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MISSIONS

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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY KEITH R. KEYSER

The Eternal God and Missions in a Temporal World

Identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in this sin-afflicted world is dangerous. Sinners gave Him a cross; therefore, His followers should expect similar treatment.¹ From the beginning, varied persecution has assailed His church. No one knew this better than the believers in Smyrna, who were poor and persecuted by false religionists.² Their security came from the immortal Son of God, whose resources stretch from age to age yet who knows what it is like to suffer in time and space. Together, Christ's eternality and incarnation outfit Him for the sustenance of His beleaguered church.

Before and after the adversaries

This world's persecutors—emperors, dictators, and religious zealots, among others—seem formidable for a time. Yet the Lord Jesus addresses Himself as “the First and the Last.”³ The church's enemies are temporal; Christ is eternal. His power, wisdom, and glory exceed, precede, and outlast His opponents'. In the end, they will give an account to Him and fall before His judgment.⁴

Triumphing over suffering

The Lord also describes Himself as the One “who became dead and lived.”⁵ Although He is eternal, He entered a time-bound world as a perfect man. He then died the sacrificial death on the cross and rose again on the third day.⁶ His substitutionary death showed He was the prophesied “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”⁷ Because He suffered to an incomparable degree, the Lord is perfectly suited to be an empathetic, faithful high priest, who can unfailingly console, comfort, and intercede for His afflicted people.⁸ But this is not the end of His credentials.

The Weymouth translation of the New Testament renders the second phrase in Revelation 2:8 as “returned to life again.” His resurrection gave Him victory over death and His spiritual and temporal enemies. Because of this triumph, believers “are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”⁹ As the Lord Jesus said, “Because I live, you will live also.”¹⁰

In the second century, Tertullian noted that Christians' martyrdom led to others being converted; he described the martyrs' blood as the church's seed. A modern author, Derek Tidball, agrees: “The supreme strategy of Christians against all the powers of evil is not to spill their enemies' blood but to point to their Savior's, and by extension, to shed their own if called upon to do so.”¹¹ Service and witness for God in this world involves laying down our lives—either daily or in martyrdom.

Glory for and with the Savior

Hudson Taylor knew the challenges of service in a fallen world: “The work of a true missionary is work indeed, often very monotonous, apparently not very successful, and carried on through great and varied but unceasing difficulties.”¹²

God's love for the lost motivates believers today, as it did in all centuries, for sacrificial service on the mission field. The Lord's command to “go into all the world” impels them to spend their lives preaching Christ.¹³ They endure suffering because they believe in a glorious future in heaven.

Like Paul, they assert: “We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. . . . For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”¹⁴ ■

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¹ John 15:18–21. ² Revelation 2:9–10. ³ Revelation 2:8. ⁴ Revelation 20:11–15. ⁵ Revelation 2:8 (DBY). ⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. ⁷ Isaiah 53:3. ⁸ Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:14–16. ⁹ Romans 8:37. ¹⁰ John 14:19. ¹¹ Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 314. ¹² J. Hudson Taylor, *Occasional Papers of the China Inland Mission*, Vol. 5–7 (London: Nisbet & Co., 1872), 5. ¹³ Mark 16:15. ¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

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With One Vision

THE JOY OF WORKING IN LOCAL PARTNERSHIP IN LOLOMA, ZAMBIA

BY TIM BEER



The privilege and blessing of Christian missions is seeing Jesus Christ's preeminent power at work in this world. Therefore, the foundation of each commission should be absolute reliance on God's ability to work out His purpose in our lives. The One who sends us into His harvest field stated, "Without Me, you can do nothing," as well as "Follow Me, and I will make you..." (John 15:5; Matthew 4:19)

These statements result in the freeing assurance that the Christian life does not depend on who we are or what we can do. Instead, it relies completely on who Jesus Christ is and what He can do. Our part is simply to be available for God's use, being sure that we are living where He wants us to be and doing what He wants us to do.

For my wife, Joy, and me, that has meant serving in Zambia for about 25 years. Due to the diversity of needs and opportunities, our ministry decisions have usually been "what we are not going to do" rather than "what we are going to do." One of the key things God has taught us is that people are more important than projects. This may be opposite to the Western mindset, but if the Lord's work is to progress, then investment in local individuals must be understood and practiced.

At times, what may appear to be a wonderful idea from a Western perspective may later fall apart because it lacks proper partnerships with local people to ensure succession and sustainability. A hundred years from now, most of the current infrastructure that supports missions will likely no longer exist, but individuals won for Jesus Christ will surround heaven's throne for all eternity. Therefore, any infrastructure must be seen simply as a means of impacting many lives for Jesus Christ. It is important to include committed national believers in the

work and mentor them so they can see the joy of evangelism for themselves.

