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# SCOTTISH AND EVANGELICAL ELEMENTS IN THE 1915 NYASALAND UPRISING (PART ONE)

TODD STATHAM

KRÜKAURING 2B, 24568 KALTENKIRCHEN, GERMANY  
toddreganstatham@gmail.com

## ‘STRIKE A FIRST AND LAST BLOW’

In the night of Saturday, 23 January 1915, a small group of African Christians in the British crown colony of Nyasaland [Malawi] rose against the colonial regime. One band of insurgents, armed with sticks and spears, marched from their base at the Providence Industrial Mission [PIM] at Mbombwe and attacked the headquarters of the nearby Magomero Estate, which was owned by A.L. Bruce, a Scottish planter married into the family of the great missionary-explorer David Livingstone who had explored the region fifty years earlier. Another group crept up on the town of Blantyre intending to seize the weapons and ammunition necessary to rid their land of European presence. At Magomero, the rebels murdered the plantation manager W.J. Livingstone and several other European staff. Livingstone was also related to David Livingstone, but the Africans knew him as a vindictive *bwana* [boss] who administered Bruce’s vast plantation with a violent hand. After taking the European wives and children to safety, they returned singing *Akhristitu limbikani* [Onward Christian Soldiers] to PIM where their pastor, the Baptist minister John Chilembwe, was orchestrating the attacks. Chilembwe led worship the next morning with Livingstone’s decapitated head impaled on a stake at the front of the sanctuary, exhorting his congregation that the kingdom of God was at hand. As they waited for news from Blantyre, Chilembwe called on surrounding chiefs to rise in support of his rebellion, and later sent a runner to the authorities in German East Africa [Tanzania] to entreat help from Britain’s wartime foe.<sup>1</sup>

Against the backdrop of the Great War’s East African stage, the colonial administration reacted swiftly. Within a few days local militia and soldiers of the King’s African Rifles had overrun PIM and quelled pockets of resistance in the countryside. Most of the rebels, wrote a contemporary (with romantic garish),

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<sup>1</sup> See P. Cole-King, ‘Letter to John Chilembwe’, *Society of Malawi Journal* 54 (2001), pp. 1-21.

were captured and brought to judgement. A great number were condemned to death by hanging on a scaffold and others were fired upon by a volley. Certain of them were sentenced to life...They all died bravely, singing hymns to their Great God...<sup>2</sup>

Chilembwe had fled into the bush but was shot dead some weeks later as he attempted to cross into Portuguese East Africa [Mozambique]; he was buried in an unmarked grave on official orders to forestall any posthumous veneration of him and his cause.<sup>3</sup>

Thus ended what came to be known as the Nyasaland Uprising or the Chilembwe Rising. While it is difficult to determine conclusively what incited Chilembwe to lead an uprising at that precise moment, or exactly what he hoped to accomplish from it, it is not difficult to grasp the sources of fury and frustration embedded in colonial Nyasaland that pushed him and his followers onto a path of violent opposition: economic disadvantage, racial discrimination, and thwarted ambition were all general incendiaries in the 1915 Uprising, as were more specific injustices experienced daily by Chilembwe's people and congregation members, like forced conscription to the war cause, beatings with the *chikoti* [buffalo hide whip], and burdensome taxes.

He often said he was very much sorry to see women...tied up round their stomach with a rope or a string in a now [knot] by the native *Askari*; as that was the system done in those days by the *Boma* [magistrate] ...to arrest women for not paying hut tax.<sup>4</sup>

Chilembwe appears to have acted pre-emptively on the night of 23 January 1915. Sources indicate that he was (wrongly) expecting that PIM would be attacked by government troops to silence his criticism of Nyasaland's involvement in Europe's war.<sup>5</sup> Other sources suggest a motive of redemptive sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of his suffering people, Chilembwe seems to

<sup>2</sup> G. Mwase, *Strike a Blow and Die: A Narrative of Race Relations in Colonial Africa*, ed. by R. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 46-7.

<sup>3</sup> D. Stuart-Mogg, 'The Identification of John Chilembwe's Body and its Secret Burial', *Society of Malawi Journal* 61 (2008), pp. 42-50.

<sup>4</sup> Mwase, *Strike a Blow and Die*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Revealed by statements made to the Commission of Inquiry, Malawi National Archives File S/10/1/2.

<sup>6</sup> Among the possessions seized by government troops when they attacked PIM was Chilembwe's well-marked personal copy of H. Adams, *David Livingstone: The Weaver Boy Who became a Missionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895) with this inscription on its inside cover: 'Greater love has no man than

have sought 'to strike a first and last blow and then all die by the heavy storm of the whitemen's army'.

The whitemen will then think, after we are dead, that the treatment they are treating our people is almost [most] bad, and they might change to the better for our people. After we are dead and buried.<sup>7</sup>

Given the apocalyptic expectations held by Chilembwe and his followers, their sacrifice would be the catalyst for Christ's return in judgement and the dawn of a millennial era of equality and justice for central Africans, independent of British rule and even European presence.<sup>8</sup>

#### 'A VERY GREAT FRIGHT OVER A VERY LITTLE THING'?

When compared to other indigenous rebellions in colonial Africa the Nyasaland Uprising might seem at first glance 'a very great fright over a very little thing'.<sup>9</sup> The Herero wars and the Maji-Maji revolt in Germany's colonies killed tens of thousands of Africans; the Zulus' Bambatha revolt was pacified by the British at large commitment of money and soldiers. But the Nyasaland Uprising was both unsuccessful and rather unspectacular. Only a handful of Europeans were killed or wounded, African

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this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). See M. Bamford, 'John Chilembwe's Book', *Society of Malawi Journal* 64 (2011), pp. 17-22.

