

A History of the Fellowship of Youth in the Zambezi Evangelical Church (1983–2018)

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Abstract

The Fellowship of Youth (FoY) is an established name for the youth organisation in the Zambezi Evangelical Church (ZEC) in Malawi. Prior to its establishment, several missionaries attempted to organise the youth ministry in the church but with little success. The idea of having an established youth organisation in the ZEC was introduced in the early 1960s; however, not much was done until 1983, when the FoY was launched at Dombole congregation in Ntcheu. The original goal of the FoY was to enhance spiritual growth among the youth through biblical teachings and social support. Its establishment helped the ZEC to bring together the autonomous youth choirs which actively participated in evangelism and crusades. The FoY has planted new churches in urban areas and produced some leaders in the church and the community. In the early 1990s, the FoY embraced a charismatic spirituality which transformed the theological praxis and the order of worship in the church. However, the shift to the charismatic movement has led to a liturgical crisis which resulted in factions and split-offs between 2004 and 2018. For this reason, the FoY has been receiving mixed perceptions.

Keywords: Fellowship of Youth; Zambezi Evangelical Church; evangelism; discipleship; Africa Evangelical Church; River of Life Evangelical Church

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Introduction

Preamble

The Fellowship of Youth (FoY) is a denominational youth organisation established in the Zambezi Evangelical Church (ZEC), one of the evangelical churches in Malawi. Not much has been written about the place and ministry of the FoY in the church. Currently, there are two minor papers about the FoY, and they were originally intended as Bachelor of Arts (BA) projects. Mateyu (2006) analyses the case of the rising conflicts between the FoY and the elders in one of the congregations in the church, and Sulumba (2012) investigates the case of the needs and challenges of the FoY in the church in urban Blantyre. Furthermore, in published sources, Munyenyembe (2011, 62–119) discusses some cases from the FoY to illustrate the attractiveness of the charismatic spirituality among the youth. In addition, Fiedler (2015a, 321–325) discusses the influence of the charismatic movement on the dynamic religious and cultural development in the evangelical churches in Malawi and categorises the FoY as a fellowship stage of the charismatic movement within a denomination. Nevertheless, the available literature does not provide a systematic and comprehensive history of the FoY. Therefore, this article seeks to unfold the unknown history of the FoY in the ZEC from 1983 to 2018.

Background of the Evangelical Churches in Malawi

In Malawi, there are three evangelical churches which share common teachings and theological praxis (Kalima, interview 21 November 2023). These are the Zambezi Evangelical Church (ZEC), the Evangelical Church of Malawi (ECoM), and the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC). These three evangelical churches have jointly established their own theological institution called the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi (EBCoM) to preserve the evangelical theology.

Of the three evangelical churches in Malawi, the ZEC is the oldest, and the only one with an established name for its youth ministry. It was founded by the British Baptist missionary, Joseph Booth, in 1892 on principles of industrial and faith missions (Ross and Fiedler 2020, 77–79). The church originally started as the Zambezi Industrial Mission (ZIM) and opened coffee plantations and a printing press to raise funds for running the mission. It shows that Booth formed an industrial mission for the missionaries to support themselves through trade and farming (Masala 2005, 6). The ZIM changed its name to the Zambezi Mission (ZM) in 1939 and demerged to the ZEC in 1964 (Sekeya 2023, 44).

The ECoM, a descendent of the Nyasa Industrial Mission (NIM), started in 1893 at Likhubula in Blantyre as a branch of the ZIM to accommodate missionaries from Australia but it gradually became independent (Ross and Fiedler 2020, 80–81). In 1901, the mission bought a farm at Ntambanyama in Thyolo where it established its headquarters. When the mission became an independent denomination, it changed its name to the Evangelical Church of Malawi, Ntambanyama Synod. The AEC was

founded by a team of missionaries from the South Africa General Mission (SAGM) in 1898 and established its mission centre at Chididi in Nsanje. In 1909, the Chididi Mission became the headquarters of the SAGM in Malawi (Ross and Fiedler 2020, 80–81). G. W. Anderson connected the SAGM to the ZIM during his missionary career in Mozambique as both missions shared a common goal of reaching the unreached areas. In 1996, the mission changed its name to the Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) and later merged with the Society of International Missions (SIM). When the Mission became an independent church it changed its name to the Evangelical Church of Malawi, Chididi Synod (Paas 2006, 202).