Here, we will share some of the opportunities that, by God's grace, we have been involved in over the years. More importantly, we will discuss their continuation today, following our transition from in-country service to remote involvement last year.

Loloma Mission Hospital

Medical work is a key part of Christian missions. This ministry of compassion is a practical opportunity to share God's love with many local people, resulting in large numbers being won for God's kingdom.

The hospital at Loloma has been the foundation and means of our acceptance among the surrounding areas, allowing us to share the message of salvation. The warm welcome we receive in the village work is due to the medical care the local people have received at the hospital.

Initially, Joy and I assisted with the many practical needs that accompany maintaining a medical facility. Then, during the last 10 years, we have seen God build a strong management team of local African believers. Together, with one missionary nurse, they run this facility on behalf of the Zambian government.



Above (L-R): Children head to a kids' club; In a Zambian village, Tim presents the Gospel in one of the local languages; In a special village at Loloma, elderly women in need receive care.
Bottom right: Loloma Mission Hospital's work, overseen by the management team of Zambian believers and a missionary nurse, has opened many hearts to the Gospel.



The support from mission partners is still an essential component, and God is glorified through the quality medical care that is delivered on a strong spiritual foundation. One medical officer, Dr. Abel Chikuta, is a local believer who was the first to graduate from a medical sponsorship program. He is a great help not only in the hospital but also in the local assembly.

The hospital provides health care to a community of around 70,000 people. The staff participates in devotions two mornings per week, and they share the Gospel in the hospital wards through the public address system, morning and evening, and one-to-one patient visitation.

Village outreach

In His commission, the Lord instructed His disciples to go where the people are to make disciples. As a result of following this model in the Loloma area, we have seen God at work in many people's lives. One blessing of life in Zambia is that the nationals are very interested in listening to the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, particularly when presented in their language. Therefore, learning one of the local languages was vital for Joy and me. It helped us understand how Zambians think and what they believe and ensured they would understand God's amazing grace and salvation.

Translating the Two Roads and the Two Destinies chart into the local languages meant people could see for themselves their position before God. In the African mindset, seeing something



with one's own eyes is more important than hearing about it.

Each week, we visited villages in our area with the life-changing message of God's grace and power revealed at the cross. Most years, we and a team of believers visited more remote areas for four to five days at a time. The concentrated time spent reaching people

with this transforming message was a great blessing. The core team of Zambian believers we have worked with over the years continues this important ministry, and God continues to speak to the people in the Loloma area.

Ministry in local assemblies

Zambia is so open to evangelism that a multiplicity of false cults and churches exist. Some people in the more rural areas struggle to read and, therefore, to study the Bible, so they are vulnerable to false teaching. The small assemblies in these areas need help with Bible teaching, so we regularly visited them. Including some of the local believers in this work resulted in them developing their God-given teaching gifts. We are thankful they continue with this important ministry in our absence.

Kayombo Boarding School

In 2009, a great opportunity to run a new boarding school in partnership with the government came to our attention. While this was a huge step of faith, God gave us clear assurance. Following years of prayer, preparation, and interface with the department of education, the church management of the school began in 2015 with about 14 students.

The remote location, poor road conditions, lack of electricity, and a limited water supply brought challenges, but God has been faithful. Several years ago, the government recognized Kayombo Boarding School as a school of excellence.

The spiritual opportunities are amazing. First thing each weekday morning, all 350 students meet for a devotion. On Saturday mornings, there is a Gospel message, and on Sundays, they all attend the local assembly for the gospel meeting.

God has put together an administration team of Zambian



Top, pages 4–5 (L–R): Dr. Abel Chikuta serves in the hospital and local assembly; The Two Roads and the Two Destinies chart supports the ministry at a conference; Missionaries and national believers from Loloma visit and preach in rural assemblies on Sundays; Kayombo Boarding School's assembly hall and administration building support day-to-day operations. **Bottom left:** A team—Tim and several local believers—prepare to minister in a village. **Bottom right:** At Kayombo Boarding School, pupils gather in the assembly hall.



“ONE OF THE KEY THINGS GOD HAS TAUGHT US IS THAT PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN PROJECTS.”

Christians, whom He has greatly used to develop the school academically and spiritually. They come under the guidance of the church management board, which is made up of mostly local believers. Some of the school graduates are now being accepted into universities in Lusaka, and we know that God has a plan for them in the years to come.

