

# A CRITICAL REFLECTION AND MALAWIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE EDINBURGH 1910 INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates why the Edinburgh 1910 International Missionary Conference needs to be remembered in Malawi. In 2010 Malawian Christian churches joined the Christian community across the globe, celebrating the International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Christian churches across the country wanted to conduct services of worship in major cities in memory of this conference. Often we celebrate something that has a direct impact on our lives. However, considering the fact that the conference was disproportionately represented by Western churches, the intriguing question is why it should be remembered in Malawi and in Africa. What impact does it have on the Christian churches in Malawi? While church historians have written on the impact of the Edinburgh 1910 International Missionary Conference in perspective of its ecumenical contribution to the Christendom, there is a scarcity of literature to explain whether the Christians in Malawi see the value of celebrating this historic conference held thousands of kilometres away from them. From the

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methodological perspective, the paper relies on archives, interviews and church records available in Malawi.

**Keywords:** Edinburgh 1910; International Missionary Conference; remember; Malawian Christian churches

## INTRODUCTION

This paper interrogates why the Edinburgh 1910 International Missionary Conference needs to be remembered in Malawi. In 2010 Malawian Christian churches joined the Christian community across the globe, celebrating the International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 (hereafter Edinburgh 1910). As is the case with any celebration, some churches in the country held preparatory meetings in readiness for the 2010 celebrations. It was planned that services of worship would be conducted in major cities in memory of Edinburgh 1910. However, celebrations were not held as planned because of the reasons this paper explores.

Often we celebrate something that has direct impact on our lives. Considering the fact that Edinburgh 1910 was disproportionately represented by Western churches, the intriguing question is why this conference should be remembered in Malawi and Africa as a whole. What impact does it have on Christian churches in Malawi? While church historians have written considerably on the impact of Edinburgh 1910 in perspective of its ecumenical contribution to the Christendom (Ross 2010; Stanley 2010), there is a scarcity of literature to explain whether Christians in Africa, including Malawi, see the value of celebrating this historic conference held thousands of kilometres away from them. From the methodological perspective, the paper relied on archives and church records, which were available in Malawi, and also interviews conducted verbally and through emails and the telephone in Malawi and Scotland. Permission was sought from research participants. The research targeted 30 church leaders, both clergy and laity, of the Church of Central Africa and Anglican Church in Malawi. The article focused on the report of the Commission VIII of the Edinburgh 1910 (World Missionary Conference 1910).

Edinburgh 1910, as noted by many historians, was not the first international missionary conference to be held within Protestant circles; it was the third conference in succession (Fiedler 2010; Ross 2006; Stanley 2006). It came after the London and New York conferences of 1888 and 1900 respectively (Stanley 2006). While Edinburgh 1910 is significant and historical to Christian churches in Africa, the African churches were not represented. The official delegates to Edinburgh 1910, according to Rowdon (1967, 55) and Thomas (2003, 578) were 1 200 participants, of whom 17 were Asian indigenous Christians. A recent figure provided by Stanley (2008, 436) puts the official delegates at 1 215. Out of this number, Stanley says, 491 delegates were from North America, 509 were British, and 19 were indigenous

Christians from Asia and Africa. Out of 19 delegates, 18 were from Asia. In this case, it implies that the nineteenth delegate was from Africa, South Africa in particular. This number does not include the missionary societies' representatives.

However, it should be noted that the African delegate was not a representative of African Christianities but an interested participant. Though the figures given by Stanley do not add to 1 215, simple arithmetic indicates that 196 delegates came from mainland Europe and/or Australia. The probability is that 196 delegates might have come from Europe. Most importantly, the non-Western participants were just invitees (Rowdon 1967, 55). It should be noted that most missionaries contributed to the conference as correspondents. They responded to the questionnaire sent by the eight commissions of Edinburgh 1910. Therefore, it can be said that Africa was not represented. However, this does not imply that Edinburgh 1910 had no impact on the growth and development of the Christian churches in Africa. As this paper will illustrate, it did indeed make a considerable contribution.

