

# **The Challenges of the Autonomy of the Baptist Mid-Missions Churches: The Case of the Community of Independent Baptist Churches in the Central African Republic**

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## **Abstract**

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This paper examined the challenges of the autonomy of the Baptist Mid-Missions (BMM) offspring churches, specifically those of the Community of Independent Baptist Churches (CIBC). BMM, an American missionary society, entered Oubangui-Chari in 1921. The Pioneer missionary, William Clarence Haas, was eager to proclaim the gospel in the heart of Africa. As soon as Clarence and his co-workers arrived, they set up mission stations for the mission work. Soon after, Haas died, but the mission continued. The missionaries of the BMM planted churches and trained the national auxiliaries but at a low intellectual level, making them unqualified to face the prevailing ecclesiastical challenges. On the social level, the missionaries founded hospitals and schools that sadly are not a reference today. The CIBC churches were granted autonomy in 1995, after the last split with the National Association of Baptist Churches almost 74 years after the establishment of the BMM in Oubangui-Chari. In the face of leadership, evangelism, and financial challenges, CIBC must become aware of its missional role according to Matthew 28:19–20 church's mission 1:8.

**Keywords:** Evangelization; Intercultural mission; Missionaries and Mission Work; Central African Republic.

## **Introduction**

William Clarence Haas founded the missionary society BMM on 15 October 1920 in Elyria, Ohio, USA ( Elmer 1996, 55). On 23 November 1920, Haas left the United States for Africa with the first missionaries of the BMM. The BMM and the offspring churches celebrated their centenary from 14 to 17 November 2023 to honor God's faithfulness. One of the preoccupations of missionary societies in the 19th century was to define the form to be given to newly planted churches and the relationship between the mission and the churches planted. Candidate Seminar Manuel No. 2, which teaches missionary methods to BMM missionaries, states, "A key step toward the establishment of indigenous churches is the training of national



pastors and leaders for all of the ongoing ministries of the churches and their institutions. Missionaries are responsible for initiating this training ministry and making it possible for nationals to continue it" (Baptist Mid-Missions 1997, 104). It further states, "No missionary is ever to be permanently the pastor of a mission church, director of a seminary or the leader of any ministry designed to be a part of the indigenous church" (Baptist Mid-Missions 1997, 106). As quoted by Steer (1996, 275), Hudson Taylor of China Inland Mission thought that "European missionaries are like temporary scaffolding erected around a building under construction. The sooner it is completed, the sooner the scaffolding can be moved elsewhere, always for the same purpose, in the interest of the work that has been implanted and in that of the regions not yet evangelized."

It has been emphasized that "The purpose of the mission is for the church to administer herself, to assume her own financial burdens, and to evangelize her own compatriots and the unreached neighboring regions. If this principle is respected, then the mission can die" (Blandenier 2003, 330). Blandenier adds that a church born of the mission cannot completely cut itself from the mother mission. Therefore, there should be a partnership between the mother mission and the daughter church.

This article briefly traces the history of the establishment of the BMM in Oubagui Chari (the name of the Central African Republic before its independence). It goes through the development of the work while emphasizing the means of preparing the church for its autonomy. Finally, an assessment will be made to identify the challenges to the autonomy of the churches of the CIBC. The purpose of this article is to take a retrospective look at the functioning of the churches of CIBC to understand the challenges to its autonomy.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in this work to collect the data is essentially documentary and orality. N'da (2015, 129) opines that a documentary study "allows the researcher to have what he or she needs to explain or understand a phenomenon; literature search provides general information about a topic and a field of study." The study utilized minutes of the general assemblies and interviews of some resource persons with experience and relevant information.

## **Review of Literature**

This section deals with the existing literature on the topic and the beginning of the work with the Baptist Mid Missions missionary society in CAR.



### ***The Establishment of the Baptist Mid Mission in Oubangui-Chari***

The missionaries of the BMM settled in the territory of Oubangui from 1921 onwards. The pioneer William Clarence Haas and his wife Geneviève came to the Belgian Congo for the first time in 1912, intending to evangelize the Zande tribe located between the current Democratic Republic of Congo and the CAR. By divine providence, they reached the CAR through Rafai. Strong (1984, 28-43) writes that during the evangelistic journeys, they took the opportunity to learn the Sango language, which, for Haas, is an effective way to reach the different tribes. Their health, weakened by illness, forced them to return to the United States of America via Bangui.

