

Methodism in the Zambezi Valley: 1901-26

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The Inspiration of Livingstone

Christian missionaries were inspired to travel to Zambia [formerly Northern Rhodesia] through the publicised efforts of David Livingstone who made his famous journeys from 1849 until his death in Northern Zambia in 1873. He went down the Zambezi Valley in October 1860 and met chief Mwemba who asked 'that he and his people might be "Sundayed" as well as his neighbours'.¹

Roger Price, one of Livingstone's fellow missionaries, and later brother-in-law, actually attempted to go to Zambia in 1859 but 15 of his party of 18 died from malaria and he had to give up. A Jesuit party also tried to start work in Zambia. Two missionaries went to Chief Mwemba's area in the Zambezi Valley. 'Arriving on 9th August 1880, they were well received by the chief and given some land on which to set up a station.'² In a few weeks malaria struck and Father Terorde was dead and his colleague delirious and the work was abandoned.

The Primitive Methodist Mission to Central Africa

The Primitive Methodists were among the first to set off for Zambia after missionary activity finally started there in 1885. This came about as a result of extending their work in South Africa where they had a large mission station at Aliwal North on the border of Cape Colony and the Orange Free State. There they were in touch with the missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission in nearby Lesotho. John Smith (father of Edwin Smith) consulted them about extending the Primitive Methodist work among 'untouched heathenism'. The French missionaries were already working north of the Zambezi and suggested that the Primitive Methodists try a neighbouring tribe of savage reputation, the Mashukulumbwe or Ila. After nearly five years of difficult travel and other hardships the Primitive Methodists began their work among the Ila in December 1893.

The Zambezi Valley

A few years later they extended their Central African work to reach the Tonga of the isolated Zambezi Valley (also known as the Gwembe Valley). These people spoke a language not so different from Ila. Although culturally similar to the Ila and Tonga of the Central African Plateau the Valley Tonga had their own distinctive environment and planted gardens on the rich alluvial soils on the banks of the Zambezi.

When the first missionaries came to the area they found a subsistence economy where the cultivation of fields was supplemented by gathering of wild produce along with hunting and

¹ Burnett, R.W., c. 1909, p. 2.

² Lane, W., 1991, p. 7

fishing. All regarded themselves as farmers. It was an insecure existence where crops could be threatened by animals, insects and diseases and by drought or flood. The climate was hostile to Europeans. The Valley can be very hot at the end of the dry season (September-November) 'with temperatures exceeding 100°F with a discouraging regularity.'³

The social organisation of the Valley Tonga was marked by strong kinship ties and polygyny was a common family pattern. There was also a strong sense of the spiritual especially the shades (mizimu) of the last few generations which became attached to living people who inherited them and many of their rights. The shades controlled all institutional positions and affected the organisation of the family. They had a strong influence on people's behaviour and were reckoned to be a source of trouble if not properly respected. However, if a malady persisted after the demands of the mizimu were met then it was attributed to God.⁴

Walter Hogg: Pioneer Primitive Methodist to the Zambezi.

The first Primitive Methodist missionary to work among the Valley Tonga was Walter Hogg who arrived at Sijoba on 30 October, 1901.⁵ Hogg was a Scot. Earlier in life he enrolled at Mr Spurgeon's college with the idea of becoming a missionary but soon abandoned the idea and returned to business. He eventually settled in South Africa. In the 1890s he was a local preacher in the Aliwal North circuit and lived at Wepener, an outpost of the circuit on the borders of Lesotho.⁶ There he ran a bakery business and led the local church. Hogg's wife died and he offered to go as a missionary to the Zambezi. Before setting out in 1901 he returned to Scotland and became engaged to a Miss McHendrie. This brave lady went to Central Africa in 1902, married Hogg and joined him in his work.

Walter Hogg's station at Sijoba was near a crossing place of the Zambezi known as Walker's Drift, a day's journey west of Mwemba's country and about 125 km from the Victoria Falls.⁷ He was active and energetic and 'within a year he had made the acquaintance of most of the chiefs of the Valley, had built a Church which was already too small, and had compiled a vocabulary of more than 3000 words.'⁸

When he wrote from Sijoba on 23 June 1902 Hogg reported the safe arrival of his family and goods and said :- 'I am extremely pleased to report a growing and intelligent interest among the natives in our work. Our congregations are gradually increasing until our little Church is nearly full... That a work of God has begun here is very evident in transformed lives and a sincere reverence for God's day... and in educational matters it is the same, the desire for knowledge is exceedingly great here...'⁹

³ Scudder, T., 1971, p.27.

