

A Triangular Conflict: The Nyasaland Protectorate and Two Missions, 1915–33

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The idea that the churches became agents of empire through their missionary activity is very popular, but it is too simple. Established Churches, such as those of England and Scotland, could certainly be used by government, usually willingly; so could the Roman Catholic Church in the empires of other countries. But the position of the smaller churches, usually with no settler community behind them, was different. This study examines the effects of the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 on the British Churches of Christ mission in Nyasaland (modern Malawi). What is empire? The Colonial Office and the local administration might view a situation in different ways. Their decisions could thus divide native Christians from the UK, and even cause division in the UK church itself, as well as strengthening divisions on the mission field between different churches. Thus, even in the churches, imperial actions could foster the African desire for independence of empire.

For the last thirty years, historians have been pointing out the ambiguities of the relationship between Christian missions and the imperial government.¹ To some extent this depended on whether the churches engaged in the missions were established or not, but it was also affected by rivalry between different missionary organizations. Colonial governments tried to maintain neutrality, not least where settler communities were small. The First World War put some of these relationships under pressure, particularly in Africa, where the borders between German and British colonies became a neglected

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¹ See Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1990), especially 133–90; Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester, 2004), especially 255–330; Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (Abingdon and New York, 2010), especially 171–212.

front line. In extreme cases missionaries were interned or deported.² The brief but violent rising led by John Chilembwe in Malawi early in 1915 drew African support from several of the missions other than the dominant Church of Scotland, and led to the expulsion of all the missionaries from the Churches of Christ mission (among others) in the Nyasaland Protectorate.³ This article explores the consequences of that expulsion for the African Churches of Christ in the period until the missionaries' return in 1929–31, and offers an explanation for what, for a mixture of financial and doctrinal reasons, became a permanent division.

The origins of the Churches of Christ mission in Malawi were quite recent (1908), and different from their other missions in Burma / Thailand and India. In the latter two there was plenty of territory without any other missions; the intention was also to establish 'industrial missions', where the local people would be able to work to increase their wealth, thereby avoiding a drain on UK funds. In southern Malawi the origin lay with the Church of Christ in Cape Town, established by British settlers, some of whose members moved north in the 1890s into the gold- and diamond-mining country, which became heavily dependent on immigrant labour from Zimbabwe and Malawi (as it still is). The leading missionary was George Hollis, a former South African policeman, originally from Australia, who had become disillusioned with British rule during the second South African War (1899–1902). He was attracted by the ideas of Joseph Booth, whose book, *Africa for the African*, caused controversy when published in 1897.⁴ Booth was a religious chameleon, changing denominations frequently, but with Baptist roots. John Chilembwe was one of his first converts, and accompanied Booth to the United States in 1895, where he studied at the Baptist Lynchburg Academy (1897–1900). Booth had tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade the British Churches of Christ to begin an African mission in

² See the important article by M. Louise Pirouet, 'East African Christians and World War I', *JAH* 19 (1978), 117–30.

³ The post-independence names will be used except in cases such as this one, where a specific institution of government is denoted.

⁴ George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh, 1958), 7–123; see also John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859–1966* (Woodbridge, 2012), 127–46; together with relevant background in idem, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875–1940* (Cambridge, 1977), 207–20; Harry Langworthy, 'Africa for the African'; *The Life of Joseph Booth* (Blantyre, 1996), 190–3.

1905–6, and in 1906 urged the annual meeting to use African evangelists, rather than government grants. He was rebuffed by the Foreign Missions Committee (FMC) because of the revolutionary implications of his ideas.⁵ When the annual meeting changed its mind in 1908, it is not clear whether the FMC members were aware of the extent to which southern Malawi was a melting pot for different Christian groups.