After their stay in the United States, there was talk of returning to the field of mission. During the return of the BMM missionaries in 1917 to Oubangui-Chari and those of the Oubangui Evangelical Mission in 1918, they were prevented in Brazzaville by the governor-general of French Equatorial Africa from reaching Bangui (Jobson 2007, 28). The Haas took the opportunity to improve their knowledge of the Sango language through the Oubanguians found in Brazzaville and to translate portions of the Bible and hymns into Sango, compiling Sango vocabulary and grammar lessons for future missionaries. When granted permission, the Haas returned to the US to seek volunteers to utilize the open doors (Strong 1984, 46-48).

Haas arrived at Bangui accompanied by five collaborators with whom he established evangelization posts in Bangui and several other localities (Blandenier 2003, 449). These pioneers were Ina Rosenau, Rowena Becker, and Ferd (Rosenau 1958, 4). They opened the first mission stations in Sibus, Kaga Bandoro, and Ouango the same year they arrived and were in Bangassou two years later. In 1928, they opened the stations of Bambari and Ippy, and in 1934, in Morouba, followed by Bria, Yalinga, and Ouadda. 1939. It was Bakouma's turn, followed by the last stations of Kembé in 1940 and finally that of Ndélé in 1943. This mission strategy of establishing mission stations was a vital means of church planting in Africa (Gehman 2004, 130). It allows missionaries to live among people and get to know them, giving them adequate and regular teachings.

These early missionaries walked long distances into the country's interior to proclaim the good news of salvation to the people. As a strategy, they preached, instituted prayer meetings, and organized daily Bible study classes for the different levels of men, women, and children (Rosenau 1958, 42). They also organized classes for new converts, during which they received the rudimentary teachings of biblical doctrine. Before baptism, candidates would have to pass an exam and prove that they understood fundamental Bible truths before baptism. The prayer meetings were essential for the growth and development of the community; they



played a crucial role in the strategies for edifying the converts (Griffiths 1985, 106). This opportunity brought them into regular contact with the word of God, which allowed them as the Body of Christ to flourish and allowed everyone to bear witness to God's marvelous deeds in their lives.

During the ministry of these missionaries, native converts testified to their conversion by burning their fetishes and abandoning their idols (Rosenau 1958, 10). By these means, the message of life in Jesus was transmitted from village to village in such a way that everyone could have the opportunity to listen and learn to read the Word of God. In Bangui, under the direction of the native auxiliaries, Baptist Christians met every evening in the various places of worship to worship, pray to God, and learn to read the Scriptures. In 1934, the missionaries of the BMM completed the translation of the New Testament; they printed 100 copies of the Gospel of John and 5,000 hymns of 160 songs, followed by reprints in the following years at the printing house in Sibut. Translation and printing of portions of the Old Testament was done gradually until 1958. The history of Aboriginal succession preparedness can be briefly outlined below.

### ***Intercultural mission***

Hiebert (1985, 14), a specialist in anthropology and missiology, presents a manual helpful to those who want to work in the mission field. He believes that before the mission field experience, missionaries should be trained with sound biblical theological foundations. Once in the field, the missionary will realize a significant gap between his world and the target populations. Hiebert suggests how to reduce these misunderstandings and communicate the message effectively. In addition to the language of the local culture learned by the missionary, he must understand the worldview, contextualize the message, prepare to avoid culture shock and adapt to the new culture.

Similarly, Hiebert (2009, 17) in *The Gospel in Human Contexts. Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* shows that each person has their own way of conceiving things that are not necessarily the same as ours. This variation occurs when we change continents or epochs. Hiebert encourages his readers to exegete his context in order to proclaim the gospel that goes so far as to transform the receiving peoples (2009, 13). Keidel (2008) points out possible ways to overcome inevitable challenges. These include identifying with indigenous people, learning the language of the local culture, social work, telling the message of salvation, and moving to an indigenous church with local leadership.



### ***Preparing Offspring Churches for Autonomy***

An important document to consider for the challenges of church autonomy in the CAR is Malipou's doctoral dissertation entitled: *le défi de la contextualisation de la théologie biblique dans les églises chrétiennes en République Centrafricaine*. The interest of his work is to examine the contexts that have made the gospel's message captive and incomprehensible to the Central African Christian in order to result in a Central African church with an autonomous but God-dependent Christian (Malipou 2007, 1). He believes that the proclamation of the gospel has put the Central African Christian under a foreign yoke, and his thoughts and actions are controlled by the missionaries, which he does not find logical. The evils decried have a remote origin. The history of colonization and evangelization were linked; the settlers and missionaries had different goals but the same culture of domination. Added to this is the Western cultural form enveloping the gospel proclaimed to the Central Africans (Malipou 2007, 10).

