



The Challenges Faced by SIM Missionaries in Nigeria in the Quest to Plant Churches between 1893-1950

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1. PREAMBLE

This is written from a desire to know the difficulties and hardships encountered by the filed missionaries when they came to do ministry in Nigeria. This research has attempted to explain and demonstrate to the reader how the theology, belief and the activities of SIM ministries reflected a biblical theology of mission. SIM Philosophy and Practices, challenges faced in the areas of language and translation, culture, and travelling.

2. SIM PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES

The ministry of SIM pioneer missionaries in Central Sudan was led and directed by ideas that helped them to experience smooth administration. Things such as policies, philosophy, practices, leadership style and the organizational structure served as a guide. The missionaries knew what they could do and their limits based on the structures put in place, (1999:140). The following were the principles practiced by the mission. First, their top priority was prayer. This was what they considered to be the motto for the mission. The history of SIM is traced from Mrs. Margret Gowans. There were three spiritual characteristics that described her. She was a woman of faith, prayer, and burden. Mrs. Gowans' burden was for the people of the Central Sudan that were considered unreached people. Her burden was shared with her son, Walter Gowans, to consider the need in Central Sudan and to go as a missionary.

The oldest among the three SIM pioneer missionaries was Rowland V. Bingham. He caught the passion and burden for the Central Sudan from Mrs. Margret Gowans who also shared her concerned and burden with him. The prayer life of Mrs. Gowans left a burden in the heart of Bingham that challenged him to consider going to the Central Sudan as a missionary. Another component of this principle was the influence or motivation of other Christians and mission agencies that had a common burden for the Central Sudan. When there were hardships and difficult times, the missionaries felt safe and protected because of prayer and their alliances with others. The prayer principle was seen as a weapon for the successes and progress of the mission. Therefore, prayer was viewed as the backbone of SIM ministry. The watchwords of Bingham were faith that is mighty and the need to always learn to trust and wait on the Lord for wisdom and strength, (SIM and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, n. d.:332). Second, the faith principle took the lead in how the finances were to be raised and managed. The ministry of SIM placed trust in God to provide financial support for the missionaries and the mission. This was the reason SIM was considered a faith mission both in financial transactions and operations. This was key in the life of the mission and missionaries. Before Bingham joined SIM, his background as a member of Salvation Army laid a good foundation for him in the area of trusting in God in matters of finances. He said, "I owe gratitude of thanks to Salvation Army. The church taught me practically how to share my life experience in Christ with non-believers and how such people can also come to know and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Also, God has helped me to exercise faith in the finances entrusted in my care," (1999:141-142).

Rowland was never happy with anyone speaking of the great faith they saw in his life. He believed that it was not his great faith; rather, it was his little faith in a great God that accomplished great things through him, (1993:5). Therefore, the prayer and faith principles have characterized the life of SIM. The SIM pioneers from the beginning have seen themselves as people of faith and prayer. They were able to trust in God to provide and protect them from any danger. They also learned to share together their resources from a single purse as brothers and sisters that had a common call and burden for the people without hope in Christ in Central Sudan, (1999:144).

To summarize the principles of prayer and faith, Dr. Hay states: “Throughout the years.

SIM has faced numerous impossible circumstances and stood firmly on this principle. As it faces fresh challenges, there must be the same vision and sense of urgency otherwise it will wither and die, (1999:144).”

Ruth A. Tucker referred to Bingham’s conviction, believing that even if there was a lack of financial support from his local churches and Board to encourage his ministry in the Central Sudan, this would not make him doubt God’s call and have less trust in God to provide for him while he did his ministry in Sudan. Moreover, his burden and passion for the people of Central Sudan would not die. Rather, he felt challenged and renewed in his spirit to exercise faith and believe in God to still go to Sudan as a missionary, (1985:295). Third, SIM held to the interdenominational principle. There was joy seeing God bringing men and women coming from all walks of life with the same burden for the people of Central Sudan. The establishment of SIM was not based on denominations. It was based on people’s calling and personal conviction from God; they came and worked as a team to plant churches among the unreached people groups in the Central Sudan. Therefore, “Bingham says, since SIM was started as an interdenominational mission, he then believed and concluded, it was a great decision,” (2006:80-81). The decision had its beginning in a place called Rescue Home in Toronto. It is better expressed as follows:

Strangely, the interest for missions to the Sudan came from an unexpected place, a Rescue Home for girls in Toronto, Canada. A Presbyterian lady, the superintendent of this Rescue Home offered Bingham her whole life savings, one hundred dollars, for missions in the Sudan. Bingham received the gift reluctantly, but it served as a turning point in the life of Bingham and the future ministry of SIM, (2006:80-81).

According to Yusufu, Rowland V. Bingham resolved to go back to Africa the second

time after the first attempt, but before then, he went around to Baptist churches in North America to raise funds towards his ministry in the Central Sudan. God raised up a woman who gave him her last one hundred dollars. In the mind of Bingham, accepting this support from the Presbyterian woman for his ministry in the Central Sudan almost convinced him to change his mind against the SIM policy. The desire of the woman was to persuade Bingham to plant local churches for the Baptists in the Central Sudan. But Bingham acknowledged that night that he could not sleep because he remembered SIM was not established based on denominational lines but interdenominational, (1999:144-145).

This was the response from Bingham to the woman:

With real conviction I had come to the conclusion that God intended that our foreign missionary work should not be on a denominational basis, but within the safeguards of the great fundamentals of the faith, should welcome to its fellowship and to its service all who were sound in the great doctrines held in common by the whole Church of Jesus Christ, (1933:221-222).

Bingham remembered the three of them came from different denominations. Walter Gowans was a Presbyterian, Thomas Kent a Congregationalist, while he, Rowland Bingham, was a Baptist. All of them came together, leaving their denominational beliefs and practices to accept the policies and practices of SIM mission based on the Scriptures. Bingham as the leader, accepted everyone as a candidate who came based on their evangelical doctrines and who shared faith in Christ, so that they would work in unity and purpose of mind as a team on the field and at home, (1999:142).

