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Interview of John Kledzik

John Kledzik

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

Volume II, No. 5

This is Volume II, No. 5 of the Harding College Living History of Missions series. I am Evertt Huffard, visiting professor of missions at Harding, and shall be interviewing John Kledzik from Zambia who is principal of Zambia Christian College.

Huffard: I would like for you to tell us just about when the school began first of all, John.

Kledzik: The first thing that we have here is a long history of educational work in Zambia. In earlier days the older missionaries had worked in primary schools. At present I am working in this high school. The high school itself is six years old. It started in 1965. The history of the primary school work goes back quite a bit further than that. I don't know the exact date of its beginning, but early missionaries had tried to help the Africans as they came in to try to learn to read and write and to understand more things than they had known previously, to be able to study the Bible.

Huffard: How long have you been there with the school?

Kledzik: I have just been there for four years.

Huffard: Could you give us something of an idea of what you are trying to do with the school in Zambia?

Kledzik: The purpose of this high school, as I see it, is the building of leadership, of trying to get these young people who are still open to changes in ideas, whose personalities are still being formed, working with the interested ones, to find those interested in what we are doing and to give them training in Bible study as well as their general academic curriculum so that they can work with the church, the leaders and teachers in the church in the coming years when they are finished with their work.

Huffard: About how many churches do you have in the area that is served by the school?

Kledzik: The school is in a transition period of opening up from one of the provinces, the southern province, of trying to draw from areas outside of that to the other eight provinces. Within the southern province where most of the educational work has been centered, we have roughly 80 churches. There is no very accurate count of them.

Huffard: Do you have boarding students who come from all of the area or just day students?

Kledzik: Primarily, we maintain a boarding facility because of the fact that our student body does come from such a wide area. Even inside that province, we have to maintain facilities for them as the transportation is not such that we could have day students.

Huffard: How many are members of the church by the time they come to the high school?

Kledzik: We have maintained at least 85%, I think. It has varied, sometimes up to 90% of the student body are Christians.

Huffard: You don't use the school then for evangelistic purposes particularly but more for the training of leadership?

Kledzik: That's right. We try to build on the foundation that has been laid in the past and try to work with students from Christian homes or those who are themselves Christians.

Huffard: How many American missionaries have been in the area in the past? Do you know?

Kledzik: Not off hand. I could name some of them. Brother Sherrill, of course, was the first one to influence things there. He changed some of the first Africans who came north from Southern Rhodesia to Northern Rhodesia and started preaching there. Earlier people who had worked there are the Brittells. Of course, they had a family there and worked there with some of their young people. Brother W. N. Short and Brother Brown worked there. Brother J. D. Merritt, Brother Shewmaker and Brother Pierce, for a time, worked there.

Huffard: This goes back quite a number of years then.

Kledzik: Yes. Brother Merritt has been there 44 years now in his time and there was a little bit going on before he got there but not too much.

Huffard: Could you give anything of the religious background of the people in the area where the church is?

Kledzik: Working as we do in southern province, things, as I say, were limited to that province for quite some time. This is mainly among the Tonga tribe. I'll present it basically from their point of view. The Tonga people are monotheistic. They recognize one supreme being, one creator, God. Although he is a little bit more remote from things, as we would learn from Bible revelation, they do their daily contact with the spiritual world, usually through the old people who are dead. The spirits of their ancestors are the ones that they have immediate contact with. As best as I understand their religion, the spirits of the ancestors work to keep them on the right road, to keep their behavior correct and to keep them walking in the good way. In some ways, I don't think that they worship their ancestors. I think this is a fallacy that has been built up over the years, but I think that their ancestors are somewhat like mediators between them and God, although they deal primarily with their ancestors.

Huffard: Now, most of the people that had been converted there are from this background, right?

Kledzik: Right.

Huffard: What would be the general educational standard of the people there?

Kledzik: The country as a whole has a rather low educational standard. There has been estimates of roughly 70% illiteracy within the country, so 30% of the people can read and write. In that 30% then you can build on up from the ones who have elementary school education and on up to the very, very few who have finished high school and have gone on to the university.