Fiedler (2010, 70), writing on the place and role of the Evangelical churches at Edinburgh 1910, concludes: 'Although the Edinburgh 1910 vision is very much active in Africa, people have usually never heard of such a conference.' However, Fiedler does not elucidate why people have not heard of this historic conference. His primary concern was to show the place and role of Evangelical churches at the conference in 1910. Nevertheless, what he raises implies that not many African Christians have knowledge of Edinburgh 1910, which prompts the question: Why is this the case?

To begin with, Malawi historiography rarely mentions Edinburgh 1910. It focuses on the contribution of David Livingstone and missionaries to the Christian churches or societies in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe without making any reference to Edinburgh 1910 (Ross, 2013). Very little is written about Edinburgh 1910 with regard to Malawian Christianity. For instance, Fiedler, though he is a Christian expatriate in Malawi, has not made any reference to how Edinburgh 1910 impacted on churches in Malawi. Both Stanley (2006; 2008) and Ross (2006; 2010) have referred to how Malawian missionaries contributed to Edinburgh 1910, but they have not explained the extent to which the conference contributed to the growth and development of the Christian churches in Malawi and why Malawians should remember the conference. It is against this background that this paper intends to interrogate whether Christians in Malawi see the value of remembering this historic conference held thousands of kilometres away from them.

## MOTIVATION FOR THE PAPER

What was the motivation that led to this question? It began with personal experience as a student at the University of Edinburgh between 2007 and 2008. Since the centenary was hosted in Edinburgh, the author had the privilege to interact with the

organisers of the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebration committee. The author did not only interact with the organisers, but some of them were his lecturers who taught him the legacy of Edinburgh 1910 in the history of Christianity. Having completed his studies, the author returned to Malawi to continue with the vocation as a church minister and lecturer at the University of Livingstonia. He was surprised to note the (lacking) level of knowledge the church leadership had on Edinburgh 1910. For instance, during the biannual meeting of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Synod of Livingstonia in 2010, the Synod Moderator intimated that the CCAP would join other Christian churches across the globe in celebrating the Edinburgh 1910 'Evangelism Rally'. In an attempt to clarify the point, the author reminded the Synod Moderator that it was not an 'evangelism rally' but it was the World Missionary Conference. He responded by objecting to the clarification. Together with the Synod General Secretary, he insisted that it was the 'evangelism rally' and argued that the author was misinforming the gathering on Edinburgh 1910.

Six hundred delegates left the Synod meeting while believing the Synod Moderator's version of Edinburgh 1910, which was incorrect. However, at break time, the General Secretary, having realised that the Synod Moderator had misinformed the plenary meeting of the Synod Assembly, privately admitted that they had erred to say it was an 'evangelism rally' rather than a conference. The interesting part was that he opted to remain silent without correcting the mistake. It was not an 'evangelism rally' but a world missionary conference. One may ask: Is it fair to misinform delegates that a centenary celebrated in 2010 was in memory of the Edinburgh 1910 'evangelism rally', yet the plain truth is that it was an international missionary conference? During interviews conducted for this research paper, 26 respondents indicated that they had little knowledge of Edinburgh 1910.

The second narrative was by a colleague who is a fellow church minister of CCAP and a lecturer at Zomba Theological College<sup>1</sup> (ZTC) as well as the responses from other church officers who were interviewed (Interview: Chitsulo). In 2010, the Malawian churches were invited by the Edinburgh organising committee to join the 2010 centenary celebrations in memory of Edinburgh 1910. In response, the Board for ZTC was asked to form a national celebration committee from CCAP synods and college lecturers to commemorate the event in Malawi. It was said that the committee members wondered why it was necessary for Malawians to celebrate an event of which they had little or no knowledge (Interviews: Banda; Chitsulo; Nyasulu; Zomba). For example, Minute Sm 52/10 of the committee (Zomba Theological College, 2010, Minutes of 2010 Edinburgh centenary committee) shows that they had little knowledge about Edinburgh 1910. It reads: 'The house was reminded that 2010 is supposed to be the Missionary Conference Anniversary, which was first started in 1910. New ideas transpired in the meeting on how this Anniversary could