Göran (2012, 4), a Swedish missionary who worked for years in the Orëbro Mission (now Interact) in the CAR and Congo, wrote his doctoral dissertation, published in 2012, looking at the history of mission and the preparation of churches planted for autonomy. The Swedish missionaries who served in Central Africa had the missionary vision shaped by John Ongman, who was oriented towards the interior of Sweden, Europe, and Africa, and especially towards the dark fields of the pagans (Göran 2012, 53). This mission was established in CAR in 1923 among the Gbaya, one of the largest religious groups (Göran 2012, 127). As early as 1924, the missionaries combined the work of the mission stations with the literacy and schooling of the natives. Göran adds, "The students were receptive to the Christian message; at the same time, the school was a link in the education of evangelists and qualified and able collaborators" (Göran 2012, 143). As the need to expand the work arose, and with the intention of a long-term evangelical mission, so did the need for Indigenous leaders. The political independence of the CAR in 1960 precipitated the autonomy of the churches that emerged from the Orëbro mission (Göran 2012, 367). Subsequently, a new constitution was drafted for the local churches and the denomination. The main point of the relationship between the mission and the new name is that: "The Church will function in collaboration with the Mission; it will no longer be subject to the Mission." The Baptist Union churches received autonomy in 1962 (Göran 2012, 416).



### ***A Vibrant Evangelizing Church***

A vibrant evangelizing church here is a church that is well-equipped by its planters. Such a church is ready at any time to face the various missionary challenges of its time. It is a church that takes to heart the great commission according to Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. Therefore, it is a church that responds to a relevant ministry in its own locality, in its immediate surroundings, and beyond.

Conn (1982) deals with the internal organization of an evangelizing church. For him, evangelization goes hand in hand with the social as two sides of the same coin, which is called holistic evangelization (1982, 9). Following the example of Paul, who made himself all things to all to gain as much as possible (1 Cor 9:19-v23), the proclamation of the gospel must be directed to the receiver's needs. A proper strategy should not be preacher-oriented but people-oriented. In addition, evangelization includes the message of reconciliation with God, incorporation into God's community, humanization, the celebration of God's grace, the call for justice, and all that the church is supposed to give.

Perbi & Ngugi (2022) encourage the African Church and Christians to revert to the mission. They believe that Africa has played a role in the Bible and global Christianity (2022, 17). The example of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which does not have a formal structure for evangelism, grew between 1937 and 2018 from one nation to 99 countries on all continents (2022, 29-30). Vandepoll (2010, 111-12) mentions that the contribution of non-Western countries to the global mission is becoming increasingly important.

### ***Missionary Societies and Offspring Churches Partnership***

Cueva (2007, 273) defines partnership as "a new relationship between the South and the North in terms of mutual covenant and reciprocal cooperation... in today's globalized world, partnership must be seen as from everywhere to everywhere with no sense of inferiority nor superiority, but with all cultures united in the same purpose of God's kingdom." Hillion believes that partnership is achieved when one goes beyond "the stage of demand of the churches of the South and the material superiority of the West to arrive at a relationship of sharing" (2014, 128). He believes that,

Working in partnership means recognizing one's limits and the limits of one's vocation and valuing the contribution and vocation of one's partner. If we do not believe that Christians in the North and South need each other, there is no point in seeking to form partnerships together... a minimum of complementarity is necessary for the implementation of a partnership (2014, 133).

For missionary actions to be encouraged, Raynaud suggests that:



Projects involving local actors, projects carried out by missionaries, or works that are well integrated within local populations can be more sustainable. Moreover, as we have seen, it is important to work for the long term. To do this, it is necessary to give priority to projects that are sustainable, that will continue after the departure of expatriate or local leaders, and that are likely to acquire a certain degree of financial autonomy on the spot without dependence on external bodies. To give is not to put on a drip or to be dependent but to grow together in communion of heart (2012, 161).