A Brief History of the Zambezi Evangelical Church in Malawi (1892–1983)

The ZIM never identified itself as a faith mission, but it showed some characteristics of faith missions, such as showing an interdenominational approach; reaching out to unreached areas; deploying unprofessional theologians as missionaries; and identifying itself by the name of the place where it was established instead of the name of the location of its sending missionary board. In contrast, the earliest missions in Malawi which preceded the ZIM, were classical in nature, and were named after the place where they came from (Ross and Fiedler 2020, 79). Booth named his mission station after the “Zambezi River” because he had a vision to expand his missionary work as far as the Zambezi River Basin (Kalumba, interview 22 July 2017). Today, the church has spread to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa.

In 1939, the mission board in Scotland dropped the concept of industrial mission due to the decline of coffee production in Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) (Heitz 2009, 6). As such, the name changed to the ZM, but the mission continued to focus on reaching the unreached areas by opening mission stations in typical rural areas (Sekeya 2023, 44). However, in the 1940s, the fight for nationalism influenced some local leaders of the ZM to separate and form the African Independent Churches (AICs) (Chatepa 2002, 12). Furthermore, by 1962, some African leaders of the ZM declared themselves to be the Zambezi Church. As a result, soon after Malawi attained its independence in 1964, the mission board in Scotland officially allowed Africans to form their own independent church with the name Zambezi Evangelical Church (ZEC) but agreed to work in partnership with it (Sekeya 2023, 44). For this reason, the ZEC demerged with the ZM, and the former became an independent church while the latter remained an interdenominational mission organisation. Therefore, the ZM board handed over its property, such as schools and health centres, to the ZEC. To this day, the ZM does not identify itself as a church, but it rather partners with all the evangelical churches in Malawi.

In the 1970s, the ZEC was connected to the charismatic revival through fellowship meetings. At first, the church resisted the charismatic theology and praxis which were more appealing to the youth than the adults (Kawamba 2018, 90). The development resulted in tension between the church leadership and the youth wing (Mateyu 2006, 9). As a result, some of the young men and women left the ZEC to join other churches that

welcomed the charismatic revival. Nevertheless, those who remained in the church brought in the charismatic way of worship through music (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017). It is this background which led to the formation of the FoY as a way of addressing the needs of the young men and women in the church (Kalumba, interview 22 July 2017). However, the established youth ministry did not resolve the conflicts; rather, it became the medium for dynamic religious development in the church (Kawamba 2018, 90). Therefore, the FoY became so strong that it shook the church system and transformed the ZEC theological praxis and liturgy.

The Leadership Structure of the ZEC in Malawi

The ZEC is Baptist in theology but employs Presbyterian polity with some elements of congregationalism. It is Baptist in the sense that it believes in believers' baptism by immersion and rejects infant baptism. The FoY falls within the structure of the church which currently has two official synods, namely: Mitsidi Synod in Malawi, and Ntachi Synod in Villa Ulongwe in Mozambique. The executive of the Central Council is known as "Management" and it comprises the Synod Chairman, the Vice Synod Chairman, the General Secretary, and the Deputy General Secretary (Sekeya 2023, 56). The ZEC has 12 departmental portfolios, namely: Missions and Evangelism; Leadership and Training; Health; Education; Pastors' Welfare; Fellowship of Youth; Fellowship of Women; Sunday School; Girls Brigade; Men's Ministry; Relief and Development; and Music. Each department is headed by a National Coordinator who is responsible to the General Secretary, who in turn is responsible to the Central Council.

A Brief Background of the Established Youth Ministry in the ZEC (1961–1983)

The active youth movement in the ZM began during the era of the evangelical revival in Malawi from the early 1960s to late 1980s (Sekeya 2023, 47). At the Synod Conference of 1961, Leonard Evance proposed introducing an established youth ministry in the church because there was a challenge of insufficient discipleship among the youth in the church (Mtima, interview 7 February 2018).¹ The focus on teaching the youth helps churches to experience change in all aspects of the Christian ministry (Mlenga 2016, 248). However, the situation at the time was that upon completion of catechism which prepared the adolescents for baptism, there was no other organised church ministry to enhance spiritual formation of the youth in their transitional period from childhood to adulthood (Kalumba, interview 22 July 2017). However, not much was done to implement the proposal.