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1 Zomba Theological College was an ecumenical college of the CCAP, Anglican and Churches of Christ. Currently, it is predominantly run by the CCAP.

be celebrated and how ZTC can benefit from the anniversary.’ From the committee point of view, the centenary celebrations were considered as a means of fundraising for the college. The same Minute Sm 52/10 continues: ‘The house agreed that the College should print a celebration cloth which will be part of mission awareness campaign as well as fundraising to the College. It further agreed that synods be reminded of the event.’ The committee’s digression from the primary objective of the 2010 World Missionary Conference centenary celebrations to fundraising for the college was evidence of inadequate knowledge on the essence of remembering Edinburgh 1910.

In line with the committee’s objective, T-shirts were printed at a cost of MK500 000.00, which was almost equivalent to US\$1420 at the time of purchase. However, the centenary was not celebrated because of financial constraints (Interviews: Banda; Kadawati; Malasa; Nyasulu; Nyondo). According to telephone and email interviews with some Malawian celebration committee members and Synod officials on the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations, it was indicated that one of the major contributing factors was the level of knowledge on why Edinburgh 1910 should be remembered in Malawi (Interviews: Banda; Chitsulo; Malasa; Nyasulu; Zomba). Financial constraint, though mentioned as one of the contributing factors for the failure of holding centenary celebrations in Malawi in memory of Edinburgh 1910, is not convincing. Why did the same churches in 2009 manage to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> David Livingstone anniversary in Malawi (Ross 2013, 23)? Resources for this celebration were largely locally raised (Interviews: Kadawati; Nyondo). Why was financial constraint not a problem at this time?



**Figure 1:** T-Shirt Printed for 2010 Edinburgh Centenary by ZTC.



**Figure 2:** The Logo for Zomba Theological College (shown as a separate figure, because the logo on the T-Shirt is not clear).

Hence, it can be argued that financial constraint was not the main reason for failure to hold the Edinburgh 1910 celebrations, but the real reason was the inadequate level of knowledge the churches had on Edinburgh 1910. If the same churches had organised similar celebrations in the past, why did they fail to organise the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations? If it was about financial problems, why did the Malawian organisers fail to appeal to congregations as they had done previously? The US\$1420 came from the Theological College alone. If the CCAP and Anglican Church managed to organise and celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of David Livingstone in memory of his contribution, why did they fail to raise funds toward the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations, to which they owe much? Answers to these questions lie in whether the Malawian churches saw any value in commemorating Edinburgh 1910.

## BACKGROUND TO EDINBURGH 1910

As stated above, Edinburgh 1910 was not the first international missionary conference to be held within Protestant circles, but it was the third one. However, it was unique to the previous conferences, particularly for the promotion of cooperation in the missionary enterprise that was decisive to the birth of united indigenous churches in mission fields and ecumenical bodies. Most importantly was its recommendation for the formation of the Continuation Committee composed of 35 members under the



leadership of John Raleigh Mott, an American and a Methodist layman, and Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, a Scot and member of the United Free Church of Scotland (Kerr and Ross 2009, 4-5; Ross 2010, 6; Thomas 2003, 578). The formation of this committee was critical to the establishment of permanent Christian ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other national bodies, as well as indigenous churches like the CCAP.