Two other points should be made. Although Churches of Christ had resisted pre-millennial and adventist ideas since their institutional origins in the 1840s, they had not previously encountered Jehovah's Witnesses. The *Watch Tower* movement, as it was known in southern Africa, copied many of the Witnesses' teachings, without being institutionally connected. It was particularly strong in Malawi and had its own prophet, Eliot Kamwana. His message of 'regeneration, through baptism, leading to salvation at the millennium' was similar to Churches of Christ teaching on baptism for the remission of sins, although the latter never fixed a date for the millennium.⁶ The Churches of Christ practice of baptizing only on confession of faith, often including converts from other churches, made them unpopular with other missions. Secondly, their polity, in which local elders presided at weekly celebrations of the Lord's supper, made it urgent for them to ordain local leaders, as well as to commission native evangelists.⁷ According to their understanding of apostolic practice, the missionary's presence ceased to be necessary after the local church had been planted. Both these issues were important in the problems that followed 1915.

⁵ The FMC stated: 'We do not find the Apostles organized the churches to secure that the Roman Government should restore its territories to former occupiers or interfere with such subjects': *Bible Advocate*, 30 March 1906, 203, cf. *ibid.*, 17 August 1906, 517, 523; Langworthy, *Africa for the African*, 192–3. Although Booth claimed to be a member of a Church of Christ in Birmingham, no record of this has been found.

⁶ McCracken, *Politics and Christianity*, 204. Kamwana predicted that Christ would take control of the world in October 1914: see John McCracken, ed., *Voices from the Chitembe Rising* (Oxford, 2015), 27, 207–8. Discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses continued even after independence in the 1960s: Klaus Fiedler, 'Power at the Receiving End: The Jehovah's Witnesses' Experience in One-Party Malawi', in Kenneth R. Ross, ed., *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective* (Blantyre, 1996), 149–76.

⁷ For the importance of native evangelists elsewhere in East Africa, see the classic study by M. Louise Pirouet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda 1891–1914* (London, 1978).

The Malawi mission station of the British Churches of Christ in Namiwawa was just to the north of the Bruce estates, where the Chilembwe rising began; a group of several families regularly walked the thirty miles to the Namiwawa mission for Sunday service.⁸ Those estates were effectively a law unto themselves: wages were low, with a proportion paid in kind; brutal physical punishment of workers was regular; schools and churches were banned.⁹ In 1915 W. J. Livingstone, manager of the estates, was beheaded by Chilembwe, and his head used in a subsequent religious service led by Chilembwe.¹⁰ Fifteen African members of the Churches of Christ, including several evangelists, were arrested on suspicion of being involved in the rising, and some were executed. Others were given prison sentences of varying lengths.

The most drastic result of the rising for Churches of Christ was the government's expulsion of all European missionaries from the territory, a process completed by 1916.¹¹ This did not eliminate the Churches of Christ in Malawi; it simply left Africans in charge, as at the Livingstonia Mission when missionaries volunteered to assist in the war effort. After the war, despite pressure placed on the Colonial Office by the FMC via government ministers and sympathetic MPs, the Churches of Christ were almost the last 'banned' mission to be readmitted, in 1928. Meanwhile the seeds for internal division had been sown.¹² The Colonial Office always referred the matter to the protectorate administration, where the churches were represented by the Church of England or the Church of Scotland, which had always resented proselytization by Churches of Christ.¹³ However, in

⁸ H. Philpott, 'Namiwawa Looking Back', *Our Missions Overseas*, no. 68 (October 1959), 5–6.

⁹ McCracken, *History*, 130–2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 140–1; McCracken regards the rising as a revolt against tangible injustice, rather than a proto-nationalist revolt.

¹¹ The way in which the British Churches of Christ mission became one of the scapegoats for that rising was first described in 1958 by Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 341–55.

¹² The Livingstonia missionaries who had been absent in the war also had difficulties in re-establishing their authority afterwards: McCracken, *History*, 156.

