



Unpacking the history of the Blantyre Synod of Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi

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Abstract

The study explores the historical origin and developments that led to the establishment of the CCAP Blantyre Synod in Malawi from early 1876 to the present. History can be a certain type of memory that evokes liberative power, not mere knowledge of the past, but one that is of commitment. Mission history, with reference to the study of Christianity in Africa requires a new approach to mission historiography, “a more honest and more critical review of the theoretical and socio-theological assumptions out of which the African church as it is today, in its fragmented state, has been formed” (Maluleke, 1989:103). The aim of the study to investigate, scrutinize and chronologically analyse the history of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi from the early years of its original establishment to the present state in the reformed church perspective.

Keywords: Blantyre Mission, Synod, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), hierarchical, reformed church polity.

Introduction

This article will investigate the historical origin and developments that led to the establishment of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi from early 1875 to the present state in 2022 in Malawi. The history of Blantyre Synod will be incomplete without the Scottish base just as Ross (1996:17) writes:

It is the study of the Scottish Missionaries who served the Blantyre Mission, their beliefs and ideas that are implied in their actual policy as well as those that they expressed when reflecting on their task. However, just as these must not be seen apart from African society, neither can they be properly understood without some reference to the Scotland and the Church of Scotland from which these men and women came.

Historiographically speaking, as far as this researcher could establish, there are very few documents written by Malawian historians on Blantyre Mission from various philosophical perspectives, but none are in chronological order in reformed church perspective. The aim of this study will be to chronologically place a proper historical record on how both the European Scottish Missionaries and African workers contributed to the life, work, development and growth of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Blantyre Mission over the past decades in Malawi in the reformed church perspective.



The main question for this study is: what are the socio-historical factors that led to the establishment of the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi? To assist in the research, the following structure was used: socio-historical factors for the establishment of the CCAP Missions in Malawi, the history and development of the Blantyre Mission from 1875 to 2022, and analysis of the life, work and evangelistic approach of the European Missionaries and African workers in Malawi in reformed church perspective, then the study ends with make a summary and a conclusion.

Socio-historical factors for the establishment of CCAP Missions in Malawi

The history of Christianity in Africa more especially in Malawi can best be perceived by examining her ideological faithfulness in missionary vision, methodology and entire activity. One of the major ideologies that provoked Dr. David Livingstone to think of mission work in Africa was to reach new peoples in the interior of Africa, introduce Christianity and ending slavery and its many evils (Gama, 2010:49). Local traditional chiefs and Arabs were highly involved in tribalism, conflict and the slave trade. Livingstone faced a numerous difficulty on his mission to stop tribalism, conflicts and the slave trade without giving the people an alternative economic enterprise. He pleaded to Christian Mission agencies in Europe to send missionary enterprises comprising of different professionals to Africa to engage African natives in “Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation,” (popularly known as three CCC), the “Gospel and Modern Culture” which would also have deep respect for African culture (Gama, 2010:49).

The origin and development of the CCAP Missions from 1875

The origin and development of the CCAP Missions in Malawi was first initiated and championed by Rev. Dr. James Stewart. He originally came from Scotland, but permanently settled at Lovedale Mission in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. According to Sundkler and Steed (2000:467-80, 795ff), the life, work and death of David Livingstone in 1873 inspired at least three Missions to begin their work in Malawi: the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland and the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), later called the Anglican Church from England. After attending the funeral of Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, Rev. Dr James Stewart felt strongly that launching a mission in Central Africa in memory of Livingstone was imperative and on April 18, 1874 the indelible impression caught fire in his mind (Selfridge, 1976:19-20). He appealed to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to support the noble cause. Rev. Dr James Stewart passionately concluded his speech by the following words:

I would humbly suggest, as the truest memorial of Livingstone, the establishment by this church, or several churches together of an institution at once industrial and educational, to teach the truths of the Gospel and the arts of civilized life to the natives of the country, and which shall be placed in a carefully selected and commanding spot in Central Africa, where from its position and capabilities it might grow into a town, and afterwards into a city, and become a great Centre of commerce, civilization and Christianity, and this I would call Livingstonia (Selfridge, 1976:19-20).

A young ordained medical doctor read the report of Stewart’s speech in the newspaper and exclaimed: “There is the very thing I have been preparing for all my life!” When Rev Dr Stewart met him later he thought, “There is the man for us!” His name was Rev. Dr Robert Laws, who was to spend over fifty years in Africa (Selfridge, 1976:20).

In May 1875, a pioneer party under Edward D. Young, a veteran sailor, left Scotland for Africa. Other members of the group were Rev. Dr Robert Laws, a medical officer, John McFadyen, Allan Simpson, engineers, George Johnston, a carpenter and William Baker, a seaman (McCracken,



1977:47-64). Henry Henderson who was sent by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to find a suitable site for establishing a mission station also accompanied them. In South Africa, Rev. Dr Stewart recruited four Xhosa African missionaries from Lovedale in Eastern Cape namely: Shadrach Mnqunana, William Koy, Isaac Wauchope and Mapassa Ntintili to serve as teachers and evangelists (Shepperd, 1971:20). After some difficult travelling up the Zambezi River and on land they reached the Shire River in Malawi, the country of their destination, and on 12 October 1875 they sailed onto the Lake Malawi itself. They eventually came to drop anchor at Cape Maclear: "Livingstonia is begun," wrote Laws, though at present a piece of canvas stretched between two trees is all that stands for the future city of that name (McCracken, 2000:66).

History of the CCAP Blantyre Synod in Malawi from 1976 to 2022

The first period for Blantyre Mission from 1876 to 1891

The first period for the Blantyre Mission occurred during the pre-colonial period when Malawi was characterized by numerous problems such as tribal immigration, scramble for land, chieftainship conflicts, and slavery from 1876 to 1891 (Gama, 2010:49).