Huffard: In this particular study, what do you hope to see accomplished by the school?

Kledzik: The government has mounted an educational program. As far as the budget goes that has been the number one priority, enlarging the educational system. Secondary education is going to be a reality for quite a number of people. Last year they had about 15,000 students begin the eighth grade. This year that would be roughly the same thing or a slight increase. At least there is going to be that much.

If we have young people who are Christians, who are interested in Christian things, who are interested in promoting the cause of Christ, who have the advantage of additional Bible training, of seeing a Christian approach to life and a Christian explanation of life in their hearts, I think that they will have a greater influence on the church and show a capacity for greater progress than we would have with young people who have come through the general government schools and had learned a little Bible here and there along the side. I think this greatly enhances their capacity to do great things for God, to have the greater influence for Him in the community.

Huffard: The graduates of the school will be accepted in this upper educational society, would they?

Kledzik: Yes, they would. The thing that would parallel the experiences there would be their test. The government has a test that is taken by all high school graduates and those who pass the test receive certificates and those who don't pass the test have to go on and do more work. Basically, they are aiming for that certification test.

Huffard: Do you have much of a class society where education makes a difference?

Kledzik: The people who are educated are open to a great degree of advancement and wealth. You don't have the discrimination on lines of education yet because most of the people just within their own background, their parents lived in the villages, their parents were peasants, were uneducated and they farmed with oxen and made barely enough to stay alive. They haven't separated off in this rush for development that we have; they haven't alienated themselves from the village society and since 75% of the country is still in a rural setting that doesn't present itself as a danger for the country or for the church either as yet.

Huffard: Through education, it is possible to work up then without any difficulty?

Kledzik: Yes, I think so. Of course, there is the difficulty of have a saturation point in the country, producing more graduates than they actually need for this level of development, having some people who are educated and capable but yet no jobs for them. As yet they haven't reached that point.

Huffard: You feel that this will result eventually in the church reaching down from a higher educated people to the lower people which is a structure somewhat different than it is in most places where we start with the poor people and reach up.

Kledzik: I think the people right now that we are working with, if we hold a level at the secondary school, I don't think we will have an elite society created because I think the people who leave this school are going to end up in all sorts of jobs in the level of the government and industrial development. I think that drawing our students as we do from rural settings, some from city settings, that we are going across those barriers now, that we are continually drawing in leadership from rural areas as well, our teacher leadership. I think that because of this they will be more open to work in rural areas.

Huffard: Where do you get the finances for operating the school?

Kledzik: The secondary school is financed primarily by funds solicited here in the States. The Zambian people themselves supply some of the money but due to their low income which is no more than \$200 a year (the average income for all of the people in the country). Of course, some are far richer than that and some are poorer, of course. They aren't capable financially of assuming more at the time. The monetary expenditures, they assume a little better than 25% of the expenses now and about 75% is supplied from America. We are talking about roughly a \$100 per student per year cost. They are supplying roughly \$25. Of course, we charge a sports fee and we let them buy their own personal books, not text books, but Bibles, songbooks, dictionaries and things of this nature. Then, they pay a boarding fee as well. This is all income of money or defrayed expenses that we would have otherwise.

They have another contribution that they make toward the school and this is in the form of work. Each student is required to do four hours work per week that they are in school. They do all sorts of work that here in the States would be done by janitors or other maintenance people and who would earn their living from that. The students clean their own dormitories; they cut their own grass; they serve their own food; they clean their dining hall; they clean the classrooms. We use them when we were in construction for hauling brick. They helped me in wiring some of the buildings and doing mechanical repair work and things of this nature around the school. They round up the cattle each Friday afternoon and then they also help in dipping the cattle on Saturday morning. We have about 400 head of cattle there at the school. We hope that when we get the breeding program smoothed out, it will provide extra income as well.

Huffard: What percent of your teachers are Christians?

Kledzik: One hundred percent of the teachers are Christians.

Huffard: Do the teachers get a salary approximately the same as the teachers in the public school or the government schools there?