¹³ Malawi had been settled by Scots, and in 1914 a significant number of members of the Executive Council were associated with the Church of Scotland mission. Institutional links are described by John McCracken, 'Church and State in Malawi: The Role of the Scottish Presbyterian Missions 1875–1965', in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, eds, *Christian Missionaries & the State in the Third World* (Oxford and Athens, OH, 2002), 176–93, especially 181–2. Alexander Hetherwick, who served the Blantyre

1927, when the new chief secretary of the protectorate government, Alexander Rankin, was in London, FMC representatives met with him alone, and an agreement was reached.¹⁴

Rankin's permission for the missionaries to return was conditional on the mission joining the Federated Nyasaland Missions, in which white men had ultimate authority.¹⁵ In October 1928 the FMC authorized the purchase of the Baptist Industrial Mission at Gowa, and applied to join the Federated Protestant Missions of Nyasaland.¹⁶ It submitted a resolution to the 1929 annual conference, approving the resumption of work in Africa.¹⁷ In January 1930 the Gowa property was secured, and in April the FMC received, or 'generally accepted', the constitution of the Federated Missions.¹⁸

The decision-making on each side in this story needs disentangling. In 1915 the governor acted partly under the Defence of the Realm Act and partly under the Nyasaland Defence Ordinance of 1914 in internment and subsequently expelling the Malawi missionaries.¹⁹ There were questions in the House of Commons about the rising that brought it to the attention of the colonial secretary. In Malawi itself, the governor, many white settlers and their representatives in the Legislative Council, who keenly resented African claims to social equality with Europeans, believed that the root of the problems was the education of Africans in mission schools, where they were encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. There was even

Mission (1886–1928), was a friend of the governor in 1915, Sir Charles Bowring, and both were Freemasons, the latter having been grand master of the Nyasaland lodge. The influential Livingstonia Mission was associated with, but independent of, the (United) Free Church of Scotland before 1914, but by the 1920s was preparing for union with the Church of Scotland, to form the Church of Central Africa (Presbyterian) in 1924: Stanley, *Bible and Flag*, 126; Ian and Jane Linden, *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland 1889–1939* (London, 1974), 90, 152.

¹⁴ Sir Hector Duff, chief secretary (i.e. head of the colonial administration) at the time of the Chilembwe Rising, had been forced to retire from Africa because of ill-health.

¹⁵ The Federated Protestant Missions of Nyasaland, formed in 1924, followed an earlier body established in 1904. One aim was to secure 'comity agreements' between missions in the same territory to ensure cooperation rather than competition. Their effectiveness in Malawi was weakened by the non-participation of the Roman Catholics and the (Anglican) Universities Mission to Central Africa. Marginal groups such as Seventh-Day Baptists, Churches of Christ and Jehovah's Witnesses were initially excluded.

¹⁶ London, SOAS, Churches of Christ Missionary Records [hereafter: C/C Records], Publications, MCM Box 1, FMC Minutes, 21, 20 October 1928 (§§18–20).

¹⁷ Resolutions 22 and 23, *Churches of Christ Year Book* (Birmingham, 1929), 176.

¹⁸ SOAS, C/C records, MCM Box 2, FMC Minutes, 26, 15 June 1929.

¹⁹ Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, 333.

a motion (subsequently withdrawn) moved by David Livingstone's grandson, A. Livingstone Bruce, to ban native education altogether. This drew the Presbyterian missions into action, both Livingstonia and the Church of Scotland, which mobilized Arthur Steel Maitland's support at the Colonial Office. He ensured that their interests were protected: the smaller missions lacked this influence in high places.²⁰ After the war the Colonial Office gradually lost interest. The Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 recommended improvements in the standard envisaged for schools and the Legislative Council appointed a director of education in 1926, followed by the introduction of a system of government curricula and inspection (in which mission schools were included) a year later.²¹ Thus 'empire' could mean London or Blantyre at different times. The educational changes explain why it was safe to change policy towards the Churches of Christ mission, because the changes ensured white control of schools. A new chief secretary was a great help.

On the Churches of Christ side, the primary actor was the FMC, with the support of other agencies such as the Anti-Slavery Society, so long as the scene of action was Westminster. This is reported, but not described, in the FMC's minutes and annual reports to the Churches of Christ conference. But, like the Seventh-Day Baptists and other smaller missions, they had no representatives in Nyasaland to plead their cause; almost inevitably they saw themselves as victims of the larger and older Presbyterian missions as much as the imperial government.