Henry Henderson and Blantyre Mission 1876-1877

Henry Henderson made a trip from Cape Maclear around the lake on the steam ship *Ilala*, as instructed by the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) of the Church of Scotland to find a suitable site on the shores of the lake, but he could not find a place that he considered suitable (Selfridge, 1976:30). He returned to Cape Maclear, from where he considered the possibility of sitting the mission in the Shire Highlands which he had passed through on the journey up the Shire. On his mission to identify the site for the Church of Scotland, the Livingstonia Mission rented Henderson an African interpreter Tom Bokwito who was to be an important person in communicating with the local chiefs in the area. The Church of Scotland group consisting of a medical doctor and five artisans separated themselves and they travelled through Machinga and Zomba until they reached Mount Nyambadwe in the land of Chief Kapeni (Phiri, 2004:134).

This location and vicinity were the one chosen for the new mission station around Ndirande Mountain in Chief Kapeni's area along the Shire Highlands (Laws, 1934:8). Henry Henderson settled a site for their mission station among the Yao tribe that would become the Centre for Christian mission, commerce, education and agriculture in the Southern Region of Malawi. On 23rd October 1876, the mission site was identified and named "Blantyre" after the birth place of Dr. David Livingstone, a small town in Scotland (Selfridge, 1976:32). Selfridge (1976:32) holds that Chief Kapeni gave the European missionaries this place, because he wanted them nearby in order to provide security as he feared the Makololo and Maseko Ngoni who had settled west of the Shire River. In this ethnic Yao dominated area, refugee slaves would turn up running away from Arab slave traders, and seek shelter at the missionary's house in Blantyre Mission. Small communities were established, a motley group of refugees and individuals from varied backgrounds, including the educated Makololo (Gama, 2010:123-4).

Difficulties at Blantyre Mission in the early years 1876 to 1881

In 1876 to 1881, during the first five early years of settlement, the Blantyre Mission faced a lot of difficulties and challenges, because the Mission did not have leadership of a clergyman (Gama, 2010:124). The mission did not commence on a positive note due to repeated attacks of malaria fever and deaths, the lack of spiritual direction and inexperience of the young White missionaries who could not understand the traditions of local Africans. While Henderson had succeeded to find a suitable place for the Blantyre mission station, Dr. Macrae, Chairman for the Foreign Missions



Committee (FMC) back in Scotland had failed to find an ordained church minister to go and start work at Blantyre Mission in the Shire Highlands (Phiri, 2004:135). Instead, laymen volunteered to come to Africa, because they were promised to be paid good salaries. Some volunteers were mere Christians with limited technical skills who had no spiritual calling to work as missionaries in Africa. The mission staff, often White European lay artisans, exercised virtual chiefly authority, taking over the authoritarian role of Magistrate and Civil Governor (Weller & Linden, 1984:45).

From early 1876 to 1889, the Blantyre Mission operated in a pre-colonial social and political context where it made its way independently in its relations with surrounding communities. In April 1877, Henry Henderson felt that his work of finding a site for the mission and seeing that it was established had ended, so he prepared to go back to Scotland. When Henderson left for home in 1877, there were a few houses, a school and a small church on the mission grounds. Selfridge (1976:34) holds that before leaving he had a strong conviction that the time had come for an ordained minister to take control of the mission station. Since no minister seemed to be available from Scotland, Henderson wrote to ask Rev. Dr Robert Laws from Livingstonia Mission to temporarily come and take charge of the mission until the arrival of Rev. Duff Macdonald (Ross, 1996:44). Having agreed to Henderson's pleas, Laws and Stewart agreed to jointly take care of the Blantyre Mission until a leader was identified. In that regard both Laws and Stewart took periods away from Livingstonia to supervise the work at Blantyre Mission until July 1878 when Macdonald arrived in Malawi to take charge. Therefore, the Scottish Missionary beginnings at Blantyre Mission faced many difficulties, they were also highly dramatic and controversial (Gama, 2010:117ff).

Rev. Duff Macdonald and Blantyre Mission 1878-1880

Earlier in November 1877, Rev. Duff Macdonald was approached and accepted to take charge of the Blantyre Mission as the first ordained minister from the Church of Scotland. Rev MacDonald concentrated on learning the local language and building the local school. He was fluent in Yao and translated the New Testament and Pilgrim's Progress into the Yao language. His knowledge of the language enabled him to connect with the local people by forming lasting friendships with chiefs and headmen. MacDonald expanded the mission into Zomba and Domasi. In terms of the administration of the mission station, it had numerous problems (Phiri, 2004:136). Ross (1996:64) notes that the outstanding and disappointing activity was the poor behaviour of some of the first team of missionaries who were involved in the most unholy activities against the locals.

In 1878, under MacDonald, in absence of clear instructions from Scotland, the Blantyre Mission staff allowed the Mission station to be a refuge for runaway slaves. Slaves were fleeing from both the coastal slave trade and localised slavery. Again, in absence of civil authority, the Mission experienced lawlessness, theft, kidnapping and murder were daily experiences. Being dragged into politics conflicted with the role of missionaries in community life. Trouble was compounded by the presence of unsuitable staff.

In 1878, the Blantyre Mission records what was called the "Blantyre Atrocities", in which severe disciplinary action led to death of more African natives. The injurious effects of "Social Darwinism" had led to an estrangement between white and black missionaries. That is one of the reasons why Blantyre Mission artisans such as John Buchanan, John Walker and George Fenwick were not religious in their behaviour (Phiri, 2004:136). They sometimes flogged and executed Africans to death without proper legal mandate and procedures being followed (Weller & Linden, 1984:45). Therefore, the involvement of some White Missionaries in scandalous activities created a lot of problems leading to administration dysfunction of mission work at the Blantyre Mission (Weller & Linden, 1984:45). The scandals were widely publicized and the Blantyre Mission both in Malawi



and in Scotland defended its position with difficulty. The General Assembly of 1877, the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) was compelled to report that:

It is with pain and regret that the committee has to report that, notwithstanding many and sustained efforts, they have not succeeded in obtaining an ordained minister to the mission...It was scarcely dreamed of, that a year would pass, and yet, notwithstanding many calls, see the mission without its spiritual leader. The want, indeed, is temporarily supplied by the charity of the sister mission but it is not a matter of humiliation that no one has come forth from the ordained ranks of the church to go to Blantyre (General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1877, FMC report in Ross, 1996:134).