Graham Cheesman stated that when SIM pioneers came to the Central Sudan, their focus was on presenting the word of God to the people of Sudan for the conversion of their souls. They also planned to establish local churches among the people considered unreached people not based on

denominational lines but seeing themselves as being united and working as a team for the progress and expansion of God's kingdom in Sudan, (1997:16). This is still to emphasize the fact that the call, vision and passion of Bingham and his colleagues was not to be a church or denomination for themselves. SIM mission was established to be an arm of the church. The mission goes back to the church to recruit personnel and raise funds for the running of the mission. The fear the pioneers had was that should they establish their own church or denomination, they might not have adequate time and freedom to move forward with launching into where the unreached people were with the gospel as an interdenominational world mission. As it were, they were satisfied getting the cooperation and support from their home churches and denominations abroad. This was how they found fulfillment in their goals for their missionary work, (1999:147). E P T Crampton added: "the object of this interdenominational effort was the evangelization of the pagan peoples of the Sudan. The mission was aware that these pagans were coming under Muslim influences. Its aim was to reach these pagans rather than the long-established Muslim communities of Hausa land," (2013:41).

Fourth, SIM held to the international principle. The SIM mission was not only interdenominational but also international in nature. The simple reason was because Thomas Kent was from America, Walter Gowans was a Scottish Canadian, while Rowland V. Bingham was English Canadian. The SIM mission could not start her operations as an international mission until the three pioneers arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, West Africa on December 4, 1893. It was then that the International Principle was exemplified in the existence of its home offices in Canada, Great Britain, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Far South Asia (Singapore), Europe (Switzerland), and South Africa, (1999:147-148). The SIM Manual states:

The Mission is international. One of the benefits of missionary life is contact with those from other countries and cultures. This helps the missionary acquire an international outlook and see the viewpoint of others. He should be careful to avoid comments and conversations that may give offense to others. The natural tendency is to feel that one's own country, customs, manner of speech, and dress are superior. Fellow-workers' may feel the same about their countries. Be careful not to take offense at remarks which are made innocently, (SIM Manual, 35).

Fifth, there was the leadership principle of SIM. Dr. Hay stresses that the birth of SIM came as a result of the vision of one person. The Lord laid the burden and passion in the heart of Mrs. Margaret Gowans. Therefore, the beginning of SIM mission was traced through her who eventually passed the vision and passion to her son Walter Gowans and later to Rowland V. Bingham who became the leader of the mission, (1999:149). The question before us is what was the secret of his power, his vision, his love, and his joy? We are aware that God had blessed the church with both the natural talents and the spiritual gifts. They were seen or meant to blend together to give purpose to the individual on leadership to grow the church. The secret was one's faith and trust in God, (1943:10).

Rowland V. Bingham observed that the mission was growing. He thought to himself, for the work of administration to be easier, it was better if the mission was institutionalized. Then he formed what was known as the non-denominational Council of Mission in 1898. He came up with official titles such as the Honorary Secretary, Chairman (President), Treasurer and others who served as members of the Council. All these officers were appointed and not elected. Any decision to be taken or made went to the Council; no individual had the power to decide alone on behalf of the Council. This idea of the Council came from Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council.

Therefore, if the mission needed a direction for her operations, a meeting was convened at the Council. Meetings touched on issues such as recruitment of personnel, policy and decision making and the practice of the mission. Therefore, the growth and the stability of the mission were tied to the systematic bureaucratic system of governance the leadership has employed for the mission. There were well planned principles, policies, practices, rules and regulations but with autonomous freedom to Home and Field Councils. SIM as a mission has handbooks and manuals that contain all her principles and practices to serve as guide to the life of the mission and the missionaries, (1999:149-150).

Harold Fuller, former SIM Acting Deputy Director (1966-1968), Deputy Field Director (1968-1972), and Field Director (1973-1977), sums up the development of ECWA in parallel with SIM:

Taking over responsibility means taking over the leadership. It is a change of leadership, of authority, of responsibility. It is the next step in establishing the kind of indigenous church that is our goal. From pioneer days we have been working toward a self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting church in Nigeria. The transfer was a major step in that direction. Preaching the gospel and winning people to Christ was the first. That was followed, on the organizational level, by forming local churches. Then came Regional bodies, and finally, the national organization, (1977:8-9).

Sixth, SIM held to central theological and biblical principles. In other words, SIM believed in the entirety of the Christian tenets such as the Biblical Authority of the Scriptures, the Great Commission, the Purity and Godliness of Christian Life, and a Life of Prayer and Faith. Most dearly, their commitment was to the Great Commission to take the gospel to the nonbelievers, so that they would come to the saving knowledge of the Lord. To help SIM mission maintain these theological principles, the leaders resolved to recruit committed candidates that would facilitate the preaching and teaching of the God's Word, (1964:6). Yusufu suggests two bodies, namely The Evangelical Christian and Missionary Witness who wrote in an article what was required of the person qualified to be recruited as a missionary.

This theological principle in missions has made SIM remain focused in her missionary work. The ministry of SIM was committed to reaching with the gospel "the neglected," "the lost," and "the unreached," (1964:152). Because there were reports on people groups and their areas where the gospel was still needed, SIM mission concentrated with her outreaches on such places.

Different strategies and approaches were adopted depending on the community and the people. The Biblical principle helped the leaders to focus on the policy making, decisions and strategies, the moral life of the missionary, ethics and practice. The field missionaries who came after Thomas Kent, Walter Gowans, and Rowland Bingham were also expected to live a life of prayer and faith under biblical authority with a strong conviction, commitment and devotion to the Great Commission of Christ and Christ Himself. They were to live humble, pious and holy Christian lives of witness and of fellowship with the Christian community and to be an example to the non-Christian community. Anything that would bring shame and disgrace to Christ and the SIM mission must be avoided by the field missionaries. It was the responsibility of every missionary to protect the name and integrity of SIM mission and what the mission stood for. Everybody was expected to be loyal to Christ and the leadership of SIM Mission, (1964:152). In his understanding of the Bible, Rowland V. Bingham, the founder of SIM:

Espoused an approach to interpreting the scriptures known as pre-millennial dispensationalist, which held that the divine creation of the world occurred in 4004 BC and that the Bible is an inerrant account of and guide to human history until the second coming of Christ. According to this approach, history could be divided into seven different "dispensations", in each of which God revealed he to humanity in ways appropriate to the times. The current (sixth) age would be succeeded by a millennium of rule by Christ over earth before the final conflict between good and evil and the last judgment. With this in mind Bingham thought that it was a spiritual obligation on him to undertake the task of taking the gospel to unexplored areas of the world, for evangelism to cover the whole world, which he believed would trigger the beginning of the new age and the second coming of Jesus Christ, (The Role of SIM Missionary in the British Colonial Leprosy Campaigns in Katsina Emirate).