This should have marked a happy ending, but it did not. Soon after his arrival the first new missionary, Ernest Gray, made a preliminary visit to Namiwawa in May 1930, where he met Frederick Nkhonde and other leaders.²² Nkhonde asked for an increase in the

²⁰ Ibid. 374.

²¹ Ibid. 363; McCracken, *History*, 112, 143–4, 159–60. McCracken wrongly describes Churches of Christ as 'predominantly American-based'. There were no American Churches of Christ missionaries before 1939.

²² Several of them had been imprisoned in 1915. The two key Africans were Frederick Nkhonde and Ronald Kaundo. Their prison sentences were eventually commuted, and they were released in 1918 and 1920 respectively, when they immediately resumed their positions of leadership. Significantly, Frederick's account of this meeting was sent via Hollis in Cape Town to William Kempster, who had been collecting funds for Malawi mission work since the early 1920s: see correspondence published in *Christian Advocate*, 22 August 1930, 530–1. Gray's letter of 9 July 1930 is at *ibid.* 531; the original is in SOAS, C/C records, Gray papers, PP1, Box A1, 'Papers relating to dispute with Frederick'.

teachers' salaries and a statement of his views on admission to communion. Gray had to refuse the first for lack of funds; on the second he said that Rankin had made the missionaries' return conditional on the mission joining the Federated Missions, which meant any member of those missions could receive communion. Nkhonde immediately wrote to his principal UK supporter, William Kempster, editor of the *Bible Advocate*,²³ accusing Gray of believing in open communion.²⁴ The exchange of letters implies that Nkhonde's question to Gray on communion had been Kempster's suggestion.

Nkhonde's letter was published in the *Bible Advocate* for August 1930, and led some churches to demand at the annual conference that Gray be recalled. The FMC received a letter from Gray at an emergency meeting, denying Nkhonde's account and indicating that he had subsequently told Nkhonde that 'he did not wish to interfere with the practice at Namiwawa whereby the unimmersed were excluded from fellowship'. This letter was read to the conference on its last day, and the conference passed a vote of confidence in Ernest Gray and the FMC by a large majority.²⁵

In fact, Gray, who as a white man was trusted by the protectorate administration, had approached the Federated Missions as soon as he appreciated the strength of feeling at Namiwawa. The Federated Missions agreed that, because this was a matter of strong religious conviction, Churches of Christ need not join them; and they never did, until the Federated Missions became the Christian Council of Nyasaland in 1942, with a wider membership. Gray also made the policy at Gowa, which as a Baptist mission had admitted the unimmersed to communion, consistent with that at Namiwawa. The underlying issue was probably that after ten years in charge Nkhonde did not like a young white missionary telling him what to do. Gray appreciated Nkhonde's leadership of the Churches of Christ mission

²³ The *Bible Advocate* began publication as the *Apostolic Interpreter*. After 1920, the official name for the Churches' magazine changed from *Bible Advocate* to the *Christian Advocate*, and the *Apostolic Interpreter* took the name *Bible Advocate*; then it became the *Scripture Standard* in 1935.

²⁴ Among Churches of Christ 'open communion' meant the admission of those baptized as infants, as well as those baptized on confession of faith, whereas 'closed communion' meant the admission of those baptized on confession of faith only.

²⁵ SOAS, C/C records, MCM Box 2, FMC Minutes, 6 August 1930, 42; Resolution 35, *Churches of Christ Year Book* (Birmingham, 1930), 170.

during this period, and later became convinced that Nkhonde had been wrongly convicted of association with the uprising of 1915.²⁶