This was called the “Blantyre Mission scandal” because the missionaries who came to preach God’s word were involved in the mistreating of the same people to whom they came to minister; it was hardly a good imitation of the humility of Christ. News reached a scandalised Scotland and the mission was very nearly abandoned. Consequently, the Foreign Office in Scotland instituted a commission of inquiry led by Dr. Rankin and Mr Pringle to investigate the reports that came from Malawi about the behaviour of the missionaries at Blantyre Mission. This misconduct led to Duff Macdonald’s resignation and the dismissal of the artisans, it also led to the appointment of new church leaders to take over the Blantyre Mission work (Ross, 1996:64-65).

Arabs and Portuguese territorial ambitions in 1880s to 1890s

In 1880s, the Arabs and Portuguese had strong political and socio-economic ambitions of taking over the territories in the Southern part of Malawi and up to the Indian Ocean (Muluzi, 1999:21f). The Scottish missionaries became more concerned with the Arabs and Portuguese territorial and socio-political interests (Ross, 1996:75-76). With the Calvinistic background of involvement in social issues, the Blantyre Missionaries initiated a different approach to evangelism. They therefore, campaigned vigorously to get thousands of signatures to persuade the Scottish Parliament pass a Bill that could make the British Government withdraw from its initial willingness to cede the area to Portugal and establish a formal “British Protectorate” (Gama, 2010:124).

One of the missionaries in Malawi Dr. Macrae made a statement to the Foreign Mission Committee in Scotland against slave trade for the committee to urgently respond as follows:

This great sore of the world: slavery must be healed. The commencement will be made as soon as mission is planted at Lake Nyasa. No Arab gang will come near an Englishman, if they can help it. With them the English name is synonymous with destroyer of slavery...(sic). We are assured that a mission once established, they (Africans) will settle around it, receive our instruction and our help, place themselves under our authority, and rise by order and Christian observance into the state of civilized communities (Ross, 1996:50).

Consequently, to protect its interests including settlers, farmers and missionaries, the British Government declared Nyasaland a “Protectorate” over the whole of Malawi in May 1891 (Gama, 2010:124ff). In 1891, the British Government finally declared Malawi a British Protectorate with Harry Johnston appointed as the first Commissioner and Consul-General to govern the protectorate (Muluzi, 1999:4f). As a British Protectorate, the administration, church missionaries, and tea and coffee planters joined hands to run the country. The church with a recommendation from the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) joined the running of government using the identification model of theology to be an industrial church through influencing individual Christians



to join the civil service and establishment of businesses such as farming of livestock as well as an evangelistic enterprise (Gama, 2010:117).

In the formation of a Christian settlement called the “Mission village”, it was necessary for the Blantyre Mission to teach the African natives some of the colonial industries and skills such as education, gardening, ploughing, and joinery work (Ross, 1996:50). The government undertook responsibility of maintaining law and order sustained by collection of hut taxes from the population. The role of African traditional chiefs was to collect hut taxes for the government. The socio-economic development was in the hands of European settlers, tea and coffee planters and traders, while education, agriculture and health services were done by Blantyre Missionaries (Gama, 2010:118). However, the policies of labour, land and political-economy were formulated with the interest of the White Europeans in mind and most of the needs of African natives were largely ignored. Consequently, the educated African native elite began to question some the bad policies and encouraged people to resist the bad policies particularly the hut taxes increases and punitive labour laws that benefited estate owners leading to Rev John Chilembwe’s uprising later in 1915 (Gama, 2010:118).

The second period for Blantyre Mission from 1881 to 1898

In the second period for Blantyre Mission, in terms of administration and an evangelistic approach to church growth, the Mission experienced unprecedented expansion and rapid growth under the leadership of Rev. David Clement Scott in Malawi.

David Clement Scott and Blantyre Mission from 1881 to 1898

In December 1881, after the difficult time of five scandalous years, the Blantyre Mission was fortunate that it received a new leader, by the name of Rev. David Clement Scott, one of the outstanding missionaries (Gama, 2010:45). Rev. David Clement Scott joined Henry Henderson, and Jonathan Duncan, the gardener both retained from the original mission party (Gama, 2010:45). He also gathered around him a very able group of people such as Dr. Bowie, Rev. W. A. Scott, and Rev. Henry Scott, Rev. Robert Cleland, Rev. Alexander Hetherwick, John Mc Ilwain, Miss Janet Beck and Miss Margaret Christie (Ross, 1996:24).

Rev. David Clement Scott managed to save the mission by giving it a new direction similar to that of CCAP Livingstonia mission. Scott came to champion evangelistic work by which he believed in spreading the gospel of Christ in an African culture (Ross, 1996:24f). Rev. David Scott’s main goal was to promote education which was to be given in an African context. Most outstanding was that Scott empowered Africans through theological education in order to develop relevant Christianity for local people and help them become members of the true universal church. Rev. Scot firmly believed that Africans were part of the same humanity and that they would contribute to the Christian Church as well as benefit from it like the rest advanced societies globally (Pachai, 1972:206). He insisted on the David Livingstone heritage, combining “Christianity, Civilization and Commerce,” (popularly known as three CCC), a formula which Scott translated as the “Gospel and Modern Culture” which also meant deep respect for African culture. He and his successor, Alexander Hetherwick, insisted on generous opportunities for the African co-workers: “Africans as co-inheritors of world culture-in African forms was his educational formula; to make the African a conscious member of the Catholic Church of Christ-his ecclesiastical program.”

In the spirit of historic reformed/Presbyterian tradition which advocated for the priesthood of all believers and distribution specific offices of minister, elder, and deacon according to gifting, Rev. David Scott felt the need to take the challenge and put his ministry at risk. Presbyterianism originated in the 16th century Protestant reformation and the teachings of John Calvin of



Switzerland and John Knox of Scotland (Calvin, 1536:1625ff). However, many White European Missionaries opposed the ordination of natives because it implied a kind of “equality” which was wrong. Most Missionaries did not understand the context of African world view, culture and societies. They condemned African ancestral customs and traditions associating them with demonic spirits. They conceived that it was wrong to teach that an African was as “good” as the white man because he was not. If he were good, he would be on a “level” with the white man, but it was because he was inferior that was why he was under the white man (Gama, 2017:6).