Concerning the American missionaries in CAR, Malipou notes that when they are absent from the mission field, the missionary society suspends its support. He explains that: "when an American missionary is not on the surface, the churches in America that support him can no longer invest materially and financially for the simple reason that their fellow man is not on the mission field to follow the management" (Malipou 2007, 28).

Vandepoll (2012, 251) comments, "In the spirit of true partnership, the organizations that send missionaries take into account the wishes and needs of the churches on the ground. Local leaders have a say in the decisions to be made, the allocation of resources, priorities, etc. They take part in the decision-making process on an equal footing." He laments that one of the difficulties is the inequality of the mission's partners. He quotes Padilla, who observes that: "Although the centre of gravity of Christianity is no longer in the North and the West, but in the South and the East, many Christian leaders in the North and West, especially in the United States, continue to assume that they are in charge of defining the strategy for the evangelization of the world" (Vandepoll 2012, 252). It would be insightful to examine the history of the BMM's establishment in Oubangui-Chari.

### **Preparing the Natives for the Rest of the Work**

From the moment the natives became involved in the work, the activities of the missionaries focused on training in Bible schools, developing Christian literature, youth ministry, and medical works. They devoted themselves to preaching, teaching baptism, and building places of worship, which increased churches and promoted the multiplication of places of worship (Rosenau 1958, 31). Thiessen (1961, 228) writes that by 1955, the BMM had a dozen stations and almost 100 servants.

Early on, the pioneer missionaries understood and acted on the field of mission according to Gehman's (2004, 131) principle that Africans should evangelize Africa. As the work grew, the missionaries set to work with the men and women whom God called to serve their people full-time. Observing that the natives had a reading problem and therefore could not read the Bible, the Baptist missionaries included adult literacy in their curriculum. This opportunity allowed them to prepare native evangelists and later pastors for the edification of



converts. The training of God's servants took place in Bible schools. The citizens of these schools are responsible for proclaiming the Good News to the villages on the outskirts of the schools and mission centers; this is how they spread the good news and planted new churches.

Although these planted churches were self-governing according to the functioning of the Baptist churches, they were nevertheless linked with the mission stations and other Baptist churches. In order to introduce the natives to financial self-sufficiency, they were taught to support their pastors after planting churches, however, with a very insignificant salary. The missionaries also encouraged churches to support evangelists who had planted young churches and ministered among them. At this stage, the churches were considered self-sufficient to recruit a full-time pastor to work with them. Many conversions took place through these works, and although some of the converts did not manifest true conversion, others had sincere faith and experienced rejoicing and walking with Christ.

Regarding the quality of training of indigenous people on the BMM side, Göran (2012, 375) observes that:

The Mid-Mission had chosen to train its local church leaders only at the Bible School level using only the Sango language. In addition, it maintained a strict distinction and hierarchical order between missionaries and Africans. All of this would be negative for unity and cohesion and would create divisions between local churches and also between different groups in the context of Mid-Mission.

From this observation, it appears that the Baptist missionaries had not adequately prepared the natives for the succession, and there was a gap between them. As a result, there were splits within the BMM in 1956, 1972, 1977, and 1995 Gounoumoundjou (2003, 5-9). These splinter groups organized themselves respectively into the following national associations: Comité Mission Baptiste, Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches of the Central African Republic (AEBEC), Fraternal Union of Baptist Churches (UFEB), and the National Association of Baptist Churches (ANEB). The pro-BMM members organized after the last split into the Community of Independent Baptist Churches.

On the social level, the missionaries of the BMM were more inclined towards the healthcare sector. They opened clinics in Bangassou, Kaga Bandoro, Morouba, Bakouma, and Kémbé. In Ippy, on the other hand, they opened a hospital with modern equipment and qualified staff (Rosenau 1958, 52). As the needs grew, Indigenous midwives and medical evangelists were trained. After the autonomy of the churches today, these centers do not function as they did in the days when missionaries were very active. However, the operation is maintained by medical evangelists trained for this purpose. On the educational level, unlike the missionaries of Örebro, who quickly integrated the school activity at work in the mission





stations for the development of the church, the Baptist missionaries opened schools specifically for their children's education.

### **From the BMM to CIBC**

The bilateral relationship that should prevail between missions and planted churches is expressed by Greenway (2000, 102) as follows:

According to the New Testament, an effective pioneer is recognized by the fact that the churches he has planted can come under the responsibility of local spiritual leaders within a reasonable period of time. He can then go and plant other churches elsewhere. We pity the churches run by missionaries who, after having found them, do not want to let go of the reins. This is an open door to hostility and division.