A second problem concerned baptism preparation. Hollis's initial practice had been to baptize people on request, without giving them the instruction customary in the other missions. This led to Church of Scotland accusations of proselytism; more seriously it raised the question of the educational level of the Africans. Dr Hetherwick of the Church of Scotland told the commission of inquiry into the uprising that they would normally expect two years' instruction before baptism. Hollis seems to have changed his practice to require three to six months' instruction, but this was still significantly shorter than the preparation expected by other missions.²⁷ Gray's proposal for a catechumens' class, lasting at least a year, derived from his college training. It may also have revived African resentment at settlers' hostility to African education in 1915–16, especially for Nkhonde, who had originally belonged to the Church of Scotland mission (as had Tabu Chisiano, whom Gray appointed head teacher at Namiwawa in 1931).²⁸

The final problem concerned the baptism of those under discipline from other missions. During a visit to the Church of Scotland mission, Gray learned from the missionary at Blantyre, the Revd J. F. Alexander,²⁹ that Frederick Nkhonde and Ronald Kaundo proposed to baptize three men under discipline from the Church of Scotland mission for marrying outside the church.³⁰ After an angry

²⁶ Ernest Gray, *The Early History of the Churches of Christ Missionary Work in Nyasaland, Central Africa, 1907–1930* (Cambridge, 1981), 21. Nkhonde is mentioned among Africans from the Churches of Christ mission in the 1915 commission of inquiry, but as Frederick Singani: McCracken, ed., *Chilembwe Voices*, 432, 441, 496, 613.

²⁷ Two years had been agreed as a minimum at the first Nyasaland Missionary Conference in 1900, before Churches of Christ arrived: McCracken, *Politics and Christianity*, 187. Hollis's change of policy was acknowledged by Henry Philpott, the third original Churches of Christ missionary, at the inquiry: McCracken, ed., *Chilembwe Voices*, 434–6.

²⁸ Evidence of Dr Hetherwick and Henry Philpott: McCracken, ed., *Chilembwe Voices*, 363–4, 428–31, 434–6. For Chisiano, see *Open Door*, May 1931, 9; he was a catechumen in a Church of Scotland school, but was baptized by Nkhonde in the Zomba district.

²⁹ James Alexander (educated at Dulwich College and the University of Edinburgh) was ordained as a missionary at Blantyre in 1908, became 'head' of the mission in 1934, retired in 1938 and died on 6 June 1941: McCracken, ed., *Chilembwe Voices*, 494; Church of Scotland, *Reports to Assembly* (Edinburgh, 1934), 654; *ibid.* 1938, 655; *ibid.* 1942, 342.

³⁰ What constituted marriage was also a contested area in the East African missions: McCracken, *Politics and Christianity*, 194–7; more generally, Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (London, 1973).

conversation, during which Gray tried to assure Alexander that he did not agree with this, Gray wrote an immediate letter to Kaundo. He saw him the following day and instructed him not to conduct the baptisms. Kaundo refused, because he did not wish to baptize some and not others. In a careful letter on 17 November 1931 to the chairman of the FMC, Gray described what had happened.³¹ Noting that Namiwawa was in the middle of Church of Scotland territory, and that there were also schools or prayer houses belonging to the Roman Catholics, the Providence Industrial Mission (Chilembwe's original mission), the Zambesi Industrial Mission and the Seventh-Day Adventists, he observed that friction between the missions was easily caused.³² All churches in the Federated Missions had agreed that Christians should not marry non-Christians in church. Gray inferred that the chief, whose son was one of those under discipline, had only invited the Namiwawa mission to build a prayer house in Chisupe to spite the Church of Scotland. The following Sunday Nkhonde baptized two men at Chisupe, once again illustrating his unwillingness to accept a white man's instructions.

The result was a showdown: the majority of elders at Namiwawa backed Nkhonde and only a minority backed Gray. He wondered whether to give up the work at Namiwawa completely, but did not wish to surrender to what he suspected were Kempster's schemes, since Gray feared that Kempster would then step in with alternative financial support. Gray forbade the church to celebrate communion until the dispute was resolved. The FMC backed Gray, and resolved that Nkhonde's letter of authorization to act as a pastor for the Churches of Christ Mission be returned, although there is no evidence that it ever was. Nkhonde, Kaundo and George Masangano left to form the 'African Church of Christ'.³³ After a failed attempt to bring about reconciliation in 1932, the FMC reported that it believed

³¹ SOAS, C/C Records: PP 1, Box A1, 'Memorandum of Facts leading up to the Withdrawal of Ce F. Nkhonde and others from the Churches of Christ Mission, Namiwawa', E. Gray to L. Grinstead, 17 November 1931; E. Gray to Provincial Commissioner, Blantyre, 6 January 1932.

