

THE EARLY FORMATION OF CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN MALAWI AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE MAKING OF MALAWIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we look at the history of charismatic churches in Malawi with a particular focus on some of the early charismatic churches. We first define what charismatic churches are. Secondly, we explore and explain the tremendous charismatic revival, tracing it from the time of its penetration in Malawi, its spread and also its survival on Malawian soil. The article also briefly focuses on the decisive role of women in the establishment of some of the early charismatic churches in Malawi. These include the Living Waters Church, Calvary Family Church, Glad Tidings Church and the Agape Church, among others, before some conclusions for the making of Malawian society are drawn.

Keywords: Charismatic churches; revival; Malawi; Living Waters Church; Calvary Family Church; Glad Tidings Church; Agape Church

1 Article based on a PhD dissertation submitted to the University of the Free State, Oct 2015 under promotorship of Prof. J.W. Hofmeyr, Extraordinary Professor, Department of Church History, University of the Free State.

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Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae
Volume 42 | Number 2 | 2016 | pp. 116–135
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2016/1232>
Print ISSN 1017-0499 | Online 2412-4265
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INTRODUCTION

Research on the charismatic churches, especially in Africa, calls for very specific approaches and methodologies. This article reports on a study in which the research method and approach entailed a case study, which was selected by means of the snowball sampling technique. Bryman (2008) states that snowball sampling is a non-probability sample in which the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these people to establish contacts that lead to the other.² As a data collection technique we conducted oral interviews, where the informants were used as the primary source of data to amplify and explain the material. The purposive sampling method was also used in which the researcher selected the respondents for the specific purpose of narrating the early history and origin of charismatic churches in Malawi. The interviews enabled the respondents to explain the origin of charismatic churches and expressed the current status of charismatic churches in Malawi. The document analysis also provided a background history of the charismatic movement in Malawi.

FORMATION OF CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

The formation of charismatic churches in Malawi is different from that of, for instance, African Independent Churches (AICs), although some similarities with the formation of other churches do exist.

Any charismatic church is formed first by having a group of people who are spiritually influential in an inter-denominational context. Good examples of such para-churches are New Life for All and Scripture Union. These people form fellowship groups and when the group gets bigger, a charismatic leader is identified by the followers. The fellowship then develops into a full ministry. The ministry performs different activities such as healing, evangelism, visitations and orphan care. Only when the ministry begins to meet on Sunday mornings and to administer the sacraments, will it be called a church.³

Another way in which charismatic churches are formed, is when conflicts exist in a traditionally non-charismatic church. Here the disagreements lead to the breakaway of the church, eventually leading to the emergence of other churches.⁴ Usually, not all members want to go charismatic, and as such two groups will often emerge alongside each other (charismatic and non-charismatic). This will go on for some time until things get worse and then they will part ways. Due to such emotions, the charismatic group may decide to leave the parent church and start its own church.

2 Alan Bryman, *Social research methods* (3rd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 697.

3 Ibid.

4 Rhodian G. Munyenembe, *Christianity and socio-cultural issues and the charismatic movement and contextualization in Malawi*, Kachere, Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 54.

Kawamba (2013) also observes that charismatic churches may be formed due to foreign influences. For instance, he relates that a charismatic leader may come to establish a church in a country, as was the case with the Blantyre Christian Centre (BCC), which was founded by Barbara Tippet in 1980, which became the first charismatic church in Malawi. Here I disagree with Kawamba: Barbara Tippet was indeed a foreigner, but her spirituality was African. She had come to Malawi as an atheist, received physical healing in a South African (Rhema) context, and then she started BCC. Though I don't count BCC as an outside influence, there are such influences, especially from Nigeria.

In some cases, churches are initiated by Malawian leaders, but with external collaboration. A good number of such churches have contacts with foreign influences either through financial or technical support. It is also common for many Ministries to have foreign contacts, as they aspire to grow into full charismatic churches. Some are branches of bigger charismatic churches across the globe.

Since the charismatic movement is a global phenomenon, Malawi is not spared of this development. As already discussed, Malawi experienced the charismatic movement in the 1970s with the revival that rocked Blantyre City. Fiedler observes that some streams of the 1970s revival went charismatic.⁵ Likewise, Kawamba observes that the charismatic movement was spearheaded by Barbara Tippet and her BCC.⁶ Thereafter, it spread to different cities and districts of this country. This study, therefore, focuses especially on the women from the Living Waters Church; Calvary Family Church; Agape Church; Holy Ghost Evangelism Ministries; Living Word Church; Winners Chapel; Christ Citadel; New Enlightened Church; Soul Winners; and Miracle of God Church.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR THEORIES ON THE RISE OF THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Collective behavioural theory

Majawa (1996) proposed the 'theory of collective behaviourism' to explain the rise of social movements. The theory stresses the importance of various social factors such as marginalisation, oppression, isolation and deprivation in cognition and emotions, which motivate people to get involved in a social movement. Such a movement promises to provide people with a renewed sense of identity, pride, meaning and the tools for fighting those in power. Conversely, corrective behaviour approaches tend to emphasise the social and psychological state of individuals in the church. It

5 Klaus Fiedler, *The charismatic and Pentecostal movement in Malawi in cultural perspective*, in *Religion in Malawi*, no. 9, 1999, p. 33.