<sup>7</sup> As recorded by Mwase, *Strike a Blow and Die*, p. 49. Mwase's purportedly first-hand account (probably written around 1931-2) certainly stretches the similarity between Chilembwe and John Brown, whose 1859 attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, was hailed as a martyrdom for the abolitionist cause in America.

<sup>8</sup> Which is not the conclusion reached by the *Report of the Commission Appointed by His Excellency the Governor to Inquire into Various Matters and Questions Concerned with the Native Rising in the Nyasaland Protectorate* (Zomba: Government of Nyasaland, 1916), p. 14, that Chilembwe wanted to erect a theocracy with himself as head.

<sup>9</sup> G. Shepperson and T. Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (1958; reprint, Blantyre: CLAIM: 2000), p. 399, citing a contemporary South African observer. The best accounts of the Uprising are Shepperson and Price along with J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi 1859-1966* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2012), pp. 127-46. Other important interpretations include: B. Pachai, 'An Assessment of the Events Leading to the Nyasaland Rising of 1915', in *Malawi Past and Present*, ed. by B. Pachai (Blantyre: CLAIM, 1971), pp. 114-36; and D. Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa: An African Perspective on the Life and Death of John Chilembwe of Nyasaland/Malawi* (Blantyre: Central Africana, 1999).

involvement in the rebellion was likely less than one thousand, and overall casualties less than one hundred.<sup>10</sup> The official report on the Uprising issued by the colonial government emphasised the local scope of the discontent and the overwhelming loyalty of Nyasaland's 'natives', and faulted the Christian missions for agitating the normally 'docile' African. It strongly recommended the censorship of subversive evangelical literature and stricter supervision of mission schools and religious gatherings of Africans, yet the overall impression it gives of the Uprising is of an isolated episode of unrest, blown out of proportion because of perceived German connections.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the powerful Scottish Presbyterian missions at Blantyre in the south (Church of Scotland) and Livingstonia in the north (United Free Church), which dominated the emerging Christianity of Malawi, uniformly condemned Chilembwe, and, in Blantyre's case, actively cooperated with the authorities to identify and apprehend suspected participants.<sup>12</sup> The Scottish missionaries dismissed the Uprising as motivated in large part by a 'private grudge' held by Chilembwe against the plantation boss—'the whole matter was speedily forgotten,' Revd Hetherwick of the Blantyre Mission was insisting a few years later.<sup>13</sup>

The Uprising has certainly not been 'speedily forgotten'. Generations of Malawians have venerated John Chilembwe as a national hero for his opposition to foreign rule and colonial exploitation. At the same time, scholars have devoted considerable attention to the 1915 Uprising in the matrix of European imperialism and emergent African nationalism. Social historians have underscored the 'class' attraction to Chilembwe's seditious course of action by those socially and economically marginalized within the system of British colonialism, like plantation workers and refugees, and have also drawn attention to Chilembwe's attempts to empower his congregation with an independent education system that

<sup>10</sup> Following P. Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission* (Zomba: Kachere, 2006), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Report of the Commission...Concerned with the Native Rising in the Nyasaland Protectorate*, pp. 13, 19, 36-48.

<sup>12</sup> Malawi National Archives File S/10/1/4.

<sup>13</sup> A. Hetherwick, *The Romance of Blantyre: How Livingstone's Dream Came True* (London: James Clarke and Co., nd), pp. 213, 215; similarly Robert Hellier Napier in *Nyasaland; Being His Letters to His Home Circle*, ed. by A. Hetherwick (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1925), p. 91, and W. Livingstone, *The Life of Robert Laws of Livingstonia: A Narrative of Missionary Adventure and Achievement* (New York: Doran, 1923), pp. 352-3. In her treatment of Nyasaland/Malawi in the official history of the Church of Scotland's foreign missions, Elizabeth G.K. Hewat, *Vision and Achievement 1796-1956* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1960), omits any reference to the Uprising.

would nonetheless usher them into the white-made modern world.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the 'modern' or forward-looking aspect of Chilembwe's seditious course of action has been paramount in interpretations of the 'little thing' that was the 1915 Uprising. As Professor George Shepperson has pointed out, while 'former movements of African resistance to European rule had aimed at recovering old conditions rather than at creating new ways of life', the Chilembwe Rising looked *forward*: it did not invoke traditional authorities like chiefs or historic patterns of tribal power for support or inspiration, but rather summoned Africans to take their place in the 'new, non-tribal way of life which was developing'.<sup>15</sup>

### EVANGELICAL AND PRESBYTERIAN

The 1915 Uprising is also significant as the only indigenous revolt in colonial Africa explicitly provoked by Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Chilembwe's vision for the future was not only utopian it was apocalyptic, millenarian, and infused with a Christian sense of racial equality and social justice. The origins and aims of this violent revolt stem in part from two Christian mission traditions—two traditions that were somewhat discordant in the context of early twentieth-century Nyasaland: (1) Anglo-American evangelical missionaries like Joseph Booth and their African converts, who taught, among other things, a robust premillennial eschatology that gave religious expression to indigenous malcontent in the colony and underscored the expectancy of many Malawians for a better world than the current colonial reality; and (2) the formidable Scottish Presbyterian missions, especially the Church of Scotland's Blantyre station that was founded in 1878 in the Shire highlands of southern Malawi and named in honour of Livingstone's birthplace.