³² Those belonging to the Federated Missions called Churches of Christ members *an-thu akunja*, meaning 'the people outside Christianity': Gray to Grinstead, 17 November 1931.

³³ After Nkhonde's death, Masangano formed the 'African Church of God': 'The Stone-Campbell Movement in Africa since the 1920s', in D. Newell Williams, Douglas Allen Foster and Paul M. Blowers, eds, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St Louis, MO, 2013), 311–43, at 324.

that the root cause of the troubles was ‘a determination to be free at all costs from anything in the nature of European control’.³⁴

Who was Nkhonde’s correspondent, Kempster? William Kempster (1873–1943) worked for the Midland Railway and its successor the London, Midland and Scottish Railway at Kettering, Bristol, Nelson, Luton and Bedford.³⁵ He was a church member in Bristol and Nelson; but there was no Church of Christ congregation in Luton or Bedford, and he devoted his time to editing the *Bible Advocate*. Some of the conservative churches that supported that magazine sent money via its editor for the work in Malawi. Nkhonde’s salary was paid from supporters in Canada, mainly UK emigrants, possibly originally mobilized by Albert Brown, an English minister who was the first minister of Fern Avenue Church of Christ, Toronto (1910–20). They saw direct support of the African leaders as an alternative after the expulsion of the UK missionaries.³⁶ As another channel for funds to Malawi, Kempster rapidly became a confidante of Nkhonde.

The *Bible Advocate*’s predecessor, the *Apostolic Interpreter*, opposed biblical criticism, which threatened the Churches of Christ claim to base every teaching and practice on the New Testament (as they understood it).³⁷ During the war it advocated absolute pacifism. It also opposed the 1917 union between the British Churches of Christ and the Christian Association – a small group of American-supported Churches of Christ that did admit unimmersed believers to communion – and the proposed establishment of a Bible training college.³⁸ When Overdale College, Birmingham, was founded

³⁴ *Churches of Christ Year Book* (Birmingham, 1933), 67.

³⁵ Kempster was appointed goods agent at Bedford in 1931, and became a member of the town and county councils and a magistrate: *Scripture Standard* 9 (1943), 73–4, 85. It is unclear whether he believed that the FMC was either necessary or desirable for missions overseas; he may well have adopted the anti-institutionalism typical of conservatives in the USA.

³⁶ Fern Avenue was an offshoot of Bathurst Street, the principal conservative Church of Christ in Toronto; such churches opposed missionary societies as unscriptural. After Brown’s return to England in 1920, the Canadians offered to take over the Nyasaland mission, which the FMC rejected. Brown played a crucial role in the meeting with Rankin that secured the return of UK missionaries: Reuben Butchart, *The Disciples of Christ in Canada since 1830* (Toronto, ON, 1949), 531–3; *Christian Advocate* 11 (1931), 99, 115–16.

³⁷ For the change of name, see n. 23 above.

³⁸ Support came through the Foreign Christian Missions Society in Indianapolis, Indiana. For more on the union and the college, see David M. Thompson, *Let Sects and*

in 1920, its principal, William Robinson, and particularly the tutor in biblical theology, Joseph Smith, came under steady attack from the conservatives.³⁹ The mission in Malawi was drawn into this conflict.