In 1969, Theodore Evance, a young ZM missionary bridged the gap by introducing Bible studies among the youth at Chilomoni in Blantyre in the pattern of the Scripture Union (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017).² Theodore Evance identified a few primary

1 Leonard Evance was the General Secretary of the ZM Board in the UK when the FoY started.

2 Theodore Evance was not related to Leonard Evance.

school boys and began to mentor them through interactive Bible studies in small groups.³ This proved to be an effective discipleship method among the youth at the time. Santrock (2002, 382) maintains that the youth love and feel loved by someone who is ready to listen and to care for them (Day 2000, 120–122). Therefore, Theodore Evance addressed the real psychological, social and spiritual needs of the youth in his time. After working hours, he would take them to the mountains for Bible study. Unfortunately, Theodore Evance left for Britain never to return due to health problems.⁴ As a result, the small Bible study group died due to lack of leadership and guidance. In 1974, another ZM missionary John Simon and his wife Ruth, revived the Bible study ministry in the ZEC but with a different approach (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017). The couple targeted the potential elders at Chilomoni congregation and introduced family Bible studies and contextual music which were attractive to the youth.

Leonard Evance brought back the idea of introducing an established youth ministry in the ZEC when he became General Secretary of the ZM in Scotland in the early 1980s (Sekeya 2023, 47). Thus, he influenced Charlie Bonongwe, the then ZEC Synod Chairman, to table the proposal in the management team. The youth groups in the ZEC at the time were so autonomous that it was challenging for the church to control them, and the Fellowship of Women (Women Guild) was responsible for both the youth and the children ministries in the ZEC. Therefore, the church management responded to the crisis by establishing the youth ministry as a full department. In 1982, Charlie Bonongwe proposed the appointment of Victor Zuze to coordinate the youth ministry in the ZEC in the pattern of the Scripture Union (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017). However, Leonard Evance was not impressed by Zuze due to his lack of theological education, so Leonard Evance asked Zuze to consider pursuing a theological education in order to qualify for the post. Nevertheless, while Zuze was still waiting for an admission offer from the Bible College, Leonard Evance changed his mind. Therefore, in 1983, Leonard Evance brought in Paul Traxel, a young missionary from Germany, and recommended him to facilitate the FoY in the ZEC because he was well trained in youth ministry. Therefore, the establishment of the FoY was the result of the interaction between African and Western missionaries.

The Establishment of the FoY in the ZEC (1983–1992)

The Birth and Early Years of the FoY (1983–1987)

The FoY was founded in 1983 to equip the youth with services of ministry through discipleship and leadership training (Zambezi Mission 2016, 1). Its purpose was to help the young people to become strong Christians and active participants in the body of Christ. Its motto is “to seek, serve and make disciples” (ZEC Fellowship of Youth 2014, 1).

3 Some of the boys were Synoden Chimkwende, Noel Chiyendausiku and Victor Zuze.

4 He was diagnosed with a heart problem which could not be treated in Malawi at the time. Although he recovered after receiving medical treatment, he could not continue with his missionary career.

The FoY has the following objectives, namely: to help the young people become good followers of Christ; deepen their spiritual lives in the churches and schools through Bible study and prayer; motivate the youth on how they can represent Jesus in their ministry to others; advise and guide the youth in their relationships; provide the youth with pastoral care; give spiritual counselling to those with problems, give teachings to those preparing for marriages; promote healthy growth and living through exercise and games; relate to the community; and help the needy through social work (Zambezi Mission 2016, 2–3).

In 1983, Leonard Evance and Charlie Bonongwe asked Traxel to lead the FoY (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017). At the same time, the ZM and ZEC management teams also appointed Zuze as the first National Coordinator of the FoY despite his lay status. The two worked together in organising the youth ministry in the church. Traxel brought together the youth movements in the ZEC and launched the first Annual Youth Conference at Dombole in Ntcheu where he introduced the now established name “Fellowship of Youth”. He stressed the importance of Bible studies and strengthened discipleship ministry among the youth. The first Chairperson of the national executive committee was Christopher Kang’ombe while the first Administrative Secretary was Rose Chimkwende (Muwalo, interview 26 December 2017). The FoY Secretariat at the time was at Ntonda in Ntcheu (Chipwaila, interview 10 January 2018). The second Annual Youth Conference was held in 1984 at Mitsidi in Blantyre (Muwalo, interview 26 December 2017). To this day, the FoY organises the National Youth Conferences every year.