To better understand why Edinburgh 1910 ought to be remembered in Malawi, we need first to understand why Edinburgh was chosen as a hosting venue for another Protestant international missionary conference. Kerr and Ross (2009, 5) cite the Scottish Church's contribution to the missionary enterprise. Alongside stating that Scotland produced notable figures in missionaries such as David Livingstone, Mary Slessor *inter alia*, they respond that Scotland 'had [also] established some of the most highly regarded centres of mission work, such as Lovedale in South Africa, Livingstonia in Malawi and Scottish educational institutions in India'. It is noteworthy that the Scottish missionary work in Malawi was considered as one of the contributing factors for the choice of Edinburgh as a hosting place for the third Protestant world missionary conference, after the one held in New York. It can be added that most of the Scottish key organisers of Edinburgh 1910 had a strong connection with Malawi through their missionaries working in the country. For example, Oldham was not only a Scot but also a member of the United Free Church of Scotland – the sending church of the Livingstonia Mission. Fairley Daly, who asked Robert Speer of the Presbyterian Board of Missions in New York in 1906 whether there was a possibility of having another world missionary conference after the New York 1900 conference, was a secretary for the Livingstonia Mission Committee in Scotland (Kerr and Ross 2009, 5; Ross 2010). Scots, through Scottish missionaries, were not only instrumental for the choice of Edinburgh as a hosting place for the world missionary conference, but also for the establishment of Malawi as a state. To use the words of the first Malawi President, Kamuzu Banda; whenever the moderators of the Church of Scotland were visiting Malawi, he used to say: 'Had there been no Church of Scotland, there would have been no Malawi' (Ross 2013, 218). Malawi history cannot be told without Scotland and the Church of Scotland in particular.

Edinburgh 1910 was held between 14 and 23 June 1910 before Malawi missionaries had a similar conference in August 1910 at Mvera, the Dutch Reformed Church Mission's headquarters (Pauw 1980). As different Christianities were represented at Edinburgh 1910, including Anglo-Catholic Anglicanism (Walls 2010, 29), the Malawi Missionary Conference was represented by most Protestant missions excluding the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), an Anglo-Catholic Church. Andrew Walls (2010, 28) describes Edinburgh 1910 as the climax of the Protestant missionary movement. However, it should be noted that it was exclusively a Western gathering.

Although debates were centred on the future of the Christian churches in Asia and Africa, they were inclined to we-and-they dichotomy. Participants looked at Christian churches in the global south as not ready to begin participating in debates pertaining to the future of their church, though missions had already developed indigenous Christian leaders. For example, the Livingstonia and Blantyre Missions in Malawi produced the first able graduates by 1900, who were educated in Edinburgh and Lovedale (A.C. Ross 1996, 172). On 24 October 1901, indigenous Christian leaders<sup>2</sup> presented various topics relating to Christianity and indigenous cultural practices at the inter-missionary conference held in Blantyre (K.R. Ross 1996, 91-96). In the following year, Malawi Mission graduates raised important questions with regard to the future of the church in Africa at the Literary Society organised under the theme: ‘Should natives depend on Europeans.’ Yesaya Mwase, a Livingstonia Mission graduate, handled a topic: ‘European and Africans: A contrast’, and Domingo, another Livingstonia Mission graduate, looked at the topic: ‘The future of Africa’ (McCracken 1994, 7). Both Mwase and Domingo were critical of missionaries’ oligarchy and paternalistic tendencies. In 1933, possibly referring to 1901 presentations, Mwase wrote:

My fellow native Christians do not understand that mission is for the time being. Mission shall never be incorporated in the life blood of the native Church, shall never uproot evil customs of the native lands, and... it shall never conquer natives for Christ. This work God has reserved for the native Christianity. (K.R. Ross 1996, 171)

Mwase was convinced that if the church in Africa was to grow, participation of indigenous Christians was critical against the paternalistic tendency and mistrust European missionaries had in involving indigenous Christians in leadership of their own churches (A.C. Ross 1996, 178). Similarly, Vendanayagam Samuel Azariah, who later became the Bishop of the Church of South India, expressed similar critique at Edinburgh 1910. Azariah lamented:

Missionaries except for a few of the very best, seem...to fail very largely in getting rid of an air of patronage and condescension, and in establishing a genuinely brotherly and happy relation as between equals with their Indian flocks...You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS. (Quoted in Bonk 2006, 10)

While paternalism was a persistent problem in mission fields, Azariah’s critique contributed to the recognition of indigenous Christian leadership in the global south. For example, in 1911 the Blantyre Mission ordained the first two Presbyterian clergymen – Rev. Harry Matecheta and Rev. Stephen Kundecha, and in 1914 the

2 The indigenous Christian leaders who presented essays at Blantyre Mission Native Conference 1901, came from the Livingstonia, Blantyre, Zambezi Industrial Mission; Nyassa Industrial Mission; Dutch Reformed Church Mission; Baptist Industrial Mission; and South African General Mission.



