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Location: Netherlands



What I do: Living a life of mission, both locally in our community and globally as I support Christian leaders in Africa and Asia to resource others.

Dear friends!

Who writes history? Which stories are told and which are left untold?

Teaching a course on mission, both at the Theological University in Utrecht in the Netherlands and at the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB) in the Central African Republic (CAR), gave this question new importance for me this summer.

When, some years ago, I asked students in Bangui how the gospel arrived in CAR, I would hear stories of missionaries coming from the USA in the early 20th century, risking malaria and other dangers. Stories were told of missionaries using coffins to transport their belongings from the USA to their place of ministry in Central Africa. They knew that they were running a high risk of death. Letters have been discovered in which these missionaries wrote to their mission headquarters in the US saying: "Send us more missionaries, because we are dying." Today, it would be impossible to write such a letter, because of the importance we place on the care for mission partners and their physical and psychological safety.

Later, stories were told about churches and denominations being created and about the role of Western missionaries in this. Sometimes, this role was appreciated and met with gratitude. But sometimes it was described as problematic because of the missionaries' lack of respect for, and trust in, the local leadership.

It is well known that history is written by the winners and the powerful. It turns out that the same goes for the history of mission. Together with the students in the Netherlands we discovered that Western mission continues to receive proportionally more attention and appreciation than the lives and work of local believers and leaders.

We discovered the important role of migration in the mission movement. We read parts of Jehu Hanciles' book *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* (2021). Hanciles shows how the biblical story of God is a story of migration, and how that continues through the history of the Church. Were not all Patriarchs migrants? And is the incarnation, Jesus leaving heaven, entering our human lives, not ultimately a story of



The cathedral in Bangui, built in French colonial style

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With each other
To the edges**



migration? Migration always carries vulnerability. Mission history turns out to be mostly a movement from the margins, mission from a vulnerable position. We can see that in the lives of the apostles, but also today. Or... do we see that? Do we dare to see migrant communities in our neighbourhood as mission movements, a blessing for our community and country?

Finally, we discovered that indeed, European and American missionaries did play a role. Yet, sadly, this was not only a positive role, because of their contribution to colonialism and slavery. And also, few missionaries travelled all the way into

the heart of the African continent. The fact that in the Central African Republic 70 to 80% of the inhabitants now call themselves Christian is mostly the result of the commitment and perseverance of newly converted local Christians. They were the ones who shared the good news with the people around them, and they do so until today.

What would the history of mission in the Central African Republic look like if it was written by these people themselves? Who are the main characters? Which stories are prioritised? What will we learn about the gospel in this particular context? What will we learn about God's good news?

According to Dr Moloby, director of the missiology department at FATEB, CAR, this writing of history is urgent because there is no habit of keeping archives and safely storing written stories and documentation. This task is even more urgent since the leaders of the first churches are old or have already passed away. Some of their families do keep relevant documents, but they are scattered throughout the country. "We need to hear the stories and document them. We need to listen, register and archive. We need to publish another account of history in the service of truth. This is the only way in which we can truly see and recognise God's work here in the CAR. Who knows what we will learn!" He told me that he would like to do this, together with his students in the Masters programme for missiology.

This will be a rather daunting project. At my question of whether he has the time and space to do this project, Dr Moloby answered: "We have to. And yes, we are able to. Even though it will ask a lot of our time and resources. We will have to travel through the whole country, also in places where the roads are terrible and unsafe because of the ongoing conflicts."

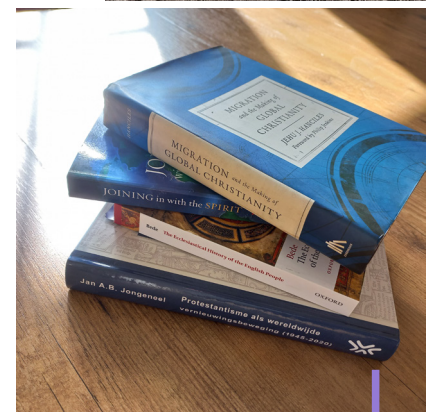
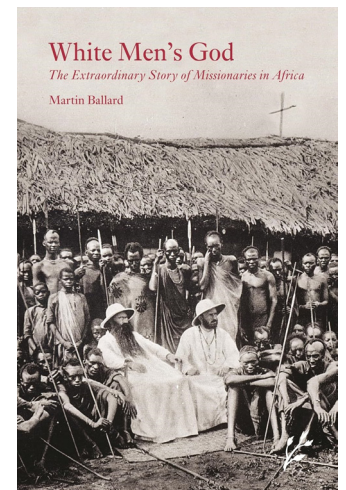
And I wonder, what stories will I hear next time, when I am in Bangui working with the missiology students at FATEB?

I will keep you updated!

Thank you for your prayer and support for me and for our brothers and sisters in the Central African region.

With love,

Berdine



Photos from top to bottom: Students share their work; entrance to FATEB, the theological school in Bangui; who is the main character in the story of mission?



Going further with Church Mission Society

Jesus never gives up. Neither should we. We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at churchmissionsociety.org/jesus-never-gives-up

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