6 Bright Kawamba, *Blantyre spiritual awakening 1969 to 1986: An Antecedent of the charismatic movement in Malawi*, University of Malawi, 2013, p. 37.

pictures people as primarily emotional creatures who are perpetually searching for socio- and psychosomatic balance.⁷

The proponents of the 'resource mobilisation approach' to the formation of a social movement, like the charismatic movement, differ from the collective behaviourists. Resource mobilisation proponents advocate for the availability of organisational resources such as leadership, control of information networks and the ability to manipulate society as key to successful social movement development. From this perspective, successful social movement cultivation is largely a rational process deliberately engaged in to achieve victory in the arena of conflict over scarce and valued social resources. The resource mobilisation approach therefore focuses on social structural conditions that favour formation of a movement.⁸

Socio-religious scientists generally seem to view religious behaviour as emotional in nature, hence they do not invest much of their resource mobilisation in the movement. However, it can also be argued that what appears to be primarily emotion driven behaviour can have some rational and goal-directed purposes. It is for this reason that Board and Faulkner (1983) in their research tried to demonstrate the applicability of resource mobilisation theory to the charismatic movement and other modern religious movements.⁹

Psychological theory

The charismatic members in many of their testimonies point out the fact that they belong to this movement; it helps them to solve many challenges. It is common to hear of persons who were lame or physically challenged but now are healed. Others believe that the Lord delivered them from abject immorality. Some had financial problems once but strongly believe that they got riches through the charismatic movement. This concurs with Falvo's (1975) observations that, right from the initial stages of the charismatic movement, its proponents believed that they were lacking something in their lives and that they got it soon after joining the movement.¹⁰

Historically, the 1960s represented a time of social instability and political change. In fact, strain and stress were and are naturally inherent and common amongst all human beings. Psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud (in Beckert 1993) state that strain can lead to apathy, depression and other forms of withdrawal, or may lead to a search for behaviour which makes life feasible again in new situations.¹¹

7 Clement Majawa, *The Holy Spirit and charismatic renewal in Africa and beyond*, Nairobi: Creation Enterprise, 2007, p. 21.

8 Ibid.

9 R. Board and J. Faulkner, *The Catholic charismatics*, London: University New York, 1983, p. 71.

10 S. Falvo, *The hour of the Holy Spirit: The dawn of a charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church*, Athlone: St Paul's Publications, 1975, p. 73.

11 Richard Beckert, *Determinants of psychotherapy today*, Pick Rosemary Press, 1993, p. 18.

Moreover, Fiedler (1999) adds that the charismatic movement came to Malawi in the 1970s after it had emerged in the United States of America in the early Sixties.¹² Some scholars observe that this movement spread very fast from its birth place to many places across the world, at first largely within the mainline churches. Munyenembe (2011) observes that church historians have attributed the rise of the charismatic movement to the reaction against secular Christianity that reached its climax in the 1960s.¹³

Likewise, Kawamba notes that the charismatic movement and Pentecostalism share many similarities when it comes to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. They believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace that brings power in the life of the believer and that the evidence of such baptism is speaking in tongues. However, other than these two similarities, the charismatic movement and the Pentecostal churches are substantially different. For example, the charismatic movement has a Catholic branch and does transcend denominational lines. Thus members of the charismatic movement with a Catholic descent believe in a sacramental form of salvation; Lutheran charismatics believe in infant baptism as redemptive; while Baptist charismatics believe in salvation that comes from faith alone. Although the three types of charismatics differ in their views regarding some fundamentals of their faith, they all believe in speaking in tongues and other gifts.¹⁴

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN MALAWI

As early as 1970, the city of Blantyre experienced an influx of huge amounts of Pentecostal and charismatic literature and audio cassettes from America. Some of these came from renowned names such as Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, and Kenneth Hagin Sr.¹⁵ Later in the mid-eighties, other television-evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart,¹⁶ Evangelist T.L. Osborn,¹⁷ David Nunn,¹⁸

12 Klaus Fiedler, The charismatic and Pentecostal movement in Malawi in cultural perspective, in *Religion in Malawi*, no. 9, 1999, pp. 27-38.

13 Rhodian G. Munyenembe, *Christianity and socio-cultural issues and the charismatic movement and contextualization in Malawi*, Kachere, Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 54.

14 Gary E. Gilley, Doctrinal distinctives of the charismatic movement, in *Think on these things* (a monthly contemporary theological issues publication) Springfield, Illinois: March 1999, pp. 4-10.

15 Kenneth Hagin was introduced by authors who printed his books as the pioneer in the teaching of faith through his Rhema Ministries.

16 Jimmy Swaggart Ministries in South Africa opened an office in Limbe at the Hard Elect House where they distributed for free a Swaggart Magazine titled *The Evangelist* and sold cassettes and booklets for the Evangelist.

17 Known for his miracles in his international crusades in India, Indonesia as in African and Far Eastern countries.

18 David Nunn was reputed for his evangelistic messages and healing ministry where he urged listeners to touch the radio set as he prayed his prayer of healing leading to the major healing experience of John Sapulani in 1978.