Barje S. Maigadi asserts that the aim of SIM mission was to plant and establish local churches. Therefore, they were committed to preaching the gospel of Christ to win and make converts disciples of Christ. After winning the people and making disciples, they would be gathered together as a church to worship God, (2006:61). For me as a researcher, I stand to challenge this decision of the early SIM pioneers who resolved to plant local churches in a particular region that was later called indigenous church when they came to Sudan. The decision to plant local churches based on tribal lines has brought conflicts, divisions and unhealthy competition that is not good for the church, (1999:153). William A. Smalley attempts to define "Indigenous Church" as "a group of believers who live their life, including their socialized Christian activity, in the patterns of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of their felt needs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures," (1958:55).

The SIM missionaries felt that was the easiest way to get the churches planted. I think they got it wrong. My point of argument is based on the fact that when God calls Abram, He says, “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” (Genesis 12:3b, NIV). Again, the Great Commission Jesus gave to the disciples demonstrated that, they were “to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV).

Moreover, Apostle Paul added, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29, NIV). Therefore, the Great Commission Christ gave to the church was to the nations of the earth. This was the reason God sent His Son to die for the whole world, which included every tribe, language and people, whether they are from the south, west, north, east or middle-belt. The SIM missionaries should have quickly remembered the Scriptural passages cited above and remained resolute to plant local churches not based on tribal lines in the Central Sudan because the commission of the disciples by the Lord was for them to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. The researcher has suggested under the strategies the SIM pioneer missionaries would have used when they first came to reach the unreached in the Central Sudan with the gospel here in chapter three.

It does not matter the tribe or language the people came from. This was what brought about resistance in some areas where the SIM missionaries went to preach the gospel because the Christianity brought by some of the missionaries was seen as white man’s religion. The implication of these local churches planted along tribal lines by SIM is that they have abetted division, tribalism and ethnocentrism among other problems in ECWA today. This does not represent the body of Christ. The command for the Great Commission was not given by Christ for the churches to be planted along tribal and ethnic lines. The instruction by the Lord was to go and make disciples of all nations. The SIM pioneer missionaries should have waited to do a survey of the Central Sudan and then decided on what the best approach would have been to present the gospel in the Central Sudan. This would have eased the resistance from the Hausa ethnic tribe from listening to the gospel of Christ.

3. CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

As a matter of need, to facilitate quick evangelism, church planting, and discipleship, every SIM missionary was required to learn the local language of the natives where each was to serve as a missionary. For the missionary to achieve that, the person was expected to devote at least two hours every day to learning the local language of the people. This was meant to open the closed doors to evangelism, (1909:2). At its annual meeting on January 23, 1911, at Wushishi, Nigeria, the SIM Field Council resolved again:

All the missionaries are supposed to [learn the language] daily and report to the secretary the hours spent herewith and also the hours spent on the language study privately except in cases (1st) where itinerating duties demand his whole attention temporarily; (2nd) where building duties are imperative; (3rd) in case of protected duties in translation work; (4th) when duties toward his or her brethren on other stations demand his or her full time, (1911:2).

Ian Fleck points out that it was part of the orientation for every newly recruited SIM missionary to make sure to learn the local language of the people in every district or region they entered and also to convert such languages into written scripts. This was meant to make it easier to translate the Scriptures into those languages. The printing of the written scripts of the Scriptures was done by the Niger Printing Press owned by SIM Mission. There were about three hundred languages altogether in the Central Sudan region. The printing press was an asset to SIM and other mission agencies. SIM had a major breakthrough among the elites when through the printing press, Christian literature such as the “African Challenge” was printed. The stories, articles and illustrations were captivating, so people bought it to read. The stories were short and the language was simple. The editor was Rev. Harold Fuller who brought success to the printing press, (2013:223). Also, Graham Cheesman agrees that the task every field missionary was expected to accomplish was to make sure the Scriptures were translated into the local languages of the people, (1997:65).

SIM pioneer missionaries considered language learning to be a serious concern because without understanding the local languages of the people, it would be difficult to communicate the Scriptures with the natives. Since SIM felt that they could not accomplish learning the language and translating it into the written script alone, they partnered with other mission agencies to help facilitate the printing of the Scriptures. These mission agencies were the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in Nigeria. They helped in translating the Scriptures into local languages. In July 1910, the leadership of SIM appointed a committee that would serve as advisers for the printing press. Through their effort, literature such as *Annuals in Vernacular* was printed. The name of the committee was called the "Standing Literature Committee." The following persons served as members of the committee: Rev. A. W. Banfield (SIM/BFBS), Dr. A. Stirrett (SIM), Rev. J. L. Macintyre (CMS), and Dr. W. R. Miller (CMS), (2006:89). The Christian Missionary Society (CMS), the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) were "the two mission bodies that established the Niger Press for the publication of the Scriptures and other Christian literature in local languages. In 1932 the first complete Hausa Bible, Old and New Testaments, was published through the effort of several Protestant mission agencies in Northern Nigeria," (1910: n. p.).

