

## Roots and Fruits - Anne Hepburn: Malawi 1950 - 1966

The layout of Blantyre Mission Station illustrates the broad general missionary policy of the Church of Scotland:

The whole world needs the Gospel;

The world needs a WHOLE Gospel;

The world will hear the Gospel more clearly from a WHOLE Church.

St Michael & All Angels Church was built in 1891 at Blantyre. The architect and builder was a Church of Scotland minister without any architectural training but with a firm conviction that Africans had a real part to play in the life of Christ's Church and Kingdom being every bit as much part of the same humanity as the Scots - a view not universally shared by his successors.

This place of worship was at the centre of Blantyre Station and round it were the school, the hospital, the printing press, the carpentry shop and the botanical gardens, witnessing to a whole Gospel for body, mind and spirit. All of these missionary departments, except perhaps the gardens, were in full operation when I arrived in Nyasaland in 1950. As a young, inexperienced white woman I was immediately in charge of the Girls School and a member of the Mission Council which had power to make decisions affecting personnel, both black and white. I was also introduced to and welcomed by the Blantyre Presbytery of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). A missionary was always Head of Station - obvious white dominance.

Prompting from Scotland led to a debate in Mission Council on the question of the integration of the work of the mission and the African Church. The policy of integration was agreed and implemented gradually. For a short time there was a joint council of elected missionaries and African representatives of the Church. When this joint council was dissolved all authority passed to the Blantyre Synod of the CCAP by which time Church of Scotland ministers were fully recognised ministers of the CCAP.

Big attitudinal adjustments had to be made all around, not least by African colleagues who for so long had not been trusted with decision-making, certainly not over the deployment and supervision of European staff. Over these years it may have seemed that nothing spectacular was being achieved but mutual trust and understanding seemed to grow and through friendships between missionaries and African colleagues, confidence and self-esteem were enhanced.

While I was at the Girls School in Blantyre, my friendship with African teachers was not always understood. A senior colleague did remark on seeing a teacher and me sitting doing translation work together on the sofa in my house - instead of her kneeling on the floor in front of me - that of course we were roughly of the same age. I was also friendly with teachers' families, especially their student brothers as they came and went to University. They later became leaders in the Congress Party.

In those days we were aware of being rather looked down on by the 'holier' type of faith-missionaries. Church of Scotland missionaries were considered to be not Christian enough! Yet my colleague and I at the Girls School shared work and housekeeping responsibilities equally and were paid the same by the Women's Foreign Missionary Committee. We discovered that the single women in some of these other missions lived together in the same accommodation but did not necessarily share even their bottle of tomato ketchup! They received remuneration for their mission work according to their ability as tear-jerkers on deputation work.

The Church of Scotland policy seemed to us to be more in line with the Gospel than that. The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) or the Women's Foreign Mission Committee (WFM) paid missionaries the same whether they were doctors, nurses, teachers or whatever, but of course this policy of equality did not extend across the gender gap. When a colleague and I were married I was very upset to discover that my name completely disappeared from mission records and my husband's name was adorned with an asterisk. Many years later when the FMC and WFM had integrated into the Overseas Council I had the satisfaction of being invited to join a working party looking at and updating missionary regulations to bring them more in line with equal opportunities.

The CCAP did seek to become a whole Church by drawing closer to other denominations, especially the Anglican Church.

Even before the full integration of Church and Mission in Malawi there was one issue on which Africans and missionaries were as one. It was in their opposition to the imposition by Her Majesty's Government (HMG) of the Central African Federation. The African population of Nyasaland was totally opposed to the scheme proposed, fearing rightly that the racist policies of Southern Rhodesia would spread to the other two countries - Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Mission staff made the facts of this fear known to the FMC - as did the delegation of chiefs who came to Scotland and expressed the peoples' disapproval. In cooperation with Church and Nation, representation was made to the Secretaries of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Colonies and the matter was debated at several General Assemblies. One argument put forward by the supporters of Federation was that opposition to it was not widespread in Malawi. My experiences at the Girls School proved how bogus this claim was. The imposition of Federation coincided with the celebrations of the Coronation and the only way left to Africans to express their outrage was by boycotting the celebrations. The infant class at the Girls School, with a flick of their shoulders refused the offer of Coronation lapel buttons from us European missionaries with the words: "Sindi funa!" - "I don't want it".

Racial tension rose in Nyasaland and relationships between black and white were damaged. The work of Church and Mission could have been adversely affected but the Church of Scotland's anti-Federation stand in solidarity with the CCAP meant that when trouble did arise and tree trunks blocked the roads they were quickly moved aside to allow mission cars to pass.

The Declaration of a State of Emergency in 1959 guaranteed the end of Federation. Southern Rhodesian troops came in and every African graduate along with other political activists were detained in prison in S Rhodesia and Nyasaland. As Senior Clerk of Blantyre Synod my husband visited the detainees in Gwelo prison and later led the CCAP delegation that gave evidence to the Devlin Commission. Learning of the detainees needs I was able to send them regular parcels thus deepening and extending friendship and trust so that when the elections for internal self-government were about to be held, Congress leaders put quite a bit of pressure on me to stand as a candidate.

Independence was celebrated in 1964 but within one month rumblings of discontent were to be heard among the young well educated Cabinet ministers against the authoritarian, dictatorial ways of Dr Banda, the Prime Minister. They lost the argument in the Cabinet Crisis Debate in Parliament and soon had to flee the country, so brutal was Banda's dealing with the slightest whisper of dissent.

Missionaries' sympathies were divided but as friends of a number of the so-called dissident ministers, we were designated persona non grata on our arrival on leave in Scotland. Pressure from the CCAP and from the Overseas Council prevailed on Banda to change his mind and allow us back but we decided not to return - the most difficult decision of our lives. The time had come for new personnel without a history of involvement, to work with the Church in Malawi.

Though the Overseas Council did eventually press Banda to allow our return, their attitude to us personally on our return to Scotland had been neither sympathetic nor helpful and only began to change when my husband pointed out that if the Good Samaritan had been an employee of the Overseas Council he would have had great difficulty in justifying his actions. That and the expulsion of another missionary family helped!

From Independence in 1964 until the Roman Catholic Bishops' Lenten letter in 1992 the C of S had remained silent on the limitation of human rights in Malawi. To speak other than in glowing terms of praise for Banda was life-threatening for CCAP members and missionaries. Though it had been Roman Catholic mission policy to keep out of politics it was the Roman Catholic Church in Malawi that became the catalyst for political change in 1992. The message of the Roman Catholic Bishop's letter received widespread ecumenical support. At last the C of S could speak out.

Official C of S missionaries are now very few on the ground in Malawi but Scotland is more involved than ever with the CCAP through Congregations' and Presbyteries' twinning arrangements. Many projects involving schools, hospitals, aids orphans, agriculture, sports and scholarships may not be Church-based but surely fulfil the aims and express the core values of former missionary work.