⁴ See Colson, E., 1960 and Reynolds, B., 1968.

⁵ Burnett, c. 1909, p.3.

⁶ Smith Papers, MMS Archives, Fiche 577.

⁷ Hugh Felix Walker was transport manager for bringing the Police to Monze on the Plateau. The families lived near each other for a time in the Valley and later one of the Hogg daughters married a son of Walker' Unpublished paper, c. 1944, on Kancindu-Masuku in Kafue School Archives, Kafue; Sampson, R., 1956, pp. 17 & 34.

⁸ Bolink, P., 1967, p. 74.

⁹ *The Record* (Primitive Methodist missionary magazine), 1902, p. 156.

Walter Hogg was given the nickname 'Siabusu' (one who is white like flour, or maybe 'the flour man') perhaps because of his greying head or more probably because it became known that he was a baker. If it referred to his apparent age¹⁰ he was not diminished in energy and is said to have built a wagon road up the escarpment to the old capital of the region, Kalomo. 'It was an amazing achievement, and though the track of the road is now lost, in some places it looks as though it had been hacked through the rocks only yesterday.'¹¹

Mrs Hogg travelled home to Britain in 1904. At the same time the wives of his fellows, Edwin Smith and William Chapman, from the Ila Mission were in Britain on sick leave. The three men got together at Livingstone in late 1904 with the Rev T. Stones, a new missionary, and considered how to extend their work. Chapman wanted to explore the Mumbwa area. It was suggested that Hogg should start a mission farm.¹² No doubt he was expecting to do this in 1905 after he finished building a new church to replace the one that was too small. This church, designed like an English village chapel with a central pulpit, was opened in January 1905.¹³ However, disaster struck in February 1905 when Hogg died suddenly after a tour down river to Zongwe.¹⁴ He was not replaced for two years though the Rev T. Stones was said to have come from Livingstone but only stayed for a few months.¹⁵

An African Missionary

Walter Hogg was not the only Primitive Methodist missionary to the area. For most of the time he was assisted by Ezekieli Masunyane – a Sotho teacher/evangelist, one of several Sotho missionaries who are easily forgotten in telling the story of the Primitive Methodist Mission in Zambia. He held the fort after Hogg's death and when Edwin Smith toured the Valley in 1906 he was well impressed with the way Ezekieli had looked after things. He was a long serving missionary who continued to work in the Valley until about 1921.¹⁶

When Hogg died the Primitive Methodists were thus in two fields about 250 km apart. There was not always harmony between them and with the inhospitable heat and diseases of the Valley there were suggestions especially from the Ila missionaries that this part of the work be closed down altogether.

John Fell: a Pioneer Educationalist.

That did not happen. The next missionary was a rugged and forthright character, John Fell, who earned himself the nickname 'Sianguzu' (industrious, man of strength). One of the first things he did was to move the mission down river to Mwemba's country, leaving Sijoba as an outstation. The mission station became known as Kanchindu. Fell studied the Tonga language and, using

¹⁰ Although he looks elderly in photographs, grey hair and white moustache, a photograph of his grave gives his birth as July 1855 so he was 49 years old when he died.

¹¹ Temple, M.M., 1991, p. 121.

¹² Smith Papers, MMS Archives, Fiche 587.

¹³ Edwin Smith Photograph Collection.

¹⁴ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

¹⁵ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979; unpublished paper on Kancindu-Masuku, c. 1944, in Kafue School Archives, Kafue

¹⁶ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

Edwin Smith's Handbook of the Ila Language as a guide, wrote a Tonga grammar (1915) as well as translating Bible portions (Mark, 1911, Genesis, 1922), primers and science readers.¹⁷ By June 1910 there 5 full members and 17 catechumens in the Kanchindu Mission.¹⁸ By December 1911 this had increased to 7 full members and 69 catechumens.¹⁹ At the end of 1912 there were 19 preaching places, 8 of them around Sijoba and others around Kanchindu and Kampilu, centres down the Valley.