Morris Cerullo,¹⁹ R.W. Shambach,²⁰ and C.M. Ward²¹ greatly impacted the ‘born-again’ movement in Blantyre. Although some of these groups or fellowships may not be described as charismatics in the strict sense, their influence combined to tilt their disposition to sympathise with Pentecostalism, and to the acceptance of ensuing charismatic influences which came on the scene through the ministry of Rev. Stewart Lane, who established probably the first charismatic mission entity in Blantyre.²² The early history will be discussed as follows:

- Stewart Lane – Cornelius Fellowship.
- Barbara Tippet – Blantyre Christian Centre (Word Alive).
- Barbara Tippet – Mustard Seed Fellowship.
- Stewart Lane – Malawi Polytechnic Fellowship.

Stewart Lane - Cornelius Fellowship

The first charismatic group or fellowship was the Cornelius Fellowship, which was founded by Rev. Stewart Lane, then resident parish minister of Holy Innocents Anglican Church in Limbe.²³ The Cornelius Fellowship was important to the Anglican and Roman Catholic charismatics from South America, the USA and the UK. These probably were the places where Rev. Stewart got his initial charismatic orientation.

The Cornelius Fellowship won the hearts of many Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The group was also popular amongst the white expatriates, many of whom drove from Mulanje and Thyolo to Limbe where it met.²⁴ The Cornelius Fellowship opened an option for a number of elite ‘born-again’ who wanted to try out free worship and tongues. Besides, the Cornelius Fellowship arranged a good reception for its members as they were treated to snacks and refreshments, and sometimes were served alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Unlike other born-again fellowships, Cornelius Fellowship never barred the smoking of cigarettes. While many elite liked this approach, extremists condemned it as a bunch of carnal Christians who still

19 Known for his schools of healing and faith conducted all over Africa and the world.

20 His sermons and services were perhaps the most emotional services and people claimed various miracles in Malawi including salvation experiences.

21 He was mostly loved by the theological stream of ‘born-again’ and they loved his in-depth exposition of Scripture with moving oratory.

22 His charismatic fellowship named Cornelius Fellowship however did not last longer than two years 1979-1980 but it served to nurture the initial charismatic orientation in Blantyre’s spirituality.

23 Stewart Lane came to Malawi in 1965 as an English teacher at Malosa Secondary School, a priest, fellowship leader, university chaplain, author and columnist in the local daily in Malawi.

24 The elitist nature of this fellowship earned it the name ‘Fellowship ya Azungu’ (Fellowship for White Men) but admittance was for all Christians. It was because of this fellowship that elite personalities like Isaac Mkukupha and a few others came to their conversion.

had a melancholy for worldliness. Although a number of ‘born-again’ stayed on with the Cornelius Fellowship, many left for the Scripture Union Fellowship; Young Believers’ Fellowship; the Gospel for All Fellowship; Fellowship of the Youth; Pentecostal Revival Crusade Fellowship; and the Chimango Revival Fellowship, which appeared to be normal and familiar to them.

Barbara Tippet - Blantyre Christian Centre (Word Alive)

Rev. Barbara Tippet came to the scene in the eighties, when she founded the BCC following a sensational conversion to the Christian faith. Tippet was the 28-year old wife of Brian Tippet, a company executive. Mrs Tippet was an agnostic when she was being bothered by backache problems. Her situation could not be treated in Malawi and she was referred to South Africa. There the experts recommended three major spinal operations which she underwent at different times. She was for some time in a plaster-cast, and was on a walking stick. She lived on black coffee, analgesics and alcohol to relieve the pain. The doctors, it appeared, recommended a fourth operation on her spine. While she was waiting for this surgery, a friend took her to pastor Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church in Johannesburg. The pastor shared the word of God with her and prayed for her, and she was immediately healed. Apparently, this healing touched her heart, and changed her view of God. She then accepted Christ as her Lord and Saviour. From then, she dedicated her life to serve the Lord. For four years she served the Lord as a lay person until 1986 when she was officially ordained by Ron Kussmaul as the first clergy-woman in the ecclesiastical history of Blantyre.²⁵

Barbara Tippet – Mustard Seed Fellowship

With regards to the Mustard Seed Fellowship there was, however, some confusion from the beginning because Willie Chabonda claimed having started a band and a ministry by the very same name a year earlier than Tippet’s Mustard Seed Fellowship. Her passion seemed to have been influenced by Magnus Udd, a veteran missionary whose ministry, Faith Christian Services, worked with a pool of different rural independent churches in Mulanje, Thyolo and Chikwawa.

Tippet’s Mustard Seed Fellowship started like a miniature Faith Christian Services that operated similar to a town-fellowship in the elite area of Limbe. As it grew, she transferred it to the Polytechnic, where Rev. Stewart Lane had been working as chaplain for a number of years. Although Stewart was Anglican, he had one thing in common with Tippet, that is their charismatic background.

25 Narration by Henry Malili, alumnus of Rhema Bible Training Centre, who worked closely with Barbara Tippet until later when he started his own Healing Hope Ministry.