In 1888, the church building at Blantyre Mission, the St. Michaels and All Angels, was built with the leadership of Rev. David Scott and cooperation of African workers within three years, and on 10 May 1891, the church building was officially inaugurated by Scot himself (Phiri, 2004:136f). It stands to this day as the inspiring architecture combining Western and Eastern traditions in a beautiful style of its own, “not Scottish, nor English, but African”. The school system was well developed with mission stations founded in the districts. Some key mission stations that were opened in Southern part of Malawi in his tenure included Domasi, Chiradzulu, and Mulanje (Ross, 1996:82). Rev. David Scott had a gift of encouraging his African co-workers. Rev. Scott promoted training of the local people, some of whom were sent to Scotland, one of them was Mungo Chisuse who was sent to Scotland to study printing (Phiri, 2004:137).

In November 1893, Rev. Scott ordained some his African colleagues as deacons who included Joseph Bismark, Kambwiri Matecheta, Mungo Murry Chisuse, Harry Mtuwa, Rondau Kaferanjira and Donald Malota and John Gray Kufa (Phiri, 2004:139). Rev. Scott loved Africans and gave them all tasks to do in which they had responsibility and virtual autonomy, apart from infrequent supervisory visits from missionaries. He did that to empower and prepare them for future leadership of the church. However, Scott found little support for his “radical views” among White European settlers because most of them could not understand the contexts of the African society. Rev Scott produced a dictionary of the Chi Nyanja language that evidenced not only considerable linguistic abilities, but also a deep and sympathetic grasp of the African culture and traditions. However, many other British missionaries of the day, thought Scott's views on African race and culture were progressive. He opposed certain elements of traditional culture as incompatible with Christianity (e.g. initiation rituals, polygamy, but he did not condemn African customs wholesale. Scott held that:

People will not believe how much the Africans are capable until they have tried. Our aim is always to teach responsibility, and at the proper time to lay it on those who have to bear it. In many ways the time has now come. It is a fatal mistake to keep the African in leading strings. We cannot too soon teach him to realise he has a part to play in the education and life of Christ's church and kingdom (Ross in Gama, 2017:6).

In 1898, Rev. David Scott was forced to resign his post probably for health reasons and Alexander Hetherwick his assistant assumed leadership. After his furlong in Scotland, Scott preceded to Kenya where he founded the Kikuyu Mission now the Presbyterian Church in East Africa. Rev. Scott died after he succumbed to thrombosis of the legs in 1907 (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:799-800).

The third period for Blantyre Mission from 1898 to 1956

The third period for the Blantyre Mission was when the mission station faced challenges of rapid growth and financial difficulties, the socio-political context in 1898, the First World War from 1914 to 1919, the Second World War in 1939 to 1945 and when Blantyre Mission became autonomous in 1956 as follows:



Major challenges in 1898 to 1945

Gama (2010:45) argues that in the period from 1898 to 1914 of the Blantyre Mission, the church faced serious challenges namely: rapid growth of the church which sour from 30 members at St Michaels and All Angels Church to a little over 5,000 members in Mulanje, Zomba, Domasi and Chiuta. Other challenges were the need for African leadership of the church, poor financial income partly due to inconveniences of the First and Second World Wars in 1914 -1918 and 1939 -1945.

The need for development of African leadership in 1898 to 1956

The challenge of need for the development of African leadership was felt when the Blantyre Mission started to expand its mission base to surrounding districts in 1898. Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, a Yao, first heard about Jesus Christ at the age of six during Henderson and Bokwitos trip to Nguludi in Chiradzulu and surrounding areas in 1876. In 1884, Matecheta went to school at Blantyre Mission up to grade four before becoming a teacher at the same school. He was later trained in printing. He was baptised on 29 December 1889. Alongside John Macrae Chipuliko, Mungo Murray Chisuse, Thomas Mpeni, James Gray Kamlinje, James Auldeam Mwembe and John Gray Kufa, Matecheta was ordained a deacon on 4 November 1893 (Ross, 1996:112f). These seven men were handpicked by David Clement Scot to form a team of deacons, a first step in his agenda to develop indigenous leadership for the African church. Ross (1996:112) describes the first stage in the training:

The training of Africans took more shape in 1893 with an announcement that a deacon class of seven but a representative of many more will in like manner devote themselves to service, meets every morning at 7.00 o'clock. All these successfully completed their training and were ordained as deacons on 4th November 1894.

In 1894, the ordained African deacons were given responsibility together with Rev. David Clement Scott to exercise church discipline, work and life of the mission and were sent to establish churches in villages around Blantyre. However, the Malawian office of the “deacon” was not properly familiar to the traditional Presbyterian Churches in general (Ross, 1996:112). It was the innovative creation of Rev. David Scott who wanted to use the knowledge and wisdom of the Africans, especially in the area of native evangelization, care for the vulnerable and church discipline.

In 1895, January in the Life, and Work of Blantyre Mission on page 214, Rev. David Clement Scott was quoted saying: “Africa for the Africans has been our policy from the first, and we believe that God has given us this country into our hands that we may train the peoples how to develop its marvellous resources for themselves” (Gama, 2017:6).

But later, in bits, the Africans began to get more powers and responsibilities. In the church, the ordination of an African church minister was a sign of giving more powers and responsibility to an African (Gama, 2017:6). In 1900, the Scottish Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Missions in British Central Africa made a resolution to ordain African natives to the Holy Ministry despite strong opposition from some staff members at Blantyre Mission such as R. S. Hynde who argued: “It is utterly wrong to teach any native he is as good as a white man because he is not. If he were, he would be on the level with the white man, but it is because he is inferior that he is under the white man” (Gama, 2017:6-7).

In 1909, the Blantyre Mission opened the Henry Henderson Institute which became an important facility, training Africans in leadership and same areas as the Overtone Institute of Livingstonia Mission. The Boarding school for both girls and boys at Blantyre Mission was as prim and proper



as any on the continent where emphasis was on English language, mathematics, higher learning and African culture (Ross, 1996:172,177).

