](#footnote-52) So basic to African life was the beer drink, that the anthropologist Harry Wolcott wrote a full-length study of beer drinking: *The African Beer Gardens of Bulawayo*.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Wolcott’s descriptions come from about 1970, but he draws on traditional understandings of beer-drinking as well as describing current patterns. In the chapter on cultural factors, he observes that drinking beer traditionally fell into two broad areas: “beer brewed for *work* and beer brewed for *ceremonial purposes*.”[[54]](#footnote-54) He continues:

The occasions for calling an *ilima* or work party were numerous, for traditional life tended to be communal, and any task that required or could be facilitated by a collective effort was customarily approached by inviting one’s neighbors for a beer drink, an implicit request for assistance. Plowing, building or repairing kraal fences, threshing corn and constructing a new hut were all occasions at which a work party might be called.[[55]](#footnote-55)

By forbidding beer-drinking, the missionaries unintentionally restricted new converts’ participation in the life of their communities. This restriction makes sense in theological terms when the beer involved was used for ceremonial purposes, most importantly at the ceremony held one year after the death of the head of the household to invite his spirit back into the family.[[56]](#footnote-56) When considered as a non-religious practice, however, the restriction makes less sense. Nor did all missionaries condemn traditional beer-drinking. The pioneer missionary among the Ndebele was Robert Moffat, close friend of the founder of the Ndebele nation, Mzilikazi. His diaries record that he welcomed the traditional beer brought to him when he visited Mzilikazi. David Livingstone (Moffat’s son-in-law) also records his willingness to drink the traditional beer.[[57]](#footnote-57) It was a welcome refreshment following a long trip.

Why then did the BIC missionaries forbid beer-drinking? I doubt that they thought through the cultural implications. Rather, I suspect that they simply applied the prohibitionist thinking then current in the North American church. Drinking beer and using tobacco were seen as simply wrong, without regard for their place within the culture.

I suggest that BIC missionary attitudes towards drinking beer illustrate their general sense that the Ndebele and Tonga people needed to separate from their cultures, just as the missionaries had set aside the dominant North American societal norms from which they came. The missionaries did not, I think, recognize that they remained fully North American in their own cultural lives, and that they were pursuing a deculturization of the African that would inevitably put pressure on the converts to adopt the missionaries’ culture. What the missionaries saw as theological and conversionary necessities were in fact a step towards turning the converts into cultural clones of the missionaries.

Lest one think that I am judging the BIC missionaries harshly, this attitude prevailed among Western Christians in general at the beginning of the 1900s. African culture was seen as “darkened” or “childlike”, and Western culture was seen as the Christian light that the Africans needed to become civilized. A text from that period describes African religion in terms that make this view clear:

It would be a most difficult task to prove that the lowest African was not a man. Hence we assume that he is a man, even though he finds his rating near the foot of the race. Having spent two decades among this low class of the human race and at the same time having lived among the highest types of the animal kingdom, we believe it reasonable to affirm that this low type of man is possessed of a religious nature …[[58]](#footnote-58)

The author (Erwin Richards) proceeds to lead his readers from the dominant view of their age – that Africans would naturally adopt the worldview of more enlightened Europeans – to a more realistic view, in which Africans hold their own worldview, which makes sense to them. His opening assumption, however – that the African people were on a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder than the European missionaries – rings harshly in the ears of 21st Century readers. It also was consistent with 19th Century views, even in anthropological circles.[[59]](#footnote-59)

In contrast to this view of evolutionary anthropology,[[60]](#footnote-60) the first BIC missionaries held remarkably different views of the people among whom they lived. Although their language reflected the common language of the colonial period, Jesse Engle wrote to the home church of his own first impressions of the Ndebele people: “While intellectually the African may stand inferior to some of the heathen nations, to their credit be it said that many, had they had our own advantages in civil and religious culture, would not be a whit behind many of our own race.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In anthropological terms, Engle’s words suggest that the real difference between the missionaries and the indigenous people was one of cultural training. This viewpoint is reflected in the title of the history of BIC Missions written for the 50th Anniversary of their founding, “There is no difference.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

Our assessment of the missionaries’ use of the indigenous principle, then, is mixed. They rejected African culture, as they rejected their own, which placed them in sympathy with other White settlers in the new colonies of Southern and Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia). At the same time, they honoured the people among whom they lived as essentially equal to themselves. Sara Cress, who followed the first party in 1899 with her husband, Clifford Cress, expressed her surprise at this dynamic following the first baptismal service thus: “We suppose those poor people in the church at home who think it such a dreadful thing to mix with these natives would have been shocked beyond measure had they seen us greet our new brethren and sister with the Holy Kiss. Of course we observed that command the same as at home.”[[63]](#footnote-63) They combined a rejection of the local culture with a deep love for the people themselves.