Kledzik: The government differentiates on salary scales between the Zambian and what they call the expatriate, the teacher who is recruited in a foreign country and brought to Zambia. The expatriate teacher makes quite a bit more money than the Zambian teacher does and is usually quite a bit better qualified. Right now they are putting Zambians into the school system who are not actually qualified for much in the way of teaching positions but for the purpose of filling in places as close as they can get to their academic work anyway. Our missionaries, I guess, receive salaries reasonably close to what the government teachers do, the expatriates.

Huffard: Now, by missionaries, you mean the teachers who are foreign, the teachers who are from the United States teaching in the school.

Kledzik: Right.

Huffard: What percent of the teachers would be nationals?

Kledzik: Our faculty numbers about fourteen and some of those teachers, quite a few of them, are wives who teach part time, half time, and so actually as far as full time teachers we don't have that many at this stage of the game. We have one Zambian who is teaching full time and probably we would get around six to eight full time teachers if you figured that according to hours of load.

Huffard: How much Bible do you teach?

Kledzik: We teach one hour or one class period of Bible each day for each student.

Huffard: Could you give us an idea of what you cover in the years of the school?

Kledzik: We have started out with the basic approach of doing somewhat of a survey program of the Old Testament, then going on into a few of the general books of the New Testament, of course, and the gospels just as a familiarization, then Acts and the growth and development of the church, and then coming back and doing a real intensive study of the teachings of Jesus as revealed in all of the gospel, to try to get more down to the idea of the teaching that Jesus is presenting there.

Huffard: I believe you told me earlier that the name of the school is not the same there as we know it here. Would you want to explain that?

Kledzik: Yes. Namwianga Mission is the location of the school, just outside of Kalomo, Zambia. From this we went first to Namwianga Christian College. College usually means a religious affiliated school, but that still was somewhat confusing to talk about that over here. The government wanted to get everything around to all being the same title so everything was normalized on secondary schools. We are Namwianga Christian Secondary School but due to the complicated spelling of Namwianga and the unusual pronunciation of it, it is generally called Zambia. Zambia is a place we can find on the map and most people in the United States would be confused if you just said Namwianga and they couldn't find anything on the map.

Huffard: Is there anything else that you can think about the school itself and the prospects for future workers that you would like to say before we start talking about you as an individual?

Kledzik: We are going to try to develop a type of trade training. It won't be extensive because of the limited amount of funds that we have available for it, but we want to try to develop that aspect. The way things are going in the educational system in Zambia now, not all of the curriculum is stiff enough. The curriculum that the government sets is stiff enough that the people don't have the capability to do the thing all the way out to the top to finish out the twelfth grade. Consequently, the normal practice is that they do the eighth, ninth and tenth grades and then they take a test and 50% of them go on out into the world at that level and then the other 50% go on to the eleventh and twelfth grades.

What our basic idea is now is to start in with some type of trade training that would utilize the skills of the students who may not be adept in the academic field so much but still have plenty of spiritual development and have a lot of skills they can use with their hands and be reliable people and benefit from the previous three years and also gain more Bible training and assume still greater responsibilities in life because of the extra training. In that way, rather than just letting them go out with three years of training, then to go ahead and work in the total five years but change the curriculum for some.

Huffard: Did you tell us how many students were in the school?

Kledzik: The school is set up for 240 students without the trade training program. That might put it on up to near 300.

Huffard: You hope to reach this capacity soon?

Kledzik: Yes, within probably the next year or so we will have the full 240. We have just been gradually letting them build up as the students come in and we prefer

to let the students go all the way from the eighth grade to the twelfth grades. If we lose any students, we just leave those places open rather than trying to grab someone to put in there who hasn't benefited from the previous year's training.

Huffard: Now, John, I would like to talk about you as an individual since there probably will be a number of young people who would like to serve in approximately the same capacity that you are serving in. What, in your past training, has been perhaps most valuable to you in these four years that you have been in Zambia?

Kledzik: I follow different lines of interest than my career prior to my college education. I was out five years working before I returned to college, to Lipscomb. I had a lot of connection with the automotive field, repairing things, mechanical ideas. We worked in hot rod clubs and such things as this. I found that unusually useful there in that in Zambia there are few people who really know anything about mechanical things, repairing, such as this. I have had a chance there working with the school to use every ability that I even thought I ever had and more, to learn more things there as well.