However, a bad famine in 1912/13 sent congregations plummeting.²⁰ In 1913 the famine situation was not helped when the agricultural workforce was depleted by men and boys being taken off to work in the mines. 'Men who had not even stored this season's corn were given no option, simply driven out like flocks of sheep.'²¹

Africans were being trained and recruited into the work of the Mission as artisans and teachers. Fell was joined by Stanley Buckley in October 1913 and they extended the work so that by March 1914 there were 33 preaching places along 60 miles of the Zambezi. 'During the dry months as many as twenty services have been held each Sunday in various parts of the mission, so that quite a thousand people each week come under our influence.'²² There were 70 scholars in 4 schools and the Mission was staffed by Fell, Buckley and Ezekieli Masunyane, Joseph Mosaku, Thomas Syavwela and Joseph Siamimpanzi. There was also Mrs Fell who 'has done much of the dressing of surgical cases, has helped in the school, and taken charge of the sewing class.'²³ As a consequence it is not surprising that she was known by the nickname 'Nabuuya' (kind one).²⁴

That John Fell earned his nickname (man of strength) can be seen from his report in December 1914:

the tremendous heat of the Zambesi Valley makes it almost impossible to do very laborious work, to undertake long journeys, or to display great energy in our tasks. Fortunately this year the thermometer has not registered more than 114 in the shade. This being so we have been able to do more than if it had been hot.²⁵

Such rugged strength was needed. Life was very tough in the Valley. Fell had to shoot lions that endangered mission personnel. When the Revd John Kerswell and his wife came to Kampilu (40 km east of Kanchindu) in 1910 they experienced many hazards. They lost a child and were much troubled by lions and snakes. 'In 1911 he (Kerswell) killed a lion which came into the school dining hall.'²⁶

¹⁷ See Smith, E.W., 1928, p.109f.

¹⁸ Station Report, June 1910, UCZ Archives Kitwe File 609.

¹⁹ Station Report, December 1911, UCZ Archives Kitwe File 609.

²⁰ Station Report, March 1913, UCZ Archives Kitwe File 609.

²¹ Station Report, June 1913, UCZ Archives Kitwe File 609.

²² Seventy First Annual Report of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society, April 1st 1913, to March 31st 1914, p. lxxxiii.

²³ Ibid., p. lxxxv.

²⁴ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979; also Syabbalo, E., and Syatakali, J., n.d., p. 7.

²⁵ Station Report, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 609.

²⁶ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

When Fell was on furlough Kerswell looked after Kanchindu as well. Although familiar with Ila, a similar language, he was helped with Tonga by Johane Siamayuwa, a teenager who would become one of the early teacher/evangelists of the church.

Cultural Differences

There was a wide difference of cultures between the European Christian view of life and the customs of the Valley Tonga. It was not altogether unbridgeable. The democratic emphasis of the Primitive Methodists was a moderating influence potentially giving a point of contact with the fairly egalitarian Tonga people. The Primitive Methodists were concerned about social issues and responded to human need which, though paternalistically offered, kept them on the side of those who were disadvantaged. For their part the Valley Tonga were generally peaceable and placid people who found missionaries more amiable than administrators.²⁷

However, there were other differences which the Primitive Methodists with their Puritan morality found hard to tolerate. Unlike Edwin Smith who eventually attained a high level of sympathetic understanding of the Ila, the missionaries among the Valley Tonga were more strongly opposed to African ways. They insisted on the Tonga being clothed, their nakedness evidently being a sign of heathenism. Hogg was delighted when he could report that the people 'are now dressed instead of being naked as they were nine months ago, one feels it difficult to realise we are in the heart of heathendom.'²⁸ A photo of 'Josefa Siamimpanzi, a Christian Boy at Kanchindu, with his Wife' shows Josefa dressed in white trousers, shirt and jacket while his wife appears to be wearing a dress and cloak.²⁹

The missionaries also introduced the gadgets and techniques of western science and technology. Although they regarded agriculture and medicine as part of their overall Christian concern they separated them from the spiritual powers which the Tonga believed important in the business of living. Thus scientific medicine, although bringing clear benefits, offered an unsatisfying interpretation of questions of sickness and death. Here the missionaries were coming with material power but not with the spiritual power and expertise expected by the ancestor-conscious Tonga. As a result, the missionaries could be seen as agents of progressive materialism in many areas.