Jester Chipwaila was a first-year student at Likhubula Bible Institute (LBI) when the FoY was launched in the ZEC (Chipwaila, interview 10 January 2018). In 1985, soon after his graduation from the Bible School, he was appointed first Travelling Secretary of the FoY. Soon after his appointment, he was posted to Ntonda where he stayed from 1985 to 1987. During his time in office, he travelled together with Traxel wherever there was a training event. His role was to coordinate with pastors in local churches and to control the youth during the conferences. At the time, the FoY promoted the concept of self-support, self-propagation, and self-government by empowering the youth themselves to pay the salary of the Travelling Secretary (Mtima, interview 7 February 2018). However, this did not last long because the FoY leadership failed to strategise measures to sustain the self-support concept. As such, the economic challenge facing the FoY remained unresolved so that it continued to depend on external support from expatriate missionaries. Unfortunately, Traxel worked with the Zambezi Mission only for two years and formed a new Mission organization with friends in Germany (Chipwaila, interview 10 January 2018). The organisation’s name was *Internationales Centrum fur Weltmission* (ICW)⁵ and it sparked a lay movement in the ZEC. Toward the end of his missionary career, Traxel shifted his interest from youth ministry to

5 The English equivalent is the International Centre for World Missions, but this is not a literal translation.

church building projects.⁶ When Traxel left, the FoY faced financial and leadership crises because the church heavily depended on him both financially and in expertise.

The Handover of the FoY from Expatriate Missionaries to Local Leadership (1987–1992)

Following the end of Traxel's missionary career in Malawi in 1987, the FoY struggled to survive due to lack of funds and change of leadership style. During his time, he employed a Western type of leadership style which the local Malawians could not maintain in their cultural context. Consequently, the leadership structure of the FoY was modified. The positions of the National Coordinator and the Travelling Secretary were merged (Sekeya 2023, 80). Furthermore, the gap between the clergy and the laity was widened by making ordination one of the key qualifications for the office of the National Coordinator (Sekeya 2019, 7). This implies that women could not hold that position because ZEC denied women ordination at the time. Chimkwende was withdrawn from the leadership team and the office of Administrative Secretary was abolished. Therefore, from 1987 to 1992, there was no female person in the top leadership position of the FoY at national level.

In 1987, Chipwaila was dismissed from the position of Travelling Secretary and the ZEC Synod leadership posted him to be the pastor at a small church at Dzinthenga in Chikwawa (Chipwaila, interview 10 January 2018). Though he did not welcome the development, he had no choice but to obey the authority. Unlike Chipwaila, Zuze resigned happily and continued to concentrate on his interdenominational ministries as a lay person (Zuze, interview 3 October 2017). Zuze claimed that clericalism and denominationalism were his main concerns in the FoY at his time. In the same year, Willard Muwalo was appointed as the first person to merge the roles of the Travelling Secretary and the National Youth Coordinator and held this position for 10 years (Muwalo, interview 26 December 2017).

The Consolidation of the FoY in the ZEC (1992–2018)

The Shift to Charismatic Spirituality and Lay Movement in the FoY (1992–2004)

Nyika (2015, 46) argues that the spread of the charismatic movement in Africa had no connections with the California movement in the United States. However, it shows that the spread of the movement in the FoY had connections with the Western movements through the Blantyre Born Again Revival (Kalu 2008, 87–88; 11–22). Furthermore, some of the young men who fought for the charismatic spirituality in the FoY, had connections to Western missionaries;⁷ hence, the Western connection cannot be denied

6 With support from the ICW he constructed church buildings at Kawale in Lilongwe and Ndirande in Blantyre. The two urban churches were officially opened in 1988 by the team of German missionaries.

7 Victor Zuze and Connex Ijalasi had personal contact with Western missionaries such as Paul Evance, Magnus Udd, Stewart Lane, Barbara Tippet, Jimmy Swaggart and Gordon Decker.