Among the youth that associated with Tippet were Willie Chaponda, who claimed to have a Ministry at that time, Zacheus Kawalala, Henry Malili, Bright Wanyemba and others. Because of the apparent confusion and misunderstandings that developed between Tippet and Chapomba's ministries, Tippet changed the name to Blantyre Christian Centre (BCC) and relocated to the city centre near Victoria Avenue in Blantyre. Because of the strategic location, and the quality of the literature she was selling in her bookshop, she became a strong competitor to the old bookshops such as the Scripture Union, New Life for All, CLAIM 'Mabuku' and Good News Bookroom. Besides, their worship was in English, and that alone attracted the elite residents in Blantyre. The Blantyre 'born-again's' now had several bookstores that sold books and other literature. When Willie Chaponda partnered with Gordon Decker, a South African Bible teacher, to open the Mustard Seed Centre on the first floor of the building that housed Commercial Bank of Malawi in Limbe, the Blantyre elite had a fourth option for book-shopping.²⁶

Stewart Lane – Malawi Polytechnic Fellowship

Rev. Stewart Lane played a special role as chaplain at Malawi Polytechnic Fellowship, particularly in the counselling and teaching of young 'born-again's' who lived amidst secular and post-modern philosophies.²⁷ Apart from helping the students overcome university elitism, he also founded the inter-denominational Cornelius Fellowship in Limbe, which served the expatriates and the students alike.

Having looked at the earlier history and founding of the first charismatic fellowships, we now turn the focus on discussing in more detail the different churches.

SOME OF THE EARLY CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

Blantyre Christian Centre (Word Alive)

By late 1981, when the Cornelius Fellowship was winding up, another charismatic fellowship led by Barbara Tippet was born.²⁸ Because of misunderstandings it later changed its name to Christian Fellowship (and later Blantyre Christian Centre), following some negative remarks and a name dispute with one of the colleagues. For over two years, it was meeting at the Polytechnic, possibly with the blessing of Stewart Lane who was then the chaplain there. In 1984, she moved the fellowship to

26 Recorded audio interview with Willie Chaponda 2012.

27 A Polytechnic student testified how Stewart Lane helped them counter anti-Christian Western secular ideas through his talks and writings.

28 Barbara Tippet was a British national who was in her earlier life an open-minded agnostic, but her life and intellectual orientation drastically changed after undergoing a serious health crisis which threatened her life in 1978. She later founded the Blantyre Christian Centre in 1986.

Downs House in Hardeleq Building. The Blantyre Christian Centre was then joined by a white South African charismatic Bible teacher, Gordon Decker, who founded the City Bible School, a school under the ministry of Blantyre Christian Centre. This was probably the first school with charismatic orientation in the country. Among the school's first students were Henry Malili, Stanley Ndovie, Willie Chaponda and a few others. The total number of students was between eight and 10. The school also operated as a fellowship because they allotted a good time to prayer, praise and worship.

- The role of the City Bible School in the BCC

The relationship between Tippet and Decker hit a deadlock because their administrative and operational styles differed within the ministry. Decker therefore decided to move out and asked the Church of Christ at Ginnery Corner to rent him a space; and there he established his City Bible School.²⁹ Decker was later joined by another Bible teacher, Mr Ormond from New Zealand,³⁰ and the two became teachers at the City Bible School. At the end of 1985, Gordon Decker needed to go back home for furlough, and he identified Willie Chaponda, who was recognised as the brightest student, to teach his fellows and assist Mr Ormond. The teachers decided to fast-track his graduation to enable him to do this, but Chaponda courteously declined because he foresaw that some of his classmates would be offended by this move. As a result, he waited the last three months of their course and graduated with his peers. He then started full-time teaching at the City Bible School. Almost all the students that graduated at the City Bible School ended up as propagators of the charismatic movement in Blantyre and Zomba. Others went out to beef up the already existing charismatic establishments, as did Malili who actively supported Tippet in her ministry, although he later parted ways with her and started his own charismatic ministry, called the 'Healing Hope'. Others went outright to start their own Ministries in Blantyre and other parts of Malawi.³¹ Likewise, Living Waters Church; Calvary Family Church; Blantyre Christian Centre; Healing Hope Ministry; Glad Tidings of Evans Chingana; Soul Harvest Ministries; and the Faith of God Church enormously benefited from the City Bible School. The City Bible School became the third charismatic expression after the Cornelius Fellowship and the Mustard Seed Fellowship (which later became the Blantyre Christian Centre and was later renamed World Alive Church).

29 Willie Chaponda's audio recorded history of both his own Mustard Seed Ministries and Blantyre Christian Centre 2001.

30 Mr Ormond was a young missionary from New Zealand to South Africa, and while there he learned of Gordon Decker's ministry in Malawi, a country with apparently more needs than South Africa. He was invited to come over to Malawi and partner with Decker in the ministry of the gospel.

31 Audio recorded interview with Apostle W. Chaponda 2013.

Willie Chaponda initially interfaced with Barbara Tippet briefly when he came to her Blantyre Christian Centre between 1984 and 1985. Apart from the initial Christian relationship as fellow ministers, they shared the same burden of reaching the city with the gospel. Chaponda offered to assist her in developing music at her worship centre. At that time, Tippet had an organ which was not being used because of lack of expertise, and Chaponda had such skills. He offered to play it and also arranged a worship and praise team. He also led the vocals while playing the organ and or the keyboard.³²

The Blantyre Christian Centre meanwhile began to grow and sizeable crowds began to attend its lunch hour fellowship meetings, and later its specially designated weekend meetings. Its location at Victoria Avenue was very strategic, particularly for Blantyre elites. This marked a sudden turn-around in its fortunes as a ministry which stood alone, unaffiliated to any other evangelical association or group apart from charismatic ministries in America and South Africa. The messages, the music and worship were in English. The church also boasted of a very rich bookstore which sold many of the published works in the charismatic world. They also sold some of the Bible versions which were not available at Bible Society and or CLAIM.