Other ministries

Managing a nursery school for 60 children provides early education with a spiritual foundation. Children attend for two years before moving into first grade. Two committed Zambian Christians teach and look after the day-to-day running of the school, receiving a little administrative assistance from one of the missionaries at Loloma.

At our village for the elderly, we have been involved in caring for women—typically about 25. Each of them has no one able or willing to look after them. Believers share God’s Word with the women, and He consistently provides for their physical needs. Two Zambian men, who have helped us in this work for the last 8–10 years, faithfully continue it in our absence.

The community radio station’s broadcasts reach many villages within an 18-mile radius of Loloma. Each Thursday afternoon, the message of God’s salvation is systematically explained in the Lunda language. A Zambian brother, whom we worked closely with when we lived in Zambia, continues with this special opportunity to present the Gospel, and one or two others support him.

In good hands

Maintaining these ministries involves a lot of behind-the-scenes administration and practical support, including vehicle maintenance, plumbing, and electrical and construction work. Training nationals to take on the many aspects of the work is vital. Our stepping back from this work for an indefinite period, while we address family needs in North America, has not been easy. However, the same God who called us to Zambia is calling others to continue His work. He opened the way for us to be with our three children, now ages 20, 19, and 16, during their transition to Western life and to help care for Joy’s mother.

The Lord’s work in Loloma is dear to our hearts. We are thankful that we can maintain regular contact with the believers there, due to technology, and make occasional trips to Zambia. We praise God that, due mostly to the teams of Zambian believers whom we have been privileged to work and partner with, these special ministry opportunities continue. We greatly appreciate your prayers for all of them. ■



Tim and Joy Beer are commended from Ardsley Bible Chapel in Ardsley, Pennsylvania.

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Above (L–R): The nursery school staff hosts a parents’ day; Elderly people are fed physically and spiritually as they listen to the Gospel during a food distribution; Recognizing the importance of equipping local believers for service, the workers at Loloma offer training—from medical care to vehicle maintenance.

GROCERIES AND THE BREAD OF LIFE

A Practical Ministry in Colle di Val d'Elsa, Italy



BY CHARLOTTE LIOTTI

In Tuscany, Italy, the medieval town called Colle di Val d'Elsa—world famous for the production of crystal—consists of 21,541 inhabitants, including my family and me. Foreign-born people comprise almost 11 percent of the population. The majority are from Albania, Romania, Senegal, and Morocco.

There has been a gospel witness here since 1984, first meeting in a private home. Then, shortly after we came to help in the work, in 1986, we opened a gospel hall. Our church has observed the poverty affecting nationals and foreigners alike—in our town and the country as a whole.

Italy's population is more than 59 million, with more than five million foreigners.¹ According to Istat (Italy's National Institute of Statistics), approximately 5.6 million people live in absolute poverty, and 8.8 million live in relative poverty.² Absolute poverty affects 32 percent of nonnational citizens.

Essentials for families

Our church has been involved in a food ministry for the past four years, to help families in need with food staples. Actually, it has been a gradual process. A young woman in the assembly, Frida, heard of a ministry through gathering food items plus gifts that a Christian association would then take to big cities and distribute personally to families. We all participated, bringing articles to be boxed and wrapped in Christmas paper. But we had various products left over, and we wondered whom we could help locally. So we contacted social services.

To get us started, the mission we had helped initially sent someone to talk with the social workers since the Italian government recognizes the association. We received two or three families to start with. A social worker and people from the church met with one of the families and made a list of staple foods they needed. Everyone decided that each family would come to our church every two weeks with an appointment, and two believers would meet them. My family has given out food to the same family since the beginning.

Our church now assists seven families. We don't provide fresh food of any kind—only staples such as pasta, rice, sugar, flour, oil, coffee, packaged bread, cookies, and canned goods, including tuna fish, beans, tomatoes and tomato sauce, and shelf-stable milk.

Creative expansion

At the beginning, we bought what was needed with our money or asked for a refund from the church treasury. Then, after a couple of years, the government-recognized mission made an agreement with a chain supermarket so people can collect food from the shoppers. One Saturday every two or three months, teams of two or three people from our church spend three-hour shifts at the supermarket. (We have four shifts in total.) They give shoppers entering the store a list of items they can buy to be donated. Then, at the exit, someone collects the items.

As **SALT OF THE EARTH** and **LIGHT OF THE WORLD**, we want to be known as practicing Christians.