A Scottish government minister has recently declared Malawi and Scotland as 'sister nations'. Indeed, the religious and political bonds formed in the late 1850s when Livingstone ventured through the region around Lake Nyasa remain strong and enduring to this day.<sup>17</sup> The story of

<sup>14</sup> E. J. Higginson, 'Liberating the Captives: Independent Watchtower as an Avatar of Colonial Revolt in Southern Africa and Katanga, 1908-1941', *Journal of Social History* 26 (1992), 55-80; E. Berman, 'African Responses to Christian Mission Education', *African Studies Review* 17 (1974), 527-540; T. Ranger, 'African Attempts to Control Education in East and Central Africa 1900-1939', *Past & Present* 32 (1965), 57-85.

<sup>15</sup> Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, p. 411.

<sup>16</sup> A point made by McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in K. Ross, *Malawi and Scotland in the Talking Place Since 1859* (Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2013), p. 9. Ross provides a fascinating chronicle of this relation-

early Christianity in Malawi does feature noteworthy Anglican (Universities' Mission to Central Africa [UMCA]) and Catholic presences (Montfort Brothers, White Fathers), but it is dominated nonetheless by Presbyterianism. Livingstonia and Blantyre were founded in the late 1870s to bring 'Christianity and Commerce' to central Africa by converting the heathen and subverting the slave trade.<sup>18</sup> No less an authority than Stephen Neill has declared them as 'certainly among the best organized missions in the world',<sup>19</sup> and they were at the forefront of the christianization of Malawi as well as its political and social development. In 1926 the synods created by these missions joined with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa's Nkhoma mission in the central region as the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, which today numbers its members in the millions.<sup>20</sup> The Blantyre Mission's influence in southern Malawi extended far beyond its church jurisdiction proper through its liberal education system and advocacy for indigenous leadership. These were factors in creating the so-called 'new men' in colonial Malawi, whose education, ability, and Christian conversion *should* have qualified them for leadership and authority in their own country, but who found themselves still on the margins of society. This cadre of 'new men' included the Baptist Chilembwe and several of his most important co-conspirators in the Uprising. When this group was agitated by the radical eschatology

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ship, which has also produced many important works of scholarship alongside Shepperson's corpus, including: J. McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940* (1977; reprinted, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2000); T. J. Thompson, *Christianity in Northern Malawi* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); K. Ross, *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996); A. Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi* (Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996). See also the Scotland Malawi Partnership website: <<http://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org>>.

<sup>18</sup> The African Lakes Company was started up at the same time by prominent Free Church businessmen to support the Christianizing of central Africa through commercial ventures. See H. Macmillan, 'The Origins and Development of the African Lakes Company, 1878-1908', (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 327.

<sup>20</sup> The standard work remains C. M. Pauw, 'Mission and Malawi: The History of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian', (DTh thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1980). Also helpful is J. Parsons, 'Scots and Afrikaners in Central Africa: Andrew Charles Murray and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Malawi', *Society of Malawi Journal* 51 (1998), 21-40.

propagated by some evangelical missionaries and indigenous evangelists, the result would be revolutionary.

On the centennial of the 1915 Nyasaland Uprising, focusing attention on its evangelical and Presbyterian ingredients aims first of all to appreciate a significant storyline in the mission heritages of these respective traditions. Second, it brings into relief both the unpredictability of the historical transmission of the gospel and the ambiguity of the missionary legacy in Christianity in southern Africa. Missionaries in colonial Malawi were typical of their time in expecting indigenous churches to develop as ‘hind-bits broken off the block of the Western masterpiece’—as the eminent scholar of world Christianity, Lamin Sanneh, put it.<sup>21</sup> Yet both the millennialist message of some evangelical missionaries to Nyasaland in the early twentieth century and the educational and racial policies of the long-established Scottish missions were appropriated by indigenous Christians for their context and transformed according to their needs—indeed, even used to dissent outright from the ‘western masterpiece’. Here, as so often in the history of missions, the delivery of the Christian message across cultures would have unexpected, even paradoxical, results.

#### ‘AFRICA FOR THE AFRICAN’

From the onset of the Established Church’s mission to Malawi, the leading Blantyre missionaries evinced sympathetic attempts to understand the culture and world view of the peoples whom they were seeking to convert, and were steadfast advocates of racial equality between Africans and Europeans.<sup>22</sup> Revd David Clement Scott and his successor Hether-