Chaponda was instrumental in assisting Blantyre Christian Centre to develop high standards of modern worship and praise. While he was doing this, he was always conscious of his calling to nurture and grow his own Mustard Seed Ministries. His dream was to build a big Mustard Seed Ministries Worship Centre in the town. Thus he made it known that he would not stay at Blantyre Christian Centre for good, even amidst the calls asking him to stay there. To this end, he decided that he would mentor someone talented who would play the organ after his departure. He finally got a young man named Bright Wanyemba, whom he mentored and who later became one of the most prolific leaders of the worship and praise team. Chaponda then concentrated on growing his Mustard Seed Ministries.³³

Henry Malili began to work with Tippet from the early days of her Mustard Seed Fellowship in Limbe, long before it changed its name to the Christian Fellowship Centre at the Polytechnic and later to Blantyre Christian Centre. Later it was through Tippet that Malili got a scholarship to study at the Rhema Training Centre in Johannesburg, joining others from Zambia and Zimbabwe for a nine-month long pastoral training.³⁴

However, after Malili was trained and at the time when he thought he could be a possible successor to Tippet, Malili fell out of favour with Tippet and this development led him to exit the ministry. He then started Healing Hope Ministry in 1987 as another charismatic ministry. This was perhaps the fifth charismatic entity in Blantyre after Cornelius Fellowship, Tippet's Blantyre Christian Centre, Gordon

32 Interview (Int). Pastor Apostle Willey, Chaponda, Nkolokoti, 12.5.2013.

33 Int. Willey Chaponda Nkolokoti, 5.5.2013.

34 Int. Henry Malili, Ndirande, 7.3.2013.

Decker's City Bible School and the Living Waters Ministries. Tippet then replaced Malili with another bright young man named Zacheus Kawalala, to whom she left the Ministry. However, before Kawalala took over, a missionary and friend of Tippet, Jim Lapka, filled the gap to prepare for a permanent reign of Kawalala as senior pastor of the church in Malawi.

Agape Church

The word 'Agape' is a Greek term which means the 'God-kind of love' or 'God's unconditional love' and the church is based on what Jesus Christ declared in Mathew 16:18 that He was going to build His church. The word 'church' is derived from a Greek term 'Ekklesia' which means the called out ones into the assembly.

The Agape Life Church International (ALCI) is duly registered in Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa, with its headquarters in Blantyre, Malawi. The ALCI started on 8 February 1982, with its first church service held in a house belonging to the late Mrs Alice Ngwira, one of the first elders of the church. Apostle Augustine D. Mgala was the first pastor and was assisted by his wife, Pastor Priscilla L. Mgala. The church started with 15 members. Prior to its establishment, Apostle Mgala and his wife had a successful inter-denominational teaching ministry that used to meet every Saturday afternoon at Red Cross Hall in Blantyre. Lives were transformed as a result of their effective teaching.³⁵ It was in 1986 that Apostle Mgala had a vision to start a church which would become a teaching centre of the uncompromised word of God. The Lord showed him that from the teaching centre, he would have to go out to other places to spread the word of God. This would set free many people who would be spiritually, physically and emotionally bound.

The vision of the Agape Life Church International is 'to make every man a disciple of Christ'. They believe that they were called not only to make converts for the Lord, but also to teach the converts the truth about the word of God, and teach them to obey God by applying His words in every area of their lives through faith. This ultimately produces disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The mission of the Agape Life Church International is 'to bring deliverance, discipleship, development and destiny to the people of all nations'.³⁶

35 Int. Apostle D. Ngala, Zingwangwa, 12.4.13.

36 Agape Life Church International Constitution, 2009, Revised, p. 14. The mission statement also contains the following: 'We believe it is our duty to help the people who have been delivered from the power of bondage and sin, by taking them through a discipleship process in order to get them grounded in Christ and become responsible Christians. After discipleship, we believe we need to empower the people by educating their minds and training them to acquire work skills. We believe in developing the total man – spirit, soul and body. We are also committed to providing relief to affected people during natural or man-made disasters regardless of ethnic, political, religious or grounds. We are committed to helping people discover their purpose for living. This will ultimately lead them into God-given destiny.'