Polygamy and marriage customs were regarded as great obstacles to Church membership and it was thought necessary to separate the converts from their social environment. The local inhabitants tolerated the new believers as outsiders who had taken different ancestral spirits for themselves. There was no trouble but people were unwilling to marry their daughters to Christians as they did not want them to leave the village.³⁰ Thus one can measure the seriousness of apparent commitment as well as the missionary's sense of approval when a 'request has been made by one at Sijoba to build on the mission station and bring his wife. He is very faithful in his attendance at Church and School, has given up a girl who was betrothed to him for a second wife.'

²⁷ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

²⁸ *The Record*, 1902, p. 156

²⁹ Seventy First Annual Report of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society, April 1st 1913, to March 31st 1914, lxxxii.

³⁰ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

Consequently, the 'way is thus open for the granting of his request.³¹

African traditional religion was also regarded with hostility by these missionaries. 'Hogg and Ezekieli said that Christians must not worship other gods, i.e. the traditional religion.'³² John Fell considered that he had seen 'no native religious movement which seemed worthy of a place in Christian worship.'³³ He went on, 'To become a Christian is to cease to be religious as the tribe understands the term. Between the two there is a great gulf so that we should preach that the gospel means a complete break with the tribal worship.'³⁴ Candidates for baptism were asked to renounce 'praying to ancestral spirits, smoking hemp, witchcraft, smelling out wrongdoers, sacrifice to spirit, mutilation of the body, evil marriage and funeral customs, drunkenness, slavery etc'.³⁵ Christians were to honour the authority of the chief and a modest marriage dowry was permitted. However, members were not allowed to take part in 'ancestor worship' and drinking intoxicants was forbidden.³⁶

The Primitive Methodists were strongly teetotal at that time and the use of beer, not only leading to drunkenness but also as an offering in the ancestral cult made it doubly unacceptable in their eyes.

Although the missionaries opposed many local African customs their language study and contact with the people gave opportunities for a more understanding approach. A possible indication of this is the fact that in 1917 the Revd J. R. Fell joined the Royal Anthropological Institution.³⁷

Fell and Kafue Mission

At a Conference of Primitive Methodist missionaries in 1914 at Nanzela Fell believed there was plenty of scope for extending the mission in the Zambezi valley from Livingstone to Kariba. He 'was amazed at the ability shown by our preachers.'³⁸ Like Hogg before him, and Smith and Chapman among the Ila, John Fell was a Jack of all trades, building, agriculture, preaching, teaching, administration and any other necessary business was his to master and attend to.' He could turn his hand to almost anything, and whatever the task he undertook, he did it well'.³⁹ However, his specialist educational talent was to achieve its full potential when the hopes of the Primitive Methodist missionaries were realised in the creation of Kafue Mission.

The Primitive Methodist missionaries had for several years desired, requested, and even demanded that their Church set up a Training Institute modelled on Lovedale in South Africa and Livingstonia in Malawi. This was a holistic mission where the literary, industrial, agricultural, educational and evangelistic aspects of mission were combined in one central place

¹ Station Report, Kanchindu, June 1913, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 609.

³² Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

³³ Fell, J.R., Paper on Evangelism given at Missionary Conference at Nanzela, 1914, p. 5, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 622.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Primitive Methodist Synod, May 1919, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 494.

³⁶ Ibid. Culture contact and change is discussed in Rotberg (1964), pp. 127-143 in relation to Zambia as a

³⁷ *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institution*, 1933, p.9.

³⁸ Paper by J. Fell at Nanzela Conference, 1914, UCZ Archives, Kitwe File 622.

³⁹ Snelson, P.D., 1974, p.56. whole and by Shewmaker (1970) pp. 99-115 etc for the Tonga area as a whole.

for the whole area covered by the mission. This became a reality during World War 1 after a deputation in 1914 had verified that the missionaries' plan was essential. Through the generous donation of £1000 by Charles and Martha Clixby of Gainsborough a farm on the banks of the Kafue River was bought in 1916. Fell was selected for the task of establishing Kafue Training Institute and built it with the help of men from Kanchindu. He was an excellent choice and

'ranks as a giant among the pioneer educationalists of Northern Rhodesia. Whereas most of his colleagues were amateurs in the teaching field, he was a professional with a definite educational philosophy and with very clear ideas of how his policy should be implemented.'⁴⁰

From the educational point of view Kafue made more 'impact on Northern Rhodesia than twenty little mission stations each running half a dozen outschools.'⁴¹ Although Fell was not easy to get on with and often harsh and dogmatic, his thinking with regard to general education and especially agriculture and technical subjects was very advanced at that time. We look again to more appropriate technologies after the destructive effects of, for example, masses of inorganic fertilizers on the soils of Central Africa.