The autonomy of the CIBC dates back to 1995 when the last split occurred between the BMM and the National Association of Baptist Churches (NABC). The members who favored the BMM organized themselves into a national association, the CIBC. The autonomy was slow due to internal dissension caused by the problem of leadership, financial, and material interests. It took almost 75 years to hand over autonomy to the natives. Unlike the Evangelical Mission of Oubangui (EMO), the missionaries handed over the leadership of the churches to the natives in 1940. At the pastors' conference in Bangui from 24 to 27 February 1967, they set up the national association, the Fraternal Union of Evangelical Churches, and the Orëbro Mission passed the baton to the relay in the 1960s (Göran 2012, 367).

### ***Autonomy of Management***

Leadership autonomy refers to the ability of the leaders of the newly born community to take the leadership in the work. Elmer (1996, 30) noted that the pioneer BMM missionary Haas could speak as many as nine languages. He learned new languages, including French, the language of the colonialists. Unlike the latter, most of the missionaries who followed did not have a taste for the French language, which was a blockage to the preparation of the national leaders to take over the direction of the work. Göran mentioned that leaders were only trained in Bible schools and the national language, Sango.

For this reason, pastors could not validly represent the churches before the state. Blocher and Blandenier (1998, 259) note that Catholic missionaries, especially the Jesuits who evangelized China, ably represented the church before the state and the authorities. We can consider the case of Matteo Ricci, who, in addition to adopting the local culture and language, gained the respect of the Chinese emperor and acquired considerable influence at the imperial court thanks to his knowledge.



In some Baptist churches, young people who have gone to school and university have expressed a desire to organize services in the French language. However, lay members and students conducted services in French because pastors could not as they were limited. Due to the limited educational level of pastors and their philosophy of ministry, some members who had reached a high social class were leaving the churches of the CIBC for the African independent churches. Pastors could not bring innovations to the ministry's socio-economic and religious challenges.

The first pastor trained at a higher level was Pastor Malipou René. He was trained at the Brothers' Faculty of Biblical Theology and received his Master of Divinity in 1995. God, in his providence, prepared this pastor for this historic situation, just at the time of the crisis that led to the separation from the National Association of Baptist Churches and, at the same time, the autonomy of the Baptist churches. When Pastor Malipou became director of the Sibut Bible Institute that same year, he brought about a reform by raising the level of Bible school to an institute. Since then, classes have been taught in French, something that the other four Bible schools of the CIBC have not been able to get rid of the tradition of the missionaries, but they continue to teach in Sango. The missionaries subsequently supported some pastors to follow the formation at the Brethren's Faculty of Biblical Theology at the bachelor's and Master's levels. They also endorsed Pastor Malipou in doing doctoral studies in the United States of America in 2007. Two other pastors defended their thesis in theology in Cameroon in 2022.

The creation of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Bangui in 2010 breathed new life into the community. Dr Malipou explains that the idea was born when he met Dr. Dannenberg (the current dean), a PhD Student at Baptist Bible School in the United States of America. God had put it in their hearts to discuss the possibility of creating the present faculty, and the first year of this faculty functioned as a capacity-building seminar for pastors. One year later, it began training in the normal cycle, awarding bachelor's and master's degrees. According to the Baptist seminary records, the leaders who have been trained are as follows: Doctors of Ministry (3), Masters (14), and Bachelor (20).

The objective calls for awareness of the new leaders' responsibility and commitment. The missionaries have done their part, but the present generation of trained leaders has a burden of responsibility. On the political level, the founding president of the CAR, Barthélémy Boganda, quoted by Gomina-Pampali (2001, 53), said: "Freedom means responsibility; we cannot take the former without the latter; otherwise, we will fall into



anarchy." CIBC leaders need to realize that when God calls, He gives a responsibility that must be fulfilled (Matthew 25:14-28).

### ***The Autonomy of Evangelization or Mission***

The mandate of evangelism is biblical. When we consider the example of the Apostle Paul, his strategy focused first on preaching the gospel in lands that had not yet known the good news of salvation in Jesus (Rom 15:20). Subsequently, he empowered the new community to continue the work (Acts 14:23). The new community continues to respond to the gospel to the surrounding people and expand elsewhere (1 Thess 1:6-8). This is in obedience to the command of the risen Christ to make disciples of all nations, strategically beginning with the immediate surroundings and gradually expanding to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

BMM missionaries did their part of the work by braving the hardships of their time to bring the good news of salvation in Jesus. The zeal of the pioneer missionary Haas, his great desire to respond to the flame of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, testifies to his yearning to obey this command of the Lord. During the centenary celebration in Bangui, the BMM President confirmed that the number of BMM missionaries who have set foot on Central African soil since the creation of the mission is 237 and that the missionaries are now in over 50 countries around the world.