The Lord used Christian Missions to contribute a lot towards the printing of Christian literature that had a positive impact on the improvement of literacy in Northern Nigeria. The SIM missionaries were able to identify places that lacked modern facilities for learning. Therefore, their abilities in linguistics helped to solve that challenge. They introduced the use of Roman script into Hausa and in the study of Hausa grammar and many other languages. Their linguistic ability helped to translate Scriptures into Hausa and Gbagyi languages in the North. The translation of Scriptures into the various languages added value to the missionary services of SIM. There was other Christian literature that was printed for the new converts and for educational purposes. This was one of the legacies left for ECWA by SIM, (1946:10-20). Barje S. Maigadi stresses that the Sudan Interior Mission was one of the mission agencies in Nigeria which considered the translation of the Scriptures into local languages indispensable to the success of its mission. Albert D. Helser, SIM General Director (1957-1962), has been quoted as saying:

The missionary aims at influencing, not the shallows of a people's life, but the deepest depths, to touch the springs of conduct, to reach down to the innermost recesses of their being. There is no part to the heart save through the mother-tongue. . . . And again, we insist that the mother-tongue is the key which unlocks the door of the people's heart. It is the road which leads to an understanding of their mind. It is the bridge across the gulf that yawns between their soul and our own. Unless and until you can speak to them, man and woman, heart to heart, soul to soul, you can never attain to that intimate sympathy which is based upon knowledge, (2006:87).

Therefore, Gary R. Corwin believed that when a person uses their own mother-tongue language, he or she would be able to communicate the gospel better than someone who has no knowledge of the language. He went further to observe that the knowledge is far better than translating the Scriptures into the language or interpreting the Scriptures to the person with whom one is communicating the gospel. Again, Gary R Corwin observed that most SIM field missionaries experienced some challenges because they were only good at translating the Scriptures into the languages of the people but had no genuine interpersonal relationships with the recipients of the gospel. Missionaries learned the language of the people but were not often able to develop open and honest relationships with the recipients, Nigerians. For instance:

British businessman and later SIM associate missionary A. T. de B. Wilmont, who wrote the first issue, explained that Africans did not want to be controlled by the dominating foreign race. Missionaries, he said, should view all people as being equal in the manner of Christ and Paul, identify with local churches, and work to provide high education for its leaders, (2018:217). Furthermore, since the mission station became primarily a missionary enclave, national Christians could only associate with missionaries on a formal level. They could not relate to them as equals even on spiritual ground. It was a policy of SIM to treat nationals differently inside and outside of the station. I observe here that, missionaries displayed attitude that was superior over the nationals and looking at them as inferior people. The missionaries refused to discard this attitude and to relate well with the nationals as equals. This was not supposed to be seen among Christian missionaries. The missionaries were supposed to know that they were coming to preach Christ,

therefore, they were not supposed to demonstrate racism among the nationals. Although, the SIM policy stated that, do not allow natives into your kitchen. Do not compel natives to take off their hats, caps or sandals when they salute you, or come into your compound, but insist on it in a gentle way. Do not offer a chair to a native to sit on even if a chief, a mat will be quite good enough, (1914:7-8).

The best approach for the missionaries would have been to contextualize their ministries among the unreached people. By this I mean, the SIM missionaries should have remained humble to relate with the nationals in such a way that the content of the gospel was seen and defined through their lives, (2006:87-88). Barje S. Maigadi further stated regarding the illiteracy of the recipients of the gospel in Northern Nigeria that the language project became one of the greatest challenges. The SIM pioneers thought the Hausa language was a general language in West Africa. But on their arrival in the field, the pioneers discovered what Bingham described as the “perfect babel of languages.” There were over 400 languages and dialects spoken in Nigeria, (2006:88). Rowland V Bingham narrates the magnitude of the challenge:

One of the greatest difficulties in giving the Gospel to the Sudan lies in the perfect babel of languages existing amongst its many tribes. Only those who have had to struggle with a barbaric tongue unreduced to writing, and without a teacher of any kind, can appreciate the problem that faced our missionaries. Those languages are not simple in construction as in Congo. They are very complex, many of them having the added difficulty of intonation, (1951:9).

Rowland V. Bingham added that SIM had a missionary, a mechanic by training, who joined the SIM team to the Central Sudan by the name of A. W. Banfield. He was the first to respond to the challenge of language learning. Because he had learned the language of the Nupe people, he was able to translate and produce the first dictionary and the four Gospels in Nupe language. The Nupe people were a difficult tribe to be reached with the gospel. They lived in a Muslim-dominated community; therefore, their lives were influenced by the Muslims, (1943:9). Except neighbors who knew the Nupe people, it would be difficult to comprehend their situation.

4. CHALLENGE OF CULTURE

Roger S. Greenway points out clearly that cultural barriers have become a major concern to missionary work. The challenges could be seen in areas such as languages, customs, religion, values, attitudes and race. This is a call to the leadership of mission agencies to take this concern seriously and do something about it. The cultural barrier has a tie with people; it can separate them from each other. Also, the cultural barrier can prevent some people from accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior. The orientation of intended missionaries could be trained in the area of the different cultures of the people. This orientation should include how missionaries should relate to and approach the nationals with the gospel of Christ. Nobody should assume that the cultural barrier would stop soon; remember, it is the way of life of the people, (1999:5). Alongside the cultural barrier is the problem of learning the language and the Scripture translation. The SIM pioneer missionaries faced the challenge of culture. When they came to Africa, they also came with their Western culture as well. Unconsciously, many of them could not differentiate their cultures from the gospel, (1981:1). Every culture and custom should be judged by the Scripture (Galatians 3:26-28). Therefore, the early missionaries who came to propagate the gospel came with the Western culture to the people of another culture. To correct this situation, Tim Geysbeek, in his article titled, “Issues of Race and Diversity,” in *By Prayer to the Nations*, quoting Gary R. Corwin writes:

The SIM missionaries should reexamine their principles and practices, discard their white master attitudes, and encourage the growth of biblically-based local churches that would work out their own roles in the new Africa that was evolving. Furthermore, there was no place in the missionaries’ vocabulary for words like “native,” “nigger,” “black man,” and possibly “national” that reflected white peoples’ deeply entrenched sense of “superiority,” (2018:217).