(Fiedler 2015a, 344–345). The charismatic movement spread into the ZEC through multiple sources through interdenominational fellowships. Zuze brought the charismatic revival to the ZEC through his fellowship with the African Assemblies of God, Come to Jesus Choir, New Life for All, and Gospel Youth (Kawamba 2018, 100). Similarly, Dyson Chitekwe brought charismatic spirituality to the ZEC through his full-time ministry with New Life for All. Furthermore, Wilson Ijalasi introduced charismatic spirituality to the ZEC through his fellowship with the Healing Hope Ministry. Therefore, the FoY adopted the charismatic spirituality from different directions.

The charismatic movement in the FoY started as a season of prayer in preparation for the National Youth Conference to be held at Mitsidi in 1990 (Connex Ijalasi, interview 30 July 2017). Among the team were two married women who were more active than others due to the leadership influence of their husbands. Two of them were Sinoliya Ijalasi and Mercy Mkwezalamba. After the National Youth Conference, the youth group continued to meet secretly for two years. In 1992, the ZEC organised a Centenary Celebration to commemorate its 100 years of existence in Malawi to be held at Mitsidi. The youth who had been organising overnight prayers secretly saw the celebration as an opportunity to come out in public.⁸ In 1993, issues of clapping hands, dancing and communal prayers were deliberated at length at the Synod Conference held at Ntonda in Ntcheu (Kalumba, interview 22 July 2017). During the debate, the elderly accused the youth of being rude and bringing strange and unbiblical teachings. In response, the youthful leaders argued that the elderly were carnal and quoted Psalm 150 to defend the biblical basis of their theology. In the end, the synod leadership reconciled the debate by declaring freedom of worship. The Synod leadership made a declaration that those who wanted to clap hands during worship service were free to do so but without forcing those who were not comfortable with clapping hands in worship. This supports the assertion that the debate about the charismatic spirituality remains unresolved (Hocken 2009, 14). Nevertheless, the coming of the charismatic mode of worship in the FoY brought flexibility in the ZEC. Cartledge (2003, 24) maintains that the charismatic spirituality enables encountering of the Holy Spirit through dancing, clapping hands and symbols. Therefore, the nature of religiosity in the FoY qualifies the charismatic identity.

In the period between 1993 and 2004, ZEC opened urban churches in all districts in Malawi with a significant participation of women. This proves that the FoY has impacted revival in the church and bridged a generational leadership gap (Sulumba 2012, 15–25). In 1997, the FoY created position of the Deputy Coordinator of the FoY to allow women participation in leadership positions of the FoY. However, there was no clear place for this position in the structure of the FoY. In 1999, the Girls Brigade was integrated into the FoY with Alice Khota as its first Deputy Coordinator (Kanthunzi 2013, 26). In 2002, Margret Chodzi became a member of the FoY National Executive

8 The ZEC prohibited any form of communal prayer, singing of choruses and clapping of hands until 1992. The first overnight prayer by the members of the FoY took place at South Lunzu ZEC in Blantyre where there was no pastor at the time.

Committee (NEC) and served in that role until she responded to her call to full time ministry. This implies that at the time, the FoY embraced an Evangelical biblical approach to women's participation (Fiedler, Hofmeyr and Fiedler 2016, 50). However, these women did not utilise the opportunity to the maximum. Fiedler (2017, 106) shows that Khota had the opportunity to join the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians but never went abroad to attend meetings nor read its book.

Connex Ijalasi stepped down from the position of National Coordinator in 2006 due to pressure of work in the office.⁹ He was succeeded by Luckwell Mtima who took the leadership position at the time when the conflict between the FoY and the ZEC elders reached its climax. Mtima had little influence at the national level because he served less than a year (Mtima, interview 7 February 2018). Nevertheless, he had much influence on the FoY at a congregational level. Under his leadership, Ndirande FoY planted new churches in Mulanje, Thyolo and Chikwawa (Gwetsani, interview 28 November 2018). They also reached out to Chichiri Prison and opened a ZEC congregation among the intimates. In the same year, Anthony Masala took over the position of the National Coordinator from Mtima. Masala led the FoY in a difficult situation due to leadership and financial crises. However, he consolidated the structure which was already put in place by the previous coordinators. In 2007, he developed a strategic plan which was suspended soon after his dismissal in 2009 (Masala, interview 9 August 2017).