Livingstonia Mission also ordained its first indigenous clergy who completed their theological training in 1900, namely Revs. Jonathan Chirwa, Yesaya Mwase and Hezekia Tweya.

While Edinburgh 1910 was an eye-opener in defining indigenous Christian leadership, the politics of representation was still problematic. During Edinburgh 1910, most missionaries participated as correspondents. Donald Fraser, a Livingstonia missionary, was ready to give a practical universal testimony on Christian missionaries' attitude to the non-Christian religion, but he failed to go because of financial constraints (Ross 2010, 7). Hence, there was no voice from Africa (Kerr and Ross 2009, 8). All decisions were 'for' rather than 'with' the evangelised. This proved to be problematic regarding the continuity of the Edinburgh 1910 legacy in countries not represented. Churches in the global south seem not to have viewed the conference as theirs. As a result, this created a problem on how its legacy would be passed on to upcoming generations.

However, two remarkable resolutions were reached at Edinburgh 1910 that were significant for the African Christian churches. These were the formation of the Continuation Committee and united churches. The Continuation Committee was critical to the establishment of the World Council of Churches and other regional and national Christian ecumenical bodies. It was this ecumenical aspect that made Edinburgh 1910 a milestone and a historic gathering in the history of Protestant missionary work. The Christian unity demonstrated during Edinburgh 1910 portrayed God's design for unity in diversity, where differences in traditions and doctrines were not conspicuous; it was common witnessing for Christ that took preference. Although various missionaries in Africa and Asia began negotiations in readiness to have a united indigenous church prior to the conference, it was Edinburgh 1910 that brought full meaning to the debates regarding the establishment of interdenominational churches and cooperation among Christian missionaries in the mission fields.

Making a contribution to the Commission VIII, the Chinese participant Cheng Ching Yi emphasised the importance of establishing an interdenominational Christian church in mission fields rather than continuing with European ecclesiastical divisions. This could have influenced self-critique among Western participants. It also led Commission VIII to debate on 'cooperation and the promotion of unity' and to recommend greater unity across the home base to promote 'one united Church of Christ in every non-Christianity' and 'the healing of divisions in the West' (Kerr and Ross 2009, 235). Why did the report of Commission VIII turn to Western Christianities? There was growing fear among missionaries and indigenous Christian leaders that European ecclesiastical divisions could be exported or imported to mission fields. The practical question is to ascertain the extent to which Western ecclesiastical divisions impacted on unity of the global south churches in the light of the recommendations and resolutions of Edinburgh 1910.

## IMPACT OF THE MISSIONARY CONFERENCE IN MISSION FIELDS: A CASE OF MALAWI

To better understand whether recommendations and resolutions of Commission VIII were implemented, it is important to explore how missionaries from various missions related to each other in the field. Prior to Edinburgh 1910, all missions working in Malawi (then Nyasaland), with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church and UMCA, had two consecutive conferences in 1900 at Livingstonia Mission's headquarters and in 1904 at Blantyre Mission's headquarters, with a purpose of establishing their working relationships. The two conferences began inculcating the spirit of ecumenism among the indigenous Christians. Commenting on the second conference held at Blantyre, the report of Commission VIII, Edinburgh 1910 (World Missionary Conference 1910, 36) reads: 'This Conference has given the native Christians a new conception of the unity of the Church, as is shown by the fact that the Livingstonia Conference was followed within a year by a united Conference of Native Elders.' The 1910 Native Conference did not bring indigenous Christians together from various missions, but it inculcated the spirit of unity in diversity. Though the indigenous Christians began appreciating the significance of ecumenism prior to the third world missionary conference, it was Edinburgh 1910 that reinforced the spirit of ecumenism among missionaries and indigenous Christians in Asia and Africa, leading to the birth of united indigenous Christian churches. This was against Europeans' denominationalism (Northcott 1963, 76).