This part is a question seeking to understand the achievements of evangelization accomplished by the CIBC near and far. We start at the root by giving pastors the right foundation. In some Bible schools, evangelism and church planting are part of the curriculum, yet sometimes, they are not given the attention they deserve. Pastors are already trained in evangelism and church planting but have a deficiency. Furthermore, as Conn (1982, 12-13) remarked, pastors are trained with the talent to communicate the message without seeking to understand the receivers' needs. This has harmed the CIBC's vision regarding the church's mission. For example, when a CIBC pastor is not in charge of a local church, he is called an evangelist pastor. This appellation is considered a derogatory title to ridicule this pastor.

### ***Mission to the Neighboring Community***

Regarding the church's mission, contrary to the vision and practice of several evangelical churches in CAR, the churches of the CIBC do not have an adequate strategy in place. The Association of National Baptist Churches separated from the BMM in 1995 has an evangelization plan in the CAR. An Evangelism and Church Planting Department plans to plant several churches each year in its action plan. It is the same case with the Churches of the Brethren, where they have an evangelistic and church planting department. In addition, they



have a missionary institute in Mbaïki, a town southwest of Bangui, which trains missionaries to serve in unreached areas among minority peoples and Muslims. The CIBC had set up an evangelization department, but this did not work, and it was eventually closed because of misunderstanding and lack of support. In an Extraordinary Assembly of the CIBC in Bangui in 2023 regarding the update on the church's mission, the association president expressly affirmed that each church is responsible for evangelizing the surrounding peoples but stated that CIBC is not responsible for organizing evangelistic programs. Of the more than 750 churches the CIBC currently has, indigenous people plant less than 8% of new churches. Most churches existed since the time of the missionaries.

For example, the church was planted by the Masters and Mistresses of the Churches of the Bangui Region in Bouboui, a village 45 km from the city of Bangui, in 2018. During the planting of this church, the Masters and Mistresses mobilized more than 15 churches of the CIBC of Bangui and the two American missionaries who were still working in the CAR. After the door-to-door companions, I was invited to project evangelistic films in the evenings. However, for the follow-up work, the initial suggestion was to have each pastor of these more than 15 local churches take turns each Sunday for Sunday services. Later, the churches were put under the supervision of one of the established churches. Evangelization among the churches of the CIBC is carried out by bodies or movements such as the African Evangelical Youth, the women's movements, or the Choir. These movements go to the churches they have targeted to carry out evangelism and especially revival to support the works of these local churches.

### *The Mission to the Unreached*

Contrary to the prediction of the Edinburgh World Mission Conference portending an uncertain future for Christianity in Africa, this continent has become the center of gravity of Christianity (Perbi and Ngugi 2022, 23-24; Walls 1995, 6). This situation also requires the responsibility of African churches in general and particularly those of the CIBC churches. First of all, the missionary identity of each Christian is not yet recognized by the members of the CIBC. Moreover, for the Christians of the CIBC, a missionary is typically a white man. No CIBC missionaries are working in the CAR or with unreached peoples such as the pygmies nor among the Muslims and the Fulani.

Regarding the strategy of itinerant evangelists, this approach was encouraged by American missionaries, especially in the Mbomou region in eastern CAR. The missionaries supported the evangelists financially and materially, who in turn presented them with reports



of their activities. Since churches were not involved in these activities, after the departure of the missionaries, itinerant evangelists were no longer supported as they were in the days of the missionaries. Hence, this approach waned. However, Wiher (2014, 58) considers that the church must maintain the missionary dimension in all its ministries and structures.

The BMM was established in Chad in 1925 after CAR, but BMM churches in Chad have missionaries working among Muslims. This is to say that the churches of the CIBC are unprepared for the globalization of the church's mission or for the reverse mission, from Africa to the rest of the world.

### ***Financial Autonomy***

Financial autonomy is about understanding how the community takes care of itself in its financial functioning. For a better understanding, I will look at the state of the integral ministry within the CIBC and how the community organizes itself for its care.