<sup>21</sup> L. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 222. K. Ross, ‘Vernacular Translation in Christian Mission: The Case of David Clement Scott and the Blantyre Mission in Malawi 1888-1898’, *Missionalia* 21 (1993), 5-18, and A. Ross, ‘*Wok-endedwa Wathu*: The *Mzungu* who Mattered’, *Religion in Malawi* 8 (1998), 2-7, claim that the remarkable David Clement Scott <<http://www.dacb.org/stories/malawi/scott-davidc.html>>, who led the Blantyre mission from 1881 to 1898, intended an authentically African Christianity to develop, but it is difficult to know for sure.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. D. MacDonald, *Africana; Or, The Heart of Heathen Africa*, 2 vols (1882; reprint, London: Dansons of Pallmall, 1969); D. C. Scott, *Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language spoken in British Central Africa* (Edinburgh: FMC of the Church of Scotland, 1892). Useful summaries are A. Ross, ‘The African—“A Child or a Man?”: The Quarrel between the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Scotland and the British Central Administration, 1890-1905’, in *The Zambezian Past: Studies in Central African History*, ed. by



wick—who between them led the Blantyre mission for over four decades—agitated extensively for African interests: against the imperialistic *Realpolitik* of the day that would have seen southern Malawi incorporated into the territory of the slave-trading Portuguese;<sup>23</sup> against the Colonial Office's consideration of Cecil Rhodes' offer to finance the new protectorate under his racially-exploitative British South African Company; against the violent expropriation of land in the 1880s and 90s by the British administration and its preferential treatment of European settlers, as well as the heavy taxes introduced that compelled Malawians into indentured work on European plantations. The Blantyre Mission periodical, *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, declared in 1894:

Our contention is that if the European take the land they practically enslave the native population. There is no law to help the native in his distress; but there is power put into Europeans' hands to force the native to work... We cannot treat this land as a conquered country.<sup>24</sup>

'Africa for the Africans has been our policy from the first,' declared Scott a year later.<sup>25</sup> Even one of Blantyre's fiercest critics, Joseph Booth—a larger-than-life presence on the religious landscape of southern Africa at that time, with links to several faith missions and holiness denominations in the vicinity of Blantyre—complimented 'the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Scotland' for its 'admirable example' of defending African interests and training Malawians for positions of responsibility in church and society.<sup>26</sup>

Although the sharp tone of their criticism dulled somewhat in the new century, leading Blantyre missionaries like Hetherwick and Robert

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E. Stokes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 332-51, and T. J. Thompson, "'Brave and Honourable Gentlemen': Missionary Attitudes to African Culture and Religion", in *Ngoni, Xhosa and Scot: Religious and Cultural Interaction in Malawi* (Zomba: Kachere, 2007), pp. 138-51.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 268-74.

<sup>24</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, (December 1894), p. 2. See further D. Stuart-Mogg, 'The Rev David Clement Scott and the Issue of Land Title in British Central Africa. A Transcription, with Commentary, of an Unpublished Letter Written by Scott from Portobello, Edinburgh on 5th December 1891', *Society of Malawi Journal* 57 (2004), 21-34.

<sup>25</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa* (January 1895), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> J. Booth, *Africa for the Africans*, 2nd edn, ed. by L. Perry, (1897; reprint, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2007), p. 82.

Napier continued to defend African interests.<sup>27</sup> They asked searching questions about land rights in the colony for the tribes who possessed it before it had been swallowed up into European estates, as well as for the tens of thousands of refugees into Nyasaland from Portuguese East Africa who worked the cotton and coffee plantations. They expressed concern for the serf-like status of those immigrant workers, whose wages were the lowest in central Africa, and whose rent to the estate for accommodation and 'hut tax' to the government was paid in mandatory labour.<sup>28</sup>

Accused as 'negrophiles' by settlers and more conservative missionaries, the Blantyre Mission also showed its commitment to racial justice and equality through its commitment to develop an indigenous clergy. In the early 1890s Scott consecrated seven young men as deacons with an eye to their future Presbyterian ordination. In 1900 the three Reformed synods committed themselves in principle to African ordination, and in Blantyre two candidates—'tested by long years of service'—began formal studies under Napier in 1909 with a Kirk-approved curriculum.<sup>29</sup> The cautious Scottish missionaries in Blantyre and Livingstonia kept the flow of Malawians into ordained ministry at a trickle, but they did affirm that 'the ordination of a native is as real and as equal to that of a European'.<sup>30</sup>

#### 'THE DRAGON'S TEETH OF EDUCATION'

The Presbyterian missions at Blantyre and Livingstonia instituted ambitious, far-reaching educational systems that aimed not only to provide practical or 'industrial' training for Africans, but also the rudiments of a classical education. A priority to education in mission was typically (though not exclusively) Scottish, owing in part to the hugely influential missiologist Alexander Duff (1806-1878), who advocated western-style educational methods and institutions that would break down the 'heathen' values of its students, even as it was forming them to be future leaders for an emerging Christian nation and its church.<sup>31</sup> In Nyasaland the

<sup>27</sup> See Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>28</sup> McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, pp. 128-32, helpfully summarizes the *thangata* system characteristic of the estates.

<sup>29</sup> *Robert Hellier Napier in Nyasaland*, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Hetherwick, *The Romance of Blantyre*, p. 175. Still, Presbytery minutes in the first decades following the ordination of Malawians to ministry condescendingly use first names, e.g. 'Revd Harry', to refer to them but surnames for the Scots (Minutes of the Presbytery of Blantyre, National Archives of Malawi 50/BMC/1/2/1).