Conclusion

We have seen that the first BIC missionaries in Zimbabwe were deeply faithful in their willingness to follow God’s call wherever it led them. They sought to plant a church that was missionary in its essence, although the tendency to build institutions hampered that desire. Their view of mission was almost exclusively evangelistic, but their actions were more holistic. They had little understanding of the importance of an indigenous church, especially in terms of how the church they planted conceptualized the gospel.

These judgments are unremarkable. At one level, we see simply that the earliest BIC missionaries were much like the home church that had sent them. At a deeper level, however, we come back to the first of the four judgments above: They sought to be faithful. It is difficult in the extreme for us to grasp the gap between their world in North America and the world they went to in the Matopo Hills, between Kansas and Pennsylvania on the one hand and the heartland of the Ndebele people on the other. To all the usual difficulties of moving from one culture to another, they experienced also a great technological and cultural distance. Through it all, they remained faithful, even at the cost of their lives.

Recently, Jake Shenk, with his wife, Nancy, were the longest serving BIC missionaries of the present generation. This past year, Jake died and was buried in the place he most wanted to be laid: In the cemetery at Matopo Mission. His body lies near Al and Thata Book, who died in Zimbabwe in 2003 and were also buried at Matopo. The bones of other missionaries lie in the cemetery: Levi Doner; Sara Cress; and the leader of the first party, Jesse Engle.

When I teach my history of missions course, we look openly at the failures and mistakes that Christian missionaries have made. We have been complicit with colonialism. We have made our own culture the measure of the church in other societies. We have assumed that we know best and should be in charge. But always beneath the mistakes that missionaries have made, there run two constant qualities. They loved God deeply, and they loved the people to whom God sent them. I tell my students, and I close with this reminder to myself, “If I am found to be half as faithful as these my predecessors, I will be grateful.”