Faith of God Church

The Faith of God Church is another charismatic expression that emerged from the disintegrating Andrew Gabriel's Born-again Evangelistic Association as Holy Cross Fellowship. It was founded by Bishop Geoffrey Matoga in 1984.³⁷ As Gabriel and his movement were plagued with leadership crises and moral problems, the Holy-Cross fellowship came out of it as a splinter group like the Bible Faith Ministries and other smaller groups. The Holy-Cross fellowship continued with a level of success, but it was the emerging leader Geoffrey Matoga who changed its fortunes when he decided not only to change its name to 'Faith of God Church' but also to change its outlook and operations into a modern and fast growing charismatic entity in Blantyre.³⁸

Living Waters Church

The Living Waters Church was founded by Apostle Stanley Madalitso Ndovie in the year 1985. At that time, he was a pastor at the Apostolic Faith Mission in Blantyre. The Lord showed him a vision to start the Living Waters Church. Initially five families were involved. Ndovie was probably the most successful leader to emerge from the charismatic fold in Blantyre in the latter part of the eighties and nineties. Unlike a number of 'born-again' of his era, Ndovie had a strong ecclesiastical foundation and church orientation from his training and ministry with the Apostolic Faith Mission.³⁹ However, he also caught much of the evangelistic zeal and fire from his peers through his regular association with them at the Zingwangwa-Chilobwe-Chimwankhunda Prayer Group in the latter part of the seventies.

As a young minister he was revered by many as an emerging leader and powerful force commanding great respect within his own church (AFM) and also outside the church. The young man was noted for his humility and sociability. He mixed well with people and intelligently engaged them. When things went awry at the AFM, it was apparent that he would fall back on his fellows he had befriended, prayed with and served with in the 'born-again' movement. He spoke with confidence and his testimony on how he came to know the Lord as Saviour, moved many people.⁴⁰

Here is a brief synopsis on Ndovie:

37 Felix Nyika, From revival to apostolic networks: The historic development of Malawian neocharismatic churches, in *Religion and culture: A Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies*, Mzuzu University, Issue no 1, November, 2013, p. 20.

38 Appreciated from long discussions with now Apostle Dr Charles Tsukuluzwa with whom I spent almost a year together as students at the Gbagada based International Bible Training Center in Lagos Nigeria (Tsukuluzwa was also an associate of Bishop Matoga).

39 Ulf Strohhahn, Pentecostalism in Malawi: A history of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Malawi, Zomba: Kachere, 2005, pp. 138 -139.

40 Int. Mcford Nkhwimba, 3.4.2013.

Stanley Ndovie was only eighteen years old when he was admitted to Apostolic Faith Mission Bible College. That was the college's first generation of students studying in the classrooms at the AFM Naperi Campus. Ndovie rose to prominence while at the Bible College through his intellect, and preaching ability. After graduation, he was asked to assist Pastor Jim Phiri as co-pastor in Naperi and to teach at the College. He worked closely with E. Wendland. Ndovie became a successful pastor at Naperi. At the time, the Naperi congregation proved to be the strongest urban church for AFM. Ndovie's pragmatism led him to introduce a band in the church called Living Waters Praise Team.⁴¹

Although he was not considered a prominent figure at the prayer group's meetings, he was nevertheless considered a very necessary person to the fellowship. When it was time to start his Living Waters Ministries, he quietly retreated from Zingwangwa-Chilobwe-Chimwankhunda Prayer Group to his small house in Nkolokosa, where he started a fellowship which met in his house. He commanded a following both from his AFM Church and from other 'born-again' fellowships, including Zingwangwa-Chilobwe-Chimwankhunda Prayer Group. These initially became the founding members of Living Waters Ministries.

Glad Tidings Church

The founder of Glad Tidings Church in Blantyre is Evans Chingana.⁴² He founded this church with some of his colleagues he had earlier associated with at the Zomba Air Field where he flew planes as a Malawi Young Pioneers government sponsored trainee pilot. The awakening that took place in Blantyre also affected parts of Zomba town and he, along with a couple of his friends, became 'born-again' through the Ministry of NLFA.

When the Malawi government experienced a funding crisis for this programme, the young pilots, that included Chingana, were transferred to Blantyre and when it was clear that Malawi Young Pioneers could not financially sustain its air wing, these young men ended up being discharged from their jobs. But as this door closed, another one opened. The three young men won scholarships to train at Rhema Bible Training Centre in Zimbabwe for a year and after their training, they came back and founded the Glad Tidings Church, which first opened its doors at Kudya Entertainment Centre in 1990.⁴³

Calvary Family Church

41 Ulf Strohhenn, *Pentecostalism in Malawi: A history of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005, p. 139.

42 The soft spoken resilient born again and charismatic leader of this church is a former trained pilot under the defunct Malawi Young Pioneers.

43 Int. Evan Chigana Chitawira, 12.5.13

The Calvary Family Church started as a ministry in the late 1970s. This was a period when numerous charismatic movements appeared in Malawi. As is the case with most charismatic movements, the primary aim was not to start a church. It started as a fellowship where people from different denominations used to meet to share the gospel. The fellowship was known as the Young Believers Fellowship (YBF), led by Madalitso P. Mbewe.⁴⁴

This fellowship started in Blantyre and meetings were held in the offices of the Evangelical Fellowship of Malawi (EFM) in Mpemba Building. The name of the fellowship changed to Pentecostal Revival Crusade Ministries in 1980. This was done to embrace all age groups and not only Young Bible believers, as the former name suggested.⁴⁵ This could be seen as an advanced stage towards the formation of the church. Since churches of this nature are usually led by an individual who is seen as a charismatic leader, consequently the church is built around him.⁴⁶ This too was exactly what happened with the Pentecostal Revival Crusade Ministries. During this period, some members of this fellowship, which included Mrs and Mr Thipa, Mr Mangondo, Mr and Mrs Jiya, Mrs G. Simanti and Sister Kamwendo, met every Sunday afternoon as a fellowship and shared their experiences concerning their spiritual life.