<sup>31</sup> See I. Maxwell, 'Civilization or Christianity? The Scottish Debate on Missionary Methods, 1750-1835', in *Christian Mission and the Enlightenment*,

Scottish missions' insistence on classical education seems inexplicable at first glance: Scott and Law schemed to erect Christian universities in a country only a few decades removed from total illiteracy; 1903 school exams at Livingstonia asked Malawian students to 'describe the character of Oliver Cromwell' and 'give the rules of hypothetical syllogisms'.<sup>32</sup> Yet this was a direct consequence of the missionaries' belief in racial equality: not only were Africans capable of learning exactly what British students did, the study of mathematics, geography, philosophy, language, and history—'one of the most valuable subjects which we can teach', argued Dr. Elmslie of Livingstonia, for 'nothing will awaken him more to the possibilities within the reach of the tribes'—was necessary for them to take their place in the modern world.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Presbyterian mission education carried an inherent risk to the political and religious establishment by creating potentially critical thinkers. Immediately after the Uprising, the former governor of Nyasaland Sir Harry Johnston wryly remarked that 'the missionaries have sown the dragon's teeth of education'.<sup>34</sup> The government Commission struck to investigate the causes of the Uprising seized on the ellipse of race and education during their interrogation of various mission representatives. Pressed by the Commission to disclose the educational policies at the Scot's sister mission at Nkhoma, a DRC missionary admitted that some Malawians were being taught theology, but quickly added: 'it is very doubtful we will ordain a native here. We are South Africans and we are dead against the natives'.<sup>35</sup> An Anglican father of the high church UMCA made clear to the Commission that indigenous teachers were only being used in 'bush schools' to teach 'numbers and letters', never religion or

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ed. by B. Stanley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 123-40. J. Kalapati, 'The Early Educational Mission of the Scottish missionaries in Madras Presidency: Its Social Implications', *SBET* 16 (1998), 140-155, treats Scottish mission thinking in the colonial Indian context.

<sup>32</sup> National Archives of Malawi File 47/LIM/4/19. I owe this reference to Dr Jack Thompson.

<sup>33</sup> *Report of the Third General Missionary Conference of Nyasaland held at Mvera, 30th July to 7th August, 1910* (Blantyre: Mission Press, 1910), p. 20. See further J. Pretorius, 'The Story of School Education in Malawi 1875-1941', in *Malawi Past and Present*, ed. by G. Smith (Blantyre: CLAIM, 1971), pp. 69-79.

<sup>34</sup> Cited by Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, p. 380.

<sup>35</sup> The following testimonies are transcribed in the appendix of K. Mufuka, *Missions and Politics in Malawi* (Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press, 1977), pp. 268-77. Sadly the files at the Malawi National Archives that contain the responses to the Commission (COM 6/2/1/1-3) are misplaced or lost, so I have had to rely here on secondary sources.

other important subjects; the Marist fathers who were interviewed indicated similarly, also remarking that new Catholics were taught to always submit to Europeans, 'who are much wiser than they'. Hetherwick, however, responded bullishly to the commissioner's leading question that it was perhaps beyond African capacity to interpret the Bible apart from missionary supervision: 'a native is able to interpret the Bible as you or me'. This attitude was typical of the leading Scottish missionaries in colonial Malawi. When pushed to give his opinion if education was giving the Malawians' pretensions, Hetherwick's response was biting:

Commission: 'Of course natives get swollen heads.'

Hetherwick: 'As Europeans do. We have met them.'

Yet Hetherwick and Laws had good reason to be defensive of the Scottish missions' education system in their testimony to the Commission of Inquiry into the origins of the 1915 Uprising. Not only was Chilembwe a former student of the Blantyre Mission's school (although not baptised Presbyterian),<sup>36</sup> he had tried with mixed success to recruit to his church and cause leading Malawian Presbyterians like Revds Harry Matecheta and Stephen Kundercha (the first Malawians ordained to Presbyterian ministry), and Mungo Chisuse, Joseph Bismark, and John Gray Kufa, who were elders of the Blantyre church and pillars of the African community.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the Commission turned up approximately eighty suspects who had been baptized or educated at the Mission, and several of Chilembwe's closest conspirators were Blantyre products. Kufa, for example, was the pride of the Mission, having been educated as a medical practitioner by the Scots, licensed as an evangelist by the Mission for work along the Zambezi River, and ordained as an elder at the main Blantyre church of St. Michael and All Angels. To the chagrin of the Scottish missionaries, he emphasized those Blantyre ties at his trial defence—unsuccessfully: he was found guilty and hung.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa*, pp. 1-10. After his death, Chilembwe's wife and children went to live with the family of Revd Matecheta, as the latter's son remembers: C. Matecheta, 'The African Ministry', Malawi National Archives File 70/CHM/1/1, pp. 11-12. See also D. Stuart-Mogg, 'John Chilembwe's Wife and Progeny', *Society of Malawi Journal* 63 (2010), 25-38.

<sup>37</sup> Matecheta and Kundercha's statements are included in Ross, *Christianity in Malawi*, pp. 146-54. See also H. K. Matecheta, *Blantyre Mission: Nkhani za Ciyambi Cace* (Blantyre: Hetherwick Press, 1951), chapter 13.

<sup>38</sup> Malawi National Archives File S/10/1/3. See also Shepperson, *Independent African*, pp. 263-5.