The question that arises is, were the pioneer missionaries not given orientation about the people of Sudan before leaving for Sudan? The three SIM missionaries were described as “inexperienced men who had inadequate knowledge on mission work but were willing to go and penetrate what was then known as the Sudan with the gospel of Christ,” (1985:295-296). The records available show that they had opportunity to study about the various needs of mission fields all over the world and they became

convinced that the Lord was leading them to the field in Sudan because there were more than sixty million without Christian witness. The training the missionaries had at A. B. Simpson's Bible School also helped in preparing them for the Sudan field, (1985:296). Finally, some orientation was given in the earliest days when a missionary entered a new district; time was spent in learning the language, culture and customs of the people before starting the missionary work, (2013:223). The encountering of Nigerian cultures was the greatest challenge the SIM pioneers faced, (2006:91). The additional orientation given to the pioneer missionaries by the nationals when they arrived Lagos, Nigeria, helped a lot in their ministries in the Central Sudan, (2018:32).

According to L K Fuller, "the reality of life is decided by every culture," (1993:82). Also, the behaviors and their meanings are determined by the cultures of these people. Nobody can read meaning into the way people behave. We need to know that culture is dynamic. It can change anytime and at any moment. It is likely that the same behavior can have a different meaning in another culture. In a situation such as this, the missionary is left to decide on the kind of strategy or approach he would choose to present the gospel to the ethnic people. Therefore, the way the missionary would speak and act before the natives matters a lot, (1993:82-83).

The gospel message to the unreached people must be understood and relevant. Since culture is a way of life for the people, it would be very difficult for them to accept any changes because they are used to it and are satisfied with the way they live and behave, except the Holy Spirit convince and convict them to see their culture in light of the Scriptures. Also, the missionary likes his or her own culture, but because the missionary has a mission among the unreached people, he or she has to adjust rather than expecting the native to adjust, (1993:82-83). Vincent J. Donovan, reflections on his missionary task may represent what SIM pioneers would have said.

In retrospect, Vincent J. Donovan, writes:

Looking back on it now, I think I can say that I and missionaries like me, of different denominations, were rather well prepared theologically and spiritually, but we were not prepared culturally for the task given us. We had no idea of the richness and importance of the cultures to which we were being sent. Most of us, Catholic and Protestant, had come in a real way as a response to the call of Doctor Livingstone to help make the Africans "gentlemen, civilized and Christian," presumably in that order. The Gospel in our hands had become an acculturated Gospel, grown with layers of white, Western, European and American interpretation and tradition. It required a great deal of time and effort and courage to peel away these accretions, to come again to the naked kernel of the Gospel message. But most missionaries did not have time even to try to make such effort, (1978:101-103).

In the Conference, it was observed, many of the early missionaries of SIM and other mission agencies did not see any good in Nigerian cultures; in fact, there was outright condemnation of them, (1910:9). The missionaries in their views of Nigerians and Africans thought that there were no ethical manners or religious principles to guide our ways of life. The continent of Africa was seen and described by the missionaries as the dwelling place of Satan and his demons, (1943:11-12). This research has afforded the researcher to know the preconceived mind of some of the SIM pioneers about the nature of the people of Sudan. This is an attitude that must be condemned. For example, writing about an ethnic group in Northern Nigeria, Bingham says:

There we found a people lower than any we had seen ever. From the time they came into the world naked, until they went out of the world naked, they never possessed a piece of cloth as large as one's hand. The other pagan tribes we had passed through had at least a sense of decency, to the extent of following the fashion of Mother Eve and putting on a leafy apron each day, (1943:11-12).

This view by Bingham and his colleagues of the people of Central Sudan and their culture provided the pioneers with a task, to "civilize," and then to "Christianize" them. Therefore, there were three things that occupied and dominated the thinking of SIM pioneers and other missionaries in the Central Sudan and Africa. First, that the people of Central Sudan were living in moral depravity and prevailing darkness and ignorance. Second, that Islam was responsible for causing untold suffering in the Sudan such as slave-raiding, slavery, degradation and immoral influence, and that it is mandatory

to stop its advance and influence. Third, that the white man in general brings both light and liberation to the land of darkness, and doing so is his or her moral and spiritual responsibility to the people of Central Sudan and ultimately to the Universal Church, (1994:3).

Graham Cheesman advised that every culture from any ethnic group, whether from Africa, the West, Asia or the Middle East, must be tested and judged by the Scripture. No culture existed by itself, because man and woman are God's creatures. It was God who created both man and woman and their cultures. Some of these cultures before God were rich in beauty and goodness. Admittedly, man and woman failed and it affected the beauty of their culture. This is important to know; God did not create any culture in the world to look superior to any culture. Rather, the cultures are to be evaluated in light of the Scripture if they follow the truth and righteousness to insist on moral absolutes in every culture. Unknowingly to some missionaries, they imported their Western cultures and expected people they came to reach with the gospel to accept those foreign cultures. The implication of this was the natives became enslaved and remained in bondage to those foreign cultures rather than to the Scripture, (2015:164). For instance, Francis Ibiam, the governor of Eastern Nigeria, writes:

It is wrong for a missionary to play big and assume an air of superiority just because the color of his skin happens to be different from that of the people amongst whom he works. We Africans note and resent such carrying on. Such attitudes, they observed, led missionaries to portray Africans negatively in stories they told, retain control of institutions as long as possible, treat Africans as servants, and make sweeping generations about them, (2018:217).

Furthermore, Ian Hay stresses "for more than 80 years in whatever fields we work, SIM has been able to work following our own culture and our own thought-patterns and we have forced the church leaders and churches to fit into our scheme of things. There are still within our heart's attitudes of colonialism and pride. By God's grace we must find a way to eliminate those things from us and to walk humbly before the Lord," (1981:1). The advice to every missionary is for them to be humble and remain empty of self from any culture outside the biblical culture. The reason is so that they become servants of others. It is the responsibility of the church to seek to transform and make every culture better in Christ for God's glory and honor (Genesis 4:21-22; Mark 7:8, 9, 13; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; Phil. 2:5-7; 2 Cor. 4:5), (2015:164). Our cultures can only be interpreted by the Scriptures. No culture on earth should be condemned by anybody. The transformation of every people, tribe, language and culture should be by God because He is the Creator of all. Although the pioneer missionaries faced many cultural challenges, some strived to live out the gospel incarnationally:

Maigadi still emphasized, from the beginning, SIM pioneers lived among the people, learned and spoke the languages of the people, as well as identified with their suffering. The pioneers also worked alongside the Nigerian evangelists. The story of Thomas Titcombe, a Canadian who worked among the Yagba, is a good example of the incarnation principle the pioneers first employed in their ministry. By living among the Yagba people, Titcombe and his wife were adopted and accepted by the community. They were no longer regarded as strangers because they identified themselves with the people both physically and psychologically by living among them. They learned the host's culture and regarded themselves as equals with the people, (1971:24).