When we look at the basis of the churches' preparation for self-reliance, we see holistic ministry. In the history of the establishment of the Mission in Cameroon, Blandenier (2003, 375) mentioned the work of the pioneer Alfred Saker, who was "concerned to take into account human needs in their totality. He fought energetically against slavery and ritual murder. He introduced fruit trees and market gardening into the country... He opened a vocational school where they taught agriculture, brick-making, hitherto unknown, and construction."

As far as the Baptist missionaries are concerned, they opened schools in 1922 in Sibut and Bangassou, but these schools no longer exist today (Rosenau 1958, 17-18). A school was also opened in Kaga Bandoro, and it later became a school for educating the missionaries' children (Rosenau 1958, 26). Missionaries also opened health centers, but most of these facilities no longer operate. The financial autonomy of the CIBC churches is problematic. Contributions and channeling funds collected in churches have difficulty reaching the Executive Committee to execute the activities programmed. Most of the finances supporting the Baptist Bible Seminary in Bangui come from the US.

Another aspect to consider is that the political or administrative authorities of the country are sometimes invited to honor with their presence at large ecclesiastical gatherings such as general assemblies or conferences. They come and contribute financially to the smooth running of the activities. When the political authorities sometimes support the work, the ecclesiastical leaders show financial malfeasance. The officials who receive these sums do



not say their exact amount and manage these funds opaquely. These cases were recorded at the centenary celebration and during a women's conference in Bangui in 2024.

For these reasons, we agree with Pascal and Fabienne Bonnaz (n.d., n.p.) that: "Indigenous leaders, in turn, need to teach churches healthily about the benefits of self-reliance and self-financing." The autonomy of the Evangelical churches in the CAR implies that they no longer need to be fully taken care of as they were at their establishment. Much of the church's financial burden should be their responsibility in the partnership phase. Leaders should teach members to support the work with their possessions while being good stewards.

### ***The Partnership between Missions and Offspring Churches***

Malipou (2007, 118) defines partnership as "a complementary relationship driven by a common goal and supported by a willingness to learn and develop in obedience to God." He argues that partnership is biblical because, according to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, the church comprises many members of one body who must play their part to realize the growth of the whole body (Eph 4:1-16). Hillion (2014, 130) defines partnership as: "a collaborative relationship, which is beneficial to both partners, with a common goal, that goes beyond what each of the two partners could do individually." He adds, "Communion between Christians of the North and the South can be expressed through various partnerships with a view to solidarity within the Church, evangelization, social and political action, theological education and other fields" (2014, 135).

Göran mentioned the relationship between Baptist missionaries and trained leaders regarding the hierarchical distinction between missionaries and Africans. This had undoubtedly led to sources of tension and division within the BMM. Raynaud (2012, 155) states, "In any case, for the church or the mission, we do not own the gift we have just made, and it must not inspire any sense of superiority." There has indeed been tremendous progress in the relationship between missionaries and the indigenous peoples. This new era requires collaboration in decision-making and the delegation of authority to Indigenous churches.

Johnstone and Mandryk (2001, 94) note that: "Missionary societies have played a large role in education and health, as well as in church planting, scripture translation, etc. These missionaries gradually withdrew, and their numbers greatly diminished. Today's major challenge is a partnership of equality between churches and missions." In this way, the mission and the newly planted churches could achieve the common goal of disciplining all nations. Practically, missionaries and planted churches find it difficult to live the partnership in humility and mutual respect. However, a good partnership practice will allow everyone,



missionaries and members of the native churches, to put their talents to work for the Lord Jesus (Matt. 25:14–30).

## Conclusion

Through the new challenges of the autonomy of the CIBC, the study evaluated the functioning of these churches to understand the origin of its challenges. The preparation of the natives for self-reliance has been slow, as it took place in 1995, almost 74 years after the BMM was installed on the Mission Field. Also, the training of leaders was not done so early at a high level to enable them to assume their responsibilities competently. Thus, preparing leaders for leadership is a real issue. The functioning of the CIBC churches also presents many missionary and financial challenges. CIBC churches lack a missionary vision and a strategy for evangelism, church planting, and growth. The churches also lack awareness of the financial support for the work.

It is up to the leaders of the CIBC to become aware of their responsibility to confront these challenges that prevent these churches from fulfilling their missional mandate.

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