## PATERNALISM AND POWER

Obviously the Scottish missions did not aim to create Christians who would challenge the status quo of British Empire and western Christianity in Nyasaland. Inadvertently, their belief in racial equality, which took form in a liberal and not merely technical education, 'had significant effects on the political thinking of a colonial people', teaching them to read, think, question—a dragon's tooth indeed.<sup>39</sup> Consider by way of contrast the great missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer of French Equatorial Africa, who hid the newspapers detailing the carnage of the Great War from his 'houseboys' so that European authority would not be undermined.<sup>40</sup> The Scottish missionaries to Malawi did no such thing, and the ebb and flow of Allied war fortunes were followed with alacrity by African Christians at the Blantyre Mission and its environs.<sup>41</sup> Those like Chilembwe who could read of Christian Europe's internecine conflict, and witness firsthand the mounting African casualties on the front with German East Africa, the tens of thousands of porters forced to carry supplies to feed the war effort, could draw their own conclusions regarding the colonial exploitation of African resources and the supposed superiority of western Christendom. In a (censored) letter to the newspaper a few months after the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, Chilembwe wrote:

If this were a war...for honour, Government gain of riches, etc., we would have been boldly told: Let the rich men, bankers, titled men, storekeepers, farmers and landlords go to war and get shot. Instead the poor Africans who have nothing to own in this world, who in death, leaves only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and distress are invited to die for a cause not theirs.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, in his testimony before the Commission, Kundecha repeated a growing sentiment among educated Malawians that the '*Azungu* [white

<sup>39</sup> Mufuka, *Missions and Politics in Malawi*, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> A. Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (1922; London: Fontana, 1956), p. 101.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 10 of Matecheta, *Blantyre Mission*.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Shepperson, *Independent African*, p. 235; see also Mwase, *Strike a Blow*, pp. 32-3. Chilembwe had earlier criticized the participation of Malawians in Britain's colonial wars in Somaliland and the Gold Coast. The authoritative account of the Great War experience in Nyasaland is M. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

people] are nothing but they are *Nkhondo* [at war]—a fact that the missionaries morally supported.<sup>43</sup>

More to the point, Scottish mission education was responsible to a large degree for creating a class of Malawians who were equipped for a modern world into which they were not permitted to enter. Racial equality was a tenet of the Presbyterian missions; cultural parity was not. 'Africa for the African has been our policy from the first', claimed *Life and Work*, which went on to say: 'we believe that God has given this country into our hands that we train its people how to develop its marvelous resources from themselves'.<sup>44</sup> Like many western missionaries in Africa at this time (and despite popular perceptions of the relationship of missions to imperialism) the Scots at Blantyre and Livingstonia were not unqualified proponents of British imperialism.<sup>45</sup> But they were typical in assuming Christian Europe's trusteeship of Africa. Africa was for the Africans, but not quite yet: the values and expertise of western Christian civilization would have to first lift up Africa so that it could stand on its own. Robert Napier expressed it lyrically in a collection of wartime verses: 'And so, as stewards true, fulfilling Britain's destiny / We dedicate our lives to live, O Nyasaland, for thee!'<sup>46</sup> This attitude—which was closely aligned with 'moral imperialism'—provided, in part, the moral and religious justification of Nyasaland's existence within the British Empire.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, an African church would come into existence only after lengthy European tutelage. 'Our experience is that it takes a long time to make a Christian', wrote Scott.

Africa stands with her sleeves rolled up, pounding away at the lumps she has thrown into her dough-pot, and a lot of raw kneading it takes to make that

<sup>43</sup> Cited in G. Shepperson, 'The Place of John Chilembwe in Malawi Historiography', in *The Early History of Malawi*, ed. by B. Pachai (London: Longmans, 1972), p. 412.

<sup>44</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa* (January 1895), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> An incisive treatment of this relationship is B. Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: IVP, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> R. Napier, *Nyasaland Numbers 1916* (Blantyre: Blantyre Mission Press, 1916), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> D. Woulfin, 'Slaves, Trains, and Missionaries: British Moral Imperialism and the Development of Precolonial East Africa, 1873-1901', (PhD thesis, SUNY Stony Brook, 2011), highlights the presence of slavery, Islam, and poverty in nineteenth-century East Africa as justification for British 'moral imperialism', in other words, political and economic intervention on religious or humanitarian grounds.

initial inexperience, which comes labeled 'Christian', into anything like real Christian bread.<sup>48</sup>

For the Presbyterian missions in the early twentieth century, this 'kneading' required potential Malawian converts to be personally examined, extensively catechized, then tested prior to baptism—a process which typically took three or four years, and sometimes even included basic literacy as a condition. Similarly, new Christians were only admitted to the Presbyterian eldership and (after 1911) to ordained ministry after many years and after rigorous testing of knowledge and character.<sup>49</sup> Scott desired a 'cultured ministry' for Presbyterianism in Malawi, which would of course require extensive education and the 'civilizing' of indigenous Christians according to British—and sometimes even specifically Scottish—norms.<sup>50</sup>

Houses that were square rather than round, funerals conducted without signs of visible emotion, marriages blessed with a feast of tea and scones culminating in the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne' in Chinyanja were all symbols of progress as defined by Presbyterian Scots.<sup>51</sup>

Lay or ordained, African Christians found themselves closely supervised by the Scottish missionaries, held accountable to western Christian morals, and expected to mimic European cultural norms. The endemic paternalism of colonial Nyasaland is perhaps best symbolized in the colony's legislative assembly that was erected early in the twentieth century, which included among the representatives charged to determine Malawi's future missionaries, settlers and government officials but no African voices.