Huffard: Were there any courses in college that you feel have been of great benefit to you?

Kledzik: Of course, I have a bias here. I was a sociology major, and I think the training that I had in sociology was helpful from the point of view of helping me to get over a feeling of great superiority by being an American and to look at different ways that people have as being different rather than better or worse. Of course, I wouldn't claim to be 100% on that but it has helped a great deal to have a better view of the people in Zambia.

Huffard: What would you say would have probably been your greatest problem in making the adjustment in the new environment in Zambia?

Kledzik: Taken from the point of view of cultural things, I think just the idea of being a foreigner, of being in a position where you feel anyway that everyone else knows what's going on and you are groping.

Huffard: What advice would you give to students who are planning to be missionaries?

Kledzik: Depending on the area they would go into, I think they really have to work hard on the point of view of being able to help people without people getting the idea that it is charity. In other words to condescend without being condescending.

Huffard: At Harding what advice would you give to us that might better prepare students to do mission work?

Kledzik: I have been impressed by the emphasis that there is on mission work at Harding. I think that the greater thing that we've got in our years ahead is to try to reduce the gap between a person in college and the work that can be done. There are a lot of adjustments that have to be made, of course, in going into a foreign country. I think that those adjustments are reducing. There is more knowledge about them and people can be more forewarned. It is still difficult for a young person in college to envision working in a foreign field. I guess it seems like there is every discouragement that can possibly come when you try to get into a foreign field. I think that the church is being more aware of encouraging young people. I don't think that the churches themselves encourage young people very much in mission work. It has

been the responsibility of the missionary to have visions, to dream dreams and to hope and expect and be interested in planting the word. The churches have to be wooed--not coerced--but you have to do everything you can think of.

Huffard: What age do you think would be well for someone to come in your area or is there a particular age that you would recommend?

Kledzik: I think that by having a structured situation, that is where we have a school going, is something that is recognized by the people and by the government as being a good thing so it is not a foreign or strange thing to them. It is a situation where the relationship between us and the people are pretty well structured and reasonably well defined. I think that it would be possible to take people younger in a situation like that than to say for them to start by themselves going into just a village situation or trying to go into the town and set up work on their own. I think from this point of view that their initial contact with the work there would be good at the school even if they didn't choose to remain there.

Huffard: Do you have need for American Christian teachers now in the school?

Kledzik: I think we will have for quite some time. There are people in Zambia who are qualified to teach in the secondary school, but getting people that are qualified and who are Christians and who are zealous about their Christianity and who are interested in education and who see the opportunity that there is in young people. With all of those qualifications they are very difficult to find and so the growth of the Zambian teaching staff is going to be slow.

Huffard: Is it your aim to eventually use all national teachers?

Kledzik: I think so. As well as I understand the philosophy of the Board of Directors they intend to add Zambian teachers to the staff as they are available and find qualified ones, not being interested in putting Zambian teachers just for the sake of getting Zambian teachers.

Huffard: You mentioned the Board of Directors. Would you tell us something about the structure and oversight of the school?

Kledzik: The school is operated by a Board of Directors. At the present time, Dr. George Benson is the chairman of this board. The board members are drawn from many different cities and some of the missionaries in Zambia are on the board. They are responsible directly for the policy of the school and for the overall administration and continuance of the school. The school has to work in cooperation with the educational department in the Zambian government so that there is no clash of interest there.

Our teachers that we have coming from the States are usually supported by various congregations. I am being supported by Brookmeade church of Christ in Nashville. So each one of the American missionaries that are teaching there in the school is supported by a church in America and thereby you have a lot of relationships where there is not a direct authority over people but we have to work in connection with and work out smooth relationships with them. I think that even in a situation of this nature that there is a great opportunity for the good that I have seen done already in some of the lives of these young people and I think that they are really going to be a great asset to the church and the richness of their faith.

Huffard: John, it has certainly been a pleasure to interview you for this Living History of Missions series and to get an idea of what the educational method of mission work can do and is doing in Zambia. May God bless you in the work.