It should be noted again that ecumenical gatherings were not peculiar to Malawi alone. They were also happening across Africa as reflected in the report of Commission VIII of Edinburgh 1910. For example, in South Africa the Rector of Cala and the Archdeacon of St. Marks, Kaffraria, invited various missions to meet in June 1909. Unlike in Malawi where the UMCA with Anglo-Catholic identity did not attend both conferences, the South African missions participated. Those who participated were as follows: the Anglican, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Moravian, and Congregational Churches (World Missionary Conference 1910, Report of commission VIII, 37). While in Malawi the DRCM attended the local missionary conference, its sending church-DRC in South Africa did not participate in the South African gathering. The explanation for the absence of the DRC at South African gatherings would be that it did not consider itself as a mission within a South African context but rather as a *de facto* established church. However, it was represented at Edinburgh 1910 (World Missionary Conference 1910). Prior to Edinburgh 1910, various missionaries began working together. However, it was Edinburgh 1910 that enhanced the cooperation, leading to the formation of interdenominational churches as per the recommendations reached at this world missionary conference. Missionaries and indigenous Christians considered unity in Christ to doctrinal, ecclesiological and socio-political differences

as their priority in their mission enterprise and Christian witnessing. This is why the catchwords in their mission work were cooperation and unity in Asia and Africa.

Despite the fact that Malawian white missionaries participated at Edinburgh 1910 as correspondents, many of their decisions were largely influenced by some recommendations and resolutions of Edinburgh 1910. One of the recommendations reached was to form the united indigenous church that transcends European denominational differences. The report of Commission VIII (World Missionary Conference 1910, 131) concludes:

The facts contained in the preceding chapters of our Report show that throughout the mission field there is an earnest and growing desire for closer fellowship, and for the healing of the broken unity of the Church of Christ. In this manifest evidence of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit we must heartily and thankfully rejoice. While we may differ from one another in our conception of what unity involves and requires, we agree in believing that our Lord intended that we should be one in a visible fellowship, and we desire to express our whole-hearted agreement with those...holding that the ideal object of missionary work is to plant in every non-Christian nation one united Church of Christ.

It was this recommendation which enabled most missionaries and indigenous Christians in Asia and Africa to begin negotiations towards a united Christian church. Though Malawi historiography links the establishment and growth of an indigenous united church to the Mvera General Missionary Conference in August 1910 (Pauw 1980, 39), it is evident that the Edinburgh 1910 recommendations had a bearing on the Malawi Missionary Conference held in August 1910. Robert Laws (1934, 143), the head of the Livingstonia Mission and contributor to the Commission VIII of Edinburgh 1910 as a correspondent, 24 years later says:

It is absurd to expect a Church abroad to accept the Westminster Confession of Faith as its standard, even if it could be adequately translated into the native language. The environment of the people is quite different; the circumstances they have to face are also different; and it is out of place to burden a new Church with declarations regarding the civil rights of the magistrate and the spiritual rights of the Church where no such question exists.

In August, 1910, it was Laws who proposed not to adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith but rather to formulate a simple Statement of Faith when the Blantyre and Livingstonia Missions unanimously agreed to form a united church called the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in 1924 (K.R. Ross, 1996). Laws was keen not to export denominational differences to Africa which is evident in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other European confessional statements. These confessional statements are dominated by politics of exclusivity where one form of Christianity demonises other forms, and this stands in sharp contrast to the aspirations and ecumenical principles of Edinburgh 1910. It is beyond reproach that Laws's proposal was against denominational exclusivity.