During the period 1980-1990, a number of Pentecostal Revival Crusade Ministries were opened in the country. Such centres included Lilongwe Pentecostal Revival Crusade, which was opened in 1982, the Mangochi Centre opened in 1984, Blantyre Centre opened in 1980 and later on the Ebenezer Centre in Ntcheu. Members met at all the centres on Sunday afternoons only, where they shared the word of God and prayed but there was no administration of sacraments such as Baptism, Holy Communion and officiating of marriage. Members demanded this to take place as they gathered. This gave pressure to the ministry to officially launch itself as

44 The Reverend D.P.H. Mbewe founded Pentecostal Revival Crusade in Ndirande in the early sixties. He came to Malawi as a returning *Matchona*, of course, he still has his roots in Zimbabwe [probably Gweru], where he first planted this ministry and continued to run the two strands of his ministry in both countries. However, the ministry in Malawi tended to weaken when he went away for long periods to Zimbabwe and then he would resuscitate it when he came back. While this was taking place the young Mbewe, who was successful in his profession as a banker, heroically ran a very powerful young people's ministry, the YBF, as early as 1975 through to 1979. At that time he decided [obviously with the father's approval] to fuse his powerful YBF into the rather ailing PRC which at the time was largely unknown to people in Blantyre outside Ndirande. His coming rejuvenated this latent and ailing ministry, taking it from the doldrums of Ndirande to the limelight of the elitist centres of Polytechnic College Hall and then later to the Chichiri trade fair grounds before he remodelled it further into a dynamic charismatic church, the Calvary Family Church, in 1987. Madalitso Mbewe, as a prolific preacher, was highly heralded for his charismatic prosperity gospel teaching titled 'The Joseph Anointing.'

45 Int. Pastor Thipa, Nkolokosa, 24.3.13.

46 Klaus Fiedler, The charismatic and Pentecostal movement in Malawi in cultural perspective, in *Religion in Malawi*, no. 9, 1999, p. 34.

a church. It was on 12 January 1992, when Apostle Madalitso Mbewe officially launched the Calvary Family Church and its first morning service was held in the offices of the Evangelical Fellowship of Malawi. In 1992, all Pentecostal Revival Crusade branches were converted to Calvary Family Churches. Currently, Calvary Family Church has branches in all the districts of Malawi. It also has branches abroad, including in the United Kingdom in Leicester.

THE RATIONALE FOR JOINING THE CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN MALAWI

The revival that emanated in the urban contexts of Malawi, with special focus on the city of Blantyre in the 1970s, produced a number of African religious movements of which the charismatic churches are a part. Nyika (2013) defines the term ‘revival’ as the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to more vital spiritual life, witness and work by prayer and the word after repentance in crisis of their spiritual decline.⁴⁷ It is from this definition that Beougher (2000) formulated the five famous facts concerning revival: that it is of divine origin; primarily affects believers; presupposes declension; prayer and scriptures are vital; and results in the renewal of spiritual life and witness.⁴⁸ After a decade, the revival renewed the church – both the Catholic and Protestant – and produced the churches that are referred to as charismatic churches. Here I differ from Nyika’s observation who calls these churches ‘Neocharismatic’ but I maintain Fiedler’s (1999, 27-38) views in the ‘Charismatic and Pentecostal movements in Malawi in cultural perspective’. Strohbahn (2005) perceives the charismatic churches as the offshoots of the Matchona (returned migrant worker). Furthermore, Fiedler notes that the development of charismatics follows four initial patterns of development, being the interdenominational phase, fellowship phase, ministry phase and then only neocharismatics.⁴⁹

Having looked at the founding history of charismatic churches in Malawi, the study at hand proceeded to research the reasons why Christians are attracted to the charismatic movement. Members of different denominations that belong to the charismatic churches were interviewed on why they had joined the movement. The following were the reasons given:

47 Felix Nyika, From revival to apostolic networks: The historic development of Malawian neocharismatic churches, in *Religion and culture: A Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies*, Mzuzu University, Issue no 1, November, 2013, p. 12.

48 Timothy K. Beougher, Revival, Revivals, in *Evangelical dictionary of world movements*, edited by A Scott Moreau, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, pp. 830-833.

49 Interdenominational phase: This is through the alliance of para-church organisations and churches which seemed to be incubators of the revival, that is, they championed the revival message of personal relationship with Christ. The para-church later formed a charismatic church. Fellowship phase: By 1970 the fellowship emerged, i.e New Life for All (NLFA) Ministries phase: Some ministries have emanated from fellowship and have evangelistic fervor and the charismatic phase.