5. CHALLENGE OF TRAVELLING

Rowland V. Bingham took time to share his personal experience when his fellow missionaries arrived Lagos on December 4, 1893. The ship they boarded could not enter the harbor; instead, they transhipped at the branch boat. They were coming to Nigeria for the first time. They did not know anybody. There were fears and hopes at the same time that God was going to help them to settle in the land. There were some foreign missionaries from other mission agencies at the coast. As they sailed up to the lagoon, the idea came to them to ask one of them to go ashore and check the possibility of their success, while two of them remained on board to pray asking God for direction on what to do next. In their prayer, the Lord showed one of them, a Scotch-Canadian leader, a Mission Home. There they were told that there was only one possible available house in the city. They went and checked but discovered the owner was an English trader who was a non-believer. This English trader did not care to assist the SIM missionaries, (1943:18-19).

The boat that conveyed SIM missionaries was tied up to the English trader's dock. At this time, he suddenly changed and became polite. He asked his workers to carry all the baggage of SIM

missionaries ashore to the available house belonging to him (the English trader). It was not long; the missionaries' documents were checked and processed within an hour after this was done. After they were cleared by the customs, they went to their available house. Later on, the English trader who owned the house became friendly with SIM missionaries. The house became their base, and they used it as their accommodation, a place of prayer, and a place of planning on how to launch out into the Central Sudan with the gospel of Christ. Therefore, it served as their temporal headquarters, (1943:18-19).

The story that follows would tell the reader the experiences of the pioneer missionaries as they took the gospel into the hinter land. Ian Fleck tells a story how Bingham walked on foot for 1,500 miles together with Dr. Stirrett, an experience he would never forget. He added, "During that time, we never knew a day's march so long but that ere he went to rest. Dr. Stirret would insist on gathering any kind of a motley crowd to tell out the story of the gospel," (2013:215).

According to Dr. Stirrett, he had opportunities to travel alone to most parts of northern Nigeria, sometimes by foot or bicycle. There were instances when he trekked a long distance which most missionaries of his age could not stand in terms of the rigor of the difficulties with trekking. He went through the bush areas of Nigeria just to preach the gospel to the nonbelievers, (2013:215). Rowland V. Bingham observed people's comments about the Sudan field. Several people concluded that Sudan was a closed field. But Walter Gowans' response was that if the field was closed, it was simply because the church had not put her hand out to open the closed door, (1943:21). Walter Gowans argued that there was never a time in which a church that prays had experienced any closed fields to evangelism. The obedient church remembers her commission to the Great Commission given to her by the One that is omnipresent. He has asked the church to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations of the world (Matthew 28:19), (1971:7).

Ian Fleck stresses that the SIM pioneer missionaries during their orientation before they left for Africa were told of the challenges that lay ahead in Sudan and the sacrifices others had gone through trying to penetrate Central Sudan with the gospel of Christ. They were never discouraged since they were prepared spiritually should any challenge come to them. As a sign of discouragement, they were told the Sudan field was a closed mission field. But they were not ready to accept those discouraging comments, (2013:207). Bingham stressed that the challenges were a test of their faith. It helped them as they were prepared to go through the dense forests and trekking and walking through the grasses in the bushes. during the time that the slave trade was common. Therefore, carriers were not willing to go to the interior because of the fear of the unknown. The missionaries were also conscious that should the carriers agree to carry them to where they wanted, the carriers might only go a short distance such as twenty miles and refuse to go further; they would demand double pay, (1943:22).

The missionaries were left to decide whether to still employ the services of the carriers or not. They thought to themselves if they doubled their pay, the natives might request for another pay again within a short period of time. Therefore, because of the above experiences, the missionaries resolved to make a trip with the carriers that would take six weeks to make it in six days. The missionaries learned to appreciate the carriers for their services and requested that they stay longer in a particular field. The missionaries would pay and allow the carriers to visit a nearby village to stay waiting for them until their missionary work was finished before the natives would go back to meet the missionaries. But if the money paid to them got finished before the scheduled trip, the native carriers could go back to the missionaries for more money. This was the routine exercise, (1943:22).

The pain, suffering and discouragement faced by SIM pioneers in travelling to take the gospel to the unreached is hard to imagine. But they endured and remained focused on their calls for Sudan. This is what has given birth to the church called ECWA. Missionaries from other societies offered gloomy predictions to the SIM pioneers, but the fact that no other missionaries were preaching the gospel in the Sudan was the very reason for which they had come, and they were not about to turn back. The following experience by the pioneers never discouraged them:

But their hope of setting off together as a team was dashed when Bingham became ill with malaria, and it was decided that he should remain on the coast and set up a supply base. In less than a year after they left on their eight-hundred-mile overland journey both Gowans and Kent, true to the pessimistic predictions, were dead. While Kent had turned back for more supplies,

Gowans, weakened by dysentery, had been captured by slave raiding tribal king, only to die several weeks after his release while he was being carried back to the coast by Africans. Meanwhile, Kent had been stricken by malaria on his return trip. He was nursed back to health by Bingham but died from another malaria attack on his way back to meet Gowans, (1985:296).

According to Dogara, in the chapter titled “Problems Encountered by Missionaries,” the SIM missionaries who served in Gbagyiland went through some challenging experiences also. He described the land in this manner: The Gbagyi people were located in desert areas. The missionaries had to trek for many hours through thick grasses before the Gbagyi people could be accessed with the gospel. The vegetational terrain was mainly forested areas with a lot of grasses. This made it difficult for the SIM pioneer missionaries to penetrate the hinterland with the gospel. Since the land was covered with thick grasses, there were a lot of dangerous and wild animals such as hyenas, pythons, lions, leopards, elephants, buffaloes, and baboons. This created fears in the minds of the missionaries, (2013:111). Paiko was the first mission station to be opened in Gbagyi land.