In 2010, Muwalo once again took over the leadership of the FoY to stabilise the situation (Muwalo, interview 26 December 2017). During this period, the FoY brought back women into the top leadership positions with Ethel Sulumba as the second Deputy Coordinator (Sekeya 2023, 137). Some women were included in the FoY NEC but with limited participation. After serving for four years, Muwalo handed over the position to Gift Mphongolo who revived the idea of having the strategic plan (Mphongolo, interview 21 October 2017). Mphongolo served in this position from 2014 to 2018. Some of his achievements were the introduction of "FoY Associates", regional youth conferences and Zambezi Evangelical Church Student Organization (ZECESO).¹⁰ He also prioritised discipleship training and created small groups for communal prayers and Bible studies through partnership with training organisations. Furthermore, Mphongolo continued to involve women in the NEC. However, some of them withdrew their leadership positions when they got married because they joined the denomination of their spouses. This implies that patriarchal culture demotivates women from aspiring to leadership positions in the church.

9 At the time, he was serving as the National Coordinator of the FoY and the General Secretary of the ZEC.

10 The "FoY Associates" was a forum for former members of the FoY who still had a heart for the youth.

The Influence of the FoY on Theological Praxis and Order of Worship in the ZEC (2004–2018)

Though the FoY appealed to charismatic spirituality from the beginning, ZEC successfully suppressed the pressure in the early years (Sekeya 2023, 154). At first, the doctrinal tension between the FoY and the ZEC leadership had no significant impact on the life and ministry of the church. However, with time, the conflict became obvious and caused factions and split offs in the ZEC. Mateyu (2006) writes about the conflict between the elders and the youth which took place in 2005 in Zomba. These tensions were related to issues of the influence of the charismatic spirituality in the ZEC. From 2004 onwards, the doctrinal conflicts between the FoY and the ZEC church elders became strong. Serious conflicts took place in Zomba, Manase and Limbe.

Santrock (2002) argues that the youth play a primary role in the contribution towards the enhancement of church growth but if they are not given sensible guidance, they become violent and get involved in conflicts (Day 2000, 120–132). As the youth grow up, they learn to discover their personal identity and intimate relationships. If they fail to resolve the crisis, they become violent (Santrock 2002, 445–455). This was true in the history of the FoY. However, these conflicts had positive results in the theological development of the ZEC. The FoY has contributed to changes in theological praxis of the ZEC and transformation of order of worship from time to time. The original order of worship in the ZEC as it is indicated in *A Handbook for Pastors and Church Leaders* (Kamuyambeni 2001, 46). This means that the charismatic spirituality has opened a door for explaining a new religious phenomenon in the ZEC (Fiedler 2015a, 341; Hunt 2010, 181).

From September 2017 to August 2018, the first author collected primary data by observing and analysing in 16 congregations of the ZEC the impact of charismatic spirituality on the transformation of Sunday worship services. In all the selected congregations, the order of worship was charismatic in nature. The elements of worship included singing choruses with dancing and clapping of hands, praises, and spontaneous prayers. However, the degree of charismatic spirituality was different.

Another charismatic contribution of the FoY in the ZEC was addressing the fear of witchcraft through exorcism and spiritual healing. Kalu (2008, 15) argues that charismatic religiosity acknowledges and revives the custom of witchcraft eradication. Based on this understanding, the first author interviewed four charismatic leaders in the ZEC to analyse their perception toward spiritual warfare. Evangelist Joseph Chigonam'malunje narrated several stories about his encounter with the forces of witchcraft (Chigonam'malunje, interview 3 August 2017). Though he had never been a member of the FoY, at the time of study he was one of the key speakers who were invited to attend the Annual Youth Conferences. Therefore, he was likely to influence the youth with his charismatic teachings. Evangelist Paul Tembo was a member of the FoY who had founded his own independent charismatic ministry known as “Jesus is Lord Ministry” (Tembo, interview 16 November 2018). He prayed for people and