All the ministers in the Blantyre Mission remained European Missionaries only until 1911. In 1911, on March 9, Harry Kambwiri Matecheta was the first indigenous minister to be ordained at a service held at St Michaels and All Angels Church in Blantyre, and three days later on March 12, 1911, Stephen Kundecha was ordained as second minister at service held at Zomba Church. The two had been trained for four years prior to their ordination (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:799). Rev. Harry Matecheta had been a leading Evangelist in the history of the church who fully connected to the Presbyterian Mission in loyalty served among other places, at Mulanje Mission, Chikwawa, Blantyre, in Southern Region and Nthumbi, Bemvu and many surrounding places among the Ngoni in Ntcheu for forty-six years (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:799-800). Later in 1933, he was elected Moderator of his church. He was ably assisted by his wife. Her last words on her deathbed sum up the faith and aspiration of a whole generation of forgotten women in the church with simple eloquence: "My way is open. I am glad my children are all educated, married and settled. I am not worried. I have done my duty" (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:799).

The Advance Movement Sub-Committee

Due to pressures of rapid growth of the Blantyre Mission, the church experienced serious financial problems stated above, the mission frequently failed to manage its resources to meet the needs of the missionaries, institutions and workers (Gama, 2010:45). The Advance Movement Sub-committee was formed for raising funds for Mission work in Scotland could not meet target because the needs were too huge. However, the Advanced Movement Sub-committee at last with difficulties, managed to clear some debts that had burdened the Foreign Mission Committee until 1914 (Ross, 1996:33).

Management and Church Polity of the Blantyre Mission

In 1900, Alexander Hetherwick recommended a highly "hierarchical system" of church government for management and church polity of Blantyre Mission. The "hierarchal" church government resembled civil government where highly executive, legislative and juridical authority evolve through one headman who rules over a council of elders (Ross, 1996:171-172, 177). The system, according to Hetherwick, represented the "true rule" of the church, like that of the bishop in his synod of presbyters, of the minister in his Kirk session, and Moderator in the Church of Scotland. Ecclesiastical power in Blantyre Synod was vested in the establishment of the all-white "Mission Council" of the Blantyre Mission as the "first governing assembly". The powerful ecclesiastical "Mission Council" was responsible to the "Home Committee" in Scotland. Ross (1996:172,177) observes that although in some areas indigenous structures were set up, the "Mission Council" was always the real source of both ecclesiastical power and authority in the hierarchy of Blantyre Synod. It controlled the larger resources including land, all buildings, schools, hospital, churches and funds. The local session and presbytery had little or no control over major elements in the staffing and property of the churches in their area.

The "Mission Council", in effect a white oligarchy, controlled all the major financial resources in the field, paying African ministers, teachers and evangelists (for most full-time staff), and controlling their posting and work. Neither the Kirk Sessions formed in 1900 nor the Blantyre Presbytery founded in 1904 had any authority over these vital matters. Matters pertaining to vision, mission and directions in which the church should expand appeared on the agenda of the "Mission Council" (Ross, 1996:172,177). Consequently, in all local congregations, the African pastors, elders and evangelists went about doing their evangelism tasks (Sundkler & Steed,



2000:799-800). This was followed by the founding of a Kirk Session around 1901 at St Michaels and All Angels Church, and then Blantyre Presbytery in 1903.

Between 1903 and 1924, the Blantyre Presbytery was officially the highest ecclesiastical court for Europeans and Africans in all church matters, but in reality, the “Mission Council” was responsible for everything in Blantyre Synod. However, the Blantyre mission, because its roots from the Calvinistic background in Church of Scotland, ascribes to the Westminster Confession of faith, the Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Heidenberg and the articles of belief the 1924 General Assembly in reformed/Presbyterian church traditional polity (Weller & Linden, 1984:114ff).

The Blantyre Mission and General Synod from 1890 to 1924

In early 1890s, Rev. David Clement Scott suggested to Dr. Robert Laws that there should be one united church for British Central Africa (Menyenembe, 2016:4-6, 20). The two Scottish Missionaries began to explore the possibility of a United Presbyterian Church (UPC). In 1903, the Blantyre Presbytery again approached Livingstonia Presbytery with the same suggestion of church unity and proposed that the Creed, Constitution and Canons should be based on those of the Presbyterian Church in India (Weller & Linden, 1984:114ff). In the following year, further discussions were held during the United Missionary Conference at Mvera Mission in Nkhoma Presbytery. In 1914, the two “mother” churches in Scotland were to give permission and plans were made for the union of Livingstonia and Blantyre Presbyteries, but because of the outbreak of the First World War, all advances for unity were postponed since most of the Ministers were busy with Army chaplaincy (Weller & Linden, 1984:114ff).

The General Synod and its constitution in 1924

After the First World War ended in 1918, the Missionary Conference was re-arranged for 1924 and it was decided that the new church would come into being (Weller & Linden, 1984:114ff). The Conference met in September 1924 at Livingstonia and formally constituted the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod and its reformed based constitution, books of confessions such as the Nicene creed, the Apostles creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism and the Church’s confession of faith of 1924. Rev. Dr Robert Laws was elected as its first moderator. The General Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) became the highest federation of ecclesiastical court, although by that time the church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland (Weller & Linden, 1984:114f). They agreed that each Synod would remain unique and autonomous in its organization, decision-making and missionary enterprise in line with the practices and traditions of the “mother” church. This made the position of the General Synod in the CCAP unstable over the decades. The General Synod became a federation of the Presbyterian Churches in Central Africa (CCAP, Menyenembe, 2016:6, 20). In 1926, Nkhoma Synod joined the General Synod. Later, other Synods that joined the CCAP General Synod are Lundazi - Zambia and Harare – Zimbabwe (Menyenembe, 2016:6, 20f). The office Headquarters have been located in Lilongwe, the Capital City of Malawi.