- *Rebirth of their faith:* Interviews with 140 out of the 250 respondents indicate that many people joined the movement because they saw the need to renew their faith.
- *Dissatisfied with life as Christians:* Other respondents explained that they were not satisfied with their life as Christians and so felt the need to feel the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- *Love, concern, reconciliation and unity:* 50 per cent of the respondents said that they were attracted by the love, concern, reconciliation and unity that exist among the members of the movement, and especially among the women. They said that they were impressed by the way the members interrelate and interact. For instance, hugging, happiness, calling each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister’, and assisting one another are some of the manifestations of their communal existence.
- *Knowledge about God:* 40 per cent of the respondents said that they joined because they wanted to have more knowledge about God, especially about the role of the Holy Spirit. They said they wanted to know the Word of God in depth and to witness it in their lives.
- *Lively faith:* A lesser percentage of 20 per cent of the respondents said that they were attracted by the lively faith the charismatic members seem to have, and the liturgy was pointed out as being very interesting and involving. They were attracted by the singing, clapping, dancing and openness.
- *A living example:* 30 per cent of the respondents said that they were encouraged by good examples given by the charismatic members and even more so the women. These people seemed to live a genuine Christian life when contrasted with the majority of Christians
- *Friends:* 60 per cent of the respondents said that they joined because they were encouraged by their friends and relatives to join the movement.
- *Good and sound Biblical teachings:* Some joined the movement because of its good Biblical teachings and the preaching of the charismatics, gospel sharing, the need to be involved in the work of evangelisation and the involvement in prayer
- *Solving a specific problem:* Some joined the charismatic movement in order to solve a specific problem. Some of the problems include: sickness that they wanted to be relieved of; psychological and mental challenges; social and economic problems that could be solved once they were prayed over.
- *Miracles and prophecies:* 10 per cent of the respondents said that they were looking for miracles and prophecies. Miracles really show God’s hand at work in our society

- *Searching for the truth:* They said that they were searching for the truth. They wanted forgiveness for their sins while others were looking for salvation.

THE GENERAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EARLY FORMATION OF THE CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

The charismatic movement has made a significant contribution in Africa, also through the involvement of women, but in Malawi more specifically in the early period. Below are some of the initial general contributions.

Encouraging the church to prayerfulness

The charismatic movement, and especially the women, have encouraged Christians to pray. For any true Christian, the importance of prayer need not be overemphasised. Despite the significance of prayer, many non-charismatic churches relegate prayer to the end-line of their duty and it is regarded as of secondary importance, so much so that some Christians cannot manage to pray in public.

The charismatic movement promotes prayer among Christians, be it at individual or group level. They organise nights of prayers, which are uncommon within mainline churches. The charismatics have also introduced the idea of prayer groups that are incorporated in small Christian communities. They argue that such groups are more helpful to the people, as they help them to participate in prayer and other activities. Moreover, through such gatherings, individuals share their spiritual and social talents.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit

The charismatic movement has helped Christians to solely depend on the Holy Spirit. Theologically, the charismatics believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They also believe that the Holy Spirit leads and guides the church. This is different from the view of some Christians who view the church as an organisation that is run by human wisdom and planning.⁵⁰ Such Christians also regard the church as secondary, social and something to give them company when they die. The charismatics' dependence on the Holy Spirit makes them re-discover and use different spiritual gifts, instead of just reading about them in the Bible.

50 It can be argued that the Holy Spirit endows certain individuals with the gifts of administration and organisation. However the propensity is to downplay the role of the Holy Spirit in the contexts where there is less teaching on the practicalities of his guidance of the church.

Belief in the healing power of Jesus

The charismatic movement is commended for giving confidence to the people affected by different diseases, through the healing power of Jesus Christ. This was something that was not recognised by the mainline churches then, but today Christians acknowledge this power. In addition, the charismatic movement also carries out physical, psychological and spiritual healing.

Spurring the church in giving

The charismatic movement encourages people to support the church materially and spiritually. Today, many people are ready to support each other, so much so that dependence on foreign aid is significantly dropping. Moreover, they achieve this through the principle of giving one-tenth of their income to the church. This is a good notion both spiritually and socially, and can be replicated by many developing countries that heavily depend on Western aid. Moreover, aid or donations do not liberate individuals or countries, as they come with strings attached.

Development of ministries

The charismatic movement has influenced the formation of fellowships which often developed into full-blown ministries, also strongly under the leadership of women as shown above. This goes back to the history of the charismatic churches' formation. Such gatherings have also led to the spiritual growth of some Christians who significantly contribute to their denominations. Moreover, charismatic churches have changed church polity and operations by attracting and utilising young people's leadership skills which were not recognised by the mainline churches. These churches also promote gospel sharing and networking in many denominations. They encourage Bible reading, interpreting and sharing among Christians at both family and community levels.

CONCLUSION

This article has reflected not only on the early formation and significance of the charismatic churches in Malawi, but also on the rationale for their tremendous growth and briefly the role of women in this process. This is amply shown in the foundations of pioneering groups like Barbara Tippet's Blantyre Christian Centre, which was the earliest charismatic church in Malawi. It was followed by the Living Waters Church, Calvary Family Church, and Agape Church, among others. The revival that brought the formation of the charismatic churches to Malawi continues to expand, such that the numbers of these churches will most probably keep on growing on these foundations. In the course of time, it was proved that most of these churches'

teaching is based on the central message of the Bible, but that some of them have in different ways deviated from that. The charismatic churches have, however, in addition to increasing the number of churches in Malawi and their membership, also greatly enhanced spiritual growth, strengthened the Christian witness, improved the well-being of Malawian Christians, and promoted the growth and well-being of Malawian society, which will continue to reap benefits well into the twenty first century.

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