People have been very generous despite the COVID-19 crisis. They have donated an exuberance of pasta especially and articles not on our list for the regular families. So, when this surplus started happening, we had to think of how we could utilize it. From time to time, we ask social services for names of families that might benefit from a special gift. They give us the names and phone numbers of 25–30 people, and someone calls them to give them the date and hour to collect their bag of groceries.

Obviously, our purpose in this ministry is two-fold: to help people in need, even in a small way, and to witness about the Lord Jesus Christ and His love. Most people stay for only a few minutes, so there hasn't been much of a chance to interest them in spiritual conversation. We hope that, eventually, some will feel the need for Christ and come to Him for salvation. But I can tell you about one person who has felt the need, and for that, we rejoice.

Food and the Gospel for Mihaela

Social services gave us the name of Mihaela, a young Romanian woman who has quite a story to tell. She left her companion in one area of Italy to seek refuge with a Romanian whose name she found on Facebook. She came with a backpack and her 11-year-old daughter. (She also has a six-year-old daughter who is not under her custody.) Mihaela turned to social services, and eventually, a social worker put us in contact. Lucilla, a woman from our church, took a food package to Mihaela.

Little by little, Mihaela showed interest in the Gospel. She told us how her mother prayed and read the Bible at home in Romania. As a child, Mihaela went to the Orthodox church with her mother but stopped going as she grew up. She led a life that was far from the Lord and suffered from depression and cancer, which led to fear. With Lucilla's help, she realized she was like the lost sheep and needed to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Mihaela is a radiant Christian and trusts in the Lord despite her advanced stage four cancer. She had to move away from our area and lives in an institution with nuns until she can find a place of her own. Mihaela attends a church, and several believers take her to the hospital for chemotherapy and wherever else she needs to go, including to church meetings. This help is a great blessing, and we pray regularly that the Lord will sustain Mihaela and, if in His will, heal her from this terrible cancer and enable her to have her younger daughter with her again.

Salt and light

As Christians, we desire to help others in a practical way as the Word of God exhorts us through Paul, James, John, and of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. As salt of the earth and light of

the world, we want to be known as practicing Christians. Jesus said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) We are not the ones to be glorified for doing a few good works, but our heavenly Father is! ■

Charlotte Liotti is commended from Curtis Gospel Chapel in Detroit, Michigan. She and her husband, Franco, serve in Italy.



¹ All data in this section was obtained from Istat: (1) "Permanent Census of Population and Households: The Italian Population Year 2019," 19 February 2021, Istat.it. (2) "Poverty in Italy, Year 2021," 7 July 2022, Istat.it. ² Absolute poverty affects those whose monthly expenditure is equal to or less than the amount needed to purchase goods and services considered essential for a minimum acceptable standard of living. Relative poverty affects those whose consumption expenditure is equal to or below the poverty line.



Opposite page (right): The Liottis give pasta, rice, cookies, sugar, oil, and milk to a specific family once per month. **This page (clockwise from top left):** The food distribution is a ministry of the whole church, with the believers (a portion pictured here) involved in various ways; Charlotte Liotti (right) visits with Mihaela (left), who is now a vibrant Christian; The believers store food essentials, ready for families in need.





Passing the Baton

50 Years of Assembly Work in Flemish Belgium

BY HENK GELLING

It's a Sunday morning in the spring of 1972. A small group of Brethren believers—two Canadian missionary families, two young couples, and one teenager—are gathered in a family's home in Antwerp, one of the largest cities in Belgium. They're in this living room for one purpose: to worship the Lord and remember the Breaking of Bread. With the meeting's commencement, the believers launch their first assembly, one of only a few in Flemish Belgium (Flanders, which is Dutch).

Within one year, this humble gathering would blossom into 70 adults and children crowded into the same living room. And, within 18 years, 27 assemblies would dot Flanders.



When these Brethren missionaries settled in Flanders, the Roman Catholic Church, which held much influence, was experiencing changes. New opportunities for the Gospel arose. By 1975, Beryl (who is now home with the Lord) and I had arrived, and we were contributing to the church-planting efforts. The Belgian people were confused about the changes in the Catholic Church, but they were open to the Gospel. God gave us strength and wisdom to take advantage of this shift. We worked hard and prayed and saw God work.

From the start, Beryl and I, and the missionaries we worked with, desired to see Belgians lead the work. We wanted to work ourselves out of a job. Since 1972, the ministry here has focused on developing assemblies, and "passing the baton" remains key.