The General Synod and church polity

The General Assembly adopted the historic reformed church polity to promote the Black African leadership, administration, and unity of the body of Christ in Central Africa. The General Assembly was committed to unity, ecumenism and cooperation in theological education, establishment of a theological school at Livingstonia, worship and Bible translation; the Blantyre and Nkhoma



Synods opted to use ethnic Chichewa as *lingua franca*, while the Livingstonia Synod chose ethnic Tumbuka/Tonga. They also agreed on the use of a joint hymn-book (Weller & Linden, 1984:114ff).

Consequently, in Blantyre Mission, evangelistic ministry continued to grow rapidly that in January 1946, to cope up with growth of the church, the Rev. Andrew Doig, the Senior Clerk, pleaded with the former Moderators of Blantyre Mission to meet quickly and elect the next Moderator after retired Moderator Rev. Duncan Msaka. On 15th January 1948, the Blantyre Mission unanimously elected Kenneth Mackenzie, Moderator of the church (Gama, 2017:5). On 13th January 1949, Rev. Stephen Green was elected the Moderator, while Rev. James Alexander was appointed as Senior Clerk. In 1950, Rev. Augustine Ndalama was elected unanimously as the Synod Moderator. Other moderators nominated in the following years were Revs. Allan Thipa in 1951, Jonathan Sande in 1952, Stainer Mambiya in 1953, William Pembereka in 1954, S. F. Chintali of Zomba Mission in 1955 (Gama, 2017:5).

The fourth period for Blantyre Mission from 1956 to 2022

The fourth period for the Blantyre Mission Presbytery of the Church of Scotland dawned when the church approved a new constitution, and attained interim status of Blantyre Synod from the Church of Scotland in 1956-1958. In 1958, the Blantyre Presbytery adopted a new constitution which led to the Presbytery to attain the status of Blantyre Synod and Rev. C. J. Watt was elected Blantyre Synod Moderator. During the transition, the Blantyre Mission changed its name from “the Church of Scotland” to CCAP Blantyre Synod. Additionally, the Blantyre Synod recruited more Black African ministers to the leadership of the church resulting in the experience of unprecedented transformation and development from 1958 to date in 2022 (Gama, 2022/03/25).

Status of Blantyre Synod in 1958

In 1958, the Blantyre Synod received autonomy from the Church of Scotland and Rev. D. Kunyenga was elected Synod Moderator in 1959. However, up to 1960, the Malawi government was run by white people at the same time the church was also under the white people. In all socio-political, economic and spiritual life in Malawi, Africans were regarded as incapable and inferior beings (Gama, 2017:5). Later, due to socio-political transformation of Malawi in 1961, Blantyre Synod also opened up for radical change in its spiritual life and fast-tracked the appointment of African leadership in its structures.

Blantyre Synod and African Ministers leadership 1961 to 2022

Consequently, the Rev. Baxter was elected Moderator in 1961, while the Rev. Jonathan Sangaya became the first African Minister to take over the position of General Secretary in 1962 and Tom Colvin was elected Deputy Secretary (Zeze, 2014:175ff). Others who were appointed as Moderators of the Blantyre Synod were Revs. L.W. Makwalo in 1964, J. B. Lamya in 1966, Cedric B. Simuja in 1968-69, J. L. Kapolo in 1969, B. E. Malikebu in 1970. In 1967, Rev. Sangaya in partnership with Rev. Canon Aiden, Bishop of the Anglican Church championed the establishment of the Chilema Ecumenical Lay Training Centre in Zomba for the joint training courses of elders, deacons, and youth and women leaders from both churches (Gama, 2017:5). In the late 1960s, the Rev. Sangaya was also instrumental in the formation of the Ecumenical Christian Organizations Malawi Council of Churches (MCC), Christian Service Committee (CSC) and the Christian Students Organization (SCO) in Blantyre.

In 1977, the CCAP Blantyre Synod with support from the General Assembly opened the Zomba Theological College for the training of its ministers. Later, the other five churches of the CCAP and the Anglican Church joined the Zomba Theological College for the ministerial formation training of their ministers and priests. Therefore, during Rev. Sangaya’s tenure of office, Blantyre



Synod experienced tremendous growth in its membership, training of young ministers, financial development and partnership with overseas churches (Gama, 2017:5).

In 1979, it was alleged that Rev. Sangaya died mysteriously in the hands of Police and Rev. Dr Saindi Chiphangwi was elected as General Secretary of Blantyre Synod in 1980-1985. In the 1980s the following were also elected as Moderators of Blantyre Synod: Revs. B. G. Kuntembwe, R. H. Makonyola, J.J. Mphatso, B. G. Kuntembwe, Rev Akule, the Evangelistic giant of the Lower Shire, R. H. Makonyola, and in the 1990s Revs. G. Chimowa, Luckson D. Chingadza, Revs. G. Bona. Other outstanding ministers who were elected to the office of the General Secretary include Professor Silas Ncozana in 1985-1995, Misanjo Kansilanga in 1995-1999, Daniel Gunya in 1999-2009. In the 2010s, Raynold Mangisa, Mercy Chilapula, Rabson Chimkwezule, Masauko L. Mbolembole was elected Moderator in 2017 and Edina Navaya succeeded him as Moderator of Blantyre Synod in 2021, Alex Maulana was elected General Secretary in 2009-2019 and the incumbent Rev Dr Billy Gama was also elected General Secretary in 2019-2022(Gama, 2022/03/25).

Blantyre Synod and other religious partners

In 1992, after the Roman Catholic Church's pastoral letter critical of the Malawi Government: "Living our faith", the Blantyre Synod in partnership with other religious bodies and political pressure groups in Malawi such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), Malawi Democratic Party (MDP), Malawi Law Society and others (Kaspin 1995:10f) formed the Public Affairs Committee (PAC, Kaspin, 1995:10f). The purpose of the PAC was to offer a platform for serious dialogue for political transition to democratic change with the Life President Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (Muluzi, 1999:35ff). The Public Affairs Committee (PAC) was instrumental in translating a popular desire for political freedom and change into reality (Kaspin, 1995:10f).