### 'DOUBLE JEOPARDY'

Sanneh expresses well the dilemma facing new Christians in the heyday of western colonialism as a 'double jeopardy': accepting the gospel uprooted

<sup>48</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa* (January 1894), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> This is brought out well in *Robert Napier in Nyasaland*, pp. 32-3

<sup>50</sup> Scott speaks of 'cultured ministry' several times in the April 1894 edition of *Life and Work in British Central Africa*.

<sup>51</sup> McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940*, p. 224. The Scottish, rather than merely British, ideals held by Scottish Presbyterian missions in this period is emphasised by E. Breitenbach, 'Empire, Religion and National Identity: Scottish Christian Imperialism in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries', (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2005).

new Christians from their indigenous traditions, yet they remained on the edge of colonial society and missionary Christianity because they were *indigenous* Christians.<sup>52</sup> There was a pronounced 'double jeopardy' in Nyasaland in the decade prior to the Uprising, exacerbated by the hugely influential Scottish Presbyterian schools which aimed to create 'modern' Africans, and the cultural and religious paternalism which these missions shared to some degree with greater colonial society. Tension was palpable in the densely populated Shire highlands (where both PIM and the Blantyre were located), where the land had been largely expropriated by European settlers and foreign missions. For many in Chilembwe's own flock, their frustration was tangible in Livingstone's refusal to allow schools and churches on the Magomero estate's three hundred square mile grounds, so as to preclude potential sources of agitation against his management. This not only offended them as Christian believers but also refused them the sense of self-progress that accompanied the erection of their own sanctuary or schoolhouse.

Above all, the Commission testimonies drew attention to the deferential removal of one's hat as an affront to the status of Africans in the colony and a touchstone of the resentment that sparked Chilembwe's call for rebellion.

A native was often times beaten by a whiteman if he did not take off his hat off his head some thousands yards away... A native often met Shouts of *Chotsa Chipewa* [take off your hat] in every corner he could go.<sup>53</sup>

For Africans the wearing of European clothing like hats symbolized their equal status in colonial society as 'modern' men and women—an assumption settlers resented.

He said 'Take off your hat, you nyani [baboon]. And I said, 'I am not a nyani. I am a human being like you'. He said, 'I will shoot you' and he pulled out his revolver. And I said, 'Shoot me! Why?' And he said 'You are a black man and I am a white man, you must take off your hat'.<sup>54</sup>

The official position of the missionaries was that Europeans were Nyasaland's trustees until the country was ready to stand on its own, to which they added the important belief in racial equality. But to many Malawian Christians, mission church and colony seemed to be in cahoots in keeping them on their knees. True, the Scottish missions had played a large

<sup>52</sup> Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> Mwase, *Strike a Blow*, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Phiri, *Let Us Die for Africa*, p. 35.



and admirable role in defending African interests, and 'it was the Scottish missions', claimed Andrew Ross, 'who had above all produced the educated African' in the first place.<sup>55</sup> But in the opinion of some of those educated Africans, the Scottish Missions were inextricably bound up with European interests. This was a point made often and sharply by Chilembwe's mentor, Joseph Booth, and it would be echoed by numerous Malawian Christian critics:

No sooner has the missionary led his convert into the freedom and light of God's word than he discerns these things and discovers we are proclaiming that which condemns ourselves and exposes the wrongs we perpetrate so shamelessly. He naturally asks why, if the missionaries be truly men of God, and not in concert with the wrong-doers, do they not solemnly and sternly denounce the authors of the evil?<sup>56</sup>

Revd Kundecha recalled an encounter with Chilembwe and his right-hand man, Duncan Njilima (also a product of Blantyre), where he was challenged to abandon the Mission for an independent African ministry.<sup>57</sup>

And he said he did not understand the foreign missionaries when they were in the pulpit repeating the ten commandments... And he said that they said 'thou shalt not steal' and 'thou shalt not covet'. And saying that they have brought in their own government and taken the land from us.

Kundecha responded to Chilembwe's repeated exhortation 'to stand alone and work by myself', by reaffirming the inherent paternalism of missionary Christianity and colonialism: 'we ought to be with them until they took the further step of going forward'. Similarly, Matecheta recalled spending a sleepless night in argument with Chilembwe and PIM church elders not long before the rebellion. 'God gave the whites their land, and to the black people their land, so we should save our land', Chilembwe argued.

I told them that the whites had come to help develop our country, which they denied. I told them that if I was to join them then my way was that of love. We needed to wait patiently to receive freedom and learn from what the whites had brought for us.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ross, *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*, p. 188.

<sup>56</sup> Booth, *Africa for the Africans*, p. 11-12.

<sup>57</sup> Kundecha's testimony in Ross, *Christianity in Malawi*, pp. 152-4.

<sup>58</sup> Matecheta, *Blantyre Mission*, p. 37.