Percy Douglas says that the passion and burden in the heart of the missionaries could not allow rest in their lives. They left their home to carry the gospel to the villages. They did not trek far into the forest before they encountered a small but deadly viper that crossed their way. The missionaries did not care to think of turning back from their mission to preach the gospel to the Gbagyi people. Apart from deadly animals, Satan and evil spirits created fears in the minds of the missionaries. These did not stop them from carrying out the task of the Great Commission, (1948:64).

The pathways accessible for the SIM pioneer missionaries to walk through were narrow, and lonely, amidst armed bandits and slave raiders. Because of the insecurity, sometimes the missionaries were conveyed on hammocks and horses to ease difficulties on the travels. Douglas C. Percy further shows how Dr. Andrew Stirret came to Karu in 1911 on a hammock assisted by four men after a seven-day trek to Karu. S. Hall John also recalls how they used carriers to convey their suitcases and bags including trunks. These items were shared and carried by the carriers on their heads. The missionaries were determined to get the mission accomplished, (n. d.: 27-28). Lowly also recalls a similar experience of their “over land trek” and states:

For some of us it was a day of trying experience. We had a journey of some sixteen or eighteen miles to make. I, for one, had never in my life walked so far in one day. I had been brought up to wear a “suit of clothes,” and to avoid getting my feet wet. I was not prepared, either mentally or sartorially for a sixteen-mile trek in the height of the rainy season at ten degrees north of the equator. Through the long morning we trampled on, and bit by bit I made myself more comfortable, discarding one garment after another, (n. d.:40).

Dogara quoted Veenstra, who was not an SIM missionary, as stressing the conditions in which missionaries found themselves. He noted that there were still a number of unreached people groups located in the Central Sudan yet to have missionaries in their midst to share about the love of God with them. “When you trek through the bushes, you would not go as far as 500 miles before you would come across tribes and languages without a sign of a church planted among the people,” (2013:112). These missionaries chose to remain in town, only visiting the villages when there were functions. They lived in town for fear of the unknown, (2013:112). Veenstra speaks of her experience: as she walked through the bushes with the gospel, she met only a few people on the way who were not willing to listen to her, (2013:112). Veenstra notes again, “The Sudan belt was infested with tsetse flies, and ants and there were a great variety of other small insects, quite harmless but sometimes very annoying,” (2013:112).

Bingham also recalls one such experience and writes thus: “At night we slept out under the stars together, rose with the first streak of dawn and walked along the winding, unending trails. Under the scorching tropical sun, we daily covered from twenty to thirty miles and at night would throw ourselves down on our cots utterly exhausted,” (1943:38). Bingham indicates how he and Dr. Andrew Stirret in 1914 trekked for more than fifteen thousand (15,000) miles. They travelled on foot, horseback and sometimes used a motor-cycle, (1943:38). Richard B. Oliver was a missionary who served among an ethnic tribe called Gbagyi. He remembers when he trekked for many days preaching and teaching God’s word for the conversion of the people. This was a journey a person would normally have gone on by bicycle, horseback or hammock that could only be carried by four strong men walking with it, but Oliver trekked on his foot because of his passion and burden for the Gbagyi people to come to Christ, (1934:17). He writes thus:

When trek is decided, what to take: food and pots and pans and dishes packed in the “Chop box”-camp bed, change of clothing, bath, folding table, and chair, lantern, books, all made up into loads averaging 60 lbs in weight. . .loads are hoisted into heads and a start made, usually first thing in the morning. The carriers are all in fine fettle and talk, singing and laughter enliven the first few miles on the way . . . then the sun rises, perspiration begins to exude, the bush path is both steep, and stony, flies bother, loads do not seem to be quite light. . .one by one the carriers fall silent, and nothing was heard but the pad of their bare feet. . ., (1934:17).

Diamond Albert wrote about the experience of Pastor Samaila Inusa and Charles Dudley. The story was all about what they experienced on their way from Karu to Kwoi. Dudley jumped into the river to cut short the distance to the next village where they were going to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. All the missionaries on that journey got wet with the water before arriving at the village, (1963:8).

There are also records of Yepwi Idakwo, Richard Oliver and other missionaries who traversed most Gbagyi villages on itinerant preaching of the gospel covering several kilometers on foot. In fact, the terrain of Idda village situated on the high plateau must have been a major challenge to missionaries and newcomers to the village. But as Hay John rightly notes, this kind of experience is expected of God’s servant, to suffer and experience pain and hardship in the cause of taking the gospel to the unreached people for the sake of Christ, (1961:94). The Apostle Paul recorded similar experiences when he wrote; “In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends” (2 Corinthians 11:26, GNB), (2013:114). The conversion, call and eventual involvement of Yepwi Idakwo with the Gbagyi mission was a great boost as he also travelled long distances among Gbagyi people preaching the gospel of salvation. Mr. Yepwi was the first convert of the SIM missionaries in Gbagyiland in a village called Karu, Nigeria. He was later disciple and trained as an evangelist. The Lord gave him a passion and a burden in his heart for his own people to be drawn to Christ. The SIM pioneer missionaries demonstrated faith and courage in their desire to preach the gospel to the Gbagyi people. They did not mind the dangers ahead of them. They experienced what the Apostle Paul went through as a missionary. They experienced hunger, thirst, exhaustion, restlessness and sleeplessness (2 Corinthians 6:4). Also, they were convinced that, “your strength will equal your days” (Deut. 33:25 NIV), (2013:114).