In October 1930, Kempster asked the FMC to disclose their correspondence with the Nyasaland government about the resumption of the work there. The FMC refused, and passed three resolutions: the first reaffirmed the policy concerning admission to communion held by the British Churches of Christ, that only those baptized on confession of faith were to be admitted; the second affirmed that their interpretation of the conditions of the membership of the Churches of Christ's Namiwawa Mission in the Federation of Nyasaland Missions did not imply any alteration in communion practice (which was possibly misleading); and the third affirmed that the FMC was responsible to conference and would report to it, and therefore declined to submit copies of correspondence to any section of the churches. Finally, the FMC observed: 'it is detrimental to the best interests of the work to correspond with Native Christians in any of the fields, except through the missionary in charge'. The first and third of those resolutions were published in the *Christian Advocate*.⁴⁰

Nothing of this ever appeared in the *Bible Advocate's* (or later the *Scripture Standard's*) description of the conflict. For it and its followers, the missionaries clearly wished to admit unimmersed people to communion; it ignored the scandal over baptizing someone under discipline, who subsequently committed adultery, and alleged that Gray supported infant baptism.⁴¹

Parties Fall: A Short History of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland (Birmingham, 1980), 83–5; 109–12, 129–34.

³⁹ Smith's early career was in the shipyards of the North-East; but from 1892, he had advocated treating higher criticism as a friend rather than an enemy: see a series of seven articles on 'The Higher Criticism', *Young Christian* 2 (1892), 104–6, 135–6, 158–60, 175–7, 224–6, 248–50, 270–1.

⁴⁰ SOAS, C/C Records, MCM Box 2, FMC Minutes, 11 October 1930, 43–4; *Christian Advocate*, 31 October 1930, 694; *ibid.*, 20 February 1931, 119.

⁴¹ Although Nkhonde died in 1935, the issue of admission to communion resurfaced after the Second World War, when the *Scripture Standard* published a letter from Ronald Kaundo, provoked by an exchange with Wilfred Georgeson at the Blackridge Church of Christ, while he was home on furlough. This restated the partial truths published in the new *Bible Advocate* in January 1931: *Scripture Standard*, Supplement, November 1945 (unpaginated), repeating the 1931 material.

Mary Bannister's diaries and letters explain what was going on.⁴² She had been one of the original pre-1915 missionaries who were expelled. Bannister's diaries show that all the money she raised for Africa from visits to churches in the 1920s after her expulsion was sent through the FMC; hence the money raised by Kempster was separate, and probably went to Nkhonde directly. Nkhonde was in regular contact with her, urging her to return. He welcomed her in June 1928 at Gowa; later that month, when she was at Namiwawa,⁴³ and again in October, she had long conversations with Nkhonde and Kaundo, mostly at Gowa, which was a long day's journey north. Altogether there were half a dozen meetings with one or both. In October she remarked: 'How often I think that some of God's children hinder His purposes rather than help Him to work them out'.⁴⁴ Just over a year later she wrote that she had 'the stiffest fight I have ever had with them. I hope it will be the last'.⁴⁵ More surprisingly, Nkhonde came with Hetherwick (of the Church of Scotland) on 15 February 1930.⁴⁶ The content of her conversations is not given. Further conversations in May left Mary 'nearly heart-broken when they left'.⁴⁷ Finally, Nkhonde brought all the teachers with him in August, when she had not expected them to be 'so stubborn'.⁴⁸ She records no further meetings. Clearly Nkhonde wanted her support once she returned; he did not get it.

In a letter of 1931 to her relative, Clifford Slater, of the relatively conservative Burnley church, Bannister reported that Gray had the backing of all the missionaries including herself. In her opinion the letter written by Nkhonde to Kempster should never have been sent:

You must remember that I have known Fred^k nearly 20 years & I repeat, he has been put up to what he has done; in my own private opinion it is a boycott against the College because Mr Gray was trained there. The Saviour would condemn most mightily such methods &

⁴² Mary Bannister's diaries, referred to by Shepperson, remained unlocated in the Edinburgh University Archives until they were catalogued in 2002 as MS 3211 and added to the online listing in 2011 without explanation of their context.

⁴³ Her report to the FMC is in *Open Door*, no. 64 (August/September 1928), 9–10.

