

ROOTS AND FRUITS: SCOTTISH MISSIONARY TRADITIONS

Zambia – Alasdair Morton

I EXPECTATIONS

A son of the manse, right through childhood I read avidly and with interest various accounts of missionary endeavours in various parts of the world and was aware of many of the great missionary names, Scots and others. An aunt had been a missionary in Manchuria (in what is now Shenyang where my daughter on a medical placement met someone who remembered her), was let out by the Japanese and spent the rest of the war in Jamaica. She and other missionaries I met on furlough further whetted my appetite for following in the footsteps of some. Africa particularly interested and challenged me and I read widely in that area. In second year at secondary school I made my commitment not only personally to Christ as his follower but to aim at missionary service in Africa.

For the rest of my education I had this in mind. All along committed to becoming a minister I took classics at school with this in mind. Then at University I specialised in Colonial History studying under Professor W.M. Macmillan, a leading authority on Southern Africa with considerable field experience there. Having heard how many ministerial missionaries found themselves deeply involved in school responsibilities on the field I decided to train as a teacher before going on to Divinity and qualified in history and religious education with Diplomas in Education and Religious Education. I also was increasingly involved with my African interests and felt honoured to have been a special guest at the dinner function laid on by the former Gold Coast students to celebrate Ghana's independence. As one of the two Scottish representatives on the National Committee of UNSA my visits to London for meetings and also conferences brought me more contacts. In all of this I was briefing myself for working in a continent whose various countries were rapidly approaching independence though that route was still not always clear.

A further two steps before the plunge. The first was to spend a post-graduate year in the United States. In the way that my life often seems to have been directed, an American exchange minister in my home village who was a graduate of Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut told me of the Kennedy School of Missions one of four faculties of the seminary and which was founded as a result of the Edinburgh 1910 conference. My year there was exhilarating and a superb introduction for the years ahead as well as allowing me to undertake a Master's field degree that required a field based dissertation in addition to the year's academic course. Then on my return to Scotland marriage to the one who was as committed as I ever was to living and working in Africa and has been my lifelong loving companion and soul mate.

The one term in St. College College in Edinburgh before setting sail was a hectic and very busy time with all the preparation in the course work as well as for the new life. I do not recall much in the way of explicit briefing about my future work or even location in Africa until later on – that Continent at least being accepted (I would not have accepted any other Continent). I sensed that people going to Africa were expected to have a considerable political awareness and I was aware also of being made to avoid meeting certain missionaries whose viewpoint might be rather different from my own.

II THE REALITY

The first four years at Mwenzo, the earliest Mission Station in Zambia, was spent in a bush touring ministry – one of the last generation of missionary ministers to do this. With a huge district to cover the work was more that of a bishop, sacramental but also training the local leadership to be more self sufficient. This resulted in me being specially set apart for some time to experiment with such training specially for illiterate or poorly resourced local leaders. My earlier briefing resulted in not being surprised by what I found and the work for which I was responsible, which included running the station single handed after only six months. A fifth year of such work was in a new location – the first missionary to take over from a Zambian minister and live in the house previously occupied by him. Political and social awareness as well as good local relationships meant I did not feel insecure or threatened during the years of the independence struggle and lead up to Independence in spite of the burning of some local schools and churches while visiting round the villages from which the men had fled to bring reassurance to the women and children left behind.

Then came a move into teacher training when I was appointed chaplain and lecturer in religious education at one of the two colleges administered by the Christian Council of Zambia. This was a bracing time of expansion of the educational services and indeed of the whole range of services in the country. After only two years in this post I was suddenly and unexpectedly called to be the Principal of the other Christian Council College at Livingstone. Again I felt very much a God directed progression now with extensive responsibilities that I had never envisaged but was able to use in what I considered a progressive and sound way. My previous rural experience made me sensitive to both the needs of the country's vast rural areas and the challenges of preparing teachers to serve there though many, like many others of the better educated Zambians, had their eyes on the towns and their higher class facilities.

Four initiatives marked my four and a half years there. A stress on the need for inclusion of agricultural science in every school programme and therefore also in the training for teachers. This saw the appointment of the first specialist lecturer in agricultural science recruited from England which allowed great developments which were fully in line with the Ministry's later policy of encouraging boarding schools and colleges to be as self sufficient in food production as possible. The land and not copper was and continues to be Zambia's greatest asset. The founding and development of a demonstration school within the College helped to enhance the quality of training provided as did the lead the College had in recruiting the first Cambridge certificate students, an advance on the former post Form three entrants. The fourth element was the progress toward Zambianisation and the preparation of my Vice Principal as my successor, When first appointed there were only two Zambian principals in the eight primary colleges and when I left there were only two expatriate Principals remaining.

At that point after my due leave, while holding permanent residence status, I might have sought some other type of appointment but family and other circumstances led me to the decision that I had served out my time as a missionary though my initial commitment of earlier years had been to life time service. My subsequent service in Scotland has seemed to be equally guided by the Spirit's direction with each appointment making me feel that I was following a guided plan for my life with all the satisfaction that gives.

III THE OUTCOME

Although my original call and planning seemed to be being fulfilled in a satisfying way, with the changing but not unexpected circumstances my missionary career continued to leave me with a feeling of fulfilment right up to the time of leaving Zambia. I had never explored what other possibilities there might have been for alternative service in Zambia but I did not have any feeling of having let the side down in spite of the encouragement of some to stay on. I felt gratified that the Church in Zambia continued to grow remarkably and much more than during my own period of service. Challenges and difficulties certainly continued to exist, not least over inadequacies in some aspects of Church administration, in some financial matters and in deployment of staff and local leaders. My sole return visit to Zambia in 1984 revealed some of these. The two Colleges in which I had served had expanded creditably and continued to offer a relevant contribution to teacher education in Zambia with the Livingstone College in particular being in the forefront with regard to curriculum and standards. God is continuing to have His work and witness continued through the often remarkable commitment of a vast number of committed persons throughout the country in circumstances that are often extremely demanding and requiring sacrificial service offering a challenging comparison with our Scottish situation.

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