Blantyre Synod and its present statistics

In 2022, Blantyre Synod has a historic record of 220 ordained ministers, 25 Women workers, and over a hundred support staff in the 800 congregations and 700 prayer houses in 18 Presbyteries with 1.8 million members across Ntcheu District in Central and Southern Regions of Malawi (Gama, 2022/02/10). The Blantyre Synod runs the Education Department with numerous primary and Secondary Schools, the University of Blantyre Synod, The Church and Society Department, Mulanje Mission Hospital, Zomba Theological College, Chigodi Womens Center, and Likhubula Youth Centre, Blantyre Synod Development Commission (BSDC), Domasi Likuni Phala Company, Blantyre Synod Radio and many other institutions of social development. Consequently, Blantyre City has rapidly grown around the Blantyre Mission station and today it is a city of 2.5 million residents. It still proudly bears the name of "Blantyre City" in memory of the birth place of Dr. David Livingstone in the South of Glasgow in Scotland (Selfridge, 1976:31-32).

The analysis and evaluation of the life, work and evangelistic approach of the Blantyre Mission in Malawi in reformed church perspective.

In light of the discussion above, this study holds that the Church of Scotland from the very beginning of missionary enterprise in Malawi was based on sacrificed and compromised principles of Scriptures, Calvinistic tradition and church polity in reformed church perspective. In terms the life, work and operations of the church, Du Plooy (1997:179) clarifies church polity as "the sacral science of the government of the visible church" that engages deep-rooted matters and motivations of the human heart. The purpose of church polity is to study in Scripture how Christ can penetrate into the hearts of His children through the administration of the keys of the Kingdom



so that the church truly becomes the body of Christ (Du Plooy, 1997:179ff). The reformed views claim that the legitimate church government and its operations must be rooted in the principles of Holy Scriptures and that the confessions regarding church providing the normative guidelines for the church (Koffeman & Smit, 2014:9f).

However, to evaluate the life, work and evangelistic approach of the Blantyre Mission, this study further argues most missionaries from the Church of Scotland made a lot of sacrifices and compromises in the sense of the principles of Scripture and reformed church polity as follows:

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) Chaired by Dr Marea

The study established that the Blantyre Mission was characterised and bound by decisions made at the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) of the Church of Scotland. The powerful ecclesiastical “Mission Council” at Blantyre in Malawi, was responsible to the “Home Committee” in Scotland (Ross, 1996:172,177). The “Mission Council” was always the real source of ecclesiastical power and authority in the hierarchy of Blantyre Synod. It controlled the larger resources including land, all buildings, schools, hospital, churches and funds contrary to the principles of Scriptures and historic reformed church polity (Ross, 1996:172,177).

In reformed church perspective, the government of the church of Christ begins with none, other than the Lord Himself and His Kingdom’s authority (Clowney, 1995:202). The authority of Christ is vested in the preaching of the Word of God through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Du Plooy, 1982:107). In the reformed church government, each local church is an *ecclesia complete*, the assembly of believers (Calvin and Kerr, 1989:133). The one universal church finds expression in this dispensation in the local church. The local church is the universal church in a specific place. Christ gives all the necessary gifts in a local church to be church. This emphasis is based on the New Testament revelation of the universal and local church. The authority of Christ is vested in the preaching of the Word of God through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Du Plooy, 1982:107). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all people in the church. Some gifts relate directly to leadership. It is the Spirit who prompts, motivates, and energizes a person with the appropriate gifts to exercise leadership role (Ephesians 4:11-14).

Missionary workers’ scandals and unspiritual behaviour

The study established that the Blantyre Mission was characterized by scandals, unspiritual attitude and behaviour amongst its officers and workers compromising the principles of the Scriptures and reformed church polity. Some workers and volunteers such as John Buchanan, John Walker and George Fenwick had technical skills with no spiritual calling to work as missionaries in Africa. There was evidence that they committed “Blantyre Atrocities” in 1878, where, severe disciplinary action on Africans, led to death (Phiri, 2004:136).

In Reformed Church perspective, office is a representative of God and it is a mystical thing (Janssen, 2006:125). The gift is service. Christ gives office as *charisma* to serve *diakonia* and perform the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet and king (Shin, 2015:42-43). The *charisma* (gift) and *ekklesia* (local church) are both serviceable to God’s Kingdom intentions with his world (Janssen, 2006:125). In the New Testament Church, the gift for service is activated through lawful calling by Christ. This view is also supported by Nicolaidis (2021) writing on the Orthodox perspective of service and its call. The service is confirmed by a conscious call in the local church. Christ alone gives the lawful calling, mandate and authority of the office (Shin, 2015:47ff). The leaders in the church must have a mature Christian character. Anyone who is going to be a leader in the church must demonstrate maturity in exercising the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all people in the church. Some gifts relate directly to leadership.



Therefore, in the New Testament Church, the Apostles exhorted the church to choose seven men of good reputation, full of wisdom and Holy Spirit, to oversee this ministry.

Highly Clerical system of government

The study established that the Blantyre Mission was characterised by highly hierarchical, clerical and professional evangelistic ministry similar to the prelacy system in contrast to the Reformed traditional church polity. In 1900, unfortunately, Alexander Hetherwick recommended that the system of church government for the church at Blantyre Mission resemble the civil government where the “traditional chief” or “headman” ruled over his council of elders. The system, according to Hetherwick, represented the “true rule” of the church, like that of the authoritative bishop in his synod of presbyters, of the minister in his Kirk session, and moderator in the Church of Scotland.

In the reformed view of church government, “the council of pastors, doctors, elders and deacons” is the only legitimate body of authority that Christ instated to maintain the welfare of his congregation in His Name (Momberg, 2009:458). Viola (2008:156, 296) defines hierarchical system of government as one that is built on a chain -of- command social structure. But it’s also present in the highly stylized sphere of the military armed forces. Hierarchical government structures characterize the spirit of the Gentile philosophy (Viola, 2008:156ff). A hierarchical leadership style is undesirable to God’s people because it reduces human interaction into command - style relationship. Such relationships are foreign to the New Testament world of thinking and practice (Viola, 2008:226). Christ warned the disciples against the Gentile view of leadership: “It shall not be so among you!” (Matthew 20:26).