His counterpart, David Clement Scott, the head of the Blantyre Mission (1881-1898) with which the Livingstonia Mission formed the CCAP, spelled out the objective of Scottish missionaries in Central Africa. Scott stated: 'our purpose we lay down as the foundation of all our work that we are building the African Church – not Scotch nor English but African' (K.R. Ross 1996, 86). Laws, Scott and other Scottish missionaries, including African Christians from the Livingstonia, Blantyre and DRC Missions, were very much in line with the vision of Edinburgh 1910 of forming a united Christian church free of denominational differences. While in China and India missionaries and indigenous Christians managed to establish a united church based on Edinburgh 1910 aspirations, the CCAP failed to accommodate other traditions in their union because of socio-political differences, especially between the London Mission Society (LSM) and the DRCM missionaries based on the South African political landscape (Pauw 1980). However, the three Presbyterian missions managed to enter into a union in 1926; and although the union was organic, by the mid-1950s it began fragmenting along missionaries' political differences and identities.

However, it is interesting to note the inclusion of European confessions in the 2002 CCAP Constitution by the CCAP leadership, which missionaries avoided to avert divisions along ecclesiastical traditions. In 2000, when the CCAP 1956 Constitution was reviewed, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod proposed the inclusion of canon of Dort, Belgic Confession, and Confession of the Netherlands (CCAP General Synod's minutes 2000). When the 2002 Constitution was adopted, it included the following statements of faith for the CCAP: the Nicene Creed; the Apostle Creed; the Westminster Confession of Faith; the Larger Catechism; the Shorter Catechism; the Confession of Netherlands; the Heidelberg Catechism; the Belgic Confession; the Canon of Dort; and the CCAP Confession of Faith of 1924. Beside the 1924 CCAP Statement of Faith, it is difficult to understand why other confessions of faith were brought into the CCAP Constitution. Instead of strengthening the CCAP unity, its leaders continued aligning synods to divisive old confessions of faith. Of course, the CCAP Livingstonia Synod proposed that the CCAP General Synod should have its own confession that meets its aspirations (CCAP General Synod minutes 2000, 30). But the inclusion of these old confessions indicates that its leaders were fostering church fragmentation along the ecclesiastical identities brought by white missionaries (Isichei 1995, 81). The inclusion of European confessions of faith was not only against the principles on which the CCAP was founded, but it was also contradictory to the vision of Edinburgh 1910.

However, not all recommendations of Edinburgh 1910 promoted the unity of the church in the global south. For example, when the Livingstonia Mission proposed the transfer of Kasungu station to the DRCM because of understaffing and financial constraints, one of the reasons cited in favour of the transfer was the resolutions made at Edinburgh 1910. In 1912, Dr Turner and James Henderson, during the Livingstonia Mission Council, argued:

That on the principles of cooperation and federation of work laid down by the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 [Report of commission VIII], where there is a large single-language area, it seems unreasonable that a small corner of that area be cut off and administered by a mission which requires to retain that language for that corner only. (Minutes. 53, Livingstonia Mission Council, 18 October 1912)

It appears that the Edinburgh 1910 recommendations had a big influence on decisions taken by the missionaries in mission fields. It was the emphasis on ethno-languages by missionaries that led to the reinforcement of salient ethnic identities between the spheres of the Livingstonia Mission and the DRCM. By demarcating the mission area through the common language spoken in that area, it downplayed the fact that indigenous people did not distinguish themselves from other social groupings through ethnic identities or language, but by political identity (Chibambo 1942). The recent division the CCAP is experiencing is based on visibility of ethnic identities through language manipulations by missionaries. Though ethnic debates are not directly a product of Edinburgh 1910, it can hardly be ruled out that it contributed to salient ethnic identity through comity agreement, as each mission identified itself with a particular ethnic group using a common language (Stanley 2010, 436).

## OUR CELEBRATION OR THEIRS? UNDERSTANDING THE RELEVANCE OF EDINBURGH 1910

Fiedler (2010, 54) is right in saying that ‘the appreciation of Edinburgh 1910 depends very much on the position of the historian’ but it can be added that it depends on what value individuals or Christian churches associate it with. Malawian theological curricula in colleges and universities are more inclined to the contributions of David Livingstone and Western Christian missionaries without making reference to Edinburgh 1910, regardless that mission work and development of churches owe much to it.