A church-planting boom

Back in 1972, Richard and Marina Haverkamp (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 10) and Herb and Liliane Schindelka (then missionaries from Canada) had the privilege of sharing the Gospel, which resulted in the start of that first assembly, in the Haverkamps' home.

Richard and Marina moved to Beerse and formed the next assembly there in 1974. Martin and Marjorie Luesink (at the time, Canadian missionaries with Operation Mobilization) came to Belgium to take over that work when the Haverkamps moved to Koersel in the eastern province of Limburg. Beryl and I joined them in June 1975 and moved into our house in Peer. In September, an assembly started meeting regularly in our home. That setup did not last long since there was not enough space. The assembly moved into a rented building. In 1983, it hived off into three assemblies—in Peer, Overpelt, and Meeuwen.



In 1977, a work started in East Flanders Province, and Richard Haverkamp suggested Beryl and I move there. One Friday evening, we stopped by. A group of friendly people met us



and were happy to have us there for the evening. I taught the Bible, and they had questions. We had a wonderful time. After the Bible study, we enjoyed refreshments together. Suddenly, someone started to speak in a strange language. Beryl and I had a 90-minute drive ahead of us, so we said good night.

When Richard asked

Clockwise from left: Although Beryl is now home with the Lord, Henk continues to serve his Savior in Belgium; The Luesinks, Haverkamps, and Gellings—missionaries from Canada—worked hard, prayed, and saw God work; In the early days, many Flemish assemblies outgrew living rooms and moved into rented facilities.

us about our experience, I told him about the language surprise. He laughed and explained their dialect. The Haverkamps moved to East Flanders instead, since we were still getting comfortable with the dialect in Limburg. They started three assemblies in East Flanders and five in West Flanders Province.

We moved into Richard and Marina's house in Koersel, Limburg. The assembly had been meeting once per month on a Tuesday evening for the Breaking of Bread. Every Saturday evening, we had a Bible study. Most of the people were coal miners who could attend only on Saturdays due to their shifts in the mines. But, soon, we started meeting for the Breaking of Bread on Sunday mornings.



The assembly in Peer could meet without the Haverkamps or Beryl and me. The Lord wonderfully used several believers. They had a good grasp of the Bible and were recognized as elders.

One young man from Peer brought me into contact with his parents, who lived in Houthalen. They were saved and started coming to the assembly in Koersel. We also had a Bible study in their home, and more people accepted Christ. Around that time, Beryl and I had to decide where to move. God led us to Houthalen, where I remain today, and we started an assembly in 1979. We had Bible studies with young people, and in a large house we rented, we started a coffeehouse. God used it for His glory.

Active participation

Most of the assemblies started with a home Bible study. Richard had developed a Bible study curriculum, which started in the Gospel of John. We would teach for at least an hour and



From top: In some areas, the people worked in coal mines such as these, which meant they could only meet for Bible studies on Saturdays; In the church-planting process, the missionaries began with home Bible studies.

then take questions. When a living room became too small for the group, we would hive off.

We missionaries did everything in the beginning. We wanted the new believers to take an active part in the church, so we held the Breaking of Bread and taught about the priesthood of believers. We could bring worship before the Lord, offering a hymn, praying, reading the Bible, giving from our earthly possessions, and simply being there. We mature believers had to be examples.

We would pass on everything the new believers could do. We have always tried to pass the work on to the national believers. Because Belgians have been in the shadow of the French and Dutch for centuries, they are somewhat insecure in their ability to do things. Often, the French and Dutch would start Christian work and keep running it themselves. We came believing the Flemish people should be responsible for the work. Passing the baton was never an afterthought; it has always been part of our work.

The work today

Today, of the assemblies in Limburg Province, three own their building. Some rent private buildings, but most rent public spaces. The average attendance is about 60 adults. One assembly runs a home for young men in crisis. Another assembly has been helping Ukraine for years; much has been done since Russia invaded the country in 2022. Three Christian schools operate in the province, and the assemblies have good contact with other evangelical churches. The Belgian Gospel Mission has been working in Limburg for 100 years.

My involvement in the assemblies looks different today. I am not responsible for any one of the assemblies; I help wherever I am needed. Every Sunday, I preach in one of the assemblies. I speak at prayer meetings and Bible studies. Assemblies ask me for assistance, often with addressing problems, and I try to help as much as possible.

Please pray we, the believers in Belgium, will stay close to the Lord. There are many influences, including the charismatic movement. Pray for unity among the believers. Please pray that Belgians will continue to lead, we will continue to pass the baton, and the Lord's work will continue to grow in Belgium. ■



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