Scottish Missionaries’ political and territorial concerns

The study established that in 1880s, the Blantyre Missionaries were characterised by strong campaigns against Arabs and Portuguese territorial and socio-political ambitions for taking over the whole of Southern Malawi, thus compromising the principles of Scripture and reformed church polity. In the reformed church perspective, the relationship of church and state distinguishes clearly between the task and territory of the church and state respectively. Both the church and the state are servants of God and, each in its own way serves the kingdom of God (Isaiah 49:23, Du Plooy, 1982:109).

In the New Testament, the Scriptures hold that God appoints the civil government and the church is called to live at peace with the state (Romans 12:1-2, 8). The separation of the church and state is imperative. However, each governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other (Du Plooy, 1982:109). Separation of the church and state should not be viewed as antagonistic (Smit, 2013:131-132). In reformed church government principles, Christ as the only ruler and Head of the church has appointed a government distinct from civil government and in things spiritual not subordinate, and those civil authorities being always subject to the rule of God. They ought to respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve Gods’ will of justice and peace for all humanity. The church should therefore exercise no authority over the state either should the state exercise authority over the church. Calvin (1536:1625f) holds that: “He who knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present fleeing life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things completely distinct.”

The formation of the General Synod

The study established that in the 1890s and up to 1924, the Blantyre Mission championed for the unity and ecumenism of the Presbyterian Church in Central Africa thereby establishing the CCAP



General Synod, thereby advancing the principles of Scripture and reformed church polity. Calvin's (1536:1625ff) view on unity is that the church is strictly one, hence his use of the "mother" metaphor to emphasise the unity of the church. If the church as a whole is understood to be a mother, then any idea of a particular denominational church being a mother is deconstructed by implication. This is an issue of both self-identification and internalised paternalism on the part of future reformed/Presbyterian churches. Calvin knew full well that the invisible and the visible churches are not two, but one (Kuyper, 1931:14).

The growth of African leadership in the church

The study established that from the year 1956 up to 2022, the Blantyre Synod had been characterised by the development and rapid growth of African leadership in line with the principles of Scripture and reformed traditional polity. Historically speaking, again from 1911, when Harry Kambwiri Matecheta and Stephen Kundecha, the first two Africans ministers of Blantyre Mission to be ordained to the Holy Ministry, to 1962, the time when Rev. Jonathan Sangaya became the first African to be appointed to the position of General Secretary, scores of African men and women have been ordained as ministers, appointed as teachers, lecturers, doctors and directors in specialised fields in Synod to this very day in 2022 (Zeze, 2014:175f). Vorster (2011:17) holds that God calls officers to serve in the various ministries. In the "calling" three parties are involved: Christ who calls, the officer who is called, and the congregation who acknowledges the "calling" (Vorster, 2011:17). Milne (1982:224) holds that the early church was committed to service, a further means of bringing glory to God. According to the reformed traditional church polity, Christ calls four different offices in the church namely: ministers of the Word, doctors or professors of theology, elders and deacons (Vorster, 2011:15). In the New Testament Scriptures indicate that Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 4:11 saying: "Moreover, He gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for edifying of the body of Christ."

Socio-economic development

The study established that the Blantyre Synod was characterised by strong partnership with the Malawi Government advancing principles of the Scriptures and the reformed church polity. There had been a strong partnership in socio-economic development between the Blantyre Synod and the Malawi Government. Consequently, the Blantyre Synod runs various enterprises in education, health, and food security and relief development in all districts of Southern Malawi. The evangelistic theory of establishment of churches, schools and hospitals in rural areas has also greatly contributed to the growth of trading centres and needed industrialization in Malawi. In reformed church perspective, the Kingdom of God includes all forms of authority and governance: the differences in the government of different institutions are all under the authority of Christ given to Him in heaven and on earth (Smit, 2013: 135f, Matthew 28:18). Christ's Sovereign authority encompasses the office, gift or *charismata* as service, the church and the state (Clowney, 1995:202). Everything belongs to God. God governs in Christ over the entire cosmos (Smit, 2013:133f).

Summary and conclusion

In summary, the study investigated the historical origin and developments that led to the establishment of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi from early years in 1875s to the present years in 2022s. This study reflected on socio-historical and political factors for the establishment of the Blantyre Mission in Malawi, the formation and development of the Blantyre Mission from 1875 to 2022, and the evaluation of the life, work and evangelistic approach of the Blantyre Mission in Malawi from a reformed church perspective.



The study established that from the early years of its establishment, the Blantyre Mission was bound by decisions made at the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) of the Church of Scotland compromising the principles of the Scriptures and reformed church polity. The Blantyre Synod had been characterised by highly hierarchical, clerical and professional evangelistic ministry similar to the prelacy system in strong contrast to the Reformed church polity. In the Reformed tradition, there is no such a thing as hierarchical offices and ecclesiastical power (Janssen, 2006:9). All gifts of offices have common origin, source of authority and the same purpose of building the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Corinthians 14:1, 4).

The study established that the Blantyre Mission adopted a strong political campaign strategy against Arabs and also the Portuguese in their territorial ambitions of taking over the whole of Southern Malawi compromising the principles of the Scriptures and reformed church polity. The Blantyre Mission championed the development and growth of African leadership in accordance with the principles of Scriptures and reformed church polity as needed. The Blantyre Mission was additionally characterised by a strong partnership with the Malawi Government in socio-economic development in line with the principles of the Scriptures and reformed church polity. Therefore, the church and government complemented each other in sharing responsibilities in their cause and interest to serve and develop the people in Malawi.

In conclusion, this study holds that Church of Scotland from the very beginning of Blantyre Mission, based its evangelistic theory on sacrificed and compromised principles of Scriptures, Calvinistic tradition and reformed church polity. However, the study commends the Blantyre Synod's holistic approach to evangelistic ministry which had always been based on engaging and developing the whole human being; spiritual, physical and mental dimensions of the person. Therefore, in the spirit of reformation, the Blantyre Synod must continue to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and its missionary enterprise, church polity, church government and historic tradition of the church reformed and always reforming according to context, by the Spirit of God. This is an approach how the history of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) could be chronologically understood, thereby calling for much research and scholarship which will impact and transform society in Malawi and elsewhere from a reformed church perspective.

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