According to interviews with Malawian church leaders the 2010 Edinburgh Centenary Celebrations’ Committee invited Malawi churches to join other Christian communities to celebrate one hundred years of Edinburgh 1910 (Interviews: Kadawati; Nyondo; Ross). It was this invitation that led the church leadership to begin preparation to have national celebrations as stated above. However, they did not succeed to realise the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations.

It is interesting to note that although the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia discussed the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations, she failed to celebrate it. Instead, the Synod celebrated Dr Livingstone’s Day at St Andrews Church in the City of Mzuzu in Malawi, three years after the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations under the theme: ‘Being light bearer to the world.’ Despite the fact that both Livingstone and Edinburgh 1910 have an impact on the life of Malawian churches and society, the Church opted to prioritise Dr Livingstone. The question could be asked why they

preferred Livingstone's celebrations to that of Edinburgh 1910, which was well publicised at the Synod biannual meeting, other than the Livingstone commemoration. The answer is simple. They had more knowledge about Dr Livingstone (Ross 2013, 27) than about Edinburgh 1910, which had taken place thousands of miles from them. It is against this background that this paper argues that if people have no or inadequate knowledge on a particular event or phenomenon or person, and its/his remarkable contribution to their societies, they can hardly see the value of commemorating it or him. It is the proliferation of information and impact on a certain event or individual that can motivate the interest of upcoming generations to remember such contributions to their society. In the case of Edinburgh 1910, it is undeniable to say that it made a considerable contribution to the life and growth of the church in Malawi. However, the knowledge that people have about it makes Malawian Christian communities fail to remember it vividly. Hence, Malawian Christians did not consider the 2010 Edinburgh centenary as their own celebrations.

## WHY REMEMBER EDINBURGH 1910?

We turn to the question why Malawian Christian churches should remember Edinburgh 1910. This article contends that it would be appropriate to acknowledge the contributions that Edinburgh 1910 had made to Christian churches in the global south, regardless of being unrepresented. It made significant contributions to the life and growth of the churches through the promotion of Christian unity in the midst of diversity. This needs to be remembered, because Christian churches, instead of winning souls to Christ, are busy politicking, in essence betraying the principles of Edinburgh 1910. For example, the CCAP that was founded on the Edinburgh 1910 principles has continued fragmenting along denominational and ethnic identities. This is the reason why Ross (2010, 14) laments: 'The ecumenical impulse of Edinburgh, however, has increasingly been supplanted by forces making for fragmentation as old divisions consolidated and new splits occurred. The historical perspective opened up by the possibility to think again about inherited divisions.' If Malawi Christian churches had celebrated the Edinburgh 1910 centenary, this would have refreshed the memories of valuing unity in purpose and unity in diversity, rather than focusing on old identities through retaining confessions of faith, which are divisive and contradictory to the core call of Jesus' Church to evangelise all ethnic groups as stipulated in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). During time of reflection, Christian churches would have seen the value of doing *Missio Dei* with unity in diversity.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, apart from printing T-shirts for the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations at Zomba Theological College (ZTC), the Malawi Christian churches



failed to celebrate this event because of inadequate knowledge on the impact of Edinburgh 1910. The centenary celebrations were perceived as Scottish or Western with little or no impact to the life of the Christian churches in Malawi. No wonder ZTC turned the centenary celebrations of Edinburgh 1910 into a fundraising activity. Therefore, remembering certain events or individuals who matter in the life of our society or Christian communities, could bring significant change and transformation. It is not only time for celebration but also reflection on successes, challenges and failures with the purpose of learning from them for future planning. Remembering our history is the only way forward to a promising, vibrant and viable future. Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, despite its blind spot, must be remembered for its resolutions and recommendations which continue to challenge us on what type of Christian church we ought to have in Africa in the presence of recurrent and possible fragmentations.

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