R. B. Oliver mentioned occasions where missionaries had no choice except to cross streams and rivers in their desire to locate the unreached people in the Central Sudan and share with them the gospel of Christ. Their experience was having a little opportunity to preach anytime they went out to preach God’s word. Then they would have some rest and sleep. This was their routine every day, (1934:17). Hay John went further to state that one of the scheduled trips they planned was to visit Minna. The carrier took his route through the river since they were trekking. They came to the river bank; the river was full with water because it was the rainy season. The carrier boy convinced the missionary that they could cross the river. They went through the river and were almost drowned, but the Lord rescued them and they went across to the other side of the river, (1961:113). Frank Ola Akolo shares an experience of Rev. Tommie Titcombe when he had opportunity to do ministry among the Odo-Ere people group. By 1908, Rev. Tommie Titcombe would start a Sunday worship with the converts at Ogga in the morning, and the next called would be at Atalu (Okeri). He would then move to Oja-Ope in Odo-Ere where the converts would have been waiting for him. He usually travelled from one place to another on foot and hammock carried by the converts. Before he could go back to Egbe, the converts from Ogga had to take him to Atalu in Imela (Okeri), then the Atalu people would finally help him to Odo-Ere in that order until he got back to Egbe, his permanent residence, (2015:6).

Ministry reports from different fields were shared with churches. The reports were meant to create mission awareness of the need for Christian workers. It was expected that individuals were left to decide to respond to the call if the Lord had laid a burden for the need in the Central Sudan. One of such reports was that of Mrs. Davidson. The reports motivated a lot of people to respond to the missionary call to the Central Sudan:

In this journey of faith, when Bingham gave his report to the church in Canada, there were four men prepared to consider going to Africa. They were E. A. Anthony, Charles Robinson, Albert Taylor and Alexander W. Banfield. A third attempt was made by this party of four who sailed from England in 1901. Upon reaching Nigeria they went up the Niger River to Lokoja. After

searching for a suitable mission site, they traveled by boat further along the Niger to Eboji and established the first mission station near Bida at Patigi. Patigi is about 385 miles (617 km) up the Niger River, well beyond its confluence with the Kaduna River. This was made possible with the help of the British-based Royal Niger Company that provided supplies for them to go to Patigi, an important town among the three hundred thousand Nupe people, (2018:44).

Williams stresses:

It was a difficult station due both to the predominantly Islamic character of the Nupe people as well as the hot and humid climate. However, it was from here that missionaries began to move out, first to the Muslim Hausa trading colony of Wushishi and then branching out to work among the non-Muslim Yagba people. This last move was the beginning of a considerable movement of missionaries into other non-Muslim groups across central Nigeria, (2010:10).

According to Barje S. Maigadi, the SIM pioneer missionaries, when they arrived Lagos on December 4th, 1893, met what they were informed about and read about regarding the Sudan. They truly encountered many spiritual and physical challenges which included disease and death, language and culture, (2006:76). Vincent J. Donovan, acknowledged the fact that, as missionaries, they were prepared theologically and spiritually, but were not prepared culturally for the great task that was ahead of them, (1978:101-103). Peter Falk stresses: "Those who felt called to Africa knew very well that tropical diseases might bring death soon after their arrival," (2015:429). They were aware of what they were coming to meet in Africa. In God's wisdom, he called the SIM pioneer missionaries and empowered them with the gospel for the people of Africa. God revealed himself to millions of Africans through the person of Christ. Therefore, mission to the Africans were only meaningful when the grace of God was accepted by the people, (2015:429). Barje S. Maigadi stated that the Lord of the harvest who called the missionaries and the strategies that were adopted by the early SIM pioneer missionaries facilitated and brought victory over the various diseases, sicknesses, death, language learning and translation, and the pain encountered with cultural differences to ease church planting and the growth of ECWA, (2006:109). Therefore, the researcher wishes to list few of the factors and strategies used by the pioneer SIM in planting churches within the said period.

6. SUMMARY

The beginning of the pioneer missionaries of SIM was rough, discouraging, and difficult, but three things kept Rowland Bingham V., Thomas Kent and Walter Gowans in Central Sudan: they were prayer, faith, and hope that God would save the people of Sudan through their ministry. Second, this research has afforded the writer to know the aim SIM had before coming to Sudan; it was for founding mission stations and out-stations as a means of occupying and entrenching the mission in the vast territory of Northern Nigeria with the Gospel of Christ despite the challenge of language translation, the challenge of culture and customs, and the challenge in travels to reach the hinterlands.

The church of God has a task before her, to preach the Word of God. It is aimed at bringing men and women to acknowledge Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior; by so doing, they can be members of the church fellowshiping with Christ. This is how they would bring glory to the Lord. As members of the church and our relationship with Christ, this relationship makes the church to be self-sufficient which motivated her to multiply herself among the unreached people. This is the reason why the pioneer SIM missionaries were dedicated to and motivated by the love of God and guided by the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Great Commission to carry the gospel to the unreached people groups in the Sudan. The SIM pioneer missionaries were aware that their call to Africa meant that diseases, sicknesses, difficulty in traveling, language learning, and culture shock were awaiting their arrival. They knew that those things mentioned could cause their death, but the missionaries had already prepared their minds spiritually and mentally. They had opportunity to read a lot of information about Africa and Nigeria from books, magazines and reports given in mission conferences.

According to Barje S. Maigadi, the SIM pioneer missionaries, when they arrived Lagos on December 4th, 1893, met what they were informed about and read about regarding the Sudan. They truly encountered many spiritual and physical challenges which included disease and death, language and culture, (2006:76). Vincent J. Donovan, acknowledged the fact that, as missionaries, they were prepared theologically and spiritually, but were not prepared culturally for the great task that was ahead of them, (1978:101-103). Peter Falk stresses: "Those who felt called to Africa knew very well

that tropical diseases might bring death soon after their arrival,” (2015:429). Therefore, they were aware of what they were coming to meet in Africa. In God’s wisdom, he called the SIM pioneer missionaries and empowered them with the gospel for the people of Africa. God revealed himself to millions of Africans through the person of Christ. Therefore, mission to the Africans were only meaningful when the grace of God was accepted by the people, (2015:429). Barje S. Maigadi stated that the Lord of the harvest who called the missionaries and the strategies that were adopted by the early SIM pioneer missionaries facilitated and brought victory over the various diseases, sicknesses, death, language learning and translation, and the pain encountered with cultural differences to ease church planting and the growth of ECWA, (2006:109).

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