⁴⁴ Edinburgh, UL, MS 3211, Mary Bannister, Diary, 17 October 1928.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–16 November 1929.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1930.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 May 1930.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1930.

they never will prosper. Mr Kempster asks you to do, what he would not do himself.⁴⁹

She wrote more succinctly a year later to the Grays, 'I blame Mr Kempster for the whole trouble'.⁵⁰

This story illustrates the interlocking of imperial and ecclesiastical conflicts. The 1920s were a turbulent decade for several missionary societies, as older missionaries encountered younger ones with more awareness of biblical criticism and a different approach to mission. All missionary activity was affected by the declining economic situation which led to financial problems.⁵¹ For Churches of Christ, these problems were accentuated by a thirteen-year exclusion from the country, influenced by Presbyterian hostility. In many ways, the Malawi Churches of Christ under Nkhonde and Kaundo became an early example of an African-instituted church. The colonial administration's exclusion of white missionaries accelerated the African control they wished to avoid.

There is a final interesting twist. War alerted the administration to the importance of education, most of which was in the hands of mission schools. In 1927 all schools were taken over by the government, which required higher qualifications for teachers.⁵² Mary Bannister lacked the qualifications to make the Gowa school eligible for a government grant, and so the Churches of Christ sent another male missionary, Wilfred Georgeson, a Cambridge PhD student of Ernest Rutherford in nuclear physics, to take charge of the Gowa school. Despite a decade of conflict, empire had its attractions, when coupled with money; and with white men once again in charge, the administration's attitude softened. Hetherwick retired. Georgeson became the favoured missionary, presumably because of his Cambridge education, and under him the Gowa school improved rapidly.

⁴⁹ SOAS, C/C Records, PP 2 (xiv), 3, Mary Bannister to Clifford Slater, 12 January 1931 (underlining in original).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, PP 1, Box A1, 'Papers relating to Frederick', Mary Bannister to Mr and Mrs Gray, January 1932.

⁵¹ The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society was founded in the Church of England in 1922 to resist biblical criticism; Baptists experienced financial difficulties in the late 1920s; even Presbyterian missions steadfastly resisted cuts in expenditure of the kind that meant that Gray could not increase native teachers' salaries.

⁵² McCracken, *History*, 159; Linden and Linden, *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance*, 149–60.

Gray, though unfairly maligned at the time, had a vision for the indigenization of mission in the early twentieth century. He studied as much as he could of the new Malawian history. Nevertheless, the systematic church government he introduced in Malawi was modelled on the British Churches of Christ, and subverted African hierarchies of authority focused on local chiefs.

The British Churches of Christ had been beguiled by Booth through Hollis into a missionary venture in Malawi which was more complex than the resources they had available. Their method of teaching 'the way of God more perfectly' (Acts 18: 26) was regarded as proselytism by the older churches. The latter were influential in the (nominated) Legislative Council, and the Chilembwe rising was an opportunity for discriminatory reprisals. Hollis was a pacifist, and therefore suspect in wartime; but any church with a primary emphasis on Scripture enabled its members to read the condemnations of economic exploitation in James 5. Such texts were not good news for estate managers or colonial administrators. The way forward was the improvement of schools, particularly with larger government grants.⁵³ A grant for Gowa school was an unexpected bonus from a previously suspicious colonial government. The divisive theological issues were real, but they were inflamed by intervention from a conservative minority in the UK with a different agenda. Thus, whereas the Presbyterian missions successfully encouraged the development of African leadership in the 1920s,⁵⁴ in the Churches of Christ mission the African trust in the new white missionaries after 1928 was poisoned by that conservative minority. The triangular conflict between the colonial administration, the dominant missions and those of the smaller denominations was worked out against the background of the different cultures, both secular and religious, in Africa and the UK. The course would have been difficult to navigate in calm waters; but in a storm the result was division.

⁵³ Hetherwick had scathingly pointed out to the commission of inquiry in 1915 that whereas the government grant in aid for schools per pupil in Cape Colony was 15s 9d, in Nyasaland it was 2d; McCracken, ed., *Chilembwe Voices*, 374.

⁵⁴ Andrew C. Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi* (Blantyre, 1996), 183–96; McCracken, *Politics and Christianity*, 221–36.