delivered evil spirits. At the time of study, he was active in the morning devotions and mid-week services in the ZEC. Though he had no leadership position in the ZEC structure at the time of study, he was likely to influence the FoY members because he was involved in preaching at open air meetings. Evangelist Enock Sanena claimed to have received direct revelations and visions from God due to his experience of Baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ One day, he preached in one of the ZEC congregations after which he sold hundreds of CDs of his popular sermon, “Power of Dreams”. He psychologically motivated the congregation to believe in the reality of witchcraft. Even before he began to preach, he had already sold many of CDs of his sermon. Amid the sermon, he began to pray for the sick, breaking ancestral curses and declaring prosperity to those who sowed a seed offering. At the time of study Enock Sanena was one of the popular speakers who were invited by the FoY to preach during overnight prayers in ZEC congregations in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Pastor Geoge Balley also prayed for the sick and practiced exorcism in the church due to his previous connection with Glorious Light International Church where he received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Balley, interview 24 August 2018). All these experiences provide evidence that the FoY has contributed to cultural processes in relation to discontinuity of personal lives and transformation to modernity (Robins 2010, 157–159).

Successes and Challenges of the FoY in the ZEC (1983–1992)

Successes of the FoY in Its History

History helps people to understand the past and the present in such a way as to facilitate the thinking about the future (Paas 2004, 21–23). It shows that the FoY revived the concepts of team evangelism and lay movement in the church to plant new congregations for ZEC in urban areas. As such the spiritual commitment of the youth had been transforming theological praxis of the entire church. The ZEC originally embraced the Baptist theology of Sacraments which teaches about believers Baptism, rejecting infant Baptism. Joseph Booth was a Baptist when he opened his mission (Fiedler 2015b, 26–27). In the 1950s, the mission adopted the Presbyterian liturgy which included reading the Psalms and reciting the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed as key elements of worship (Sekeya 2023, 113–114). Later in the 1990s, the FoY pushed the ZEC to embrace the charismatic order of worship. Therefore, these past experiences could help the church leadership to think seriously about the future of the FoY.

Challenges Facing the FoY throughout Its Historical Development

Leadership crisis has been a serious challenge facing the FoY in its history. The National Coordinators of the FoY have been replaced for belonging to opposing factions in the church. Liturgical conflict is another common challenge facing the FoY. Major liturgical conflicts took place in the 1990s when the youth demanded the introduction of spontaneous prayers, dancing, and clapping during the worship service. The situation

11 The first author attended this sermon where he shared his testimony with the congregation at a Sunday worship service.

caused serious conflicts between the church elders and the youth so that some congregations split up. Financial crisis has been going hand in hand with the leadership crisis in the FoY. In its early history, the FoY was well funded by the International Centre for Christian Missions (ICW) and World Vision. When the foreign organisations began to reduce their aid, however, the FoY struggled to raise funds for its daily operations. This implies that the concept of self-support is compromised in the FoY. Nevertheless, to this day the FoY remains in the ZEC despite the setbacks. In contrast, when the youth wing of the AEC equally absorbed Charismatic Practice and Theology, it did not remain within the church, but formed an independent charismatic church, River of Life Evangelical Church. (Ndadzera, interview 12 December 23). Therefore, this justifies the relevance of the FoY towards the dynamic religious and cultural development of the evangelical theology in Malawi.

Conclusion

The original goal of the FoY was to equip the youth with services of ministry through discipleship and leadership training. The concept of the FoY was brought to the ZEC to bridge the gap between adolescence and adulthood in the church. Though the implementation of the FoY in the ZEC was a joint initiative between the Western missionaries and African leaders, it shows that the expatriates played a major role in establishing the ZEC youth ministry. When the FoY was launched in 1983, the expatriates and African leaders cooperated well. However, when the Western missionaries handed over the FoY to full local leadership, the movement began to struggle for survival due to economic challenges. This challenge was resolved by going back to the ZEC's original concept of self-support, self-propagation, and self-government. However, the 3-selfs have not been fully realised because the FoY does not receive any budget support from the central funds of the church. As part of its achievements, the FoY has promoted lay participation in evangelism and church planting in the ZEC. It has also contributed to the transformation of theological praxis and the order of worship in the church under the influence of the charismatic movement. Nevertheless, leadership crises and liturgical conflicts between the youth and elders have been common challenges of the FoY in its history. The youth wings of other evangelical churches in Malawi share similar experiences with the FoY but respond differently. Thus, the FoY has contributed to the theological trajectory and socio-cultural changes in the life and the ministry of the church in Malawi.

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Sekeya and Landman

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