Such responses by leading Malawian Presbyterians like Matecheta and Kundercha (or Joseph Bismark)<sup>59</sup> should not be taken to imply subservience or complicity. These were intelligent men who were guardedly critical of the colonial administration, and cautiously sympathetic to their erstwhile friend Chilembwe. They too shared in the double jeopardy of colonial African Christian experience: their Christian faith had pushed them out of their home culture but their modern education, skills, and new religion could not put them into the colonial world or mission church as equal members. Could one wait for the European to take 'the further step of going forward'? Those who could remained in the missionary churches, while many of more impatient ended up at PIM, which Chilembwe had founded upon his return from the United States in 1900 as *Revd* Chilembwe, i.e., over a decade before the Scottish Missions saw fit to ordain an African.<sup>60</sup> This African-American Baptist-sponsored mission, with its enormous brick church building erected in 1913 a symbol of African progress and respectability, became 'the rendezvous of many Africans with an independent outlook on life'.<sup>61</sup> Chilembwe was a vocal advocate of racial equality in fact, not merely theory, and the hundreds of children learning at schools under PIM's auspices and those baptized at its various congregations were catechized accordingly. One visitor to a PIM school overheard children recite the catechism (significantly in English). 'Did God say that white people should be superior over the black people?' 'No, God made all alike; we are all the same before God'.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the 'raw natives'—as they were dismissively called—in his congregation and community, who had often immigrated into Nyasaland from Portuguese East Africa and worked the surrounding plantations, were encouraged to send their children to school and to inculcate habits of European dress and education and good Protestant virtues like tem-

<sup>59</sup> See also J. Bismark, *A Brief History of Joseph Bismark* (1932), Malawi National Archives File 59/PAC/4/1.

<sup>60</sup> Chilembwe had accompanied Booth to the USA in 1897, and with financial assistance from African-American Baptists earned a divinity degree at an African-American college in Virginia (now Virginia University of Lynchburg <[http://www.virginiauniversityonline.com/ouruniversity\\_a.html](http://www.virginiauniversityonline.com/ouruniversity_a.html)>). He returned to Malawi in 1900 under the auspices of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. On the latter see R. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 360.

<sup>61</sup> Makondesa, *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission*, p. 17. This building may have been erected to rival Clement Scott's 'cathedral' of St. Michael and All Angels at the Blantyre Mission. After the Uprising the church was dynamited and PIM banned.

<sup>62</sup> Matecheta's testimony in Ross, *Christianity in Malawi*, p. 149.

perance and thrift that would integrate and advance them in the colonial order. Employing schemes for economic cooperatives and vocational training that he had witnessed firsthand among the African-American community, and reflecting their confidence and self-determination which he had experienced during his travels and studies in the eastern United States, Chilembwe's PIM was at the hub of a expanding network of the 'new men' in the colony: educated, able Africans on the margins of a white world. It was these African entrepreneurs, educators, and professionals who were significant in the 1915 Uprising, preaching and rousing popular support the months prior, and often taking positions of strategic or military leadership during the insurgency.

In the wake of the violence of January 1915, the leading planter A.L. Bruce publically declared that the Uprising 'was a rebellion of mission trained natives' and added his voice to calls urging the government to suspend mission education.<sup>63</sup> Hetherwick and Laws were forced to argue extensively for the loyalty of the Presbyterian missions and the propriety of mission education. What irked them above all was that the Commission, while finally *not* suspending mission control of education, was openly suspicious of the Scots (even to the extent of circulating the Westminster Confession of Faith for its delegates to examine!) and admitted in their final report 'a certain danger' posed in 'the absence of adequate supervision religious instruction' which did not exist in the Roman Catholic and UMCA missions, but presumably did amongst the Presbyterians.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the Presbyterian rebuttal protested too much, with *Life and Work* claiming:

that Protestant methods open a door to disloyalty which is closed by Romanism and Anglicanism is a doctrine new to us and, we think, to those of our readers who know anything of Church history'.<sup>65</sup>

Obviously one cannot here link the Chilembwe Rising to historic Presbyterian theories of political resistance nor even to the appropriation of

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Shepperson, *Independent African*, p. 35. For the Scottish missionary response to the Uprising see pp. 363-80; also helpful is K. Ross, 'Crisis and Identity: Presbyterian Ecclesiology in Southern Malawi 1891-1993', *Missionaria* 23 (1997), especially pp. 381-8.

<sup>64</sup> *Report of the Commission*, p. 44. N. Etherington, "Education and Medicine," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. by N. Etherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 282, notes the aftershocks of this report in Britain's colonies in southern Africa.

<sup>65</sup> *Life and Work in Nyasaland* (1916), p. 1, cited in Shepperson, *Independent African*, p. 373.

certain Calvinist motifs by liberationist theologians in contemporary Africa.<sup>66</sup> And, after all, Chilembwe and his followers were Baptists. But the Scottish Presbyterian mission had a tangible impact in creating those 'modern' Africans who were denied access to power and privilege in the colonial state that their religion, education and ability should have otherwise entitled them to, and whose resentment and frustration—growing through the first decades of the twentieth century—would be a decisive factor in the 1915 Uprising. In this sense, Shepperson put his finger directly on the ambiguity of the Scottish missionary legacy: 'It was Nyasaland's privilege and its perplexity that its taste for education had been formed by men from a country that had pioneered the spread of common schools: Scotland.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> E.g. J. Knox, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558); A. Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1984).

<sup>67</sup> Shepperson, *Independent African*, p. 242.