Though Kafue took Fell away from the Zambezi Valley his work was vital in developing the mission as a whole. Promising young men from Nambala, Kasenga, Nanzela and Kanchindu were brought together at Kafue and learnt academic, practical and spiritual subjects. The first intake for Kafue included six men from Kanchindu out of the 19 enrolled – David and Johane Siamayuwa, Thomas Siavwela, Joseph Siamimpanzi, Isaiah Muntengwana and Joseph Fulele.⁴² They and their successors became the teacher/evangelists for the growing network of preaching centres and schools in the Primitive Methodist Mission in Central Africa. By 1924, 66 students were enrolled at Kafue.⁴³

Fell left the work at Kanchindu in the hands of Stanley E. Buckley who continued the industrious missionary tradition. In March 1919 he reported that a 150 mile wagon road had been cut from Livingstone to Kanchindu - a feat on a par with that of Hogg.⁴⁴

Ezekieli left in about 1921 and Zambian Christians came to greater prominence in the mission as time went along. Thomas Siavwela from south of the Zambezi stayed with the mission and went to Kafue. He was said to be rather old in 1934. 'Thomas is quite a unique personality and there is no doubt that he commands the respect and confidence of the people.'⁴⁵ Joel Njase from the Valley was one of the early graduates of Kafue. He became a teacher and was the first African

⁴⁰ Snelson, P.D., 1974, p. 56.

⁴¹ Snelson, P.D., 1974, p. 57; cf also Rotberg, R., 1965, pp.119-124. Temple (1991) shows how the battle of appropriate and inappropriate technologies was being waged in the Zambezi Valley in the 1990s. The Gossner Mission and Harvest Help are especially noted and commended

⁴² Kafue School Archives.

⁴³ Jones, T.J., 1924, p.262. The history of Kafue has been written recently by Pearson, Philip C, *Those Awakening Days: The Kafue Story*, 84 pp., Fairway Folio, Alsager, 2002,

⁴⁴ UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 579; It is always possible that the road Temple refers to is this one though they do go in different directions.

⁴⁵ 1934 report, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 580.

Methodist minister from among the Valley Tonga. Njase Girls Secondary School at Choma is named after him. Others who later became Methodist ministers were Joseph Syaluzu and Mark Malyenkuku. Johane Siamayuwa who helped to build Kafue became a teacher/evangelist and had further training from 1930-32 when Fell opened the Jeanes school at Mazabuka.⁴⁶ The work in the Zambezi Valley continued to grow slowly. In September 1925 the Kanchindu station (from Sijoba to Sinazongwe) had 25 schools attended by over 500 pupils.⁴⁷ Around the same time (March 1926) there were only 46 members in the Kanchindu circuit with 30 catechumens. However, there were about 75 preaching places around the Valley in those days.⁴⁸

A significant point in the history of this part of the Primitive Methodist Mission came in September 1926, almost 25 years after Walter Hogg's arrival at Walker's Drift. A hill station was opened at Masuku on the edge of the escarpment. £31-2-6 was spent on it and a spacious brick house and three dormitories were built on the site.⁴⁹ After that European missionaries were infrequently stationed in the hot Zambezi Valley. This was seen as a withdrawal from the area though there were then many more Africans in the mission workforce.

⁴⁶ Interview with Johane Siamayuwa, 9 January 1979.

⁴⁷ Educational Report, Kanchindu, September 6th 1925 Kafue School Archives, Kafue.

⁴⁸ UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 607.

⁴⁹ Station Reports, 1926/7, UCZ Archives, Kitwe, File 607.

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Ulrich Luig's research on religion and culture and the Primitive Methodist mission in the Zambezi Valley analyses the subject in detail over most of the twentieth century. I am sure that his work has influenced my writing. However, I confined my account to the early period and used materials relating to the Tonga mission gathered when I lived in Zambia and during my later researches into the life and work of Edwin Smith.

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