1. There is a large body of specialist literature on the Opium Wars, which I have not read. One good general source for a brief overview is Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (2004: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 177. I suggest this source because Tucker is writing from the heart of evangelical missions, and she is also clear in her description that some missionaries embraced the use of military force to open a pathway for preaching the gospel. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1964) pp. 282f. Today, this perspective is almost taken for granted. See, for example, Paul Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2009), p. 54 and p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See H. Frances Davidson, *South and South Central Africa*, (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1915) pp. 39f. I saw the letter from Rhodes containing this quote in 1991, which was then held in the archives of the BICC in Zimbabwe in Bulawayo. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stewart’s personal details are readily available from Wikipedia. The speech that brought him to my attention is found at http://www.utoronto.ca/knox/pages/News and Events/brian\_stewart.htm (accessed February 8, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Robert Woodberry, “The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy”, *American Political Science Review* 106(2):244-274 (May 2012). Woodberry is a senior research professor at Baylor University in Texas. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tom Hiney, *On the Missionary Trail: a journey through Polynesia, Asia, and Africa with the London Missionary Society*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sanneh has a prodigious output, but most pertinent to this question is his seminal work, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”, in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 3-15 for a penetrating description of the way that the centre of the Christian faith has moved throughout the history of the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Woodberry, pp. 267f. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example, Nikolova, Elena and Polansky, Jakub, “Conversionary Protestants Do Not Cause Democracy” (February 28, 2020). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3314001 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3314001. Accessed February 15, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hiney, 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See especially chapter 7 of Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*. I am indebted to Alison Fitchett Climenhaga for reminding me of Sanneh’s work and of the similar points developed by Andrew Walls. See especially, “Culture and Coherence in Christian History”, in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*, pp. 16-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A useful missions history textbook that follows a similar process is Paul E. Pierson, *The Dynamics Of Christian Mission*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Don Richardson uses this theme as the organizing principle for his book, *Eternity in their Hearts*, revised edition (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), which gives examples of the gospel already present in a variety of cultures. In *Lords of the Earth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1977), Richardson develops one of these stories more fully, of the Yali people in the island of Papua, Indonesia. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The first missionary party went to Matopo Mission in Zimbabwe in 1898. The first years go up to the end of World War One, when a new generation of missionaries came out to Africa. For purposes of this essay, I am considering only the first 10 years or so. These reflections also draw from a history of BIC missions I am working on. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The way that discipleship finds full expression in faithful living can be illustrated by a range of literature too broad to explore here – from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised edition (New York: MacMillan, 1976) to the works of Richard Foster (for example, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th Anniversary Edition (HarperSanFrancisco) to Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See footnote 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Carlton Wittlinger, pp. 184f. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Frances Davidson, pp. 100f. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Frances Davidson, p.35. Quotations from Davidson’s journal spell out this discussion more fully. Her history was written 17 years later and summarizes what happened on board ship. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. E. Morris Sider, “Hannah Frances Davidson” in *Nine Portraits: Brethren in Christ Biographical Sketches* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, pp. 159-214), p. 164. I could have cited this quote from Davidson herself (it is found in *South and South Central Africa*, p. 23), but I give Sider’s work to encourage the reader to read his excellent study. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Sider, E. Morris, ed., “The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part I: The Early Years (1881-1895).” *Brethren in Christ History and Life.* VIII(2) pp. 103-123, 1985. “The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part II: The Call to Africa (1895-1898).” *Brethren in Christ History and Life.* VIII(3), pp. 181-204, 1985. “The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part III: The First Years in Africa (1898-1904).” *Brethren in Christ History and Life.* IX(1), pp. 23-64, 1986. “The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part IV: The Founding and Early Years of Macha Mission.” *Brethren in Christ History and Life.* IX(2), pp. 125-149, 1986. “The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part V: The Later Years (1908-1931).” *Brethren in Christ History and Life.* IX(3), pp. 284-309, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Journal of Frances Davidson. Part III, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This name for the 19th Century comes from Kenneth Scott Latourette’s magisterial history of Christian missions: *Great Century: A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Volume 4, 1941, Volume 5, 1943, and Volume 6, 1944), New York: Harper & Bros. The fact that Latourette devoted three of the history’s seven volumes to “the Great Century” indicates something of the missionary activity of that period. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. James B. Scherer *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1987) p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The narrative that follows comes primarily from Scherer. See footnote 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Scherer, pp. 170-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See, for example, David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) and Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I have taught at Providence, Manitoba since August 1997. Providence grew out of the Bible College movement in Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Verwer is the founder of OM International. I served on the board of OM Canada for about 20 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Frances, Davidson, “Matoppo Mission”, *The Evangelical Visitor* August 1, 1900, pp. 297ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. More precisely, the missionaries did not realize fully how they were challenging social structures in a somewhat destructive way. By forbidding beer-drinking, they effectively cut converts off from their social support within the culture. We discuss this issue further below under the heading of “indigeneity”. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Davidson wrestled with this dynamic tension from the beginning of the work at Matopo. See “Matoppo Mission Oct. 2, 1898”, *H. Frances Davidson Diaries, Volume 3, June 5, 1898 - December 3, 1900*, transcription page 3. The transcription of Davidson’s diary is held in the Archives of the Brethren in Christ Church, Grantham. PA. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Unoccupied Mission Fields of Africa and Asia* (New York: Laymen’s Missionary Movement, 1911), p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Paul Pierson, p. 291; Ruth Tucker, p. 160. The phrase linking “Christianity, commerce, and civilization” comes from this campaign. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. H.P. Steigerwald’s report on the first year of Wanezi Mission is typical: H.P. Steigerwald, “Wanezi Mission”, *Handbook of Missions: Home and Foreign 1925*, pp. 27-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Find articles in BIC History and Life that support this view – such as David Brubaker’s story of Phumula, and history of Mtshabezi or Macha Hospitals, and anything on Matopo Book Centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Ronald J. Sider, *Good New and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999). Lest one think that the argument above suggests that BIC work should have been intentionally committed to changing social structures, Sider’s point is that one-sided Christians live on both sides of the divide. As argued above, both sides – social and spiritual – belong together in an indissoluble unity. Good missionary outreach, then, takes both social (or physical) and spiritual into account. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The literature in the theology of mission is extensive in this regard. David Bosch’s magisterial work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) is an excellent study of the way that the missionary impulse has been expressed throughout the history of the church. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) expand the study to include the Eastern Church as well as the Western. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Wilma I. Musser, “Brethren in Christ Churches in Kansas”, *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, Volume XIV, Number 2, pp. 145-147. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Rhoda Lee, “Home and Foreign Missions”, *EV* (August 15, 1894), pp. 241. This essay follows up on the essay Lee read to the General Conference in Kansas, printed in the June 1, 1894 *EV* (pp. 162-163). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. This definition stems from the work of Henry Venn in England and Rufus Anderson in the United States of America, who developed the definition independently, yet on conversation with each other, in the mid-19th Century. See, for example, David Bosch, p. 450 and p.451f. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See, for example, Sitjokupi Sibanda, “Experience of a Native Sister, part 1” and “Experience of a Native Sister, part 2, *EV*, January 24, 1910, pp. 5 and 12, and *EV*, pp. 5 and 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Thus, we read in *HANDBOOK OF MISSIONS, HOME AND FOREIGN of the Brethren in Christ Church 1935* (the Handbook was the BIC Missions official annual report to the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church), p. 41, that in 1934 there were 191 unordained African evangelists, as compared to three ordained “overseers”. The overseers were the first ordained African ministers in Zambia and Zimbabwe. The *Handbook* began in 1916 and did not use the category of “evangelist”, so I have cited from 1935. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See, for example, Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”, pp. 7-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Carlton Wittlinger, pp. 5, 46 for a basic description of “separation” or nonconformity. Chapter XV, “Nonconformity Under Stress” (pp. 342-362) explores the way in which the BIC wrestled with the practical implications of this doctrine during the 20th Century. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See, for example, the way that Don Richardson explores the presence of the gospel ion every culture in *Eternity in their Hearts*. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See references to beer drinking in *The Evangelical Visitor*. For example, L. Doner, “Mapane Mission”, January 15, 1909, p. 12, and L. Doner, “Mapane Mission”, November 15, 1909, pp. 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Although I cannot find the reference, it was Fred and Grace Holland, I believe, who observed the way that we removed Christian men from their social circle by forbidding beer. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Harry F. Wolcott, *The African Beer Gardens of Bulawayo* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Wolcott, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Wolcott, p. 70. In the letter from Levi Doner (fn. 50), Doner writes, “This is the busy season of seeding and natives (not Christian) are absorbed in beer drinking at digging bees.” [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Wolcott, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See the volumes by Moffat and Livingstone in the Oppenheimer Series. J.P.R. Wallis, editor, *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 1829-1860*, volumes one and two (London: Chatto and Windus, 1945). J.P.R. Wallis, editor, *The Matabele Mission: A Selection from the Correspondence of John and Emily Moffat, David Livingstone, and Others, 1858-1878*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1945). The Oppenheimer Series was published by the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Erwin H. Richards, D.D., “The Religion of the African”, pp.1-23 in *Religions of Mission Fields as Viewed by Protestant Missionaries* (New York: Laymen’s Missionary Movement, 1905), p. 3. The volume describes Richards as “For Twenty-four Years a Missionary to East Africa”. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See Paul Bohannon and Mark Glazer, editors, *High Points in Anthropology*, Second edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988) for the viewpoint of evolutionary anthropologists such as Herbert Spenser. By “evolutionary anthropology”, I mean anthropological study that is based on the assumptions of evolutionary theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Contemporary evolutionary anthropology values cultures more neutrally. See the writings of Marvin Harris for some insightful work within the late 20th Century version of this branch of anthropology. For example, Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Random House, 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Jesse Engle, *EV*, August 15, 1898, pp. 318f. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Anna R. Engle, J.A. Climenhaga and Leoda A. Buckwalter, *There Is No Difference: God Works in Africa and India*. Nappanee, IN: E.V. Publishing House, 1950. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. G.C. and Sara Cress, “Letter from Sister Cress”, *EV*, November 1, 1899, p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)